

Notes on the strategic debate of the Situationist International¹

1. More on the recent period and what it has begun.

One is in complete agreement: at the same moment that, all through Europe (but also elsewhere), reality was seeking out situationist theory, this theory wasn't developing. Without doubt, the Venice Conference² was "exemplary" of this "intensive" non-development. The period after Venice was a good example of the real dimensions of the SI's extensive development.

Never before did the SI have so many members who were less "useful" or, rather, so many members who were less useful *to the SI*, than it did in 1969. It goes without saying that it was truly disgraceful that those who were part of the most modern and coherent international revolutionary organization active today used it so little and so sluggishly; almost as if one could at certain moments doubt that the SI was truly at the disposition of those who wanted and knew how to make use of it.

Striving to be at the center of the organization, as Raoul [Vaneigem] said,³ and being "admirable" to the other members – these are the same things. And what is true for each situ[ationist] is true for each section: the SI must stop being divided between a "center" in Paris and various Eastern peripheries (it goes without saying that there are comrades from other countries whose membership entails certain difficulties). The Italian section *must* provide a lot here: at the least, it must provide an example of a country other than France that has an active, well-constructed section of the SI.

In other words, the Italian section and its hoped-for successes must immediately be examples and, above all, *precedents* for the other sections, today and in the future, just as the French section has consistently been for more than 10 years. Among the other sections, the one in Italy is in the most favorable position where this is concerned.

It is necessary, in the future, and to the extent that we want the organization to be really creative and experimental, that we emphasize the choices faced by the SI: it isn't a question of situs making problems for the SI (as an Italian comrade⁴ recently did), but rather making the SI

¹ Written in French by Gianfranco Sanguinetti and datelined Milan, June 1970. Unpublished by the Situationist International. Included in *Internationale Situationniste. Debat d'orientation de l'ex-Internationale Situationniste* (Paris: Centre de Recherche sur la Question Sociale [CRQS], 1974).

² The Eighth Conference of the Situationist International took place in Venice, Italy in late September 1969 and was organized by Sanguinetti. See his text "La casa Frolo: The Venice Conference, September 1969," dated August 2014 and included in Raoul Vaneigem and Gérard Berréby, *Rien n'est fini, tout commence* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2014).

³ Raoul Vaneigem, "Note of synthesis for the meeting of 19 May 1970," included in *Internationale Situationniste. Debat d'orientation de l'ex-Internationale Situationniste* (op. cit.): "If it appears necessary to be more and more explicit among us concerning our specificity, it is nevertheless distressing to have to say how each member should comport himself so as to strive to be at the center of the organization, to make the group an extension of what it wants to be."

⁴ Paolo Salvadori, "Provisional Theses for the Discussion of New Theoretico-Practical Orientation in the SI," May 1970, *ibid.*

and all of its choices *the* problem for each situ. It would in fact be ridiculous for the situs to want to resolve the SI's strategic problems without confronting their own problems (cf. Raoul: "group discipline").⁵ Contrary what was desired by unhappy Pavan,⁶ the SI isn't a sinecure for its members or for its enemies; if some of us have found it happy chance to know the SI, others surely haven't found it so. It seems to me that (today, less than ever) it isn't necessary at all to encourage among us a certain optimism, even though, from another point of view, there are real reasons for it. One says this, not out of a kind of stupid "rigor," but simply because I am convinced that we don't need it, especially because it never served us well. For the rest, this debate has already demonstrated its usefulness.

One last thing concerning the period of crisis and the most recent exclusions:⁷ in his first text, Comrade Christian⁸ said in reference to the crisis that "it is sad but true that it is necessary for us to say: 'the SI was also that.'" But the failures of the members of the SI are, it's true, in part the failures of the SI itself. But I believe it isn't necessary to dwell upon this, because, for the SI, these kinds of failures are moments of its success, because these failures mark the historic progress of the SI. And the historic success of the SI will be its truth.

2. *Some remarks on our strategy and this debate.*

As Paolo noted, and with good reason, the fact that we have had more or less *direct* and conscious contact with other autonomous revolutionaries is already an indirect support for and verification of our theory. But it is necessarily much more interesting for us, because we have recently become *very popular* and because the movement and struggle that we have announced puts everything in motion; and, in enlightening everyone's interests, we confer to everyone the interest of this struggle, *our* struggle.

