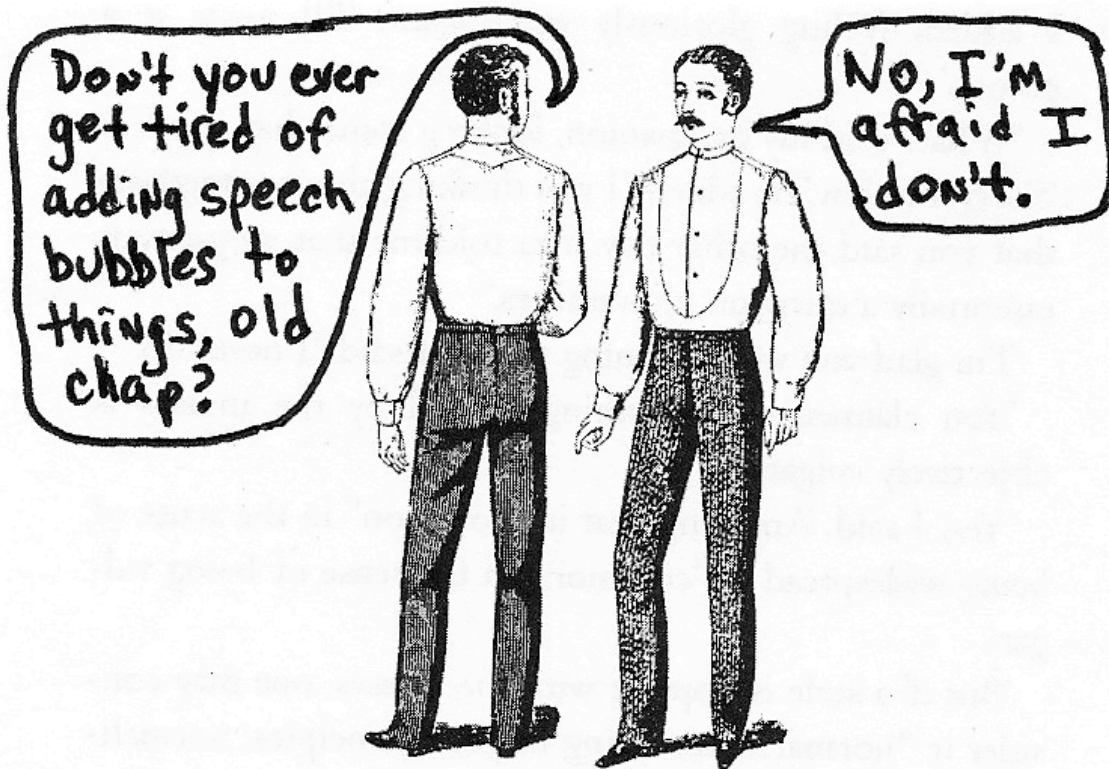


NOT BORED! #42

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Contents

Editorial Notes (p. 3)

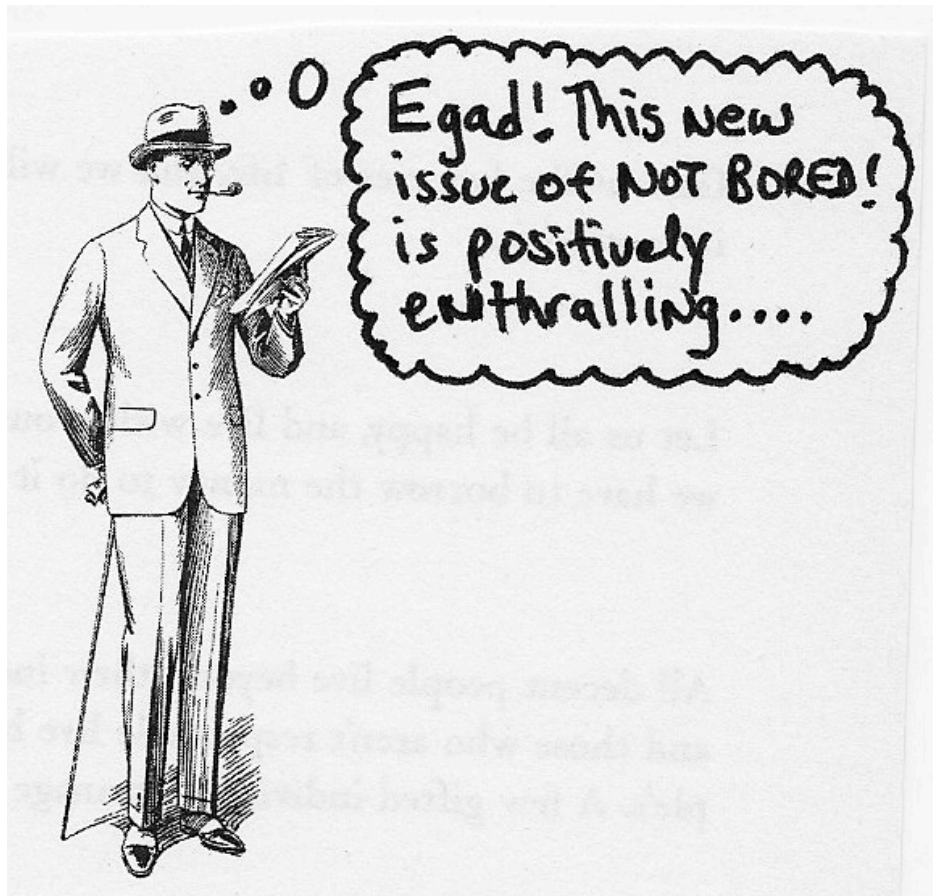
Summary of Activity Since *NOT BORED! #41* (p. 20)

Descriptions of Activity Since *NOT BORED! #41* (p. 21)

Collective Projects (p. 21)

Polemics (p. 23)

Essays (p. 36)



Editorial Notes

Why I Am Still A Situationist After All These Years

Because nothing has changed since I wrote these lines (“The Society of the Virtual Spectacle,” *NOT BORED!* #40, May 2008).

To begin at the roots: capitalism cannot be depended on to “correct” its own defects or fix the damage and destruction it has caused, nor can it be depended upon to collapse, on its own, due to its own internal contradictions and then leave a *tabula rasa* upon which one could build a new and truly human society. Capitalism cannot be fixed by piecemeal reforms, nor can revolution “fix” capitalism if that revolution is limited to the political, economic, technological, moral or indeed *any* particular sector. Only *social revolution*, which is total revolution, can both save humanity from capitalism's evils (war, pollution, poverty, ignorance and intolerance) and instaurate the kind of society in which humanity can truly flourish (peaceful co-existence, physical and mental health, self-fulfillment and pleasure).

Social revolutionaries must have a “working theory” of capitalist society: that is to say, what it really is, how it continues to exist despite its nearly fatal defects, and how it defends itself against both reformist and revolutionary actions. Here we distinguish ourselves from all those who do not believe that a theory of any kind is necessary, who believe that theory only keeps revolutionaries from acting, that “radical” action is the only theory that is needed, etc., and who form “organizations,” and “federations” among these “organizations,” most of which have programmatic statements that declare that their members are against a list of bad things (abstractions such as militarism, religious fundamentalism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, et al) and that they are in favor of a list of good things (abstractions such as self-organization, voluntary association, mutual aid, freedom, justice, et al).

We believe that only theory allows our actions to be strategic rather than tactical, to be effective rather than ineffective, to be precise rather than approximate. “The first business of every theory is to clear up conceptions and ideas which have been jumbled together, and, we may say, entangled and confused; and only when a right understanding is established, as to names and conceptions, can we hope to progress with clearness and facility, and be certain that author and reader will always see things from the same point of view” (Clausewitz, *On War*). But we have no illusions about the completeness of theory. As Clausewitz notes, “nothing more than a limited theory can be obtained, which only suits circumstances such as they are presented in history. But this

incompleteness is unavoidable, because in any case theory must either have deduced from, or have compared with, history what it advances with respect to things. Besides, this incompleteness in every case is more theoretical than real” (*On War*).

There are, of course, many theories of “modern” society: psychoanalytic (institutions are created by repressive sublimation); sociological (power is held by large groups, small elites or complex networks); etc. But none of these theories were conceived or elaborated so as to overthrow “modern” society. Many were in fact intended to justify that society's existence. As a result, they are not perceived as scandalous or unacceptable to it; such perceptions are among the hallmarks of a truly revolutionary theory.

There are at least two major sources of truly revolutionary theory: Marxism and anarchism. Both try to explain who (or what) holds power in society, and why or how they hold it: for the Marxists, the bourgeoisie holds power because it owns and controls the means of production; for the anarchists, the State holds power due to its monopoly over coercive force (the military and the police). Each theory is revolutionary because it envisions an end to this kind of society and its replacement by another, truly humane one: Marxism envisions proletarian revolution, which abolishes all class power; and anarchism envisions a political revolution after which voluntary association will replace coercion.

But both Marxism and anarchism have degenerated a great deal over the course of the last century. Some Marxists now prefer to call themselves “libertarian communists” and have completely abandoned the idea of revolution: “Our primary focus,” say the people who run libcom.org, “is always on how best to act in the here and now to better our circumstances and protect the planet.” Other Marxists (such as those who produce the journal called *Aufheben*) retain the idea and goal of revolution, but – despite their announced intention to move with the times – remain trapped in the worst aspects of “classical” Marxist theory, in particular, a fetishism of the proletariat and “proletarian theory.” There are still handfuls of Leninist, Trotskyist and Maoist sects in existence; not surprisingly, all of them are hierarchically organized, rigid and terribly dull. Though some of these groups are “behind” several large organizations (including the A.N.S.W.E.R. coalition), these “front groups” are not explicitly revolutionary and indeed simply channel revolutionary impulses back into the electoral system (typically, support for the Democratic Party).

There are many small contemporary groups and movements that subscribe to “anarchism” and “anti-authoritarianism,” but few of them are sources (or even readers) of revolutionary theory; mostly they eschew theory in favor of “radical” or “direct” action. For too many of them, “action” is taken against particular aspects of capitalist society: police brutality, the treatment of animals, biotechnology, racism, pollution, environmental degradation, the war on drugs, sexual violence against women, homophobia, neo-liberalism, etc etc. Very rarely is “action” taken against capitalist society or the State as a whole. The very idea of such action seems utopian, millenarian and even impossible. And, of course, some of these “anarchists” aren't anarchists at all, but Leftists or “citizenists” who have simply adopted the label because, in the aftermath of the Seattle 1999 riots,

it became fashionable and won several people TV coverage and book contracts.

There are exceptions: the “insurrectionary” anarchists, the green anarchists, the “primitivists,” those who describe themselves as anti-technology and anti-civilization, etc. (there can be a great deal of overlap between these various currents of thought). Most of these folks certainly speak about revolution, but – because they have come after a wave of extremism exemplified by the Situationist International (SI), but do not want to follow in its “Marxist” footsteps – they feel themselves compelled to be even more extreme than those extremists. And so, while Marx and Engels were opposed to the bourgeoisie and capital's domination of labor, and while the Situationist International was opposed to work and the spectacle's domination of everyday life, the revolutionary anarchists declare themselves to be against virtually everything: “technology,” industrial society, “progress,” rationality, and civilization itself. Some of these hyper-extremists are even against revolution, because – to them – them is the ultimate manifestation of the ideology of progress [...]

We believe that Guy Debord's theory of the spectacle, which is a total theory that attempts to blend or at least reconcile the best aspects of Marxism and anarchism, is the most relevant and useful revolutionary theory available to us today. As Anselm Jappe remarked in 1998, “thirty years [after May 1968], now that Althusserianism, Maoism, workerism, and Freudo-Marxism have all disappeared into historical oblivion, it is clear that the Situationists were the only people at that time to develop a theory, and to a lesser extent a practice, whose interest is not merely historiographical but retains a potential relevance today.” But, unlike Jappe, who was content to reiterate and critique the theory of the spectacle (he did both quite well), we wish to go even further and bring this theory up to date. After “biding its time” for so long, perhaps this theory is finally ready to surpass the spectacle.

Given our personal autonomy with respect to all of the existing groups and movements, we might be asked: “Why not simply start from scratch, with your own theory?” Clausewitz provides a good answer: “Theory is instituted so that each person in succession may not have to go through the same labor of clearing the ground and toiling through his subject, but may find the thing in order, and light admitted on it. It should educate the mind of the future leader (...), or rather guide him in his self-instruction, but not accompany him to the field of battle” (*On War*).

NOT BORED! Anthology 1983-2010

Published by Colossal Books in February 2011, the *NOT BORED! Anthology* includes selections dating back to the journal's first issue, which came out in July 1983, and going all the way up to issue #41, which came out in November 2009. A truly massive book, almost 700 pages long, the *Anthology* also includes a handful of essays that were written and published online (www.notbored.org) in 2010.

At the time issue #41 came out, and even more so when the *Anthology* was published, I had the sense that *NOT BORED!* had come to rest upon a terrain where it seemed appropriate to let the old warhorse die and be properly buried. It has served its purpose. Though the website would continue to be active, especially as a repository for new translations (issue #41 was almost completely translations of other people's writings), the journal itself would quietly cease to exist.

People who have bought copies of the *Anthology* have done so directly through us (approximately 12 copies have been sold this way); through our printer (8 copies); through Amazon or Ingram (15 copies); and through AK Press Distribution (30 copies). No doubt this very small number (a total of 65 copies sold over the course of the last two-and-a-half years) has been the result of its relatively high retail price (\$25), the availability (for free) of all the texts included in the *Anthology* on our website, and the fact that only two reviews of it have ever been published.

The first review was written by "Mahkno," published under the title "The Spectacular World of Bill Brown: A Review of the NOT BORED! Anthology," and appeared on Infoshop News (an anarchist website) on 28 February 2011.

In our contemporary Internet-saturated world of tweets, blogs and on-line journals, where the satisfaction of posting nearly instantaneous comments and replies is just a mouse-click away, and almost anyone can find a web site to suit their particular ideological or cultural niche, it would be easy to forget the crucial role that zines have played for decades in helping to form and inform a radical alternative culture in North America (and perhaps elsewhere, as well). In the early to mid-1960s, for example, there were *Horseshit* and *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*. When punk music arrived in the '70s, there must have been a veritable explosion of zines. Cheap, amateurish layout and crude typography are common characteristics of this format, which seems appropriate for their marginal and ephemeral position in our consumer society. To a certain extent, the medium *is* the message.

How many zines have we seen come and go after only a few issues, or even just one? How many can we name that have been published consistently, for almost thirty years? Bill Brown's *NOT BORED!* has been a labor of love and rage since 1983, when he was a graduate student and part-time local journalist in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Combining his interests in politics, pop music, art, and critical theory, *NOT BORED!* has offered reviews, rants, reports on Brown's own projects, *détourned* graphics (more on that, later), and often-insightful analysis. However, it wasn't until after the first issue came out that Brown discovered, by way of a book review by Greil Marcus, what the true purpose of his zine was to be. The book reviewed by Marcus was Ken Knabb's *The Situationist International Anthology*, and thus *NOT BORED!* became, and has remained, a "Situationist fanzine".

At that time, according to Brown, there wasn't much literature by or about Situationists available in English: just Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, and the *Anthology*. My own Situationist reading has been limited to the first two, a portion of the third, Rene Viénet's *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement: Paris, May, 1968*, and (just recently) Debord's later essay, *Comments on the Society of the*

Spectacle. Brown has become something of an expert on the Situationists, having read, it seems, everything available in English and French written by them, and at least translations of the Italian and German works.

As Brown tells it, the SI (Situationist International) went through three distinct phases in its 15-year existence between 1957 and 1972: first, the *artistic* phase, in which SI members concentrated on applying critical theory to art, and developed two of their signature concepts, *détournement* and the *dérive*; secondly, a *political* phase, as the SI fashioned itself as a properly revolutionary organization; and, finally, post-May 1968, when the Situationists debated and came to terms with their own role in the revolutionary events in Paris in that year. Each of these phases involved splits or “exclusions” in the small group - sometimes amicable, sometimes not. Public denunciations of ex-members were not uncommon.

Détournement is the technique of reappropriating cultural artifacts such as cartoons, advertising, music, film, and even buildings to deliver radical, subversive messages. The graphics in NOT BORED!, some of which are reproduced in the *Anthology*, are one example; another is the Situationist Hong Kong gangster film, *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?*, which I saw in Chicago a few years ago, along with *The Society of the Spectacle*. The *dérive* is an exploration of physical and social space informed by critical theory, for the purpose of identifying underlying connections of class, capitalism, State power, etc. In addition to *détourned* graphics, Bill Brown has also, along with a group of comrades, engaged in a radical graffiti campaign at State University of New York at Buffalo, a report of which is included in this collection. He has worked with two other Situationist-inspired groups, as well: the New York Psychogeographical Association (based on the *dérive*), and the Surveillance Camera Players, who stage dramatic works in front of surveillance cameras (which are, of course, ubiquitous in New York City, as they are in Chicago). Brown also includes in the book a description of how he recorded a “Situationist” symphony in his apartment. Unfortunately, it can never be released for copyright reasons.

Unlike the original issues of NOT BORED! (which I have not seen), the *Anthology* is a thick paperback in glossy black, with the title spelled out in cut-and-paste style on the front, and on the back, surprisingly enough, a quote from Thucydides on the writing of history (the significance of the quotation becomes clearer when one reads Debord’s essay, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*). The book is arranged both thematically and chronologically, in sections called “Local Interventions”, “Internecine Polemics”, “The Situationist International”, “Book Reviews”, “Musicians”, and “Miscellaneous”. Within each section, the selections move from oldest to most recent. I was very interested in “Local Interventions” which described the ways that Brown and his comrades have put Situationist theory into practice, as well as analysis of local issues such as squatting and gentrification. The next section deals, of course, with the theory and history of the SI in great detail. The book reviews take up about half of the *Anthology*, and some of them are quite good. I particularly enjoyed the ones on Cornelius Castoriadis, Henri Lefebvre, and Elizabeth Byrne Ferm. The section on musicians reviews a few of the author’s favorite groups or individuals, except for

the humorous polemic, "Radio Noriega". I think the piece on Kurt Cobain was a bit of a stretch - trying to draw an analogy between him and victims of the Nazi concentration camps. The "Miscellaneous" section was a mixed bag: some of it insightful, some amusing, and a few things I didn't care for at all.

Now that I have mentioned what I like about the *Anthology*, I have to make a few criticisms, some relatively minor, but others more serious. First, the editing could have been a little better: a few missing or extraneous words, spelling mistakes ("Bryne" for "Byrne"), etc. Still, for a book that's nearly six hundred pages long, it's not bad. Secondly, Brown occasionally lets his polemical tendencies get the better of him, and can come across as petulant and defensive. This is particularly evident in the "Internequine Polemics" section. Next, there are a couple of concepts which I believe he should revisit: the role of technology in a free society, and the nature of the "revolutionary organization". Brown says at one point, very emphatically, that capitalist technology cannot be used for liberatory purposes. Now, to be consistent, he would either have to reject technology altogether, or make a clear distinction between what does and does not count as "capitalist" technology, which he never does. Furthermore, he seems to be ambivalent about the notions of technological progress and material abundance. At times, he sounds as if he believes the old Marxist fairy tale that if we just distributed the benefits of industrial society fairly, then nobody would ever have to work again, and we would have peace, liberty, and justice for all. Well, automation and industrial advances have done just the opposite: we work longer and harder (if we can find work), and not just because of the capitalist system. No matter how goods and services and the means of production are organized, that level of production simply cannot be maintained without an enormous expenditure of time and labor, not to mention the adverse health effects and the dwindling of natural resources.

