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A Cavalier History Of Surrealism (by Raoul Vaneigem as 'J-F Dupuis' (translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith)) . . . . . 1



# **A Cavalier History Of Surrealism (by Raoul Vaneigem as 'J-F Dupuis' (translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith))**

By Stewart Home

After Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem is one of the more celebrated situationist theorists. This short sketch of a forerunner to the group of which he was once a leading light, says more about Vaneigem's theoretical weaknesses than it does about his ostensible subject. Vaneigem usefully stresses the specificity of surrealism, concentrating on its differences to dada. Unfortunately, he rather mechanically expands on the situationist dictum that the dadaists wanted to suppress art without realising it, while the surrealists wanted to realise art without suppressing it. Part and parcel of Vaneigem's reductive treatment of this subject are his blinkered Eurocentric and Francophone perspectives. His more general pronouncements emerge very clearly from his immersion in European high culture and indicate an inadequate knowledge of other social and cultural forms. Vaneigem's grasp of history is every bit as defective as his attempts at dialectic. He writes of books being transformed into commodities by the market when, as perhaps the first perfected capitalist commodity, the book actually played a key role in the development of capitalist markets (there is a dialectical relationship between books and the market, Vaneigem's treatment is one-sided). However, while this is a bad book, it is also a very instructive one. The attraction of situationism for many of its fans is the air of extremism that emerges from the very weaknesses that are displayed so extravagantly here. The text is well worth reading, not as a critical primer on surrealism, but rather as an unconscious exposition of the flaws underlying situationist ideology.

Author Stewart Home [<http://www.stewarthomesociety.org>] also reviewed Annabel Frearson's web project BaudriR in this issue.