

*A Season with Marianne, the last surrealist*

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*Translated from the French by Bill Brown*

## Exploding-Fixed<sup>1</sup>

The request that was made of me at the beginning of June 2020 by two Serbian anarchists plunged me back into uncertain times and made mostly buried memories come back to the surface. They'd undertaken a translation of my "Knights," which is the shortened title of the only one of my texts that has ever been published: "And So They Went on, the Knights on Their Quest." After responding to their first message, I found myself pressed by questions concerning my friend Marianne,<sup>2</sup> one of the principal people in my narrative.

Marianne, who'd signed "A Yugoslavian comrade who knows a lot" to one of the most beautiful tracts of May 1968,<sup>3</sup> greatly interested them because they'd discovered that she'd known members of the Situationist International. My text brought unpublished insights to this subject. It also contained information about Marianne and her friendship with Guy Debord.

I initially hesitated to respond to them and thought about keeping quiet. Marianne loved to remain unknown and she had even given herself a nickname: "The Anonymous Person of the Twentieth Century." In her desire to remain in the shadows, there was a lot of coquetry and a dash of vanity. And so, a little light could be shed on her.

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<sup>1</sup> *Explosante-fixe* is a slightly awkward phrase in a famous line by André Breton (*L'Amour Fou*, 1937): "La beauté convulsive sera érotique-voilée, explosante-fixe, magique-circonstancielle, ou ne sera pas" (Convulsive beauty will be erotic-veiled, exploding-fixed, magic-circumstantial, or it will not exist at all).

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Nikolic was born in Budapest on 10 July 1919. She studied the piano and lived in Belgrade with a musician friend whom she followed to Rome in 1941. Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany had invaded the Balkans. Returning to Belgrade, towards the end of 1943, Marianne hastened to join the Partisans' fight against them. After the war, she joined a puppet theater group, in which she met a poet who would become her husband, Radovan Ivsic. Among many literary works, they translated Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* from French into Croatian. They came to Paris together at the beginning of the 1950s. Contacts made with the artistic avant-gardes in Yugoslavia led them to participate in the activities of the Surrealist group, which Marianne would continue to do until the death of André Breton. When she lived on the rue Charlot, she started painting in order to justify the status of artist that she'd declared to the owner of modest studio that was in poor condition but on which her heart was set. Marianne died at the Saint-Antoine Hospital on 14 August 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Titled "Nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout" (We have been naught; we shall be all) this one-page flyer concluded with the lines, "Long live the Workers Councils. Down with Yugoslavian self-management." (Translated from the French by NOT BORED! 4 December 2022; corrected 11 February 2023.)

Apart from my text and Marianne's tract, my two correspondents knew nothing about the situationist episode. I would be able to furnish them with the names of a few contacts. They'd been able to track down a few photographs of the paintings that Marianne had offered to her friends. I'd also be able to assure them that she played no other role in May 68 than writing her celebrated tract and distributing it in the streets, a pile of copies in her arms.

I did research in order to find photos of the places in which Marianne had lived. No, Marianne had not written any other tracts or political texts. But thanks to a love story, she found herself at the center of a workshop in Ménilmontant, in the east of Paris, which for a time was also frequented by some of the Enragés and the situationists. She made a violent charge amongst a workerist who found fault with a statue of Charles Fourier, which was being constructed there at the time. This was enough for Guy Debord – amazed by her fury, which was worthy of the best outbursts of André Breton or Antonin Artaud – to call Marianne “the last Surrealist.”

Her friendship with Benjamin Péret also spoke well of her.

The number of messages coming from Serbia was increasing. I responded each time that I was able. When I first started collecting these messages, the task appeared vain to me. It also went against the impulse that worked to keep me silent.

There is a black light in alchemy, as in poetry. It is that light which I endeavor to spread, confident that it alone has the explosive power of revelation, by producing successive but spaced-out flashes, which the eye can only catch by adjusting itself to their escape in the flow of time in which their disappearance is assured.

There is nothing before or after that. Even less than nothing, in this perspective.

## *Operation Marianne*

This initial contact with Serbia was made with some trouble, because an intermediary had at first refused to transmit the message to me, due to some infighting that put us on opposite sides.

The story could actually have remained right there or suffered from an unfortunate setback. Upon receipt of their first message, I responded to my correspondents, who were quite pleasantly surprised by the fact that I was so responsive to it. This seemed to each of us to bode well for any future collaboration.

The business at hand was getting to know better the journey of Marianne Ivsic, known as Marianne Nikolic when she took up arms in 1944 on the side of the Yugoslavian partisans. The task that fell to me was to furnish information concerning the period in which Marianne lived in Paris. She moved there in 1953. I started spending time with her in the fall of 1967. I had firsthand information thanks to our conversations, which sometimes took place daily.

I exhumed from my archives of important documents the relevant originals that I'd kept, some of which only existed as single copies. I set an objective for myself: to collect the photographs that could shed light on the places that she'd lived, the streets that she'd frequented.

My Serbian correspondents were an historian and a translator. English was chosen as our shared language. We advanced on two fronts – the Yugoslavian episode and Paris. If we could manage to clarify each one, and then join them together, a good part of the research would be accomplished. But for the moment, the first investigations could only be conducted in our respective countries.

A veritable wind from the steppes blew upon the project. I felt carried away by a furious maelstrom that shook my computer's keyboard. The principal difficulty was Marianne herself, who never stopped deliberately obscuring the facts of her life, effacing virtually all of the traces, letting hardly anything remain. Photos of her with the Surrealist group, a few paintings offered to friends: that's all that could be rounded up, provided that these friends would be identified and that they would be disposed to collaborate on the project. Which was, in fact, far from assured. Marianne had emulators of her art of concealment.

In Paris, a few of us were able to speak on the subject. There was my friend Jean-Paul, the sculptor of Charles Fourier, whom Marianne had truly adored. But Jean-Paul seemed to have decided to adopt the most extreme position: silence at all

costs and even above all else. I couldn't expect any secrets from him, any returns to the past.

So, what would be my position? I hesitated. I do not know if I chose to speak or to not remain silent. I don't know exactly. Maybe it was a bit of both. Perhaps I wanted to break a silence that Marianne didn't deserve and that she'd chosen with a certain humor, that is to say, very seriously. But her freedom left mine to me. By speaking about her, I wasn't affecting her decision or her will to keep silent. It was me whom I was putting in danger. I couldn't see myself refusing to commit myself. I also found the attempts at clarification undertaken by my Serbian friends, with so little means, to be truly commendable. Helping them seemed salutary to me. Little thought was given to Marianne during her lifetime. Without thinking about paying tribute to her, which is something she never wanted (with good reason), it appeared to me that it would be a good thing if I were to bring her back to life in accordance with my memories, with the way she loved to go into hiding, with the way she took pleasure in "mystifying the world," to take up an expression of which she was fond.

It was in this state of mind that I took up my position on a terrain filled with landmines, not placed there by an adversary, but by the besieged herself – Marianne. In self-defense.

"Ah! Friends," she often said. "You can't count on them."

We did not fight against her and we were, no doubt, rarely at her side. When the first testimonies began to arrive, we were submerged. Our place took on water from all sides. But this was our position. And no one other than us was ever exposed by it.

Because I must say here, as much for Serbia as for Paris, we were able to contact people whom we'd never considered at the start and who all strove to respond to our appeal: Alice Debord, René Viénet, Donald Nicholson-Smith and two of Marianne's surrealist friends.

And so one afternoon I found myself in a bookstore near the rue de Sèvres where René Viénet had agreed to meet me. Like René, Donald – then living in New York – had kind words for my text about the "Knights," in which I speak of Marianne and which had motivated my Serbian friends to contact me. What can I say about Alice, who searched through her personal archives and who sent us 4 photos in which one can see her in the company of Marianne and Guy, in front of Pierre Lepetit's house in Vosges where they'd stayed in August 1968? These were unexpected documents that my Serbian correspondents had heard about and had been trying to track down for months.

I decided to make one last attempt, even if it cost me, to try to get Jean-Paul to talk, at least about the sculpture of Charles Fourier that he'd created in 1968-69. I wanted to be useful to René Viénet, who was seeking information on this subject.

An International was revived, thanks in part to us. One day I said with a smile to my Serbian friends that we could reconstruct the SI, only this time with an important section in the Balkans, which was something that never happened during the best years of the organization and which, at the time, it didn't even dare to dream about.

All this might seem meaningless. Of what importance is the memory of Marianne? Why revive her by evoking her past as a Yugoslavian partisan and a surrealist? I can even agree, especially since, as I have said, Marianne herself no doubt would have preferred silence. The undertaking of my Serbian friends appeared to be highly commendable. As for me, I often return to the past of my father, who fought with the Spanish anarchists in July 1936. The worst thing would be to act as if none of this had ever happened. All the fighters against fascism have sought aid, which they have only rarely found. To turn towards them is a bit like accompanying them in the mountains, helping them to climb a slope, giving them their rifles back when they have lost them. It is important to silence – even for a moment – the incessant noise [*brouillage*] concerning them that is emitted by the rest of the world.



Marianne lived in the building on the right, on the second floor.  
The cinema was opened after her departure for rue Charlot in the early 1970s.  
This address, 42 rue Galande, was probably a sign for her: André Breton lived at 42 rue Fontaine.  
The light in the windows of the second floor is disturbing.



When the renovators' hammer threatened the stone, Marianne, as a true adept and poet of the place, hurried to stop it.

