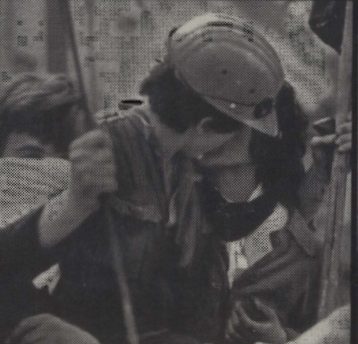
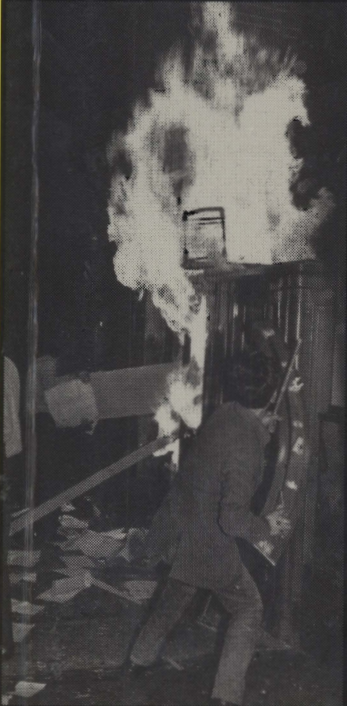
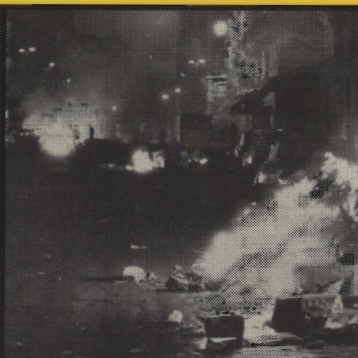
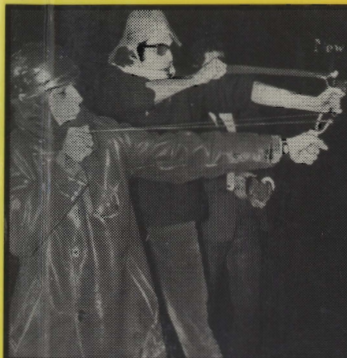


WHAT IS SITUATIONISM? A READER

Stewart Home, editor





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**Stewart Home,
editor**

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Introduction

Stewart Home



The situationists have now taken their place in cultural history alongside the futurists, dadaists, and surrealists. In many ways the process which led to the SI being elevated to the status of a cultural icon is as interesting as the history of this — or any other — avant-garde group. While there have been a number of monographs on the situationists published in recent years, this is the first anthology of shorter critical pieces about the SI. The collection is in no way definitive — which would require both a far larger book and a selection process less biased towards anglo-american perspectives. With only one exception, Jean Barrot's *Critique of the Situationist International*, everything in this anthology was written in English and even this exception was first published as a translation. The texts run chronologically according to date of publication.

Everyone who writes has an axe to grind, since this is particularly true of those who write about the situationists, I feel completely justified in making a few comments about the words that follow and passing judgment on the individuals who wrote them. Guy Debord isn't the only corpse to make a career out of situationism. All those who've composed texts on the subject are guilty of this crime. However, without the groundwork laid down by Christopher Gray — who was a member of the SI and King Mob — most of us would still be writing about surrealism. Moving on to a more interesting subject, Dave and Stuart Wise were both active in King Mob. Their text also played a major role in transforming situationism from a fringe product without commercial value into a saleable commodity

within the key British and American markets. Back issues of *King Mob* — particularly the two numbers dedicated to the Motherfuckers — give a valuable insight into how these entrepreneurs developed their promotional skills.

Jean Barrot is the political theorist most likely to inherit the SI's mantle as guru to those anglo-american ultra-left obscurantists who look to France for intellectual leadership — although he faces stiff opposition from Jacques Camatte. The pieces by George Robertson, Bob Black, Sadie Plant and myself represent the attempts of innumerable cultural hacks to create an orthodox interpretation of situationism. Both Sadie Plant and I have written books on the SI — these being *The Most Radical Gesture* and *The Assault on Culture*. Having read my Stirner carefully, I'm forced to conclude that mine is the better of the two works. While Plant's tome is a very good introduction to situationist theory, I adopt a far more subjective approach. The task of historification having been successfully completed, Jimmie Martin and Alastair Bonnett are both looking for fresh takes on the SI — the former by using a compare and contrast method with Wilhelm Reich, the latter by applying the conceptual tools of cultural geography to situationist theory. I think the Reich analogy is particularly satisfying, since the ideas of 'spectacle' and 'emotional plague' function in an identical fashion, providing the true believer with a universal category that is to be attacked endlessly, relentlessly and — most importantly — everywhere!

And so, to the future. I am, of course, looking forward to yet more books about the SI. I'm also hoping to see an ever greater abundance of situationist translations — all of which ought to be published as very slim and expensive editions. Now that it's run through the sixties underground/avant-garde, the culture industry is diving headlong into the seventies and eighties — which means we'll soon be seeing much serious discussion of neoism, plagiarism and the art strike. The tradition marches on . . .

London January 1993



Essays from Leaving the 20th Century

Christopher Gray

From Leaving the 20th Century
edited by Christopher Gray
(Free Fall, London 1974)

'Everyone will live in his own cathedral': The Situationists 1958-1964

YOUNG GUYS, YOUNG GIRLS
Talent wanted for getting out of this and playing
No special qualifications
Whether you're beautiful or you're bright
History could be on your side
WITH THE SITUATIONISTS
No telephone. Write or turn up:
32 rue de la Montagne-Genevieve, Paris 5e.

Internationale Situationiste 1, 1958

Summer of 1958: number one of a new, unusually glossy avant-garde magazine, *Internationale Situationiste*, began to appear around the Latin Quarter of Paris. Its contents were quite as terrifying as its name. Surrealism, the cinema, automation, town-planning, politics, games theory, the Beat Generation and the freedom of the press were all, in rapid succession, dismissed as being beneath contempt. Western culture and civilisation in their entirety were, so it seemed, totally bankrupt. Yet there was something in which these 'situationists' believed — only its nature was far from clear. What were 'the transcendence of art', 'the construction of situations', 'drifting', 'psycho-geography', 'unitary urbanism' and 'revolutionary play'? Why choose pinups of girls in raincoats, on beaches, or supine on the

backs of horses to illustrate these concepts? Why the maps of Utopian countryside, the photos and detailed diagrams of modern cities? Why the line drawing of an apparatus for generating Gaussian distribution? . . . And how could you feel such disgust with everything . . . ?

Intellectual terrorism has never been anything particularly surprising on the Left Bank. What was unusual was that *Internationale Situationiste* seemed to have financial and organisational backing on a par with its megalomania. It wasn't just a 'magazine'. The articles presented a coherent and interwoven attack on the whole of contemporary social life and culture. Half were written collectively and left unsigned. Editors and contributors were French, Dutch, Belgian, German, Scandinavian, Italian and Arab; all apparently belonging to the same international organisation. Physically the magazine was well co-ordinated. The layout was eminently sober, the paper the highest gloss, and the covers glowing gold metal-board. These, which must have been ludicrously expensive, were apparently to stop the thing getting wet in the rain. And it was dead cheap. And there was no copyright.

Basically the first number revolved around an attack on art. The situationists' central thesis was that art, in all its traditional forms, was completely played out. Dada had marked the end of western culture; no major self-regeneration was possible. At the same time western civilisation had reached the point where mechanisation and automation had, potentially at least, eliminated the need for almost all traditional forms of labour, opening up perspectives of unprecedented leisure. The situationists suggested that this leisure could only be filled by a new type of creativity — a creativity that started where 'art' left off. Imagination should be applied directly to the transformation of reality itself, not to its symbols in the form of philosophy, literature, painting, etc. Equally, this transformation should not be in the hands of a small body of specialists but should be made by everyone. It was normal everyday life that should be made passionate and rational and dramatic, not its reflection in a separated 'world of art'. *The modern artist does not paint but creates directly . . . Life and art make One* (Tristan Tzara).

The situationists, however, were not just art theorists. The cultural crisis was a symptom of a far greater breakdown. *A new form of*

*mental illness has swept the planet: banalisation. Everyone is hypnotised by work and by comfort: by the garbage disposal unit, by the lift, by the bathroom, by the washing machine. This state of affairs, born of a rebellion against the harshness of nature, has far overshot its goal — the liberation of man from material cares — and become a life-destroying obsession. Young people everywhere have been allowed to choose between love and a garbage disposal unit. Everywhere they have chosen the garbage disposal unit. A totally different spiritual attitude has become essential and it can only be brought into being by making our unconscious desires conscious, and by creating entirely new ones. And by a massive propaganda campaign to publicise these desires (Gilles Ivain, *Formula for a New City*, I.S. 1, 1958).*

The situationists' programme was based on what they called 'the construction of situations'. In the first place this meant the bringing together and fusion of various separated art forms in the creation of a single unified environment. Nor was this process restricted to a new focusing of contemporary artistic activity. All the great artistic visions and masterpieces of the past should be pillaged and their contents made real: 'subverted', as the situationists called it, as part of a real script. All scientific knowledge and technical skill could be brought into play in the same way. For the first time art and technology could become one: put on the same practical footing with reality. Working out the widest possible unified field of such 'situations' would reveal the true dynamic and shape of the city. Most utopian visionaries since Fourier paled before the situationists: *Everyone will live in their own cathedral. There will be rooms awakening more vivid fantasies than any drug. There will be houses where it will be impossible not to fall in love. Other houses will prove irresistibly attractive to the benighted traveller . . . (Formula for a New City).*

The point was not just the creation of an exterior environment, however vast or however lovely. *What we should be aiming at is a sort of situationist-oriented psychoanalysis. Those concerned having to discover within themselves desires for particular environments in order to make them real — the diametrically opposed attitude to that taken by the various neo-Freudian groups. Everyone must search for what they love, for what attracts them . . . (The Construction of Situations: An Introduction, I.S. 1, 1958).* The point was the conjuring up and the mastery of immediate subjective experience. *Art need no longer be an account of past sensations. It can become the direct organisation of more highly evolved sensations. It is*

a question of producing ourselves, not things that enslave us (from an article by Guy Debord in the same number). Thus the situationist project, as originally outlined, was the liberation of desire in the building of a new world — a world with which we will be permanently in love.

