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# A Brief History of the Italian Section of the Situationist International

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Retrieved on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021 from [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)

The original version of this essay, written in 2009, was published as the “Introduction” to *Textos completos de la sección italiana de la Internacional Situacionista (1969–1972)*, tr. Diego Luis Sanromán, Pepitas de Calabaza, Logroño, 2010. The text that follows was extensively revised and updated by the author in December 2017. Translated in February 2018 from a copy of the newly revised Spanish-language text provided by the author. An English translation of the original (2009) version of this essay, featuring numerous translator’s notes, is available at: [www.notbored.org](http://www.notbored.org).

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The postwar crisis of bourgeois society began in the early 1960s in the United States, and then spread to Europe and even to the countries of the East Bloc. The nature of capitalism and its classes had undergone a profound change: from an economy of poverty it had progressed to an economy of waste; formal domination based on the control of the labor market was transformed into real domination based on the commodification of all aspects of life, or, to express this process in more sociological terminology, on the generalization of mass consumption. On the one hand, the traditional sector of the proletariat, with some technical and political training and a certain amount of control over the productive process, was trapped in bureaucratized party- and trade union-based structures, which drove it towards passivity and conservatism. On the other hand, the new proletariat, the “mass-worker”, a product of recent industrial development and economic tertiarization, that is, of the predominance of science in the productive process, without

either traditions or skills, a purely unskilled mass of laborers that was completely alien to the interests of mass production, threatened to overtake the dominant sector of the skilled proletariat as an emergent political and social subject.

Because its central component was the revolt against the colonization of everyday life, the social question could be posed both inside and outside the factories in the form of a questioning of each and every aspect of “advanced” capitalist domination, whether in the form of the rejection of work and consumerism, or the desertion of politics and institutions. The aspect of the affirmation of subjectivity was so strong that, once it arose with an unforeseen vigor in the struggles of the time, it was for the most part known for its criminal side, which attracted the most attention in the nascent contestatory movement as a result of its negative and destructive dimension as well as its spontaneous, disorderly and vital character. In the factories of Italy, the young workers violently rejected the work ethic, sabotaged the assembly lines, disobeyed their trade union leaders and convoked open assemblies. The confrontations of the FIAT workers with the police and the Stalinists at the Piazza Statuto in 1962 in Turin constituted the opening act in the new class struggle, which the PCI and the CGIL managed to quell and repress for a few more years. The breach was opened up on the surface of consumer society, although only in its first faltering steps, in the grey zone of the mostly student-based “youth” culture.

Young people were especially sensitive to the breakdown of traditional bourgeois values, a breakdown that at first took the form of a generation gap that was restricted to the field of culture. Gianfranco Sanguinetti and Marco Maria Sigiani were two precocious youths with literary interests who made their appearance in June 1966 in La Spezia at the fourth conference of “Gruppo 63”, a movement of writers, poets and critics who were dedicated to a renovation of Italian culture, transcending the framework of the academic field of postwar neo-realism

*La Casa Frollo. Conférence de Venise, septembre 1969*, Gianfranco Sanguinetti, 2014.

*Rien n'est fini, tout commence*, Gérard Berréby and Raoul Vaneigem, Allia, Paris, 2014.

*L'Internationale Situationniste. De l'histoire au mythe (1948–2013)*, Anne Trespeuch-Berthelot, PUF, Paris, 2015.

*Debord, le naufrageur*, Jean-Marie Apostolidès, Flammarion, Paris, 2015.

“Un caso di pazienza titanica. Ancora sulla controcultura in Italia negli anni Sessanta del secolo scorso”, Felice Accame, in *Working Papers*, no. 299, 2016.

“Anamnesis o los postreros días de la Internacional Situacionista”, Javier Urdanibia, in *Agente Provocador*, No. 2, Madrid, April 2016.

*Un organsmo della storia: Il 1977 in Italia*, Gianfranco Sanguinetti, June 2017.

Most of the texts of the Italian radical current can be found at the website, [www.nelvento.net/critica/](http://www.nelvento.net/critica/), including those of the situationists, as well as interesting interviews with Mario Lippolis, Joe Fallisi, Riccardo d'Este and Paolo Ranieri.

There is abundant information about the “Beat” period at: [www.melchiorre-mel-gerbino.com](http://www.melchiorre-mel-gerbino.com).

Some of the information in this “Brief History” was provided by Franco Bevilacqua, a former comontist, and Yves Raynaud, a former member of GLM and the CMDO; it has also obtained the approval of one of those who are implicated in the story of the Italian Section, Eduardo Rothe.

The papers of the SI concerning the Italian Section, IISH, Amsterdam.

“An Aesthetic of the Grand Style: Guy Debord”, Mario Perniola, in *Substance*, no. 90, London, 1990. A French translation of this essay can be found at the author’s website.

*Dieci anni di illusioni. Storia del Sessantotto*, Michele Brambilla, Rizzoli, 1994.

*Le amère victoire du situationnisme*, Gianfranco Marelli, Sul-liver, Arles, 1998.

*Controcultura in Italia 1967–1977*, Pablo Echaurren and Claudia Salaris, Bollati Boringhieri ed., Turin, 1999.

*Un terrorismo en busca de dos autores. Documentos de la revolución en Italia*, a compilation of texts edited by Miguel Amorós, Muturreko, Bilbao, 1999.

*Guy Debord*, Anselm Jappe, Denoël, Paris, 2001. [In English: *Guy Debord*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999 (American Translator’s Note).]

“A proposito di controcultura”, Carlo Oliva, in *Working Papers*, No. 152, 2002.

“Une utopie qui était en train de se vivre: Entretien avec Angéline Neveu”, Montreal, November 2002, in *L’arte et la vie*, No. 85, Fall 2003.

*La sconcertante traiettoria dell’operaismo italiano*, Claudio Albertani, 2003, available at the website of Spazio Alternativo.

*Là s’en vont les siegneuries*, Alice Becker-Ho, Le Temps qu’il fait, Cognac, 2003.

*Correspondence[/i,] Volume 4, *Guy Debord, Fayard, Paris, 2004.**

[i]Apocalisse e sopravvivenza, Francesco “Kukki” Santini, Milan, 2005. [An English translation is available at: libcom.org (American Translator’s Note).]

*Œuvres*, Guy Debord, Gallimard, Paris, 2006.

Entrevista a Eduardo Rothe en la universidad de Sevilla, December 2007, at [www.interven.tv/](http://www.interven.tv/).

