

Letter from Guy Debord
to Paolo Salvadori
11 December 1984¹

Dear Paolo:

I have just received your long letter of 26 June [1984]. As you imagine, I am greatly preoccupied. In your letter, which I read very attentively, I must say that I have not found an immediately applicable practical orientation. Nevertheless, the majority of the points of your analysis are very pertinent, quite exact or strongly probable. It is possible that the totality will find itself being the truth. Thus, rather than weigh or nuance the great number of your observations that naturally have my agreement, I would like now to perfect your information on several details that are not without importance, and to evoke a little more widely the general situation: that is to say, the one that we actually encounter, rather than the one that would be simpler to encounter and settle.

The most fragile point of your thesis resides in the fact that anyone who decided to assassinate Gérard [Lebovici]² for reasons of private interests or a personal hatred that would be more or less demented could certainly calculate in advance that we would be obliged to follow the reasoning that you have laid out; and that we can obviously not draw it aside as the only logical explanation. But, at the risk of deceiving oneself, to choose this thesis as the only force of socio-historical reasoning is to exonerate all the other possible guilty parties. I thought that the momentary silence on the positive question of the identities of the guilty parties would be more menacing; and it actually is menacing. Thus one would say that we are in for a long war.

You have very quickly seen, concerning this crime, that the whole affair and the *modus operandi* itself are impregnated with an atmosphere of personal betrayal, ambush, the absence of any form of false explication, and I even dare to say the apparent limitation of the means (although direct and brazen); all things that are hardly in the current style of the States. There is in it a kind of curious “illegibility,” because the State always wants to be a pedagogue: from the “death squads” of Brazil and Poland to the great Italian operations of *Potere due*.³

It is necessary to distinguish the crime itself (perhaps noticed in advance and in a certain fashion “blessed” by the interested authorities) and its “normal” political exploitation, today and in the future. Up to the present, and it has already been nine months, it is necessary to recognize that the police exploitation of the matter has remained very moderate, almost indiscernible. One has ordered into action our “Red Brigades”⁴ (*id est* “Direct Action”), then stationed in Brussels,

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² Murdered on 5 March 1984 in Paris by person or persons unknown.

³ The P2 Lodge, a secret group whose existence was exposed in 1980, brought together the cream of Italian society (high-level politicians, businessmen, etc.) and formed a kind of shadow or parallel government. See Debord’s *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988).

⁴ See Debord’s letter to Gianfranco Sanguinetti dated 21 April 1978.

several days after the assassination, and not before. I believe that the misadventure of Genthial⁵ is tied to disagreements over the exploitation of the crime, rather than its execution. As far as the exploitation by the press, its own authentic hate for me, for historical thought, for May 68, etc. has no need of being commanded by the police. One has obviously made use of certain police sources where I am concerned. But here again it is necessary to note that no more serious or more recent dossier has been confided to the press, which is content with ridiculous counter-truths or old banalities that are without consequences. Reflect an instant on what could have been a more resolved and methodical exploitation. *Cazzo!*⁶

Moreover, although I am aware of the uncertain and ephemeral character of this last observation, I am still alive. Whence comes this failure? I took some calculated risks last summer in Champot, without seeing anything suspicious, even from afar. Inversely, an assassination that could put an end to my scandalous anti-career couldn't "scientifically" prove that Gérard was himself the victim of a political assassination. This new crime could, on the one hand, make itself part of the exploitation, because it would be rendered easier and more desirable by the first crime, and because of the strange reactions of what used to be called "public opinion." On the other hand, it could be decided by Gérard's assassins, whoever they are: for the simple reason that they know that they are themselves in great danger as long as I live, with my suspicions.