Reciprocally, in actively seeking our real interest in all this, it's necessary for us to make precise our strategy for combating the interests of recuperators and producers of situationism, which, unfortunately, are interests that are more real than necessary for us.

Without doubt, there are different ways of combating the recuperators: a good tactic is to sabotage their work. *By giving them too much.* It is necessary to augment the cadences for these salaried workers in the established order! Our gain will be immediate and double. In order to prevent recuperation, one must use some kind of *détournement*. The progress of the SI will be measured by its ability to ceaselessly *détourn* itself.

Artists, intellectuals, students: we have had enough. It is necessary, perhaps, to be indulgent *against* them: it seems to me that, since [19]68, the majority of the SI's attacks on them, violent though they were, risked becoming objectively *pedagogical* rather than exemplary.

⁵ Raoul Vaneigem, op. cit.: "To think by group discipline obviously amounts to thinking one way for the group and another for oneself, thus thinking as badly of one as of the other."

⁶ Claudio Pavan was excluded in February 1970.

⁷ Eduardo Rothe was excluded in April 1970. Paolo Salvadori would be excluded in September 1970.

⁸ Christian Sebastiani, "Notes for the meeting of 13 April 1970."

On the contrary, like the workers, we don't have to be indulgent (cf. the last text by Christian: "it won't be necessary to be tender with them").⁹

It will be necessary for us to be more and more intolerant of *justifications* (beginning with our own): we know that they exist, if one goes in search of them, but we also know that it is the old world that produces them for its own benefit and that they will one day cease to exist. We have quite naturally chosen to be collectively and individually *compromised* with the proletariat; it is necessary that the proletarians, who are our next interlocutors, begin to compromise directly with us. It seems to me, for example, *that it is Italy that one can know and critique the workers* for what they have and haven't done, for example, in response to the events of December 1969.¹⁰

In Europe, at least in the countries in which they are sections of the SI, the workers can be criticized for not fully living up to their potential, even as they have begun speaking to and criticizing themselves (it goes without saying that it is useless, even academic, for us to criticize the workers before *communicating* with them: *this is the importance of "The Wildcat Striker's Notebook."*¹¹

It seems to me that the text by Paolo is particularly remarkable for the problems that it approaches, for beginning the discussion of strategy that Raoul wished to take up in his most recent text.¹² To be precise, as Paolo tried to be, about moving closer to the realization of a classless society – this was already sketched out in the lines of force of our positive strategy. One of our goals, at least as we've defined them, has been to supersede being a "group of theoreticians." "But if we can't go beyond theory without using it decisively in practice, neither can we exert ourselves in practice except by means of our own theory" (Paolo).¹³ And, even more trivially, as the interventions of this debate have made clear, it is obvious that the SI can't actually and definitely supersede being a "group of theoreticians" even if its theoretical production is *quantitatively* superior to what has been so far (cf. Riesel and others on this point).

Another point. If one can say that the sections in France and Italy, and perhaps Spain and Scandinavia, have been very well served by the "Theses of April 1968,"¹⁴ one must also put them to work in England, the USA, Germany, etc. It is time that the SI had a good journal in

⁹ Christian Sebastiani, "Notes for the meeting of 19 May 1970": "it won't be necessary to be tender with those mentioned by Raoul (March 1970): 'it is shameful that those who dispose of the real means of revolution don't use it or use it badly.'"

¹⁰ On 12 December 1969, a bomb exploded at the Piazza Fontana in Milan, killing a dozens and injuring many more. One week later, the Italian section of the SI published "Is the Reichstag Burning?" which claimed that the Italian secret services were behind the attack and that it was designed to thwart and intimidate the increasingly militant working class.

¹¹ A projected publication by the SI.

¹² Raoul Vaneigem, "Note of synthesis for the meeting of 19 May 1970," op. cit.: "One of the things lacking is a long discussion of the function of the worker in the commodity-spectacle society and our strategy."

¹³ Paolo Salvadori, op. cit.

¹⁴ Guy Debord, "The Question of Organization for the SI," written in April 1968, published in *Internationale situationniste* #12 (September 1969) and the launching point for the SI's "orientation debate."

English.¹⁵ It seems to me that we merit one, just as the proletarians in the USA, England and Germany merit us. Without doubt, with one or two films, it would be easier for us to penetrate into these countries than if we employed texts (here is another reason to speed up work in the cinema).