*Capellone e ninfette. Mondo Beat 1966–67. Storia, immagini, documenti*, Giani DeMartino, Costa e Nolan editori, Milan, 2008.

by breaking the rules and experimenting with language. According to Felice Accame, they read a document on the application of information theory and other techniques to literary texts. Between August and September Accame taught a course on the “operative methodology” of the linguist Silvio Ceccato at the Milan “Casa de Cultura”, which was attended by Sanguinetti, Sigiani and Antonio Pilati, at the conclusion of which two alternatives were posed: the position of Accame and Carlo Oliva (who maintained that the questions addressed in the course should be subjected to further theoretical investigation), and the position of Sigiani and the others (who thought that it was necessary to proceed to active protest). He also agreed to sign the articles and essays that were subsequently published with the initials, “GW” (*Green Wave*, the title of an LP recorded by Joan Baez). These alternatives were not mutually exclusive, however, since Sanguinetti wrote an article entitled, “The Erratic Denomination of the Term ‘Family’”, for the journal edited by Accame, Andrea Mossetti and Oliva, *Nuovo 75—Metodologia Scienze Sociali Tecnica Operativa*, adding to his by-line the initials, “GW”. Their vehement anti-authoritarian commitment, however, soon spread beyond the domain of literature and penetrated Italian youth culture, driving it towards protest. In the main cities of the country groups of young people were formed which, inspired by the American counter-culture or the Dutch Provos, questioned the moral and social pillars of the established order, that is, the family, school, religion and sexual taboos, the military, courts, press, traditional politics ... at the same time that they declared themselves to be pacifists and anti-militarists. In step with the times, after long discussions, in November 1966 Sigiani and Sanguinetti formed “Onda Verde” [“Green Wave”], together with Antonio Pilati, Andrea Valcarengi and Marco Daniele. This group was open to young intellectuals and “capelloni” (longhairs) who, in the words of Sanguinetti, wanted to address “the problems that directly concerned the new generation” by employing the

methods of the Provos: “play and desacralize, provoke and propose.” The group had no ideology apart from an inchoate youthful spirit, but it did have a “method”; according to one of its manifestos, “Onda Verde only wants what the young people want. This can be a little or too much, but it is necessary. Non-violence. Resistance to war. Rejection of meaningless words. Rejection of ideologies that exist only because pre-existing interests support them.” For Valcarengi, however, Onda Verde also sought to constitute “a free school within the official school: a kind of anti-school without professors or notebooks, without classes or homework, enjoying the confidence of the students”. In December, Onda Verde linked up with another similar group, “Mondo Beat”, exercising its imagination in small demonstrations and symbolic and ludic actions of the “happening” or Living Theater variety, with the participation of both the Gruppo Provos-Milano No. 1 and libertarians from the “Sacco and Vanzetti” circle—who contributed the use of their mimeograph machine—along with modern freaks, eccentric hippies with or without long hair, and, finally, members of Marco Pannella’s “radical party”, including Accame and Oliva, who let them use their offices on the Via Lanzone in Milan. Pannella had become acquainted with Sigiani and Sanguinetti when he lived in Bologna. Their first public action was truly provocative, when they burst into a police station and voted to request that the policemen should be armed with flowers, which resulted in beatings and arrests. This action was followed by other protests, against the war in Vietnam, compulsory military service, the dictatorship of the colonels and the laws from Italy’s fascist period that were still on the books, between January and June in 1967. The influence of the Radical Party, a leftist successor of the old Liberal Party, is displayed in the program of demands set forth in the “Manifestino della Base”, which was widely distributed at college campuses in March 1967. It included the generic “no to the war” type demands embellished with others that were politically unac-

*Internationale Situationniste (1958–69)*, Van Gennepe, Amsterdam, 1972.

*La véritable scission dans l’Internationale, circulaire de l’Internationale situationniste*, Paris, 1972.

“I situazionisti”, Mario Perniola, *Agaragar*, no. 4, Rome, 1972.

*Underground a pugno chiuso*, Andrea Valcarengi, Arcana editrice, 1973, Rome.

*Débat d’orientation de la ex-Internationale Situationniste*, Centre de recherche sur la question sociale, Paris, 1974.

*Scritti Corsari*, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Garzanti, Milan, 1975. A Spanish translation of this book was published by Del Oriente y del Mediterráneo, 2009.

*Rapporto verídico sulle ultime oportunita di salvare il capitalismo in Italia*, Censor (Sanguinetti), Mursia, Milan, 1975. French translation published by Champ Libre, 1976. [In English: “Censor” (Gianfranco Sanguinetti), *The Real Report on the Last Chance to Save Capitalism in Italy*, tr. Len Bracken, Flatland Books, Fort Bragg, 1997. A different English translation of the book is available online (in May 2014) at: [www.notbored.org](http://www.notbored.org) (American Translator’s Note).]

*Vivere a sinistra*, Emira Cevro-Vukovic, Arcana Editrice, Rome, 1976.

*Lettere agli eretici*, Enrico Belinguer (Pier Franco Ghisleni), Turin, 1977.

*Cronaca di un ballo mascherato*, Cesarano, Coppo and Fallisi, Varani editore, Milan, 1983.

*In torno al drago*, Riccardo D’Este, Edizioni Banalità di Base, Bologna, n.d. Republished by Nautilus, Turin, 1990.

*Ben venga Maggio e’l gonfalon selvaggio!*, Mario Lippolis, Academia dei Testardi, Carraia, 1987.

*L’Orda d’Oro (1968–1977)*, Primo Moroni and Nanni Balestrini, SugarCo Edizioni, Milan, 1988.

*Les situationnistes et Mai 68*, Pascal Dumontier, Editions Gerard Lebovici, Paris, 1990.

ble laboratory of the counterrevolution. A counterrevolution on the surface concealed another counterrevolution that was being carried out in the depths, a less noisy counterrevolution, but more effective, based on a tacitly approved permissiveness that embraced everything from clothing styles to drugs. The project of domination was not undertaken to restore the bourgeois society of the postwar years, but to consolidate a motorized consumer society thanks to an impressive culture industry, terrorism and immersion in private life. The so-called Movement of '77 was the last serious revolt against this new type of society. It was destroyed by the biggest police raid in the history of Italy, and alienation broke every kind of resistance with new cultural models that were individualist, playful, escapist, and hedonist, models that were taken from the dissident movements themselves thanks to the efforts of ideologues like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. In the absence of a coherent critique—the spread of situationist and radical communist ideas was not capable of producing one—the manipulation of desires and the suppression of reason paved the way for neo-fascism, modernized clericalism, the in-depth renovation of Stalinism and financial globalization. The years have passed by and some of the actors in the historical drama reviewed above have since died; others have maintained their dignity, while still others have faded away or taken up comedy, since everyone knows that it is amidst pride, wisdom, negligence, misery, intelligence, betrayal and character that... *sic transit gloria mundi*.

#### **Bibliography of Sources Consulted (compiled by the author)**

*Internazionale Situazionista*, no. 1, July 1969. There is a French edition of the complete works of the Italian Section, published by Contre-Moule, Paris, 1988. A Spanish edition was published by Pepitas de Calabaza, Logroño, 2009.

ceptable within the rigid dominant system, such as its call for the revision of the statutes concerning minors, the abolition of the draft, the disarmament of the police and complete legal freedom of sexual relations (abortion, divorce, homosexuality, etc.). What was most characteristic of the youth culture agitation of the Milanese Provos was their aspiration to “fill the void on college campuses caused by the lack of a really committed student movement, one that is not linked to the party sects” (“The Provocative Methodology of Onda Verde”). They sought to occupy a specific terrain of action in order to further the internal development of their group. With the ongoing trials of various activists, the hostile articles published in *Corriere della Sera* and the destruction of the free encampment on the Via Ripamonti by the police, the impossibility of nonviolent protest and a peaceful path for the imagination became apparent. The old bourgeoisie, anchored in a fascist and Catholic morality, was shocked by these unexpected protest movements and responded with repression.

