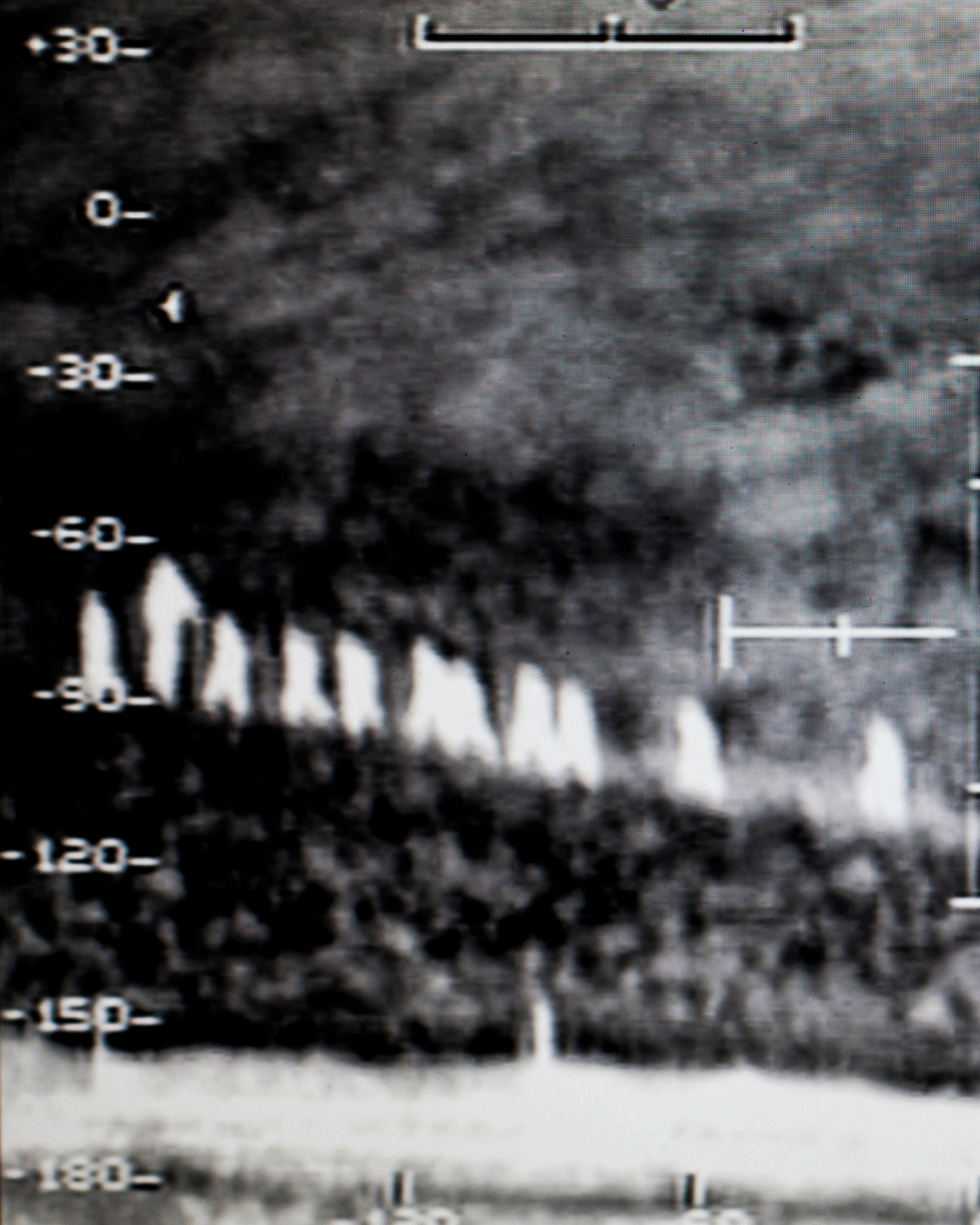
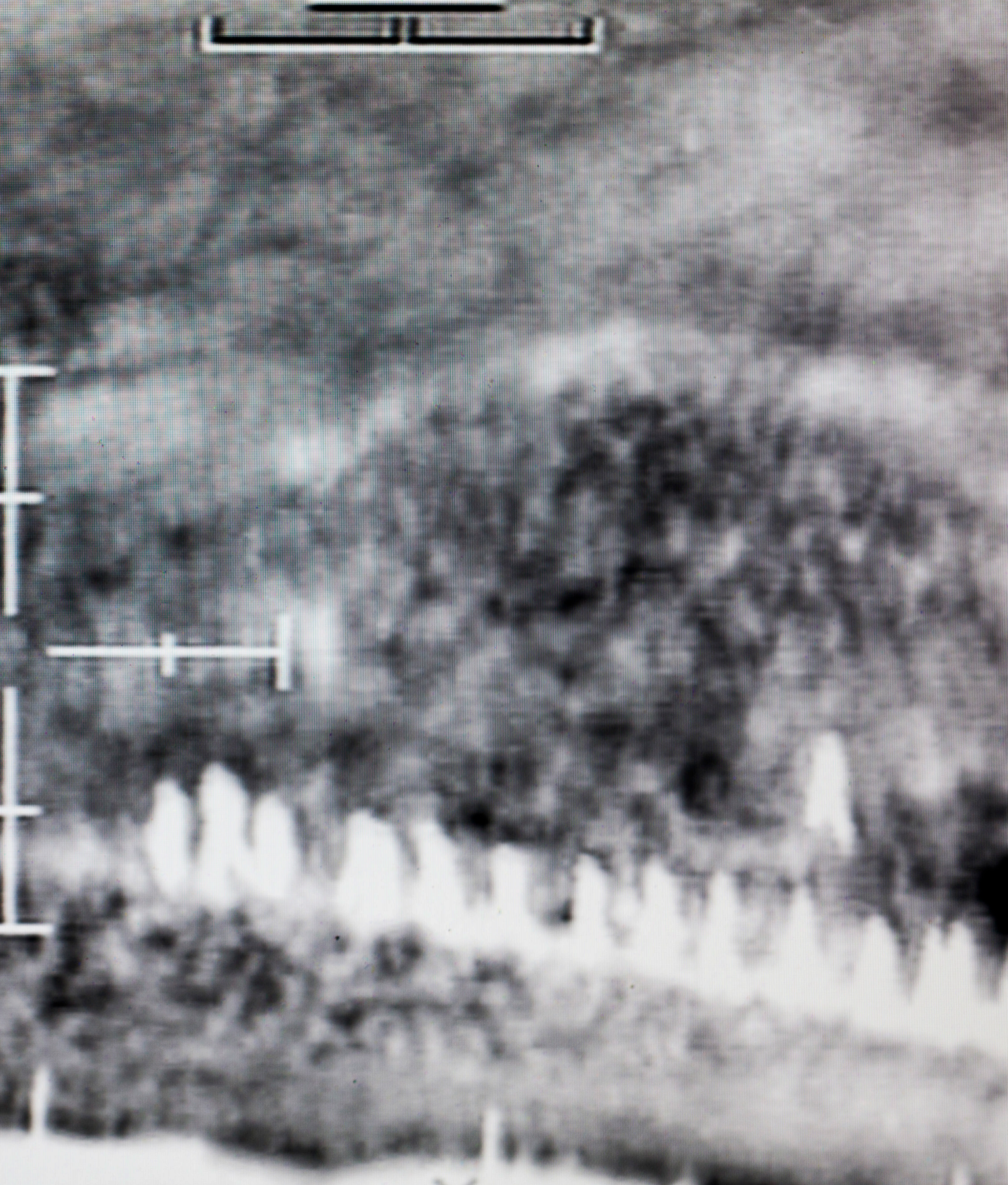