More abstractly, concerning our strategy, one can say that the SI only poses problems that it can solve, but also that, today, the SI can solve many more problems than it has posed.

This will not be without difficulties; as elsewhere, nothing is accomplished without effort. But the *value* of the changes the SI is making will not be measured by *cost*, but by what has been *gained* by the accomplishment. The SI must continue to produce situationists; but now it can't produce them by producing other things (cf. Riesel " . . . make *more* and other things").¹⁶ Comrades, if we want to once again astonish *this* world, we must act quickly.

The problems posed by this debate are problems of choice and knowing how to choose. In general, one will know that the debate has ended when we have very precisely and *practically* defined all that no longer interests us, all that can engage us, and, finally, our time-frames. From this point of view, we are already at a good point. From here, the discussion can take two different directions: towards a long-term, deep and precise delineation of the fundamental questions of strategy and the development of theoretical questions already posed or to be posed; or towards the rapid precision of the times and modes of realization that we have discussed and decided upon (I am speaking of modes because, it goes without saying, these realizations will be international in the double sense that comrades from all sections of our organization will participate in their theoretical construction and in putting them into practice in several different countries: choosing work crews, fixing meetings, aiding the actions of numerically weaker sections, etc).

3. Some modest propositions "on the economy," in comparison with the debate on the workers' condition.

Without wanting to fall into Marx's tendency or its inverse, I propose that we pay a great deal of theoretical attention to economic problems, even if this subject isn't one of the most impassioned. However, all the modifications and veritable changes that have been produced in this domain over the course of the last half-century render it more interesting.

Today more than ever, it can't be a question of *foreseeing* any economic "crisis" or deriving from this vision the mythological "necessity" of social crisis. On the contrary, because there is *already* a grave social crisis, *it is the smooth functioning of the economic sector that is directly implicated*. One saw this in [France in] May [1968] and afterwards. One also sees it in Italy (and in the USA and the USSR, too).

No revolutionary dialectician since Marx – except maybe the SI – has said anything really new on the subject of the development of capital. Of course, most commentators on capital have been specialists in and *for* survival. It is now necessary for us to completely "demystify" this "monstrous" argument. In Italy, as elsewhere, one has long known that "the intelligence of capital" (power, too) resides in the stupidity of those who believe in it, generally Leftist

¹⁵ The first and only issue of *Situationist International*, the journal of the American section, was published in New York in June 1969.

¹⁶ René Riesel, "Notes for the meeting of 12 May 1970": "The only way the SI can continue being a revolutionary organization is to do *more* and *other* things than it has done before."

ideologues who attribute intelligence to capital so that they can explain away the impotence of their “struggle” against it. This is so true that one is sometimes astonished by the infrequent moments of relative lucidity (bombs, etc). And if capital is sometimes or more and more forced to be lucid, this demonstrates the precariousness of its general state and the habitual nature of its stupidity. Capital is suspicious of the workers, because they are the weakness of this system of production; but capital must remain totally aware of them; the Communist Party and the unions must make even the simplest things difficult, even impossible. And all that comes easily.

One can say that, after 50 years of defeats and lies, the workers will never enter into struggles without sufficient “guarantees” of their seriousness and success (cf. for example, French workers didn’t stir themselves in [May] 68 until there’d been a week of real struggle in the streets of Paris). But, in becoming conscious of the weaknesses of their adversary, the workers understand that they are the only ones who can guarantee the seriousness of the struggle. This understanding is a big victory for them.

As for us, we have already entered “into the melee” by, at the suggestion of Comrade Donatien,¹⁷ producing a good *Wildcat Striker’s Notebook*. It seems urgent to me, and perhaps others as well, that the cinema should be employed (even though it takes longer and is more difficult to realize than a tract). Our *Wildcat Striker’s Handbook* will demonstrate to the workers, as well as those who expect so much from the workers and whom we accuse of “workerism,” *that we don’t expect the workers to stir themselves*, not when they are *already on the march* from one end of Europe to the other. And it also will demonstrate that, in the factories and other places of programmed deadness, creativity is an excellent weapon against the management of its absence. In fact, if power can more or less tolerate the existence of new techniques of disorder in culture and the universities, power must nevertheless keep control over the factories and offices (*it can always control the newly rich*), so that everyone sees the concrete character of its force as well as the precariousness of the condition of the commodity. By staging fast and wild actions, which cost little to execute and publicize, small groups of revolutionary workers can inspire other initiatives, can “oblige” other proletarians to comprehend, recognize and reproduce such initiatives.