By the end of the summer, it could be said that the youth movement that followed in the footsteps of the “Beat” model had entered the stage of recuperation. Sanguinetti, a student at the Liceo Classico Giovanni Berchet<sup>1</sup> like some of his other comrades, protested against the publication of the last issue of *Mondo Beat* by the Feltrinelli publishing house by collaborating on the journal, *Stampa Libera* (its only issue came out in September), in which he signed an article with Umberto Tiboni and his colleague Sigiani that rejected ideologies and emphasized the importance of the provocative method against the repressive dynamic imposed by contemporary society. In the meantime, the wave of unrest had spread to the universities and assumed a greater scale: the world of the

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<sup>1</sup> A kind of specialized elite high school, with emphasis on a classical curriculum; the closest approximation in the U.S. would probably be certain “Magnet Schools”, as they are now called, such as the Bronx High School of Science, part of the New York City public school system [Translator’s note].

beatniks was a small world. On September 15, a meeting of activists was held in Toscana in order to discuss youth politics on various levels. Accame recalls that the meeting was held at Mosetti's house in Forte dei Marini. The "Carta di Vallurfa" was discussed, written by Sanguinetti and Sigiani in July at Sanguinetti's house in Santa Caterina de Valfurva, in which the extinction of the movements of the Beats and the Provos was confirmed as a step forward for the progress of "youth power". Those who were most insistent on going beyond fashion and preventing the crystallization of a self-complacent youth milieu—a "youth ghetto", as we would say these days—that would be at the mercy of every kind of manipulation, then made a qualitative leap forward thanks to their reading of situationist texts. In October the Provo Sanguinetti, Sigiani (a first-year philosophy student, one of the very first "philosituationists"), Claudio Pavan, and Paolo Salvadori (both of whom were students at the Berchet academy), participated in the formation of a new self-managed project, the journal, *S*, "a single weekly publication for all students, whose influence is growing because of the increasing numbers of young people who are tired of passively allowing themselves to grow old". Carlo Oliva allowed them to name him as the editor-in-chief of the journal, due to Italian laws regulating the press, because he was a certified journalist, but he had absolutely nothing to do with its operations. His name was also used as an official cover for other journals and bulletins, with which he was likewise almost entirely uninvolved. The first issue of *S* was announced on October 19 with the distribution of 20,000 leaflets. This was a new kind of publication, for although it still advocated the cultural or "anti-cultural" proposals of its most radical predecessors, it bracketed them among slogans of the style depicted as "for a politics for the youth" or the more emphatic "for student power". In its pages it offered suggestions for playful practices oriented towards the dissolution of the dominant culture, called for "a creative

Florence in 1974 when Debord encouraged him to go to Lisbon to participate in the "carnation" revolution. By the time he returned to Paris, all kinds of disagreements put an end to their relationship. In the summer of 1975 Sanguinetti brilliantly synthesized the analyses of the Italian Section in a scandalous *True Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism in Italy*, which led to police investigations that forced him to publish "Proofs of the Nonexistence of Censor by His Author". He was beginning to be targeted by judicial conspiracies, whether to implicate him in the bombing at the Piazza Fontana, or in arms trafficking. He was a "marked man" and he was being watched by the forces of repression. In February of 1976, the French police apprehended him while he was attempting to cross the border on a night train and deported him to Switzerland. Debord wrote a note of protest in an ironic, magisterial tone, which Champ Libre published as a paid notice in the February 24 issue of *Le Monde*. In that same year, Sergio Ghirardi and Dario Varini, members of the editorial board of the magazine *Puzz*, published a good anthology of situationist texts that included the texts of the pamphlet, "On the Misery of Student Life..." and the leaflet, "Is the Reichstag Burning?" In Genoa, a group of radicals undertook the task of producing a mimeographed translation of the twelve issues of the journal, *Internationale Situationniste*. There can be no doubt that the most important phenomenon of that era, the accelerated conversion of the dominant values of the past into new values based on a kind of repressive tolerance, which was especially promoted by television, passed unnoticed as a result of the strategy of tension that was implemented by the system. The dissolution of popular cultures and the destructions of classes as they had previously existed, with their morality, their folklore, their customs and their internal relations, passed unnoticed due to the terrorist attacks carried out by fascists, the bloody outrages perpetrated by Mafia networks, the manipulation of the armed struggle and the devious activities of the secret services, which turned Italy into a verita-

Viénet and Riesel had been excluded, and J.V. Martin was missing in action in Denmark, Sanguinetti and Debord wrote the “Theses on the S.I. and Its Time”, the concluding act of the S.I. Sanguinetti’s presence in France was not appreciated by the Gallic authorities; he was expelled from France in July of 1971. As a result, his “Correspondence with a Publisher”, in which he settled accounts with the Feltrinelli publishing house, bore the signature of the Italian Section. In 1972, Perniola wrote a long article that was published in the journal, *Agaragar*, of which he was editor-in-chief, in which he demonstrated his extensive knowledge of situationist theory and practice. In his conclusion he asserted the incapacity manifested by the situationists with regard to the reconciliation of radical subjectivity with the program of the workers councils, the experience of direct democracy. In his view, the S.I. was obliged to retreat within itself, while attempting “to form ephemeral national sections that reproduced in a caricatural form all its own defects while it was at the same time proclaiming the historical need for their supersession”. Thus, “its inability to make a concrete contribution to the formation of a councilist organization caused the S.I. to return to the point from which it had never really moved, in pure, un superseded artistic subjectivity, in the exclusive sectarian possession of the ideal totality”. The persons against whom these arguments were aimed were not at all pleased. In 1973, Salvadori’s Italian translation of *The Revolution of Everyday Life* [*Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations*] was finally published; this was the sole “notable contribution” that could be attributed to him. The counterculture publisher, Arcana (whose editor-in-chief was Simonetti) published “Terrorism and Revolution”, the title of the Introduction to a new edition of the Coeurderoy’s libertarian classic, *Hurrah!!! Ou La Revolution Par Les Cosaques*. Despite Debord’s disapproval, the text got a lot of attention, as the question of violence was the hot topic of the moment. Eduardo Rothe returned to Italy and once again contacted Debord. He was in

and innovative use of the original Marxism”, and criticized the spectacle of politics and the scourge of consumerism. Its editors defined the journal’s purpose in the following way: “S is a method; situationism is not an ideology; it elaborates methods and the consciousness of those methods. The goal is determined from one situation to another.” The “essist” group denounced the State’s major cutbacks in funding for education. The appearance of *S* in Milan and Florence was followed by the victory of the “situationist” slate in the elections of the delegates at Berchet and by the outbreak of a widespread student movement (in 1967 there were half a million college students in Italy), a circumstance that provided it with a larger audience. In December, 6,000 copies of the second issue of *S* appeared on the college campuses. Its articles discussed the uniforms worn by students, the role of the family and the mystifying language of leaders. The third issue, released in a print run of 18,000 copies, was distributed along with the bi-weekly *Quindici*, the journal of the Gruppo 63 led by Nanni Balestrini. The editors of *S* pointed out that “‘S-ism’ or ‘situationism’”, as they liked to call it, was “not the vanguard of the young proletariat, but all the young people who have decided to act in relation to the social mechanism on the basis of a specific joint program”. Its guerrilla program, however, could be summarized as student control of the educational system, the creation of a “cartel” of young people to facilitate their participation in politics, the formation of organizations of workers and students, and other reforms of that kind. Significantly, the first page was dominated by an article that took account of the phenomenon of youth culture, proclaiming the end of an era, whose title left no room for doubt regarding its origin: “On the Poverty of the Student Life Considered in Its Political, Economic, Psychological and Intellectual Aspects, and Some Suggestions for Its Remedy.” Students formed part “of a new proletariat that is being marginalized at the very moment when they are using this condition for their own

purposes". In the supplement to the third issue, however, the "S-ists" went out of their way to distance themselves from the pamphlet, "On the Poverty of Student Life". On the one hand, they did not accept the Hegelian Marxist methodology because they thought that it left the door open to ideology, arguing that it was a sign of the survival of Ciccato's "methodology"; on the other hand, they rejected the "myth of the worker" and therefore the function of the Workers Councils. They also displayed a critical approach to the role of technology. At this point, at its last meeting held on December 24, the editorial team, which had tripled in number, chose to dissolve the journal and decentralize its activities. Disagreements had arisen within the group. Meanwhile, the weakened youth movement dissolved into a broader movement that emerged at the peak of the occupations movement.