## And So They Went on, the Knights on Their Quest<sup>4</sup>

For Roger Langlais<sup>5</sup>

“Gleaming coats of mail, bright shining helmets, and lances and shields, and gold and azure and silver.” Like Perceval,<sup>6</sup> I was dazzled.<sup>7</sup> They moved about in a maze of backstreets that they seemed to have known forever; they loved the cafés on whose signs working-class insurrection bloomed; they told anecdotes and made mysterious remarks. Seekers of the Castle Dangerous,<sup>8</sup> adepts of the High-Science, they called themselves situationists.

In 1966, I was in my first years at the Jean-Baptiste Say High School. Students my age, but from another section, had published a little journal of anarchist leanings, several badly bound pages, faltering ink, in which, if I remember correctly, they spoke of the anniversaries of Hungarian insurrection and the Spanish Civil War.<sup>9</sup> I was vaguely familiar with the history of the latter country, from which (I knew) my father had fled, and also because of an excellent teacher who had instructed us – few were the students who were disposed to follow her – to translate the poetry of García Lorca [from Spanish into French].

I soon found myself invited to the meetings of the anarchist group, whose activity, as well as its very existence, depended on a short young man with long hair and a black beard, who signed the name René Riesel to almost all the articles.

His commitment, combined with his lively intelligence, won him the goodwill of the teachers whom he sometimes embarrassed, like the day in the amphitheatre when he launched into a thundering version of “Il était un petit navire,”<sup>10</sup> which seriously upset an admiral who’d come to publicize a promotional

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<sup>4</sup> “Or s’en vont, les chevaliers questant” was first published in *À contretemps*, n° 40, May 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Langlais (1941-2018) was a French painter and writer. Very active in radical politics, he founded the Situationist-inspired group *Pour une critique révolutionnaire* (1968-1972) and the journal *L’Assommoir* (1978-1985).

<sup>6</sup> One of the King Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table and the hero of Chretien de Troyes’ *Perceval: the Story of the Grail* (circa 1180).

<sup>7</sup> *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*, lines 129-134, translated from the Old French by Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University, 1999). “Their gleaming mail shirts and bright / And spears as he’d never seen / In all his life, with their gleaming / Colors, green and purple, / Gold and blue and silver.”

<sup>8</sup> An allusion to Walter Scott’s novel, *Castle Dangerous*, published in 1831.

<sup>9</sup> The Hungarian uprising took place in 1956; the Spanish Civil War in 1936-1938.

<sup>10</sup> A traditional French song about a young sailor who is saved from being eaten by his starving shipmates thanks to the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

film about the benefits of a career in the marines corps. The lights came back on, revealing dismayed faces, while the song, taken up as by a chorus, made the rows of seats shake.

In love with radicalism, always on the lookout for new movements and currents, he sold copies of the group's journal during recess and every Wednesday evening attended the meetings of the Comité de liaison des jeunes anarchistes.<sup>11</sup>

This was how he got wind of the famous "Strasbourg Scandal." A small pamphlet had been published there, at the expense of the University, and it spoke – in brilliant language and between beautiful blue covers – of "The Poverty of Student Life."<sup>12</sup> At first, I understood nothing. But in its exposition there was a breath of fresh air, a joyful enthusiasm, and the gracefulness of truth. Moreover, the diatribe concluded, not leaving the critique unresolved, but by connecting it to the strongest currents, which were momentarily extinguished, but waiting to be rekindled. The moment seemed imminent, as one paragraph after another did away with the nonsense of isolated demands in order to embrace a global theory, a small problem that the Workers Councils would easily overcome.

Even more so than the amazing writing, the miracle cure for a finally liberated world, the rumors and noise surrounding the pamphlet's authors didn't fail to evoke a mysterious brotherhood, omniscient, invisible and resolutely closed: the Situationist International.

I wanted to know more, to acquire a copy of their journal. The address of a bookstore was confided to me, as well as the name of a subway station in a neighborhood where I'd never gone before.

As soon as I departed for it, a soft, dimmed light, filtered by the autumn of very tall trees that I never managed to find again, picked me up. On one side, the crossroads led to the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève; on the other, it headed towards the river and the quays. I headed towards the rue des Boulangers, which back then was still covered by paving stones.

I can still see the bookstore and, in the background, the annex to which I was guided and which was brighter than the shop itself because of the light that came from a small adjacent garden and went through a half-open glass door. On a large waxed wooden table, laid out according to issue number, were copies of the journal *Internationale situationniste*, with their colored metallic covers, which reminded me of the balls hung from Christmas trees or the wrappers for sour candies after you've used your fingernail to make the gilding shine. The paper was glossy and

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<sup>11</sup> Liaison Committee of the Young Anarchists.

<sup>12</sup> *On the Poverty of Student Life, Considered in its Economic, Political, Psychological, Sexual, and Particularly Intellectual Aspects, with a Modest Proposal for its Remedy*, primarily written by the Situationist Mustapha Khayati and first published in Strasbourg in November 1966.

the ink had an intoxicating, almond scent that was similar to that of the library in the small town where I had once lived.

I retain from that day the radiance of an illumination. Later on, when I came to know the neighborhood better, the Jardin des Plantes<sup>13</sup> and the foliation of the rue Cuvier would remind me of my marvelous discovery, the peaceful leisure and the contentment that filtered through on that day.

From then on, I struggled to decipher the journal, without any preparation and especially without any recoiling from the dialectical seduction of its propositions. The photographs were accompanied by captions that, on first view, do not explain them. But the repeated use of a concept, its multiple implications, had the fascinating effect of raising the image: light first crackled all around it, then suddenly burst out from behind.

Thus the single word *misère*<sup>14</sup> definitively clarified a feeling that I could not name. I saw my childhood, my requirements – my consternation when a new toy only increased my sense of emptiness that its acquisition did not vitiate.

Another word, loaded with an emotional tonality, was *commodity* [*marchandise*] which, for me, mixed together associations with something precious and a taste for confectionary. But a whole theoretical apparatus came along with it, making it a keyword that I needed to explore in depth.

“Revolt against the commodity,” with respect to the burning of Watts.<sup>15</sup> “The indulgences of the commodity,”<sup>16</sup> for the free paid that it grants. From within this hall of mirrors a sudden clarity would sometimes emerge. A moment when the world found itself boarded and inspected.

I was seduced by the self-assured tone, the well-constructed sentences and the slightly old-fashioned tone of a style that borrowed heavily from the great moralists. The examination of the commodity revealed a great disappointment in which feelings of vanity and abandonment were mixed.

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<sup>13</sup> A Parisian botanical garden.

<sup>14</sup> The French word *misère* means “poverty,” but also “misery.” It has featured prominently in critiques of capitalism ever since the publication of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s *Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère* (1846) and Karl Marx’s response, *Misère de la philosophie* (1847).

<sup>15</sup> The August 1965 riots in Watts (Los Angeles, California) were analyzed by the situationists in their pamphlet “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy,” first published in December 1965 and reprinted in *Internationale situationniste* #10 (March 1966).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Guy Debord, thesis 67, *La Société du spectacle* (1967): “the commodity’s *indulgences* – the glorious tokens of the commodity’s presence among the faithful” (translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Zone Books, 1994).

I also loved the photos of the group, taken at port cities, during their meetings. Around a long table, in a slightly out-of-the-way hall, the drafting of the final report seemed to conclude a comparative test between different kinds of beer.

I sometimes accompanied René to liaison meetings held in a room that the Spanish anarchist union in exile, the CNT,<sup>17</sup> placed at our disposal. The Strasbourg critique had also taken aim at the anarchist movement and the organ of its federation, “the unbelievable *Monde libertaire*, obviously published by *students*.”<sup>18</sup> Daniel Cohn-Bendit thought this was too much. Attacking that good federation! And its journalists, too! A current that was open to the SI’s theses tried to give an objective account in the pages of that very publication.<sup>19</sup> Rejected as “Marxist,” this tendency soon broke away and, along with several other groups, formed the Anarchist International, which had already created a bridgehead to the SI’s theoretical platform.

The situationists’ prestige at the time was very great. The honor that they showed us by dispatching emissaries was felt to be an immense privilege. Almost timidly at first, and this on both sides, some of us met up over a drink.

Overcoming my reticence, I attended one of the first such meetings, which was held at a bar on la Place de la République. The two Parisian groups of the Anarchist International were represented. When I entered the place, I was struck by the red-colored immensity of its back room and its complete emptiness, with the exception of a table all the way in the back, around which two young men and their girlfriends were having a conversation. My comrades were already walking up to them; handshakes were exchanged. All the insolence and recklessness of my sixteen years of life hardly justified my presence there. No more so than my curiosity, which would have been inappropriate. But these people gave me confidence. Their aura of mystery and the essential quality of their personalities made it worthwhile to get as close as possible to the dramatic action and to the place where it was being played out.

I only opened my mouth to greet them. I have a confused memory of a question that was put to them by Hubert Bérard, concerning their relations with the workers. At the time, that struck me as an extraordinarily stupid thing to ask. But René Viénet didn’t bat an eye; he thought the question was very pertinent, though

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<sup>17</sup> The Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor), a confederation of anarcho-sindicalist labor unions, was founded in 1910. It had been in exile since 1939, when Francisco Franco took over the country and outlawed it.

<sup>18</sup> A line from *On the Poverty of Student Life*. Note that English translations of this text render *incroyable* as “pitiful.”

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Guy Antoine [Bodson], “What is Situationism?” *Le Monde Libertaire* #127, December 1966.

he had a little difficulty when he started to answer it, eventually referring to a recent strike in Belgium.<sup>20</sup>

We went out into the winter and the night. At one of the windy corners of the square, René Viénet asked about our respective destinations and if we wanted to accompany him to the district of les Halles, which he pointed to with one hand. With his other hand, he clenched the collar of his shirt. My comrades politely turned him down. But I followed him for a moment, as far as the depths of a dark alley where all of Old Paris came to an end.

