

“Exile and Engagement: Short Study of Four Journeys Within the Situationist International”

By Maurice Fréchuret¹

Only a few years separate the insurrection in Budapest from the so-called war for national liberation in Algeria. The several weeks during which the Hungarian movement attacked the basis of the Stalinist state by delegating power to the spontaneously organized workers councils seemed to be of much shorter duration in comparison to the long years in which Algeria, thrown into the war against colonization, was finally going to free itself from the presence of the French and soon thereafter fell under the yoke of a single autocratic political party. At the same time, in 1956, when the Russian tanks crushed the popular revolt and, along with it, the hopes for a direct democracy, Tunisia liberated itself from the French protectorate that had been in place for more than 70 years and founded its first constituent assembly. What has been consistently evoked by the euphemistic terms “events” or “crises” was, as expected, at the origin of many important migratory movements. Among the hundred of thousands of people who fled Hungary and the very numerous Algerians and Tunisians who also chose to leave their respective countries, four men retain our attention because, far from the image of victim so tenaciously attached to the status of refugee, they embodied combative exile. Their refusal to disengage and yield to the constant pressures of their own countries as well as those of their newly adopted ones make the Algerians Mohamed Dahou and Abdelhafid Khatib, the Tunisian Mustapha Khayati and the Hungarian Attila Kotányi singular examples that allow us to highlight the importance of the actions they took and the pertinence of their theoretical contributions. Shortly after their arrivals in France (Austria in the case of Kotányi), all four men were able to find the milieus in which they could develop their ideas and construct their projects. The Lettrist International and its beautiful, decisive publication, *Potlach*, and the Situationist International (SI)² and its

¹ Maurice Fréchuret, « Exil et engagement : petite étude de quatre parcours au sein de l'Internationale situationniste », *Hommes & migrations* 2022-2023, No. 1338, pp, 49-55. <https://journals.openedition.org/hommesmigrations/14215>. Translated from the French by NOT BORED! 13 January 2024. Footnotes by the author except where noted. All comments [in brackets] added by the translator.

² The Lettrist International was a very committed artistic movement, started at the very beginning of the 1950s from a split from “historic” Lettrism, which itself appeared soon after the end of the war. While the Lettrist movement, principally centered around Isidore Isou, worked

eponymous journal in whose analyses a non-negligible part of the politicized youth of the 1960s recognized itself, were the two movements that welcomed them and allowed them to express themselves.

Mohamed Dahou and the Algerian section of the Lettrist International

From the start of the 1950s, the fate of the colony in Algeria and, more generally, the propensities of French imperialism preoccupied the members of the Lettrist International. The contributions of Dahou were an important part of the movement. Arriving in France after the Second World War, this Imam's son, whose education was seriously limited, found employment at an automobile factory. Thanks to his assignment to a plant run by Renault, he frequented the nearby cafés, where he found artists, writers and revolutionary theorists and developed his own critical abilities. In April 1953, along with Cheik Ben Dhine and Ait Diafer, he so-signed the *Manifeste du groupe algérien de l'Internationale lettriste*.³ A severe indictment of society, which was described as violently police-like, and of “the eminently regressive character of all salaried work,”⁴ this short and incisive text preceded other writings in which Dahou condemned colonialism and bureaucracy. And so, in *Notes pour un appel à l'Orient*, which he signed the next year, the critique was more precise: “We need to go beyond any idea of nationalism. North Africa must

towards a new conception of poetry by emphasizing the sonority of words instead of their meaning, the LI greatly enlarged its research and experimentation by orienting reflection around many other factors, social as well as political. Its journal, *Potlach*, signaled this decisive turn through its very diverse articles. The Lettrist International was one of movements that founded the Situationist International, launched in July 1957, and that, for almost 25 years, had, through its actions and writings, contributed to the decisive renewal of critical thinking. [Translator: Isou himself was an post-WWII émigré from Romania. The LI was founded in 1952. The SI only lasted 15 years, not 25.]