There is perhaps a misunderstanding when you are surprised that, "among the family, there was something we didn't know about Gérard." Nothing of the sort. Gérard's cinematographic affairs were absolutely not suspicious. And Floriana [Lebovici] was quite regularly brought up-to-date on everything that was going on. Naturally, not having directly participated in certain, perhaps delicate negotiations or decisions, she was only informed about them second-hand. This is the situation evoked by Balthazar Gracian when he writes: "Almost all of life is spent finding out information. We live on the faith of others." It goes without saying that I, in this domain, am even further away from any possibility of direct verification. With a single exception, the professionals of the cinema have kept a frightened and ignominious silence. If, for example, someone knew something of the machinations of the *malavita*⁷ that had begun to manifest itself in this sector, I am sure that he would not say anything to Floriana. It isn't an exaggeration to say that we, "the family," are considered with much scorn and antipathy, and even with a fear that is perhaps sincere.

On the other hand, I can absolutely exclude the hypothesis according to which Gérard had prepared a "Strasbourg coup"⁸ for the cinema. Likewise, the situation of Champ Libre, extremely marginalized for the last seven or eight years, can be more justly compared to a unshakeable fortress, blockaded and besieged, than to an invasive maneuver that lands rapid and fearsome blows.

I think that it was a waste of your time to urge me eloquently to feel the menacing and offensive character, notably for me, of the assassination of Gérard. I understood it immediately, by strategy as much by normal sensibility. I have passed the last 32 years surrounded by diverse

⁵ Police Superintendent Jacques Genthial, the first person to be in charge of the investigation into Lebovici's assassination, removed from his position as the head of the Criminal Brigade for obscure reasons.

⁶ *Fuck!* in Italian.

⁷ "underworld" in Italian.

⁸ That is to say, something that would involve the diversion of a large sum of money.

threats, and you know that I have not let them bother me. And yet this is, it seems to me, the first time that I have been offended or hurt. (Naturally, I have instead felt complimented by all the coarse reproaches of the enemy and of several turncoats, and I am unconcerned with the arbitrary insults that I have been addressed to me in the context of certain barroom brawls.) In any case, as I find the possibility that the assassins don't know of my existence to be highly unlikely, I obviously hope to make them discover that they would be ill advised to take the risk.

It is actually very bitter to have easily understood why [Aldo] Moro and others have been assassinated, and to be unable to conclude with the same certainty where the killing of Gérard is concerned, in some way at my very doorstep. But the other times I never divined, nor found, a univocal response by a simple application of theory. Each time I used the flaws and patent impossibilities in the explications that had been advanced by those responsible among the enemy. But in this affair, leaving aside the ridiculously irresponsible commentaries of the journalists of the moment, one only encounters complete silence.

Either the criminality of the State has this time inaugurated a new style (and, if that is the case, one will often see this particular modernism elsewhere), or it is a question, at the origin, of a private operation, for private interests (or the illusion of private interests). I still cannot respond to this alternative, although I can imagine a certain conjunction between the two, a kind of two-triggered system.

It seems to me that you have a tendency to see – and to imagine that all the others have seen – Gérard's activity as permanently participating in a kind of "situationist conspiracy." Here you are wrong about the dates, but not about Gérard's personality. His qualities were so great that I estimate it very probable that, if we had met five or ten years earlier, he would have become a situ, and assuredly he would have been one of the best. But it is a fact that at the time that I met Gérard [1971], the SI had ended. You know how and why. Thus I do not have the intention, the possibility, or the right to involve someone in this genre of engagement from another period. For three years, I have explained to several comrades in Spain that all of my relations with Champ Libre were exactly defined in my letter to Jaime Semprun dated 26 December 1976 (*Editions Champ Libre: Correspondance*, vol. 1), and that all remained the same thereafter, with the single but important difference that we became, him and I, better and better friends. We spoke at length about practically everything, with sincerity and pleasure. But there are two or three things, to my eyes quite secondary, of which we never spoke, or hardly ever; my fault, no doubt. At the first rank, questions about the cinematographic business. I have regretted this a little, after the crime. That is to say, in the same way that I absolutely did not have to report to Gérard, he obviously didn't have anything to report to me. Quite different from the relationships that you saw in the SI, and with which I am quite glad to be done, after having experienced them for more than twenty years, because the last years have been oppressive.