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For the location of our meetings, my anarchist comrades had chosen a café near les Halles that the Surrealists had frequently visited, a choice that was intended as an emphatic – almost over-emphasized – indication of the tribute that they wished to pay them. One evening, René Viénet came to meet us there; then our little troop followed his long strides through the neighborhood until we came upon his place, into which we were invited to enter.

I remember a short trek, in single file, at nightfall, from one sidewalk to the other, occasionally impeded by packing crates. We stopped in front of the oak gates of a big square building whose cut-stone walls seemed to ascend to the roof of a doll's house that was covered with very small windows.

At the very top of the stairs, there was a series of sonorous and steep steps that we tried to walk upon quietly, at the request of our host, who added with a smile that we were walking on his landlord's head.

We emerged into an attic that had been converted into a workshop. Light trickled in from several hidden sources, leaving the few pieces of furniture in the shadows. At the edges of the building's framework, the attic was accentuated, so much so that the floorboards rested against the bottoms of the windows.

Two situationists were waiting for us. There was Donald Nicholson-Smith, whom I'd already seen with René Viénet at la place de la République. And Guy Debord!

The mere mention of his name sent shivers of mystery through us. His intransigence was legendary as much among his enemies as among his colleagues. People believed he knew everything, that he incarnated all the prodigies. This was heightened by the contempt he displayed for all forms of publicity; those who were

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<sup>20</sup> On 16 February 1966, more 3,000 workers, most of them women, walked out of the main mechanical workshop of the FN in Herstal, Belgium. Demanding "equal pay for equal work," the ensuing strike would last for three months.

honored to know him flattered themselves with the idea that they shared a rare privilege.

That particular evening, dressed in a sweater and corduroy pants, Debord affected the look of a Left Bank bohemian from the 1950s. The acuity of his gaze was very keen; over his face passed the restrained shadow of a critical and mischievous smile; behind finely circled glasses; under the short bangs of a monk's hairstyle, almost a tonsure. His persistent smile veiled an internal tension, but also testified to the polite courtesy with which he welcomed us, as he did on each of the rare occasions that I saw him.

The slow, almost solemn resonance of his voice emanated a powerful warmth. Most of us were sitting on the floor, cross-legged, which was his favorite position. My shoulder came to rest against one of the small windows, at an angle so vertiginous that, when I risked looking out, I had the impression that I was soaring above the street.

Guy Debord was neither a conspirator nor an intransigent leader, which some have alleged him to be, often due to prejudice, but also because their ambitions and expectations, inevitably disappointed, were changed into dishonest and scathing criticism. Guy Debord's influence was great, his simplicity confusing. When he was present at a meeting, his ability to combine ideas and the richness of his interventions naturally organized the debate around him.

On another evening, in a bar near the gare de l'Est, I found myself sitting across from him with the draft of a tract in my hands that René Riesel had tasked me with submitting to the group. He was quickly intrigued by this paper that I had only shown to the closest of my neighbors and that now lay crumpled up in front of him; with a smile he urged me to give it to him. On a simple sheet of paper, René had sketched out the cover for a pamphlet that he proposed to address to the small groups that claimed to profess a revolutionary option: "If you want to make the revolution . . . you must have a comprehensive theory!" An even more radiant smile illuminated Debord's face and seemed to interrogate me. The conception was René's alone, I wanted to tell him, and I heard myself stammer out the following: "It is René who had the idea, it was René. . . ." But the sheet was already circulating around the table and he was amused by the laughter that it didn't fail to elicit.

That evening Debord was wearing a very nice, dark herringbone *pull-over*,<sup>21</sup> which I thought he must have acquired at a faraway meeting in some Baltic port city. One of our comrades was wearing the same one under her rain coat. We were amused by the coincidence. She had purchased hers at a market, near la place des Ternes. Guy had purchased his at a market on la place Monge.

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<sup>21</sup> English in original.

I could hardly visualize Guy Debord going for a Sunday stroll through a market. But this unexpected breach revealed to me a little bit of his life and I was very moved by it.

That evening, Mustapha Khayati was supposed to tell us about the recent events in Strasbourg. At the time, we didn't know the preponderant role he'd played in drafting of the pamphlet, even if there was a photograph that appeared in the press, showing him at the sides of the students who were elected to the student union "without any program of any kind." The caption to the photo emphasized his legendary status: "The mysterious M.K., of the Situationist International."<sup>22</sup>

So mysterious that, on this particular evening, he wasn't even there, having been corralled into having dinner with some Arab friends. Guy Debord joked a bit about this brotherly and ethnic meal, then invited René Viénet to begin the presentation.

Viénet began speaking with his usual vivacity, but Guy quickly stopped him.

"No, René, things didn't happen that way. You must start at the beginning, so that our friends will understand."

Guy affected the tone of a professor speaking to a student who had begun his presentation with its ending. We looked at him with disbelief, then with closer attention, because of the gravity of his intervention. This trait would subsequently reappear and even, it must be said, at our expense. In a debate, Debord proceeded slowly and following a chronology of solid facts. Then he'd make a sudden articulation – luminous, obvious and amplified by an example taken from a book or a film, which won over everyone's support.

He also intervened to say that Mustapha should never have allowed himself to be photographed with members of a group that he didn't represent. "His only error," was his comment.

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One day I went to his home on the rue Saint-Jacques so that I could again experience the amazement that had come over me at the crossroads of the rue Monge and the rue des Boulangers – that same soft and muted light that I'd thought was like tasting autumn on very tall trees. Time had stood still, like the

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<sup>22</sup> Mustapha Khayati, "On the Poverty of Student Life, Past and Present. Mustapha Khayati interviewed by Mehdi El Hajoui," *On the Poverty of Student Life* (Brooklyn: Common Notions, 2022), p. 40: "Around December 1966, things started to get worse for me after the French weekly *L'Express* published an article [5-11 December 1966] where 'MK' was presented as the 'brains' behind the operation. The journalist from *L'Express* had come with a photographer who took a picture of us without our knowledge or consent. This picture, where I am shown next to [André] Schneider, would be printed in *The Times*."

quieting of anxiety in the development of a fairy tale. “Here’s reinforcement!” Guy Debord called out when he opened the door for me.

On that day, the business at hand was responding to the author of a poor plagiarism of a remarkable pamphlet written by our friends in the Makhno group in Rennes. One of our comrades<sup>23</sup> distinguished himself by coming up with the best formulations for this response.

But our organization believed that it could become more revolutionary by also practicing exclusion, which, for reasons I no longer recall, struck the same comrade<sup>24</sup> who had summarized a program that sought to extricate anarchism from its many vestiges, both and present, just as the situationists had done with Marxism, and that had received a very favorable reaction from the SI.

Asked to justify this dismissal, we addressed to the SI a long memorandum that I was tasked with sending to the group’s mailbox. Then the wait began.

It didn’t last long. Almost immediately we received, in a thin envelope, just a few lines written in a uniformly flat style, which was quite different from our extended profession of faith and which simply refused to accept our justifications for the repudiation of our former comrade.

There could have been a step-by-step refutation, which would have led the SI to restate its high-caliber theses. But a dismaying judgment accompanied their simple words: our beautiful letter was “so very predictable” [*“cousue de fil blanc”*].<sup>25</sup>

We had previously been invited to join the situationists while they posted copies of their comic strips,<sup>26</sup> but a terse post-scriptum canceled these plans, which were obviously “rendered obsolete.”

That was a simple clarification. But it was also intended to make us understand that things between the SI and us would not go any further.

Already contrite expressions turned into long faces. We were removed from the feast, from the sacred table, from the libations, from the meandering procession of strict practice – each of us sent back to his own desolation.

Deprived of the guarantee of rigor due to this important neighborhood, our group rapidly declined. The theoretical aspirations of some of us were abandoned. Others found a simpler path, confident that this failed encounter did not rule out another meeting after some time had passed.

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<sup>23</sup> Jacques Le Glou.

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Le Glou.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted from a manuscript letter by Guy Debord included in the archives of the Anarchist International.

<sup>26</sup> Collage of poster-comics announcing the publication of *Internationale situationniste* #11, which were put up at dawn on Sunday 15 October 1967.

It was in November 1967, shortly after this episode, that Guy Debord's book, *La Société du spectacle*, was published.

The Strasbourg pamphlet had summarized the principal situationist theses. The strength of this pamphlet, the acuity of its critique, and the seductiveness of the answers provided placed it among the greatest such works of the last several hundred years, because it took as its pretext the exasperated expectations and the promises of the advent of better times, at the end of a finally recovered eschatology.

Remarkable and unique people had guaranteed it; their sincerity, their integrity, were never in doubt. Far from the apologies for misery made by all of the small groups of the time, the assured tone, the feeling of an elegant overview, conferred an uncontested authenticity on the enterprise.

Guy Debord's attempt was excessive and appealing. *The Society of the Spectacle* seemed to promise all kinds of revelations. Even if I was never convinced by this book, by its solemn effort or its ponderous exposition, I perceived under the title in black letters and the bright white cover an anxiety that didn't leave me indifferent, that of wanting to hold on to the words, as if the world, once seized, would have to remain a prisoner of the ink and could no longer escape from the paper.

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At the entrance of the liaison office, where I continued to go, an old Spaniard had set up a stand of publications that contained books and pamphlets, manifestoes and declarations – all of the anarchist press in exile. He was a small, tired, worn-out guy. His retreat was the landing at the top of a staircase that smelled of bleach.

The room we were allowed to use for our meetings resembled the duty room at a high school. A coal-burning stove roared in a corner, chairs were scattered around a few benches. The place had the air of attics and conspiracies, like the workshops in old engravings in which leaflets are being produced amidst the smoke that comes as much from tobacco pipes as from the patched flue of the chimney.