³ Christophe Bourseiller, a biographer of Guy Debord, lists the regulars at the café Moineau in his book. Mohammed Dahou has his place there. See Christophe Bourseiller, *Vie et mort de Guy Debord* (Paris: Plon, 1999), p. 13. Le Tonneau d'or, Le Mabillon, Le Saint-Claude and other bars would, over the course of time, serve as headquarters for the group. Finally, Jean-Michel Mension, throughout his interview with Gérard Berréby and Francesco Milo, evokes the group's way of living and mention the role played by Mohammed Dahou, who “was part of the Lettrist International” and who, with his cousin, “played the guitar when spirits started to flag.” Jean-Michel Mension, *La Tribu*, Paris, Allia, 1998, p. 29.

⁴ Mohamed Dahou, Cheik Ben Dhine, Ait Diafer, “Manifeste du groupe algérien de l'Internationale Lettriste,” in *Internationale Lettriste* #3, single front sheet, Paris, August 1953. [Translator: this text has been translated by Bill Brown, “Manifesto,” in *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018), p. 163: “Modern society is a society of cops” and “We have become aware of the extremely regressive character of all salaried work.”]

rid itself, not only of foreign occupation, but of its feudal masters.”⁵ If the critique of nationalism and its abuses, like the critique of military bureaucracy, are still strongly emphasized here, other subjects are analyzed in *Potlach*, whose contents, often of great acuity, are in stark contrast with the simplicity and modesty of the presentation. Simple roneo-typed sheets constituted the first few issues, which were sent free of charge to dozens of people. The name of Dahou regularly appeared next to those of Guy Debord, Gil. J. Wolman, André-Frank Conord and Michèle Bernstein . . . for example, hailing the struggles of Bolivian students and the battles of the Guatemalan revolutionary movement, or denouncing the imperialist military attacks in the subjugated countries of Central America.⁶ The critical contributions of Mohamed Dahou to *Potlach* also concerned other realities of the world, such as art, architecture and poetry.⁷

To the question posed by the journal *La Carte d'après nature* – “What meaning do you give to word poetry?” – there was a collective response in which

⁵ Mohamed Dahou, « Notes pour un appel à l’Orient », in *Potlach, Bulletin d’information du groupe français de l’Internationale lettriste*, n° 6, 27 July 1954, p. 27. [Translator: translated by Reuben Keehan and WNLA, “Notes for an Appeal to the East”: <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/potlatch6.html>.]

⁶ See the article « Leur faire avaler leur chewing-gum », in *Potlach, Bulletin d’information du groupe français de l’Internationale lettriste*, n° 1, 22 June 1954, not paginated. Reprinted in *Potlach, 1954-57* (Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1985), pp. 13-14. See also « Le Guatemala perdu », in *Potlach, Bulletin d’information du groupe français de l’Internationale lettriste*, n° 3. *Ibid*, p. 21-22. [Translator: translated by Gerardo Denis and Reuben Keehan, “Make Them Swallow Their Chewing-Gum”: <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/potlatch1.html> and by WNLA and Gerardo Denis, “Guatemala is Lost”: <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/potlatch3.html>.]

⁷ See the article that he co-signed with Guy Debord, « Les Derniers jours de Pompéi », in *Potlach, Bulletin d’information du groupe français de l’Internationale lettriste*, n° 21, 30 June 1955, *Ibid*, pp. 148-150. Additionally, Mohamed Dahou was the author of a very concise play whose title neatly summarizes its meaning: *L’acarien qui n’attaque que la laine des orphelins* [The dust mite that only attacks the wool of orphans]. His name also appeared in the announcement for an exhibition at the Galerie du passage Paris that opened on 11 June 1954 and that was titled *Avant la guerre, 66 métagraphies influentielles* [Before the war, 66 influential metagraphs]. [Translator: *métagraphies* was the name that the Lettrists gave to the collages they created out of words, images and symbols. According to Mehdi El Hajoui, the administrator of a “situationniste blog,” the text in question was an “Announcement leaflet (no catalogue was issued) for the first lettrist exhibition, held at the Galerie du Passage in Paris on June 1954. Gil Wolman was the organizer, and this would be the first time his collages would be shown. Other stated contributors include Andre-Frank Conord, Mohamed Dahou, Guy-Ernest Debord, Jacques Fillon, Gilles Ivain (i.e., Ivan Chtcheglov, who contributed a map of Paris with islands, archipelagoes, and peninsulas), and Patrick Straram.” <https://situationnisteblog.wordpress.com/2021/10/06/avant-la-guerre-66-metagraphies-influentielles-1954/>.]