# NOTES ON BIOPOLITICS





From the filmed archives of the Media Service of the INS (Immigration and Nationalization Service), used in Chantal Akerman, *De l'autre côté*, 2003.

# Notes on Biopolitics.

## On a posthumously published text by Guy Debord

Michael Stone-Richards

What's yet in this that bear'st the name of life?

Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act. III, scene 1.

Probably the most disquieting aspect of Debord's books is the fact that history seems to have committed itself to relentlessly confirm their analyses.

Giorgio Agamben, "Marginal Notes on the *Society of the Spectacle*."<sup>1</sup>

I

Wherever we turn in the thinking of the art-life nexus or practice the name of Guy Debord or the *Internationale situationniste* cannot easily be avoided. The recent publication of Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), a study in the genealogy of social practice / participatory art, bears out the omnipresence of the name of Debord. Mapping? Dérive? The image of the city? Commodification? Re-purposing (the poor man's détournement)? Ecology and representation in the terms of a sick planet ? The ethics and politics of time, indeed, an anthropology of time? The role of secrecy / disinformation in the formation and maintenance of ignorance? The sense of a politics of loss? Most, if not all, of the terms of thought in contemporary advanced art and theory of representation find themselves at the least genealogically anchored in Debord's formulations. Even as Debord's much misunderstood language of failure and pessimism comes more and more to be acknowledged – and in many quarters deeply *resented* – it still remains that his name, and the practices long associated with it, cannot escape invocation, whence Claire Bishop, at the very opening of chapter 1 of her *Artificial Hells*:

A recurrent set of theoretical reference points governs the current literature on-participatory and collaborative art: Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau, the Situationist International, Paulo Freire, Deleuze and Guattari, and Hakim Bey, to name just a few. Among these, the most frequently cited is the French filmmaker and writer Guy Debord, for his indictment of the alienating and divisive effects of capitalism in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), and for his theorisation of collectively produced 'situations'. For many artists and curators on the left, Debord's critique strikes to the heart of why participation is important as a project: it rehumanises a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production.<sup>2</sup>

Bishop is correct in her assessment of the extent to which Debord's formulations have become terms of reference, even reflexes for many contemporary art theorists and practitioners, but the problem, which she herself does not address, is that the Debord of contemporary art imaginary is in any case deeply misread, curiously dated, almost something preserved in aspic, a nostalgia for revolutionary enthusiasm.

