

Extract from **Internationale Situationniste** at **Context XXI**

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Questionnaire

■ KEN KNABB (TRANSLATION) ■
SITUATIONISTISCHE INTERNATIONALE

1. What does the word “situationist” mean?

It denotes an activity aimed at *creating* situations, as opposed to passively recognizing them in academic or other separate terms. At all levels of social practice or individual history. We replace existential passivity with the construction of moments of life, and doubt with playful affirmation. Up till now philosophers and artists have only interpreted situations; the point now is to transform them. Since human beings are molded by the situations they go through, it is essential to create human situations. Since individuals are defined by their situation, they need the power to create situations worthy of their desires. This is the perspective in which poetry (communication fulfilled in concrete situations), the appropriation of nature, and complete social liberation must all merge and be realized. Our era is going to replace the fixed frontier of the extreme situations that phenomenology has limited itself to describing with the practical creation of situations; it is going to continually shift this frontier with the development of our realization. We want a phenomeno-praxis. We have no doubt that this will be the first banality of the movement toward the liberation that is now possible. What situations are to be transformed? At different levels it could be the whole planet, or an era (a civilization in Burckhardt's sense, for example), or a moment of individual life. On with the show! It is only in this way that the values of past culture and the hopes of realizing reason in history can find their true fulfill-

ment. Everything else is in decay. The term situationist in the SI's sense is the total opposite of the current usage in Portugal, where “situationists” refer to supporters of the existing situation (i.e. supporters of Salazar's dictatorship).

2. Is the Situationist International a political movement?

The words “political movement” today connote the specialized activity of group and party bosses who derive the oppressive force of their future power from the organized passivity of their militants. The SI wants nothing to do with any form of hierarchical power whatsoever. The SI is neither a political movement nor a sociology of political mystification. The SI aims to represent the highest degree of international revolutionary consciousness. This is why it strives to illuminate and coordinate the gestures of refusal and the signs of creativity that are defining the new contours of the proletariat, the irreducible desire for freedom. Centered on the spontaneity of the masses, such activity is undeniably “political” in the sense that those rebellious masses are themselves political. Whenever new radical currents appear — as recently in Japan (the extremist wing of the Zengakuren), in the Congo, and in the Spanish underground — the SI gives them critical support and thereby aids them practically. But in contrast to all the “transitional programs” of specialized politics, the SI insists on a permanent revolution of everyday life.

3. Is the SI an artistic

movement?

A large part of the situationist critique of consumer society consists in showing to what extent contemporary artists, by abandoning the richness of supersession implicitly present (though not fully realized) in the 1910-1925 period, have condemned themselves to doing art as one does business. Since that time artistic movements have only been imaginary repercussions from an explosion that never took place, an explosion that threatened and still threatens the structures of this society. The SI's awareness of this abandonment and of its contradictory implications (emptiness and a desire to return to the initial violence) makes the SI the only movement able, by incorporating the survival of art into the art of life, to speak to the project of the authentic artist. We are artists only insofar as we are no longer artists: we come to fulfill art.

4. Is the SI an expression of nihilism?

The SI refuses the role that would be readily granted it in the spectacle of decomposition. The supersession of nihilism is reached by way of the decomposition of the spectacle; which is precisely what the SI is working on. Whatever is elaborated and constructed outside such a perspective will collapse of its own weight without needing any help from the SI. But it is also true that everywhere in consumer society wastelands of spontaneous collapse are offering a terrain of experimentation for new values that the SI cannot do without. We can build only on the ruins of the spectacle. Moreover, the fully justified anticipation of a total destruction

precludes any construction that is not carried out in the perspective of the totality.

5. Are the situationist positions utopian?

Reality is superseding utopia. There is no longer any point in projecting imaginary bridges between the wealth of present technological potentials and the poverty of their use by the rulers of every variety. We want to put the material equipment at the service of everyone's creativity, as the masses themselves always strive to do in revolutionary situations. It's simply a matter of coordination or tactics. Everything we deal with is realizable, either immediately or in the short term, once our methods of research and activity begin to be put in practice.

6. Do you consider it necessary to call yourselves "situationists"?

In the existing order, where things take the place of people, any label is compromising. The one we have chosen, however, embodies its own critique, in that it is automatically opposed any "situationism," the label that others would like to saddle us with. Moreover, it will disappear when all of us have become fully situationist and are no longer proletarians struggling for the end of the proletariat. For the moment, however ridiculous a label may be, ours has the merit of drawing a sharp line between the previous incoherence and a new rigourousness. Such incisiveness is just what has been most lacking in the thought of the last few decades.

7. What is original about the situationists considered as a distinct group?

It seems to us that three notable points justify the importance that we attribute to ourselves as an organized group of theorists and experimenters. First, we are developing for the first time, from a revolutionary perspective, a new, coherent critique of this society as it is developing now. This critique is deeply anchored in the culture and art of our time, which can in fact be truly grasped only by means of such a critique (this work is obviously a long way from completion). Second, we make a practice of

breaking completely and definitively with all those who oblige us to do so, and in many cases with anyone else who remains in solidarity with them. Such polarization is vital in a time when the diverse forms of resignation are so subtly intertwined and interdependent. Third, we are initiating a new style of relation with our "partisans": we absolutely refuse disciples. We are interested only in participation at the highest level, and in setting autonomous people loose in the world.