Dahou's name figured.⁸ "Poetry has exhausted the last of its formal prestige. Beyond aesthetics, it exists in the potential power men have over their adventures. Poetry can be read on faces. Thus it is urgent to create new faces. Poetry is in the form of towns. We will construct them through upheaval. The new beauty will be that of the SITUATION, that is to say, *provisional* and actually lived."⁹

Perhaps it was because of Dahou's involvement in all these episodes that Debord dedicated a key text to him. Titled « Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationniste »¹⁰ and published in the last issue of *Potlach*, it began a new adventure, that of the Situationist International, in which Mohamed Dahou would participate for two years, notably by being a member of the editorial board for the first two issues of the SI's eponymous journal. In 1957,¹¹ his return to Algeria to help support his family after the death of his father put a definite end to his active participation in the avant-garde movement.

Dahou's friend Abdelhafid Khatib was also an Algerian immigrant. His participation in *Potlach* came later and was briefer than his friend's: Khatib only published one article in 1956, a year before the dissolution of the group and the disappearance of their journal.¹² His principal contribution remains his « Essai de description psychogéographique des Halles », a meticulous study of the "material décor" of the world in which we live, the stifling narrowness of which strongly encourages the reorganization and profound modification of urban space.¹³ In this

⁸ *Translator*: the signatories to this answer were Mohamed Dahou, Henry de Béarn, Guy-Ernest Debord, Gilles Ivain, Gaëtan M. Langlais, and Gil J Wolman.

⁹ Quoted by Christophe Bourseiller, *op. cit.*, p. 80. [*Translator*: see Mehdi El Hajoui's "situationniste blog" for a reproduction of this text: <https://situationnisteblog.wordpress.com/2018/03/25/4467/>.]

¹⁰ Guy Debord, « Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationniste », in *Potlach, Bulletin d'information du groupe français de l'Internationale lettriste*, n° 29, 5 November 1957. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-240. [*Translator*: translated by John Shepley, "One More Try if You Wish to be Situationists": <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/onemore.html>.]

¹¹ *Translator*: since the second issue of *Internationale situationniste* does indeed list Dahou as a member of the editorial board and was published in December 1958, it is likely that 1957 was not in fact the date of Dahou's return to Algeria. Perhaps the date should be 1959.

¹² Just as virulent as the texts by his friend, Khatib's contribution « L'Expression de la révolution algérienne et l'imposteur Kateb Yacine, » which was published in issue #27 of *Potlach* (26 November 1956), is a violent indictment of that Algerian writer. The massacres at Sétif in 1962, experienced first-hand, no doubt reinforced his [Yacine's] nationalist sentiments. Comparing Algeria to a beloved woman, the author presents her as a national goddess "still a virgin after each violation." See the article by Jean Déjeux, « Les Structures de l'imaginaire dans l'œuvre de Kateb Yacine », in *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, n° 13-14, 1973. *Mélanges Le Tourneau*. I. pp. 267-292.

¹³ Abdelhafid Khatib, « Essai de description psychogéographique des Halles », in *Internationale situationniste* n° 2, December 1958, pp. 13-17. [*Translator*: translated by Paul Hammond,