It will be necessary for us to communicate to the workers our taste for *games*, among other things, and for us to play more. Today, when we say “play,” we mean *everything put in play* in the struggle for our liberation. It is necessary that the workers taste the pleasure of playing this kind of game: constructing situations that merit the difficulty of being lived – this is what is worth deciding today.

Completely necessary in the short-term: a certain interest in the economy, a discussion of the workers’ condition as proposed by Raoul, and direct action among and with the workers.

¹⁷ René Donatien Viénet, “Notes for the meeting of 5 May 1970”: “The first step – which would, without doubt, allow the SI to involve more than just observers when the next time comes – appears to be the publication of a wildcat striker’s notebook, which would lay out a quick history of the wildcat strike movement, confirming its more or less formulated analyses of the role of the unions, etc.”

Contribution to the “orientation debate”¹⁸

Comrades:

I’d like to make clear my position on the tendency constituted on 11 November [1970] by Comrades Viénet, Riesel and Debord, and, at the same time, to make clear the reasons for my accord with all of the positions taken in their declaration.¹⁹

The principal merit of this tendency is that it is the first concrete act *taken* in and for the SI since *talk* of the crisis first began: all of the responses to the tendency have largely confirmed this.

¹⁸ Letter hand-written in French, dated Paris, 8 December 1970. Unpublished by the Situationist International. Included in *Internationale Situationniste. Debat d’orientation de l’ex-Internationale Situationniste* (Paris: Centre de Recherche sur la Question Sociale [CRQS], 1974).

¹⁹ “Declaration”: “The crisis that has continually deepened in the SI in the course of the last year, and whose roots go back much further, has ended up revealing all its aspects; and has led to a more and more glaring increase in theoretical and practical inactivity. But the most striking manifestation of this crisis (ultimately revealing what was precisely its original hidden center) has been several comrades’ indifference in the face of its concrete development, month after month. We are quite aware that no one has in any way expressed this indifference. And that is precisely the heart of the problem, for what we have really been experiencing, behind abstract proclamations of the contrary, is a refusal to take any responsibility whatsoever in participating in either the decisions or the implementation of our actual activity, even at a time when it has been so indisputably threatened.

“Considering that the SI has carried out an action that has been at least substantially correct and that has had a great importance for the revolutionary movement of the period ending in 1968 (though with an element of failure that we must account for); and that it has the potential to continue to make significant contributions by lucidly comprehending the conditions of the new period, including its own conditions of existence; and that the deplorable position in which the SI has found itself for so many months must not be allowed to continue — we have constituted a tendency.

“Our tendency aims to break completely with the ideology of the SI and with its corollary: the miserable vainglory that conceals and maintains inactivity and inability. We want an exact definition of the SI organization’s collective activity and of the democracy that is actually possible in it. And we want the actual application of this democracy.”

In the manner of Italian truants, this tendency has said to all of the members of the SI: “Empty your pockets so we can see what you have and what you lack!” It’s now clear that *there hasn’t been a hold-up like this for a long time!*

This tendency is also concrete in the precise sense that, by *speaking* of the “crisis,” it has made itself the party of veritable crisis and not its relatively painless supersession. In fact, no one can deny that, to this point, the debate on strategy and the crisis has been a debate between deaf people and has generally reconstituted the very *comfort* that it was intended to break up.

Every time that someone touches upon the *punctum dolens*,²⁰ there is silence. This silence attained its paroxysm after Guy’s text of July.²¹ At the same time, the tendency has made the only response. Now, one can say retrospectively that, as far as the discussion has gone, it seems to have wanted unconsciously to exorcise precisely that which it pretended to speak about. Guy’s July text has been greeted by three-and-a-half months’ of silence, which reveals that everyone is responsible for what has been lacking.

This tendency is most concrete in its opposition to the informal but generally dominant tendency in the SI that, with a certain smugness, is content to see in such-and-such an event the confirmation of such-and-such a part of our theory. This was, without doubt, the most discouraging aspect of those who were comfortable. Moreover, this comfort existed in inverse proportion to its *real enrichment*.

