

The Society of the Spectacle

Guy Debord • Edited and translated by Ken Knabb

The Society of the Spectacle is a carefully considered effort to clarify the most fundamental tendencies and contradictions of the society in which we find ourselves—in order to facilitate its overthrow.

Guy Debord was the founder of the Situationist International, the notorious avant-garde group that helped trigger the May 1968 revolt in France, which brought the entire country to a standstill for several weeks. His book *The Society of the Spectacle*, originally published in Paris in 1967, has been translated into more than twenty other languages and is arguably the most important radical work of the twentieth century. Ken Knabb's meticulous new translation is the first edition in any language to include extensive annotations, clarifying the historical allusions and revealing the sources of Debord's quotations and "détournements."

Contrary to popular misconceptions, Debord's book is neither an ivory tower "philosophical" discourse nor a mere expression of "protest." This makes the book more of a challenge, but it is also why it remains so pertinent more than half a century after its original publication, while countless other social theories and intellectual fads have come and gone.

It has, in fact, become even more pertinent than ever, because the spectacle has become more all-pervading and glaringly obvious than ever. As Debord noted in his follow-up work, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988), "spectacular domination has succeeded in raising an entire generation molded to its laws."

Debord's book remains the best guidebook to understanding that mold and breaking it.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Guy Debord was the founder of the Situationist International (1957), the editor of its journal *Internationale Situationniste* (1958–1969), the author of several books, and the creator of seven films, including one based on his book *The Society of the Spectacle*.

Ken Knabb has translated numerous works by Guy Debord and the Situationist International, including Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (2014; reissued by PM Press in 2024) and Debord's *Complete Cinematic Works* (2003; to be reissued by PM Press in 2025). Knabb's own writings, published in *Public Secrets: Collected Skirmishes of Ken Knabb* (1997) and posted online at his "Bureau of Public Secrets" website, have been translated into more than fifteen languages. He is currently presenting a series of Zoom webinars on *The Society of the Spectacle* and the *Situationist International Anthology*.

GUY DEBORD

THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

Translated and annotated by Ken Knabb

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