major article, published in *Internationale situationniste*, Khatib defines the basic principles of psychogeography and the experimental drift [*dérive*]. “The means specific to psychogeography are numerous and varied. The first, and most solid, is the experimental *dérive*. The *dérive* is a form of experimental behavior in an urban society. At the same time that it is a form of action, it is also a means of [acquiring] knowledge specific to the notions of psychogeography and the theory of unitary urbanism.” Although it is was incomplete – due to the fact that Khatib, like all the Maghribi, was subjected to curfews imposed by the French government all through this period – this study was a decisive turning point in the development of Situationist theory. Going beyond the simple viewing of aerial views, maps and plans, and the study of statistics and other sociological data, the psychogeographical approach to an urban zone (in this case, the very particular Parisian neighborhood of les Halles at night) entails a precise and sensitive description of a neighborhood whose real limits exceeded the official boundaries without crossing them too frequently. The zones of ambiance, the connections that they establish between themselves, the brutal breaks that sometime separate them, and the tangential lines that try to re-establish a lost unity are perceived, described and analyzed. Also observed are the zones of advanced social deterioration, the spaces for the acculturation or intermingling of populations “that render the environment suitable for cultural exchange.” This in-depth exploration of an urban zone isn’t simply descriptive. It is accompanied by a truthful reflection about the real conditions of the places traversed and the possibilities of transforming them. The notions of a network of “labyrinths in perpetual evolution” and of “encouraging the large-scale development of the tendencies towards constructive play and mobile urbanism” constitute important propositions. Guy Debord’s *Théorie de la dérive* (a text that was published in the same issue as the one by Abdelhafid Khatib), Gilles Ivain’s *Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau* and Constant’s *Une autre ville pour une autre vie*¹⁴ all position the form of the labyrinth as the best one when it comes to responding to the desire for adventure, to the playing of games and, more globally, to the profound desire to reinvent life.

Mustapha Khayati’s radical critique of the student milieu

“Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles”: <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/leshalles.html>.]

¹⁴ *Translator*: Guy Debord’s “Theory of the *Dérive*” was published in *Internationale situationniste* #2 (December 1958); Ivain’s “Formulary for a New Urbanism” appears in *Internationale situationniste* #1 (June 1958); and Constant’s “Another City for Another Life” is in *Internationale situationniste* #3 (December 1959). They have all been translated into English.

Almost 10 years after the period during which Lettrism was strengthened by the input of the CoBrA movement and the Bauhaus imaginiste in order to, by radicalizing itself, become the Situationist International, other figures appeared, coming from different backgrounds but motivated by the same rebellious spirit and the same desire to do battle with the world. Among them, there was another Maghrebin – Tunisian, to be precise – whose political commitment led to actions that were as spectacular as they were scandalous and that had a very strong impact. Mustapha Khayati arrived in France at the beginning of the 1960s. He was a student in the sociology department at Strasbourg and took courses by Henri Lefebvre, who'd been recently appointed. Although already quite political, Khayati – along with several friends from the libertarian movement who were close to the SI – took control of the offices of the student union¹⁵ and used the money it had collected to publish a short pamphlet whose distribution, weak at first, grew to such an extent that it would become a reference work, widely read and commented upon. Its title and the principal positions developed in it were provided by Guy Debord, but the drafting of the text was, in large part, the work of Mustapha Khayati. Thus it was under the aegis of the Union générale des étudiants de France that *De la misère en milieu étudiant considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectuel et de quelques moyens pour y remédier* was published. In this Strasbourgian episode, the practice of détournement, which was so dear to the Situationists, attained a very concrete reality that, depending on who you were, either amused or scandalized you. The 30 pages that made up this opusculé constituted a veritable polemical tract. Forcefully denouncing the image, status, role and life of the student, the gaze cast is merciless: “The student is a stoical slave: the more chains authority binds him with, the freer he thinks he is. Like his new family, the university, he sees himself as the most ‘independent’ social being, whereas he is in fact *directly subjected* to the two most powerful systems of social authority: the family and the state. [He is] their well-behaved, grateful and *submissive child*.”¹⁶ But beyond the student, the

¹⁵ Translator: *this is a dreadful factual error*. Khayati was *not* part of the group of pro-situationist students in Strasbourg who got themselves elected to the student union and contacted the Situationists with the intent of giving the money to them. Rejecting this offer, the SI (including Khayati) proposed that the students spend the money on a publication about their situation that might be written by one or several Situationists. Cf. *On the Poverty of Student Life, Considered in its Economic, Political, Psychological, Sexual, and Particularly Intellectual Aspects, And a Modest Proposal for its Remedy: Members of the Situationist International and Students from Strasbourg*, edited by Mehdi El Hajoui and Anna O’Meara (Brooklyn and Philadelphia: Common Notions, May 2022).