## II

The publication in 1988 of Debord's *Commentaires sur la Société du spectacle* made clear that Debord still held to the theses of the *La Société du spectacle*, the central argument of which states that social relations are mediated by images in such a way that the structuring of representation takes on a (spectral) life of its own, deriving its energies from a *life* increasingly unknown to itself, culminating in an autonomy not merely of image but of the commodity (form) always doubling with that on which it feeds:

The individual whom this impoverished spectacular thought has marked in depth, and *more than any other element of his formation*, from the beginning becomes placed in the service of the established order, even as his subjective intention was able to be completely the contrary of such an outcome.<sup>3</sup>

The *Commentary* deepens the connection between spectacle, image, and commodity in the direction of *life* itself, its impoverishment and endangerment:

The spectacle does not conceal that certain dangers surround the marvelous order which it has established. The pollution of oceans and the destruction of equatorial forests threaten the renewal of oxygen for the Earth; its ozone layer scarcely resists industrial progress; radiations of nuclear origin accumulate irreversibly. The spectacle simply concludes that this is without importance. (*Commentaires*, XII.)

The most significant development in Debord's thought since *The Society of the Spectacle* is the clearer emergence of a Biopolitical dimension always implicit in his thinking.<sup>4</sup> Though there are many sources for the development

– in Hans Jonas, in Hannah Arendt, for example – Michel Foucault can rightly be taken as the figure who has formulated the terms of a development of the critical theory of late modernity / neo-liberalism in terms of Biopolitics. This was the project of Foucault's late work, that is, the lectures of the Collège de France. When Foucault comes to define the Biopolitical, it is part of his argument that the distinctiveness of late modernity, as this emerges from Enlightenment forms, is decisively not the power over death – the prerogative and core of classical notions of sovereignty – but rather a set of interlocking systems of knowledge and power (the development of the life sciences, for example, such demography, anthropology, social science, improved medical-clinical care) which bear upon life itself:

It appears to me that one of the fundamental phenomena of the 19th-century has been what one could call the taking into account of life by power: if you wish, an assumption of power [une prise de pouvoir] over man *qua* living being, a sort of nationalization by the state [etatisation] of the biological.<sup>5</sup>

The development of the new knowledges of the social goes hand-in-hand with new a new technique / technology which addresses directly “the life of men, or further, if you wish, [this new technique of non-disciplinary power] addresses itself not to the body-man, but to living man, to man the living being; at the limit, if you wish, to species-man. (*Cours*, 216.) A necessary implication of these techniques applied to life, to what is living in man, is the standardization or normalization of forms to facilitate the accessibility and expansion of such techniques, hence as (human) beings become standardized *life itself* becomes shaped by this process of technical and technological standardization, by the statistical which is the

method for study not of the individual (thing or item) but of populations (regularities as distributed over large groups): “It’s at that moment, in any case, that the statistical measure of these phenomena along with their first demographics begins to be put to work.” (*Cours*, 216.) For Foucault, modernity is precisely this situation in which “For undoubtedly the first in history, the biological becomes thought with the political [se réfléchit dans le politique]; the fact of living is no longer this inaccessible underground which only emerges from time to time, in the hazards of death and its fatality; for one thing it passes into the controlling field of knowledge and the intervention of power.”<sup>6</sup> Here Foucault makes the internal connection between a new conception of history and a new conception of the political for the comprehension of modernity (and subsequently the age of neo-liberalism):

If one can call “bio-history” the pressures by which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with each other, it would be necessary to speak of the “bio-political” in order to designate that which makes life and its mechanisms enter into the domain of explicit calculations and makes of knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life. (*L’Histoire de la sexualité*, 188.)

