

# For the orientation debate of Spring 1970: Note on the first series of texts By Guy Debord<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Essential points already touched upon

a) To reaffirm “our specificity,” as Raoul [Vaneigem] said. This was also formulated by René [Riesel], Tony [Verlaan], myself (notably on the “situationist” content of the Councils).

b) To develop our theory. René [Riesel] had reason to say that “the (veritable) existence of a group of critical theorists” is already highly justified and necessary. Paolo [Salvadori], in a discussion on the margins of this debate, has justly insisted on the fact that the realization of the anticipated “Manifesto”<sup>2</sup> isn’t *at first* a matter of a good edition (and less a question of intelligent distribution), but the coherent and immediate development of many points that haven’t been outlined in our theory up to this point. Tony – whose text is, in general, the most concrete of all – gave the best dialectical expression of the desirable stage “beyond” being a group of critical theorists: “In sum, we remain theoreticians, who nevertheless apply theory more and more closely to concrete activities. This can become one of the best means – of which we have need – to *effectively* make our theory known.”

c) Not wait an instant to demand, of the most theoretical as well as of the most practical, the *verified* participation of all (in the same way that it is clear, after the exclusion of Eduardo [Rothe], that one can no longer discuss, even for an hour, any acts of personal impertinence susceptible of offending the SI). René [Riesel] concretely posed this question in lines contained in points 7 and 10. Our numerical and geographical extension is quite secondary as concerns this basic banality, on which our existence is based. In this sense, Christian [Sébastien] wasn’t wrong to say that each should “rejoin the SI.”

## 2. Several nuances that appear useful to me

a) I completely approve of Raoul’s text, if we understand the project of “chasing away the readers who don’t interest us.” This is to signify our explicit refusal of the interest that people show us; our *practical* refusal of all contact with them; the development by the SI of *contents* that always cause them to reject us in disappointment and fury (see what they call our

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<sup>1</sup> Dated 27 April 1970, this document was one of Debord’s many contributions to the internal “orientation debate” that the Situationist International conducted between April 1968 and January 1971. A collection of 35 such documents was circulated in 1974 by the *Centre de recherche sur la question sociale* (CRQS) in the form of a green-covered volume of mimeographed reproductions called *Débat de l’Orientation de l’Ex-Internationale Situationniste, 1969-1971*. In 2000, a website created by Franck Einstein offered a collection of 40 of these documents (all of them, apparently) under the title “Documents Situationnistes, 1969-1970.” It is this website that provided the source for the present translation by Bill Brown. Uploaded to the *NOT BORED!* website (notbored.org) in 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The situationists planned to write and publish a “Situationist Manifesto” modeled on Marx and Engel’s “Communist Manifesto” (1848), but never did.

“workerism”). But this isn’t a practical solution to effectively “choose” the readers we want. The most extreme voluntarism can’t mislead itself into believing that we have the power to prevent imbeciles from reading us. And, without doubt, it would be too puristic to pretend that a certain (inevitable) part of mediation by imbeciles always has absolutely terrible results in the diffusion of a revolutionary critique. The imbecile, especially when he is scandalized, is a good resonance chamber.

In his critique of the intellectual milieu, Raoul has placed to the side a “handful” of resolute people who are completely idle. I do not know if they are perfectly resolute, but I have the impression that there are slightly more than a handful of them. Without a doubt, René [Riesel], in point 4, had reason to critique “a routine of useless meetings.” It is necessary to strongly cut down the number of these meetings, but not to suppress them absolutely. If “autonomous groups” are slow to form – and one can pose the question of their real possibility as long as autonomous workers haven’t also begun to form their own groups – there are already semi-autonomous individuals, who are an important symptom. Obviously, it is necessary to give them as little chance of boring us as possible; but they bore us in proportion to the extent that they are not autonomous (said otherwise, these are the *same criteria* that one uses on the outside of the SI and – to the extent that the SI knows it is in crisis – in its interior).

c) In going beyond the impatience and bad humor that we usually inspire among the admiring yapping dogs that would like to bite us, I believe that it is necessary for us to comprehend the *social base* of their existence and perspectives. Tony’s analysis shows the essential aspect of the opposition: “sociologically,” we are the *déclassé* who want to abolish classes, while they are the pseudo-*déclassé* who dream of one day becoming a class (or workers or middle executives of the revolution, whom they most often pretend to be).

d) Everyone is in agreement on the historic meeting with the workers; and it has already started. Before choosing tactics, we recall our strategic path: we don’t go to the workers. We go so that the workers will come to us – and remain autonomous! This will be the true “Strasbourg of the factories.”<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Modest propositions

a) *Theoretical works*. The *Manifesto*. The *explication* of Workers Councils, in recalling what we have *already said* insofar as the essential exigencies are concerned (in several issues of *L’Internationale Situationniste*, in [*The Society of the*] *Spectacle*, etc.; this is already present in *I.S. #13*.)<sup>4</sup> Possibility of a pamphlet (small book?) that, for example, is called *The problems of a classless society* and that, coolly considering all the possible and desirable characteristics of the next revolution, would analyze all the *difficulties*, the serious uncertainties and the truly obscure points that the revolution would inevitably have to surmount (this text would be the inverse of the *Manifesto*). Another work (a book, no doubt) would propose to establish (all of Marx’s errors

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<sup>3</sup> In 1966, the SI helped a group of radical university students in Strasbourg cause a scandal, in part by writing a brilliant and soon widely read pamphlet titled *On the Poverty of Student Life*. One imagines that a “Strasbourg of the factory” would involve the publication of a tract with a title along the lines of *On the Poverty of Working for a Living*.

<sup>4</sup> The situationists planned to publish a thirteenth issue of their journal *L’Internationale Situationniste*, but it never came out.

exactly indicated) how the history of capitalism in the last 125 years has *completely justified* the fundamental points of Marx's critique.

b) *Works more directly oriented towards "agitation."* One or many handbills. A collection of our most striking quotations, grouped chronologically to enlighten the meaning of certain keywords (replacing the stillborn "dictionary," less ambitious but more readable).<sup>5</sup> A part (later on, no doubt) of a *History of the SI*;<sup>6</sup> or, at the least, a presentation of a collection of isolated or unpublished documents.

c) *The cinema.* Previous economic questions, to be settled with all the others. [René] Viénet has announced that he would like to make a film of our "Theses on Watts"<sup>7</sup> – this would be the moment – and I will make *The Society of the Spectacle* (I would also like to shoot the *Treatise on Living*).<sup>8</sup> Each film can provide one or two situationists with work as assistants and thus have the occasion to master their own style in this language; and the inevitable success of our works will also supply the economic base for future productions by these same comrades. The broadening of our audience will be decisive.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mustapha Khayati's "Captive Words: Preface to a Situationist Dictionary, which was published in *Internationale Situationniste* #10 (March 1966).

<sup>6</sup> The first such work was Jean-François Martos's *Histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste* (Éditions Champ Libre 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Guy Debord's "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," which was first published in the USA in an English translation (December 1965). Viénet never made such a film.

<sup>8</sup> In 1973, Guy Debord released his film version of his 1967 book *The Society of the Spectacle*. (Among the assistants on the film was the ex-Situationist Gianfranco Sanguinetti.) Work on the film version of Raoul Vaneigem's *Treatise on Living for the Younger Generations* never began.