¹⁶ *De la misère en milieu étudiant considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectuel et de quelques moyens pour y remédier*. Special supplement to issue n° 16 of « 21-27 Étudiants de France », Union nationale des étudiants de

text takes aim at society in its totality. The concepts of alienation and reification, which are directly tied to the concept of the spectacle, are broached here and echo texts by Guy Debord, [including] « Le Déclin et la chute de l'économie spectaculaire-marchande », ¹⁷ published in issue #10 (1966) of *Internationale situationniste*, [and] *La Société du spectacle*, as well as by Raoul Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, both published the following year. Mustapha Khayati, arguing emphatically, denounces the systems of oppression, affirming that only “the unitary critique of the world is the guarantee of coherence and the truth of the revolutionary organization.” ¹⁸ Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the youth movements in both the Eastern and Western countries, he – following the example of the Japanese *Zengakuren* – calls for the fusion of students and avant-garde workers. ¹⁹ As indicated by the pamphlet's title, the socio-economic reality [of the student] is discussed at some length. It is the object of an in-depth study and its laws are described as “natural” as long as “the lack of awareness of those who participate in them” continues. ²⁰ Politics is also discussed insofar as it concerns both the options of the student in his or her existential quest and the role of the political parties and unions as “regulators of the system.” By contrast, the psychological and sexual aspects are treated more marginally and are limited to a denunciation of the repressive role of psychiatrists and psychologists and to the critique of “the most traditional erotic-loving behaviors, which reproduce the general relations of class society in their inter-sexual relations.” ²¹

Attila Kotányi's unitary urbanism

France. Association fédérative générale des étudiants de Strasbourg, 1966, p. 5. [Translator: translation taken from Ken Knabb, “On the Poverty of Student Life, Considered in Its Economic, Political, Psychological, Sexual, and Especially Intellectual Aspects, With a Modest Proposal for Doing Away With It by members of the Situationist International and students of Strasbourg University,” *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, revised and expanded edition, 2006): <https://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/poverty.htm>.]

¹⁷ Translator: see Ken Knabb, “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy,” *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit. As Knabb notes, an earlier translation (by Donald Nicholson-Smith) was circulated in England and America in December 1965, three months before it was published in French.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. [citation missing]. Khayati's text presents Willem Reich as the object of an emphatic praise and as “an excellent teacher of the youth.” *Ibid.*, p. 3.

“I have lived through three terrible dictatorships, [and] witnessed the emergence of two with my own eyes and ears.”²² That is how the Hungarian Attila Kotányi summarized his life’s journey and the reasons for his exile in the countries of Western Europe after the failure of the Budapest insurrection in the Fall of 1956.²³ After passing through Yugoslavia and staying in Brussels for several years, he came to Paris and got closer to the Situationists, whose texts and actions he knew about. In the beginning of the 1960s, the period of architectural and urban reconstruction was far from over and, to respond to the still-strong demand, the planning established by the Minister of Reconstruction and Urban Planning²⁴ continued. Kotányi, who had studied architecture, was critical of the policies implemented in France, but also elsewhere, and denounced the mediocrity of the alleged achievements and the pretext of urgent needs that was used to excuse that mediocrity. In June 1960, his contribution to *Internationale situationniste* #4, titled « Gangland et philosophie », set the tone and opened up future critical developments of great acuity.²⁵ Analyzing the neo-capitalism that already held sway over what has been unfairly called « les trente Glorieuses » [the Glorious Thirty Years], Kotányi wrote, “Day and night, it only speaks of land use planning. But for it, the most important thing is obviously the conditioning of commodity production.” His vision, which was in accord with the SI’s propositions in this domain, led him to develop something that was not yet a real practice but which was more than a simple concept: unitary urbanism. On the basis of a radical critique of architectural and urban functionalism, such as the one promoted by the Marshall Plan, and against the reductive idea of the house conceived as a “machine for living,”²⁶ Kotányi – with Raoul Vaneigem – co-signed a text titled « *Programme élémentaire du bureau d’urbanisme unitaire.* »²⁷ These two Situationists denounced urban planning as being little more than “conditioning and

²² Attila Kotányi, « Existe-t-il des critiques médiatiques qui ne soient pas suicidaires ? », Conference held at MetaForum III. Under Construction, Budapest Content Conference, October 1996. [Translator: “Is There Any Media Criticism That Isn’t Suicidal?” translator unknown: <http://www.ljudmila.org/nettime/zkp4/14.htm>.]