This put them in much the same position as the *first* Surrealists — and beyond Surrealism in the same position as a liberated psychoanalysis. Or, more simply, in exactly the same position as children. For their underlying philosophy was one of experiment and *play* — but play equipped with the whole of twentieth century technology. Ultimately all that was involved was the simplest thing in the world: wanting to make your dreams come true. And its enemies were equally simple: sterile subjective fantasy on the one hand and, on the other, its objective counterpart: the world of art.

Rediscovery of the complete cultural turning point reached by a number of small avant-garde groups during the years 1910 to 1925 — above all by the Dadaists and the Surrealists — was the main achievement of the *Lettrist* movement. The Lettrists, another movement almost totally unknown in this country, evolved in Paris during the years immediately after the Second World War. Starting from Dada, from the complete dissolution of artistic form, they developed in a number of different directions. One group was concerned with Dada-type cultural sabotage, another with inventing a new activity to replace art; another, crystallising around Isidore Isou, concerned with aesthetics and art in itself.

Perhaps the most famous stunt pulled off by the first two groups was their sabotage of the Easter High Mass at Notre-Dame in 1950. Just before the High Mass, a small group of Lettrists, including one who had previously intended to be ordained, slipped unobserved into the back of the cathedral. In a sideroom they caught, gagged, stripped and bound one of the priests. The ex-Catholic Lettrist put on the priest's vestments and, just before the service was about to begin, gravely ascended the steps to the main pulpit. A moment's respectful silence. "Freres, Dieu est mort," he said; and began benignly to discuss the implications of this conclusion. Several minutes passed before the congregation actually registered what was happening. He managed to escape out of the back of the cathedral but the congregation caught up with him on the *quais* where they proceeded to try and

lynch him. The Lettrist, alas, was forced to surrender to the police in order to save his neck.

Their taste for this kind of contribution to culture led to a complete break between the anti-and-post-artistic factions and Isidore Isou and his followers. The leftwing of the Lettrists had, after a hectic summer in 1952, just wrecked Chaplin's press conference for *Lime-light* in the Ritz Hotel and left for Brussels when they heard that Isou had denounced them to the newspapers. They promptly denounced him back, called themselves *L'Internationale Lettriste* and set up their own magazine, *Potlach*. If until this time Isou had been the dominant personality in the Lettrist movement, *L'Internationale Lettriste* saw the rising of the star of Guy Debord.

Debord, born in 1931, was at this time producing some brilliantly nihilistic anti-art. *Memoires*, his first essay in 'subversion', was a book put together entirely from prefabricated elements whose happiest touch was its binding in sheets of sandpaper. The book couldn't be put away in bookshelves because whenever it was taken out it ripped the covers of the books on either side. The same period saw his first film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952). This was a feature length film which, far from being pornographic, lacked any images at all; the audience being plunged into complete darkness from beginning to end apart from a few short bursts of random monologue when the screen went white. The last twenty-four minutes were uninterrupted silence and obscurity. In France there was considerable violence when the film was first 'shown'; in London, however, when the first house came out at the ICA they didn't even tell the queue for the next performance that there wasn't anything to see. Intellectuals really are a hopeless lot.

Socially, *L'Internationale Lettriste* was defined both by its refusal to work, and thus its penury, and by its grandiose desire to regenerate the nature of immediate experience. The tensions implicit in this are obvious. Total despair was never far away. Debord related how one night they were all drunk and stoned in someone's apartment. It was way into the night and almost everyone had crashed. Debord was smoking kif by himself when suddenly he thought he could smell gas. He walked down a corridor to the kitchen at the far end of the apartment. Two friends were sitting drinking in silence at the kitchen table. All the windows were shut and the gas was turned on full. They

had hoped that the whole sick crew would die painlessly in their sleep. This was just symptomatic. They were drinking and doping a lot of the time. There was more than one attempted murder and several suicides. Someone jumped out of several hotel room windows before they finally made it.

Not that their way of life was one of unbroken hippie gloom. Over the whole mid-fifties there was sustained work on their 'activity to replace art'. In 1953 Ivan Chtcheglov, then aged nineteen and using the pseudonym Gilles Ivain, wrote a short manifesto called *Formula for a New City*. The text was a badly needed shot in the arm for French Surrealism — increasingly bogged down in virtually conventional art and cultural rehabilitation since the end of the twenties. Chtcheglov's central theme was that *the city* was itself the total work of art, the total work of real life so long sought for. *Need for total creation has always been inseparable from the need to play with architecture: to play with time and space*. Only in the possibilities offered by the real distribution of time and space can all dreams become true and become one. This manifesto seems one of the most brilliant single pieces of writing produced since the heyday of modern art just after the First World War. Unfortunately his own visions were to prove too much for Chtcheglov: he ended up in the lunatic asylum a few years later.

Before this, however, he was to play a leading role in developing the two main practical techniques used by the Lettrists at this time: *drifting* and *psychogeography*. The first could be described as a sort of free association in terms of city space: the idea being simply to follow the streets, go down the alleys, through the doors, over the walls, up the trees and into the sunlight, etc., that one found *most attractive*; to wander, alone or with one's friends, following no plan but the *solicitation* of the architecture one encountered. Drifting was an attempt to orient oneself in the absence of any practical considerations: to find the types of architecture one desired *unconsciously*. Amongst other adventures, they found down by the Seine a door leading to what was supposed to be a small tool store but was in fact a concealed entrance to those parts of the Paris catacombs that are closed to the public; apparently a large proportion of the total area. Hopefully many happy hours were spent with the matches, the skulls and the rats.

'Psychogeography' was the study and correlation of the material obtained from drifting. It was used on the one hand to try and work

out *new emotional maps* of existing areas and, on the other, to draw up plans for bodies of 'situations' to be interlocked in the new Utopian cities themselves. During the same period they were also toying with new forms of communication and deconditioning within the city: *L'Internationale Lettriste* were the first artists to understand the enormous potential of graffiti as a means of literary expression today. A number of the slogans they chalked or painted up — 'Never Work', 'Free the passions', 'Let us live' — were to turn up again, more than twenty years later, on the walls of the Latin Quarter in May 1968. They also painted slogans down their trouser legs and across their ties and shoes. The two latter items they tried to sell.

The actual transition from *L'Internationale Lettriste* to *L'Internationale Situationiste* doesn't seem to have marked any major change in the nature of their activities. 1957 saw Debord's *Rapport sur la construction des situations*, the first theorisation of the new concepts of *situation and spectacle*, and they wanted to be dissociated once and for all from Isou and the other art-ridden Lettrists. On the 28 July 1957 delegates from *L'Internationale Lettriste*, from the largely Scandinavian and German *Mouvement pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste* and from a dubious *London Psychogeographical Committee* met at a formal congress at Cosio d'Arroscia in Italy and decided to amalgamate. *L'Internationale Situationiste* was born.

The first few years of the SI were devoted to a systematic exposition of Lettrist philosophy and life-style; to getting a magazine out regularly, and distributing it internationally. The number of card-carrying members of the SI at this time seems to have been around thirty or forty people, but presumably many more were involved on a less formal basis or were just very considerably influenced. Most were in their late twenties and were living off the usual expedients of what was still 'bohemian' life: grants, small pockets of bourgeois money, petty crime, hustling, and occasional labour in culture or elsewhere.

At this point the SI really was an international movement. Autonomous groups were functioning over most of Europe. The Scandinavian, Dutch, German and Italian sections organised their own demonstrations and produced their own publications — the German *Spur* ran into trouble with the police — while issues of the Paris magazine appeared steadily, all equally sober, equally luxuriously

produced, each with its glowing metal covers a different colour. The terrorism, wit and general megalomania held good. So did the flow of photographs of girls, soldiers, bombings, comic strip frames, maps of cities and diagrams of labyrinths, cathedrals and gardens.

In Italy, Pinot-Gallizio invented 'industrial painting' — painting produced mechanically, by the roll. A leaflet by Michele Berstein read: *Among the advantages . . . no more problems with format, the canvas being cut under the eyes of the satisfied customer; no more uncreative periods, the inspiration behind industrial painting, thanks to a well contrived balance of chance and machinery, never drying up; no more metaphysical themes, machines aren't up to them; no more dubious reproductions of the Masters; no more vernissages. And naturally, very soon, no more painters, not even in Italy . . .* (I.S. 2, 1958). Industrial painting was exhibited and sold, pokerfaced, in Turin, Milan and Venice that year.

Their dominant intellectual concern was still with the fusion of all art forms in a new Utopian town-planning while their experiments with architecture and the use of cities continued to provide a practical means of self-expression, a real group cohesion on the level of everyday life. Large-scale drifts, sometimes using several teams linked by walkie-talkies, were undertaken; psychogeographic studies and architectural plans were worked out in detail. *We are only at the beginning of urban civilisation . . . Twentieth century architects should be building adventures . . .* (I.S. 3, 1959). Debord made two more films, shorts this time, *Sur le passage de quelques personnes a travers une assez courte unite de temps* (1959) and *Critique de la Separation* (1960-61). Neither got beyond elitist avant-garde screenings. The only other films to which they bear the slightest resemblance are the early films of Resnais — and for good reasons. Close examination of both would show that Resnais knew Debord's films very well and had quite cynically ripped them off.

During this initial period the SI rose to some sort of underground fame, particularly within Northern Europe, though almost exclusively as a group of anti-art theoreticians and revolutionary architects. They were invited to participate in a number of exhibitions and events; generally they refused or just went along to cause trouble. The few attempts they made to work under official patronage invariably ended in disaster. Plans for the conversion of Claude-Nicholas Ledoux's complex of buildings at la Saline-de-Chaux, for the detailed

study of Les Halles and for a labyrinth to be built in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam all proved too crazy for the various authorities concerned and had to be scrapped.