Henceforth “man” is no longer, according to the Aristotelian formula, a speaking, rational animal capable of a political existence; rather, “modern man is an animal in whose politics his life of being alive is in question.” (*L’Histoire de la sexualité*, 188.) It is not sovereignty or even the development of the State which defines the distinctively modern on Foucault’s account, but rather the development of a *technology centered upon life itself* (*L’Histoire de la sexualité*, 190) in such a way that agency

will progressively move away from subjects and even States and into technology itself now become part of complex networks beyond the control of the State. The spread of technological agency beyond the control of the State will at first be associated with forms of outlaw practice and para-State entities – multi-nationals, say, but also mafias and cartels of all sorts – but eventually the distinctions between State and para-State actors will become blurred or non-existent (something which has long been the case in any situation in which the extraordinary doctrine of “national security” is invoked) as actions more and more bear on the control and exploitation of life as made possible by technological capacity and projection and the conception of life as a resource – whether in terms of human labor/energy, genetic manipulation, or ownership of nature. “For undoubtedly the first in history, the biological becomes thought with the political [se réfléchit dans le politique]; the fact of living is no longer this inaccessible underground which only emerges from time to time [...]; it passes into the controlling field of knowledge and the intervention of power.” (*L’Histoire de la sexualité*, 187.) In this conception of the late modern, politics are no longer about the struggle over the distribution of resources within even a notional sovereignty of the people, rather, the political has become the network of power through which instrumentality over life itself is exercised, but this is not a *care of life* but a politics over life – “For undoubtedly the first time in history, the biological becomes thought with the political [se réfléchit dans le politique]” – in which life itself is endangered and uniquely so by man. There are many areas where Debord and Foucault disagreed but on this point of the new way in which life itself is endangered by a new conception of the political they are fundamentally in accord.

In a quite extraordinary text – a set of “Notes pour Mezioud”<sup>7</sup> – on the problem of immigrants and immigration in France, or rather, the discourse on immigrants and immigration, from 1985 posthumously published in 2006, Debord makes clear the implicit connection between pollution and spectacle in the production of waste: the pollution that makes waste of the earth is structurally equivalent to the pollution that turns human lives to waste.<sup>8</sup> Immigrants are the waste of the contemporary world order. Here is how Debord puts it:

Like the wastes of the atomic industry or oil in the Ocean – and here the thresholds of intolerance are being defined less and less “scientifically” – immigrants, products of the same administration of modern capitalism, will remain for centuries, for millennia, all ways.<sup>9</sup>

Immigrants, then, cannot be expelled or got rid of – there is, in other words, a politics of visibility at work here: we try to hide that on which we have come to develop a dependence, fail to acknowledge what we have made resistant presence in our midst, whose expelled absence allows us to feel more than simply a part or moment of larger autonomous structures (“products of the same administration of modern capitalism”). But what is the function of the contemporary immigrant? – the *sans-papiers*, as they are called in France, or the undocumented as they are called in the United States – this is Debord’s question. The usual way of addressing the question of “immigration” is one in which, says Debord, “One discusses nothing but idiocies. Should we keep or eliminate immigrants? [...] Should we, then, assimilate them or “respect cultural diversities?” (“Notes,” 1588.) These questions may sound pragmatic, even legitimate though harsh, but, argues Debord in his “Notes pour Mezioud,” they are specious, indeed, idiocies

which serve only to conceal the gravity and near uselessness of the situation. How can there be talk of assimilation – whether for or against – when it is no longer possible to assimilate since the model upon which assimilation was predicated is no longer viable, for it is not only immigrants (or refugees) who are excluded: “*We can no longer assimilate anyone [personne].* Not youth, nor French workers, not even provincials or old ethnic minorities (Corsicans, Bretons, etc.)” (“Notes,” 1588.) (Debord’s argument, it should be clear, is a structural argument about the effects of late capitalism and so it should be easy to fill in our own examples of excluded youth, of Native American reservations (or are they sovereign nations?), or the long-term unemployed who, as it is said in the monthly unemployment statistics in the United States, have been so long unemployed they no longer figure in the statistics because *they have given up looking for work* and as a result become unassimilable to society.)

Debord gives a singular – and fascinating – reason as to why the very idea of assimilation is no longer viable as a national or cultural model for the creation and transmission of identity: it is because “Paris, destroyed city,<sup>10</sup> has lost its historic role which was to make Frenchmen.” (“Notes,” 1588.) We might understand this statement, that “Paris, destroyed city [or, devastated city], has lost its historic role which was to make Frenchmen” by considering the famous statement made by Massimo Taparelli, Marquis d’Azeglio, upon the creation of the nation of Italy in 1861: “L’Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani,” which has come to be known in the following translation: *We have made Italy, now we must make Italians.* Consider, for a moment, the question, How are Americans made? and the answer to this question, one in which the Detroit of Fordism plays a central role *historically*, cannot but be along the lines of: *The creation of the middle class is the way in which America made out of many one.*