One evening, the door at the far end of the room opened. Massive figures slipped inside. Men in dark clothes passed among our ranks, which suddenly fell silent. They smiled timidly, as if embarrassed to have interrupted us, but also because our youthfulness recalled their past and suggested that we were their naïve successors.

A photograph of one of the issues of *Internationale situationniste* shows captured militiamen being led to the place where they will be executed. I'd often

scrutinized their faces. The only worry that I could see on them was that of not tripping over the clods of earth that had been hardened by the frozen furrows beneath their shackled feet. These men who passed before me seemed to resurrect that unfortunate procession.

One day I was sitting at a table in a bar with an issue of *Internationale situationniste* half-opened in front of me. A man approached. He knew the journal and seemed to want to talk about it. He was Spanish and after we warmed to each other's company, he confided to me that he belonged to the youngest faction of the CNT, one that was trying to shake up the old certainties of the exiles. I told him of my Spanish origins and gave him my name, as well. He looked at me with amazement and said, "I know your father; he often comes to our meetings." I was completely unaware of his membership in that anarchist union, not to mention that he'd remained a militant. Suddenly, in a flash, I was at a meeting of the liaison committee; the door at the back opens and I see my father come through it.

I found myself remembering an insistent and worried voice I'd heard in the village of his childhood, where he still couldn't return. Darkness had fallen over the winegrowers' collective and the film was about to begin. A hand grazed my shoulder; the voice of a man, speaking in a whisper, made sure of my identity before giving me a short message for my father and especially a name that I must not forget.

I also see my father in that picture of the captured militants. I'd heard him recount a gripping story. A village that he managed to reach during the retreat was still unoccupied by the enemy. The next day, he'd awoken before his comrades did so he could go on a reconnaissance mission. The nationalists were at the street corner. They were conducting searches in every house. He barely had time to return and alert his companions.

In Paris, he'd found his best friend, who, like him, was a refugee and a native of the same village. One evening, I accompanied them to a small cinema on the boulevard. The theater was packed full, the audience trembling before a montage of news reports that recounted the Spanish Civil War.<sup>27</sup> The murmuring was constant, the rumbling was terrible, and when a song from the Revolution rose up behind the commentary, it was taken up as by a chorus.

For an exile, time is a stopped clock whose hands await the return so as to leave again. It is also a clock with an empty face on which time has collapsed. I got a sense of this abyss one day in Barcelona, in front of a massive building, suffocated by gray dust, that my father had shown us.

"It was from this barracks that we left for the front."

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<sup>27</sup> Note by the author: the movie was *Mourir à Madrid*, directed by Frédéric Rossif (1963).

He recalled the name with a smile, because, he told us, it had probably been changed a long time ago. More than thirty years had passed. But as soon as the name of the barracks was said aloud, the car [we were riding in] suddenly came to a stop. The flow of traffic closed around us. We were assailed by threatening waves, ear-splitting sirens, a dazzling stream that gushed underneath the streetcars' wheels. We were stuck in the past, like a troublesome wreck that will soon be completely submerged.

“Again a peaceful arrival. No taxi-cabs, but instead old horse-cabs, to carry us to the town. Few people in the Paseo de Colon. And then, as we turned round the corner of the Ramblas (the chief artery of Barcelona) came a tremendous surprise: before our eyes, in a flash, the revolution unfolded itself. It was overwhelming. It was as if we had been landed on a continent different from anything I had seen before. The first impression: armed workers, rifles in their shoulders, but wearing civilian clothes. Perhaps 30 per cent of the males on the Ramblas were carrying rifles, though there were no police and no regular military in uniforms [...] Very few of these armed proletarian wore the new dark-blue pretty militia uniforms. They sat on the benches, or walked the pavement of the Ramblas, their rifles over the right shoulder, and often their girls on the left arm.”<sup>28</sup>

“It was the first time in my life that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flags of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workmen. Every shop and café had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Rather than translate Borkenau back into English, I have quoted directly from the original: Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit: An Eye-witness Account of the Political and Social Conflicts of the Spanish Civil War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 69.

<sup>29</sup> Rather than translate Orwell back into English, I have quoted directly from the original: George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1966).

A van took us in tow, but the chain broke twice before the clamor of George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and Franz Borkenau's *The Spanish Cockpit* died down.<sup>30</sup>

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René [Riesel] had changed the deadline for his final year in high school so that he could present himself earlier and successfully graduate. In the fall of 1967, he showed me the campus of Nanterre-La Folie. I'd never seen anything so sordid, so simply desolate. This aggressive and restrictive urbanism spoke volumes about power's contempt for the student sub-proletariat. The poverty [*misère*] of the shantytown nearby seemed less irreducible and especially less premeditated in comparison.

I also felt alarmed, after wandering around a campus that was conceived in accordance with the new models for the circulation of inmates in a prison, standing in front of the palm trees whose large plastic leaves shaded the neon lights of the cafeteria.

There I met Gérard Bigorgne<sup>31</sup> and his long lanky frame, his disheveled hair, and his distinguished air; he was never tolerant of a circumstantial bohemianism that he never claimed for himself.

But I knew little of his work in Nanterre with René and the other Enragés, except for their first tracts, which expressed their refusal of the student status as well as its elaboration by contestatory modernism.

One of these tracts borrowed from a comic strip an old chronicle of a group of robbers who are talking in a tavern about the University and its future, which is in conformity with the laws of the market – a simple game of boxes to be filled in, a game played long ago.

In the tavern in les Halles that this legend evoked, I wanted to recognize the “Radis couronné” [“Crowned Radish”] chapter in Théophile Gautier's novel *Capitaine Fracasse*, in which Jacquemin Lampourde sits alone at a table with two glasses on it, hoping for a guest. I gave him such a companion, by changing the name a little, to Lancelot Bigorgne, so that he could join Jacquemin in the book's pages.

While the events of May 1968 were taking place, in the workshop of a comrade from the Ménilmontant group, a project that he'd long planned was

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<sup>30</sup> Orwell's book was published in 1938, Borkenau's in 1937. The two authors knew each other and were friends.

<sup>31</sup> One of the Enragés, a radical group created in Nanterre in February 1968. Other members included such future situationists as René Riesel, Patrick Cheval and Christian Sébastiani.

finally taking shape: an homage to the author of *Nouveau Monde amoureux*,<sup>32</sup> a statue of Charles Fourier.<sup>33</sup> Gérard Bigorgne posed as Fourier while the statue was being forged. A crease in his pants resisted reproduction by the sculptor,<sup>34</sup> who still recalls that the Enragé applied himself to the task with good grace, even helping to transport a heavy bag of plaster to the site.<sup>35</sup>

During its creation, the sculpture began to encounter a certain hostility in the workshop in which were seen former members of the Anarchist International, as well as several situationists, with whom the one-upmanship was going quite well.

The one who hid his disapproval the least had already distinguished himself by asking René Viénet about the SI's relationship with the workers.

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<sup>32</sup> Written in 1816, Fourier's *New World of Love* was first published in 1967.

<sup>33</sup> Originally erected in 1899 and designed by Emile Derré, this monument was destroyed by the Nazis in 1942 during their occupation of Paris. No post-War French authority ever sought to replace it.

<sup>34</sup> Jean-Paul Coillot.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. "The Return of Charles Fourier," *Internationale situationniste* #12 (September 1969), translated by Reuben Keehan:

At 7 pm on Monday 10 March 1969, the precise moment when a "general strike" – carefully limited to 24 hours by union bureaucrats – was scheduled to commence, the statue of Charles Fourier was returned to its plinth in the place de Clichy, which had remained empty since the removal of its original incarnation by the Nazis. A plaque on the statue's pedestal explained: "A tribute to Charles Fourier, from the barricaders of the rue Gay-Lussac." Never before has the technique of détournement reached such a domain.

The job of putting it in place was accomplished at one of the place de Clichy's busiest times in front of more than a hundred witnesses, many of whom crowded around it, but none of whom was particularly shocked, even upon reading the plaque (hardly anyone in France is ever shocked after May 1968). The statue, an exact replica of the original, was made of plaster but finished in bronze. On first glance, it looked like the real thing. Even so, it weighed over a hundred kilograms. The police were advised of its presence shortly after, and left a guard around it for the course of the next day. It was removed by the authorities at first light the day after that.

A commando of around twenty "unknowns," as *Le Monde* put it on 13 March, was enough to complete the operation, which lasted a quarter of an hour. According to one witness, quoted in *France-Soir* on the 13th, 'eight young people of twenty years of age deposited the statue with the aid of wooden beams. Not a bad performance, considering the fact that it took no less than thirty guardians of the peace and a crane to lay the plinth bare again.' And *L'Aurore*, telling the truth for once, remarked that the whole thing was notable because "the enragés aren't usually in the habit of paying tribute."

A voice was raised and Marianne launched into a violent indictment that relayed her dismay to the situationists.

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I'd met her a little before May 68. The friend I was accompanying had a rendezvous with her in a café on the place de l'Odéon. In her fifties, slender and elegant in the armor of a long black oilskin, her face hidden by sunglasses, she held a cigarette-holder in which a Gauloise was burning. Her strict deportment had already distinguished her from the other patrons, who were few in number, because the majority of them were lounging around on the terrace. I didn't stay long, under the pretext of attending a conference on self-management that was to be held at the Sorbonne. I hadn't felt her looking at me until then. A flash nailed me to the spot.

"And who is giving this conference?"

"The author of a book about anarchy."<sup>36</sup>

"At this moment, all the idiots are talking about self-management, without knowing what they have in their mouths."