What the SI in Paris was trying to work out was a new *revolutionary* critique of society: to discover forms of organisation and activity more effective than the slapstick anarchy of the Lettrists. Henri Lefebvre had been their first mentor in social revolution. Once a leading French Communist Party theoretician, Lefebvre had resigned from the Party and become increasingly anarchistic; his basic contention was that contemporary society wasn't suffering from any shortage of consumer goods but from a new poverty, a *poverty of everyday life*, and that revolution today must be focused on the regeneration of this area. The SI, though they relied increasingly on this concept of *everyday life*, tended to reject Lefebvre's philosophy as being basically academic and personal relations between them deteriorated and finally petered out. In 1960 they passed under the influence of Paul Cardan and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (*Solidarity in England*), a neo-Marxist group devoted largely to redefining the nature of capitalist exploitation during its present bureaucratic and consumer-oriented phase, though also far more involved in the realities of shopfloor agitation and struggle against the unions than either Lefebvre or the SI.

The working class gradually became something less of an abstraction. They began a systematic reinterpretation of European revolutionary history: of Fourier and the Utopians, of the young Marx, of the anarchists, of the Commune, of the terrorists, of all the massacred ultra-left social experiments that broke out amidst the proletarian and peasant uprisings of the first third of the twentieth-century. Their attack on leaders and all hierarchical political organisations became increasingly savage as did their insistence on popular spontaneity, violence and the ability of a revolutionary proletariat to evolve adequate political forms on the spot. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* left them with their central, if somewhat summary, political concept: that of the various attempts at workers' total self-management which, under the name of *Workers Councils*, have emerged from the revolutionary wars of the twentieth-century as the most consistent experiments yet made in integrally democratic organisation: St. Petersburg 1905, Turin 1920, Catalonia 1936, Budapest 1956.

Socialisme ou Barbarie also left them with the need for developing a new revolutionary critique of political economy: of the commodity-form denounced by Marx as the basis of all our social and individual alienation. They developed what was to become their most famous single concept — that of the *spectacle*. Used from the very first as a term to designate contemporary culture — French: *spectacle* a spectacle, a circus, a show, an exhibition — a one-way transmission of experience; a form of ‘communication’ to which one side, the audience, can never reply; a culture based on the reduction of almost everyone to a state of abject non-creativity: of receptivity, passivity and isolation. Now they saw that the same structure applied not only to cultural and leisure ‘activity’, not only to political organisation (whether that of the ruling classes or that of the so-called ‘Left’) but that this experience of passivity, isolation and abstraction was the universal experience imposed by contemporary capitalism: an experience radiating from its basic alienation, the commodity. Henceforward, consumer capitalism was to be simply *the society of the spectacle*.

The first thing this meant was that the situationists could no longer see themselves as an art movement of any sort at all: art was no more than the consumer good par excellence. Any work of art, however radical, could be digested by modern capitalism and turned into the opposite of all it had meant to those who originally created it. From the point of view of Paris — increasingly that of Debord whose intransigence was reinforced by the appearance of Raoul Vaneigem (born 1934) — all the other sections were dabbling far too much in ‘experimental art’ and courting the danger of being separated from what was *essentially* a *total* programme. Modern society wouldn’t find any difficulty in re-absorbing individual works of art as the latest *chic* revolutionary consumer good; and thus the rejection of consumer society made by the whole group would be compromised.

The situation exploded in the first series of the ‘exclusions’ for which the SI was to become notorious. *‘The architects Alberts and Oudejans, by accepting a commission to build a church at Volendam, have automatically excluded themselves from the SI’*. Exclusion followed exclusion over 1961 and 1962, in the best surrealist manner. The chaos only ended with the virtual disintegration of the Scandinavian, Dutch, Italian and German sections. At the same time a number of situationists who were becoming personally famous as artists — Constant in

Amsterdam, Asger Jorn in Scandinavia, Alex Trocchi in London — either dropped out or drifted away to follow individual careers. All these exclusions and break-ups, which set off a whole myth as to the situationists' fanaticism and glacial arrogance, really revolved around whether it was possible to create anything in contemporary society strong enough to withstand the massive pressures brought to bear upon it; or whether the only thing was denunciation, exposé.

'Shake in your shoes bureaucrats': the Situationists 1965 -1969

By the mid sixties the situationist project had taken on its definitive form. The SI was to be a small, tightly knit group of revolutionaries devoted to forging a critique of *contemporary*, that is to say, consumer capitalism — and to publicising this critique by every form of scandal and agitation possible. All practical experiment with art went by the board. Everything depended on universal insurrection. Poetry could *only* be made by everyone.

Over 1965, 1966 and 1967 they put forward an analysis of life in the West more incisive than any made since the twenties. Lefebvre, the only thinker on the same level in France, was left looking distinctly pedestrian, as was Marcuse in the States. And both for the same reason. Because the SI refused to define themselves as detached observers. They knew that in the last analysis they were as proletarianised as everyone else, and because of this they were able to detect and identify with the unacknowledged and snowballing 'revolt of youth' of the early and mid-sixties in both its middle-class 'dropout' and its working-class 'delinquent' forms. At the same time they were among the very few revolutionary groups both to understand the crucial importance of *the wildcat strikes* and to see that this whole new stage of industrial struggle was in no way incompatible with the psychological distress experienced by the younger generation.

They did a far better job on the newspapers than *Private Eye*: repeatedly quoting the growing number of openly acknowledged signs of utter world weariness and bitter anger spreading throughout Europe and the States. And they used these explosions of genuine revolt as a stick with which to still further belabour 'revolutionary' intellectuals: anyone who thought that revolution was only possible

somewhere on the other side of the planet — which meant that they couldn't see anything wrong with contemporary society and its consumer goods; anyone who bemoaned the absence of a revolutionary movement in Europe without doing anything about it *themselves*. They really were incredibly rude, and rude in the worst possible taste, to the entire political and cultural avant-garde establishment. Mr. GEORGE LAPASSADE IS A CUNT, in huge letters, filled one page of the magazine. In return French culture boycotted them completely. The censorship of the SI has probably been the most blatant case of cultural repression since before the War.

July 1965, the first copies of a cheaply duplicated magazine called *PROVO* appeared on the streets in Amsterdam — and were promptly seized by the police owing to the unusual precision of their recipe for homemade bombs. The torchlight meetings, the street demonstrations, the smoke-bombs, the white bicycles, the sabotage of state occasions, etc. that followed marked the first eruption into public consciousness of precisely what the situationists had been heralding for years: an anarchic, festive attack on the *quality* of life organised as a *political* movement. The Provos were the occasion of the situationists' first appearance in the French press — as the 'occult international', the theoretical driving force behind the Provos' political carnival. Exactly how much influence the SI had on the Provos is difficult to ascertain. In a loose sense, a good deal: Amsterdam had been one of the hubs of situationist activity a few years before and at least one of the Provo leaders, Constant the architect, was ex-SI. There wasn't, however, any constructive interaction between the two groups: the SI was as haughty with the Provos as with everyone else. All they had to say was that unless the Provo street lumpen proletariat shook off its own bureaucracy and star system and fused with the Dutch working class the whole episode would end like a damp squib — which was precisely what did happen. Be that as it may, it was only after the Provos that situationist-type politics began to gain any real credibility.

The same year saw an even more violent corroboration of their theses: the Watts riots in the States. The SI's analysis of these riots — *The Decline and Fall of the 'Spectacular' Commodity Economy* — was translated and distributed in England and the States even before it appeared in French. The text achieved some notoriety, though largely for its violence and incomprehensibility — the idea that there was a

revolutionary crisis brewing in America and that the blacks would play any part in it being obviously out of the question. As for the enthusiastic analyses of violence, looting and arson, let alone the discovery of poetry within them (poetry . . . ?) the good pacifist souls of the Anglo-American Left simply threw up their hands and fled. During the summer of 1966 an embryonic English section was formed, translated Vaneigem's *Banalites de Base* as *The Totality for Kids*, ran a magazine, *Heatwave*, and began to make contact with other lunatic fringe groups in London and the States.

By this time the situationist critique of society was almost complete. The problem before them was one of publicising their position: of breaking the very real conspiracy of silence against them. Some publicity came from the fact that their main base in Denmark was blown up and burnt down — to the situationists' great delight — apparently by the extreme right-wing for the role they had played in fomenting a series of riots in the Danish town of Randers. However it was the 'occupation' of Strasbourg University in November 1966 that finally rocketed the SI to national headlines.

A small group of students from Strasbourg University approached the SI in early 1966. Over the summer they worked out their tactics.