Brown also appears to be a little confused about just what a revolutionary organization is, or what its purpose should be. In part four of "The Society of the Virtual Spectacle", he lays down some conditions for an ideal revolutionary organization:

(1)...*revolutionary organizations must be international in composition and action, and must include members of as many countries as possible.*

(2)...*revolutionary organizations must be small....exclusions are regrettable but absolutely necessary, as are breaks with "outsiders" who are hostile to our existence, program or actions, or who continue to collaborate with third parties with whom we have broken.*

(3)...*Revolutionary organizations must be **real** communities that exist in face-to-face situations: they cannot exist on-line, that is, in or on list-servs, posting boards, or chat rooms. Such communities must strive to produce their own food, clothing, and housing...*

That's quite a lot to ask for from one small affinity group, which is what he seems to be describing, or is it an urban commune? That part about exclusions, breaks, and ostracism sounds very authoritarian, and very much in the spirit of Guy Debord and the SI. If this is to be a genuine small urban commune (then why call it an "organization"?), producing their own food, clothing, *and* housing is going to be quite a feat. Did the Surveillance Camera Players or the New York Psychogeographical Association meet all these criteria?

Finally, my most serious objection is to Brown's on-going obsession with conspiracy theories, which evidently has its roots in Debord's late essay, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. Here, I will be blunt. While *The Society of the Spectacle* is a very important and influential theoretical work, the *Comments* is a steaming pile of horseshit. In the latter piece, Debord produces one interesting idea - the distinction between the "concentrated Spectacle" (represented by Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union), the "diffuse Spectacle" (represented by the United States), and the "integrated Spectacle" (developed by France and Italy since the 1960s) - and then goes on writing pages and pages of paranoid nonsense about the fundamental role of secrecy in modern capitalist/technological societies. Now, of course, secrecy, surveillance, and infiltration of radical groups do play a huge role in State operations, but Debord turns secrecy and conspiracy into metaphysical principles, and seems to have trouble distinguishing fantasy from reality. The most oppressive aspects of capitalism and the State have never been a secret, and even the recent Wikileaks disclosures have told us very little that we didn't already know. Brown's writing is at its weakest when he is discussing topics such as the Illuminati, Masonic lodges, or the 911 Truth Movement.

All these objections aside, however, the NOT BORED! Anthology is still worthwhile reading for anarchists. It contains a lot of very good writing, some of which has heretofore only been published on the NOT BORED! web site (<http://notbored.org/index1.html>). Despite what I said earlier, Brown does have some good critiques of technology. He is sympathetic to anarchist activity in squatting and the Black Bloc, hates advertising and consumer society in general, and has a healthy contempt for work. Although I might not classify him as an anarchist, he is resolutely anti-authoritarian, and certainly no friend of the Left. At its best, his work uses critical theory, humor (sometimes), and passion to encourage what he and I both long for: a revolution of everyday life.

Not entirely pleased by this review, I took advantage of the "Comments" feature of the Infoshop News website to respond to it.

First, a clarification: I contacted Mahkno about writing a review of the *Anthology* after I'd read an appreciative and thoughtful comment concerning my work under the name NOT BORED! that he'd posted somewhere. In exchange for a free copy, he agreed. That was only a few weeks ago.

Though once again appreciative and thoughtful (let me make clear that I'm happy with it and glad that I made the arrangement with Mahkno), his review

was obviously hastily written. I say this because of an old joke about James Joyce – it took him seven years to write *Ulysses* and so it should take any reader/reviewer the same amount of time (it took me 27 years to write the contents of the *NOT BORED! Anthology*) – but also because my own book reviews are usually very long and detailed, and nine or ten times the length of Mahkno's review.

The haste is especially evident when Mahkno declares that “the significance of the quotation [from Thucydides on the book's back cover] becomes clearer when one reads Debord's essay, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*.” In point of fact, the quote from Thucydides comes from my own essay, “The Society of the Virtual Spectacle,” contained within the anthology. Though this essay is inspired and informed by Debord's *Comments*, it attempts to do something that Mahkno never mentions: both bring Debord up to date and go beyond Debord. Mahkno's haste is also evident when he says that the “Musicians” section of the book “reviews a few of the author's favorite groups or individuals, except for the humorous polemic, ‘Radio Noriega’.”

In point of fact, the section in question denounces musicians for selling their songs to commercial advertisers, and some of these musicians are hardly my favorites (the Cure, Led Zeppelin, etc.) Once again in his haste, Mahkno states very good criticisms of me – “Brown occasionally lets his polemical tendencies get the better of him, and can come across as petulant and defensive. This is particularly evident in the ‘Internequine Polemics’ section.” – but fails to mention the positive results of the polemics themselves. In one such instance, I freed one of the movies that Mahkno mentions in his review (Viénet's *Can the Dialectics Break Bricks?*) from the greedy clutches of the subtitler who was charging upwards of \$30 a copy for it (I sold them at \$5 postage included for more than five years).

I believe that an unhurried review would have commented less on quantities (the number of years I've been publishing), but on qualities (the development of my thinking, which has taken me to, through and beyond Debord and the situationists). Furthermore, an unhurried review would centered on the obvious claim made by the book (by the existence of the book itself), which that over the last quarter century I have produced something of durable valuable to others, despite the apparent ephemerality of the zine format.

If I may direct some hopefully constructive criticism back towards my reviewer, I believe that it is also your haste that makes you devalue “conspiracies theories,” which you tie to my reading of Debord's *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (rather hastily dismissed), when it fact it derives from my study of historical events. Such study can never be a hasty affair. It must be slow and careful, and must wait until all of the relevant facts have come to light, for of course yesterday's conspiracy theory is tomorrow's front page news.

I am very happy to say that “Mahkno” responded to these comments, and did so honestly and in good faith.

Of all the criticisms Bill Brown might have made of my review, that one hurt the most - that it had been written in haste - because it is absolutely true. After two weeks reading his book, I was hell-bent on finishing my review in one day. Having praised Brown's own thoughtful book reviews, it would have behooved me to take more time with my own.

A few clarifications are in order:

First, instead of "favorite" musicians, I should have said something like, "musicians in whom he took some interest", or "musicians in whom he saw some initial promise". Clearly, no group or individual could "sell out" unless they had something of value to sell in the first place.

Secondly, while it is true that the author was able to produce a positive result in his campaign against the person who was selling his own sub-titled version of a Situationist movie, I'm not convinced that the polemical style of Brown's writing in that case ("greedy clutches", etc.) was warranted.

Thirdly, my reference to the marginality and ephemerality of the zine format was in no way intended as a judgement on the quality of Brown's work in *NOT BORED!*, and I think I made it quite clear that much of his writing *is* of durable value. Thus, I am glad that the *Anthology* is out now, since web sites may go down, and copies of zines may easily be lost or destroyed (as the author mentioned the loss of several of his own personal copies of back issues of *NOT BORED!*).

Finally, on the matter of conspiracy theories. While I'm certain that Bill Brown has done a lot of historical research on this topic, I would ask what it was that originally prompted him to carry it out? Was it Debord's "Comments on the Society of the Spectacle"? Perhaps fellow SI member Sanguinetti's essay, "Is the Reichstag Burning?" Both of these discussed the matters of Italian terrorist groups and State infiltration at length, and one of Brown's most prominent examples of conspiracy involves the allegedly complete takeover of the Red Brigades by the Italian security services and/or the P2 Masonic Lodge prior to the assassination of Aldo Moro. Either Debord and Sanguinetti provided the initial impetus to Brown's conspiracy writings, or they helped to confirm and strengthen an existing tendency.

If one is pre-disposed to discover conspiracies, then they can always be found, and no amount of evidence or rational argument to the contrary will be enough to dissuade a true believer, for whom secrecy and conspiracy have become not just one more (and not always effective) weapon in the State's arsenal, but an article of faith. It is this which separates a rational investigation of historical and contemporary uses of secrecy, subversion, infiltration, etc., from incipient - and from a revolutionary standpoint, counter-productive - paranoia.

The second review of the *NOT BORED! Anthology* was written by Ryan M. Rogers (cf. the "Polemics" section of this issue for more on him and the circumstances in which this review was written). Originally published on Rogers' blog, this review is reproduced below, but without any further comment.

“I might, it is true, have written to you something different and more agreeable than this, but nothing certainly more useful, if it is desirable for you to know the real state of things here before taking your measures.” Thucydides (back cover of the anthology)

Without much doubt, the question of situationist theory as it stands today is fraught with far too many dead ends. The multitude of academics and neo-anarchists who have since taken up the task of recuperating the situationists into a history of footnotes and ideological anecdotes are only testament to the validity present in predictions Debord and company were all too aware of in their lifetimes, and they have served primarily to make the life and times of the SI utterly incomprehensible to the newest entrants into the field of revolutionary anti-capitalist action. Keeping this in mind, Bill Brown’s Not Bored! zine, the base from which he draws the content for his anthology, is an incredibly rare piece of cohesion in this confused muck of modern situationism (if not already aware, the reader should note that this term was considered by the SI to be a purely ideological understanding of their work designed to oppose its aims). Through its wide collection of articles, divided into sections on interventions, polemics, the SI, book reviews, and music, Brown weaves together a critique of the spectacle which takes on nothing short of a totalizing quality, leaving the reader with a fulfilled and robust impression of what situationist theory can amount to today in practice while also having prepared an effective outline of the state of most leading contemporary understandings of the situationists, and their understanding of revolution.

It is quite easy to read any number of the writers Brown critiques in his anthology and come out of their work no more informed of the history of the SI or their idea of social revolution than one was at the start; in some cases the opposite even becomes true. As Debord was write to point out in *Society of the Spectacle*, the term of the spectacle itself has indeed been robust fodder for careless academics only intent upon explaining the ordering of class power today without any intent to change it. And, as Brown points out, there are equally as many former situs and neo-situs who would simply paint themselves as the heirs of the grand legacy of the SI, adopting an insultingly shallow idea of the situationists acclaimed ‘elitism’, and without any of the practice.

Admittedly, this is not the sort of collection of work open to most any blend of review. Brown has been producing his zine since 1982, so any review of its content is necessarily, and regrettably, going to miss certain points of great significance, but the overall impression that we’ve taken from its content has been centered along these lines. Situationist action in the US never really managed to find the mass practice it did in May 68 in France, and most of the endless number of imitators of situationist organization in the US have never fully escaped this position of mere repetition. We’ve had our occupy movement, surely, wherein many participants were actively influenced by the SI, but the vast majority of said occupiers (minus Oakland and Denver, as Brown noted in correspondence with our group) never really managed to escape the ideology of reformism, of the spectacle. As Brown notes in one of his valuable introductions to the SI, the

cultural history of the US is simply not the same as that of France, or most of Europe for that matter, thus, some difficulties arise when one tries to do a hack copy-paste job of situationist theory unto the American scene. We don't have the same history of avant-garde activity, nor have we confronted the same forces of spectacular power, he comments, which presents a need for certain critical approaches to the SI to be taken if their work is to be continued on our terrain.

While it is something of a limited view of a much larger body of work, we found that the ultimate value in Brown's anthology was its capacity to clearly speak to the current state of the spectacle as it pertains to the latest developments in its domination. Brown realizes that Debord himself did indeed update his theoretical formulations when he saw it fit, and thus applies this understanding of situationist praxis in his work in a fluid manner sparsely seen in most comparable situationist style publications. He talks about the spectacle as it exists today, reverting back to a state wherein even basic labor struggles now have some restored relevance in the discourse of the spectacle while also devising a theory of the virtual spectacle,[1] but this theorizing is always tied to intents in practice, which is arguably what makes his work some of the most important in the field of revolutionary praxis. This is a stance which stands in quite staunch contrast to others in the milieu such as T.J. Clark's Retort group and Knabb,[2] who more or less consider what the SI wrote to be solid gospel, and who thus hardly see it necessary to carry on in any practice today which correlates to the revolutionary project forwarded so intently by the SI, in stark contrast to Debord's statement that "One must advance strategic theory in its moment." [3]

When a student or worker in the US comes into their first contact with a group like the SI, often times their instinct is to go to the best known names in the pro-situ community in their initial readings. So they flock to the McDonoughs, Sadlers, Knabbs, Nicholson-Smiths, TJ Clarks, and maybe if they're particularly unfortunate, the Blacks, generally ending up at the behest of 'all that appears' without really knowing who is full of shit and who isn't. And this response is quite natural; the body of academic, and pseudo-revolutionary, excess surrounding a subject once entirely opposed to such esoteric specializations is indeed quite overwhelming, if not in perfect line with what Debord imagined would come of the history of the SI. What we found as the strongest trait in the Not Bored anthology was its capacity to put all of this into a coherent perspective, lining up where the academics and the disinterested translators stand while also outlining possibilities for authentic continuity in the revolutionary experiment initially begun by the SI.

In addition to a wide array of book reviews and writings on the SI, which serve as the heart of the anthologies theoretical base, there also exists a number of accounts of various different actions which Not Bored has been engaged with on a revolutionary basis over the past 3 decades, ranging in variety from a selection of creative graffiti campaigns to the formation of a prestigious PAC for the unbomber's strong presidential run in 1996, among numerous others. This incredibly diverse field of action thus presents the reader with the sort of vivid image of modern revolutionary action that one is presented with in reading a comparable anthology of the SI itself. Surely, it is not precise imitation, but if

such were the case, this would hardly be worth reading.

Not Bored has not amounted to a carbon-copy of blindly applied situationist texts to whatever situations may arise for their application, and it does not claim to attempt as much. Therein lay the beauty to its contributions to revolutionaries today, the fact that it is capable of assessing the SI in terms of its theory seriously, but without academic fetishization, or the inverse of complete denunciation towards all things vaguely ‘academic’ related. It may be open to some critiques of ‘in-authenticity’ from those more zealously literal defendants of the physical word of the SI (Brown makes some critiques of the Situationists hostility towards students and of their use of the notion of workers councils, to name a few points of contestation) but it is precisely because his work has been bold enough over the years to begin these conversations that it takes on the value it has. By any measure, the Situationists themselves were constantly engaged in a collective progress of critique towards their positions, it would be quite hard to imagine a group organized against all spectacular fame lavishing in literal translations of every single stance they maintained to the contemporary backdrop of the spectacle. To quote Brown on the point, “Action gets theory dirty, and only pure, non-active theory (the passive reproduction of theory) keeps it clean.”

Brown additionally said of this theme in correspondence with our group that: “The SI no longer exists, and there has never been any need or value in pretending that it continues. But there is something larger: theory means nothing unless it is put into practice. This is, in many ways, the ultimate point of the SI itself, which existed in a time of many theorists and virtually no revolutionary agents”. It would be difficult, if not somewhat redundant, to try to reiterate this point, as there is not much to be said in summation of this theme.

Beyond these considerations, the anthology contains a wide number of original (detoured and otherwise) images as of yet not published online, as well as an expansive collection of situationist- related book review, comments on music, theory on the SI, polemic histories, and documents from campaigns/interventions/actions undertaken by Not Bored. This immense degree of content thus makes it an invaluable source to anyone seeking to decipher the labyrinth of the modern situationist milieu and its history, while also providing innumerable points of inspiration for continued struggle against the spectacle. If a piece like Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* can be said to still maintain the capacity to turn ones brain upside down, Brown’s anthology can be said to make some sense of this process after the initial shock.

A wide majority of the content in the anthology is available for free at notbored.org, as is the contact information to buy a hard copy.

[1]. In the article contained in the anthology by the name, Brown refers to it as “what the global spectacle becomes as or after the integration of Communism and capitalism becomes so complete that one no longer refers to ‘Communism,’ and ‘capitalism’ is replaced by euphemisms such ‘free enterprise’ or ‘the free market.’” See “The Society of the Virtual Spectacle” for further detail.

[2]. He has in the past also told one of our members that Debord NEVER updated

his theoretical formulations, a piece of evidence which falls very much in line with Brown's comments on Knabb which state his prevalent apathy towards Debord post 1971, conveniently leaving out *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, the definitive point of refutation towards this claim.

[3]. Cited from a letter prepared by Debord to Eduardo Rothe on 21 February 1974 (translation available via notbored.org) which is cited in Brown's response to Knabb's 2005 re-release of his Situationist International Anthology.

Translations

As I have already said, between 2009 and 2011, I thought that the work of NOT BORED! might well become "reduced" to the work of translating interesting texts from into French into English. Though it was abandoned (the "larger" project of NOT BORED! has continued,) this idea suggests just how rewarding and valuable I find translating to be. There is obviously an objective value and a general usefulness in bringing into English texts that have never been translated before or have only been translated badly.

And there are indeed a great many bad translations. While a few are compromised by a poor knowledge of French (or whatever the original language was), and others by a poor knowledge of English, the majority are ruined by translators who either do not really understand or share the politics of the original authors or who fancy that their role is to "improve" the quality of the original. Note well what Burton Raffel says in his "Translator's Foreword" to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (Modern Library, 2008): "Translation is not supposed either to worsen or to improve what it tries to *re-create*. Change is obviously unavoidable, but quality – ideally – should be pretty much the same."

Both types of bad translators (sometimes the two types can be found in one and the same translator) do not really believe that the original author really and truly knew what he or she was doing or, rather, they do not really and truly believe that their own readers will understand what the original author meant to say. Speaking for myself, I believe that the authors I have tried to translate knew exactly what they were doing (otherwise I would not have chosen them) and that my own readers will understand what was meant, precisely because I have managed to understand it. (I never let a sentence go until I am satisfied I have understood and properly rendered into English, not only that particular sentence, but the role it plays or the function that it serves in the work as a whole.)

Let me emphasize that, as a translator, I have *tried* to do my very best. Sometimes my very best hasn't been good enough (Burton Raffel: "it is frequently impossible for a translator to equal the author he translates"). And this is why, over the course of last decade, I have continued to work on my French and have returned to several texts that I translated in the past and have translated them from scratch. Indeed, it seems that the two activities are interconnected: you learn more to translate better and, when you translate

more, you learn better. Perhaps it is only when a text has been translated twice that it has really and truly been translated well.

There is an obvious parallel here with reading: to really understand a book or, rather, to really enjoy it, you must read it twice. Of course, it is only really good books that withstand being read twice: bad books are precisely those that were written and published to be read once and discarded. And so, not just to improve my abilities as a translator, but also as someone who loves writing, I have tried to read (twice) the best works in the English language. Since I got my doctorate in American literature, I have spent many of the intervening years reading the classics of British literature. But here we begin to circle 'round, because the greatest British authors knew at least one language spoken on the Continent: French, most often, but also Italian, German or even Latin.

Before concluding these remarks by providing a partial summary of the works (originally in French) that I have translated or retranslated into English since November 2009, I'd like to emphasize a point: when it comes to works by the Situationist International, they cannot be fully understood or enjoyed unless you read them in the original French. (The same goes for Marx, Hegel and Clausewitz, who must be read in the original German; for Dante, Plutarch and Leopardi, who must be read in the original Italian; etc. etc.) Not only because all translators are traitors to the works that they claim to have translated, but also because each language offers a particular advantage or set of advantages to those who speak them natively, and because, whether consciously or not, each author is influenced by these advantages during the formation of his or her ideas and each author takes advantage of those advantages during the expressions of those ideas.

Since November 2009, I have translated and placed on www.notbored.org translations of the following short texts (partial list): various news articles about the purchase of Debord's archives by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (2009-2011); "Social Networking Sites in General and Facebook in Particular," written by La Boétie (June 2010); various texts by Raoul Vaneigem (Dec 2011-May 2012); "The Situationists in the United States," written by Fabrice de San Mateo (March 2012); Maria Alekhina's statement to the court (Oct 2012); various texts by Gianfranco Sanguinetti (Sept 2012-May 2013); various news articles about the exhibition of Debord's works at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Jan 2013-May 2013); and "How Can Celebrity Be Stopped Once It Has Started?" written by Les Amis de Némésis (May 2013).

