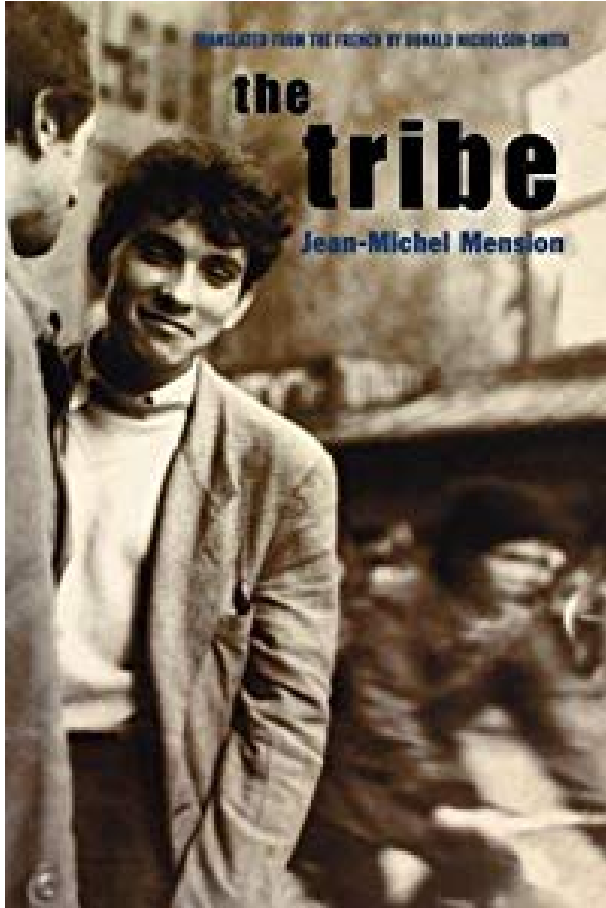


The Tribe



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The Tribe, the companion volume to Ralph Rumney's excellent The Consul is another fascinating slice of history concerning the ultra avant-garde's favourite sect. Jean-Michel Mension was a member of the Situationist International's precursor, the political and more art focussed Lettrist International (which was founded in 1945 in Paris by the Romanian Jean-Isidore Isou as a reaction to Andre Breton's dictatorial control of the surrealist movement). Surrealism had become something of a cult of personality surrounding Breton and had drifted from its dada origins into mysticism. In 1956 at Alba in Italy a group of lettrists took an active part at the First World Congress of Liberated Artists (with the slogan "The International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus"). From June 1954 to November 1957 they published 29 numbers of their journal Potlatch. The last issue, formally indicating the direction the LI had been heading was subtitled "Bulletin d'information de l'internationale situationiste." The SI was soon to be born. In a series of interviews, Jean-Michel Mension recalls drunken philosophising with Guy Debord and his circle in a book beautifully filled with Ed van der Elsken's celebrated photographs of "the tribe" accompanied by reproductions of Lettrist leaflets and posters. When he woke from his "long night of drinking" Mension became a militant of the Ligue Communiste while the SI became a continuing source of inspiration for the non-authoritarian left. The tensions in the avant-garde were real enough it seems and this is a fascinating, if tangential, account of them. --George Bowman