8. Why don't people talk about the SI?

The SI is talked about often enough among the specialized owners of decomposing modern thought; but they write about it very little. In the broadest sense this is because we refuse the term "situationism," which would be the only pigeonhole enabling us to be introduced into the reigning spectacle, incorporated in the form of a doctrine petrified against us, in the form of an ideology in Marx's sense. It is natural that the spectacle we reject rejects us in turn. Situationists are more readily discussed as individuals in an effort to separate them from the collective contestation, although this collective contestation is the only thing that makes them "interesting" individuals. Situationists are talked about *the moment they cease to be situationists* (as with the rival varieties of "Nashism" in several countries, whose only common claim to fame is that they lyingly pretend to have some sort of relationship with the SI). The spectacle's watchdogs appropriate fragments of situationist theory without acknowledgment in order to turn it against us. It is quite natural that they get ideas from us in their struggle for the survival of the spectacle. But they have to conceal their source, not merely to protect their reputation for originality from charges of plagiarism, but because this source implies the broader, coherent context of these "ideas." Moreover, many hesitant intellectuals do not dare to speak openly of the SI because to speak of it entails taking a minimum position — saying what one rejects of it and what one accepts of it. Many of them believe, quite mistakenly, that to feign ignorance of it in the meantime will suffice to clear them of responsibility later.

9. What support do you give to the revolutionary movement?

Unfortunately there isn't one. The society certainly contains contradictions and is undergoing changes; this is what, in continually new ways, is making revolutionary activity possible and necessary. But such activity no longer exists — or does not yet exist — in the form of an organized movement. It is therefore not a matter of "supporting" such a movement, but of creating it: of inseparably defining it and experimenting with it. Admitting that there is no revolutionary movement is the first precondition for developing such a movement. Anything else is a ridiculous patching up of the past.

10. Are you Marxists?

Just as much as Marx was when he said, "I am not a Marxist."

11. Is there a relation between your theories and your actual way of life?

Our theories are nothing other than the theory of our real life and of the possibilities experienced or perceived in it. As fragmented as the available terrains of activity may be for the moment, we make the most of them. We treat enemies as enemies, a first step we recommend to everyone as an accelerated apprenticeship in learning how to think. It also goes without saying that we unconditionally support all forms of liberated behavior, everything that the bourgeois and bureaucratic scum call debauchery. It is obviously out of the question that we should pave the way for the revolution of everyday life with asceticism.

12. Are the situationists in the vanguard of leisure society?

Leisure society is an appearance that veils a particular type of production/consumption of social space-time. If the time of productive work in the strict sense is reduced, the reserve army of industrial life works in consumption. Everyone is successively worker and raw material in the industry of vacations, of leisure, of spectacles. Present work is the alpha and omega of present life. The organization of consumption plus the organization of leisure must exactly

counterbalance the organization of work. “Free time” is a most ironic quantity in the context of the flow of a prefabricated time. Alienated work can only produce alienated leisure, for the idle (increasingly, in fact, merely semi-idle) elite as well as for the masses who are obtaining access to momentary leisure. No lead shielding can insulate either a fragment of time or the entire time of a fragment of society from the radiation of alienated labor — if for no other reason than the fact that it is that labor which shapes the totality of products and of social life in its own image.

13. Who finances you?

We have never been able to be financed except, in a very precarious manner, by working in the present cultural economy. This employment is subject to this contradiction: we have such creative abilities that we can be virtually assured of “success” in any field; yet we have such a rigorous insistence on independence and complete consistency between our project and each of our present creations (see our definition of anti-situationist artistic production) that we are almost totally unacceptable to the dominant cultural organization, even in the most secondary activities. The state of our resources follows from these conditions. In this connection, see what we wrote in issue #8 of this journal (p. 26

[*The Counter-Situationist Campaign in Various Countries*]) about “the capital that is never lacking for Nashist enterprises” and, in contrast, *our conditions* (on the last page of this issue [*Announcement*]).

14. How many of you are there?

A few more than the original guerrilla nucleus in the Sierra Madre, but with fewer weapons. A few less than the delegates in London in 1864 who founded the International Working Men’s Association, but with a more coherent program. As unyielding as the Greeks at Thermopylae (“Passerby, go tell them at Lacedaemon...”), but with a brighter future.

15. What value can you attribute to a questionnaire? To this one?

Questionnaires are an obvious form of the pseudodialogue that is becoming obsessively used in all the psychotechniques of integration into the spectacle so as to elicit people’s happy acceptance of passivity under the crude guise of “participation” and pseudoactivity. Taking such an incoherent, reified form of questioning as a point of departure, however, enables us to express precise positions. These positions are not really

“answers,” because they don’t stick to the questions; they reply by posing new questions that supersede the old ones. Thus, real dialogue could begin after these responses. In the present questionnaire all the questions are *false*; our responses, however, are true.

Situationist International: Situationistisch / Situationist: All das, was sich auf die Theorie oder auf die praktische Tätigkeit von Situationen bezieht. Derjenige, der sich damit beschäftigt, Situationen zu konstruieren. Mitglied der situationistischen Internationale.

Situationismus: Sinnloses Wort, missbräuchlich durch Ableitung des vorigen gebildet. Einen Situationismus gibt es nicht — was eine Doktrin zur Interpretation der vorhandenen Tatsachen bedeuten würde. Selbstverständlich haben sich die Anti-Situationisten den Begriff „Situationismus“ ausgedacht.

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