The student movement made its debut in November 1967 in Trent with the occupation of the offices of the Sociology Department, followed by the occupation of the School of Architecture and of the Palazzo Campana, the central offices of the Humanities Department, in Turin, and shortly thereafter by the occupation of the State University of Milan and its Catholic counterpart, the University of the Sacred Heart. The movement spread rapidly and between January and February there was not a single Italian university that was not occupied at one time or another. The Battle of Valle Giulia, in Rome, on March 1, 1968, where the police were forced to retreat for the first time, was the culminating point of the movement. A few days later, at a conference held in Milan, the students proclaimed that their cause was the cause of the proletariat and at the end of March, in the same city, the most violent confrontation with the forces of order up until that time took place. After this battle, the movement went into decline at the universities, but then the high schools answered the call. The Berchet school was one of the first, having been occupied by its students at the end of January. The movement soon reached its

and the *enragé* Pierre Lotrous met Patrick Negroni at the Taverne du Régent, on the Place de Clichy, to judge the conduct of Angeline, who was also present. As far as she was concerned, it was a "Stalinist show-trial. I was accused of every crime on earth. I was infuriated when I left, and I cried like a baby on the Metro. I didn't understand any of it, I didn't know what I was being accused of. What were they thinking? The whole thing had gotten a little out of hand." She was judged to have been guilty of sowing discord and further contact with her was forbidden. Viénet, Riesel and Sébastiani were not really impressed by what Sanguinetti had said and thought that his passive and irresponsible conduct merited his being excluded as well; if we are to believe the testimony of Yves Raynaud, Vaneigem shared this view. Debord, however, supported Sanguinetti and thus pulled his chestnuts out of the fire. Paolo was still included among the "estimable comrades who no doubt can bring some notable contribution to subsequent moments of the revolutionary process of this time" ("Notes to Serve as a History of the SI from 1969 to 1971").

The Italian Section died in a most pitiful and ridiculous way, although a less indolent Sanguinetti mitigated his dishonor by publishing one last manifesto in October, "The Workers of Italy and the Revolt of Reggio Calabria", redolent of the workerist idealism of the time. From then on he was a member of the French Section, in which he aligned with the November 11 Tendency, constituted by Debord, Viénet and Riesel in order to break with "the ideology of the S.I.", refusing to accept any "response that is in contradiction with the actual practice of the person who formulates it". Sébastiani, instead of joining the November 11 Tendency, submitted his resignation, as did Vaneigem. No one paid any attention to the American Section. Xavier Urdanibia, who was attending meetings of the SI with the intention of forming a Spanish Section, was scandalized by the "ritual of humiliations and excommunications", and never attended another meeting. In April 1971, by which time both



Paolo. Viénet, however, the most indulgent of the situationists, was chosen to interview Salvadori and obtain his explanation first hand. First he went to Rome, and heard Salvadori's testimony about "[Sanguinetti's] very existence at its deepest and most tangible level", and then to Milan, where Salvadori added some finer points to his arguments. It was all very Kafkaesque. While he was there Vienet finally heard Sanguinetti's side of the story, and conveyed it by letter to the entire S.I. Angeline, on that afternoon on July 27 in Sperlonga, spent two hours hurling bitter accusations at Gianfranco, and only stopped when he walked out. Paolo remained silent throughout almost the entire meeting. As soon as he was alone with Angeline, she told him that she wanted Sanguinetti expelled from the S.I. That was when Paolo decided to exclude him. Then he spoke with Viénet and he thought that he had convinced him to support his position, which Viénet was compelled to deny. Vaneigem commented humorously to his comrades: "The farce of the lover who is unhappy at having been retrospectively cheated by her man. Here we are made to look the fool twice over; once for trying to mediate in lovers' quarrels, and again for having done so without knowing anything" (letter dated September 6). Recapitulating the whole business, an indignant Debord wrote to Sanguinetti on September 8: "We must have done with *metaphysicians* in the SI, who survive in and for *real inactivity*, and who are only really active at the moment in which they have the occasion to deploy some monstrous error, which is the only thing that impassions them. Shame and misery!" In the same letter he also expressed his personal opinion "that we cannot currently maintain a phantom Italian section". Salvadori traveled to Paris in order to defend his cause, but no one believed him when he denied the role played by Angeline, and he met with even less success when he tried to justify his unilateral decision to expel Gianfranco with the silly excuse that Gianfranco had accepted it as a *fait accompli*. On September 22 he was definitively given his walking papers. In Paris, Sébastiani

limits: the students were incapable of criticizing the curriculum without criticizing the role of education and class society itself, in which education is inscribed, nor were they capable of questioning university life without questioning their own alienated lives, starting with sexuality and religion. In brief, the student found himself divided between his approval of the destiny for which he was being trained—the assumption of his social role in the system—and his will to reject his own condition. All the dominant values began to be subjected to challenge, particularly those transmitted by the educational system, by the priests, by the communications media and by the world of labor, and with them, all the institutions that promoted them, from the family and the Church, to the school, the factory and the state. The assembly was denominated as the absolute decision-making institution, and delegation, and more generally representative democracy of the parliamentary type, were rejected. Inevitably, self-proclaimed student leaders, Catholics and Stalinists, attempted to mitigate the contradictions by leading the movement into the dead end of the pseudo-democratic spectacle of academic reform, but this was hardly of any importance because by then the social crisis had shifted onto the terrain of the workplace: Pirelli, Fiat, Montedison, Saint Gobain.... On the pretext of mobilizing support for a favorable outcome in wage negotiations, beginning in March numerous autonomous wildcat strikes took place, accompanied by sabotage, street fighting, looting, etc. The French revolt of May '68 then completed a panorama of violent rejection of hierarchy, work, all social conventions and the very condition of the worker. The appearance of an uncontrolled workers movement, committed to solving its problems with always more violent measures, was the determinant factor. In less than one year, Italy took the leading role at the heart of the European social crisis.

The first core groups of a radical current emerged from the student occupations, influenced above all by the situationist

critique, as the theoretical project of the S.I. was the only one that offered a comprehensive explanation of the real content of the revolts and was also the only one that offered a coherent and total view of the new era, and of the return of the social revolution. Joe Fallisi, one of the participants in the movement, explains: “we were not situationists, we were familiar with and further developed a certain way of thought whose essential contribution in France was that of the situationists.” However, despite the fact that “France shows the way”, as they said in those days, in 1968 the actual dissemination of such ideas was quite limited. One year earlier, Feltrinelli had published “On the Poverty of Student Life”, which quickly sold out; DeDonato had published a bad translation of *The Society of the Spectacle* and an even worse translation of “Basic Banalities”—this was all the situationist material published in Italian until the appearance in November 1968 of a selection of articles (including “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacular-Commodity Society”) entitled, *The Coherent Extremism of the Situationists*. This book was published by a publishing house known as “912”, founded in 1967 by Gianni Sassi, Sergio Albergoni and Gianni-Emilio Simonetti, for the purpose of promoting and disseminating the works of young vanguard artists, especially contributors to *Fluxus*, but after May ’68, when art, avant-garde or not, began to be viewed as a bourgeois corpse, 912 would find new inspiration in a “Servizio Internazionale di Collegamento”. This “Service” was composed of Marco Sigiani, Antonio Pilati, Paolo Boro (former members of Onda Verde) and one other person, who, seeking to establish themselves as the official Italian liaison group for the situationists, had made contact with the S.I. Up until that time, most Italian readers who wanted to stay abreast of new developments had purchased situationist books or issues of the journal *Internationale Situationniste* during trips to France, especially after May, but even so, by the end of the year the situationist journal had no more than twenty subscribers in all of Italy. If we compare the very lim-

wreck of the expectations of the radicals and forge connections with the workers who were still participating in wildcat strikes.

