

[A Possible Appointment With Michele Bernstein](#)

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A possible appointment was a psychogeographical technique used by the Lettrist International and later the Situationist International. One variant of it was to go to a specific place at a specific time to meet someone who may or may not be there. When I got an invitation to the launch of the first English translation of Michele Bernstein's 1961 novel *The Night* (Book Works 2013), I decided this was a possible appointment with its author (who was deeply involved in lettrist and situationist activity in the 1950s and 1960s). While I didn't know for sure Bernstein would be at the launch, it seemed likely because she's lived in south-west England for more than thirty years and London is only a few hours away from her home by train.

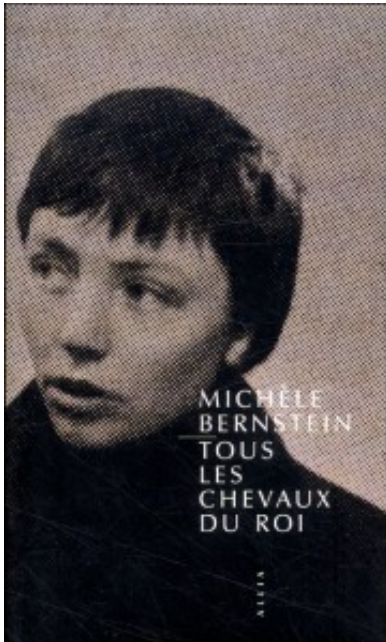


If Bernstein was present and had retained the sense of humour she'd clearly had in earlier life, I thought I could amuse her by littering any conversation we might have with various detoured (altered) literary phrases. Among those I'd come up with were: to marry one alcoholic, Michele, may be regarded as misfortune, but to marry two looks like carelessness (Wilde); your two novels are as beautiful as a chance encounter between Guy Debord and Lolo Ferrari at a Parisian bar room table (Lautreamont); Kojève is odious and obscure, both Sartre and de Beauvoir are for petty wits; Lenin is basest of the three, unpleasant,

harsh, contemptible, and vile, 'tis ultra-leftism and the collective power of the workers' councils that hath ravished me! (Marlowe); the simplest situationist act consists of going into the street with pump action water pistols in your fists and shooting blindly into a line of armed cops (Breton).



When I arrived at The Old Kings Head pub in Holywell Street, I immediately clocked a woman sitting outside who looked to me like Michele Bernstein. I went in to get a drink and ran into Gavin Everall of Book Works who said he must introduce me to Michele. Steve Beard earwigged our conversation and decided to come along too. So Gavin led us into the street and introduced us to the lady I'd already identified as Bernstein. She was sitting at a pavement table because she was smoking as well as drinking (bitters alternated with whisky shots).



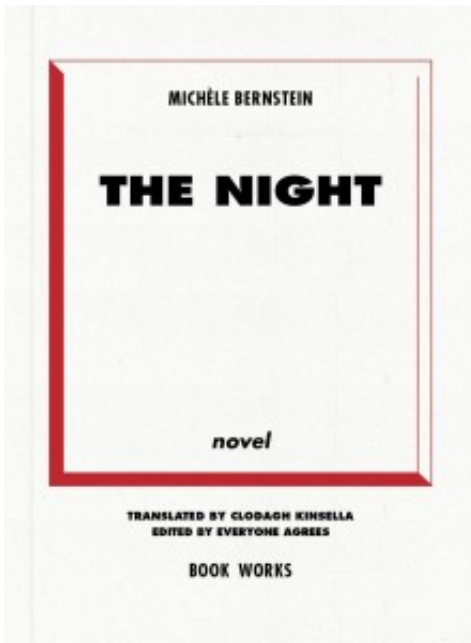
Gavin introduced me to Michele and I managed to shake hands and say hello but before I could do anything else, Steve Beard was handing her a copy of his new book *Pre-Enactments* and telling her about it. Publishers love authors who are good at self-promotion and Steve obviously knows what he is doing in this department (so all editors out there take note: this is not only a man who writes fabulous texts, he also hustles them, so he's gotta be worth signing up). And since you often learn more from observing someone than speaking to them, maybe it was better that I didn't get to try out my prepared conversation, which aside from detourned literary quotes also included such non-sequiturs as: "I've always been sexually attracted to washing machines."



Bernstein was very robust for someone in their eighties. She told Richard Essex that not only did Guy Debord have a collection of toy soldiers, she'd even bought him some when they were married. Boys will be boys was her take on this. And that would have probably been her response to what I'd have said to her, if I'd got to say it.... *The Night* in English translation is being published alongside a detournement of the original book by the artists collective Everyone Agrees, with the action moved from Paris of the late 1950s to contemporary London. Bernstein told Gavin Overall that when she'd read this detournement the previous day it had made her laugh out loud. So I suspect if she ever gets to read this post it might give her a few chuckles, although the joke would have been funnier if I'd got to deliver it directly to her!



Images top to bottom: 1. Old photo of Michele Bernstein date and photographer unknown. 2. Bernstein's first husband Guy Debord, on whom the character Gilles in both *The Night* and *All The King's Horses* is based. 3. Lolo Ferrari, a dead porn star billed as having the largest breasts in the world, and who I introduce into the detournement of Lautreamont above in a chance encounter with Guy Debord. 4. Michele Bernstein on the cover of a reprint of her first novel *All The King's Horses*. 5. Bernstein's second husband the British artist Ralph Rumney (like Bernstein and Debord, he was a founder member of the Situationist International). 6. The only result I got doing an image search on Yahoo for "Guy Debord Lolo Ferrari" – fortuitously on French Wikipedia under a creative commons license (Poupee de Lolo Ferrari, 2006 by Karel Leermans).



7. Cover of the first English translation of *The Night* by Michele Bernstein (Book Works, London May 2013). 8. Cover of the detournement of Bernstein's novel *After The Night* by Everyone Agrees (Book Works, London May 2013).



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