

Interview with Mustapha Khayati

By Gérard Berréby

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When and in what circumstances did you meet Raoul? What impression did he make on you, as much on the personal plane as on the theoretical and political one?

We discovered Raoul – I say “we” because, at the time, from 1962 to 1966, there was a group of friends in Strasbourg, composed of Théo Frey, his sister Edith, Jean Garnault, Béchir Tlili and myself. We shared the same ideas and the same preoccupations – thanks to reading “Basic Banalities,” published in issues #7 and #8 of the journal *Internationale Situationniste*. It was Tlili who had a copy of #7 in his possession and we all read it, one after the other. It made a strong impression on us. We found that “Basic Banalities” was the strongest text in the issue, and we didn’t stop discussing it during our daily meetings in the cafeteria of the university restaurant Gallia, called the ‘Minotaur.’

After reading the other issues of the *I.S.*, especially issues #6, #8 and #9, we decided to undertake a small operation against the sociology professor Abraham Moles, champion of cybernetics and American sociology. Debord had already denounced him in a letter published in issue #9, August 1964, in a text titled “Correspondence with a Cybernetician.” We wanted to sabotage the conference that he was organizing with the artist Nicolas Schoeffler in March 1965 in Strasbourg. In coordination with Debord, with whom I’d already begun a correspondence, we drafted and distributed the tract “La Torture dans la Vitrine.” This tract marked our membership in the Situationist International, at first implicitly then formally. As we only knew Guy Debord and René Viénet, we sought to meet Raoul Vaneigem, who lived in Brussels. This was only possible to do in October or November 1965. We’d already distributed “The Address to the Revolutionaries of Algeria,” and Debord and I were in the process of finishing up the article titled “The Class Struggles in Algeria,” which was published in issue #10. And as we had decided to distribute it in Algeria first, it needed an accompanying note from the SI. Debord went to see Raoul in Paris and had

¹ Included in Raoul Vaneigem and Gérard Berréby, *Rien n’est fini, tout commence* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2014). Translated by NOT BORED! 28 October 2014. All footnotes by the translator.

prepared a rough draft that we reworked in Brussels. He made it clear to me that Raoul expected us all when he gave me the itinerary that we had to take to arrive by car at the avenue de Fléron, in Forêt, Belgium.

We thus met Raoul in an atmosphere that was full of friendship and euphoria, and we were struck by his gentleness, his good will and his simplicity. The contrast with Debord, who was “serious” but affable, always “theorizing,” was more than striking. With Raoul, one could joke around and speak of anything at all. At the time, the Strasbourg group had the bad habit of being too light-hearted, of mocking everything – this went unperceived during our stay in Brussels. Working on the notice prepared by Debord, we were a little too casual and had drafted a text, certainly short but also full of blunders. The style was pseudo-objective and the content was triumphalist. It needed very pertinent critique by Debord, who frankly found the text “bad,” as well as discussions that took more than a month, to bring it to the form in which it was eventually made public. The general impressions from this first meeting stayed with us: while Debord resembled his writings, Vaneigem resembled another person than the writer. We were very happy with this trip and we promised to return.

At the seventh conference [of the SI] in July 1966, we had many discussions about both practical and theoretical problems, sometimes with divergences of points of view. I recall that, with respect to certain questions – the details of which I no longer remember – Debord and I disagreed with Raoul.

What were your relations like during your companionship in the SI?

After the publication of the preface to a situationist dictionary – the “Captive Words” – I prepared a preliminary list of “concepts” to be defined in the dictionary and, after speaking with everyone, in Paris and in Strasbourg, Raoul sent a complementary list . . . We even began to distribute lists of the words to be defined. In friendship and not meaning any harm, Raoul suggested that Denise Cheype participate in the project. Guy Debord reacted violently² and forbid any contributions from outside the group. The principle of the thing was approved, but the dictionary itself was never put together . . .

During the discussions in Paris concerning the different sections of *On the Poverty of Student Life* that I proposed to the group, I think that Raoul was able to be

² Cf. Debord’s letter to Khayati dated 13 February 1966: <http://www.notbored.org/debord-13February1966.html>.

present once or twice. Nevertheless, I can't recall any major contribution on his part.

To tell the truth, at that time Raoul was expecting a response from the publishers contacted for an edition of the *Traité*. He regularly came to Paris but he was absent from the dialogues and meetings that we had after the Strasbourg scandal. I had moved to Paris at the end of 1966, beginning of 1967, and the group – after the exclusions of those whom we called the “Garnaultins”³ – was reduced to five members: Viénet, Nicholson-Smith, Debord and myself in Paris, and Vaneigem in Brussels.

When the May movement began, Donald had already left and the English section no longer existed. Raoul participated in the meeting of 15 May – which took place at my place on the rue des Tournelles, nearby la place des Vosages, but he immediately left for Spain. Debord would reproach him for it, three years later, in “Concerning Vaneigem.”⁴ At the time, we laughed about it amicably, with, nevertheless, an underlying regret. It was at Raoul's place in Brussels to which the SI withdrew when the occupations movement came to a sudden end and we feared repression, which we didn't want to be the victims of. It was there that we wrote *Enragés et situs*.⁵ Raoul and I constituted one editorial team and Debord and Riesel formed another. Everything was done in a joyous and amicable atmosphere, despite the large number of troublesome presences, but also several romantic visitors.

Between the publication of the book and the Venice conference, attention was especially paid to the activities of the Italian and American sections. The French section, “enriched” by several new members, most of them useless, didn't manage to move things along and found itself engaged in an endless crisis. I was no longer there to witness it, but I learned about everything when I returned from Jordan in July 1970. I saw Raoul before and after his resignation from the SI, and it was especially after 1971 that our friendship was affirmed, despite all of our theoretical disagreements. . . .

³ Cf. Debord's letter to André Bertrand and Daniel Joubert dated 22 January 1967: <http://www.notbored.org/debord-22January1967.html>.

⁴ Cf. “Communique from the SI concerning Vaneigem,” dated 9 December 1970: <http://www.notbored.org/debord-9December1970.html>.

⁵ *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (Paris: Gallimard, 22 November 1968) was attributed to René Viénet.