In July, the ridiculous concluding episode of the Italian Section took place. Far from the madding crowd, in a tempestuous meeting at Sanguinetti’s summer residence in Sperlonga, ostensibly convened for the purpose of clarification, Salvadori expelled Sanguinetti for “the resurgences of idiocies with respect to his life, smug self-assurance and even conceptual debasement”, that is, for everything and for nothing, without providing any concrete reasons. In a letter he said: “As for the reasons, there isn’t a particular one, because they exist all together.” The incident was greeted with perplexity in Paris, with the aggravating circumstance that Sanguinetti gave no signs of life; it was as if he intended to make it understood that he accepted his bizarre exclusion without a word of complaint. In a second letter, despite the fact that he obscurely claimed that “rather than seeking the sanction of a single concrete fact to explain his expulsion, you have to see the need to reject his very existence at its deepest and most tangible level”, a phrase that was taken as a joke, Salvadori recited an extensive litany of detailed accusations, one more ridiculous than the other: that Sanguinetti put on airs as if he was a great nobleman, that he had consumed a half liter of grappa at one draught, that he was romantically enthralled with a little girl, that he had taken off on a motorcycle at 140 kilometers per hour, that he had abandoned himself to *la dolce vita*... All to dissimulate his real motive, that is, Sanguinetti’s indelicate behavior with regard to Angeline Neveu—a former *enragé* and Patrick Negrone’s ex-girlfriend—with whom Salvadori had fallen in love, and the fact that Gianfranco was two-timing her with another girl named Connie, “just like Vaneigem”. Debord was in Spain at the time, travelling in Castile with Pierre Lepetit, and was apprised of the affair by telephone: from Segovia he weighed in against Salvadori. In Paris, the situationists decided, on August 7, at a meeting convened to address the issue, to exclude

the communist parties, the exacerbation of the repression and other facts of a similar nature, clearly indicated that what was taking place was a retrocession of the proletarian movement, a reflux that was simultaneously practical and theoretical, which was why the S.I. remained isolated in its vanguard role by denying itself, or more accurately, by devouring itself. It was still looking to its past, congratulating itself on its victory, while it let the opportunity slip through its fingers and the capitalist state recovered the terrain it had lost. Contrary to its expectations, the social crisis, in France and in Italy, had been held in check; fatally, the transformed atmosphere of the factories proved to be reversible. The unification of the exploited class had only taken place at particular moments of offensive action. The trade unions, far from disappearing, gained influence. Militantism—which Vaneigem called “the nonsense of sacrifice”—made a comeback and even affected the radical milieus. Put on the defensive, the more traditional proletariat inclined towards the re-establishment of the economy on different foundations (co-management, cooperatives, nationalization, trade union mediation), whereas the most advanced sector of the proletariat still wanted to abolish the economy (the rejection of work, of consumerism and of the trade unions). In view of the strongly entrenched position of the working class bureaucracy in Italy, any progress on the part of the radical workers would lead to a confrontation with their more backward comrades; there was no progress, however, but rather division and stalemate. Theoretical elitism, the ideology of everyday life, the apology for criminality, the resort to heroin and the phenomenon of armed struggle were direct products of this dead end. In order to grasp the nature of the new situation and criticize it, and also to provide itself with a concrete terrain of action, the S.I. needed to change its tactical orientation; it needed to find tactics that would be directed towards resistance and, most likely, a new type of non-vanguardist organization, one that would regroup the survivors of the ship-

ited familiarity with situationist analyses with their impact at that time, we can confirm that the subversive yield of the S.I. was formidable.

The critique of everyday life occupied the central place in social critique; it condemned the bureaucracy of parties and trade unions, rejected militancy, sexual repression and sacrifice, it spoke of the right to assemblies, direct action, generalized self-management and workers councils; it criticized Stalinist totalitarianism and Soviet and Chinese state capitalism; it rediscovered the history of the workers movement, its bureaucratic degeneration, the counterrevolutionary role of the Bolsheviks; it became acquainted with anarchosyndicalism, the Spanish Revolution, the repression of Kronstadt and of the Makhnovist movement, the I.W.W., etc. Part of the radical current came from the younger elements of organized anarchism, who were opposed to the old, antiquated, sclerotic libertarian movement, which was indifferent to the events and changes of the sixties and satisfied with its “democratic” role within the system. This radical current believed that it had overcome the opposition between Marxism and anarchism: in its view, not only did revolutionary Marxism have nothing to do with the Leninism and Stalinism of the PCI and the sects, but revolutionary anarchism had nothing in common with the FAI, the GAF or *Umanità Nuova*. The overcoming of this opposition was supposed to lead to a reconciliation between the Marxist critique of political economy and the Bakuninist critique of the state and politics. With the exception of a handful of persons, who had been educated in the traditions of heterodox Italian Marxism (the Rosa Luxemburg Circle of Genoa, the journal *Classe Operaia*), the radicals were very young, with little experience, learning and acquiring experience very rapidly; their vitalist subjectivism, their still-incipient assimilation of situationist theory and their predominant strain of activist spontaneism, did not favor a unified collective reflection, nor was it propitious with regard to the prospect of developing theoretical creativity at the level of

the model of the autonomous group required by the S.I., except in one case: that of Sanguinetti's group, an offshoot of "S". Its members were outstanding students of subversion; in the fall of 1968 they drafted a text entitled, "Dialectic of Putrescence and Supersession", an excellent analysis of the student movement of the previous years. At that time there was a meeting between the radical groups of Milan, that is, Sanguinetti's group, that of the renovationist anarchists of the FAGI such as Joe Fallisi and "Pinkie" Gallieri, that of the editors of *Il Gatto Selvaggio* [Wildcat] including Eddy Ginosa—supporters of a critical re-elaboration of the councilist theses—and finally, isolated individuals or "lone wolves" who found the theoretical perspectives sketched out by this movement to their taste, such as Giorgio Cesarano. They adopted the name of "Council Communists", and distributed a pair of leaflets under that name in December, one of which denounced the schizophrenic Stalinism of the Maoists, entitled "The Explosion Point of the Bureaucratic Lie".