I ended up seeing her several days later in a bar near the Louvre that had been used as the setting for the TV serial *Belphégor*.<sup>37</sup> Her long, black figure, perched at the edge of a red booth seat, had all the insistent appearance of a phantom.

I quickly came to understand that nothing about her was obvious. Like seizing a chair, while an imperious and haughty glance put an end to my carelessness and told me quite clearly that I had not come there to meet friends.

During meetings with her, I held myself back a bit, but not without already perceiving a path, a glimmer, behind the well orchestrated outbursts of her fury.

"I'm an intellectual, for fuck's sake! And I admit it!"

The authorized thinkers, the repentant intellectuals disguised as fake workers or as true workerists, were equally despised.

I observed that the common attitude when in her company was to justify yourself. You always felt guilty because you were unable to rise to even the first level of her requirements. I was thrown off balance, but also amazed by her brilliance, by her way of shutting down renowned minds with a single word, when she suspected them of neglecting this motto: "Poetry equals Love equals Freedom." She repeated this surrealist credo, which very few of the group's poor imitators tried to illustrate, in every possible tone, at every moment, against all

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<sup>36</sup> Footnote by the author: Daniel Guérin.

<sup>37</sup> *Belphégor ou le Fantôme du Louvre* (The Phantom of the Louvre) was broadcast in four episodes during March 1965.

odds, but unflinchingly. This sometimes caused some awkwardness, because the situation didn't always require the deployment of such weaponry.

I remember her hatred of the word "liberation," then very much in vogue.

"A word spoken by slaves. Liberation will never be liberty."

In an alchemical engraving that I had discovered, a dog runs at full speed after having broken its chain. But its collar, from which dangle several rings, is still gripping its neck. And its running resembled an escape. In a few words, Marianne shed light on the enigma of the Latin text that accompanied the engraving and that I had tried to translate into French.

"The marvelous," she said again, "can appear suddenly at a street corner, but the world is suffocating under the weight of conventions and the dismaying insipidity of habits." An insurgent, a hothead, a rebel – as soon as she sensed the appearance of the idle chatter of received ideas, she would coldly consider her interlocutor, look him right in the eyes, and then set him on fire:

"Nonsense! Think with your head! All the assholes have such ideas. It is thinking that counts. And be careful with your words. . . . If you use them incorrectly, they will take their revenge. . . ."

I knew her at two of her homes, both marked by the touching hallmarks of her demands.

The first, on the rue Galande, rose up to the second floor of a medieval dwelling that had been rebuilt over the centuries and, if one believes the chronicles of the times as much as the legends, was a place in which Dante had supposedly lived. But Dante, when he was in Paris, surely knew the beautiful street of signs hanging in the wind, its undulating corridor so propitious for day dreaming, its tall houses that lose the gables of their pointed roofs in the mist.

The door opened upon a dark hallway that led to a large red-tiled room under a ceiling of brown-colored crossbeams. In a corner there was a library, in another there was a long oak table with two matching benches. To sit there was to stop at a relay in the crossroads of time, and to place one's elbows on the table was to brush up against impressive presences.

Marianne lived in poverty but detested misery. She claimed poverty as a luxury that she had chosen, against success at any price and the career that she left to schemers and to *all those who had nothing better to do*. She loved to quote this remark by Benjamin Péret: "Even an hour of work per day is still an hour too much."<sup>38</sup> But it wasn't paradoxical to see her work very scrupulously on her part-time jobs.

"Work is a dirty trick. But the freedom that it gives me is valuable because at least afterwards it doesn't clutter up my thoughts."

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<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Péret (1899-1959) was a French poet, Dadaist and Surrealist.

Because after her work was done, Marianne belonged to her friends. She strained to listen to them and always found – in the works of painters, sculptors, and writers – a path towards the kernel that she strove to glorify, yet letting them know that *mercury*, due to its unruly nature, does everything it can to escape and not let itself be led or guided.

“Listen to it. It is trying to speak to you, through your worries. And it has everything to tell you.”

Talking to her about a difficulty was never asking her to resolve it. But the sliding of the words, their secret complicity, led us to speak about something entirely different and we’d burst out laughing.

Her criticism was uncompromising when she detected a concern for beauty.

“Beauty bores me shitless. I don’t give a fuck about beauty.”

She often related to us the anecdote in which André Breton,<sup>39</sup> leaving an art gallery, puckered his lips to say, with hopelessness, “It’s beautiful. . . .” Marianne mimed the scene with such despondency that, for a moment, with her arms open, she could have fallen forward.

“Benjamin . . . an adoration. . . . And André, always a little signal when I arrived at the café. . . .”

Marianne often evoked their long friendship, in fact it could sometimes be embarrassing to see her bring it up, as if she were introducing herself by saying: “So, my name is Marianne, and I have been the friend of André Breton and Benjamin Péret.”

I became a devotee of the rue Galande, the endless conversations, the reading out loud. Marianne’s attitude changed. On several occasions, when she had found a brighter nuance to express her thoughts, she turned towards me to thank me, with the flutter of her lashes, for the silent approval that, in myself, I gave her. We were five, four, often three, in number. Marianne was reluctant to have more than that, and the privilege of her choice was that the chosen ones were in a singular relationship with her, between ourselves, if possible, though she did not favor that.

“The rue Galande is a fortress. That’s why André was able to come here and take refuge during the Algerian war, when he was in danger. . . . His head raised, a finger on his lips, he slowly walked back and forth in great strides, recalling poems that he let out in full stanzas, so inspired, and with such a voice. . . .”

Draped in the mantle that the centuries have woven for it, the rue Galande has never held back sharp and vivid lights. I still see myself climbing the small

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<sup>39</sup> André Breton (1896-1966) was a French poet and writer. He was a co-founder, the principal theorist and the leader of the Surrealist movement.

staircase, as the mist of another age descends outside, the fine dust of a book on the edges of its pages.

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The day after her outburst in the studio, Marianne heard someone knocking at her door. It was René Viénet. He took a blank canvas out of its packaging, covered it with violet blue paint, attached to the center of it a miniature model of a car that he'd sprayed with gasoline and then set it on fire. Then he patiently wrote in calligraphy at the bottom of the canvas a short text in white letters: "The car of the workerist Hubert B.<sup>40</sup> if he continues to piss off the brave buggers of the Enragés who do not ask him if he loves Fourier."

He himself attached the painting to a wall, where it hung for a long time, before being lost during a change of residences. But it remains intact in my memory and still fills me with a very lively contentment. Perhaps one day I will try to reproduce it, so that its light is not short-lived in our times.

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Not for a moment did I feel in harmony with the crowds of May 1968. The occupations movement intimated the shutdown of the entire world, from which it was supposedly more important than ever to secede. But underneath the grid of demands, the bars – far from giving up – had on the contrary multiplied.

In an amphitheater, I was surprised one day by a clear and booming voice that, during an open discussion, tried to bring to it a little concision and light. This intervention by René Viénet, worthy of the best revolutionary assemblies, was greeted by lively applause and was then immediately drowned out in the popular uproar.

I could recognize, standing in front of the stage, all the faces of the members of the Liaison Committee. Great was the vanity of this haphazard appearance, in which many boasted about their improper rights of representation, while at the bottom of the stage, gathering together the revolt, various factions waited to seize control of the place.

Slogans covered the walls, but a feeling of déjà-vu made them appear old,<sup>41</sup> as soon as one read them.

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<sup>40</sup> Hubert Bérard.

<sup>41</sup> Many of these slogans were of situationist inspiration and thus already familiar to people such as the author.

“Destroy power without taking it,” Marianne declared in one of the most beautiful May 68 tracts. “The last surrealist . . .” Guy Debord said of her with astonishment at the same time that he wondered whether one should rejoice or be saddened by this. Surely we would be rejoicing when the Surrealist group, showered with ridicule, claimed in sticker: “The Surrealists are at the service of the students.”

“That word ‘service’ makes me want to throw up,” Marianne said angrily. But he was also saddened.

“Benjamin and André waited in vain for this moment, didn’t they?” Guy asked, seeking approval. Marianne reluctantly admitted, “I am not certain that they would have jumped for joy.”

She wasn’t fooled by the spontaneity claimed by those who watched themselves take action or by the councilist tendencies<sup>42</sup> attributed to the occupations movement.

The stakes were quite different for Marianne, who was more interested in a federation of the despondent and who – not contradictorily – called for “a revolution made by happy people,” who, according to her, were the only ones who wouldn’t succumb to the vertigo of power, which forever remains the lot of emancipated slaves.

One cannot always blame the world for the barriers raised in front of it like so many screens that also hide good luck.

“Irrational and too subjective,” concluded Guy Debord, whom Marianne teased about his habit of annotating his copy of *Le Monde* every afternoon: “My poor Guy, you resolutely go right past poetry.”

Nevertheless, a reciprocal respect, even a lively friendship, soon linked them together, as can be seen by her copy of *The Society of the Spectacle*, which, much later, she showed me: “To Marianne, whom I have always loved.”

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At the end of the summer of 68, I returned to Paris after a long stay at the foot of the Pyrenees, in Collioure, where I met a student from my high school whose parents owned a long-since closed hotel. After the Spanish Civil War, it served as a refuge for many exiles. The poet Antonio Machado<sup>43</sup> blessed it with his presence before ending his life there.

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<sup>42</sup> The situationists (among others) became staunch partisans of workers’ councils during and after the May-June revolt. They drew their inspiration primarily from the Socialisme ou Barbarie group, which had been studying and popularizing such councils since the mid-1950s.

<sup>43</sup> Antonio Machado (1875-1939) was a Spanish poet.