This small group got itself elected, amidst the apathy of Strasbourg's 16,000 students, to the committee of the left-wing students' union. Once in this position of power they began to put union funds to good use. They founded a Society for the Rehabilitation of Karl Marx and Ravachol. They plastered the walls of the city with a Marxist comic strip: 'The Return of the Durruti Column'. They proclaimed their intention to dissolve the union once and for all. Worst of all, they enlisted the aid of the notorious Situationist International and ran off ten thousand copies of a lengthy pamphlet which poured shit on student life and loves (and a few other things). When this was handed out at the official ceremony marking the beginning of the academic year, only de Gaulle was unaffected. The press — local, national and international — had a field-day. It took three weeks for the local Party of Order — from right-wing students to the official left via Alsatian mill-owners — to eject these fanatics. The union was closed by a court order on the 14th of December. The judge's summing up was disarmingly lucid:

The accused have never denied the charge of misusing the funds of the students' union. Indeed they openly admit to having made the union

*pay some £500 for the printing and distribution of 10,000 pamphlets, not to mention the cost of other literature inspired by 'Internationale Situationiste'. These publications express ideas and aspirations which, to put it mildly, have nothing to do with the aims of a student union. One has only to read what the accused have written for it to be obvious that these five students, scarcely more than adolescents, lacking all experience of real life, their minds confused by ill-digested philosophical, social, political and economic theories, and perplexed by the drab monotony of their everyday life, make the empty, arrogant and pathetic claim to pass definitive judgements, sinking to outright abuse, on their fellow students, their teachers, God, religion, the clergy, the governments and political systems of the whole world. Rejecting all morality and restraint, these cynics do not hesitate to commend theft, the destruction of scholarship, the abolition of work, total subversion and a world-wide proletarian revolution with 'unlicensed pleasure' as its only goal. In view of their basically anarchist character, these theories and propaganda are eminently noxious. Their wide diffusion in both student circles and among the general public by the local, national and foreign press are a threat to the morality, the studies, the reputation and thus the very future of the students of the University of Strasbourg (from the first English version of *Ten Days That Shook The University*.)*

This was Europe's first university occupation and for weeks the scandal echoed through all the student unions in France. The pamphlet referred to, *Of Student Poverty*, became a bestseller overnight and there can hardly have been a single left-wing student in France who didn't hear of the SI. Over 1967 the pamphlet was translated into half a dozen European languages; the English version, *Ten Days That Shook The University*, was reproduced several times in the States both in the underground press and as a pamphlet. In France the court cases dragged on for several months and the scandal was still further exacerbated by another batch of exclusions ('the Garnautins'), a nasty and protracted business this time solely about the supposed authoritarian role played by Debord. Their new-found fame, however, remained untarnished. The SI had become synonymous with the utmost extremism. It bathed in revolutionary charisma.

The whole of that year the SI gained greater and greater influence in French universities. They made personal contact with a fair num-

ber of students (via their official P.O. Box number, the only way they made contact with anyone) but always insisted that the people they met developed on their own and formed autonomous and self-sufficient groups. Of all these students the ones they became closest to were a group from Nanterre — a handful of anarchists destined, the following year, to become almost as notorious as the SI itself. The situationists' theoretical expression was completed by the publication of two full length books, Raoul Vaneigem's *Traite de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations* and Debord's *La Societe du Spectacle*, treating what could be called the subjective and objective aspects of alienation respectively. Both books were almost entirely ignored by the French press until the following summer.

Yet for all this there was a growing desire for direct action within the group itself. Amongst many plans there was one particularly good one to cause a massive scandal in the heart of Paris by staining the Seine blood-red and dumping the bodies of a couple of hundred vaguely Vietnamese Asiatics in it, so they floated downstream past Notre Dame and L'île Saint-Louis. The corpses were a cinch: one of the main medical schools in Paris bought dead Chinamen by the ton for dissection. The route taken by the refrigerated truck was known and quite sensible plans for hijacking it were worked out. The bodies were to be dropped into the Seine upstream in the suburbs. The fuck-up was the red industrial dye. The quantities necessary seemed enormous. The connection didn't come through and the whole thing petered out . . .

Much has been made, both in the newspapers at the time and in subsequent sociological studies, of the situationists' influence on May '68: on the first general wildcat strike in history and the wave of occupations that left France tottering on the brink of a revolutionary crisis more vertiginous than anything since the Spanish Civil War. This influence can't be measured in any meaningful way. In the first place the SI never claimed to stand for more than the consciousness of a real social and historical process embodied by millions of people; nor to act as more than a catalyst in certain quite specific social areas. However, once that has been said, one can only add that the extent to which they had *prefigured* everything that materialised that May was little short of clairvoyant.

More specifically: it should be remembered that the first spark that set off the whole gunpowder keg came from the handful of *Enrages* — a group which had adopted the theses of the SI and who turned the University of Nanterre upside down in early 1968. Several of them were disciplined by university authorities along with other radicals and this action precipitated the immediate crisis at the university level. The *22nd March Movement* had been thoroughly impregnated with situationist ideas by the *Enrages*, although they had walked out of it at its inception because of its mish-mash composition and its refusal to expel certain known Stalinists. Situationist ideas had also spread far among many students, 'artists' and politicians in the Latin Quarter and throughout the entire French university system. (After it was all over, Vaneigem's *Traite* turned out to be the most widely ripped off book in France in 1968.)

As the crisis developed the SI and the *Enrages* played a decisive part: the *Enrage Riesel* and others were elected to the Sorbonne Occupation Committee and were the first to communicate the call for self-management and the creation of workers' councils after the first factories were occupied by French workers. But they were unable to prevent the steady encroachment of the various bureaucratic leftist sects and the endless verbalisation so beloved of students; and so they left in disgust.

On May 17th they founded the *Council for the Maintenance of Occupations* (CMDO) which occupied the National Pedagogical Institute on rue d'Ulm, and then, from the end of May, the basement of a 'School of Decorative Arts' next door. The CMDO dissolved itself on June 15th with the nationwide ebbing of occupations. About forty people made up the permanent base of the CMDO, who were joined for a while by other revolutionaries and strikers coming from various industries, from abroad or from the Provinces, and returning there. The CMDO was more or less constantly made up of about ten situationists and *Enrages* (among them Debord, Khayati, Reisel and Vaneigem), and as many respectively from the workers, high school students or 'students', and other councilists without specific social functions. Throughout its existence it was a successful experiment in direct democracy, guaranteed by an equal participation of everyone in debates, decisions and their execution. It was essentially an uninterrupted general assembly deliberating day and night. No faction or private meetings ever existed outside the common debate.

A unit spontaneously created in the conditions of a revolutionary moment, the CMDO was obviously less of a council than a councilist organisation, thus functioning on the model of *soviet democracy*; as an improvised response to that precise moment, the CMDO could neither present itself as a permanent councilist organisation nor, as such, attempt to transform itself into an organisation of that kind. Nonetheless general agreement on the major situationist theses reinforced its cohesion. Three committees had organised themselves within the general assembly to make possible its practical activity. The Printing Committee took charge of the writing and printing of the CMDO's publications, both using the machines to which it had access and in collaboration with certain occupied print shops whose workers gladly put back into operation the excellent equipment at their disposal. The Liaison Committee, with ten cars at its disposal, took care of contacts with occupied factories and the delivery of material for distribution. The Requisitions Committee, which excelled during the most difficult period, made sure that paper, petrol, food and money were never lacking. There was no permanent committee to ensure the rapid writing of the texts, whose content was determined by everyone, but on each occasion several members were designated, who then submitted the result to the assembly.

The CMDO printed a series of very curt, simple posters; and a series of leaflets and throwaways — amongst which were an *Address To All Workers* and a reprinting of the *Minimum Definition of a Revolutionary Organisation*. The major texts had printings of between 150,000 and 200,000 copies, and responsibility was taken for translation into English, German, Spanish, Italian, Danish and Arabic. They also published several appropriate songs and about forty comic-strips, which seem to have been popular (at any rate several of the occupied factories produced their own), though the massive use of graffiti was a more successful medium, indeed the first new form of expression since the twenties: the spray can, far more than the street poster, offers the writer the one way he can be certain of being read by everyone.

The CMDO recognised that what had initially been a student revolt now contained, because of the factory occupations, the possibilities for a social revolution. As such it attempted to show what prevented the May movement from becoming revolutionary; in its interventions it denounced the recuperators of the parties, Stalinist

unions and the confusion of the 'groupuscules' (Trotskyists, Maoists and Anarchists who formed 'action committees' of militants united only on the most immediate particulars — the banal demands of 'reform the university' and 'end police repression') who sought to impose their 'non'-leadership on the movement. But more importantly, the CMDO posed the issue of self-management concretely as an immediate possibility; revolution was the only demand to be made by the French proletariat.

'Those who make half a Revolution only dig their own graves': The Situationists since 1969

May 1968 and France on the verge of anarchy . . . An atmosphere of martial law in Paris and hundreds of factories occupied . . . 140 American cities in flames after the killing of Martin Luther King . . . German and English universities occupied . . . Hippie ghettos directly clashing with the police state . . . The sudden exhilarating sense of how many people felt the same way . . . The new world coming into focus . . . The riots a great dance in the streets . . .

Today — nothing. The Utopian image has faded from the streets. Just the endless traffic, the blank eyes that pass you by, the nightmarish junk we're all dying for. Everyone seems to have retreated into themselves, into closed occult groups. The revolutionary excitement that fired the sixties is dead, the 'counter-culture' a bad joke. No more aggression, no more laughter, no more dreams. 'To talk of life today is like talking of rope in the house of a hanged man.'

Yet there were thousands and thousands of people there. What has happened to us all?

The Paris May Days were the end for the SI. On the one hand, the police state pressure on the French Left after May made any overt action virtually suicidal. On the other, the SI, because it couldn't think its way beyond the debacle, finally received the cultural accolade it had always dreaded: it entered 'the heaven of the spectacle' by the scruff of the neck, and that was that. The atmosphere in France after May was one of utter defiance coupled with complete impotence, and 'situationism' was the perfect ideological expression of this frustration. The SI became famous, and its truth stood out in all its bitterness: a brilliant theoretical critique of society without any

grasp of the real problems of what to do about it. What is to be done? Reread Korsch and Duchamp, *mon vieux*.

The movement disintegrated. The last copy of the magazine came out in late 1969. The only significant text to emerge in four years is *La Vritable Scission dans l'Internationale* (1972) by Debord and Sanguinetti — a laboured and increasingly desperate attempt to come to grips with French students' attitude of passive and lifeless worship of revolutionary ideas, but remaining silent on the vital issues of organisation and activity which alone could lead them out of their dilemma. The organisation itself broke up amidst bitter tactical wrangling over 1969-70. Khayati and Vienet resigned. Vaneigem fried, predictably enough. The others went their different ways.

At present there are said to be between two and four members of the SI — including the poor Chtcheglov in his Central European madhouse. Perhaps one should add there are stories that the SI remained intact and really just disappeared owing to police pressure and is now working on a real underground organisation. Sounds a bit like King Arthur and His Knights, but you never can tell. Certainly it seems unlikely that the last has been heard of either Debord or Vaneigem.