Since November 2009, I have translated and placed on www.notbored.org translations of the following books (complete list): Guy Debord, *"This Bad Reputation"* (May 2010); Pier Franco Ghisleni, *Letters to Heretics* (Nov 2012); various authors, *Champ Libre Correspondence, Vols. 1 and 2* (June-August 2012); Gianfranco Sanguinetti, *On Terrorism and the State* (September 2012);* Gianfranco Sanguinetti (aka "Censor"), *Truthful Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism in Italy* (September 2012);* Giovanni Giovannelli, *Never Work: The Autobiography of Salvatore Messina* (Dec 2012); and Raoul Vaneigem, *Resistance to Christianity* (June 2013).* Note: asterisks indicate books that were translated twice.

Gianfranco Sanguinetti

In August 2012, I was contacted (in English) by an Italian woman named Christina, who wished to make a small correction in one of the letters written by Guy Debord that I'd translated. Because Christina mentioned that she was a friend of Gianfranco Sanguinetti, I asked her if she might put me in touch with him. (Ever since 2009, I have been interested in putting together an English-language anthology of Sanguinetti's works.)

To my great delight, a week or so later, I was contacted (in French) by Gianfranco. I described to him my idea, which concerned the composition and publication of the first anthology in any language (Italian, French or English) of his writings. He agreed, provided that such an anthology would not be a dry "academic" work, one that was limited to reprinting texts understood to be irretrievably stuck in the past, but would emphasize all that happened since the late 1960s, which was when he started writing and publishing, first as a member the Situationist International, and then as an autonomous individual. I agreed, of course; as early as 1999, when I started posting texts by Sanguinetti to the www.notbored.org website, I saw the unique value of his works – especially *On Terrorism and the State* – when it came to understanding certain incidents of spectacular terrorism (especially the bombing of apartment buildings by Russia's own secret services during that country's war against the Chechens). Quite obviously, the spectacular "events" that took place in New York and Washington, D.C. on 11 September 2001 only added to relevance of Sanguinetti's works to the contemporary period.

While Gianfranco went about the business of locating, sorting through and indexing his archives, which he described as "sometimes mutilated by rats, etc., [and] enveloped by the dust of the preceding century," I personally translated or retranslated (see above) all the texts that I had been hosting on www.notbored.org. In three cases – "The Workers of Italy and the Revolt in Reggio Calabria," published in the name of the Situationist International in October 1970, "Notice to the Proletariat About the Events of the Last Few Hours," published pseudonymously in April 1977, and "Welcome to the Freest City in the World," published pseudonymously in September 1977 – I had to locate and work from the Italian originals. In the case of the first text, the French translation I'd formerly used as the basis for my translation into English was not just bad, but *falsified*, as well (it dropped out whole paragraphs from the original and added paragraphs from a completely different text); in the case of the second one, I'd entrusted the translation to a then girlfriend, who, I discovered, had done a terrible job; and in the case of the third text, I'd been relying on the work of a fool named Jordan Levinson. *If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.*

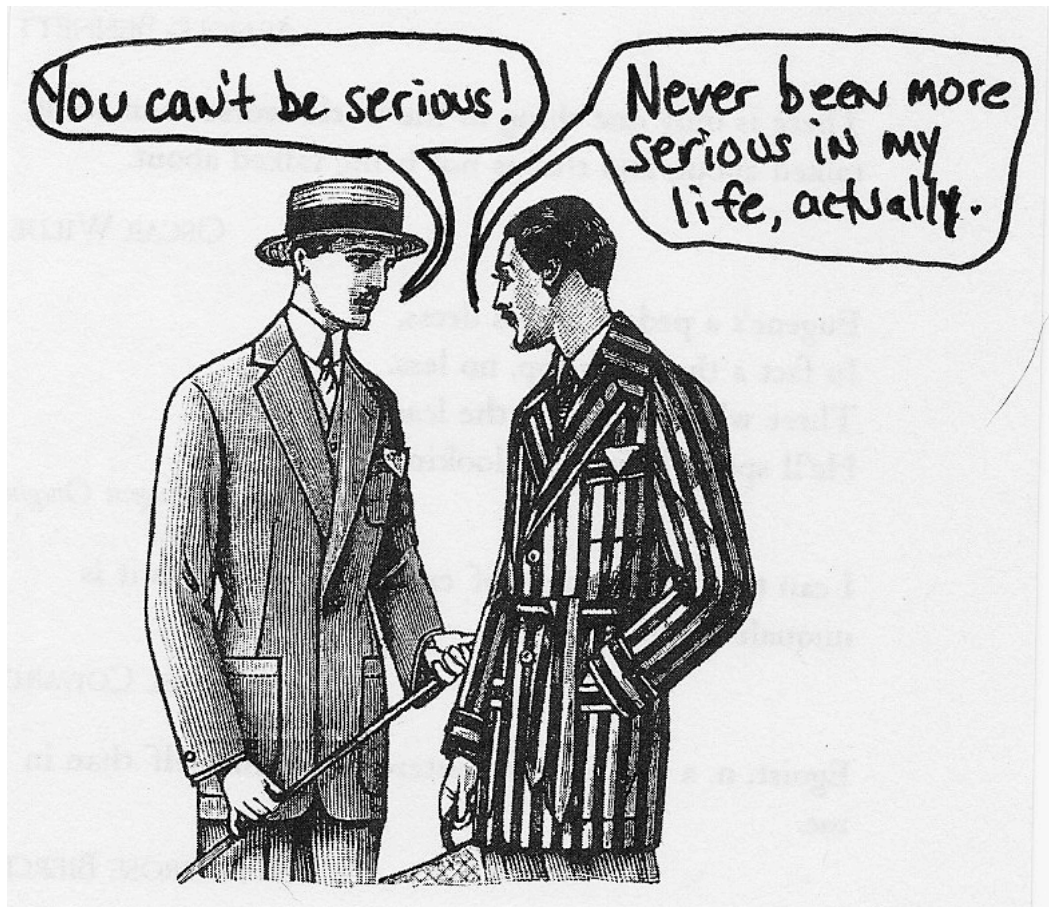
Between September and November 2012, I received from Gianfranco a variety of texts – all written in French – that had either been published in limited editions (a text on the book and exhibition called *The Pussy*, an essay about the Czech photographer Miroslav Tichy, and a text about the philosophical poems of Giacomo Leopardi) or had never been published in any language ("DUM NOVUS NASCITUR ORDO," which

concerned the fall of the Berlin Wall; an introduction to the paintings of D. H. Lawrence; and an article about the anti-cold war aviator Mathias Rust). Anticipating the production of the anthology, tentatively titled *Put Aside All Lying: the Complete Works of Gianfranco Sanguinetti*, I put none of these texts (once I had translated them into English) on the www.notbored.org website. As the reader will see, I wrote reviews of *The Pussy* and the text about Tichy, and placed both of these reviews on-line.

In February 2013, Gianfranco sent me two brand-new and unpublished texts (both written in French): his letter to the situationist Mustapha Khayati, dated 10 December 2012, and a remembrance of his friend and attorney, Aliberto Mignoli, aka “the Doge,” which was dated 17 December 2012. In both of these texts, Gianfranco returned to the events of the 1970s and early 1980s, and especially his relationship with Guy Debord, which he had chosen not to discuss during the entire intervening period. (As Gianfranco explained, he had been the victim of calumny, and one doesn’t honor calumny by responding to it.) In April 2013, Gianfranco sent me the first part of his letter to Debord dated 24 September 1978, which had never been published, neither in *Champ Libre Correspondance*, Volume I (1978), nor in *Guy Debord Correspondance*, Volume V (1973-1978). Gianfranco added to this letter a note, dated 29 April 2013, which explained and documented the harassment he was suffering at the hands of the police and various Stalinists.

All three of these important texts – which go a long way towards vindicating Gianfranco where Debord’s insinuations and suspicions about him are concerned, and showing how early in the game Debord was trying to position himself as the only situationist who really mattered (a stance adopted and amplified ever since then, but especially by the exhibition of Debord’s works at the Bibliothèque nationale de France) – were published on the www.notbored.org website.

Though I have heard rumors that Gianfranco’s archives are going to be purchased by a major American university, the project to compose and publish *Put Aside All Lying* is still active – at least as far as I know.



Summary of Activity* Since Publication of *NOT BORED!* #41 (November 2009)

* Does not include translations of other writers.

Collective Projects:

1. “Youth Uprising” (April 2011)
2. Cornelius Castoriadis (2010-2013)
3. Pussy Riot (Nov 2012)

Polemics:

1. Wayne Spencer (March 2010)
2. Rachel Kushner (January 2013)
3. Marc Lenot (April 2013)
4. McKenzie Wark (May 2013)
5. Ryan M. Rogers (May 2013)

Essays:

1. “Guy Debord in 2009: Spinning or Laughing” (Dec 2009)
2. “The Real Split in John McHale’s Translation of *The Real Split*” (April 2012)
3. Sanguinetti’s *The Pussy* (Oct 2012)
4. Sanguinetti’s *Forms of Truth* (Oct 2012)
5. “What Rachel Kushner Knows About Guy Debord” (Jan 2013)
6. “Non Serviam” (May 2013)
7. “Five Major Omissions and Thirty-Four Factual Errors in McKenzie Wark’s *The Spectacle of Disintegration*” (May 2013)

Descriptions of Activity Since Publication of *NOT BORED! #41*

Collective Projects

1. “Youth Uprising” (April 2011)

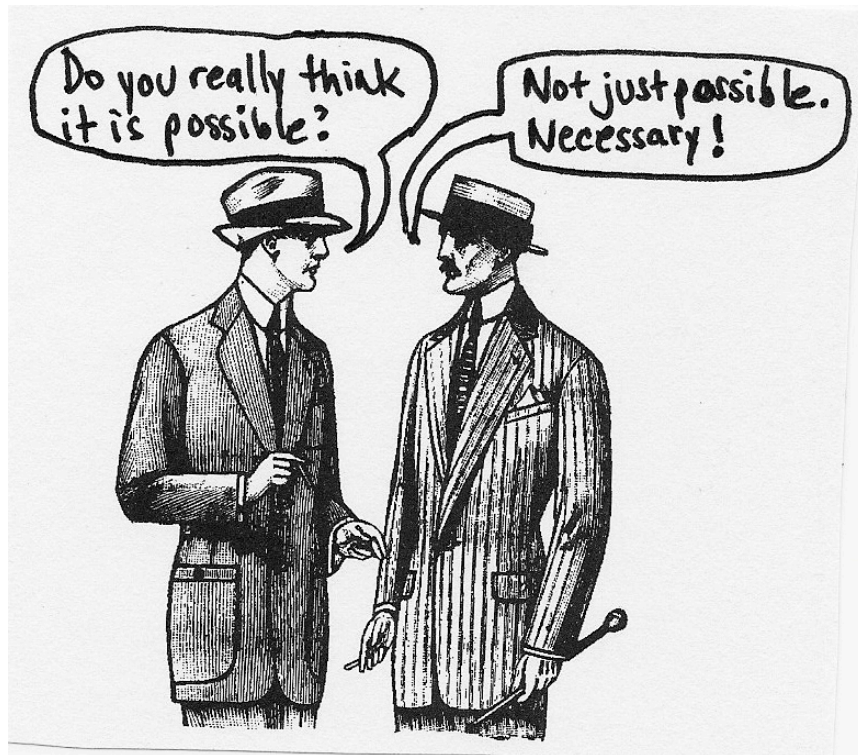
Written by the creator and principal exponent of *Lettrisme*, Jean-Isidore Isou, in 1948, “Youth Uprising” was first published as a booklet in 1950 (Paris: International Press Office). When David W. Seaman translated it into English in early 2011, he was the first to do so. Working in tandem with Frédéric Aquaviva, who wrote notes to accompany the translation, we hired a graphic artist named Robert Inhuman, arranged for the text to be printed as a wall poster, and, in April 2011, distributed five hundred copies of it to interested parties all over the United States.

2. Cornelius Castoriadis (Oct 2010-Jan 2013)

Ever since 2003, we have been working with an anonymous Translator/Editor to make available through our website, as a public service, texts by Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) that have been translated into English. Prior to 2009, we published two volumes of writings by Castoriadis, who co-founded *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1948: *The Rising Tide of Insignificance* in December 2003 and *Figures of the Thinkable (Including “Passion and Knowledge”)* in February 2005. Since 2009, we have published *A Society Adrift* (October 2010), *Postscript on Insignificance* (March 2011), and *Democracy and Relativism: Discussion with the “MAUSS” Group* (January 2013).

3. Pussy Riot (Nov 2012)

In October 2012, we translated into English a French translation of Maria Alekhina's statement to the court (originally made in Russian on 8 August 2012). The following month, we began working with Stepan. This young Russian, who has published a Russian translation of the situationists' pamphlet *On the Poverty of Student Life*, compared our translation to the original statement, and his offered corrections. He then provided us with the prison addresses of both Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Andreyevna Tolokonnikova, and translated a brief letter that we wrote into Russian. We sent these letters to the imprisoned members of Pussy Riot, and distributed the text of it to comrades in Denmark, France and the United States, who, in their turn, sent copies of the same letter.



Polemics

1. Wayne Spencer (March 2010)

In early March 2010, we were among the people who received emailed copies of “Towards a New Situationist International,” which was written by a blogger named Wayne Spencer. (His blog is titled “The Annals of Significant Failure: Revolutionary Critique in Dismal Times, Largely Derived from Situationist Theory.”) On 16 March 2010, we published the following response, titled “Let’s Not and Say We Did,” here reproduced in its entirety.

Wayne Spencer’s call for the formation of a “new Situationist International” (5 March 2010) is an embarrassment. It embodies everything that is wrong with post-situationist thought, and I wouldn’t blame anyone if they dismissed that thought on the basis of it.

“Towards New Situationist International” is wrong about the proletariat: the “defining quality of proletarian life” is *not* “a craven acceptance of the separate commodity economy and the state as unchangeable givens” (Spencer’s thesis #1), but a constant struggle to make a living in an unlivable world. Spencer’s attention is on ideology, not socio-economic conditions, and – with respect to the proletariat – he places himself outside of it, as a nay-sayer to its “craven” acceptance, not inside, as an inmate in the same prison.

His text is wrong about the current state of the class struggle: the “discontent with the petty and idiotic lives” that we are obliged to lead is *not* “buried” (thesis #2), but front-page news: the student occupations movement in America; the on-going rioting and social strife in Greece; the popular demonstrations against the government in Iceland; the social movements in France against detention centers and expulsions; et al. Spencer speaks of a world that was destroyed more than 40 years ago.

His text is wrong about the current state of critical theory: “revolutionary theory” has *not* “almost completely failed to keep abreast of developments within advanced capitalism” (thesis #3); it is incorrect to say “revolutionary theory and practice stands at present in a state of *perfectly scandalous dereliction*” (thesis #6). In point of fact, since the dissolution of the SI, revolutionary theory has gone on to produce useful critiques of artificial terrorism, nuclear power, and political sovereignty, as well as such useful concepts as biopolitics, deterritorialization, and the integrated spectacle. Spencer speaks as if revolutionary theory stopped cold in 1972, which of course would come as a surprise (or insult) to Guy Debord, the ex-situationist who continued to develop “situationist” theory well after the SI dissolved and who personally associated with at least one other major critical theorist of the era (Giorgio Agamben). As for revolutionary practice, which Spencer hardly mentions, the revolutionary movement has produced tactics that were *unknown* before 1972: Black Blocs, flashmobs, and computer viruses, among many others.

His text is wrong about the situationists: one *cannot* speak of “the

thought” of the SI, as Spencer does (thesis #4), because that “thought” changed several times between 1957 and 1972: after Debord’s contact with Socialisme ou Barbarie in 1960 (the theme of workers councils); after the admission of Raoul Vaneigem in 1961 (the critique of everyday life); after the break with Henri Lefebvre in 1963 (the abandonment of unitary urbanism); after the admission of young revolutionaries and anarchists in 1966 and then again in 1968 (the emphasis on student life, occupations and general assemblies); and, of course, after the birth of the “pro-situ” phenomenon (the critique of the cadre). Spencer speaks as if everyone understands what “situationist theory” is, but he himself fails to outline its basic principles.

His text is wrong about post-situationists: “situationist thought” has not been “abandoned by individuals with revolutionary intent” (thesis #5). It certainly hasn’t been “abandoned” by ex-situs such as Raoul Vaneigem, Jacqueline de Jong, Donald Nicholson-Smith, and T.J. Clark, or by first-generation pro-situs such as Michel Bounan, Ken Knabb and Michel Prigent (not to mention yours truly, who accounts himself a second-generation pro-situ). Spencer makes no mention of the French anarchist website Jura Libertaire: it consistently mixes together news items about current anti-capitalist and/or anti-state actions with situationist texts from long ago. The situationists are also dear to those (do not doubt their “revolutionary intent”!) who maintain the websites called Les Amis des Nemesis, Jules Bonnot de la Bande, and Debord-Encore. Spencer writes as if he doesn’t read any other language than English. (Was his text translated into any other language? Not even French?! How “international” can this be?)

His text is *anti-situationist* when it comes to matters of organization: the SI *never* allowed its members the abilities to carry out “theoretical and other practical actions [...] in the *individual* names of those who produce them, and on their responsibility *alone*” and/or “carry out projects outside the framework of the international and to form other associations to do so” (thesis #7). Spencer writes as if he wants to found an organization that is “situationist” in name only, no matter how well he recites certain catechisms (thesis #8).

Last, but not least, his text is worse than a monologue: it is a sterile dialogue with himself (“it might be objected that such a proposal”; “it might also be objected”; “if I fail to heed these weighty objections”) (thesis #9). This echoes Spencer’s own situation: not a member of any organization, no matter how small, but an isolated individual. It is easy to foresee what would take place at a “conference between interested parties” that was based upon written answers to Spencer’s five questions, so much so that a face-to-face meeting wouldn’t be necessary (or so he claims): there would be a deluge of useless paper. Everyone would read what had been written and submitted, sure. But who would judge what was good and what was bad? Spencer himself? Note well his sudden recourse to the word “we” when the subject of whom to “exclud[e] from the outset” comes up. “We might save ourselves a little time by excluding from the outset anyone who . . .” (thesis #10). I have a better idea. Let’s exclude from the outset anyone who would exclude anyone from the outset.

On 23 March 2010, we received a lengthy reply from Wayne Spencer. Those of you who wish to read it in its entirety should visit this blog and search for the essay titled “Why Break the Seals of Mute Despair Unbidden, and Wail Life’s Discords into Careless Ears? A Reply to Bill Not Bored” (25 March 2010). We presumed that few of our readers would want to do so, and we simply reproduced the last paragraph of Spencer’s “Reply” without commenting upon it. We repeat the same gesture here.

“No doubt Bill Bored can be assured that he is not speaking to himself. He presents his work at galleries. He lectures at subsidized cultural events. He speaks to the press and appears in documentary films. He leads walks. He stages plays and displays placards before passers-by and surveillance camera workers. He complains that his civil liberties are not upheld. He translates and comments. But after 25 or so years of presenting tepid social critique to spectators who have evinced no practical dissatisfaction and passively view his activities with no practical revolutionary purpose in view, nothing in the way of revolutionary contestation has been achieved. His efforts do not disrupt the processes by which his own life becomes foreign to him, however briefly. Nor do they attack the processes by which his audiences’ lives become foreign to them. Yet he continues untroubled by the compatibility of what he does with the persistence of the society of alienation and takes no steps to turn against his palpably inadequate praxis. Indeed, he seems quite content with the cultural and pseudo-oppositional niche he has found within that society. For him, it seems, revolution is a process that is satisfactorily unfolding at some distance from the everyday life around him and will one day deliver salvation to his door. All this is very different from the views that prompted my proposal for a new international association of situationist revolutionaries. It is no surprise that Not Bored views that proposal with contempt.”