In short, Americans were made by the creation of a middle class. There is no city in America whose structural and cultural role is even vaguely comparable to Paris; there is no author – no Dante, say – who functioned as a symbol of the importance of the vernacular language in national identity-formation, hence the fact that to this day there is not – and there is no need for – a Homer, a Virgil, a Dante, a Shakespeare, a Racine, a Cervantes (for Castilian, not Spanish), a Goethe, a Mickiewicz, a Mácha, that is, a National Writer, in the United States of America. In the United States of America, more decentralized than any European country with the possible exception of Germany, no city, no language played the role of bonding agent in the creation of national identity, for that role was taken by The American Dream, or, the creation of the middle classes. With the collapse of the industries for the creation of a middle class - Detroit and every other post-Industrial city – and the difficulties in maintaining the myth of the middle class in the face of increasing inequalities it becomes ever easier to see that the middle class, that invention of the modern world and the nation-state, in other words, a form of life of very recent invention, may have reached its end, may be dying. The crisis of America is, in other words, the crisis represented by the inability to sustain the middle classes and with it a certain idea of America. It is in this context that the (victimized) immigrant becomes, in Debord's telling characterization, the *figure of dispossession* in a society and a world of dispossession, wherever the conditions of modern production prevail, that is, the society of the spectacle:

Immigrants have the perfect right to live in France. They are the representatives of dispossession; and dispossession is at home in France, so long as it is in the majority, and almost universal. Notoriously, immigrants have lost

their culture and their country, without being able to find others. And the French are in the same situation, and scarcely more secretly. ("Notes," 1592.)

(A not dissimilar point is made by Hannah Arendt in her final interview, given in 1973 to French television, when her interviewer Roger Errera asked her: "What does it mean for Jews to be assimilated into American society," to which she replied: "Would you kindly tell me to what the Jews should assimilate here? To the English? To the Irish? To the Germans? To the French? To the ... you know, whoever came here?"<sup>11</sup>) On this line of argument – which can be found in the work of a Zygmunt Bauman or an Agamben and many whose development in Critical Theory extends to Biopolitics - the immigrant is the figure of what will become the norm in the near future of a world where power and technology are centered upon life as a resource for the grand narrative of the middle class has run its course and may no longer be viable. To grasp the way in which the immigrant may be the figure of dispossession in a near future, we need only consider that all of the practices of control which are at first exercised and perfected upon marginal groups – immigrant specific laws, refugee laws, but think, too, the Patriot Act for terrorists – will eventually move to the center and, having being tried out and perfected, become the norm (think, again, the Patriot Act and the NSA spying on American and world communications at every level in part simply because the technology makes it possible so to do even as the individuals who run the NSA do not yet have the capacity to use all the information which their systems can capture).

The unassimilable – the unemployed, youth, no less than immigrants – is the figure of dispossession within a society and a culture in *decomposition* as Debord uses this Situationist term ("Notes," 1590) and as such it is a



society prone to sudden explosions: “Thus its décor everywhere becomes inflammable like a high school in France [comme un collège en France].” (“Notes,” 1590.) Barely twenty years after writing these words, in October-November of 2005, France, Republican France, France *laïque* (secular), color-blind France where it is illegal for government research to ask racial questions or collect data based upon race, would be traumatized by the spontaneous outbreak of urban violence and arsons in the blue-collar outskirts of Paris (*the banlieues*) started by the unassimilable youth from a “collège [high school] en France,” *second-generation* immigrants.<sup>12</sup>

#### IV

Guy Debord committed suicide in November 1994. Before his death, he had carefully prepared for transmission all areas of his life which mattered to him: works which previously had been copyright-free were brought into copyright to be controlled by his wife Alice Debord; henceforth Gallimard would be the house responsible for the publication of his works; his archives were organized, etc. One thing that he also undertook was to co-operate with the film-maker Brigitte Cornand in the making of a documentary of the life, *Guy Debord: Son art, son temps*, by agreement to be screened after his death, which it was in January, 1995. One of the most powerful, troubling, and disturbing parts of the film is an approximately nine minute section showing the rampant, utterly depressing illiteracy of the French school system (the “collège en France”) in the *banlieues* (outskirts) of Paris.<sup>13</sup> Female students of African and Islamic descent cannot readily say that a novel by Zola – *Au Bonheur des Dames!* – published in 1883 means that it was published in the nineteenth-century. When asked by the instructor what century this would be one student – whilst others play with their hair – responds, “Oh là là!” as if this might

be a problem in higher mathematics. And it is downhill all the way from there as the film deploys documentary footage of the decomposition into violence of the public school system of the *banlieues* (a homemade bomb is set off in one school, for example) – as the voice over says at one point: in the mid-nineteen eighties Parisian schools were safe, “Since then the violence of the street has entered into the school,” and “the violence of the language of the street has entered into the school.”<sup>14</sup> At the end of this extended passage of the learning of illiteracy – “The French [send their children to school] to learn illiteracy,” wrote Debord in the “Notes pour Mezioud” in a context that is not racialized (“Notes,” 1591) – there appears an inter-title evidently composed by Debord (and not Cornand) which says that the preceding documentation illustrates with exactness Hobbes’ great saying about life before and outside civilization and the state: solitary, dirty, bereft of pleasures, brutish, and short.<sup>15</sup>