The presence of the SI never made itself properly felt in either England or America. The English and what could well have become the American sections of the SI were excluded just before Christmas 1967. Both groups felt that the perfection and publicisation of a theoretical critique was not sufficient: they wanted political subversion and individual 'therapy' to converge in an uninterrupted everyday activity. Some of this they saw, though on a very limited and local scale, the following year: the Americans as *The Motherfuckers* and the English as *King Mob*. Neither group survived that apocalyptic summer of 1968.

Henceforward the dissemination of situationist ideas in both countries was dissociated from the real organisation that alone could have dynamised them. On the one hand this led to obscure post-grad groups sitting over their pile of gestetnered situationist pamphlets, happy as Larry in their totally prefabricated identity. On the other, the more sincere simply went straight up the wall: *The Angry Brigade*, very heavily influenced by situationist ideas (translate *Les Enrages* into English . . .), destroying themselves at the same time as they took the critique of the spectacle to its most blood-curdling spectacular extreme.

One of the first English members of the SI writes from the States:

Seen from over here, the S.I. has a lot to answer for: it has spawned a whole stew of 'revolutionary organisations', usually composed of half a dozen moralists of the transparent relationship; these have inevitably foundered after a few months — though not without bequeathing weighty self criticisms to a breathless posterity. Idiots. Worse: *cures*. Yet their traits are undoubtedly linked organically, genetically, to the original SI in its negative aspects: the SI is responsible for its monstrous offspring. Somehow or other, the SI's 'original sin' is tied up with a shift from the sardonic megalomania of iconoclasm to the true megalomania of priesthood. Moving, justifiably, from 'culture' to 'politics' the SI threw the baby out with the bathwater. One day somebody (I forget who) took refuge up a lamp-post, while freaked on acid, from a *derive*-cum-discussion-of-Lukacs with a merry band of situationists. How is it conceivable that this act could be greeted with blank incomprehension (and — *c'est bien la mot* — *displeasure*) by Debord, drunkard extraordinary? Yet it was so.

What then remains of the SI? What is still relevant? Above all, I think, its iconoclasm, its *destructivity*. What the SI did was to *redefine the nature of exploitation and poverty*. Ten years ago people were still demonstrating against the state of affairs in Vietnam — *while remaining completely oblivious, to the terrible state they were in themselves*. The SI showed exactly how loneliness and anxiety and aimlessness have replaced the nineteenth century struggle for material survival, though they are still generated by the same class society. They focused on immediate experience, *everyday life* as the area people most desperately wanted to transform.

Rediscovering poverty cannot be separated from rediscovering what *wealth* really means. The SI rediscovered the vast importance of visionary politics, of the *Utopian tradition* — and included art, in all its positive aspects, in this tradition. People today will never break out of their stasis for the sake of a minor rearrangement. There have been too many already. Only the hope of a total change will inflame anybody. Who the hell is going to exert themselves to get another frozen chicken, another pokey room? But the possibilities of living in one's own cathedral . . .

What was basically wrong with the SI was that it focused exclusively on an intellectual critique of society. There was no concern whatsoever with either the emotions or the body. The SI thought that you just had to show how the nightmare worked and everyone would wake up. Their quest was for the perfect formula, the magic charm that would dispense the evil spell. This pursuit of the perfect intellectual formula meant inevitably that situationist groups were based on a hierarchy of intellectual ability — and thus on disciples and followers, on fears and exhibitionism, the whole political horror trip. After their initial period, creativity, apart from its intellectual forms, was denied expression — and in this lies the basic instability and sterility of their own organisations.

In the last analysis they made the same mistake as all left-wing intellectuals: *they thought that everyone else was plain thick*. The poor workers don't know what's going on, they need someone to tell them. But people in the streets, in the offices and factories know damn well what's going on, even if they can't write essays about all its theoretical ramifications. *The point is that they can't do anything about it*. What needs understanding is the state of paralysis everyone is in. Certainly all conditioning comes from society but it is anchored in the body and mind of each individual, and this is where it must be dissolved. Ultimately the problem is an *emotional*, not an intellectual one. All the analyses of reification in the world won't cause a neurosis to budge an inch. Certainly a massive propaganda campaign to publicise the possibility of a revolution, of a total transformation of the world, is vitally important — but it will prove totally ineffective if it isn't simultaneous with *the creation of mass therapy*.

Look, after so many, many pages, let's try and be honest, just for a moment. I feel very fucked up myself, and I know it's my responsibility. Yet whenever I go out on the streets my being somehow reels back appalled: these terrible faces, these machines, they are me too, I know; yet somehow that's not my fault. Everyone's life is a switch between changing oneself and changing the world. Surely they must somehow be the same thing and a dynamic balance is possible. I think the SI had this for a while, and later they lost it. I want to find it again — that quickening in oneself and in others, that sudden happiness and beauty. It could connect, could come together. Psychoanalysts and Trotskyists are both silly old men to the child. Real life is elsewhere.



Critique of the Situationist International

Jean Barrot

From Red-eye #1 (Berkeley, 1979)

Ideology and the Wage System

Capitalism transforms life into the money necessary for living. One tends to do any particular thing towards an end other than that implied by the content of the activity. The logic of alienation: one is an *other*; the wage system makes one foreign to what one does, to what one is, to other people.

Now, human activity does not produce only goods and relationships, but also representations. Man is not *homo faber*: the reduction of human life to the economy (since taken up by official marxism) dates from the enthronement of capital. All activity is *symbolic*: it creates, at one and the same time, products and a vision of the world. The layout of a primitive village:

summarizes and assures the relations between Man and the universe, between society and the supernatural world, between the living and the dead (Levi-Strauss).

The fetishism of commodities is merely the form taken by this symbolism in societies dominated by exchange.

As capital tends to produce everything as capital, to parcelize everything so as to recompose it with the help of market relations, it also makes of representation a specialized sector of production. Stripped of the means of their material existence, wage-workers are also stripped of the means of producing their ideas, which are produced by a specialized sector (whence the role of the 'intellectuals',

a term introduced in France by the *Manifesto of the [dreyfusite] Intellectuals*, 1898). The proletarian receives these representations (ideas, images, implicit associations, myths) as he receives from capital the other aspects of his life. Schematically speaking, the nineteenth century worker produced his ideas (even reactionary ones) at the cafe, the bar or the club, while today's worker sees his on television — a tendency which it would certainly be absurd to extrapolate to the point of reducing to it all of reality.

Marx defined *ideology* as the substitute for a real but impossible change: the change is lived at the level of the imaginary. Modern man is in this situation as extended to every realm. He no longer transforms anything except into images. He travels so as to rediscover the stereotype of the foreign country; loves so as to play the role of the virile lover or the tender beloved etc. Deprived of labor (transformation of environment and self) by wage-labor, the proletarian lives the 'spectacle' of change.

The present-day wage-worker does not live in 'abundance' in relation to the nineteenth-century worker who lived in 'poverty'. The wage-worker does not simply consume objects, but reproduces the economic and mental structures which weigh on him. It is because of this, contrary to the opinion of *Invariance*,¹ that he cannot free himself of these representations except by suppressing their material basis. He lives in a community of semiotics which force him to continue: materially (credit), ideologically and psychologically (this community is one of the few available). One does not only consume signs: the constraints are as much, and first of all, economic (bills to be paid, etc.). Capital rests on the production and sale of objects. That these objects also function *as signs* (and sometimes as that above all) is a fact, but this never annuls their materiality. Only intellectuals believe themselves to be living in a world made purely of signs.²

True and False

What are the consequences for the revolutionary movement of *the function of social appearances in modern capitalism* (I.S. #10, p. 79)? As Marx and DeJacques³ put it, communism has always been the dream of the world. Today, the dream also serves not to change reality. One cannot content oneself with 'telling' the truth: this can only exist as

practice, as relationship between subject and object, saying and doing, expression and transformation, and manifests itself as tension. The 'false' is not a screen which blocks the view. The 'true' exists within the false, in *Le Monde* or on television, and the 'false' within the true, in texts which are revolutionary or which claim to be. The false asserts itself through its practice, by the use which it makes of the truth: the true is so only in transformation. Revolutionary activity that locates itself in what it says *on this side* of what the radio says is a semi-futility. Let us measure the gap between words and reality. The SI demanded that revolutionaries not dazzle with words. Revolutionary theory is not made revolutionary by itself, but by the capacity of those who possess it to put it to subversive use not by a sudden flash, but by a mode of presentation and diffusion which leaves traces, even if scarcely visible ones. The denunciation of Leftists, for example, is secondary. Making it the axis of activity leads to not dealing with fundamental questions for the purposes of polemic against this or that group. Acting in this way modifies the content of ideas and actions. One addresses the essential only through denunciations, and the denunciation quickly becomes the essential.

Face to face with the multiplication of individuals and texts with radical pretensions, the SI obliges one to ask: is this theory the product of a subversive social relation seeking its expression, or a production of ideas being diffused without contributing to a practical unification? Everyone listens to the radio, but radio sets unify proletarians in the service of capital — until the day when these technical means are seized by revolutionary proletarians, at which time one hour of broadcasting will be worth years of previous 'propaganda'.⁴

However, the 'end of ideology' does not mean that there could be a society without ideas, functioning automatically, like a machine: this would presuppose a 'robotized' and thus a non-'human' society, since it would be deprived of the necessary reaction of its members. Having become an ideology in the sense of *The German Ideology*, the imaginary develops exactly along these lines. There is no dictatorship of social relations which remote-controls us, without reaction and reflection on our part. This is a very partial vision of 'barbarism'. The mistake in descriptions of completely totalitarian societies (Orwell's *1984* or the film *THX1138*) is that they do not see that all societies, even the most oppressive, presuppose the intervention and action of

human beings in their unfolding. Every society, including and especially capitalist society, lives on these tensions, even though it risks being destroyed by them. The critique of ideology denies neither the role of ideas nor that of collective action in propagating them.