²³ Concerning the modern era, Kotányi is alluding to the dictatorial powers of Miklós Horthy, the Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944 and a supporter of Hitler, and János Kádár, the head of the government and unconditional supporter of Soviet policies after the crushing of the insurrectionary movement of 1956.

²⁴ Translator: circa October 1944.

²⁵ Translator: see Ken Knabb, “Gangland and Philosophy,” *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit.: <https://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/4.gangland.htm>.

²⁶ Translator: a phrase coined by the French architect Le Corbusier.

²⁷ Translator: published in *Internationale situationniste* #6 (August 1961). See Ken Knabb, “Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism”: <https://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/6.unitaryurb.htm>.

false participation,” automobile traffic as “the organization of universal isolation,” and the happiness promised by the developers, which quite quickly reveals itself to be the shiniest lure with which the society of the spectacle tempts its inhabitants. In another text,²⁸ in which Debord’s name joins those of Kotányi and Vaneigem, the critique is just as virulent and the references to the Paris Commune (in which, the authors emphasize, many foreigners participated) takes on a particular dimension: “To us, the Commune represents the only realization of a revolutionary urbanism.” Deliberately placed under the sign of festival and without leaders, the [reborn] Commune is the declared objective of the insurgents, “become masters of their own history” and their environment.

In addition to such contributions and others on which he worked anonymously, Kotányi was one of the principal editors of the journal and, despite precarious health, one of the most active members in the movement. The last text that he published appeared in issue #7, dated April 1962.²⁹ Its title, « L’Étage suivant », clearly indicates the necessity that the Situationist International needed to find its own surpassing.³⁰ To be precise, the title is in conformity with the decisions taken during the [SI’s] conference in Göteborg and also with Raoul Vaneigem’s declarations, at least where artistic questions are concerned.

The vectors of Situationist change

A member of the Lettrist International and the Situationist International, Mohamed Dahou resigned from the organization in 1959 to rejoin his family in Algeria and provide for their needs after the death of his father, as we have mentioned. He returned to France many years later and opened a bookstore in Nice with his wife Marcelle. He lived there until his death in 2010.

Abdelhafid Khatib, after writing the works already mentioned and making numerous translations, left the movement the following year [1960]. This experienced “drifter,” whose theoretical contributions constituted a substantial input to Situationist thought, pursued his journey alone and disappeared in the

²⁸ *Translator*: “Sur la Commune,” written 18 March 1962, first published in the tract “Aux poubelles de l’histoire” (February 1963) and later reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste* #12 (September 1969).

²⁹ In her interview with Christophe Bourseiller, Magda Huszar, Kotányi’s partner, recalls his exclusion from the SI. “The break was an assassination [...] We weren’t excluded from an organization, but from a community of ideas. And that’s worse.” Christophe Bourseiller, *op. cit.*, p. 199. [*Translator*: cf. Anthony Hayes, “On the Exclusion of Attila Kotányi,” December 1963: <https://www.notbored.org/kotanyi-exclusion.html>.]

³⁰ *Translator*: see Reuben Keehan, “The Next Stage”: <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/nextstage.html>.

twists and turns of existence, leaving behind only the records of his past wanderings.

Mustapha Khayati also resigned from the SI, but a decade later – in September 1969, to be precise. A leading actor in the Strasbourgeois saga and author of the sulphurous pamphlet that accompanied the movement, he participated actively in the movement of May-June 1968. During the last conference of the SI, held in Venice [Italy] in October 1969, he tendered his resignation and declared his intention to go fight alongside the Palestinians. Consistent with both himself and the SI's positions, he stated that he was opposed to any form of double membership and thus legitimated his departure from the movement. He joined an armed Palestinian group, Nayet Hawatmeh's Democratic and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which he left after several months.³¹ Author of a « Préface à un dictionnaire situationniste », which was published in issue #10 of the *IS*, he knew the meaning of words well and forcefully denounced their “captivity,” orchestrated by power, whose stated dream is to impose a [single] universal language.³² Its conclusion takes the form of a definitive warning: “Words will not cease to work until men do.” His encyclopedic project would not be completed but his taste for research and teaching would lead to important publications concerning the history of literature and thought in the Arab world.