2. Rachel Kushner (January 2013)

In December 2012, we received an email from Gianfranco Sanguinetti, who wished to know more about Rachel Kushner, who’d written an article for *The Paris Review* (Winter 2012, Issue 203) that mentioned him. We’d never heard of Kushner before, nor knew anything about her novel *The Flamethrowers*, which partly concerns Italy in the 1970s. After writing a letter to the editor of *The Paris Review*, which never acknowledged receipt of it and doesn’t appear to have published it, we contacted Kushner herself, through the email address listed on her website. Our correspondence with her is reproduced here, in its entirety:

4 January 2013

Ms. [Rachel] Kushner:

In the course of your article concerning the images that inspired *The Flamethrowers*, which was published in the Winter 2012 issue of *The Paris Review* (No. 203), you claim that “a woman who was friends with (...) Gianfranco Sanguinetti” reported to you “coolly” and “disdainfully” that all that

the ex-Situationist “does (...) now” is live (“he lives,” that’s all).

Since you don’t name or even say anything more about this woman, it is impossible to discern what her agenda might be. And, since neither Sanguinetti personally nor any of his writings play a part in your novel, it is impossible to discern what possible motive you might have for passing along this bit of gossip to your readers.

In point of fact, Mr. Sanguinetti is active. In 2004, Silverbridge published his essay *La Chatte, Hier et Aujourd’hui* (“The Pussy, Yesterday and Today”) as part of *1724 Birth of the Cunt*, an art installation and book created by Jason Rhoades. In 2011, Editions Kant published his monograph (*Forms of Truth*) on the photographs of the Czech artist Miroslav Tichy. Mr. Sanguinetti is currently working with me on the creation of an English-language anthology of his works (the first anthology of his writings in any language), which will be published this year under the title *Put Aside All Lying*.

Sincerely yours,

Bill Brown
New York City

[4 January 2013]
Dear Bill Brown,

I’m very glad you wrote me, because the issue is one of a very simple misunderstanding in meaning, perhaps my reference in the Paris Review was too ambiguous. I didn’t say that she answered “all he does is live.” She said he lives, period, suggesting that my question was naive. I asked her what he was up to, which turned out to have been, I realized in the way she answered, perhaps an unforgivably bourgeois-seeming question. It suggests that one, you know, has a nine to five job, perhaps, children, “hobbies”, an identifiable, approved life under capitalism. it was a clunky question in the context, asking after Sanguinetti in this rather naive way, what is he up to. When his life has been a series of intensities and commitments (as I merely gather, I don’t know him, but I definitely am aware of the Rhoades collaboration, since I wrote a long essay about it and other things in Artforum in 2006).

I’m not sure what gossip you mean. I only outed myself as being a bit eager and foolish in regard to a storied and key figure of subversion and political thought.

keep up the good work, and great news, about your collaboration.

Best,
Rachel

PS: who is publishing the anthology? I look forward to it! I’ve always been intrigued by Sanguinetti, which hopefully you’ll recognize now that I’ve clarified

what that exchange meant, in the Paris Review. Lastly, that's amazing that you've already read my novel, did you get an advance copy? It's true that Sanguinetti is not explicitly an aspect, since I don't quite think of him as involved in the Autonomist movement, certainly not in Rome. But as I explain in that short essay, Debord has always been an inspiration to me, and specifically *in girum*, and these things, as far as novels are concerned, become metabolized and filtered to the point that a reader might not know what I reference or learn from in order to construct what I write.

Best,
Rachel

[5 January 2013]

Dear Ms. Kushner:

Thank you for replying.

You are right to say that what you wrote about Sanguinetti was "ambiguous" and thus easily misunderstood. It has in fact been misunderstood by Gianfranco himself and his friends. As you can imagine, none of them are happy about it.

I would suggest that you inform *The Paris Review* that an official clarification is called for.

Sincerely yours,
Bill Brown

P.S. Yes, I have seen your article on the Rhoades collaboration. It contains an absolutely unforgivable error: "Sanguinetti's advocacy of terrorism." You conflate "Censor," *the character* that Sanguinetti created (it was "Censor" who authored *The Truthful Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism*), with Sanguinetti himself. This too requires an official clarification, even if it comes seven years after the fact.

Post-P.S. You write, "I don't quite think of him as involved in the Autonomist movement, certainly not in Rome." I would suggest that you familiarize yourself with this text, which proves that your "certainty" is quite mistaken: <http://www.notbored.org/Rome-1977.html>

[5 January 2013]

there is absolutely no need for a correction. The mere idea of it is ridiculous. correct what? that he lives?

More importantly, I am hereby officially requesting you not contact me again.

I don't appreciate your harassment.

If I hear from you, I will consider it harassment and report it.

thanks.

Of course we went "public" with this rather entertaining exchange: we posted it to the anarchist news site Infoshop.org. It had been up for a week or so before we got an email from the news site's administrator, who informed us that Ms. Kushner had written him a couple of times, rather angrily demanding that the exchange be taken down. Explaining that he hadn't responded to her, and wasn't particularly moved to heed her demands, he wanted to know the context for our exchange with her. After we'd explained, he assured us that it would remain up on his site and that he would continue to refrain from answering her emails to him.

But we were not done with Ms. Kushner. There remained the matter of her "short essay," the one in which she had explained that "Debord has always been an inspiration to me, and specifically *in girum*." (Cf. "What Rachel Kushner Knows About Guy Debord," reproduced in the Essays section of this issue.)

3. Marc Lenot (April 2013)

In March 2013, we translated a long and very interesting article about the Czech photographer Miroslav Tichý that was written by a French blogger named Marc Lenot. Our interest in this article derived from its references to Gianfranco Sanguinetti, who has both written about Tichý and organized an exhibition of his works. We sent Lenot a copy of our translation and exchanged a few emails. In April 2013, Lenot – whose blog is dedicated to reviews of art exhibitions – turned his attention to the exhibition of the works of Guy Debord at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF). In this case, what Lenot wrote was truly awful. We translated it into English, which we did only because we were translating many other articles about the BNF exhibition into English. As we do with *all* our translations, we appended explanatory footnotes to Lenot's article, only in this case these footnotes were tasked with pointing out all the distortions, errors and boldfaced lies that it contained. (If the reader wishes, she can visit <http://www.notbored.org/marc-lenot1.html> and read the article for herself.) Lenot was not happy, and posted a message in French to his blog, which we have translated as follows.

The translator's notes that NOT BORED! added to my text constitute a great example of devout reaction by post-situationists who refuse any different view of their idol.

One finds in them, among other pearls,

– diversion of meaning (N14: "Jorn wasn't excluded, he resigned": yes, that's right, like Cahuzac . . .),

– counter-truths (N6: "de Jong had no more political activity after having left the

SI in 1962”: further down in my article, one sees her posters from May 68, which the translator carefully omits),

– rewritings of history (N17: though this pleases or not, it is perfectly established that on 17 May, the Enragés and the situationists had to leave the Sorbonne on the request of the other student movements, they then established themselves at the INP),

– historiographical biases (Note 17: it is sufficient to study any bibliography of May 68 to take an inventory of the side to which the quasi-totality of the authors belong; to cite a single book doesn’t prove the contrary),

– gratuitous and venomous accusations (N8: the fact that Actes Sud published a book on Debord at the moment of the exhibition is quite obviously a proof of his recuperation and commercialization; furthermore, the fact that I wrote this review is surely another example),

– and, of course, a holy terror of anything that could reveal some of Debord ambiguities (N10 and N11 do not even emphasize his remarks to Jorn in 1957 about the necessity of “creating a legend,” but take exception to me interrogations as if they were blasphemy).

Our response (English only) was as follows.

After completing and posting my translation of Marc Lenot’s review, I sent him an email that said that I did not want to fight with him or be dismissed as a “pro-situ.” That is my idea of what mature people do, even if they disagree with each other or hate what the other person has said: they treat each other with respect; they engage in conversations; they exchange ideas directly with each other. But Lenot did not respond to my email; instead, he chose to post his responses to his blog, and left them there for me to find or not find. The conclusions one might draw from this behavior are obvious.

Though I have translated and will append his remarks at the end of the present text, I would like to introduce them with the following brief comments. I wrote *twelve* footnotes that pointed out the inconsistencies, errors or flat-out lies that I found in Lenot’s text. But in his response, Lenot only replies to *six* of them (note that he replies to footnote #17 twice). He has therefore left me and my readers free to conclude that fully half of my objections were rather well taken.

The footnotes that Lenot did not, indeed, *could not* reply to paint a devastating picture. They show that, when it suits his purposes, he is quite comfortable with intentionally misleading his readers about the contents of other people’s writings (footnote #5); that he is ignorant about Lettrism before Debord arrived on the scene (footnote #9); that he is unable to admit when he is wrong and that he does in fact aim at minimizing the importance of May 1968 in the life of Debord and the development of the SI (footnote #13); that he is ignorant about the politics of Andre Breton (footnote #15); that he is ignorant about the nature of the early years of the SI (footnote #16); and that he wants the society of the

spectacle “to win,” even if that means lying about Debord’s views on the subject and the current state of the world (footnote #28).

How does Lenot fare when he addresses my objections? Very poorly, indeed. In his response to footnote #6, he not only fails to quote me accurately (he places his own paraphrase of my remarks within quotation marks and pretends that that’s what I said), but he proves my point for me: during May 1968, when the Enragés and situationists were behind the barricades and then occupying buildings, Jacqueline de Jong was making posters. In his apparent response to footnote #8, *he doesn’t respond at all*; he simply gives up the ghost and takes my side of the argument, albeit sarcastically. Though he *refers* to footnotes #10 and #11, he doesn’t respond to them: he simply says that they do not “emphasize” Debord’s comment to Jorn (of course they don’t: footnote #10 concerns Lenot’s ignorance about the Lettrists, while footnote #11 points out that he has carelessly failed to specify his reference to “the journal”). His “response” to footnote #14 is yet another non-response; it reveals the type of politics that he is more knowledgeable about and comfortable with (a scandal concerning a “Socialist” politician).

This leaves us with footnote #17, the one that Lenot responds to twice. It is significant, I think, that this footnote concerns May 1968, which, as I indicated in footnote #13, is the reason why Debord and the SI are not “as obscure and socially unimportant as Jacqueline de Jong.” It is not surprising that Lenot’s responses introduce new errors: namely, that the Enragés and the situationists were “student movements,” and that it is quantity, and not quality, that determines the value of the historical accounts about May 1968.

Marc Lenot is a dilettante. He likes to hop from exhibition to exhibition, and to consume what is given to him to consume. Since he approves of what has been given to him, he wants approval in return. But when that approval is denied him, he turns very nasty. He thinks he knows what insults to hurl when approval hasn’t been given to him. Or, in my case, when he has confused approval with having one of his previous articles translated, and then finds out that he was wrong. But he doesn’t know what he is doing. When he pontificates about “gratuitous and venomous accusations” and the like, he only makes himself look even worse than he already did.

Though we tried to post this response to his blog, Lenot refused to accept it.

4. McKenzie Wark (May 2013)

In May 2013, rhizome.org announced that, to commemorate the publication of McKenzie Wark’s *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages Out of the 20th Century* (Verso Books), it would give away to the winner of a trivia contest about the situationists one of the “Guy Debord Action Figures” that Wark had produced on a 3-D printer. Appalled by both the poor quality of Wark’s previous books on the situationists (*The Spectacle of Disintegration* is his third on the subject) and by the puerility of turning Guy Debord into a figurine, we authored a text called “Stunted Publicity” and circulated it to all the people we know. In the end (19-20 May

2013), five other people signed their names to this statement and placed it on their own blogs or websites, and one person wrote a statement of his own. (This statement was written in French; we translated it into English as “How Can Celebrity Be Stopped Once It Has Started?”). “Stunted Publicity,” reproduced below, was also translated into Greek and Russian, and placed on-line by its respective translators.

“If a rock falls on your head it does positive harm, but shame, disgrace, reproaches and insults are damaging only in so far as you’re conscious of them. If you’re not, you feel no hurt at all. What’s the harm in the whole audience hissing [at] you if you clap [for] yourself? And Folly alone makes this possible.” Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*.

“To mark the launch of McKenzie Wark’s new book *The Spectacle of Disintegration*, Verso Books have offered Rhizome readers in the UK a chance to win a 3D printed Guy Debord action figure.” (Rhizome.org, 17 May 2013)

It seems to us that a response is necessary to this impudent and silly provocation. Silence on the part of people like us – who have spent many years and a great deal of effort trying to understand, enrich and act in accordance with what remains vital and relevant in the situationist critique of spectacular society – would only allow those unfamiliar with, newly informed of or hostile to the legacy of Guy Debord and the other members of the Situationist International to think that impudent and silly provocateurs such as McKenzie Wark are the only ones who are interested in this legacy today.

But what kind of response is called for in this instance? Let’s look at two of them: one might respond seriously, and denounce it sincerely and violently; or one might respond facetiously, and pretend not to be outraged by it (one might even pretend to find it amusing). There are advantages to both approaches: the first would have the merit of showing that not everyone in this world is a silly twat who thinks that life is but a joke; while the second would have the merit of being easier on the writer (there are so many outrages these days and it can be hard to be outraged by all of them all the time). And of course there are disadvantages to each of these approaches: the first one carries the risks of being dismissed as evidence that one doesn’t “have a sense of humor” or that one sees oneself as the exclusive holder of the “the truth” about Debord and the situs, and thus a kind of authoritarian; while the second one might very well encourage the perpetration of other, even more impudent and silly provocations.

So we have chosen a response that allows us to both laugh and tell the truth about this stunted publicity for Wark’s newest book. *The class-consciousness of our era has made sufficient progress to demand, using its own means, an accounting from the pseudo-specialists of its history who continue to eke out a living by exploiting its practice.*

[signed]

Brendan Boehning (Danish Society for Comparative Vandalism, Denmark)

Bill Brown (NOT BORED! USA)

Thomas Evans (Thenameofthisfanzineiscensored, USA)

Anthony Hayes (Notes From the Sinister Quarter, Australia)

Alastair Hemmens (Marblepunk, England)

Grant McDonagh (Ultrazine, New Zealand)

All six of the co-signers of “Stunted Publicity” went on to issue other statements concerning Wark. We produced three of them, all in May 2013. The first one was titled “Non Serviam”; the third “Five Major Omissions and Thirty-Four Factual Errors in McKenzie Wark’s *The Spectacle of Disintegration*.” (Because these statements are relatively long, both of them have been reproduced in the “Essays” section of this issue.) The second statement we issued was titled “Is McKenzie Wark a Plagiarist?” Because it was short, it is reproduced below. (Note that we sent copies of our second and third statements to Verso Books; we presumed Wark’s publisher would be interested in what they had to say.)

Below the reader will, perhaps, find three very good reasons to answer, “Yes, McKenzie Wark is a plagiarist, and you’ve caught him red-handed.” The first image shows a screen grab [*not reproduced here*] of our translation of the interview that Julian Coupat gave to *Le Monde* on 25 May 2009. (We have highlighted a single passage in this interview in yellow.) Note that we translated this interview from the French and put it on our website two days later, that is to say on 27 May 2009. *Both at the time and today, it is the only English translation of this interview available on-line.*

The second image shows a scan [*not reproduced here*] of page 144 in Wark’s newest book, *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages Out of the 20th Century* (Verso Books). We have circled in pencil a single passage that bears an uncanny similarity to our translation. Note well that this passage, as well as two other quotes attributed to Julian Coupat (see below), are not footnoted. Nor is any source given for these quotes, i.e., that they come from Coupat’s interview with *Le Monde*. This is quite anomalous: *every other quotation in Wark’s book is properly referenced.*

For the reader’s ease, we have juxtaposed our translation with the passages that appear on p. 144 of Wark’s book.

Our translation (#1):

“Anti-terrorism, contrary to what the term itself insinuates, is not a means of fighting against terrorism, but is the method by which one positively produces the political enemy as terrorist.”

Wark’s unattributed quotation (#1):

“Anti-terrorism,” Coupat writes, “contrary to what the term insinuates, is not a means of fighting against terrorism, it is the means by which it positively produces the political enemy as terrorist.”

Our translation (#2):

“Unfortunately, I am not the author of *The Coming Insurrection*, and this whole affair will end up convincing us of the essentially repressive [*policiere*] character of the author’s function.”

Wark’s unattributed quotation (#2):

Coupat declares that “unfortunately, I am not the author of *The Coming Insurrection*, and the whole affair will end up convincing us of the essentially policing role of the author-function.”

Our translation (#3):

“In French memory, one hasn’t seen power become fearful of a book for a very long time.”

Wark’s unattributed quotation (#3):

He also notes that “In France one can’t remember power becoming so fearful of a book in a long time.”

It is easy to see what Wark seems to have done here. By his own admission, “my French is terrible.”

“I learnt to read French by reading these texts. I just taught myself. And my French is terrible. I make no claims to be a scholar of the language or anything like that whatsoever.” (Interview with Rhizome.org dated 7 May 2013).

Note as well what Wark says in this same interview.

“One of the reasons I like to teach the SI is that all the texts are free in translation on the Internet. It’s everywhere and done by amateurs, but done lovingly.”

It looks like Wark, knowing full well that *plagiarism* would not be considered acceptable by Verso Books, changed *a single word* in each of the three instances (even though it produced bad English, such as the lack of a proper conjunction in the first passage [the repetition of “it is”] and “the essentially policing role of the author-function”), and thus – by way of *a technicality* – could not be accused and proven to be guilty of plagiarism. But an absence of guilt due to a technicality is *not* innocence: indeed, the *tiny* changes it seems that he introduced into our translation only proves his awareness of his guilt.

Why couldn’t he simply have used our translation and given us proper attribution?

5. Ryan M. Rogers (May 2013)

We're not sure exactly when (January 2013, perhaps), we were among the recipients of an email from a group that published a blog and a journal called "Letters of Public Terror." Ostensibly an invitation to view this group's work, this email was extremely arrogant and dismissive of the very people to whom it was addressed. For some odd reason, instead of ignoring it, we took the time to read all of the materials that this group had produced and then sent back a critique of their efforts. Among our criticisms were the facts that the writers of these essays were clear about what they hated, but mentioned nothing that they either liked or loved; that the texts were badly written and full of typographical errors; and that the same arrogance and self-importance of the group's email appeared in those badly-written and typo-filled texts.

There were responses. At first, we were insulted and dismissed. Then, some time later, we received an email that apologized for these insults and dismissals; that explained that we were sent the original email by mistake; and that praised our efforts. It's too bad we didn't save that email, because it was a really thorough and, all told, highly merited self-critique. No matter. In March 2013, one of the members of this alleged group – a certain Ryan M. Rogers – wrote a long and very favorable review of the *NOT BORED! Anthology*, which he'd purchased on his own. (Note: this review is reproduced else in this issue.)

Curious as to what type of fellow this Ryan M. Rogers was, in March 2013, I traveled up to Albany, NY, to meet him. Though I immediately disliked him – he seemed to be unable to look me in the eye for any length of time – I spent the afternoon with him. (What else could I do? I'd traveled 3 hours to get there.) We had something to eat, walked around downtown Albany and visited a park. After a few hours, I made my departure, deciding on the way home that I hadn't wasted my time because the trip itself was pleasant: springtime was just beginning, and a lot of plants and trees were beginning to bloom.

