

G rard Berr by:

“Vaneigem is more interested in the human structure of society, while Debord was interested in its theoretical structure.”

An interview with the publisher by Fr d rique Roussel.¹

In its form, it is an exceptional work, a collection of dense and sometimes contradictory interviews between a passionate connoisseur of situationism,² the publisher G rard Berr by, and one of its greatest figures, Raoul Vaneigem, minutely enriched with all the photos, texts and tracts of the epoch. Despite all expectations, the most captivating part is the first one, the recitation of the childhood of the son of a Belgian worker. The education of the young Vaneigem, who fell for Lautr amont, as did Debord, whom he met in 1961, is very absorbing. The most vertiginous part comes towards the end, after the unfolding of the everyday life of a ferociously hard-partying circle that was infused with thought like they guzzled alcohol and in which each actor had his role. In the last part, there is face-to-face between two men who agree to look at the misguided ways, the mummification and the cadaver without making any concessions and with a contemporary view of an incisive significance. Opening the field. Perhaps Raoul Vaneigem has had the last word by deciding upon the title: *Nothing Has Ended, Everything Begins*³ . . . or not. Interview with G rard Berr by.

¹ Published on 1 October 2014 by *Lib ration*:

http://www.liberation.fr/livres/2014/10/01/vaneigem-s-interesse-plus-a-l-humain-debord-plus-theorique-a-la-structure-de-la-societe_1112635. Translated from the French by NOT BORED! 6 October 2014. All footnotes by the translator.

² This is a mistake (there is no situationism), which is always made intentionally by people who wish to indicate that they refuse to play by the situationists’ rules and are thus “autonomous” thinkers and social critics in their own right.

³ *Rien n’est fini, tout commence*, Paris: Editions Allia, 2014, 400 pages. Excerpts have been published by Allia and translated by NOT BORED!:

<http://www.notbored.org/rien.pdf>.

How did you convince Raoul Vaneigem to do these interviews?

He's never given interviews except sometimes by mail. Before this mess, we exchanged two letters. A tacit and moral agreement was made. We would go back and forth and I would provide the historical materials, the structure of an interview, and a chronology. He enjoyed the game, but it took time. At one moment, I even wondered if going to the Belgian countryside for three days made sense . . . But during the silences of the first six months in which I went fishing, I proved myself. I'd been all around the question and he saw that I was unaffected and sincere. Complicity was established. In November it will be three years since we had our first exchange. We both took risks, without sparing ourselves the examination of the limits of the [situationist] movement.

Why this form?

I am not a university professor and I will never seize upon an aspect of the situationist movement in order to make a doctoral dissertation of it. This book functions as an historical novel in which one speaks of everyday adventures, celebrations, love stories, betrayals, politics – everything. It evokes working-class poverty and dignity in 1940s Belgium; it retraces the genesis of a mind in full revolt. In it one sees how a young man tried to publish his manuscript⁴ by contacting Henri Lefebvre, who in turn knew Guy Debord; how he met Debord and how they prepared the books that would mark the epoch. What interests me is how one becomes Raoul Vaneigem. In the same way, if one wants to understand situationism,⁵ it is fundamental to first take stock of the entire landscape, the political and literary context, etc. A Benedictine labor.

Isn't Debord a little under-emphasized [in your book]?

I tried to make a portrait supported by a certain number of protagonists. The book simply works as a kind of upgrade [*une mise à niveau*] and brings through the front door the actors who gravitated around Debord and are now in the process of being

⁴ On Lautréamont (1956). Translated into English:
<http://www.notbored.org/ducasse.html>.

⁵ D'oh!

forgotten [*en train d'étouffer*].⁶ Thus I am preparing a new edition of *On the Poverty of Student Life* with an unpublished preface by Mustapha Khayati.⁷

Debord and Vaneigem, though very different, seem to complement each other.

Their differences are illustrated by their successively published books, *La Société du Spectacle* and *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*. The latter was a cult favorite for any youth who asked questions, who demonstrated in the street. Vaneigem is more interested in the human structure of society, while Debord was interested in its theoretical structure.

Your dialogue [with him] touches upon our epoch.

It is completely open to our future. I didn't want a tomb or a mausoleum. I did not want an ode to the movement. I didn't want to jump over the communists to find the lowbrows, but to place them together.

What are the limits of the Situationist International?

The situationists produced very original thought in almost total anonymity. The height was reached with May 1968 and the success of all of their theses.⁸ The decline had already begun. Afterwards, they no longer produced great things. Some ended up marginalized, more or less in material need, because they were faithful to their ideas.

What does the word radicalness cover?

It was a key term at the end of the 1960s. There was theory and praxis, that is, the agreement between what I think and what I live. The first exclusions in the

⁶ Certainly a reference to the institutionalization of Debord's archives by the Bibliothèque nationale France (BNF) between 2009 and 2013.

⁷ This is an intervention against *étouffement* because, in 1976, Editions Champ Libre published a reprint of *On the Poverty of Student Life* in a form that displeased and tended to minimize the visibility of its primary author, Mustapha Khayati. Cf. his letter to Champ Libre dated 12 October 1976: <http://www.notbored.org/khayati-12October1976.html>. Cf. also <http://www.notbored.org/champ-libre.html>.

⁸ *All* of their theses? Hardly, but certainly the theses developed between 1962 and 1965, when Vaneigem's involvement in the SI was strong and active.

situationist milieus were a product of the lack of adequation between the two. The search for the total man was fascinating for them. And dangerous.

*Why were you fascinated at 17 years of age?*⁹

Back then, we lived in a kind of suffocation. Quite suddenly, everything seemed possible, the realization of poetry, love, wellbeing . . .

The end of work, as well?

That's what's changed. "Never work" has become the minimum program of every progressive government because there is no more work to be had.¹⁰ These last 20 years have seen a phenomenal acceleration. Google is only 16 years old but can stand up to any government. This isn't an evolution that is inherent to any civilization, but the destruction of the recent past in all its forms, a rupture between generations.

This acceleration has created an enormous fracture. I can also see the triumph of barbarism. For me, there is no other outcome than an individual solution, which will go against all that these movements have developed. In these times, one only thinks of the collective.

⁹ Circa 1967. Berréby was born in Tunisia in 1950.

¹⁰ This would seem to confuse recent experiments with reductions in the work-week with the complete abolition of wage labor.