Thus the rumor according to which Gérard had "yielded" Editions Champ Libre to me is thus a pure Stalinist calumny (everyone knows well that it is [his wife] Floriana who has been occupied with its management since the beginning). It is also false to allege that Gérard had "offered" a movie theatre in the Latin Quarter to me. He only bought a theatre⁹ so as to show my films, and I wanted to break this arrangement off after his death, above all because the public no longer appeared to me to merit being able to see them.¹⁰ It was truly a gift, but of another kind: it

⁹ The Cujos, which screened Debord's films between October 1983 and April 1984.

¹⁰ In March 1984, in response to both the murder of Lebovici and the way he himself was slandered in the French press (he eventually sued and won defamation judgments against several

was a little like he had bought a restaurant, simply so that I could eat a suitable cuisine in it when I happened to spend several days in the vile Paris of today. That is to say, it was a violent response to an abnormal situation to which everyone is accommodated. Such a freedom of spirit no doubt created lots of hate among the envious [and] ignorant.

What has, from the beginning, primarily determined my obligation to be reserved where Champ Libre is concerned, despite the initial cordiality of my personal relations with Gérard, has been the fact that, at that establishment and from the beginning, there were a number of former situs of whom I didn't think anything good. And I didn't want to say a single word that might injure my ex-comrades in the vicinity of someone whom they wanted to make their employer (inversely, I don't know Guégan and the others at all, and this is why I never said anything before their maladroit attempt to stage a *putsch*, which was so easily swept away by Gérard). Several years later, Gérard spoke to me of his brief encounters with [René] Viénet, [Raoul] Vaneigem, and [Mustapha] Khayati (they lasted a little longer with [Jean-Pierre] Voyer). And he judged them, on his own, to be upstarts without means, without dignity, without prestige. Then we shared a laugh together.

It is true that I can't imagine that Gérard, being who he was, would have refused me anything. But it is also quite true that I almost never asked him for anything. What more could I have asked for?

For nearly 10 years, in another atmosphere and for other reasons, I remained conspicuously far from the efforts of Editions Champ Libre, which surely had no need of me. The fact that this enterprise, coming in another epoch and managed, whatever anyone else says, by other people, so little resembled the SI, is exactly what has been shown historically, in a finally incontestable manner: it was not the continuation of the SI ("counter-signed by universal and general hatred"). Moreover, I will change my policy on this subject. Now that one has assassinated its head, I propose to figure more in the development of its catalogue, as soon as possible.

What to do to subsequently clarify the crime itself? Beyond diverse punctual investigations, from which one can no doubt expect something, I propose the following method: wait to determine what has changed (for Editions Champ Libre or elsewhere). Because one didn't kill a man like Gérard without precise intentions. What has actually changed will give the *cui prodest*.¹¹ And here, the guilty can only attract the thunderbolt, because this method prevents them from hoping to continue to keep themselves hidden. So far, one still hasn't seen the change, but one will see it.

Several friends from the past have made contact with me.¹² At first, I have not wanted that they should vainly compromise themselves *tra la perduta gente*,¹³ since we still do not know where it is necessary to strike.

newspapers), Debord stopped all his films from being screened and distributed. In a letter to Thomas Levin dated 29 May 1987, he wrote, "I believe that I was wrong to declare, after the assassination of Gérard Lebovici, 'that none of my films will again be projected in France.' This restriction hardly justifies itself, and was only put forward so as to mark the particular ignominy on this occasion by the French press. Naturally, I should have said: never again and nowhere."

¹¹ Latin for "Who profits?"

¹² Including Jaime Semprun and Christian Sebastiani, who went on to establish the *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*.

¹³ *Editor's note*: "Among the lost people" (Dante, *The Inferno*, III, 3).

You must read [Lebovici's] *Tout sur le personnage*.¹⁴ Nothing very decisive, but certainly a beautiful presentation of the social surface that engendered (which must engender?) the crime. I believe that many people who figure in it do not like it.

Cordially,
Guy

P.S. This letter being finally written, I will communicate copies to several trustworthy people; asking them to not say anything until a subsequent change in the situation.

¹⁴ Published by Editions Gérard Lebovici in November 1984.