The Theoretical Dead-end of the Notion of the 'Spectacle'

The notion of the spectacle unites a large number of given basic facts by showing society — and thus its revolutionary transformation — as activity. Capitalism does not 'mystify' the workers. The activity of revolutionaries does not demystify; it is the expression of a real social movement. The revolution creates a different *activity* whose establishment is a condition of what classical revolutionary theory called 'political' tasks (destruction of the State). But the SI was not able to conceive in this way of the notion which it had brought to light. It invested so much in this notion that it reconstructed the whole of revolutionary theory around the spectacle.

In its theory of 'bureaucratic capitalism', *Socialisme ou Barbarie* had capital rest on the bureaucracy. In its theory of 'spectacular commodity society', the SI explained everything from the *spectacle*. One does not construct a revolutionary theory except as a whole, and by basing it on what is fundamental to social life. No, the question of 'social appearances' is not the *key to any new revolutionary endeavor* (I.S. #10, p. 79).

The traditional revolutionary groups had only seen new means of conditioning. But for the SI, the mode of expression of the 'media' corresponds to a way of life which did not exist a hundred years ago. Television does not indoctrinate, but inscribes itself into a mode of being. The SI showed the relationship between the form and foundation, where traditional marxism saw nothing but new instruments in the service of the same cause.

Meanwhile, the notion of the spectacle elaborated by the SI falls behind what Marx and Engels understood by the term 'ideology'. Debord's book *The Society of the Spectacle* presents itself as an attempt to explain capitalist society and revolution, when in fact it only considers their forms, important but not determinant phenomena. It robs the description of them in a theorization which gives the impression of a fundamental analysis, when in fact the *method*, and

the *subject* being studied, remain always at the level of social appearances. At this level, the book is outstanding. The trouble is that it is written (and read) as if one were going to find something in it that isn't there. While *SoU B* analyzed the revolutionary problem by means of industrial sociology, the SI analyzes it starting out from a reflection on the surface of society. This is not to say that *The Society of the Spectacle* is superficial. Its contradiction and, ultimately, its theoretical and practical dead-end, is to have made a study of the profound, through and by means of the superficial appearance. The SI had no analysis of capital: it understood it, but through its effects. It criticized the commodity, not capital — or rather, it criticized capital as commodity, and not as a system of valuation which includes production as well as exchange.

Throughout the book, Debord remains at the stage of circulation, lacking the necessary moment of production, of productive labor. What nourishes capital is not consumption, as he leads one to understand, but the formation of value by labor. Debord is right to see more in the relation between appearance and reality than in that between illusion and the reality, as if appearances did not exist. But one never understands the real *on the basis* of the apparent. Thus Debord does not complete his project. He does not show how capitalism makes what is only the result into the cause or even into the *movement*. The critique of political economy (which Debord does not make, content to ignore it as were the utopians before him) shows how the proletarian sees standing over and against him not only his product, but his *activity*. In the fetishism of commodities, the commodity appears as its own movement. By the fetishism of capital, capital takes on an autonomy which it does not possess, presenting itself as a living being (*Invariance* is a victim of this illusion): one does not know where it comes from, who produces it, by what process the proletarian engenders it, by what contradiction it lives and may die. Debord makes the spectacle into the subject of capitalism, instead of showing how it is produced by capitalism. He reduces capitalism to its spectacular dimension alone. The movement of capital becomes the movement of the spectacle. In the same way *Banalities de base*⁵ makes a *history of the spectacle* through religion, myth, politics, philosophy, etc. This theory remains limited to a part of the real relations, and goes so far as to make them rest entirely on this part.

The spectacle is activity become passive. The SI rediscovered what Marx said in the *Grundrisse* about the rising-up of Man's being (his self-transformation, his labor) as an alien power which crushes him: facing it, he no longer lives, he only looks. The SI brought a new vigor to this theme. But capital is more than pacification. It needs the intervention of the proletariat, as *Sou B*⁶ said. The SI's overestimation of the spectacle is the sign that it theorizes on the basis of a social vision born at the periphery of society, and which it believed to be central.

The Spectacle and the Theory of Art

The theory of the spectacle expresses the crisis of the space-time outside labor. Capital more and more creates a realm outside of labor according to the logic of its economy: it does not develop leisure to control the masses, but because it reduces living labor to a lesser role in production, diminishes labor-time, and adds to the wage-worker's time of inactivity. Capital creates for the wage-workers a space-time that is excluded, empty, because consumption never succeeds in filling it completely. To speak of space-time is to insist on the fact that there is a reduction in the working day, and that this freed time also occupies a geographical and social space, in particular the street (c.f. the importance of the city and of the *derive*⁷ for the SI).

This situation coincides with a dual crisis of 'art'. Firstly, art no longer has meaning because Western society doesn't know where it's going. With 1914, the West lost the meaning and direction of civilization. Scientism, liberalism and apologetics for the 'liberating' effect of productive forces went bankrupt like their adversaries (Romanticism, etc.). From then on, art was to be tragic, narcissistic, or the negation of itself. In former periods of crisis, one sought the meaning of the world: today, one doubts if it has one. Secondly, the colonization of the market and the vain and frenzied search for a 'direction' enlist the artist in the service of consumption outside of labor.

The SI is conscious of its social origin. *Sur le passage de quelque personnes . . .* (1959), one of Debord's films, speaks of people *on the margin of the economy*. On this terrain, like *Sou B* on the terrain of the enterprise, the SI understood that modern capitalism tends to exclude people from all activity and at the same time to engage them in a pseudo participation. But, like *Sou B*, it makes a decisive criterion out

of the contradiction between active and passive. Revolutionary practice consists of breaking *the very principle of the spectacle: non-intervention* (I.S. # 1, p. 110). At the end of the process, the *workers' council* will be the means of being active, of breaking down separation. Capital endures by the exclusion of human beings, their passivity. What moves in the direction of a refusal of passivity is revolutionary. Hence the revolutionary is defined by 'a new style of life' which will be an 'example' (I.S. #6, p. 4).

The realm outside labor rests on bonds that are more contingent (c.f. the *derive*) and subjective than wage labor, which belongs more to the necessary and the objective. To the traditional economy, the SI opposes *an economy of desires* (I.S. #7, p. 16); to necessity, it opposes freedom; to effort, pleasure; to labor, the automation which makes it unnecessary; to sacrifice, delight. The SI reverses the oppositions which must be superceded. Communism does not free one from the necessity of labor, it overthrows 'labor' itself (as a separate and alien activity — Tr.). The SI identifies revolution with a *liberation* from constraints, based on desire and first of all on the desire for others, the need for relationships. It makes the link between 'situation' and 'labor' badly, which limits its notion of the situation. It thinks of society and its revolution from the context of non-wage-earning social layers. Hence, it carries over onto the productive proletariat what it said about those who are outside the wage system (street gangs, ghetto blacks). Because it was ignorant of the center of gravity of the movement, the SI moved toward councilism: the councils permit a 'direct and active communication' (*Society of the Spectacle*). The revolution appeared as the extension of the construction of inter-subjective situations to the whole of society.

The critique of the SI passes through the recognition of its 'avant-garde artist' aspect. Its sociological origin often provokes abusive and absurd interpretations of the 'they were petty-bourgeois' variety. The question is clearly elsewhere. In the case of the SI, it theorized *from its own social experience*. The SI's artistic origin is not a stigma in itself; but it leaves its mark on theory and evolution when the group envisages the world from the point of view of its specific social layer. The passing to a revolutionary theory and action that were general (no longer aimed only at art, urbanism, etc.) corresponds to a precise logic on the SI's part. The SI says that each new issue of its journal can and

must allow one to re-read all the previous issues in a new way. This is indeed the characteristic of a theory which is growing richer, being enriched, and the opposite of *S ou B*. It is not a matter of: on one side the general aspect of the SI, and on the other its more or less critical relationship to art. The critique of *separation* was its guiding thread. In art, as in the council, in self-management, in workers' democracy and in organization (c.f. its *Minimum definition of revolutionary organizations*), the SI wanted to break down separation, to create a real community. While the SI refused 'questioning' *à la* Cardan, it ended by adopting the problematic of participation' *à la* Chaulieu.

The SI and Socialisme ou Barbarie

In order to attain 'the transparency of inter-subjective relations', the SI wound up with the councilism supported by *S ou B*. The council is the means of rediscovering unity. Debord met the *S ou B* through Canjuers and joined it for several months. His membership was not mentioned in the SI journal. On the contrary: *La Veritable Scission*⁸, speaking of Khayati, excludes on principle 'a double membership (in both the SI and another group) which would immediately border on manipulation' (p. 85). However that may be, Debord participated in the activities of *S ou B*, throughout the time he was a member, notably taking part in the team that was sent to Belgium during the great strike of 1960. At the end of an international meeting organized by *S ou B*, which was at once deceptive and revealing of the lack of perspectives, and which concluded with a pretentious speech by Chaulieu on the tasks of *S ou B*, Debord announced his resignation. Not without irony, he declared that he was in accord with the vast perspectives outlined by Chaulieu, but that he did not feel equal to so immense a task.

I.S. #6 (1961) adopted the idea of the councils, if not councilism; in any case it adopted the thesis of the division between 'order-givers' and 'order-takers'. The project which the SI set for itself in I.S. #6, comprising among others 'the study without illusions of the classical workers' movement' and of Marx, was not to be realized. The SI was to remain ignorant of the reality of the communist left, particularly Bordiga. The most radical of the revolutionary movement would always be an improved *S ou B*. It saw theory through this filter.

Vaneigem's *Banalities de base* cheerfully bypasses Marx and re-writes history in the light of *Sou B*, while adding to it the critique of the commodity. The SI criticized *Sou B* but only in terms of degree: for the SI, *Sou B* limited socialism to workers' management, while in fact it meant management of everything. Chaulieu confined himself to the factory, Debord wanted to self-manage life. Vaneigem's procedure is close to that of Cardan. He looks for a sign (evidence): no longer the shameless exploitation of workers on the shop-floor, but the misery of social relationships, there is the revolutionary detonator:

The feeble quality of the spectacle and of everyday life becomes the only sign.