To say that this scene from *Guy Debord: Son art, son temps* has occasioned controversy would be an understatement. There are those who believe that this passage of film demonstrates Debord’s elitism, even racism. Of course, it does nothing of the kind. There are formal, diagetic, and intertextual factors to consider in understanding what is being performed with this passage of film on the decomposition of education in a “collège en France.” First, it is a *détournement*, found footage that has been re-presented within a new framework in film, which Debord had long believed was the most effective medium for *détournement*: “It is obviously in the cinematic framework that *détournement* can attain its greatest efficacy, and without doubt, for those occupied by the matter, also its greatest beauty.”<sup>16</sup> More specifically, the found footage is not an example of what Debord and Wolman, in their earliest conception of the practice of *détournement*, called *détournement mineur*, that is, where the



'We will go no further. Here begins the land of phantoms.'



détournement “is the détournement of an element which has no particular importance”;<sup>17</sup> instead, this re-use of the found footage is an example of “Abusive détournement [...] when an element significant in itself is the target (fait l’objet); the element which will draw from the new rapprochement a *different significance*.”<sup>18</sup> What, though, is the *different significance* to which this found footage is put in *Guy Debord: Son art, son temps*? It is assuredly a cruel representation, but the cruelty resides not in the intention of the author but within the originating social complex captured in the used footage. Where the original footage is meant clearly to show the sorry state of the school system in the *banlieues* where teachers are threatened, bombs are set off, guns carried to schools, where sexually aggressive and violent messages are left on the answerphones of female teachers, where, in short “the violence of the language of the street has entered into the school,” as a means of generating identification with the plight of the teaching profession, *Guy Debord: Son art, son temps* re-directs the significance elsewhere. This is a classroom scene, a genre that has a key role within modernist and avant-garde sensibility in Mallarmé, Alain-Fournier’s *Le Grand Meulnes* (1913), in the Dada and Surrealist iconography of Max Ernst, André Breton, and a painter such as Toyen, but especially so in the work of Lautréamont,<sup>19</sup> for the classroom is not only the space of inculcation, it is the space of childhood and in modernist and avant-garde thought it is a privileged space for the figuration of the growth of sensibility as childhood develops into self-awareness, spiritual growth with the birth of new capacities, desires and symbolization, and eventually the loss of the condition of childhood through separation. The youth depicted in the film passage under discussion is astonishing for its absences – of innocence, security, and childhood<sup>20</sup> – which precede its arrival in the classroom, hence, again, in the “Notes pour Mezioud,” Debord

observes, again in a context that is not racialized, that “The ghetto of the new spectacular apartheid (not the local, folkloric version of South Africa) is already here, in contemporary France: *the immense majority of the population finds itself there enclosed and brutalized*; and everything would happen the same even if there were not a single immigrant.” (“Notes,” 1591) And here is how Debord argues that the violence of the new form of childhood marked by dispossession precedes and is carried into the classroom:

The French can no longer bear their children. They send them to school from the age of three, and until they are at least sixteen, in order to learn illiteracy. And before they may be three, more and more numerous are the people who find children “unbearable” and hit them with a greater or lesser degree of violence. (“Notes,” 1591.)

The original footage from which *Guy Debord: Son art, son temps* derives this classroom scene would make it seem that the problem of the French school system is the fault of, due to the presence of, immigrants, but the same footage détourned shows the immigrant children as *bouc-émisaires*, that is, scapegoats. There is a telling passage in Mezioud’s book *Le Cauchemar immigré dans la décomposition de la France* – the Mezioud for whom Debord wrote his “Notes pour Mezioud” – which could function as subtitles to the nine minutes of footage used in *Guy Debord: Son Art, son temps*. I quote Mezioud in *extenso*:

There is a quite widespread opinion which would attribute the breakdown of teaching in France to a too strong presence of immigrant children in the schools. These children are generally thought of as congenitally feeble and who inconvenience the overall

functioning academic institution at all “levels.” In a word, immigrants not only steal the livelihood of the French; by a kind of contamination, they permanently condemn the French to certain mental regression. But one need only consider what songs French youth listen to; what religious sects infinitely more ridiculous than Islam for which it is a source of adepts; indeed, to what Ministries this youth must submit teaching reforms and counter-reforms in order to comprehend and clearly see who is responsible for so many ravages, without immigrants – even if some people wished it – from near or far being brought into the mix. Or, if they are brought into the mix, *it is to the same extent as French youth, as victims.*<sup>21</sup>

It is no longer, if ever it was, a loss and dispossession uniquely typical of the immigrant experience. It is a loss shared by many, indeed, all on Debord’s argument. The type of political thinking required to make sense of this condition, though, can no longer be classical politics but a thinking of the Biopolitical, hence in “La Planète malade” (1971) Debord speaks of “The period which has all the technical means to alter absolutely the conditions of life over all the Earth”<sup>22</sup> being also a period in which there is a radical narrowing of political choices:

Concerning an environment, whether “natural” or constructed, of natality, of biology, of production, of “madness,” etc. the choice will not be between joy and sorrow [la fête et le malheur] but, consciously and at every intersection, between, on the one hand, a thousand happy or disastrous possibilities relatively corrigible, and, on the other hand, nothing. The terrible choices of the

near future leave this one alternative: total democracy or total bureaucracy. (“La Planète malade,” 1069.)