After May, protestors from all regions, from all countries, mixed together at Collioure. Individuals of confused allegiances, most of them incredibly opportunistic, the very creators – if one believed them – of the tempest that had hardly finished raging, all competing with each other concerning the fires, the conflagrations and the barricades that each one has raised everywhere. The rioters of the beach, under the sand, were still seeking paving stones.<sup>44</sup>

But there were also singular characters, who were at first more reserved, almost secretive, less concerned with being noticed or counting the cans of gasoline that they'd set on fire. The wildest ones had not waited for the ship of May to set sail. One of them had just a small bag that he sometimes emptied of its contents in order to reach, at the bag's bottom, the precious companion of his wanderings and solitude, a book whose black cover and large burning letters I recognized: the paperback edition of *Les Chants de Maldoror*.<sup>45</sup>

If he had been a character in a tale, Axel<sup>46</sup> would have been a page, a cobbler or a woodcutter because, during his voyages, he had learned a thousand-and-one small trades, which he never described as chores. It was the spirit of each one that he loved to recall, and his luggage was far from empty.

Playing the guitar, Axel had the light touch and fast speed of a Manouche<sup>47</sup> that has been launched in pursuit of a fleeting memory. I had never before heard such accents, which he gave to everything that he played, but especially that old song which was my favorite and which I often requested: "Ménilmontant."<sup>48</sup>

Patricio was Chilean and came from Germany. He took on odd jobs while waiting for the grape harvest and was on good terms with the old exiled Spanish fishermen. Methodical, aloof, aristocratic in all his manners, he knew how to throw a festive light on each moment of the day. He and a small group occupied the ruins of the castle on the hill; every evening he made them a meal of *arlequins*<sup>49</sup> that the sellers had left to his smile.

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<sup>44</sup> A reversal of the famous May 1968 graffito, "Underneath the paving stones, the beach."

<sup>45</sup> Isidore Lucien Ducasse, aka Lautréamont (1846-1870) was the author of the prose poem *Les Chants de Maldoror* (The Songs of Maldoror), among other writings.

<sup>46</sup> *Note by the author*: a former member of the Council for Maintaining the Occupations during May 1968.

<sup>47</sup> *Jazz manouche* is a form of jazz that incorporates elements from gypsy, klezmer and French popular song traditions.

<sup>48</sup> "Ménilmontant" was written and recorded by Charles Trenet (1913-2001) in 1938. Its lyrics are about the famous neighborhood in Paris of that name.

<sup>49</sup> Argot for leftover food collected from bourgeois tables, restaurants and hotels, and then sold at market by enterprising merchants.

In the autumn, I returned to the rue Galande. A young man haunted the place, wearing a bright green velvet suit, which he made quite singularly unique by wearing every day. He was Jean-Paul, the sculptor of Charles Fourier, to whom Marianne had offered her apartment as a studio.

On the terrace of a café where I shared his company one evening, two young women, at a neighboring table, were looking at us. Jean-Paul began to be very annoyed, especially since, for a long time, he alone was the object of their insistent gazes, and the two beauties, without otherwise hiding anything, were exchanging their mutual impressions of him. He stood up and quickly made his way through. I saw him lean over their table. Then he abruptly turned around and returned to sit at our table, sweeping away with a gesture the impression that he had been preoccupied.

“Do you know them?”

“Not at all.”

“But then . . .”

“Nothing. According to them, I am the very picture of a young First Romantic.”

This made me smile. I blamed myself immediately. Jean-Paul was thinking of something else. But his archangel’s beauty, if one must account for it, could not be viewed without a certain amount of fear, and perhaps the clumsy words of the young women simply stated this miracle with a great and beautiful innocence. He had the figure and face of the young Artaud,<sup>50</sup> mixed with Vallotton’s imaginary portrait of Lautréamont,<sup>51</sup> the resemblance already vivid in his obvious beauty, doubled by another, much more disturbing beauty, the one that was inside him.

After leaving Marianne’s place, we would wander around on long walks, prolonged by nocturnal drifts. When the morning showed us empty streets, damp from the lukewarm mist, the revelation that we sought from day to day seemed inevitable and imminent. Often, exhausted, we collapsed on a bench and, from a book found in some passage, chosen for its cover or its edifying title, there surged, starting from the very first page, the anticipated echo of what we’d just been talking about.

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<sup>50</sup> Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) was a strikingly handsome poet, actor and theorist of the theater.

<sup>51</sup> Félix Vallotton’s imaginary portrait of Lautréamont was published in Remy de Gourmont’s *Le Livre des masques* (1898).

Soon thereafter, the SI no longer existed.<sup>52</sup> Guy Debord decreed its scuttling when the ghost of a useless relic had taken the place of the organization, which now only existed to produce, year after year, issues of the journal that was awaited by an increasingly large public, confident in a brand that was recognized everywhere.

One morning, many years later, when all contact with the former situationists was long over, I acquired a copy of the little book by Guy Debord that had been recently published<sup>53</sup> and that I read during the day. In its pages, and for the first time, Guy wrote about himself and, as closely as possible, followed the paths of his existence, even if he still used a distant tone to avoid unwanted recognition.

The name of a street on which he'd been seen several weeks previously suddenly came back to me. I strolled over there that very evening.

Still bustling with a very old crowd, the rue du Cherche-Midi starts out following the elegant curve of the old hotels that, on the ample arches of their portals, have windows that are barely a few stories high and skylights that are flooded with the sky – so beautiful to behold.

My steps questioned the fall of night. I wanted to cross over to the other side to come closer to an interesting sign I'd seen and I ran into Alice<sup>54</sup> and Guy in the middle of the street.

They were walking along peacefully, leaning on each other, Alice matching her steps with those of Guy, who was hesitant and tired. They didn't see neither my surprise nor my stop when I crossed their way. Guy was speaking, his eyes lowered, with Alice listening to him with a confident smile. Without delaying any further, I finished crossing the street in order to admire the sculpted medallion of an astronomer who was surrounded by his instruments and seemed to be working in accordance with the wise advice of a child. And the compass held in the hands of the old man might also have been able to trace out the basic outline of a rendezvous that I still didn't know about that morning, but whose mounting urgency I'd felt the whole day.

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I ran into Jean-Paul one Sunday near the Louvre, and he gave me Marianne's new address in the Marais. The rue Charlot, uncertain street number,

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<sup>52</sup> The SI dissolved in late 1971, a fact that was announced by the publication of *La véritable scission dans l'Internationale*, published by Champ Libre in April 1972.

<sup>53</sup> Guy Debord, *Panegyrique, tome premier*, published by éditions Gérard Lebovici in 1989.

<sup>54</sup> Alice Becker-Ho, whom Debord met in 1963 and married in 1972.

but the clear indication of a porch that opened upon a workshop whose door had Marianne's name written on it. It was on an evening of chimera that I decided to venture there.

Getting off at the place de l'Hôtel de Ville, the bus left me in windy solitude. I had the route in my head: vertical lines of streets to go up, cut by successive horizontal lines that would gradually bring me closer.

I had no idea at the time how often I would make this journey, determining my route according to the propitious angle of an old wall to be skirted or by the singular glow of a street lamp that increased the obscurity around it. I entered the stuffiness of an ageless time that the amassed centuries hadn't dispersed. Then there was a half-closed gate and, on a door in the courtyard, *Marianne* written in chalk. I gave the door a few quick knocks. Inside, nothing stirred.

I walked back to the crossroads. The last shop windows of the evening still hadn't gone down. A figure took leave of a passer-by, then turned and said to me, "Here's a friend who comes from afar and whom I haven't seen in a long time."

The entry devoted to the rue Charlot in the *Dictionnaire historique des rues de Paris*<sup>55</sup> is accompanied by two photographs. The first one shows the crossroads where I saw Marianne again. The second shows the entrance leading to her workshop. The caption says, "An entrance under the joists of a vault, picturesque first courtyard, openwork staircase, old house at the far end." Later on I discovered an old postcard in the *Paris d'autrefois*<sup>56</sup> series that depicted from the same angle this "doorway of a very old house that is remarkable for its ceiling beams."

A lone small lamp lit the entrance where I stood, near a long workbench mounted on trestles, cluttered with pencils and pens, quills and paintbrushes. A canvas, mounted on an easel, acted as a screen for the shadows that swallowed the far end of the workshop.

But the most striking thing, like the balcony of a miniature that emerges from an old illuminated book, was the corbel construction of the joists that rested upon thin, fluted wooden beams. The body of the old house arranged itself below this overhanging structure.

"I saw the marvel immediately," Marianne told me. "But I've had to deal with tons of rubble. I began with an axe and ended up with a knife."

A fine stone edging, set into the paving stones, brought half of the old alleyway to a corner at the far end of the courtyard. The other half, under the joists, traversed the workshop. It was in what was still visible that the route was best hidden, like a path that nothing illuminates and that shines in the darkness.

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Jacques Hillairet, *Dictionnaire historique des rues de Paris* (éditions de Minuit, 1960).

<sup>56</sup> Fernand Donnet, *Paris d'autrefois* (De Backer, 1904).

I brought a manuscript with me. I didn't stay long, that first evening, standing before Marianne, who contemplated the title in black letters.

"*WARRIOR*,<sup>57</sup> what a magnificent word. Where did you find it?"

I wanted to explain it to her, to translate it. She stopped me immediately.

"It's useless. Reading it aloud, everything is said: *VARIE OR*,<sup>58</sup> that which changes gold."

Today I've brought my camera. I frame in the viewfinder the door to the workshop that Marianne will no longer open. It is impossible to focus on the small label that long ago replaced the vivid letters traced out in chalk. Perhaps later I will try to take some pictures of the workshop's interior.