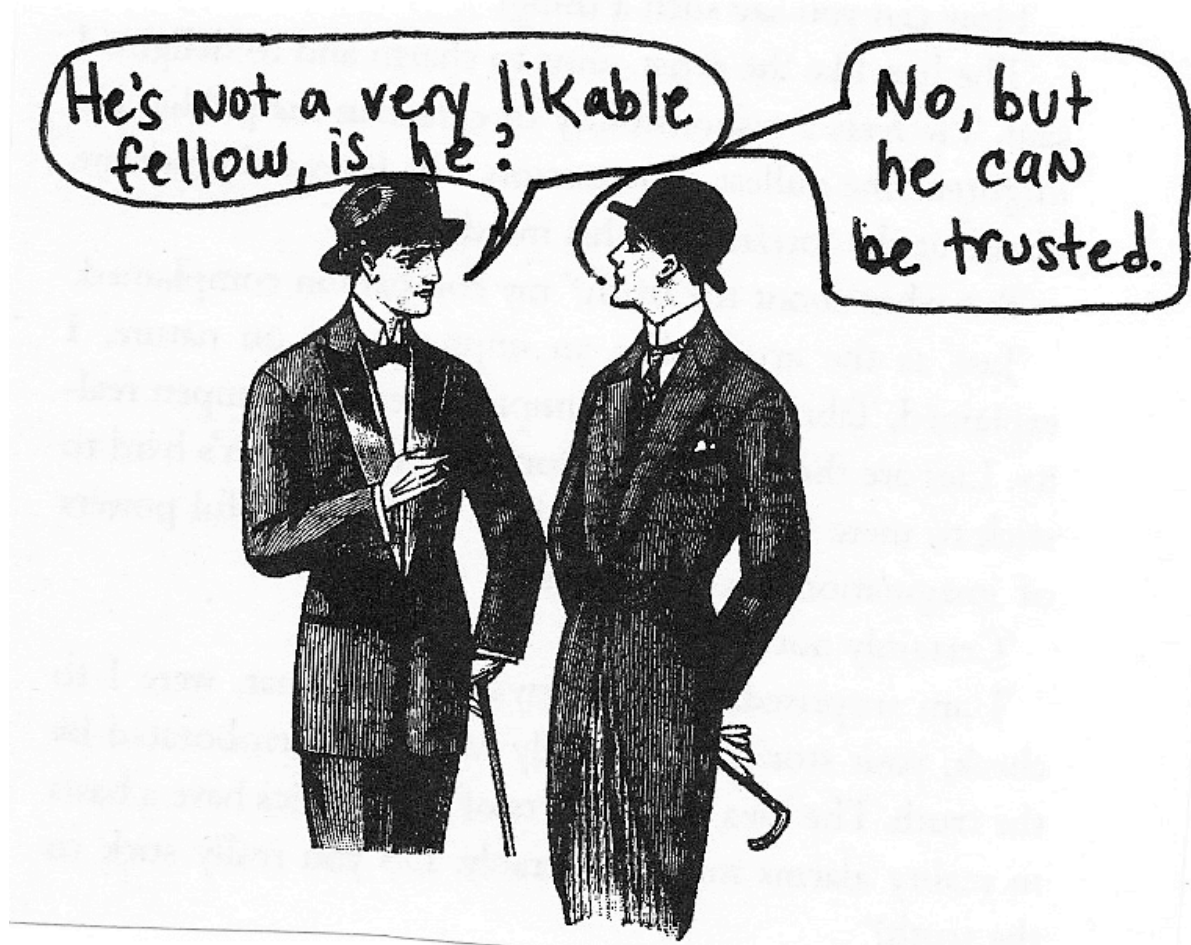
During my conversations with Ryan M. Rogers, I happened to mention that I was contacted by an ex-member of his group, an even younger fellow (Mr. Rogers is only 21 years old) by the name of Thomas Evans, who'd sent me a link to his blog. Though Rogers was rather nonchalant about Evans during our brief discussion of him, I found, upon my return home, that Rogers had seized upon what I'd said (and the "authority" that was confirmed upon him by our meeting) to issue a really violent denunciation of his former colleague. This denunciation was rather like Marc Lenot's response to my critical footnotes: there was a wide and very noticeable split between the charges being leveled against Evans and the actual behavior that was allegedly the cause and justification for those charges. But in Rogers' case it was much worse, because he presumed that, simply because he had "broken" with Evans, I would, of course, follow suit. I wrote a carefully worded response that, in addition to disabusing Rogers of such an absurd notion, made clear my observation that he was rather enamored of hostility and violent denunciation: he didn't seem to know how to express himself any other way. All I got back was more hostility and denunciations, this time – or, rather, once again – of me. I didn't bother to respond.

Quite significantly, I think, Rogers surfaced again during the campaign against McKenzie Wark. (As the reader will see, Thomas Evans, when informed of "Stunted Publicity," was happy to sign his name to it and post it to his blog.) Rogers' response was to issue two statements (both badly written and full of typos) that condemned me and made excuses for Wark's "Guy Debord Action Figure." Rather imprudently, he posted links to these statements on a public website –

one other than his blog – where he was completely and utterly crushed. (If the reader is interested, she can visit <http://anarchistnews.org/content/mckenzie-warks-stunted-publicity> and witness the carnage for herself.) One set of comments posted in answer to Rogers' diatribes says it all:

back when he thought that sucking NOT BORED!'s dick was the way to get ahead in the world of revolutionary politics – that was only two months ago – he wrote a glowing review of the NOT BORED! Anthology.

the simple truth that his current vitriol against NOT BORED! is a simple case of "sour grapes" (Denial of the desirability of something after one has found out that it cannot be reached or acquired: The loser's scorn for the award is pure sour grapes.)



Essays

1. “Guy Debord in 2009: Spinning or Laughing” (Dec 2009)

Guy Debord wasn't buried. Following his wishes, his remains were cremated and scattered into the wind over a beloved Quay in Paris. The gesture couldn't be clearer: no place to come to worship his memory, to mark significant anniversaries or to leave tokens of appreciation. A refusal of eternity and “posterity”; an emphatic embrace of the ephemeral and disappearance(s). And so one can't say “Guy Debord is probably spinning in his grave” or “Guy Debord is probably laughing in his grave.” But the question can still be raised. Fifteen years after he committed suicide at the age of 62: is Guy Debord, now in heaven or hell, spinning or laughing?

He's gotta be doing *something*, something other than resting peacefully. He has not been forgotten; he has not achieved oblivion. On the one hand, his works continue to inspire and motivate people: his 1950s-era notions and practices of psychogeography and urban drifting (*la dérive*) continue to be popular, especially among urban theorists and contemporary performance artists; his chess-like cabinet game from 1977 (aka *Kriegspiel* or *The Game of War*) has become fairly popular among programmers and players of digital games in England and the USA; and his critique of the society of the spectacle (aka “the Spectacle”) continues to be adopted as a starting point by young revolutionaries in France (cf. *Tiqqun* and *The Coming Insurrection*).

On the other hand, Debord's works have been repackaged and sold by his second wife, Alice Becker-Ho. Over the course of the last 15 years, “Ms Debord” has chosen to distribute her late husband's films in DVD form through Gaumont, a large and well-established producer and distributor of spectacular entertainment; to publish her late husband's “complete” correspondence in abridged form through Fayard, a subsidiary of a large arms manufacturer; and to sell his complete archives to either the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) or the Beinecke Library at Yale University, whichever can come up with \$2.34 million by 2011. “Ms Debord” has also used her commercial and legal clout to either change the presentation or completely suppress the “unauthorized” usage of her late husband's works by the Radical Software Group (re: *The Game of War*) and Jean-François Martos (re: *Correspondance avec Guy Debord*), neither of which came close to actually competing with the “official” copyrighted products. Were either of these heavy-handed actions really necessary? They certainly generated a ton of negative press for Alice.

I grant that her conduct could have been (even) worse. After all, she *could* have written books or appeared in the movies or the mass media to extol the virtues of her late husband. She *could* have licensed his image for use in an advertising campaign . . . “Spectacular eyeglasses,” or some such. She hasn't, of course. Nevertheless, she *has* conducted herself like a classic recuperator. Would Guy agree? What would he think? Intriguing questions, *n'est pas*? I don't know what the answers would be, of course: I never met or corresponded with him; I am not in communication with either his ghost or his spirit; I have simply translated a bunch of his writings, especially his letters. And so, I can only make an “educated guess.”

I would say – all things considered, contrary to what others seem to think and despite what I personally might want or like – Guy Debord would have *approved of it all*, not just the “good” things (inspiring yet another generation of young people), but the “bad” (capitalist) things, as well. He would have found *no contradiction* between these two developments or, rather, he would have seen the contradiction between them *in a positive light*. His approval would of course be a matter of supporting everything that his wife and companion for the last 30 years of his life would do “in his name” – *only she knows* what his real wishes and intentions were – but also an affirmation that these would have been *the precise things that he himself would have done*, had he been alive. In short, Alice isn’t to blame for the weird repackaging of Guy Debord’s works; Guy himself is.

I say this despite the fact that Ms Debord’s recent conduct – appearing in public and hobnobbing with high-level governments officials, wealthy patrons, and literary celebrities like Phillipe Sollers so as to “raise money” for the BNF, or appearing alongside Jacqueline de Jong and allowing herself to be misidentified as a “member of the Situationist International” in the publicity for an art opening at Yale University – would have appalled her late husband, who detested celebrity and avoided celebrities, and had a mania for correcting “small” factual mistakes concerning membership in the Situationist International. She certainly would have done none of these things when he was alive. Though Guy had been litigious, he never sued a publisher of a “pirate” or copyright-infringing edition of his works. Though he allowed his works (both the new and the old ones) to be published by Gallimard, he did so provisionally, in response to a specific situation, and was ready to “jump ship” at any moment. And though he himself had created, organized and made plans for the eventual disposition of his archives, he would certainly have been mortified by the idea that the French government, in a fairly mysterious attempt to keep those archives in France, would declare them a “national treasure.” Guy detested literary prizes and would certainly have hated the *explicitly anti-May 1968 politics* of the very French government (the Sarkozy gang) that has miraculously deemed his archives to be worthy of such great distinction.

Guy Debord was a very complicated person. While he was alive, he – he and Alice, as a matter of fact – were supporters, organizers and beneficiaries of various kinds of scams. According to his own *Panegyric*, he was a thief in his youth. In the 1950s and 1960s, Debord and his first wife, Michelle Bernstein, made a little “easy” money by publishing cheap novelties (a horoscope for racehorses, a superficial novel about the depths of the “existentialist” scene, etc.). In a letter to Gianfranco Sanguinetti dated 26 October 1975, Debord referred to this kind of enterprise as “shit crushing”: crushing shit and getting money as a result. For example: claiming to the Italian government that one’s ships were destroyed during World War II and that one is therefore entitled to financial compensation. In August 1993, Debord justified the publication and sale of *Memoires* (originally produced as a gift to its recipients) in the following manner: “It was a gift, but now it must cease to be one [...] In sum, I prefer to sell my prestige and to recoup my losses with suitable liquid compensations.”

The greatest emblem of this side of Guy Debord is the cover of his post-humous book, *Des Contrats* (1995), which was designed in accordance with Debord’s own wishes. It shows “the Street Acrobat” (*Le Bateleur*), which is a card in the Marseille Tarot deck. In one of the last letters he ever wrote, Debord explains that this image is “the most mysterious and the most beautiful, in my sense of these words [...] It seems to me that this card will add, and without the duty to imply it too strongly, something that one could see as a certain mastery of manipulation, and will do so by opportunely recalling the extent of its mystery” (letter to Georges Monti). The

“mystery” of truly masterful manipulation is that it achieves its intended effects without any apparent effort, without the manipulation ever being detectable, not to mention obvious. But then, if the manipulation is indeed undetectable, how do you know it is really there? In the Tarot card: note the deceptive simplicity of the Acrobat’s movements.

Of course it isn’t quite clear *who* was being manipulated in the pages of the *Contrats*. Was it Gerard Lebovici, Debord’s patron in the 1970s and the co-signatory of his film contracts? Or was it Lebovici’s heirs, with whom Debord had broken off both commercial and personal dealings in the early 1990s? I believe it was the latter. In 1992, Editions Lebovici had been forced to turn the rights to Debord’s films over to Debord himself. Perhaps the *Contracts* book (and its Tarot-card-cover) were ways of signaling Editions Lebovici that they had been “manipulated” because they had failed to realize that, even though Debord’s films had not been screened since 1984, the texts surrounding them (the film contracts, in this case) *could be* commercially exploited.

How could someone like Debord be devoted to “the objective truth” of the dialectic and History, and committed to the practice of “transparency” by and within revolutionary organizations, and yet still be a mysterious master of manipulation? Properly answered, it seems, this question is not a matter of ethics (the rhetorical demand/condemnation “How *could* you do that!”), but a question of practicality (“How did you *do* that?”). It is, of course, tempting to break Debord’s “career” into parts, with – inevitably – the good parts coming early and the bad parts later on. With greater or lesser justification, people have said the “break” came in 1962, with “the expulsion” of “the artists” from the SI; in 1971, with the end of the SI; in 1975, with the appearance of the first-person “I” in his films; in 1984, with the murder of Gerard Lebovici; in 1988, with the publication of *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*; or in 1990, with the onset of chronic health problems. All were turning points, but “breaks”? I’m not sure.

And so let say this: during his lifetime, Guy Debord managed to juggle a lot of objects of different kinds; his genius was his ability to (attempt to) retrospectively demonstrate the consistency of his movements. *The Preface to the 4th Italian Edition of “The Society of the Spectacle”* (1979), *Considerations on the Assassination of Gerard Lebovici* (1985), *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988), *Panegyric* (1989), and *Preface to the Third French Edition of “The Society of the Spectacle”* (1992) are all true feats of intellectual acrobatics. In each case, Debord shows that there had been no contradictions, no *real* contradictions, in the sense that he had never come to a halt or been stopped en route; at every turn, he’d found a way out. The line from 1952 to 1994 was surely irregular and meandering, but it was unbroken. But what happens *after* 1994, when the line must continue (the “legacy” must be protected, the Show must go on) despite and yet because of the death of The Acrobat himself? The answer is obvious: another acrobat must be found who can “step in” and keep the acrobatic feat going.

But why does the Show *have to* go on? What would it mean for the “Debord Show” to stop? Instead of being repackaged (sold piecemeal or en bloc), his archives could be *donated* to, say, the Institute for Social Research in Amsterdam, the Beinecke Rare Books Library at Yale University or the French National Library – someplace open to the public. The Debord estate could receive the appropriate tax deductions and write-offs, *plus* whatever it might make as sole copyright holder from the sales of individual components of the archives (Debord’s films, film scripts, film contracts, essays, song lyrics, translations, books, letters, posters, audio recordings, paintings, etc.). That would be a lot of money, obviously; perhaps as much as \$2.34 million. The estate would be free to make as much money as it wished, provided that the contents of the thing(s) being sold were complete and unabridged, and that the producers/distributors of the

item(s) – the truly complete correspondence of Guy Debord, for example – were either independent or non-profit entities.

As things stand today, Alice Becker-Ho, doing as she pleases, will make a great deal of money in the coming years, perhaps much more than \$2.34 million. I do not think it too much to ask, “Where is all that money going? To what purpose(s) is it being put, other than Alice’s personal needs?” Unfortunately, unlike her late husband, “Ms Debord” doesn’t explain herself. Except for a brief notice published shortly after Guy’s suicide on 30 November 1994, she has remained silent and/or let her attorneys do her talking for her. Though the last 15 years have seen her publish several groundbreaking books about argot, she has published nothing that explains how her decisions, both individually and taken together, have been in line with those taken by Guy before 1994. Either she can’t explain or she won’t explain. Perhaps she feels no need to explain anything to anyone. Her silence might derive from the fact that she was *never* a member of the SI, even though she had known some of its members personally since 1964 and participated in the CMDO during May 1968 in France. Are the conceptual acrobatics necessary to explain, not to mention justify, Alice’s conduct over the last 15 years even possible? Could Guy himself perform such a feat? Could *anyone*?

The answers to these questions are simple, just as the actions encouraged by them are unacceptable. If someone were to *smash the glass vitrines* that contained the manuscript of Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*, steal the document, and hold it in exchange for ransom, then everything – everything “theoretical” – would become crystal clear. “Guy Debord” isn’t property that can be owned. He is a weapon, and weapons were meant to be used.

2. “The Real Split in John McHale’s Translation of *The Real Split*” (April 2012)

La Véritable Scisson dans L’Internationale: Circulaire Publique de L’Internationale Situationniste was published 40 years ago this month. It was the last “official” publication of the Situationist International, which was disbanded by one of its co-founders, Guy Debord – in consultation with Gianfranco Sanguinetti, Juvénal Quillet and others – shortly after the exclusion of René Riesel on 7 September 1971.[1] *La Véritable Scisson* was published by Editions Champ Libre, which had been launched by Gérard Lebovici in 1969 and had previously issued reprinted editions of Debord’s *La Société du Spectacle*, first published by Chastel-Buchet in 1967, and the complete run of the French section’s journal, *Internationale Situationniste*, first published (as a collection) by Van Gennep in 1971.

The six texts included in the original edition of *La Véritable Scisson* (all except one written by Debord) were composed over a five year period: the “Report to the Seventh Conference of the Situationist International” was written in July 1966; the “Declaration of 11 November 1970” was written on the date indicated in its title and co-signed by René Riesel and René Viénet; the “Communiqué from the SI Concerning Vaneigem” was written on 9 December 1970, in response to Raoul Vaneigem’s letter of resignation from the group, which was also included in the original edition of *La Véritable Scisson*; “On Our Enemies’ Decay” was written in June or July 1971; the “Notes to Serve Towards the History of the SI from 1969 to 1971” was primarily written in February or March 1971, and then updated in September 1971 to reflect the

exclusion of Riesel; and the longest and most important text in the whole volume, “Theses on the Situationist International And Its Time” was written last, between September 1971 and February 1972.[2]

Until 2003, when Pluto Press brought out John McHale’s translation of *La Véritable Scisson* under the title *The Real Split in the International*, the only available translation of this important book was the one published under the title *The Veritable Split in the International* by B. M. Piranha in 1974.[3] Though B. M. Chronos reprinted this translation twice in “revised” editions (1985 and 1990), it remained awful. The problem wasn’t that the translator, Michel Prigent, didn’t know French very well (he was in fact a native speaker of the language), but that his writing *in English* was poor. He may have clearly understood what Debord was saying in French, but he consistently failed to render it into clear, understandable English.

We are happy to report that John McHale is an excellent translator: both his knowledge of French and the quality of his writing in English are superb. This pairing of abilities sets him apart from both Michel Prigent, who is simply incompetent, and Ken Knabb, who intentionally dumbs Debord down so that allegedly stupid Americans can understand what he was saying. Better still, McHale doesn’t appear to have an ideological or personal axe to grind, which sets him apart from both Malcolm Imrie and Donald-Nicholson Smith. As a result, his translation of *The Real Split* is a real pleasure to read.

And yet, at the same time, *The Real Split* is also a real embarrassment. Rather than translate the volume that was published by the SI in 1972, McHale agreed to translate the “enlarged” edition of the book published by Librairie Arthème Fayard in 1998, four years after Debord’s death. (The “enlargement” consisted of the addition of three appendices: an excerpt from the statutes adopted by the SI in 1969 at its conference in Venice, a very short list of the détournements deployed in the “Theses on the SI and Its Time,” and an excerpt from Debord’s essay “Détournement as Negation and Prelude,” published in the third issue of *Internationale Situationniste*. Because of the date and placement of the text on détournement – 1959 and at the very end of the volume – the Fayard edition ends the book in the distant and largely irrelevant past, whereas the original edition ended in 1970, with the very recent and totally relevant past of the “Communiqué Concerning Vaneigem.”)

McHale’s choice meant that he or his publisher, Pluto Press, had to pay Fayard a sizable “translation fee,” which in turn meant that he or it had to get funding from somewhere. (Though two of the “new” appendices were originally published without copyright, and thus could have been published in translation *without paying any money to anyone*, the fact that Fayard published them together, and as appendices to its edition of the book, meant that this commercial publishing house could, at least according to bourgeois copyright law, charge whatever it wanted for the “translation rights.” As for the remaining “new” appendix, the one listing the détournements, it is so short and so incomplete – and the détournements that it acknowledges are so obvious – that it McHale himself could easily have compiled it.) In a real betrayal of both the SI and Debord, McHale and/or Pluto Press sought and received that funding from the French government (the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs). To make matters worse, McHale not only thanked the person who ended up receiving that “translation fee” from Fayard (someone named “Alice Debord”), but he also dedicated the book to her.