The immigrant is the figure of this Biopolitical near future.<sup>23</sup>

## V

In 2009, the French director Jean-Paule Lilienfeld made a film, *Journée de la jupe* (American Skirt Day), starring the incomparable Isabelle Adjani as Sonia Bergerac a high-school teacher “dans un collège ‘difficile’ (in a ‘difficult’ high school)” in which the class cannot and will not be taught. When a gun drops from the bag of one of the students she quickly takes it and holds the class hostage saying, “On va pouvoir faire un cours (We are going to be able to have a class),” gun in one hand and Molière in the other. She is also on the edge of a nervous breakdown. The film caused a furore in its aim, as Isabelle Adjani put it in an interview, “to render visible what one does not wish to accept as existing.” The practice of *détournement* can be grasped in this context as part of a practice, an ethic and politics of visibility where immigrants would be made scapegoats and invisible in their alterity. The figure of this alterity, of this falling below the threshold of visibility, of personhood, has been conveyed with an unsurpassed power, intelligence and pathos in the Belgian film-maker Chantal Akerman’s film *De l’autre côté* (From the Other Side), 2003, through a stunning use of *détournement*.

Concentrating on the border crossing between Arizona and Mexico, Akerman’s *De l’autre côté* is a slow series of interviews in which an unmoving camera concentrates on the faces and seated bodies of immigrants – mothers, grandmothers, sons, fathers, both in Mexico and Arizona – who are invited to tell their stories with minimal interference from an off-screen Akerman. A film could not be more austere yet

pregnant with the poetry of silences and emptiness in landscapes and lives. The quiet sense of proleptic tension which is characteristic of Akerman's film aesthetic finally finds its form – figural, symbolic, and anthropological – in an extended scene of found footage. The found footage comes from the filmed archives of the Media Service of the INS (Immigration and Nationalization Service). Shot in black and white night vision it shows an INS helicopter pilot surveying the border landscape. His camera, with crosshairs, moves unevenly, when suddenly, rapidly, jerkily it turns back upon itself and there we see what was there all along but which had passed unnoticed: a line, a long line of (white) ghosts moving slowly, painfully slowly across the landscape in gleaming negative white and black. The pilot lets out a scream of delight – that is the mark of the spontaneous – and recognition, matching the equal recognition of the viewer (in startled shock), and lets his camera linger over this undulating line of ghosts. The scene is shocking and moving – here, you think, is as clear an example of the logic of (in)-visibility at play – but it becomes affectively *stunning* as it dawns on one that what the scene evokes simultaneously is another great moment of negative in film history, namely, the moment in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1921) where the carriage drivers, taking their mortal passenger to the meet Nosferatu the vampire, arrive at the bridge,<sup>24</sup> the place of transition and passage, and say to their passenger: "We will go no further. Here begins the land of phantoms." And as the passenger is met by Nosferatu's carriage the movement into the land of phantoms, the movement *to the other side*, is conveyed through a landscape effulgent in negative light as almost to suggest acoustic qualities. Not only are the ghosts and vampire figures of alterity, the landscape, too, the territory, is an *estate* of alterity. Such a re-cognition is not, however, the preserve of film-makers of the caliber of Debord or Akerman. In a recent article by Rory

Carroll in the London *Guardian* on American immigration, we learn of one Crisanta Ramos, a mother of three, from Guatemala who, "[after the death by drowning of her partner Benjamin Roldan Salinas], was granted provisional permission to stay [in the United States]. But she felt *haunted*." Estanislao Matias, a twenty four year old Guatamalan, undocumented immigrant in the United States, is quoted by Carroll as saying that "In our imagination we think of the marvels awaiting us. That's why we risk everything to come." But, concludes Matias, "It was like a horror movie."<sup>25</sup>

Behind us, beyond us now  
is phantom territory.

Robert Hayden, "Travelling through Fog"

<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "Marginal Notes on the *Society of the Spectacle*," *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 80.