The three years during which Attila Kotányi was a member of the Situationist International were rich in theoretical contributions. Just like Khayati, he was interested in vocabulary and worked at the détournement of certain terms by revisiting argot and working-class language. Just like Constant, he saw architecture and urbanism as factors of alienation and atomization; he worked with Raoul Vaneigem in the elaboration of a unitary project that was capable of countering the givens of the dominant power and led the Bureau of Unitary

³¹ *Translator*: it would appear that the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (founded in 1969 by Nayeh Hawatmeh) (note correct spelling of the first name) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (founded in 1967) are in fact two different organizations (the former split off from the later).

³² In a letter sent to him by Guy Debord, the author of *La Société du spectacle* writes about Mustapha Khayati's project: “In any case, no one has to take responsibility for a word. Above all for the simple reason that none of us can ultimately have ‘ownership’ of a word (perhaps the semic-ludic distribution of words to be treated has somewhat masked this obvious fact?).” These recommendations show that the project [of the Situationist dictionary] was well underway. Guy Debord, *Correspondance*, volume 3, January 1965-December 1968 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003), p. 126. [*Translator*: see Ken Knabb, “Captive Words: Preface to a Situationist Dictionary”: <https://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/10.captivewords.htm>.]

Urbanism, which carried the idea forward.³³ Like all the other members of the organization, he belonged to the SI's Central Council³⁴ and, in this capacity, assured the editing and publication of the journal. The texts that he published back then and others that he wrote after his exclusion from the group have been collected in a work titled *Architecture du silence*.³⁵

In his film *In Girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, Guy Debord presents several portraits of his friends, sometimes seated at tables at the cafés that they all loved to frequent. The director evokes this period and, alluding to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, gives this interpretation: "Midway on the journey of real life we found ourselves surrounded by a somber melancholy, reflected by so much sad banter in the cafés of lost youth."³⁶

The deliberately neutral tone adopted by the author does not hide the emotions called up by the passage of time and the emergence of memories that are attached to it: "Where are those merry companions of times gone by?" he asks, taking up the celebrated verse of Villon's *Je plains le temps de ma jeunesse*. He continues: "These are dead; another lived even more quickly, until the iron gates of insanity snapped shut."³⁷ The faces of Gilles Ivain, Ghislain de Marbaix and Asger Jorn are presented along with other sequences, such as the group portrait at the café Moineau, at which are present all those who could say, following Debord's example: "We, more than anyone else, were the people of change in a changing time."³⁸ Mohamed Dahou and Abdelhafid Khatib, Mustapha Khayati and Attila Kotányi were among those people.

³³ In September 1960, the research bureau for unitary urbanism was moved from Amsterdam to Brussels and thenceforth directed by Attila Kotányi. See Jean-François Martos, *Histoire de l'Internationale situationniste* (Paris: Gérard Lebovici, 1989), p. 129.

³⁴ *Translator*: the short-lived Central Council was in fact an elected body within the SI, met frequently and, through delegates, represented other members of the organization who could not attend all the meetings. Cf. Ken Knabb and Reuben Keehan, "The Fourth SI Conference in London," *Internationale situationniste* #5 (December 1960): <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/london.html>.

³⁵ Attila Kotányi, *Architecture du silence* (Paris: Exils, 2022).

³⁶ The first canto of *The Inferno* begins with this phrase: "In the middle of our life's journey, I found myself in an obscure forest, because I had lost the right path." Debord draws inspiration from this line in his film. [*Translator*: see Ken Knabb, "In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni (film soundtrack)": <https://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord.films/ingirum.htm>.]

³⁷ Guy Debord, « In Girum imus nocte et consumimur igni », in *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes, 1952-1978* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1978), p. 272.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 274.