McHale’s “Introduction” to *The Real Split* is totally inadequate. It is only six paragraphs long, and two of those paragraphs do not even concern the subject at hand. (The second paragraph informs the reader that “a regular feature” of all twelve issues of *Internationale Situationniste* was “the pages given over to news or developments within the SI that the editorial

board wished to communicate,” but says nothing about *why* this was done or *what it might mean* to either the situationists or their readers. The fifth paragraph first speaks of the translation into English of situationist texts other than *The Real Split* over the course of “the last 30 years,” and then – quite incoherently – shifts *backwards* in time to the non-SI groups that were “already the subject of polemical debate in the pages of the SI journal itself.”)

The paragraphs that *are* about the subject at hand fare little better, and sometimes much worse. Save for the fact that McHale states that *The Real Split* was “first published by Editions Champ Libre, Paris, in 1972,” he mentions *none* of the information relayed in the first two paragraphs of this review. As a result, he fails the minimum requirement of being “chronological and biographical,” and doesn’t even broach the question of “venturing into the specifically historical aspect” (cf. Debord’s comments about Raspaud and Voyer in “On Our Enemies’ Decay”).

The first paragraph of McHale’s “Introduction” flatly informs the reader that the title of the book is a détournement of a text “written by Marx and Engels in French between January and March 1872, as part of their preparations for the Hague Congress of September which, among other things, saw the expulsions of Mikhail Bakunin and James Guillaume.” (In both the original French edition and the B. M. Piranha/B. M. Chronos translation, the book’s cover was also a détournement: a détournement of the cover used by the original printer of Marx and Engels’ text.) But that’s all: the reader is never told *why* this détournement was executed, or *what it might mean*. In the absence of such information, the reader might reasonably conclude that the split in the Situationist International was between the Marxists and the anarchists, when, of course, it wasn’t. It was in fact a split between those who, even after May 1968, remained committed to “the work of the negative” and those who preferred to remain satisfied with the “positivity” that had already been accomplished. As for the détournements of the cover and title, they were executed to ridicule “our enemies” – “whether bourgeois, bureaucrats or spectators” – who “can conceive of history only in the form of spectacular, organizational or police manipulations [...] which are those of the anti-historical period we have just left behind” (“On Our Enemies’ Decay”).

McHale’s third paragraph begins with the false and very misleading idea that “the seriousness of the crisis into which the world events of 1968 eventually plunged the SI, events that the latter had done so much to foment and whose repercussions are with us to this day, thus prompted Guy Debord as prime mover of the organization to devote an entire book to the SI and its place in history.” In point of fact – indeed, as any good reader of *The Real Split* knows – the “crisis” in the SI was diagnosed by Debord *in his text from July 1966*, that is to say, well before “the world events of 1968.” Furthermore, this “crisis” wasn’t simply provoked by “events” that took place outside the SI, but also by “events” that took place *within* it. McHale himself knows this; he goes on to list those “internal” events in his next sentence (the Venice Conference of the SI, the orientation debate of 1970, the failure of the editorial team of Beaulieu, Riesel and Viénet to produce issue #13 of *Internationale Situationniste*, the appearance of “contemplatives” within the SI, etc.). But by the time his next sentence is finished, McHale has somehow forgotten all about the “external” events. Or, rather, he introduces a separation or “split” (one that originally didn’t exist) between the “external” events that prompted Debord to write a book about the SI and the “internal” ones that, to quote McHale, “seemed indeed to indicate that the organization in its present form should be wound up.”

As if all this wasn’t enough, McHale’s third paragraph ends with the blatantly false claim that the SI was “a separate vanguard of revolutionary extremism.” As any good reader of Thesis

5 of “Theses on the SI and Its Time” knows, “The SI not only saw modern proletarian subversion coming; it came along with it [...] We did not put our ideas ‘into everybody’s minds’ by the exercise of some outside influence [...] We gave voice to the ideas that were necessarily already present in these proletarian minds, and by so doing we helped to activate these ideas.” McHale’s third paragraph also claims that “*The Real Split in the International* is important testimony to the fact that, for a number of years after 1968, proletarian subversion in the industrially advanced countries continued to make itself felt and feared,” as if Debord’s book was a mere work of journalism about the post-1968 years, when it is in fact an historical critique of the SI in the *pre*-1968 period. (The existence of this critique should cause historians of the SI’s development to question the usual or customary division of that development into an “artistic” period that lasted from 1957 to 1961, a “theoretical” or “political” period that lasted from 1962 to May-June 1968, and a third period of intense self-critique that lasted from July 1968 to 1971. It seems, instead, that the “political” period ended – and the period of self-critique began – in July 1966.)

McHale’s fourth paragraph is another incoherent mess. First it makes the false claim that *The Real Split* contains a “brilliant and incisive analysis of the new class relations and conditions in the emerging ‘postcolonial,’ post-industrial society” (it doesn’t: it remains focused on the old class relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and says nothing at all about either the “postcolonial” or the “post-industrial”). Then McHale falsely claims that the book contains a “caustic assessment of the ravages of pollution on the global environment” (it doesn’t: it speaks of pollution as a “calamity of bourgeois thought,” “the *ne plus ultra* of ideology in material form,” and “the wholly contaminated superabundance of the commodity, as well as the real, miserable dross of spectacular society’s illusory splendor”). Finally, McHale’s fourth paragraph would have its readers believe that good and proper examples of the “pro-situ” phenomenon – upon which “withering fire was also trained” by *The Real Split* – can be found, not in France nor in the era in which the SI was active, but in *England* and in the years *after* it had been dissolved. In this ahistorical non-context, McHale mentions “the pro-situ Svengali, Malcolm MacLaren” and the Angry Brigade, neither of whom were pro-situ because they, unlike the real pro-situs of which Debord speaks, were in fact (in the words of Debord’s 1966 report to the SI) committed to putting SI theories “to some, even superficial, kind of use” instead of passively contemplating these theories as mere “ideas.”

McHale’s sixth and final paragraph (it is actually a single sentence) is the perhaps the worst. Though it might be true that *The Real Split* is “essential to an understanding of the revolutionary thought that inspired May 1968,” it is both false and quite misleading to say that it is “also an indispensable guide still to all that underpins and is really at stake in the society of the spectacle.” In point of fact, *The Real Split* is perfectly useless to contemporary struggles – which have seen the radicalism of the 1960s and early 1970s quashed by the retrenchments and repressions of the 1980s, which were in turn outflanked by the radicalism of the 1990s – unless one is willing to *rewrite it* in the light of those very developments.

No one – or no one who is truly serious about destroying “all that underpins and is really at stake in the society of the spectacle” – could claim that, back in 2003 or today in 2012, the extent and intensity of proletarian subversion exceeds or even matches that of 1972. It is no longer true that, “at all levels of global society, people no longer can nor do they want to continue as before” or that “people are no longer prepared simply to put up with whatever comes their way” (Thesis 8). No one truly serious could claim that, today, “youth, workers, people of color, homosexuals, women and children [...] refuse most of the paltry results that the old organization of class society allowed people to obtain and put up with” or that “they want no

more bosses, family or State” and “are in fact taking issue with alienated labor, for what is now clearly on the agenda is the abolition of wage labor” (Thesis 12). Only fools, clowns and jesters could feign to believe – or try to get others to believe – that, today, consumers “are sick of the tawdry ‘semi-durable goods’ with which they have long been swamped” or that workers “no longer want to take on” the jobs being created and that they “no longer want to buy” the goods that are being produced (Thesis 14). Phrased another way, Debord was wrong – or was only right for a few years – when he spoke of the “obvious fact” that “capitalism has finally delivered proof that it cannot develop productive forces any further” (Thesis 14) and when he asserted that “class society can neither come to a halt nor go any further” (Thesis 18). The year 1972 or the 1970s, for that matter, did not bring the capitalist world “to the final act” (Thesis 35). It is forty years later, and capitalism is still developing its productive forces “further”; pushed to the limit, it has not accomplished its “self-destruction” (Theses 14 and 15).

In point of fact, the 1980s saw global capitalism “turn itself around while remaining under the exclusive control of the same bosses” (Thesis 14); these bosses managed to “reverse their falling rate of control over society in as few years as possible” (Thesis 13). Debord himself understood this, and that was why, in 1988, he undertook to write his *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, which in the words of *The Real Split*, showed him “rewriting theories with the help of [new] facts” (Thesis 40).

And yet there are many aspects of *The Real Split* that are startlingly relevant to today’s situation, especially where “the economy” (its autonomy from and control over society) is concerned.

The crisis of the economy, by which we mean the economic phenomenon as a whole, a crisis which has become ever more blatant in recent decades, has just crossed a qualitative threshold. Even the old form of plain economic crisis that the system had succeeded in overcoming during the same period, and in the way we know, has resurfaced as a possibility for the near future. (Thesis 14)

Because of this perpetual and deepening crisis (“the phenomenon is in no way cyclical, it is cumulative,” says Thesis 13), *illusions about revolution* and *revolutionary ideologies* persist and thrive. In the form of McKenzie Wark, Alexander Galloway and Sam Cooper, there are still “submissive intellectuals who are currently at the beginning of their careers” who “find themselves obliged to adopt the guise of moderate or part-time situationists merely to show that they are capable of understanding the latest stage of the system that employs them” (Thesis 2). In the form of Occupy Wall Street, there is still a milieu that “expresses that share of authentic modern protest which had to remain ideological, imprisoned by spectacular alienation, and informed solely of what the latter sees fit to impart” (Thesis 25), whose ranks are swelled by the type of individual “who may follow fashion to the point of extolling the image of the revolution – indeed many were favorable to something of the character of the occupations movement – and these days some of them are even minded to give the situationists their seal of approval” (Thesis 36) and who is “secretly of the opinion, even though he himself is unemployed, penniless and talentless, that contemporary society should see to it that he enjoys a fairly comfortable standard of living by sole virtue of the fact that he has proclaimed himself to be out and out revolutionary because he declared himself to be one, and an unadulterated one at that” (Thesis 38).

To combat both the capitalist spectacle and its spectacular opponents, we must return to the “negative side” of revolutionary critique. To readers of *The Real Split*, that means two things:

a rediscovery of the reality of the proletariat, and a rediscovery of the critique of capitalist time. For Debord, the proletariat is not an already-existing “class” of workers. It is, instead, a potential force: “the proletariat can only be defined historically, by what it can do and by what it can and must want” (Thesis 35). What can the proletariat do? It can, by refusing to work, shut down the entire system (and not just the universities or “Wall Street”). What can, what must the proletariat want? Not just the conversion of all capitalist enterprises into truly human ones (the destruction of exchange value and the triumph of true usefulness), but also the recovery of historical time. In the words of “On Our Enemies’ Decay,”

The revolutionary moment concentrates the entire historical potential of society as a whole into a mere three or four propositions whose gradual evolution in terms of power struggles, growth or overthrow can clearly be witnessed [...]. It is at such moments that those who regularly spend every waking hour of the day not thinking start to think in accordance with an everyday logic.

[1] For Sanguinetti, see letter dated 16 September 1971; for Quillet, see letter dated 14 December 1971; and for Riesel, see letter dated 7 September 1971.

[2] For “On Our Enemies’ Decay,” see letter dated 7 May 1971; for “Notes to Serve Towards the History of the SI from 1969 to 1971,” see letter dated 27 September 1971; and for “Theses on the Situationist International And Its Time,” see letter dated 15 February 1972.

[3] The word “Veritable” (as in “True”) is better in this context than “Real,” precisely because there are some things that, while “real,” are *not* “true.” The spectacle, for example.

3. Sanguinetti’s “The Pussy, Yesterday and Today” (Oct 2012)

Writing about women or America, if one is not a woman or a resident of America, is impossible, at least if one wants to get at the truth. If one is a man or a European (or an Asian, African or South American), one can only judge women or America by their respective appearances or by what women or Americans say about themselves. As a result, one can’t help but be wrong: appearances are deceiving and no one – not even someone who knows herself well – can speak for or be taken as truly representative of all the others of her kind.

Of course, this is not to say that men or people who don’t live in America cannot say interesting, important or truthful things about women or America. After all, both men and women are people, as are all the human inhabitants of the world’s many countries. By seizing hold of the truth about themselves as people, they can certainly grasp the truth about the humanity of women and non-Americans. But when it comes to what makes the others different, uniquely different, they will always be wrong.

This is the fundamental problem with Gianfranco Sanguinetti’s *La Chatte, Hier et Aujourd’hui* (“The Pussy, Yesterday and Today”), which was published in a bilingual edition (French and English) by Silverbridge in 2004, as part of *1724 Birth of the Cunt*, an art installation and book created by Jason Rhoades. “The Pussy” attempts to do two things simultaneously: celebrate vaginas and the way they have inspired poets (“1724” refers to the

number of synonyms for vagina in the English language, which was chosen among other languages because Jason Rhoades was an American); and denounce the suppression of these words in the name of “political correctness,” especially in America. But since Sanguinetti is neither a woman nor an American (he is an Italian man), he meets with mixed results. To be specific, he spends too little time on the first of his two projects, at which he is mostly successful; and too little time on his second one, at which he mostly fails.

“The Pussy” begins with a discussion of “the very origins of modern poetry,” which Sanguinetti locates in *Roman de la Rose* (“The Saga of the Rose”), begun in 1225 by Guillaume de Lorris and completed by Jean de Meun in 1265. “The rose is the vulva,” Sanguinetti writes, and “the text uses a multitude of different synonyms to describe it.” After showing the influence that the *Roman* had upon Dante’s poem *Il Fiore* (“The Flower”), he notes that the central metonym of the *Roman* (rose = vagina)

was contemporary, in poetry, to the Sicilian School of which Cielo d’Alcamo was a member (1250 – cf. the sonnet entitled “*Rosa fresca e aulentissima. . .*” and has endured through poets such as Ronsard (“*Mignonne, allons voir si la rose. . .*”), Pietro Aretino at the end of the Renaissance, Giorgio Baffo from Venice – considered to be “the greatest libertine poet of all time” by Apollinaire who particularly appreciated his “sublime obscenity” – and even Marcel Duchamp who signed his works *Rose Sélavy* (= Eros c’est la vie).

Here Sanguinetti isn’t simply claiming that the image of the rose, and the way it has been used to symbolize the vagina, has persisted in modern poetry for seven hundred years. I believe that he is claiming that *all* modern poetry is about the vagina or, rather, a celebration of it, which, in his words, is “the synonym of happiness and metaphor for life itself.” This sweeping claim is certainly suggested by the very beginning of his text.

In the beginning was the Word. Then men found synonyms. A total of seven hundred and twenty-four are listed here. In other words, the very first Word wasn’t “God”: it was “Vagina,” and all the other words in every language are either substitutions for or derivations from it.

But before this provocative thesis can be developed, Sanguinetti drops it and moves on to his second project. “We *should* carefully measure, and appreciate the merit of, the distance that separates Dante and Jean de Meun from contemporary hypocrisy,” he writes (emphasis added), but he doesn’t do this, no doubt because contemporary hypocrisy – especially of the American kind – is so deserving of denunciation. But it is also an easy target; perhaps too easy.

“*And the cunt?*” Sanguinetti asks. “It simply cannot be named, even though it is on everyone’s mind, because we have to be *politically correct* (...) *The word that has by far the most synonyms in all languages is also the most taboo and noticeably absent from all of the dictionaries.*” Though “all” dictionaries are guilty of this “linguistic infibulation,” it is the Americans and English – because of “their puritanical attitude” – that get the most criticism. “For a long time,” Sanguinetti notes, “they censored and banned some of the greatest writers of the twentieth century – James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and Henry Miller – precisely because of the mental cobwebs that poison and imprison the poor sexuality of those who rule over them (...) Wilhelm Reich, the famous author of *The Sexual Revolution* and *The Function of the Orgasm*,

had fled to the United States to escape the Nazis and in 1957 was left to die by the Americans in Lewisburg prison simply because of his ideas.”

There is no denying these facts, but there is also no denying the fact that America has changed – at least where its attitudes towards “the cunt” are concerned – since the 1960s. Among many possible proofs of this, I need only cite one: the existence and tremendous popularity of Eve Ensler’s play *The Vagina Monologues*, which appeared long enough ago (1996) for Sanguinetti (who wrote “The Pussy” in 2004) to have found out about it. Not only does this play reclaim “the vagina” from its confinement in Puritanism’s prison, but also its synonyms, even the word “cunt.”

Of course, the “victory” of *The Vagina Monologues* has been partial. America is a very big, very diverse country, in which many different forces are fighting for attention, respect and power. Only this past year, Representative Lisa Brown (D-West Bloomfield) was barred from speaking in the Michigan House because she offended hypocritical, religious Republican men by using the word “vagina” during a debate about abortion. But when this happened, not only did Eve Ensler join Rep. Brown (and 8 other female members of the Michigan House of Representatives) to stage a performance of *The Vagina Monologues* on the steps of the Michigan Statehouse, but public opinion strongly condemned the misogynist men who had barred her.

To Sanguinetti, America is a place dominated by “gyms, body-building, sport” and so on. Though this may have been true in the 1970s and 1980s, it is no longer true today, at a time when the numbers of obese people are growing at an alarming rate. According to current estimates, between twenty and thirty percent of all Americans (especially poor and working-class Americans) are dangerously overweight. Such people certainly do not go to the gym, build their bodies or engage in sport.

Sanguinetti is certainly right to condemn Americans for their “sexual undernourishment,” which leads them “to nourish themselves with whatever they can get their hands on, no matter how poor, criminal, altered, disgusting or indigestible it may be”; for their “ridiculous” oversensitivity to “sexual harassment” and their zeal in pursuing “zero tolerance” for it; for their “frigidity,” which “creates cruelty and a society that is as anaesthetized to the joy of orgasm as it is to pain”; and for their “insurmountable mistrust of the other and an unbelievable lack of curiosity, sustained by inexhaustible passivity and active cowardice.”

But *none* of these things truly derive from the sources that Sanguinetti cites. “Contempt, fear and simple lack of pussy are what cause the majority of their crimes and psychopathic deviances,” he writes. In capitalist society, “the repression of sexuality” – which creates an artificial scarcity or “lack of pussy” – “is therefore *necessary*, because it produces dissatisfaction, to which the market responds by offering cheap commercial images with considerable profit margins (...) The degradation of eroticism is absolutely *essential* to the promotion of an industrially producible and economically attractive substitute.”

In point of fact, what makes America the monster that it is – what distinguishes it from all the other countries in which “the repression of sexuality and the resulting dissatisfaction are extraordinarily powerful engines of consumption and production” – is *the prevalence of the sexual abuse of children*.

Though they are exceptions, the majority of the abusers are adult men, and the majority of the victims are girls. These men *do not* abuse children because they are deprived of pussy, though that is precisely how many abusers justify their crimes (“If only my wife would have sex with me, I wouldn’t need to have sex with her daughter”). These men perpetrate this abuse because, back when they themselves were children, they weren’t allowed to attain accurate

knowledge about either their own bodies or the bodies of girls, nor were they allowed to experience healthy sexual relations with their female counterparts. Like Guillaume de Lorris and Dante, these boys were raised to believe that – to quote Sanguinetti – “the cunt is (...) covered by a ‘curtain’ (the pubic hair) that hides” it; that it is “covered by a cloth” in such a way that “the sanctuary appeared not.” But of course these boys were deceived by their teachers (here “Puritanism” certainly plays a role, but so do all of the world’s patriarchal religions, which think it natural that God hid what they posit to be evil): even when a woman’s pubic hair has been shaved off, her vagina cannot be seen. It is in fact an *internal* organ, the orifice of which can only be seen when the woman spreads her legs. And when these misinformed boys grow up to be men, and *then* experience sexual repression, they – *some* of them – try to undo the damage done to them by having sex with a little girl, all the while pretending that they are still little boys, which of course they are not. Inevitably, they project or unleash their frustration, confusion and sense of betrayal onto those little girls, who are of course innocent and completely undeserving of such punishment.