When someone opened the door for me, I was repelled at the very idea. I'd learned of her death, two days earlier. A gray gloominess that floated like fog reduced the space of the workshop. The sun, blazing away, bathed the courtyard, but the windows had become opaque to the light of day. What could my camera have captured? It was the very spirit of the place that had been annihilated. At that moment, I resolved to leave and never come back.

This morning the great wind of spring is blowing clear gusts of brisk and biting air that Marianne had welcomed from her doorstep.

"Paris," she used to tell me, "is located on the shores of the ocean."

With one last wave of my hand, I disappeared under the great porch, and, at the last minute, on the other side of the roof, I felt the shaking of invisible riggings.

In the alleyways of the Marais, where I'd quickened my pace, I'd followed a changing route, according to the hour and the light, the appeal of a street sign, some perfume in the wind. I'd experienced all the seasons and all the crepuscules there, the silent nights when I'd returned, clutching the pages – now even more precious – that I'd read in her workshop just a while ago.

My chair is leaning back against the darkness. The darkest night surrounds the workshop. Near a small table, the only thing illuminated, Marianne is sitting up straight, her profile crossing the lamp's halo, her eyes flashing vivid alerts.

\* \* \*

"It's unbelievable," the second-hand bookseller lamented. "We should have recorded him speaking."

I'd stopped in front of his stand, in which books about all the revolutions were piled up. At first I thought that he was talking to himself, but he'd noticed that I was perusing a little pamphlet about Spain.

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<sup>57</sup> English in original.

<sup>58</sup> Phrase left in French to preserve the pun.

“Everything that is in there, and much more, was related to me one day in a café. He knew a lot about it, the little father did, and not because he’d read about it, but because he’d been there.”

He then paused to savor my surprise. I was in fact quite intrigued, but especially by the café’s location.

“Over there, near les Halles, between the rue Rivoli and the quays.”

With his hand, he indicated, beyond the river, a small neighbouring that I knew very well, as well as the café in question, located at the bottom of my apartment building.

For several months, my father helped me fix up a proper musketeer’s dwelling, as I immediately dubbed it, to which I gained access by an open-air staircase and which smelled of freshly waxed wood.

In the little café enclosed on the ground floor like an antique tavern, he’d participated in the conversations of the regular customers. One day, he’d talked about Spain with a second-hand bookseller.

“You must go see him,” my father told me afterwards, “because he knows a lot about it.”

The very words used by the bookseller, so many years later. Perhaps I should have spoken to him and introduced myself. But he continued to shake his head, lost in the dream of book that would be impossible to reconstitute. His pleasure was to say to the passers-by who glanced at him that there was a book known to him alone and that no one would ever find.

I moved away, letting him believe that I was shocked. But I could have shocked him even more. One day, rereading *Homage to Catalonia*, I had a start. In the revolutionary city of Barcelona, George Orwell joined the militias that were preparing to leave for the front in an old cavalry barracks that had been taken from the soldiers several weeks previously and that had been victoriously rechristened the “Lenin Barracks.”

That was the same name pronounced by my father, in Barcelona, in front of the same old building.

## Twenty Years Later

For Relja and Aleksa

What would happen if, today, I returned to the streets that lead from the place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville up to Marianne's workshop on the rue Charlot? When I think of that place and the illumination that welcomed me there at nightfall, I see only a single streetlight that still manages to provide great clarity. And this reminds me of one of the few funny stories that I've retained. There was a man who, near a streetlamp, was searching for his keys. A passer-by asked him if he was quite certain that he'd lost them there. No, the man replied, but it is only here that I have a chance to find them.

To rediscover the path to the workshop, I must depart from here, so that I can slip into the exquisite pleasure of the alleyways, orienting myself according to the inspiration of the moment, by smelling the ancient air that rises up from one of them, a little like a person's hand that, in a library, reaches towards the cover of an old book.

At the time I was living nearby l'Hôtel-de-Ville, which was the obligatory passage and the departure point for a new adventure. Because it was indeed an adventure. During the week, I'd added several pages to my novel *Don Juan* and I trembled with impatience to read them aloud to Marianne. Such moments had also acquired great importance for her, too. She listened to me with extreme attention, I would even say in a state of extreme tension. A mood of trust settled in between us. We spoke heart-to-heart to each other.

This took place towards the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s. Before beginning *Don Juan*, I read to her several texts that had pleased her. One day, during one of our reading sessions, she raised her arms and exclaimed, "I have everything I could ever want! I have even witnessed the birth of a great writer!"

It goes without saying that I report all this with the greatest humility, I would even dare to say with humor, which for Marianne was the very hallmark of gravity. Quite obviously she thought so, but she was especially sensitive to the pleasure of sharing a quite moment, a true halt, to contemplate together a landscape in which everything can emerge and invent itself, just like the vast prairie in a poem by Garcia Lorca<sup>59</sup> that resonates under the horses' hoofs like a drumhead.

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<sup>59</sup> "Romance de la luna, luna" (from *Romancero Gitano*, 1924-1927): "El jinete se acercaba tocando el tambor del llano" ("The horseman approached / beating the drum of the plains").

You would understand everything if you could stand in front of the painting that Marianne painted and titled *Don Juan*. It evokes quite well the metaphysical solitude in which Marianne developed, which was full of steep escarpments with which one had to ceaselessly engage oneself in order to follow her.

For me, the image of an alchemist is the one that suits her best.

The portrait that I am painting isn't intended to be eulogistic, but just. And I believe that I have succeeded in conveying the truth. Nevertheless, there is another side to the coin, but either it was not visible to me back then or I have deliberately left it in the shadows.

Marianne's exhilaration could often make us lose sight of reality. In the athanor<sup>60</sup> of her workshop, everything was tinged with vivid hues, with magical glimmers flashing out behind the cloud of smoke from our cigarettes.

I did not become a great writer, except in the minds of several friends who are dear to me, and not only for that. No publisher wanted my *Don Juan*. When I'd finished it, Marianne herself expressed some reservations when I spoke of getting it published. She put off, from one week to the next, giving the manuscript to some friends as she'd promised to do. When their verdict was finally announced, it was not favorable. Marianne agreed to tell me that it would no doubt be necessary to rewrite certain passages and perhaps even write something else entirely.

If I am dwelling on this episode, it is because it highlights the exhilaration that could seize hold of us at certain moments, only to collapse like a soufflé when it receives even the slightest jolt of reality.

Freud spoke of a death instinct. He said this about it: "The name 'libido' can once more be used to denote the manifestations of the power of Eros in order to distinguish them from the energy of the death instinct. It must be confessed that we have much greater difficulty in grasping that instinct; we can only suspect it, as it were, as something in the background behind Eros, *and it escapes detection unless its presence is betrayed by its being alloyed with Eros*" (emphasis mine).<sup>61</sup>

In the same sense and using the same words, we could speak, where Marianne was concerned, with an instinct to fail, of a will to fail.

An instinct and a will very well hidden in erotic manifestations.

"We are in love, both of us, aren't we?" she often asked me. No doubt, and I could only agree, but by hiding from myself that this love was demanding, exclusive, excessive – in a word, surrealist.

Because her compensation were the facts that she possessed me and that, with my *Don Juan*, she also held me for a long time in a state of waiting and expectation, in Kantian terms one would say "without foreseeable end," which she

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<sup>60</sup> In alchemy, an athanor is a furnace that provides uniform and constant heating.

<sup>61</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), translated by James Strachey.

called “the exasperation of desire.” She held me captive in that state of waiting and expectation.

It was a delicious prison, I must admit. And I should make clear that we were never lovers. The will to fail that she instilled in me with infinite patience and that made me explode at the end when I rebelled against her request to either rewrite *Don Juan* or “let it sit on my bookshelf.”

Marianne recounted to me the ordeal that she went through at a gallery to which she had come to propose a book written by her husband at the time, Radovan Ivsic. She had a really beautiful copy, illustrated by a Miró’s lithograph, that the gallery owner, with an abrupt gesture, ripped out from the book and threw what remained into the trash bin.

Shortly after my outburst, Marianne had a heart attack. For her, it was clear that I’d wanted to kill her. It was, she told me, as if the ceiling had fallen on her head – the ceiling that she herself had greatly weakened by removing the plaster from a wooden pillar as well several joists. And so, it wasn’t only the ceiling of her workshop that could collapse, but all of the house’s floors, as well.

Should I had to be worry? Should I have reproached her? It never crossed my mind. That was one of the rules of the game. It was my fault for not having understood.

We’d laughter together so much, we’d been so spellbound by each other.

Marianne remained very discrete about her experiences fighting against fascism with the Yugoslavian partisans. But she’d confided in me two memories that remained very vivid for her.

The first concerned an injured soldier who demanded food, but his comrades had nothing to offer him. Marianne and a few others approached a farm and asked for an egg. The farmer refused.

“An egg! Unbelievable! And they refused to give it!” Rage burned in her face.

The second story concerned a young combatant who’d adopted Marianne as a friend and had placed himself at her side. One day, when he had to go out on a reconnaissance mission, he asked Marianne for her overcoat, which he claimed was bulletproof. Marianne did what she could to dispel this idea, but, because of the young man’s insistence, she ended up giving in. Moved by this memory, Marianne paused for a moment and then added very quickly: “He was killed later that same day!”

Marianne was buried in the Montparnasse cemetery. For the inscription on her tombstone, I’d suggested her motto: *Ama et fac quod vis*.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Latin for “Love and do what you want.”

This was done without me talking about it again. I am very grateful to her friends who took care of the funeral's details.