Salvadori, Sanguinetti and Pavan met with the situationists at the end of 1968. Their culture and intelligence made a good impression, and showed that they had a lot more in common with the S.I. than the guys from the now-defunct publishing house "912", who were ultimately merely importers of contestatory fashions. As a result, the S.I. cut off its relations with Sigiani's group, provoking the indignation of those affected, who discredited themselves by sending a defamatory letter against their imaginary competitors to the SI on January 5, 1969. This letter received no response from the SI. The three future members of the Italian Section settled accounts with Sigiani's group by publishing a rejoinder in their journal in July entitled, "In Enemy Hands the Gold of the SI Turns into Coal", although we are unaware of the reason why Simonetti, the supreme pro-situ and the leading exponent of the esthetic-commercial exploitation of situationist ideas, was not included among the targets of their invective.

terpreted as proof of being amidst converging useless monologues, an indication of theoretical fetishism: "... to declare that one does not separate theory and practice *is not yet to practice theory*" ("Remarks on the S.I. Today", June 27). A drastic change was necessary: "If, in spite of all its advantages, our organizational formula has this sole fault of *not being real*, it is obvious that we must at all costs make it real or else renounce it and devise another style of organization, whether for a continuation of the SI or for a regroupment on other bases..." The S.I. had stagnated and was incapable of going beyond generic affirmations that only repeated the conclusions arrived at in its previous stage. To declare that contact must be made with the workers milieu does not mean that the contact is actually made, but rather the discovery of a psychological compensation mechanism: faith in an abstract proletariat, the depository of the radical essence, beyond the reach of discouragement, with regard to whom all that was necessary was to communicate to them their own theory, a task that devolved upon a select group of theoreticians. That is why Vaneigem's formula, "a Strasbourg of the factories", viewed in retrospect, remained in the category of good intentions, and the proposal of "René-Donatien" (Viénet) concerning a "wildcat striker membership card" never went beyond a harmless joke. Ludd experienced the same problems. The Turin group, in an internal document, sought to explain these problems as due to an imbalance between theory and practice: "the theory is new, advanced [...] the fear of not being radical enough leads in practice to the same conclusions as the S.I.: the most radical act, in fact the only possible act, is that of saying radical things." This was not the only problem, however. At the tactical level, no notice was taken of the circumstance that the extreme weakness of the French groups that emerged after May, the non-existence of working class councilist organizations, the easy success obtained by the provocation in Italy, the phenomenon of revolutionary "fashion", the efficacy of the demobilizing activities of

to Milan and avoided contact with his comrades. The S.I. did not accept his resignation so lightly and decided to expel him, that is, the S.I. contravened its principle of the autonomy of Sections. His fondness for coca-cola undoubtedly was a strike against him; nor is this a trivial detail. Sanguinetti remained free from suspicion but he was ordered to deliver six million liras to the organization (he had inherited a small fortune). Salvadori met with Debord in March, and in April there was a joint meeting of the French and Italian Sections. Believing that everything was cleared up, the tendency of February 14 dissolved. The dispute between Eduardo and Paolo was supposed to be resolved by an agreement not to arguing about trivialities, but Eduardo burst out with a provocative, "I shit on the dialectic!", which Paolo took seriously and to which he responded in kind. Rothe, who could see the writing on the wall, did not attend the meeting scheduled for April 21 between the French and Italian Sections, and left for Venezuela. The situationists repaid Salvadori for his outburst with exclusion and Eduardo, from Caracas, sent a letter full of formal excuses, and signed off with an ironic "Viva Eduardo!"

Once the crisis of the Italian Section was resolved, at least in appearance, the S.I. attempted to address its essential problem, that of theoretical production, that is, the reason for its existence, opening up an orientation debate with the ultimate anti-vanguardist goal of bringing about a situation in which "the workers will come to us—and remain autonomous". At the same time, it was making plans for the production of the thirteenth issue of the French journal. Salvadori and Sanguinetti devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the debate and drafted their respective "Provisional Theses" and "Notes". They also began to make plans for a second issue of the Italian journal. In the meantime, Beaulieu, Khayati and Cheval had resigned from the S.I., for different reasons. At the end of June, Debord drafted a summary of the orientation debate, expressing his shock at the unanimity of the contributions, a sign he in-

Sigiani, Pilati and their supporters tried to reinforce their extremist-modernist bluff by attempting to forge contacts with the remnants of the "Mouvement 22 mars" [March 22<sup>nd</sup> Movement], somewhat less profitable ideologically. They also published a book by Paul Cardan (Castoriadis), a person who was particularly detested by the situationists. In late January 1969, Sanguinetti and his two colleagues met in Rome with the college professor Mario Perniola for the purpose of creating the Italian Section of the International. In France, the difficulties of the social crisis rendered a more urgent organizational reconsolidation necessary. In April 1968 Debord wrote a document on organization—"The Organizational Question for the S.I.", known as the April Theses—that was soon overshadowed by the May events; the dissolution of the CMDO, however, caused the situationists to think that it was necessary to resume the organizational debate and return to the April Theses. The latter proclaimed the autonomy of the Sections—correcting the error committed by the S.I. with regard to the English Section—and recognized the legitimacy of the formation of tendencies. They served as the basis for the constitution of the American Section; now they would also have to perform the same role for the Italian Section. The call for a deliberately restricted group of theoreticians, in accordance with the stipulations of the crucial document entitled the "Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations", a group with a high degree of collective expression and method, in short, with a proven equality of abilities, was granted the highest priority over any other organizational alternative. Debord had recommended that, "you certainly have good reason to choose the higher level of the group, rather than an abstract camaraderie". Thus, two sympathizing comrades who accompanied Salvadori when he met with the S.I. in Paris in January 1969, Francesco "Puni" Cesoni and Cristina Massili, were not admitted to the Italian Section, because they lacked sufficient background and training: "... it is the

'historic stage' of our activity that has changed, and thus they, without moving, have moved away" (Debord). This closing of ranks was convenient for demarcating the situationists from the pseudo-situationist groups like that of Sigiani, or the one formed by Pasquale Alferj, who, in an attempt to pass himself off as very modern, had distributed a pamphlet in Trent composed of sentences from *The Revolution of Everyday Life* [*Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*], signed abusively, "S.I.". Perhaps, however, the S.I.'s intentions were not primarily directed towards finding possible allies; although the S.I. would delegate the responsibility of conducting all contacts in Italy to the three Milanese situationists, this was a sign rather of the S.I.'s opposition to establishing any kind of relations with the radical individuals and groups of Italy.

The newly constituted Italian Section thus underwent its first debate in connection with the organizational question. Despite the fact that the S.I. was founded in Italy and once boasted of the membership of an important figure like Pinot-Gallizio, the original Italian situationist nucleus was liquidated during the initial wave of the struggles against artistic tendencies in the International and no trace of it remained afterwards. Relations with Italy were not resumed until December 1966, when a disillusioned former surrealist, Mario Perniola, wrote two pro-situationist articles, "Il surrealismo oggi" [Surrealism Today] and "Arte e rivoluzione", for the journal, *Tempo Presente*. For a while Perniola played the role of disseminator and correspondent of the S.I. in Italy. After the May revolt, he traveled to Brussels and Paris in order to meet with Debord and the other situationists, and to study a way to intervene in the Italian crisis. He had come to elaborate a project involving statutes that were intended to challenge the April Theses and the S.I.'s vanguardism. Perniola proposed a broad-based councilist organization, a kind of federation of affinity groups or independent sections, minus the egalitarian requirements