<sup>2</sup> Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la Société du spectacle*, XI (Paris: Gallimard, 2006). Roman numerals refer not to page numbers but to Debord's numbered commentaries.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Guy Debord, "La Planète malade" (originally intended for what would have been volume 13 of the *Internationale situationniste*) in Guy Debord, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 1063-1069, and "Abat-faim" (1985, *Oeuvres*, 1582-1587. In each of these works, and increasingly in Debord's work from 1969 onward, the relations among technology, life, food, and pollution become more insistent.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société : Cours au Collège de France, 1975-1976* (Paris : Gallimard, Seuil, 1997), 213.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Foucault, "Droit de mort et pouvoir sur la vie," *L'Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1. *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris : Gallimard, 1976), 187.

<sup>7</sup> Guy Debord, "Notes sur la «question des immigrants»: Notes pour Mezioud," *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 1588-1592. Mezioud is Mezioud Ouldhammer, *Le Cauchemar immigré dans la décomposition de la France* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1986). An English translation of Debord's "Notes" is available as "Notes on the 'immigrant question'," <http://www.notbored.org/immigrant-question.html>

<sup>8</sup> On this thinking of human lives in late modernity as waste, cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Guy Debord, "Notes sur la «question des immigrants,»" *Oeuvres*, 1588.

<sup>10</sup> It is in his *Panegyrique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) that Debord reveals his admiration for Louis Chevalier's *L'Assassinat de Paris* (1977).

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Arendt, "The Last Interview," *The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2013), 127.

<sup>12</sup> Here are the opening two sentences to the Wikipedia entry for "2005 French riots": "In October and November 2005, a series of riots by mainly Arab, North African, and black French second-generation immigrants occurred in the suburbs of Paris and other French cities,[1][2] involving mainly the burning of cars and public buildings at night starting on 27 October 2005 in Clichy-sous-Bois. Events spread to poor housing projects (the cités HLM) in various parts of France." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005\\_French\\_riots\\_accsded\\_5-11-14](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_French_riots_accsded_5-11-14). Cf. Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, *La Psychose française: Les banlieues: le ban de la République* (Paris : Gallimard, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> This extract of *Guy Debord: son art, son temps* can be viewed at YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugA4oaSrtiA>

<sup>14</sup> Here Agamben's observation that the spectacle is language is utterly correct. "It is evident, after all, that the spectacle is language, the very communicativity and linguistic being of humans." Agamben, "Marginal Notes on the *Society of the Spectacle*," 82.

<sup>15</sup> Here I translate back from the French of Debord.

<sup>16</sup> Guy-Ernest Debord and Gil. J. Wolman, "Mode d'emploi du détournement," *Les Lèvres nues*, no. 8 (May 1956) :6.

<sup>17</sup> Debord and Wolman, "Mode d'emploi du détournement," 4.

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<sup>18</sup> Debord and Wolman, “Mode d’emploi du détournement,” 4. My emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> On the significance of the classroom in Lautréamont, cf. Gaston Bachelard, *Lautréamont* (Paris: José Corti, 1989). Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dic-tée* (1982) in its opening pages – like Alain-Fournier’s *Le Grand Meulnes* – is a fully self-conscious assumption and exploration of the topos of the classroom, one of the most powerful in recent late modernist writing.

<sup>20</sup> At Culture Lab Detroit in April 2014, an audience member asked the panel (Theaster Gates, David Adjaye, and the Campano brothers) how, in terms of Social Practice, humanity, one may address children who live in and must daily walk through landscapes of blight, ugliness, and violence. With great tact and subtlety, Theaster Gates took up the question and re-formulated it in terms of environments of psychic trauma. This is how *Guy Debord: Son art, son temps* looks at the schools of Paris.

<sup>21</sup> Mezioud Ouldamer, « Les Immigrés existent, tout le monde les a rencontrés, » *Le Cauchemar immigré dans la décomposition de la France* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1986), 85. My emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> Guy Debord, “La Planète malade,” *Œuvres*, 1063.

<sup>23</sup> From a school system predicated upon wasted lives to the prison-industrial system for the warehousing of wasted lives is a logical step, as Grace Lee Boggs, amongst many, recognizes, when she speaks of “the cancerous growth of the prison industry” and how “prisons clearly serve as warehouses for the millions whom capitalism has made expendable.” Grace Lee Boggs, “Let’s talk about Malcolm and Martin,” *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 104. On the need and possibility of new forms of schooling, cf. Boggs, “Detroit, Place and Space to Begin Anew,” *The Next American Revolution*, 105-134. Since the academic year 2013-14 there has opened in Detroit a James and Grace

Lee Boggs School where a new experiment in education for Detroit children has begun.

<sup>24</sup> In 1936 Yves Tanguy would construct a Surrealist object bearing the title *De l’autre côté du pont*, clearly inspired by *Nosferatu*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Rory Carroll, “‘It was like a horror movie’ – The undocumented Latinos living in fear,” *The Guardian*, 4-9-14.