That was more than twenty years ago. *Vingt ans après* is the title of the novel that Alexandre Dumas wrote after his *Trois Mousquetaires*.<sup>63</sup> Marianne loved to tell us that there had been in her courtyard a blacksmith-farrier who had the trust of D'Artagnan, the fourth of the Three Musketeers, to whom he brought his horse. How did she know this? She was looking at the courtyard, and, from her way of speaking, one would have believed that the blacksmith still working there just a few weeks ago.

I'd spoken to her one day about Alexandre Dumas' follow-up to his most celebrated book. I promised to bring her a copy of it. It was Christmas. After having dinner with my parents, I got on my way, with the book under my arm. It was past midnight and I had a long trip ahead of me. I had to cross almost all of Paris on foot. But the night was very beautiful. It had snowed. Passing by the Louvre, I slipped on the pavement, but got up without any trouble. I'd come close to breaking a bone.

Reaching Marianne's courtyard – because it would be very late – we'd agreed that I wouldn't knock on her door. I approached the window. One of the small panes was half open.

I slipped the book through it at the same time that Marianne held out her hand.

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<sup>63</sup> Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) was the author of *The Three Musketeers* (1844), among other works. *Twenty Years After* was published in 1845.



Marianne Ivsic  
*Don Juan*  
Oil on canvas, 1981  
34 x 27 cm



Marianne had made her home in the little studio on the right.  
You can see the dark rectangle of her window through which I slid the book one Christmas night.



When her landlord evicted her from the rue Galande, Marianne found this dwelling in the Temple district where real estate speculation had not yet converted all the workshops into "lofts".



When Marianne occupied the place, a door had been opened in the wall  
where the gutter descends.  
It was the entrance to her workshop.  
On this door I discovered her name written in chalk.

## Musketeer

He is a friend of long standing. And yet we haven't often spent time together. I first met him in the middle of the 1960s. René Viénet was a member of the prestigious Situationist International. This memory would make him smile. But this was indeed the idea that we shared about the SI in the now faraway past.

I have already written in "Knights" about this first encounter, which took place on a winter evening in a café on la Place de la République. Upon entering, it was not Viénet but rather his friend, Donald Nicholson-Smith, who drew my attention, with his beard worthy of Mikhail Bakunin. René wore a blue canvas jacket, which seemed very light for the season. The I had also noticed the two young women of extraordinary beauty who accompanied them. We sat down at a neighboring table after greeting them. Except for us, the place was empty.

We were 4 or 5 members of various anarchist groups and the situationists honored us by agreeing to meet up. It was something they rarely did. They kept themselves at an almost haughty distance from everyone else, at least that's what I believed at the time. I learned later on that I'd been wrong. They didn't seek that distance; I even believe that they were saddened by it. But the revolutionary critique in which they were engaged had isolated them, due to the lack of interlocutors who could satisfy their requirements.

If Donald had an anarchist's beard, René contented himself with a thin blond mustache. His blue jacket could have been the pea jacket of a sailor or a docker, which I understood later on, when I got to know his background better.<sup>64</sup> When he stood up and stretched out his tall frame to leave, he had the appearance of a giant. But the best image I keep of him is that of a Musketeer, taller than D'Artagnan, with his medium-length hair, blue eyes and haughty mustache.

Today, I know his age, so I can say that, at the time, he was twenty-two years old, and I was barely seventeen. And if, today, I know his age, it is because we saw each other again more than fifty years later, and he is now seventy-eight. To have seen him again, several weeks ago, was the result of a miracle, or at least fortuitous circumstances, which comes down to the same thing.

I have written several lines in which I speak of him, in a longer narrative ["Knights"] that includes this period, a little before May 1968 and the following years. He knew this text and desired to meet me. We then began to exchange our

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<sup>64</sup> According to his privately circulated "Autobiographical Sketch" (February-March 2020), later uploaded to Wikipedia.org, Viénet was "born [...] to a family that had been dockworkers for several generations in Le Havre, France."

first messages. Even Donald, then living in New York, found himself getting involved. There was hardly any coincidence in all this. As is often the case, events had knit their threads in silence and reconnected with their actors across the fabric of time.

In these days of confinement,<sup>65</sup> René agreed to meet me in a friendly bookstore that served as his lair and that, he assured me, would serve us coffee. My emotions upon seeing him again were the same as they'd been the first time. Except that fifty years ago I'd only opened my mouth to greet him. Here before me was one of the remarkable men whom you do not forget once you have met them. Our handshake that day had a certain weight. It put back together fragments of memory, poetry and history, all mixed together. He did indeed match the image of a Musketeer that I'd had of him. Great nobility was clearly visible in his features.

My memories had touched him. Up until then, he'd had difficulty recalling his own. I'd helped him to remember them. I had the feeling of guiding him even more strongly when he had to leave to run an errand and I proposed to accompany him. There was now something frail about his once-powerful figure. It seemed to me that the path would be easier for him if he had a partner.

Those steps in the street, matching his long strides, remain with me like a moment of excellence that, even today, still completely amazes me. We were two survivors from a sunken galleon; we walked on gold dust, glittering in silence, almost shoulder to shoulder when the sidewalk got narrower. Just like the hours in which we were sitting, in a café, around a table.

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<sup>65</sup> The period of quarantine imposed in France and elsewhere in the world in March 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## A bridge during the day, a gate at night<sup>66</sup>

We knew that the meeting had taken place, but doubts remained until Alice Debord made available to us four photographs – we'd only expected one. Four proofs of her visit to les Vosges, in August 1968, with Marianne and Guy, plus an unknown young man who we were unable to identify at the time.<sup>67</sup>

Until then, we were uncertain that such a meeting had even taken place. There was a photo, we'd learned, in which Marianne, Alice and Guy were seen together.

This photo had been lost by the person<sup>68</sup> who'd assured our Serbian historian that it existed. Trusting her, we got to work looking for it. It was Alice who found pictures taken at the time in her personal archives. The one that we were looking for was not there, but the negatives received from Alice exceeded our expectations. And we did not expect to receive so many of them.

We were on a fragile and shaking bridge. Then the door to the castle facing the bridge opened.

It was more than proof: it was an avowal, because an avowal consents. It envelops us and saves us, by dissipating all doubt. We had crossed the threshold, as if we were propelled by the wind that blew away our hesitations, questions and uncertainties. In our quest, we had just entered the Castle of Wonders.

Four black-and-white negatives depicting dark undergrowth and a house lost in the heart of the forest to which nothing leads except the pressing desire to approach people with very uncommon individual destinies, which is felt even more strongly because they met together.

Suddenly, the air around us was different. The raised drawbridge changed into a door, which held us in an enchantment similar to the one Vivian created when, using a magic spell, she imprisoned Merlin in a glass tower.<sup>69</sup>

It was quite enchanting to find this house in the forest and its inhabitants. The path that led there could only appear all at once, thanks to a sudden burst of sunshine from the sky or a blast of wind that flattens the ferns.

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<sup>66</sup> An allusion to the drawbridge in Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*.

<sup>67</sup> Roger Legarec, a friend of Pierre Lepetit, another member of the Ménilmontant anarchist group.

<sup>68</sup> Nicole Le Foll, a former member of the anarchist group in Ménilmontant.

<sup>69</sup> Characters in the *Lancelot-Grail* cycle of Arthurian tales.

A house made of somber wood, as if the smoke of a great fire had darkened it. Several steps away from the entrance, Guy is inside, at a window; Marianne is standing up, one hand on the shoulder of a young man, as if to knight him. Of course it is Alice who took the photo.

Their inactivity is troubling, but also touching. They seem to possess a seriousness that implies nothing but commands everything when, fifty years later, we study this image, without believing in it too much at first, only to marvel at it later.

Their rendezvous with the three friends who have sought them out seems to have already taken place. They now have no other goal than to confuse and surprise us, we who had doubts.

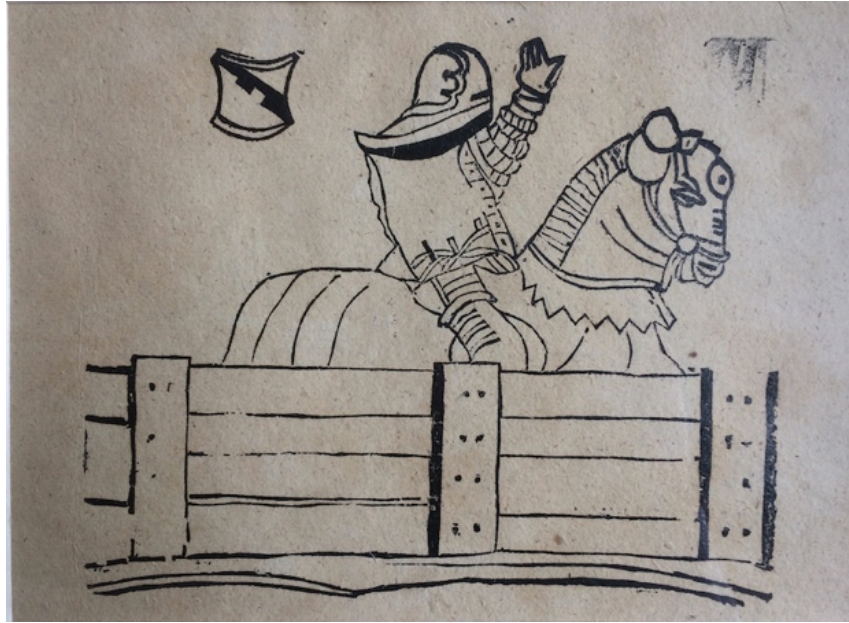
Their expressions seem to say: “You’ve taken your time. Now you’ve finally arrived.”



Roger Legarec  
(a friend of Pierre Lepetit)  
Marianne  
Guy Debord



Marianne Ivsic and Alice Becker-Ho, aka Alice Debord



We did not miss our time.  
We just bypassed it.