The riches, the money, the SI has recently spent doesn’t make the group less *poor*. What it has lacked has been the *desire* to realize what each member surely thought every day: not a choice between drama and the passivity of routine, but the routine of real drama!

It’s a banality that we must state: either this is a revolutionary organization, fittingly organized for the realization of our projects, or a circle of intellectuals who are united around their journal. The strange comfort that exists in an organization *of struggle* (such as the SI) exists in proportion to the weakness of that struggle.

Détourning Raoul, I wrote in my text on the debate that it is truly shameful that today’s the most modern and coherent international revolutionary organization is used so little and so sluggishly by its members.

Moreover, Raoul himself got it right when he said that it was distressing to try to tell each member how should he should comport himself: “One comports oneself spontaneously, namely, striving to be at the center of the organization.”²² But he said this from *the organization’s extreme periphery*.

Raoul now seems to say that, henceforth, the SI no longer exists; and he already calls for the historians to come up with explications.²³ But he who has declared that he wants to

²⁰ Latin in original: “sore point.”

²¹ “Remarks on the SI Today,” 27 July 1970.

²² Raoul Vaneigem, *op. cit.*

²³ On 14 November 1970, in response to this “Declaration,” Raoul Vaneigem resigned from the SI. See his “Letter of Resignation,” published in *La Véritable scission dans l’internationale* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1972): “The tendency that constituted itself on 11 November 1970 in the French section has the merit of being the last abstraction that can formulate itself in, for and in the name of the SI. If it is true that the group has never been but the sum of its capabilities and weaknesses, very unequally distributed, of its members, there is, in the moment that concerns us, no longer an apparent community, nor even a tendency that might make us forget that each one of us has to answer for himself alone. How could what was impassioning in the consciousness of

make history doesn't give a fuck what historians will say about him *post-festum*, because he knows perfectly well what he has done, what he has succeeded at, and what he has failed to do.

It is germane to speak of "the slight degree of penetration of situationist theory into the worker milieu and the slight degree of penetration of workers into the situationist milieu."²⁴ But it is equally necessary to remember what the SI, or each of its members, has accomplished. And it is necessary to say that, since one speaks more concretely [illegible].

What made the SI admirable in its first 10 years of existence was the fact that, in a bad epoch, it was constantly *good* in its struggle. Should one conclude that, after 68, the SI found itself in a *constitutional* crisis of the kind experienced by the Communist League after the revolutions of 1848-49? No. First, because times are better today and because the SI is objectively better than the League. It isn't our style that needs changing.

But one can't say that the SI was unacquainted with the momentary return of a large movement, which it foresaw and prepared for so well. The little we did in 69-70 was correct. Since it isn't, in my opinion, the style of organization chosen by the situationists that has proven false, it is necessary for us to conclude that the fault certainly exists, but it exists in all that has been keeping the movement from progressing. Up until now, the absence has concealed the fault. The merit of the tendency is that it has finally revealed it.

One can say in a slightly general and crude fashion that the potency of creativity among us at all moments isn't inferior to the creativity that had been necessary to *concretely imagine* the existence of the situationist organization, that is to say, as it existed in 1957.

The futility of the "critiques" and chicanery of the Americans²⁵ serve once more to change nothing: they substitute a veritable lack of real critiques for critiques that are really *false*; they substitute a lack of real activity for the uniquely artificial activity of making false critiques. As for the rest of what they say, they have already joyously embraced (cf. their letter of 18 November)²⁶ the perspective of their small faction.

It is in this climate that so much foolishness has limped from Sperlonga [Italy] to New York. As Marx said, "We know well the role of stupidity in history." But we are here to prevent it from playing a role among us.

a common project change into a malaise of being together? This is what the historians will establish."

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jon Horelick and Tony Verlaan, members of the American section of the SI, who constituted a tendency of their own (the Tendency for the Truth of our Practice). See their letter to Guy Debord dated 21 September 1970: "We conclude with the preliminaries of a tendency [within the SI], of which the most discussable point would be the following: the SI must be capable – in the light of the collective responsibility for several of the individual failures that ended in an exclusion, and for several failures not yet judged – of reconsidering participation in a dialogue concerning a regroupment with those who have most directly denounced their respective failures. As said above, the immediate preliminary to such participation is self-critique."

²⁶ Addressed to Guy Debord, René Viénet and René Riesel.