And what about the victims of such crimes? *No one* of good faith can blame them if they grow up to be “feminist” women, frigid, suspicious, hostile, terrified of (further) harassment and even “guilty” of what Sanguinetti has denounced elsewhere as the “most common, the most broadly imposed and also (...) the least talked about (...) form of sexual abuse”: “being deprived of sex,” that is to say, adult women depriving adult men of sex.

And so Sanguinetti is certainly right to say the following.

Since the eruption of the free market economy in ex-Communist countries, one of the first changes to occur was that girls who previously only attached a *use-value* to their pussy [sic] quickly understood that they could also have an *exchange-value*. The principal consequence of this was the inevitable death of fantasy, spontaneity, illusion and even poetry that comes with the creation of exchange-value. Previously the gateway to infinite opportunity, the pussy tendentiously becomes no more than one raw material among many others, entering the flow of goods like a kidney for transplant, wheat, oil, an eye or a heart.

But he has missed the greater horror, which is that, in these same countries, parents – that is to say, the fathers – have flooded or perhaps even re-created the global market in child pornography with pictures of their daughters’ vaginas. This is most definitely not something that these girls decided to do: they were forced into becoming “child models.” Nor can this horror be fully or simply explained by the “eruption of the free market economy.” If such an explanation were sufficient, these men – these new pornographers – would have been satisfied with or limited themselves to photographing the cunts of their wives and girlfriends. No: they chose to pursue a form of pornography that is just as likely to earn them lengthy prison sentences and universal hatred as large profits and universal prestige. So we must search for an explanation elsewhere: in the religious fear and hatred of the body, which of course precedes the advent of capitalism and cannot be eradicated by a revolution that is simply anti-capitalist.

4. Sanguinetti's "Miroslav Tichý: Forms of Truth" (Oct 2012)

Most art critics (those who write about art in exchange for money) would probably designate the photographs made by Miroslav Tichý as *outsider art*. That is to say, Tichý – a self-taught Czech photographer who used homemade cameras and lenses to take surreptitious shots of young women and girls – was “outside” of society and thus *a creep*, someone with whom we – those “inside” – would not want to socialize or be associated, but who attracts and holds our intellectual interest because of the unexpected “beauty” of his photographs. *Who would have thought that such an ugly person could make such beautiful art?*

But in *this* society, this global society that includes both small villages in Central Europe as well as large cities in America and Western Europe, there are no “insiders,” and so there cannot be any “outsiders,” either. *Everyone* is deprived of a truly social existence by an organization that is only a vast assembly of markets and centers of production and consumption; *everyone* is alienated, isolated and separated off from everyone else. The only difference is that some people have the material means that allow them to accept, tolerate and become acclimated to such asocial conditions, while the rest do not and suffer accordingly (that is to say, doubly).

Given these facts, it would be better to say that Miroslav Tichý is *distant from us*. Born in 1926, he lived in Kyjov, a small village in the country once known as Czechoslovakia. He was poor or, at least, he did not work in the established sense of the word. He did not sell his photographs to make a living, nor did he even exhibit them. Indeed, he rarely made more than one print of each shot he took. (Later, when he became somewhat famous, he didn't attend the exhibitions of his photographs, even when they were held in Brno, just a few miles from where he lived.) He was not part of any “institution”: no church, political party or community organization could claim him as a member. He never married and never had any children. He didn't follow the news or the latest developments in the world of art.

It seems that Tichý spent all of his time – at least during a certain period of his life – by constructing cameras and lenses out of rudimentary materials, going out for meandering walks, hiding in the bushes or behind fences at playgrounds, swimming pools and public streets, watching the women and girls whom he happened to find along his way, taking black-and-white photographs of them, developing those photos in his homemade studio, framing the intentionally defective prints in homemade pasteboard mounts, decorating those mounts, drinking rum, and, no doubt, engaging in reveries, fantasies and daydreams.

But Tichý was a self-conscious artist, not an *idiot savant*. In his youth, he studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. After 1948, when the Communist Party seized control of Czechoslovakia, students such as Tichý were required to paint in the “Social Realist” style. Instead of doing so, Tichý dropped out of the Academy. He was punished by being drafted into the military, where, it appears, he was either injured or declared mentally unfit (upon his return to Kyjov, he was awarded a small disability pension).

In the 1950s, Tichý returned to painting; once again, he refused to paint in the “Social Realist” style, choosing instead to follow modernism and his own inspiration. Because he didn't do what was obligatory and engaged in what was forbidden, the bureaucrats of the Communist Party considered him to be a “dissident” (although he was never a part of any organized political movement), kept him under constant surveillance and, it appears, even institutionalized him at

times that the Party wanted to maintain a good appearance (May Day, et. al).

In the 1960s – perhaps in response to the changes in European culture brought about by the students’ movement, the “counter-culture” and revolutionary groups such as the Situationist International – Tichý decided to *look like* the creep that the authorities considered him to be. He stopped shaving and cutting his hair, and began wearing the same suit every day. He also switched from painting to photography, which he pursued obsessively until the 1980s, when he once again returned to painting and drawing.

Significantly, nothing really changed for him after 1989, despite the “Velvet Revolution.” Solitary as always, he remained distant or, rather, kept his distance from everyone and everything, but especially from the worlds of art and commerce.

Perhaps Tichý lived to such a ripe old age (he died in 2011) because he was always surprised: surprised to find such beauty in the ordinary women in his village; surprised by the power of his own responses to that beauty; and surprised that, even after years and years of engaging in his obsessive-compulsive behavior, he still found beautiful women (and/or still found women beautiful) and his responses to their beauty remained strong.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Tichý’s “voyeuristic” photographs have a powerful erotic charge. Perfectly ordinary people, not “stars” or members of the ruling class (Stalinist bureaucrats or bourgeois businesswomen), the women and girls he photographed generally did not know that he was taking their picture, and he often focused upon their curvy tits and asses. And when they *did* realize that Tichý was “out there,” photographing them, they were surprised, reproachful or undecided about what to do. Some weren’t even sure that his camera was actually a real, functioning device, and so struck poses for him. In any event, Tichý managed to photograph those reactions, and thus captured the complex interplay of watcher and watched.

It would be wrong to say that Tichý’s photographs are “pornographic” images, even though he no doubt looked at them while masturbating. Pornography, that is to say, *commercial* pornography – the specialized, spectacular product of a truly immense and ever-growing industry – never produces surprise, nor does it leave anything to the imagination. These are not the things that its consumers want or, at the very least, they are not what its producers think that the consumers of pornography want. These consumers want to see *everything*, up-close and clearly, with virtually clinical precision; and they want see every act brought to its *proper conclusion* (cum being ejaculated into or onto a woman’s body, which has long been known by the obviously capitalist phrase “the money shot”).

By contrast, Tichý’s photographs are blurry and vague, so much so that he sometimes felt compelled to use a pencil to highlight the outlines of the women and girls he desired but *could not have*. No: his photographs aren’t examples of “pornography,” but obvious instances of erotic art, and this is why they surprise us. They engage our imaginations, not our brains (what we think, what we know, and what we think we know).

In short, Tichý’s photographs collapse distance: not only the distance that separates us from him, but the distance that separates us from ourselves. Despite the limited means that he used to produce them, and his equally limited subject matter, these photographs – that is, if we allow ourselves to experience them, rather than merely “see” them – fill us with excitement, warmth, surprise and the conviction that what we are experiencing is *true*, not false or faked. We are certainly seeing the truth about Tichý himself.

As Gianfranco Sanguinetti says in his introduction to *Miroslav Tichý: Forms of Truth* (Kant, 2011), “I am not an art critic – fortunately, perhaps, for the reader, and most definitely for me.” As a matter of fact, Sanguinetti is a former member of the Situationist International, a

writer of “scandalous” texts about Italy in the 1970s, and, it would seem, an amateur (that is to say, casual) art collector. “I love this art,” he says about Tichý’s photographs, “which I have long collected for my personal pleasure.” He has also “come to know and like Miroslav Tichý well” – that is, personally – and wrote his introduction, as well as shared with the world his extensive collection of Tichý’s photographs, “simply (...) to repay the debt of acquaintance with the man and his art.” Significantly, perhaps, he repaid this “debt” while Tichý was still alive; the photographer died shortly after *Forms of Truth* was published.

Sanguinetti’s introduction, like all of his texts, is full of rich and pertinent references to and quotations from a wide variety of sources: poets (Giacomo Leopardi), art critics (Edgar Wind), critical theorists (Walter Benjamin), painters (Kandinsky), and novelists (Stendhal). A native speaker of Italian, he also knows English, Czech, and French (which is the language in which the original text was written and then translated into English by Richard Drury). As a result, his introduction, like all of his writings, is a very stimulating read.

But Sanguinetti’s introduction to *Forms of Truth* is not a work of criticism or theoretical exegesis. It is divided into nineteen numbered sections, each of which ends with a conclusion that has been reached. These conclusions are similar in form: each one begins with some variation on “In this lies,” “This is why,” or “This is the,” and includes a reference to Tichý himself or his work, which is described by or given the following attributes: strength, beauty, universality, refinement, rigor, defiant challenge, modernity, classic, scandalous, aura, originality, eloquence, painted, erotic art, poetic art, freedom, excellence and strength.

Prompted by Sanguinetti’s comments about poetry – or, rather, about the absence of poetry from “the general art market” and “most of the other arts” – we can say that his introduction is a kind of prose poem, but a unique and original one. After a while, it begins to sing in our ears.

5. “What Rachel Kushner Knows About Guy Debord” (Jan 2013)

“Film is such an important part of my life that, um, it’s hard to chose just one favorite film, um, maybe I would reframe and say a movie I’m thinking about a lot right now is by the French filmmaker, artist and kind of provocateur, ah, Guy Debord. He made a film in 1978. It was his last film and it’s called *In girum imus nocte consumimur igni*, which is a Latin palindrome that means “we turn in the night in a circle of fire,” and um, I’m very, uh, I’m – I find the title totally magnetic and amazing, and the film itself, um, is his very best film. It’s an incredible film. It includes, um, a lot of found footage that he edits together, interspersed with footage that he shot riding around in a vaporetto in the Venice canals, and the film offsets themes of water with themes of fire, and water is time and the wisdom of time, and fire is the bursting of change and by that he really means revolutionary change, and so it’s this idea of fire and water, and change and stasis, and at the end of the film he says that water always puts out the fire of change and, um, it’s a very rich film and its full of various thematic elements that I’m in the process of, uh, grand theft for my next novel.”

In only one minute and fifty seconds, Rachel Kushner (speaking in a video uploaded on 30 July 2009 by her publisher, Simon & Schuster, which also has placed it on the page that advertizes her latest novel) racks up an impressive number of mistakes about Guy Debord and his film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*. She gets the title wrong in both languages: she drops the word “et” out of the Latin; and she mistranslates the phrase into English (it actually means “we turn round in the night and are consumed by fire”: she imagines people turning around a fire instead of being consumed by it!). The footage that was not shot by Debord himself was not “found footage,” which implies snippets from generic or non-artistic works, but extended excerpts from famous films that he specifically requested. (If fact, not all the footage he requested could be obtained.) Finally, it is true that (1) there are shots of flowing waters and raging fires in the film, and (2) Debord himself – in a note written on 22 December 1977– did say the following:

All of the film (with the help of the images, but also in the text of the “commentary”) is built on the theme of water. Thus, one cites in it the poets of the flow of everything (Li Po, Omar Khayyam, Heraclitus, Bossuet, Shelley?), who all have spoken of water: it is time.

Secondarily, there is the theme of fire: the flash of the instant: it is the revolution, Saint-Germain-des-Pres, youth, love, negation in the night, the Devil, the battles and the “uncompleted enterprises” in which men go to die, dazzled as “voyagers who pass”; and the desire in this night of the world (“nocte consumimur igni”).

But the water of pent-up time carries away the fire and extinguishes it. Thus, the brilliant youth of Saint-Germain-des-Pres, the fire of the assault of the burning “Light Brigade” that drowned in the coursing water of the century when it advanced “under the cannon of time”. . . .

But this note was *only one* of several descriptions that Debord made of his film, which is certainly *not* a metaphysical or merely “poetic” work. In the words of a letter to Gerard Lebovici (the film’s producer) dated 21 July 1977, Debord called *In girum* “a veritable outrage to the public, and perhaps the only one that it has lacked so far, despite deserving it.” What kind of outrage? In an undated note that was never published during Debord’s lifetime, but, like the one relied upon by Ms. Kushner, was included in the documentation that accompanied the 2005 release of all six of his films as a boxed set of DVDs, he writes that *In girum* must have, “especially if it is rather ‘lyrical-subjective,’”

a very violently critical-political side (very subversive, shocking). For example: on the horror of current society, its shameful poverty (living conditions, food, illusions and neuroses), on the executives, their declarations, their thought (something like “On the Poverty of the Executive Milieu,” in the genre of the notes by Alice [Becker-Ho]...).

The passage can be this: how the time that passes has led us to another world: the “good” and “bad” of this:

- 1) the good: I transmit to my epoch the malady of subversion;
- 2) the bad: how this world is disfigured (giving this as reason for our critique).

For example, to show: this is no longer a question of aesthetics.

The experts critique or reassure.

But their illusions: what they accept, believe, love. . . .

The spectators (proletarians in this, but ashamed) don't even have a past.

This note allows us to see how much escapes shallow and placid Ms. Kushner, for whom *In girum* is (and only is) “a question of aesthetics”: the heated and implacable condemnation of both this society and people (“experts”) such as Ms. Kushner herself; the insistence on and joy taken in the fact that “the fire” always returns; and the hope that, one day, a “fire” will break out that will be so hot and extensive that no amount of water will ever be able to extinguish it.

And so a question arises. Why do people like Ms. Kushner claim to “accept, believe [and] love” Debord’s works, despite his explicit hatred of them? The answer is simple: because there is no one to dissuade them from doing so. Debord himself is dead; his widow has done everything she can to encourage people such as Ms. Kushner to say whatever they like; and his former friends refuse to speak up in his defense. And so it falls to people such as ourselves – who never knew Debord nor aspire to be famous authors, and so have nothing to gain or lose by speaking up – to denounce those who would “turn” him (a revolutionary) into a mere filmmaker, artist and provocateur.

6. “Non Serviam” (May 2013)

Omne enim spectaculum sine concussione spiritus non est. Tertullian

McKenzie Wark is full of shit. Confronted with a denunciation of him,[1] he will exclaim, “Oh, have some wit or imagination for once.” But then, a minute later, he will say of the title of that same denunciation, “That’s a good one” and call out to his admirers, like he was a trained parrot, “Let’s all retweet that!” He will dismiss the text of such a denunciation as “pro-situ posturing,” but will then claim that it “warms my heart that somebody still cares, and holds debordiana sacred. Keepers of the flame, etc.”[2] “Yes i respect the fact that there’s people vigilant about the memory of all things Situationist.”[3]

Wark is so full of shit that he linked to our denunciation of him (pretending that it is a “petition” of some sort) and then said, in response to his own posting of it, “I’d sign it myself. Agree with the sentiments.” He linked to another article that denounces him and crowed, “The pro-situ crowd are annoyed. What makes them think i disagree with any of this?” In fact, “yes, i quite agree with many of their sentiments.”[4]

In other words, though he makes his money as a professor of liberal arts, Wark is a politician: we will say anything to get elected, and will say anything to stay in office. What

office has he been elected to? He is the representative of “situationism,” which of course only exists in the minds of people who either know nothing about or hate the situationists. Wark both represents “situationism” to his students and readers and, when he goes abroad, he represents American “situationism.” Having written three books on the subject, he is a specialist in the field, despite or precisely because the situationists *detested* specialists.[5]

Since he knows nothing about and hates the situationists, he has published his books through commercial publishing houses that, in addition to publishing his books, publish all kinds of trash, but chiefly Leftist (or even Maoist and Trotskyite) bullshit. And, as we have already seen, he uses the most degraded forms of spectacular communication to publicize those books,[6] makes alternatively arrogantly dismissive and “candid” comments about his critics, and basks in the glow of his admirers, sycophants and fellow politicians.

His message is simple. To conclude “Who dares to dodge Google’s information tax?” a self-serving opinion piece published in the 22 May 2013 issue of *The Guardian*, he says,

It’s 45 years since the failure of May ‘68, that last attempt to rock the old kind of state. Afterwards the situationists, who gave us the concept of the spectacle, disbanded.[7] But they did not go silent. They pioneered ways of discreetly carving out spaces where other codes apply, protected by cryptic passwords. Perhaps some of their subtle arts might work within the belly of this new digital beast, so that we might live within it, but not give it our undivided attention.

The only assertion in these five sentences that isn’t bullshit is the fact that forty-five years have elapsed since “May ‘68,” that is to say, since France was *paralyzed by the first general wildcat strike in history*. (If that is a “failure,” then I’d like to see the capitalist world suffer from many more of them.) In the decade after May ‘68, several other European States were either shaken to their foundations or *completely swept away* by revolutionary movements: Italy; Greece; Portugal; and Spain. Wark’s chronology suggests the situationists must have disbanded soon after May ‘68: later that year, in 1969 or in 1970. But the Situationist International continued until 1972 – and then, except for the paranoid fantasies of the Italian political police, who managed to discern the continued existence of the SI into the late 1970s, the SI did in fact “go silent.” Ex-members of the organization continued to speak and act, but the SI itself did not make a sound: there were no anthologies, no self-congratulatory retrospectives, nothing. According to both *The Veritable Split in the International* and recent statements made to me by Gianfranco Sanguinetti, that was the whole point of the group’s dissolution, which came after almost three years of silence: to disappear, to become obscure, to prevent people *just like McKenzie Wark* from having the good ol’ SI to depend upon, year after year.

But the key point is this: despite the assertion by Wark (and so many other apologists for capitalism), it is *impossible* to “live within it.” All one can do in a capitalist society, especially capitalism in its spectacular stage, is *survive*. And this is precisely why people like Wark – and all those who are attached to the meager privileges and rewards that this society has given them in exchange for their services as prostitutes, apologists and representatives[8] – must do everything they can to recuperate, denigrate or even destroy Guy Debord.

On the one hand, Debord was one of the fiercest and most lucid critics of the intellectual, spiritual, psychological and moral bankruptcy of the people who try to avert their eyes from this society’s most objectionable aspects (in Wark’s words: “not give it our undivided attention”). Without Debord, that is to say, without the *bad conscience* that Debord represents for such

people, they can get on with the business of enjoying their survival.

On the other hand, Debord was a great believer in the desirability and possibility of social revolution. Indeed, the mission of both Debord as a person and the Situationist International as an organization was *to put revolution back on the agenda*. But politicians like Wark do not want revolution to *ever* be on the agenda: it's not that he believes that revolution is impossible; it's the fact that revolutions put politicians out of work.[9] This explains why Wark wants people to believe that May '68 was a "failure," when it was actually a near-success, and it also explains why he is so comfortable with extolling "Occupy Wall Street," an explicitly reformist movement that famously made no demands because the only demand to be made today is for revolution.

What Wark stands for, what Wark accomplishes, is a *regression* in modern revolutionary theory. In an interview published on 24 May 2013 with *Furtherfield*, a spectacular blog about "Arts, Technology and Social Change," Wark says,

when one reads the *Society of the Spectacle*, it is the second-to-last chapter that is the one that counts. The second-to-last chapter is about *détournement*, it's about the way that you appropriate and use the whole of poetry and technology as always and already belonging to all of us. You act on that basis, self-consciously. That's the struggle, that's the strategy [...] To me, the key to Debord is *détournement*. It's all about Lautreamont, not Marx. Debord absorbs all these Marxist elements into this avant-garde practice of *détournement*.