La Veritable Scission . . . would also speak of a sign of what was unbearable. Vaneigem is against vulgar marxism, but he does not integrate marxism into a critique. He does not assimilate what was revolutionary about Marx that established marxism has obliterated. In *I.S.* #9 (1963), the SI still acknowledged that Cardan was 'in advance' of it.

Like *Society of the Spectacle*, *Banalities de base* situates itself at the level of ideology and its contradictions. Vaneigem shows how religion has become the spectacle, which obliges revolutionary theory to criticize the spectacle as it once had to start out from a critique of religion and philosophy. But in this way one obtains only the (pre) *condition* of revolutionary theory: the work remains to be done. The SI at first hoped for a lot from Lefebvre⁹ and Cardan, then violently rejected them. But it kept in common with them the lack of both a theory of capitalism and a theory of society. Toward 1960, it opened up to new horizons but did not take the step. The SI confronted value (c.f. Jorn's text on political economy and use value) but did not recognize it for what it was. Its theory had neither centrality nor globality. This led it to overestimate very diverse social movements, without seeing the kernel of the problem.

It is, for example, incontestable that the article on Watts (#9, 1964)¹⁰ is a brilliant theoretical breakthrough. Taking up in its own way what might have been said about the exchange between Mauss and Bataille, the SI posed the question of the modification of the very substance of capitalist society. The article's conclusion even takes up

once again Marx's formulation about the link between Man and his generic nature, taken up at the same time by Camatte in the P.C.I.¹¹ (c.f. #1 of *Invariance*). But staying at the level of the commodity, the SI was incapable of differentiating between the levels of society, and of singling out what makes a revolution. When it writes that

a revolt against the spectacle situates itself at the level of the totality . . .

it proves that it is making the spectacle into the totality. In the same way its 'management-ist' illusions led it to distort the facts concerning Algeria after Boumedienne's coup d'etat:

The only program of the Algerian socialist elements is the defense of the self-managed sector, not only as it is, but as it ought to be (#9, 1964, p. 21).

In other words, *without revolution*, that is to say, without the destruction of the State and key transformations in society, the SI believed that there could be workers' management, and that revolutionaries should work for its extension.

Positive Utopia

The SI allows the recognition at the level of revolutionary activity of the implications of the development of capital since 1914, already recognized by the communist left insofar as this development involved reformism, nations, wars, the evolution of the state, etc. The SI had crossed the path of the communist left.

The SI understood the communist movement and the revolution as the *production* by the proletarians of new relations to each other and to 'things'. It rediscovered the Marxian idea of communism as the *movement* of self-creation by men of their own relations. With the exception of Bordiga, it was the first to connect again with the utopian tradition. This was at once its strength and its ambiguity.

The SI was initially a revolt which sought to take back the cultural means monopolized by money and power. Previously the most lucid artists had wanted to break the separation between *art* and *life*: the SI raised this demand to a higher level in their desire to abolish the distance

between *life* and *revolution*. 'Experimentation' had been for surrealism an illusory means of wrenching art out of its isolation from reality: the SI applied it in order to found a positive utopia. The ambiguity comes from the fact that the SI did not know exactly whether it was a matter of living differently from now on or only of *heading that way*.

The culture to be overthrown will not really fall except along with the totality of the socioeconomic formation which upholds it. But, without further ado, the SI proposes to confront it throughout its length and breadth, up to and including the imposition of an autonomous situationist control and experimentation against those who hold the existing cultural authority(ies), i.e. up to and including a state of dual power within culture . . . The center of such a development within culture would first of all have to be UNESCO once the SI had taken command of it: a new type of popular university, detached from the old culture; lastly, utopian centers to be built which, in relation to certain existing developments in the social space of leisure, would have to be more completely liberated from the ruling daily life . . . would function as bridgeheads for a new invasion of everyday life (#5, 1960, pp. 5 & 31).

The idea of a gradual liberation is coherent with that of a self-management spreading everywhere little by little: it misunderstands society as a *totality*. Besides this, it grants privilege to 'culture', *the center of meaning of a meaningless society* (#5, p. 5).

This exaggeration of the role of culture was later to be carried over into workers' autonomy: the 'power of the councils' was supposed to spread until it occupied the whole of society. These two traits have deep roots in the origins of the SI. The problem, then, is not that the SI remained too 'artistic' in the Bohemian sense, lacking in 'rigor' (as if the 'Marxists' were rigorous), but that it applied the same approach throughout.

The projects for 'another' life were legion in the SI. I.S. #6 (1961) dealt with an experimental town. At the Goteborg conference, Vaneigem spoke of *constructing situationist bases, in preparation for a unitary urbanism and a liberated life*. This speech (says the account of the proceeding) *met with no opposition* (#7, 1962, p. 27).

One makes an organization: revolutionary groups have no right to exist as a permanent vanguard unless they themselves set the example of

a new style of life (#7, p. 16). The overestimation of organization and of the responsibility of living differently now led, obviously, to a self-overestimation of the SI. Trocchi declares in #7:

We envisage a situation in which life is continually renewed by art, a situation constructed by the imagination . . . we have already gone through enough experiences in a preparatory direction: we are ready to act (pp. 50 & 53).

A significant fact: the critique of this article in the following issue did not pick up on this aspect (#8, pp. 3-5). Trocchi was to realize this program in his own way in *Project Sigma*: the SI did not disavow it, but only stated that Trocchi was not undertaking this project in his capacity as a member of the SI (#9, p. 83).

The ambiguity was brought to a head by Vaneigem who in fact wrote *a treatise on how to live differently* in the present world while setting forth what social relations could be. It is a handbook to violating the logic of the market and the wage system wherever one can get away with it. *La Veritable Scission* has some harsh words for Vaneigem and his book. Debord and Sanguinetti were right to speak of *exorcism*:

He has said so as not to be (p. 143).

No doubt. But the critique is belated. Vaneigem's book was a difficult work to produce because it *cannot be lived*, threatened with falling on the one hand into a marginal possibilism and on the other into an imperative which is unrealizable and thus moral. Either one huddles in the crevices of bourgeois society, or one ceaselessly opposes to it a different life which is impotent because only the revolution can make it a reality. The SI put the worst of itself into its worst text. Vaneigem was the weakest side of the SI, the one which reveals all its weaknesses. The positive utopia is revolutionary as demand, as tension, because it cannot be realized within this society: it becomes derisory when one tries to live it today. Instead of hammering away at Vaneigem as an individual, *The Real Split* could have drawn up the balance sheet of the practice which had produced Vaneigem, but there was no such balance sheet (see below).

The reformism of the *everyday* was later transferred to the level of work; arriving late for *work*, writes Ratgeb¹², is the beginning of a critique of wage labor. We are not seeking to make fun of Vaneigem, unhappy theoretician of an art of living, 'la radicalite'. His *brío* only succeeds in giving the *Treatise* an empty pretension which makes one smile. *The Real Split* is ill inspired to mock the *attitude* of Vaneigem in May 1968, when he left for his vacation as planned even though the 'events' had begun (he quickly returned). This personal contradiction reflected the theoretical and practical contradiction sustained by the SI from its beginnings. Like every *morality*, Vaneigem's position was untenable and had to explode on contact with reality. The SI in *denouncing* his attitude gave itself over also to a moralistic practice: it judged acts without examining their causes. This revelation of Vaneigem's past, whether it troubles or amuses the radicalists, has besides something unpleasant about it. If Vaneigem's inconsistency in 1968 was important, the SI should have drawn conclusions from it, as it did not fail to do in a host of other cases, and should not have waited until four years later to talk about it. If Vaneigem's default was not important, it was useless to talk about it, even when he broke with the SI. In fact the SI, to use its own expression, exorcised the impotence of its morality by denouncing the individuals who failed in upholding this morality, thus saving at one blow both the morality and itself as the SI. Vaneigem was the scapegoat for an impossible utopianism.

Materialism and Idealism in the SI

Against militant moralism, the SI extolled another morality: that of the autonomy of individuals in the social group and in the revolutionary group. Now, only an activity integrated into a social movement permits autonomy through an effective practice. Otherwise the requirement of autonomy ends up by creating an elite of those who know *how to make themselves autonomous*.¹³ Whoever says elitism also says disciples. The SI showed a great organizational idealism, as did Bordiga (the revolutionary as 'disintoxicated'), even though the SI resolved it differently. The SI had recourse to an immediate practical morality, which illustrates its contradiction. Every morality puts on top of the given social relations the obligation to behave in a way

which runs counter to those relations. In this case, the SI's morality requires that one be respectful of spontaneity.

The SI's materialism is limited to the awareness of society as intersubjectivity, as interaction of human relationships on the immediate plane, neglecting the totality: but society is also the production of its own material conditions, and the immediate relations crystallize into institutions, with the state at their head. The 'creation of concrete situations' is only one facet of the revolutionary movement. In theorizing it, the SI does indeed start out from the real conditions of existence, but reduces them to intersubjective relations. This is the point of view of the subject trying to rediscover itself, not a view which encompasses both subject and object. It is the 'subject' stripped of its 'representation'. The systematization of this opposition in *The Society of the Spectacle* takes up again the idealist opposition characterized by its forgetting of Man's *objectifications* (labor, appropriation of the world, fusion of Man and nature). The subject-object opposition is the guiding thread of Western philosophy, formed in a world whose meaning Man sees escaping him little by little. Already Descartes was setting side by side the progress of mathematics and the stagnation of metaphysics. Mercantile Man is in search of his role.

The SI was not interested in *production*. It reproached Marx for being too economic, but did not itself make a critique of political economy. Society is an *ensemble* of relations which assert themselves by objectifying themselves, creating material or social objects (institutions); the revolution destroys capitalism by a human action at the level of its objectifications (system of production, classes, state) carried out precisely by those who are at the center of these relations.

