

“At the Café of Lost Youth: A Funereal Oration by Guy Debord” By Francois Bott¹

Guy Debord rejects both praise and condemnation. One of his films is titled *Réfutation de tous les jugements tant élogieux qu’hostiles*.² But we can still highlight the pleasure of reading his texts, because they demand and provoke a passionate reading. Far from wanting to attract the favors of his contemporaries, Debord mistreats many of them, whom he denounces with the ferocity of a grand inquisitor for their weaknesses and abandons them. Taking up the words of Chateaubriand, he thinks that, in our era, scorn must be dispensed “sparingly, because so many deserve it.”

Of this era, of its masters and its servants, he makes the most severe judgment: to him, it is a “disastrous shipwreck.” The seductiveness of this author comes precisely from the rigor of his critique and the sovereign form that he gives it. The publication of his complete cinematographic works, and particularly the text of his most recent film, *In girum imus nocte*,³ confirms that he continues a line of French writers – Pascal, Bossuet and Chamfort – who combine elegance, passion and firmness.

In girum imus nocte: we turn round in the night. . . .⁴ Debord makes the funereal oration for an era marked by “the war that a society wages against itself, against its own possibilities.” No doubt this world can lead the most enthusiastic and daydream-preoccupied minds to misanthropy. “It has become ungovernable, this spoiled world⁵ in which new suffering is disguised under the name of old pleasure, and in which people have so much fear. . . . They awake stunned and they gropingly seek for life.”

It is raining in Paris. We wonder if winter will end soon, or if, at the very least, in these indifferent times, we can still feel the magic despair and the unparalleled pleasures of the winters that were ours. The author writes the requiem for his disappeared years; he evokes the “somber melancholy that has been expressed by so many mocking and sad words in the café of lost youth.” We will die one day, soon. And so, let us never be unworthy of our pride or ambitions. That, I believe, is the lesson of Guy Debord.

¹ Francois Bott, “Au café de la jeunesse perdue: Une oraison funèbre de Guy Debord,” *Le Monde*, 19 January 1979. Translated from the French by NOT BORED! 20 July 2020. All footnotes by the translator.

² The rest of the film’s title is *qui ont été jusqu’ici portés sur le film « La Société du spectacle »*. It was released in 1975.

³ The rest of the film’s title is *et consumimur igni*. It was released in 1978.

⁴ The author once again fails to complete the phrase: *and are consumed by fire*.

⁵ The phrase “spoiled world” appears in scare quotes in the text of Debord’s film.