

Addendum from 2014 relating to the relationship between Guy Debord and *L'obsolescence de l'homme*

Anders published his book *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen (L'obsolescence de l'homme)*¹ in 1956. That same year, the first pages of the chapter titled “Le monde comme fantôme et matrice” were translated into English and published in the American journal *Dissent*.² The English-language translation was the work of Norbert Guterman.

Guterman was a philosopher and good friend of Henri Lefebvre, and he fluently translated into English texts that had been written in German, Polish or French. One would be correct to think that Anders' book was known in this circle and that it appeared sufficiently important to promote it in the United States. Nevertheless, it does not seem that, at the time, its contents were available on the French market through a book, translation, critical review, inventory or journal (one might imagine that Anders had a paranoid side, but this seems as erroneous as claims about Rousseau: he had been robbed by people, such as Sartre, who never cited him).

We know that Lefebvre and Debord were very close in 1957-1958 (and not as late as 1962, as Lefebvre mistakenly claims in an interview with Kristin Ross in 1983)³ and that they thoroughly discussed what they were reading and doing.

Thus it is very likely that Debord, who did not know German, knew about Anders through such conversations, perhaps those that took place upon the occasion of the publication of the English translation of it.

As all of Anders' readers can see, the entirety of the chapter titled “Le monde comme fantôme et comme matrice” contains analyses that are very close to those in chapters 1 and 3 of [Debord's] *La société du spectacle*. A very strong kinship is clear, much stronger than the kinship between Debord's book and

¹ The English would be *The Obsolescence of Mankind*. Note well that Anders' book as a whole has never been published in an English translation.

² To be precise: *Dissent* (Vol. III, pp. 14-24) published the first seven sections of Volume I, Part Two, which was titled “The World as Phantom and as Matrix.” For a scan of it, see <http://www.lesamisdnenemesis.com/wp-content/uploads/2005/11/Dissent.pdf>. A translation of the entirety of Part Two (all of its five chapters) can be found here: <https://libcom.org/library/obsolescence-man-volume-i-part-two-“-world-phantom-matrix-philosophical-considerations-r>.

³ Translator unknown. Published in *October* 79, Winter 1997, and reprinted here: <http://www.notbored.org/lefebvre-interview.html>

Boorstin's *L'image*.⁴ But Anders' book does not contain the term "spectacle." Jean-Pierre Voyer⁵ has tried to demonstrate the opposite by citing the term *Schauspiel* ("spectacle" in the sense of a theatrical representation), which appears at the end of "Le monde comme fantôme et comme matrice," but it is clear that this term is utilized only once and in passing, not as a major concept. In all of Anders' pages, one could believe that his reasoning *led him to such a concept, but he did not formulate it*.

Three remarks seem worthy of being added.

The first: the term "spectacle" appears in *Internationale situationniste* starting in 1960 (*IS* #5, p. 4); it is then developed as a concept in "Programme élémentaire du bureau d'urbanisme unitaire," which was drafted by Raoul Vaneigem and Attila Kotanyi in 1961 (*IS* #6, pp. 16-17), and then again in an orientation report presented by Vaneigem the same year at the Fifth Conference of the SI, which was held in Gothenburg (*IS* #7, pp. 26-27). "Spectacle" reappears in the "Réponse à une enquête du Centre d'art socio-expérimental," signed by Martin, Strijbosch, Vaneigem and Viénet in December 1963 (*IS* #9, p. 42); in March 1966 (*IS* #10, p. 3) in the essay "Le déclin et la chute de l'économie spectaculaire-marchande," which was written but not signed by Debord; and then, repeatedly, in issue #11, published in [October] 1967, along with a chapter from Debord's book ("La séparation achevée"), just before it was published. In other words, the formation of the concept was the result of a collective and longstanding effort before it reached maturity in Debord's book.

The second: Anders only broached the subjective aspect of the question, that of the spectator, and the media industry that produces the spectator, but without ever enlarging the circle, as the SI and Debord did, to include the class structure of society, the market economy, urbanism and the time of his era (Debord was eminently influenced by Lukács, who had no influence on Anders).

The third: one can't avoid posing this question: Was what appears as an oversight on Anders' part really one? In other words, is the spectacle the only or the best way to conceptualize (to totalize) the analyses made by Anders, Debord and several others? It might appear that Anders failed in his final conceptualization, but he might not have been particularly interested in that mode of conceptualization. The task was nothing less than defining a new phase in the history of domination by capital and the commodity, which Anders perceived as a real anthropological mutation.

⁴ Debord briefly quoted Daniel Boorstin's *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America* (first published in English in 1962) in *The Society of the Spectacle*.

⁵ Cf. <http://leuven.pagesperso-orange.fr/Baudet.htm>.

To conclude, I will not deprive myself of the opportunity to school those who have thought they've been able to detect the presence of the concept of spectacle in Anders because he actually used the term, but in fact did so in a conference paper delivered in 1960 and published by Beck in 1980 as part of Volume II of *L'obsolescence de l'homme* (for a long time this book was unavailable in French and was finally translated and published by Editions Fario in 2012):

“We are deprived of the capacity to distinguish between reality and appearance. When appearance is presented in a realistic fashion, as is often the case in radio and TV broadcasts, reality takes on the aspect of appearance, of a simple representation [*Darbietung*], because, it is a broadcast, it hears and sees itself as an appearance. When the stage has taken the appearance of the world, the world becomes a stage, thus a simple *spectaculum* [Latin in original] that one need not take seriously. The accumulation of images in our lives is an illusionist's trick because it gives us – and it is intended to give us – the illusion that we are seeing reality. The sensation of *spectaculum* [Latin in original] that produces the reality one sees on TV [also] produces an infection of reality itself: the fact that Kennedy and Nixon were made-up for their final televised debate proves not only that they were perceived by the public as a mere *show*,⁶ but also that they themselves considered themselves to be actors.” (*Antiquiertheit des Menschen II*, p. 252, my translation).

If Anders used the precise term “spectacle,” and if he spoke of a continued succession of *spectacula* (*Antiquiertheit des Menschen II*, p. 253), it was always with the same limitations as in his first volume – in other words, he did so *without wanting to turn it into a concept*. Wrongly or rightly? That is another debate.

Jean-Pierre Baudet⁷

⁶ English in the original.

⁷ Published here: <http://www.lesamidenemesis.com/wp-content/uploads/2005/11/Anthropologie-négative-1-avec-addendum1.pdf>.

Translated by Bill Not Bored, 28 August 2014, in consultation with the author. All footnotes by the translator.