this meeting that the Section would modify its operational program. Debord suggested, as a way of escaping from this impasse, that one or two new members should be admitted into the Section, and it appears that Eddy Ginosa was approached as a possible candidate, but that he turned down the offer because he did not think that he was sufficiently prepared. It seemed that the situation had returned to square one, but neither Rothe nor Pavan attended the meeting of the Italian Section in Milan scheduled for early February. An interview with Eduardo after the Wolsfeld meeting and a confused letter from Pavan (dated February 5) that described a disturbing atmosphere of mistrust and disloyalty among the members of the Section, led some of the situationists to believe that the Section's internal problems had reached such a point that they required an immediate clarification, or even a split, if necessary. For this purpose, on February 14, a tendency was formed within the S.I. "for the maintenance of the second 'Thesis on Feuerbach,'" composed of Debord, Rothe and Christian Sébastiani. At first, the crisis could be reduced to the "problem of Gianfranco", who was accused of unjustifiable absenteeism, repeated reckless behavior, laziness, falsified reports, a lack of conscientiousness and reprehensible conduct. For example, Sanguinetti had submitted a biased and "qualitatively false" report of a discussion concerning Sylvain and Sigiani held between Pavan and Eduardo and Ennio Valeri, a sympathizer. Pavan's letter mentioned above confirmed the existence of a diffuse climate of hostility, as well as Gianfranco's lack of *savoir vivre* and his inaccurate reports, but three days later he signed a letter addressed to the S.I. as a whole as well as Salvadori and Gianfranco himself, in which he said that all was going well, that Sanguinetti's only shortcoming was the fact that he failed to attend a few meetings. His attitude was, at the very least, contradictory, and he was harshly criticized by Debord and Sébastiani when he came to Paris, which led Pavan to admit his mistakes and submit his resignation (in a letter dated February 20). Pavan then returned

completely disregarded in the Section: "... we cannot recognize any group as autonomous unless it is engaged in autonomous practical work; nor can we recognize such a group as durably successful unless it is engaged in united action with workers...." Debord grasped the nature of the problem and proposed to Salvadori, after having read the text by Eddy Ginosa, "Avevo por fine il movimento reale", the possibility of forming a kind of CMDO with the Milanese group, Ludd, and a handful of radical workers, allowing the latter complete freedom of initiative. Debord also recommended the modification of the principle of immediate break with the pro-situ followers who were capable of further development and who would agree to resign from the unacceptable groups to which they belong. Under these circumstances, it was agreed that Pavan should travel to Paris at the end of December to explain the status of the Italian Section to the French. Then the bomb exploded in the Piazza Fontana, however, an event that would be a turning point in the movement (although Salvadori did not think so at the time), allowing a strange party of order composed of the police, the leftists and the Stalinists of the PCI to recover the initiative and isolate the radical minority in the factories and the streets.

Pavan's visit revealed the latent crisis of the Italian Section, the personal problems, the reigning morbid atmosphere and the indifference towards the real situation, all of which was quite distressing. On January 17 Pavan attended a meeting with the other situationists in Wolsfeld, a town in the German Rhineland, and spoke of his resignation or of a possible split in Italy. According to the report of the delegates published in Trier (Marx's birthplace): "Concerning the interpersonal and organization difficulties and the *real* problems of his Section, Pavan announced the practical decisions taken to address them and put an end to these problems and to prevent their reappearance in the future; he also recognized the need for the formulation of an organic practical-theoretical critique of the past activities of the Italian Section". He also told those present at

and restrictions pertaining to a group of theoreticians, and adding the stipulation that the International Congress should be the final arbiter of such questions. His proposal had many features in common with the CMDO, whose real worth did not correspond to the glory that has been attributed to that institution. Obviously, such an organization was contrary to the very nature of the S.I.: it did not guarantee the autonomy of its members and reduced to almost zero the role of the S.I. as a structured, coherent, voluntarily restricted organization devoted to specific tasks. Pavan, Salvadori and Sanguinetti wrote a letter to Debord informing him of important disagreements with Perniola, mostly with regard to organizational questions, that emerged during their meeting with him in Milan in February. Debord thought that the organizational problem was in principle a technical problem and had to be addressed on the basis of what the S.I. was in reality, not as a reflection of a councilist organizational ideal. Although he recommended that the Milanese situationists should work with Mario, he also expressed his fears that a decentralized organization of the kind Mario advocated would endanger the "unity" of the SI by exposing it to the activities of undercover provocateurs, "idiotic" fractions or accidental majorities. For the occasion, he drafted a counter-proposal calling for each member of the SI to be responsible to the SI as a whole and vice versa. The general assembly would have the final decision-making power in all theoretical and practical questions; in this way, intermediate bodies such as groups and sections would be neutralized, and Debord's informal authority would be preserved—this was the significance of his proposal, which was unanimously approved by the situationists. From that point on—March 1969—there was no other Italian Section besides the one composed of the three Milanese comrades, and Perniola was to retain the status of a waiting postulant, as an "external sympathizer". Although it was agreed that discussions would continue, Perniola's "extreme federalist" proposal was incompatible

with the situationist position, not to mention his theoretical shortcomings (for example, his alleged ignorance of Hegel), which is why the subsequent episodes of this debate would be inscribed within the history of an expected break. As opposed to the indiscriminate acceptance of all contacts with anyone who merely expressed interest, without any guarantees, in the S.I., Debord raised the bar even higher by opposing any collaboration with sympathizing or kindred radicals. Perniola, for his part, also upped the ante by rejecting the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, repudiating unanimity as the point of departure and calling for the explicit condemnation of the organic concept typical of the Leninist parties. At this point, Debord's patience was exhausted. In May, he wrote to the Italian Section: "We cannot propose to maintain any discussions, exchanges of information or limited joint actions except with autonomous revolutionary groups, whose basic revolutionary value we shall recognize—that is, that you shall yourselves recognize, in Italy." And he pronounced the sentence: "Perniola is our number one enemy in Italy." The Italians brought the affair to a conclusion by sending a "Memorandum" (May 1969) to Perniola that made the break official, accusing him of manipulation and considering him to be an enemy. Perniola became an pariah, capable of every iniquity, beginning with having desired an open organization. Shameful rumors were credited as true without the slightest evidence. The S.I. approved of the Memorandum and had nothing more to say. Later, in October, Perniola participated in the founding of a national councilist organization that for about one year embraced the majority of Italian radicals, called "Ludd" or "Ludd—Proletarian Councils".

At the end of July the Italian Section published the first issue of its journal, *Internazionale Situazionista*, which exceeded all expectations. It seems that the sacrifice of Perniola played a fundamental role, as in the time of the Etruscans, in facilitating this advance. It was printed at the Stamperia Nava print shop on the Via Rucellai, where *S* had been printed. Its theoretical

sion pronounced by a single situationist, a point that caused Debord to ask whether it had been formulated with the idea of applying it in the near future. If the defect of the French resided in agreeing with everything, that of the Italians was precisely the opposite: the Section engaged in endless debates, every problem was promoted to a question of theory regardless of its relevance, and every theoretical question led to irrational disputes over the most trifling details. According to Eduardo Rothe, the meetings were becoming increasingly more irritating and boring, and Salvadori, a diligent student of philosophy, was mainly responsible for this trend. Rothe's first confrontation with Salvadori took place when he translated a phrase as "there are almost no doubts", instead of "there are no doubtful cases". With an insufferable professorial tone, Salvadori began to pick the error to pieces, speculating with total seriousness concerning the causes of such a lapse, each more fabulous than the previous one. The problem was not considered to be serious, merely "a bad practice of theory", the resort to theory in cases in which it was not necessary, but apart from this, he began to reproach Sanguinetti for not attending meetings and for a certain disdainful attitude towards the comrades. There was a tense atmosphere in the Italian Section, the product of living in a closed-off world, almost like a family, and this tension was constantly increasing. The Section was far from abiding by the cornerstone of its program, so splendidly proclaimed in the journal: "not to disregard anything that serves to unify and radicalize dispersed struggles, to federate autonomous groups, communities of individuals in open rebellion who *practically* experience the organizational forms of the revolutionary proletarians." Obviously, one writes better about a struggle if one was present in it. But the problems of communication with the real struggles that arose as a consequence of the choice to be a "group of theoreticians" and from its repulsion of sympathizers, reduced the radicalism of the Section to mere words, and led it to focus on individual relations. The April Theses were



