

# THE AVANT-GARDE VERSUS THE MODERNS: THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL

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For a long time the historiographer has only had access to two versions of the facts: the Situationists were a legend and, as we know, legend is what gets into print; or one goes along with the official version which Guy Debord, for the most part, provided by writing his own memoirs. For some years the boundaries have been shifting, and are now redrawn based on the history of modernity. It should be added that there has been an upsurge of publications, thus making the gilded legend more complex and prompting the most orthodox of interpretations to a greater rationality.

This is the angle of Fabien Danesi's book, which stands somewhat aloof from these categories, and dodges pious intimations. For all this, though, it is not devoid of difficulties—quite to the contrary—in aptly unravelling the break between art and politics, which kept the Situationists out of reach of any overarching vision. Those who deride aesthetics will hail dull retrieval, while historians will see therein a sociology of the avant-garde, rather than any far-reaching questioning of the Situationists' "anti-art". The scope of the book and its montage of the various periods shed light on the main issue: the mythology of a movement that wanted no heirs, and which ended up becoming a major influence. The author places himself right away after that end of art, decreed by Debord, but the pull of the original "shattered myth" helps him to topple in turn towards the central matter of the denial of the artwork in the name of "totality".

The symptom that F. Danesi brings out is the clash between Situationists and moderns—Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jean-Luc Godard, not forgetting Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, and the Nouveau Roman [New Novel]. The breaks with the Happening, and every other modernist movement, hallmarked the Situationists at least as much as their progressive determination to shift the promises of art into humdrum or historical life, depending on the formula desired. Their gestures of "de-creation" (Giorgio Agamben) caused idle hands at the same time as they created processes which went beyond the art history of the avant-gardes. F. Danesi's book attempts to broach these challenges to the notion of opus, without always seeing its messianic range, which the author incidentally challenges, unlike Agamben. Metagraphs, slippage, psychogeography, situational constructions and, above all, appropriation and hijack cannot be understood without this messianism, which, in the end of the day, is close to Walter Benjamin and the Marx of the "critique of value" and the "fetishism of merchandise". But his project prompts him to mark the points of rupture and more often of continuity between the Situationists and some of their contemporaries (Henri Lefebvre, Socialisme and Barbarie). Beyond the flop of the revolutionary myth of the Situationists, F. Danesi

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