This is truly what marks Wark as a recuperator: his *inversion* of Debord's real achievement, which was to absorb the avant-garde practice of *détournement* into revolutionary Marxism. In Wark's neutering of Debord, revolutionary Marxism and the fourth (and longest) chapter in *Spectacle* ("The Proletariat as Subject and Representation") are systematically erased. Without these truly central elements, all that remains of the situationist project are the masturbatory efforts of individual artists; we remain deprived of what was needed in 1967 and still need today: effective collective action. "For the society of the spectacle to be effectively destroyed," Debord says in Thesis 203, "one must have men [and women] putting a practical force into action. A critical theory of the spectacle is only true if it joins forces with the practical movement of negation within society." And if it doesn't join forces with the practical movement of negation within society, that is to say, with *revolutionary workers*, then it is false and, like all ideologies, the enemy of revolutionary theory.

For these reasons, one can only be appalled by some self-avowed anarchists, who are happy to pretend to find Wark's bullshit amusing and to join him in dismissing the "pro-situs" as out of date. Though "pro-situs" (they are actually *post-situs*, but this is like explaining Shakespeare to a monkey) may be irascible and quarrelsome, they still believe that revolution – not reformism – is the order of the day. The only conclusion one can derive from the behavior of smug hipsters such as Aragorn Bang (snickering about the "pro-situs" within the confines of Facebook and posting our declaration to anarchistnews.org website with the tag "LOL" and "drama") is that they, too, are not revolutionaries. For them, "anarchism" is what "postmodernism" is for Wark: a way of showing that, at the very least, they are not pro-Obama social democrats. But they might as well be: they share with them the laughable conceit that the only way to "change" the system is to "work within it," using digital technology, naturally.

For the last several years, I have contented myself with writing and publishing short denunciations of this faker, this whore, this preening fop – someone for whom Guy Debord and

the other situationists (or any other true revolutionary) would have had nothing but contempt. And if Michele Bernstein and Jacqueline de Jong are willing to share a podium with him, and if other ex-situationists were willing to help him put together his most recent book, this simply shows that, despite or precisely because of their accomplishments *in the past*, they have become what the Surrealists had become in the 1950s, when the SI first started: obstacles in the way of the revolutionaries of *today*.

No more needs to be said. “Some actual critical thought” on his production of a figurine of Guy Debord “would be quite welcome,” he “tweeted” on 21 May 2013. He wants something “other than spectacle! recuperation! everything!”[10] But, unfortunately for us, that’s all that Wark and his books and his little statue of Debord are: no actual critical thought, just spectacle and recuperation. And so all he’s going to get from me is scorn and insults. I refuse to serve.

[1] “Stunted Publicity,” written by me and signed by four other situationist-inspired people.

[2] All quotes from Wark’s Twitter feed 19-22 May 2013.

[3] Wark’s Twitter feed 24 May 2013.

[4] All quotes from Wark’s Facebook page 22 May 2013.

[5] “It is only specialists, whose individual power depends on the power of a whole society of specialization, who have abandoned the *critical* truth of their various disciplines in order to enjoy the more positive wages of their *function*.” (*Internationale Situationniste*, #7, 1963).

[6] Let me be clear about this, because one of Wark’s most cynical defenses is to point to other people’s use of the Internet and say “See? It’s all spectacle. There is no avoiding the spectacle.” With a single exception, all of the books I have published have been self-published (the exception was published by a very small independent press). I would not have it any other way, and have in fact turned down publishing contracts offered by bourgeois publishers. I do not have a Twitter feed nor a Facebook account in my name. Though I run this website, it is far from technologically sophisticated: I handcode every entry myself. And, once again, I would not have it any other way, and I have turned down *dozens* of self-interested offers to have this site spectacularized.

[7] In the original article, the word “situationist” carried a hypertext link that brought the reader to the on-line archives of situationist materials maintained by “Libcom,” an ultra-Leftist website. Though its administrators, members and viewers don’t seem at all interested in adding new material (which it desperately needs), Libcom’s archive is still technically active. And so it made a better choice for a hypertext link than the ones provided by either Wark himself or the person who edited the interview with him that was published in that well known organ of radical thinking, *The New Statesman*, which sent its readers to two sites that have not been updated *in ten years*.

[8] “Well, I am obviously not concerned with being inconsistent because not only am I a tenured professor, I was also associate dean for two years, so I am about as institutional as you can get, even if at that strangely marginal place that is the New School for Social Research.” McKenzie Wark, interviewed 1 September 2011 by *The New Significance*.

[9] *Note added 27 May 2013*: with respect to what he calls “the failed revolution of 1968 and 1969 in France and Italy” (note that there is only one, and it existed, self-same and identical, in two very different countries), Wark states, “Whether such a revolution was possible or even desirable at that moment is a question best left aside” (*The Spectacle of Disintegration*, p. 15). But the simple fact of the matter is that those who speak of the situationists without explicitly mentioning revolution have a corpse in their mouths.

[10] *Note added 27 May 2013*: confirming my image of him as a trained parrot, Wark is still repeating this refrain: “We’d all like to see some critical thought on #3Debord [his Debord figurine], rather than the old posturing” (Tweet @Mark_Kauri and @InfoshopDotOrg dated 27 May 2013). He just doesn’t understand or refuses to understand that he is getting precisely what he deserves.

7. “Five Major Omissions and Thirty-Four Factual Errors in McKenzie Wark’s *The Spectacle of Disintegration*” (May 2013)

McKenzie Wark: “I’m happy to be corrected, but usually its [*sic*] differences of interpretation” (tweet @dillon_votaw, 28 May 2013).

Omissions

Despite its broad and apparently inclusive title (“Situationist Passages Out of the 20th Century”), there are several very important events or facts left out of it.

1. In 1978, Guy Debord wrote a preface to the fourth Italian edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*. Published as a short book by Champ Libre, this was Debord’s first and only major statement about Italy. It is not mentioned even once here.
2. In 1984, in response to the calumnies of the French press where the murder of Gérard Lebovici was concerned, Debord withdrew all of his films from distribution everywhere in the world. This withdrawal remained in effect up to and well after Debord’s suicide in 1994. These facts are not mentioned.
3. In 1988, Debord published *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, a major work that, except for three passing references, is not discussed.
4. In 1999, Alice Becker-Ho – who was never a member of the SI and whose conduct since her husband’s death has been distinctly un- or even anti-situationist, and yet is included in this book – used the French “justice system” to suppress Jean-Francois Martos’ edition of the letters he exchanged with Debord, and in 2006, she threatened legal action against an NYU professor for allegedly infringing on the copyright foe Debord’s *Game of War*, aka *Kriegspiel*. She was roundly and universally criticized for these recourses to bourgeois “justice.” Neither event is mentioned here.
5. In 1999, Alice Becker-Ho, working in tandem with Fayard, began publishing Debord’s letters. Though Debord (and Lebovici) had always taken care to publish his letters along with the ones

that were sent to him (cf. both volumes of *Champ Libre Correspondance*, 1978 and 1981), none of the volumes in the series *Guy Debord Correspondance* included a single one of the letters sent to Debord, which thus destroyed the context of the letters that Debord sent out. Once again, none of this is mentioned.

Factual errors

Only thirty-four errors (on average, one every seven pages)? No doubt there would have been many more, were it not for the facts that Chapters 3, 4 and 5 primarily concern French paintings of the 19th century (and only indirectly concern the situationists), and Chapters 6, 7 and 8 primarily concern Charles Fourier (and, once again, only indirectly concern the situationists).

p. 13: “The period from 1961 to 1972 is considered the political phase”

There was a third phase, 1968 to 1972, the existence of which is recognized by every other historian of the SI, but especially Debord himself. This third phase is different from the second phase because, as a result of May 1968, the SI was rather suddenly “discovered” by all the people who had previously ignored its existence. Furthermore, the composition of the SI in its third phase was qualitatively different than it was in its second (énrages, anarchists, etc), and the purpose of the SI in its third phase was different (no longer to put revolution back on the agenda, but to spread and intensify it).

p. 20: “Debord, like Retz and so many others, failed to transform the world of his own time”

Before 1968, no one believed a massive revolt in an advanced Western nation was possible (cf. Lefebvre, Adorno, Marcuse); afterwards, revolt suddenly seemed to be everywhere. The SI succeeded in its historical mission to put revolution back on the agenda, from which it had been missing since the 1930s.

p. 44: “What Debord calls the concentrated spectacle has its roots in David and Delacroix; the diffuse spectacle arises out of the contradictory materials Manet and Pissarro explore.”

According to Debord’s *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, the concentrated spectacle was created by the Stalinists and Nazis in the 1930s; the diffuse spectacle was created by the USA in the 1940s and early 1950s.

p. 49: “Raoul Vaneigem and Guy Debord met in 1960”

As demonstrated by the letter from Debord to Vaneigem dated 31 January 1961, the two men didn’t meet until 1961.

p. 50: “All of which [Vaneigem’s ideas about May ‘68] was finally too much for Debord and some of the others in the Situationist International”

As reported by Debord in the “Communiqué Concerning Vaneigem,” the hostility to Vaneigem within the SI after May 1968, and Vaneigem’s decision to resign in 1970, concerned the other members’ objections to his “contemplative” attitude towards the SI itself and his inaction within it.

p. 54: “While Debord and Vaneigem were fellow travelers in their Situationist wanderings, in the end they belong to different camps.”

The difference between Debord and the other situationists (Riesel, Viénet, Sanguinetti, et al) and the “Vaneigemists” was not based on ideology, but on the latter’s contemplative attitude and absence of activity within the SI.

p. 55: “When they turned away from Stalinism, Breton and friends were left with nowhere to go except the rewriting of everyday alienation as cosmic mental theater.”

In 1951, Breton explicitly embraced anarchism.

p. 76 “come in their own hands, making an offering, if only they knew, to Barbelo, reigning Goddess of one of Vaneigem’s favorite heresies.”

The cult of Barbelo were not simply men [sic] who masturbated and ejaculated in their own hands. They believed that Barbelo was a sperm-eating Goddess, and so the Barbelites ate their cum – and menstrual blood, too. Furthermore, Vaneigem has no real interest in the Barbelites, who still believed in a divine being. In fact, his favorite “heresy” was that of Simon of Samaria.

p. 79. “[After 1968,] wage labor was bought off in the usual fashion, with more of the same, at least while it retained the power to demand it.”

Both before and after May “68, “wage labor” (workers in capitalist countries) could not be “bought off” with modest or even large salary increases: it was only people like Adorno, Lefebvre and Marcuse (cf. p. 20 above) who believed so. It was this precise refusal to be “bought off” that led the workers to leave the unions, go out on wildcat strikes, engage in sabotage, etc. etc.

p. 88: “The slogan “those who make the revolution by halves dig their own graves” is not mere overblown sixties rhetoric. It is quite literally true.”

This slogan was coined by Saint Just, and only repeated by the SI in the 1960s.

p. 89: “Viénet had been to China, had seen the Cultural Revolution begin, and was well aware of the costs of failed revolutions.”

The Cultural Revolution was not a “revolution”; it was a counter-revolution, that is to say, an attempt to hold on to power despite the refusal of the Chinese

working classes to be ruled by the Communist bureaucracy.

p. 106: “Debord admitted to using false names and documents in Italy in the seventies, but he had his reasons.”

Cf. letter to Martos dated 27 July 1988.

“The malevolence of *Le Monde* wants to console itself by starting a rumor about my “diverse pseudonyms, not all identified.” The paper immediately “proves” this rumor by indicating that here [in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*] I have adopted “for once [my] name as a pseudonym” (my emphasis). I said so in *Considerations [on the Assassination of Gérard Lebovici]* and even before that: I have never published *anything* under a pseudonym. Apart from several anonymous or collectively written texts, all were signed Debord. It was only for certain letters or meetings and [certain] internal debates – where there were good reasons for only leaving discrete traces – that I employed a very small number of pseudonym, clearly known by the comrades concerned, in each period; and a “lapsed” pseudonym was never reprised. As it is quite possible that you will become the historian who “has authority” on these questions, and as the liars will surely persist in unforeseeable inventions, I now provide for you a quick list of *the totality* of these pseudonyms: that is to say, any other would be subsequently invented and, likewise, any “publication” that one might vaguely evoke or that one might exhume from one knows not where, and that one might claim to be signed by one of them, will be an obvious fake.

“*Gondi* – in France, starting in 1965. (Colin) *Decayeux* – starting at the end of 1968, in France, then in Italy (he was a friend of Villon). (Guido) *Cavalcanti*, starting in 1972, in Italy (he was a friend of Dante in his youth). *Glaucos* – starting in 1974, in Portugal. (Juan) *Pacheco* – in Spain, starting in 1980 (he was an enemy of Manrique).”

p. 107: “I have known a man who spent his time among the *party girls* of Florence” (italics in original).

In Italian, *Sfacciate donne fiorentine* in fact means “The immodest/impudent/shameless ladies of Florence.”

p. 108 “Debord and Sanguinetti’s critique of the Italian left pleases no one.”

It certainly pleases us!

p. 108 “From a wealthy Tuscan family with leftist pretensions, Sanguinetti [...]”

Gianfranco’s father, Bruno Sanguinetti, was a clandestine, anti-fascist militant during WWII and the head of the then-illegal Italian Communist Party. Gianfranco’s mother, Teresa Mattei was also a member of the then-illegal Community Party. She was instrumental in the post-WWII assassination of the

Italian fascist Giovanni Gentile. She was a member of the Constituent Assembly, elected as a member of the ICP.

p. 109: “Perhaps the origins of terrorism are not so easily decided. Perhaps the origins are not even all that relevant” and p. 112: “They may be agents of another state. They may be agents of the very state they are attacking, or merely its dupes. It doesn’t actually matter.”

The existence of “Operation Gladio,” aka the “stay behind” networks organized by NATO and the CIA, were confirmed by the Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti on 24 October 1990. This fact and others certainly “mattered” to all the people falsely arrested, imprisoned and even *murdered* by the Italian State in its attempts to hide the existence and purpose of Gladio.

p. 115: “Certain states are less and less concerned with the well being and productivity of their subjects – their so-called *biopower*” (italics in original).

It is certainly the case that the USA is more and more concerned with the health of its subjects: the anti-smoking regulations that concern public places; the attempt to ban large containers of sugary soft drinks and trans-fats in NYC; the federal mandate that all citizens must have health insurance, etc. etc.

p. 117: “Censor stressed the usefulness of the Communist Party in imposing discipline on the working class and keeping refractory elements in line. But this view was not shared by the ruling class, deluded by their own fiction that cast the Communists as the leadership of the working class against the state.”

It was precisely the ruling classes of Italy (the politicians such as Aldo Moro and the big bourgeois, such as Gianni Agnelli) that sponsored the Historic Compromise. Its opponents were the military and the reactionary big bourgeoisie (and of course NATO and the CIA).

p. 120: “It [Censor’s pamphlet] was thought to be either the work of some kind of modern Tancredi [...] or perhaps some junior state functionary.”

Neither of these possibilities is mentioned by Sanguinetti’s *Proofs of the Nonexistence of Censor by His Creator* (which says the speculation ran from “everyone from Guido Carli to Cesare Merzagora, from Giovanni Malagodi to Raffaele Mattioli himself”) or by the press clippings that Sanguinetti himself assembled and published.

p. 122: “With the failure of disorganized labor to turn local and sporadic expressions of boredom into a strategy for dismantling spectacle power, the integrated spectacle emerges triumphant.”

First of all, the “labor troubles” that afflicted Italy between 1969 and 1979 were not motivated by boredom, nor were they local and sporadic. They were motivated by a desire to share in the spectacular wealth produced by Italy’s miraculous growth after WWII, and they were organized, continuous and very

effective. The subversion was directed at private firms, state-owned enterprises and the unions. The integrated spectacle (which expresses in general terms the tactic of the “historic compromise”) arose due to the success of this subversion, not due to its “failure.”

p. 124: “Nothing about their provenance is to be respected; not their context, their ownership, their genre.”

The ownership of the images used in *The Spectacle of the Spectacle* was very much respected: through Lebovici, Debord sought and received permission to use them. Money was paid so that this usage was legal. Sometimes permission was denied and the images in questions were not used.

p. 125: “Martine Barraqué edited *Society of the Spectacle*”

The name of Debord’s movie and his book were ***The** Society of the Spectacle*. (Wark also consistently refers to Debord’s book as *Society of the Spectacle*.) Without the definite pronoun, the title no longer refers to the unity of the spectacle.

p. 126: “In appending it [*Refutation*] to *Society of the Spectacle* [sic], Debord makes a complete work that subsumes not only the actual reactions to the film but any possible reaction into the work itself, in advance.”

Two full years elapsed between the completion of *Spectacle* and the *Refutation*: they are separate films; they were never “subsumed” to create a single film. Reviewers had plenty of time to react to the first film.

p. 131: “Spread throughout the film [*Spectacle*] is the particular sequence of moments in which historical time accelerates, and the conflict of forces pushes it toward new qualities: Paris 1871, St. Petersburg 1917, Barcelona 1935, Watts 1965, Paris again, 1968. The sequence continues in *Refutation* with the carnation revolution in Lisbon, 1974. It is a sign of the further progress of the spectacular erasure of historical time”

The places and dates that are mentioned here are *revolutions*, and they mark instances where historical time was flowing, not frozen or “accelerated.” The significance is the gap of thirty years between “Barcelona 1935” and “Watts 1965”: that is when revolution was no longer on the agenda; that was when historical time had been frozen in place by the spectacle. These revolutions are included in *Spectacle*, but especially in *Refutation*, to show that the historical mission of the SI had been fulfilled: to get historical time to flow again.

p. 132: “As Debord writes, these stolen films”

Many of these films were properly licensed, not “stolen” (cf. p. 124 above)

p. 135: “The revolutionary movement is over. Some think it dies in Paris in ‘68. For Debord it died in Barcelona in 1935”

For Debord, *the first phase* of the revolutionary workers’ movement was crushed in Barcelona (in 1937, not 1935); and its *second phase* began all over Western Europe in the 1960s. That second phase lasted until early 1980s. The revolutionary movement itself is far from over: it is simply “waiting for” its third phase.

p. 136: “The failure of the workers’ revolutions is that they relied on the same thought, the same methods, as the successful bourgeois revolutions before them.”

The distinctive feature of many workers’ uprisings including and since the Paris Commune is precisely their differences in “thought” (Marxism and anarchism) and methods (occupations of public places, not the palaces or other “seats” of political power). What took place in Hungary in 1956 – the instauration of workers’ councils – had never taken place before, in any revolution, whether bourgeois or proletarian. This is why the situationists championed workers’ councils for many years afterwards.

pp. 139-140: “*In Girum* concerns itself with the world after a series of failed revolutions: France 1968, Italy 1969, Portugal 1974, Italy again in 1977”

So many “failed” revolutions! The point should be obvious by now: the effort to put revolution back on the table was successful.

p. 140: “The spectacle is haunted by what negates it. Or do Debord seemed to think at the time. In the nineties his mood grew darker.”

As late as 1992, when he wrote his preface to the third French edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord was still optimistic about the collapse of Western capitalism.

p. 142: “Enemies like Julian Assange, the hacker-journalist-cypherpunk, publishing secret documents on the internet which reveal what those in the know already knew anyway”

The whole point of whistleblowers like Assange is that they reveal documents that contain information (usually the commission of war crimes, atrocities and the like) that was *unknown to the public*.

p. 151: “The same neighborhoods [*les banlieus* outside of Paris] would erupt in riot and fire in 2005”

This self-contradiction supports the corrections concerning p. 135.

p. 155: “It wasn’t a riot, a revolt or a revolution.” Later on the very same page, the perpetrators of the attacks in question (quoted by Wark) say, “we will revolutionize the country from inside

the prisons.

No further comment necessary: by contradicting himself, Wark has revealed his own error.

p. 179: "The Russian Revolution [...] which for Debord is a historic defeat of the revolutionary movement"

For the idea that "the revolutionary movement" was utterly or completely defeated (once and for all: "a historic defeat"), cf. pages 20, 131, 135, 139-140, 151.

p. 190: "As T.J. Clark once noted, it is no accident of timing that Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* came out in 1967, just after the start of the Althusserian boom"

Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* came out in 1967 exactly one hundred years after Marx's *Das Capital*, which the former détourns in its opening line.