chief of the journal. The French Section was afflicted by a creative paralysis and a distressing absence of debate and activity, which were not at all remedied by the conviction of its members that they belonged to the elite of the world revolution. Neither the exclusion of Chevalier nor the Venice Conference (September 25-October 1, 1969) made much of a difference. Vaneigem described the atmosphere at the Venice Conference as “the boredom of worn-out adventures.... There was a general animosity, fleshed out with unhealthy gossiping”. And Sanguinetti confirmed Vaneigem’s observation: “... there was the general feeling of abstraction and insufficiency that the most impoverished sought to hide behind a façade of disembodied radicalism.” According to Debord, “... the situationists in attendance numbered eighteen, but they had the spirit of four”. The good feelings of belonging together in a project were transformed against the will of the members of the SI into anxiety and malaise. Surprisingly, the Conference adopted an organizational model based on the autonomy of the Sections. The S.I. had to function in a different way, find new terrains of action in the factories, seek out people involved in the workers revolts, or simply allow its members to engage in a quest for life according to their own tastes, but instead, in November, the American Section underwent a crisis. At the same time, the apparently exemplary Italian Section began to show some cracks in its façade. The sinister atmosphere of Venice proved to be contagious. In a letter sent to Eduardo, Debord mentioned the excessive rigidity of personal relations between members of the Section and expressed his view that they should be “more relaxed” in order to help bring about “an authentic homogenous community in the SI as a whole”. This rigidity took the form of a “resolution on organic practice”, by means of which the Italians submitted to even more stringent demands on their personal conduct than those stipulated by the already quite strict formal requirements of the S.I. The Italian Section’s rules regarding exclusions included a provision authorizing an expul-

level was very elevated and the discussion of the Italian crisis was comprehensive and lucid. The concept of the totality, so dear to situationist critique, was masterfully applied. Debord was impressed: “I think that nothing this powerful has been written in Italy since Machiavelli.” Italy had the distinction of hosting the largest Communist Party in the West, flanked by the more fanatical Maoist groups, which is why a revolutionary movement could not be established there except on the theoretical and practical ruins of both Communist factions. The latter represented everything that the revolution had to sweep away: bureaucratic state capitalism, political totalitarianism, sectarian mentality, the annihilation of the individual, the permanent exploitation of the workers in the name of socialism, the disguised class rule of a leadership party.... Furthermore, the most outstanding features of the Maoists were their aggressive services on behalf of the forces of order, as they were devoted to the systematic persecution of anarchists and radicals. The critique of Stalinist ideology, in both its pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese variants, was, in Italy more than anywhere else, the precondition of all critique, and the journal executed this task impeccably. Its theoretical mission was complemented with translations from *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, *The Enragés and Situationists in the Occupations Movement*, and the principal articles from the French journal, for which purpose the publishers Sugar (recommended by Perniola) and Silva were contracted. In August Debord went to Milan and Florence to fraternize with the comrades of the Italian Section, and was charmed by the *dolce vita* of Italy. At the end of the summer of 1969 the Venezuelan revolutionary Eduardo Rothe, a former member of the CMDO, arrived in Milan to reinforce the Section. In September the Venice Conference of the S.I. took place, amidst a triumphalist atmosphere. Shortly afterwards, the twelfth issue of the French journal was published, which, inexplicably, praised the anthology entitled, *L’estremismo coerente dei situazionisti*, presenting it as “an intelligent selection

of well-translated texts, accompanied by commentaries that demonstrate partial understanding". In conjunction with this lapse, one of the Italians' French liaisons, the Lyon anarchist Jacques Sylvain, was still in contact with Sigiani, which rendered an immediate break necessary, communicated by a letter dated September 5. Meanwhile, Sigiani was making a big splash at the Casa de Cultura in Milan, where he denounced Mario Capanna, a kind of Catholic Cohn-Bendit who had made a name for himself as a parasite of the student movement, at an open debate organized by a Comitato d'Azione Permanente. Sylvain spoke favorably of Sigiani to Debord. The Italian Section drafted a communiqué on Sylvain and Sigiani in order to prevent any misunderstandings from arising.

Throughout 1969 the class struggle only grew more acute. Anti-trade union wildcat strikes at Fiat, Pirelli, Building 32 of Mirafiori and RAI; barricades in Milan, Caserta, Turin and Naples; revolts in the prisons; creation of unitary base committees in the factories; insurrection in Battipaglia; riots in Sardinia; incidents, confrontations, occupations, fires, etc., a little everywhere. Any pretext was good enough for a demonstration, an act of sabotage or an occupation, dragging the reluctant trade unions along, which were compelled to participate or else become isolated. A general strike was called for November 19 and on that day the Italian Section plastered the walls of Milan with a Manifesto that summarized the situation and explained the real meaning of the workers struggles, pointing out the lines of advance of the movement and calling for the formation of Workers Councils. This manifesto was entitled, "Address to the Italian Proletariat On the Current Possibilities for Social Revolution", and was the culmination of the subversive activities of the Italian Section. Italy was one step away from a general insurrection. Within the next few weeks, faced with the irremediable ineffectiveness of the police and the trade unions, any local conflict might light the fuse that would lead to a situation of no return. The Italian

state was becoming more enfeebled with each passing day; the ruling class felt besieged, and was preparing for a fight to the death. The labor bureaucracy called for a policy of unity with the ruling class in order to combat the revolution, but it was no longer capable of pacifying the workers. If the workers were to decide to arm themselves, there would be no way to avoid civil war. The highest bodies of the state refused to contemplate an economic or political solution to the crisis, and support for the military option was gaining ground among the leaders of the state, which is why the secret services had for some time been reactivated and had been infiltrating the sects and organizations, preparing a bloody counterattack. This counterattack would begin with a diversionary tactic, involving an incomprehensible and gratuitous attack that would claim innocent victims, for the purpose of traumatizing popular opinion and disorienting, if even only momentarily, the proletariat, paralyzing its action and halting its gradual accession to increasingly higher levels of consciousness. The rest could be taken care of by the Stalinists, the forces of order and the judicial system. Then, on December 12, the bomb exploded in the Piazza Fontana, in Milan, which the police, the parties and the communications media attributed to the anarchists. The set-up was complete. Eduardo, Puni, Cristina and Filippo Orsini were the first to denounce this maneuver in the leaflet entitled, "Is the Reichstag Burning?", distributed on December 19 at the Piazza Fontana and at the gates of the main factories of Milan; two weeks later, Ludd distributed another leaflet, "Bomb, Blood, Capital", written for the most part by Eddy Ginosa, who was arrested in a police raid following the explosion and released a few days later. These two leaflets constituted the only denunciations of this instance of state terrorism that were contemporary with the events.

Until October, the Italian Section remained immune to the symptoms of crisis that had plagued the French Section, which began in July with Debord's decision to resign as editor-in-