

# Letter from Guy Debord to Patrick Straram

## 3 October 1958<sup>1</sup>

To Straram<sup>2</sup>

1) The theoretical objectives of the SI<sup>3</sup> are the construction of situations. At least the building of several ambiances – or fragments of ambiances – for experimenting with transitory behaviors (we are already on this road).

To the extent that a notable development of creations of this sort will not take place without liaison with the social and political climate, and will even need (cf. unitary urbanism) to affirm itself in relationship with liberatory socio-economic upheavals, we have, since the beginning of 1958, been taking into account new factors of delay.

The historical assessments of my “Report”<sup>4</sup> (which were made on the basis of the revolutionary first steps of 1956)<sup>5</sup> must be corrected in a more pessimistic direction. The rapid cessation of the de-Stalinization of the USSR, the immobilization of the Polish Revolution, the passage of China over to the camp of Communist dogma, the incapacity of the French proletariat to aid the insurgent Algerians even a little bit and, consequently, the collapse of bourgeois democracy in France [all] mark the phase of reaction into which we have now entered. One fears that the camp of revolution will be frozen for a more or less long time, and that dictatorship as a form of government will extend itself to the “free world,” starting with Europe.

In these conditions, we now foresee a longer period of (pre-situationist) transition. Which means a larger place for it than we had originally envisioned.

2) Our essential practical objectives are propaganda (the theoretical development of our positions, publicizing this theory) and the gathering together in united action – of a new type – of those who have found in the different advanced sectors of modern culture the same objective problem, that is to say, the same impasse, and often the same beginnings of a solution (this theory and this gathering together being inseparable from an extension of practical experiments). To reach this superior cultural creation – which we call the situationist game – we now think that it is necessary to construct a force that will act upon the actual field of this era’s culture (and not on the fringes of it, as we cheerfully did in 1952-1953). This real action isn’t devoid of perils: the ideological and material powers of artistic commerce can, in the end, carry off and dissolve us. Nevertheless, we have had to renounce the pure – inactive – extremism that Wolman<sup>6</sup> and I represented in 1952 as a reaction against the confusionism of Isou’s Lettrism and that Wolman supported to the bitter end, in a later phase of the IL.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Published in *Guy Debord, Correspondance*, Volume 1, Juin 1957 – Août 1960 (Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1999). Translated by Bill Brown and uploaded to the *NOT BORED!* website (notbored.org) in 2005. Footnotes by the translator, except where noted.

<sup>2</sup> Note by Alice Debord: Canadian, a member of the Lettrist International in 1953. He resigned in 1954 in solidarity with Gilles Ivain [Ivan Chtcheglov], who was excluded from the LI.

<sup>3</sup> Founded on 28 July 1957.

<sup>4</sup> “Report on the Construction of Situations,” June 1957.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, the uprising in Hungary.

<sup>6</sup> Gil J Wolman, a co-founder of the Lettrist International.

<sup>7</sup> Wolman was excluded from the LI in January 1957.

3) The case of the French section of the SI.

First of all, we say that this administrative division into national sections was only adopted at the conference at Cosio d'Arroscia under pressure from the right wing of the Italian section, which wanted to keep a certain autonomy. Since then, these problems have been sorted out.<sup>8</sup> The general tendency is toward centralization. By the way, the situationist sections in Germany and Scandinavia are still quite inactive; the one in Algeria (where Dahou<sup>9</sup> is) is obviously absolutely ghostly. The French section, which is cosmopolitan, has up the present served as the center (geographical position, French is the only language common to all), and has begun the publication of our revue. At present, the political conjuncture here in France already poses the problem of transferring this center to Belgium or Italy (police surveillance, including telephone wiretaps, which is likely to become worse after the publication of issue #2, which will come out in November, I think).<sup>10</sup>

4) It would be quite unrealistic for me to define for you the current positions of the SI without knowing your attitude towards the "minority of 1954." I think that our opposition back then, even if it was aggravated by subjective interpretations, rested upon real divergences. But it seems to me that subsequent developments have shown that these divergences, which concerned points that, today, have been superseded, were less important than the positive value of the conceptions that we formulated together in 1953-1954. Such is my conclusion. If you and Gilles Ivain, of whom I've heard nothing for several years, think that you have moved in a direction that isn't foreign to our former communal positions and to the general style of the SI's research, then I would be happy if our dialogue were re-opened.

Your move,  
Guy

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<sup>8</sup> In January 1958, at the Second Conference of the SI, three members of the Italian section – Walter Olmo, Pierro Simondo and Elena Verrone – were excluded.

<sup>9</sup> Mohamed Dahou, a former member of the Lettrist International.

<sup>10</sup> It was in fact published in December 1958.