

Extract from **Internationale Situationniste at Context XXI**

(http://contextxxi.org/gangland-and-philosophy.html)

extracted on: 14 April 2024

Date of this contribution: June 1960

Gangland and Philosophy

■ KEN KNABB (TRANSLATION) ■
ATTILA KOTÁNYI

The *Beijing-Bao* is the oldest daily newspaper in the world. It has appeared for over fifteen centuries, its first number having been printed in Beijing in the 4th century. The editors have often incurred the anger of the Chinese rulers for attacking the infallibility of religion and the state. The paper has nevertheless continued to appear every day, even though the editors have often paid for it with their lives. During those fifteen centuries, 1500 editors of the *Beijing-Bao* have been hung.

— *Ujvidéki Magyar Szo*, 1957

The situationist tendency is not aimed at preventing the construction of situations. This first restriction in our attitude has numerous consequences. We are striving to provoke the development of these consequences.

'Protection' is the key word in the Garment Center racket. The process is as follows: One day you receive a visit from a gentleman who kindly offers to 'protect' you. If you are really naïve, you ask, 'Protection against what?'

Groueff & Lapierre, *The Gangsters of New York*.

If, for example, the head honcho of existentialism assures us that it is hard for him to adopt any sort of vulgar materialism because culture is an integral part of our lives, we can agree substantially with the latter point but without being sure that we should be so proud of this fact. That's one consequence.

How can we comprehend the formation of our culture and of our philosophical and scientific information? Modern psy-

chology has eliminated many of the doctrines that used to obscure this question. It looks for the motives: why do we accept or refuse an "idea" or an imperative? "One of the most important results of the process of socialization is the development of a system of normative equilibrium, which superimposes itself on the system of biological equilibrium. The latter system regulates the body's responses to various needs and necessities (nourishment, defense against cold or against physical attack, etc.), whereas the first one determines which actions can be considered 'practicable' or even 'thinkable'" (P.R. Hofstätter). For example, someone becomes aware of situationist activity. He "understands" it and "rationally" follows its arguments. Then, in spite of his momentary intellectual agreement, he relapses: the next day he no longer understands us. We propose a slight modification of the psychological description quoted above, in order to understand the play of forces that have prevented him from considering various things as "practicable" or even "thinkable" when we know they are *possible*. Let us examine this striking experimental reaction: "The trial of Dio and his accomplices begins. Then something extraordinarily scandalous takes place. The first witness, Gondolfo Miranti, refuses to talk. He denies all the statements he has made to the FBI. The judge loses all patience. Furious, he resorts to the ultimate argument: 'I order you to answer. If you do not, you will be sentenced to five years' imprisonment!' Without hesitation, Miranti accepts the five long years of prison. In the defendant's box Johnny Dio, well dressed and smooth shaven, smiles ironically." (Groueff &

Lapierre, *op cit.*) It is difficult not to recognize an analogous pattern of behavior in someone who doesn't dare speak of problems as he knows they are. We have to ask: Is he a victim of intimidation? He is indeed. What is the mechanism common to these two kinds of fear?

Miranti had lived in *gangland* since his youth; this explains many things. "Gangland," in Chicago gangster slang, means the domain of crime, of rackets. I propose to study the basic functioning of "the Organization," in spite of the risks of getting involved: "As for the man who would try to set them free and lead them up to the light, do you not think that they would seize him and kill him if they could?" (Plato). Philosophy must not forget that it has always spoken its part in the most burlesque and melodramatic setting.

We should develop a little *glossary of de-tourned words*. I propose that "neighborhood" should often be read *gangland*. Similarly, social organization = *protection*. Society = *racket*. Culture = *conditioning*. Leisure activity = *protected crime*. Education = *premeditation*.

The systematic falsification of basic information (by the idealist conception of space, for example, of which the most glaring expression is conventional cartography) is one of the basic reinforcements of the big lie that the racketeering interests impose on the whole gangland of social space.

According to Hofstätter, "We are as yet incapable of examining the process of socialization in a truly 'scientific' manner." We, on the contrary, believe that we are capable of constructing a model

for examining the production and reception of information. If we were allowed to *monitor*, by means of an exhaustive survey, the entire social life of some specific urban sector during a short period of time, we could obtain a precise cross-sectional representation of the daily *bombardment of news and information* that is dropped on present-day urban populations. The SI is naturally aware of all the modifications that its very monitoring would immediately produce in the occupied sector, profoundly perturbing the usual informational monopoly of gangland.

“Integral art, which has been talked about so much, can be realized only at the level of urbanism” (Debord) [Report on the Construction of Situations]. That is indeed where the limit is. At this level we can already *remove* certain decisive elements of conditioning. But if, beyond such salutary eliminations, we expect the largeness of scale in itself

to generate favorable results, we will have committed the most serious error. Neocapitalism has also discovered some advantages in large scale. Day and night it talks of nothing but city planning and national development. But its real concern is obviously the conditioning of commodity production, which it senses escaping it unless it resorts to this new scale. Academic urbanism has accordingly defined “slums” from the standpoint of postwar neocapitalism. Its techniques of urban renewal are based on sterile, antisituationist criteria.

We must make this critique of Mumford: If neighborhoods are not considered as pathological elements (ganglands), we will not be able to develop new techniques (therapies).

The constructors of situations must learn how to read the constructive and reconstitutable elements of situations. In so doing, they begin to understand the language spoken by situations.

They learn how to speak and how to *express themselves* in this language; and eventually, by means of constructed and quasi-natural situations, how to say what has never yet been said.

Attila Kotányi: Geboren 1924 in Ungarn, gestorben 2003 in Düsseldorf. Poet, Philosoph, Autor, Architekt, Urbanist. Flüchtete nach dem gescheiterten ungarischen Aufstand 1956 aus Budapest nach Brüssel und schloss sich dort der *Situationistischen Internationale* an. Wurde aus dieser 1962 unter dem Vorwurf des “christlichen Mystizismus” ausgeschlossen.

Ken Knabb: Geboren 1945 in Louisiana. Autor, Übersetzer und radikaler Theoretiker, Betreiber des Website *Bureau of Public Secrets*.

License of this contribution
Gemeinfrei
Gemeinfrei