Debord is to Freud what Marx is to Hegel: he finds what is only a materialist theory of personal relationships, a contradiction in terms. Instead of starting from the ensemble of social relations, the notion of the 'construction of situations' isolates the relation between subjects from the totality of relations. In the same way as, for Debord, the spectacle says all there is to be said about capitalism, the revolution appears as the construction of situations expanded to the whole of society. The SI did not grasp the mediations on which society rests; and foremost among these, labor, the 'fundamental need' (William Morris) of Man. As a consequence of this, it did not clearly discern the mediations on the basis of which a revolution can be made. To get out

of the difficulty it exaggerated the mediation of the *organization*. Its councilist, democratic and self-management-ist positions are explained by its ignorance of the social dynamic.

The SI insisted on forms of organization to remedy the inadequacy of the content which escaped it. Practicing 'the inversion of the genitive' like Marx in his early work, it put things back on their feet: inverting the terms of ideology so as to understand the world in its reality. But a real understanding would be more than an inversion: Marx was not content to turn Hegel and the Young Hegelians upside down.

The SI only saw capital in the form of the commodity, ignoring the cycle as a whole. Of *Capital*, Debord only retains the first sentence, without understanding it: capital *presents itself* as an accumulation of commodities, but it is more than that. The SI saw the revolution as a calling into question more of the relations of distribution (c.f. the Watts riot) than of the relations of production. It was acquainted with the commodity but not with surplus value.

The SI showed that the communist revolution could not be only an immediate attack on the commodity. This contribution is decisive. Although the Italian Left had described communism as the destruction of the market, and had already broken with the ideology of the productive forces (i.e. the ideology which glorifies their development for its own sake: Tr.), it had not understood the formidable subversive power of concretely communist measures.¹⁴ Bordiga, in fact, pushes social communization back beyond a seizure of 'political power'. The SI viewed the revolutionary process at the level of human relations. Even the State cannot be destroyed strictly on the military plane. The mediation of society, it is also (but not) solely destroyed by the demolition of the capitalist social relations which uphold it.

The SI ended up with the opposite mistake to Bordiga's. The latter reduced the revolution to the application of a *program*: the former limited it to an overthrow of *immediate* relations. Neither Bordiga nor the SI perceived the whole problem. The one conceived a totality abstracted from its real measures and relations, the other a totality without unity or determination, hence an addition of particular points extending itself little by little. Incapable of theoretically dominating the whole process, they both had recourse to an organizational palliative to ensure the unity of the process — the party for Bordiga,

the councils for the SI. In practice, while Bordiga depersonalized the revolutionary movements to the point of excess, the SI was an affirmation of individuals to the point of elitism. Although it was totally ignorant of Bordiga, the SI allows one to develop Bordiga's thesis on the revolution further by means of a synthesis with its own.

The SI itself was not able to realize this synthesis, which presupposes an all-round vision of what society is. It practiced positive utopianism only for the purpose of revelation, and that is without doubt its theoretical stumbling block.

What must happen . . . in the centers of unequally shared but vital experience is a demystification (#7, p. 48).

There was a society of 'the spectacle', a society of 'false consciousness', as opposed to the supposedly classical capitalism of the 19th century: it was a matter of giving it a time consciousness of itself. The SI never separated itself from Lukacsian idealism, as is shown by the only critique of the SI which has appeared up to the present: *Supplement au no. 301 de la Nouvelle Gazette Rhenane*.¹⁵ Lukacs knew (with the help of Hegel and Marx) that capitalism is the loss of unity, the dispersion of consciousness. But, instead of concluding from this that the proletarians will recompose a unitary world view by means of their subversive practice (concluding in the revolution), he thought that consciousness must be re-unified and rediscovered *first* in order for this subversion to happen. As this is impossible he too fled back into magic and theorized the need for a concretization of consciousness which must be incarnated in an *organization* before the revolution is possible. This organized consciousness is the 'party'. One sees immediately that, for Lukacs, the justification of the party is secondary: what is primary is the idealism of consciousness, the primacy accorded to consciousness of which the party is only the manifestation. What is essential in his theory is that consciousness must be incarnated in an organization. The SI takes up in an uncritical way Lukacs' theory of consciousness but replaces the 'party' with the SI on one side and the councils on the other. For the SI, as for Lukacs, the difference between 'class in itself' and 'class for itself' is that the latter possesses class consciousness. That this consciousness would not be brought to it by a party, but would spring spontaneously from the

organization of the workers into councils is quite secondary. The SI conceived of itself as an organization destined to make the truth burst forth: it made revelation the principle of its action. This explains the inordinate importance which the SI saw in the tendency toward 'total democracy' in 1968. Democracy is the perfect place for consciousnesses to elucidate themselves. Everything is summed up in the SI's definition of a proletarian as one who 'has no control over the use of his life and *who knows it*'.

Art is today voluntary alienation; in it the systematic practice of artifice renders more visible the *facticity* of life. Shutting itself in its idea of the 'spectacle', the SI remained a prisoner of its origins. *The Society of the Spectacle* is already a *completed* book. The theory of appearances turns back on itself. Here one can even read the beginnings of currently fashionable ideas about capital as *representation*. *Capital becomes image... the concentrated result of social labor... becomes apparent and submits the whole of reality to appearance.*

The SI was born at the same moment as all the theses about 'communication' and language and in reaction against them, but it mostly tended to pose the same problem in different terms. The SI was formed as a critique of communication, and never departed from this point of origin: the council realizes a 'true' communication. In spite of this, unlike Barthes and his ilk, the SI refused to let the sign turn back on itself. It did not want to study apparent reality (the study of 'mythologies' or of the 'superstructures' dear to Gramsci's heart) but rather reality as appearance. Marx wrote in 1847:

Human activity = commodity. The manifestation of life, active life, appears as a mere means: appearance, separate from this activity, is grasped as an end in itself.

The SI itself succumbed to fetishism in fixating itself on *forms*: commodity, subject, organization, consciousness. But unlike those who today repeat its ideas while conserving only the flashy parts and the mistakes (utopia, etc.), the SI did not make it a rule to confuse language with society. What was for the SI a contradiction became the *raison d'être* of modernism.

No Theoretical Summing-up

Nothing is easier than a false summing-up. One can even do it over, like the famous self-criticism, every time one changes one's ideas. One renounces the old system of thought so as to enter the new one, but one does not change one's mode of being. The 'theoretical summing-up' can be in fact the most deceitful practice while appearing to be the most honest. *The Real Split . . .* succeeds in not talking about the SI and its end, except so as not to grapple with its conceptions — in a word, it talks about it non-theoretically. Denouncing (no doubt sincerely) triumphalism and self-sufficiency in relation to the SI and in the SI but without a theoretical critique, the book ends up presenting the SI as a model. Debord and Sanguinetti don't get to the point except with the pro-situs, who inspired them to some good reflections, but still at the level of subjective relations, of *attitudes*. Theory is always seen from the standpoint of attitudes which incarnate it; an important dimension certainly, but not an exclusive one.

There is no self-analysis of the SI. The SI came, 1968 announces the return of the revolution, now the SI is going to disappear so as to be reborn everywhere. This lucid modesty masks two essential points: the authors argue as though the SI's perspective had been totally correct; they do not ask themselves whether there might not be a link between the sterility of the SI after 1968 (c.f. the correspondence of the *Orientation Debate*) and the insufficiency of that perspective. Even on the subject of the pro-situs, Debord and Sanguinetti fail to establish any logical relation between the SI and its disciples. The SI was revolutionary with the aid of a theory based on attitudes (which would later prove to be a brake on its evolution). After the phase of revolutionary action, the pro-situ retained nothing but the attitude. One cannot judge a master solely by his disciples: but he also has, in part, disciples he has called forth. The SI accepted the role of master involuntarily, through its very conceptions. It did not directly propose a *savoir-vivre*, but in presenting its ideas as a '*savoir-vivre*' it pushed an art of living on its readers. *The Real Split . . .* registers the ideological use to which *I.S.* was put, its being turned into a spectacle, says the book, by half the readers of the journal. This was partly inevitable (see below on recuperation) but in part also due to its own nature. Every radical theory or movement is recuperated by its

weaknesses: Marx by his study of the economy in-itself and his radical-reformist tendencies, the German Left by its councilism, etc. Revolutionaries remain revolutionaries by profiting from these recuperations, eliminating their limitations so as to advance toward a more developed totalization. *The Real Split* . . . is also a split in the minds of its authors. Their critique of Vaneigem is made as if his ideas were foreign to the SI. To read Debord and Sanguinetti, one would think that the SI had no responsibility for the *Traite*: Vaneigem's weakness, one would think, belongs to him alone. One or the other: either the SI did indeed take his faults into account — in which case why didn't it say something about them? — or else it ignored them. The SI here inaugurates a practice of organization (which *S ou B* would have qualified with the word 'bureaucratic'): one does not learn of the deviations of members until after their exclusion. The organization retains its purity, the errors of its members do not affect it. The trouble comes from the insufficiencies of the members, never from on high, and not from the organization. As the eventual megalomania of the leaders does not explain everything, one is obliged to see in this behavior the sign of a mystified coming-to-consciousness of the group's impasse, and of a magical way of solving it. Debord was the SI. He dissolved it: this would have been proof of a lucid and honest attitude if he had not at the same time eternized it. He dissolved the SI so as to make it perfect, as little open to criticism as he was little able to criticize it himself.

In the same way, his film *Society of the Spectacle* is an excellent means of eternizing his book. Immobilism goes side by side with the absence of summing-up. Debord had learned nothing. The book was a partial theorization: the film totalizes it. This sclerosis is even more striking in what was added for the film's re-release in 1976. Debord replies to a series of criticisms of the film, but says not a word about various people (some of them very far removed from our own conceptions) who judged the film severely from a revolutionary point of view. He prefers to take on *Le Nouvel Observateur*.¹⁶ More and more, his problem is to defend his past. He runs aground of necessity, because all he can do is re-interpret it. The SI no longer belongs to him. The revolutionary movement will assimilate it in spite of the situationists.

An Exercise in Style

Otherwise serious, Sanguinetti's book *Veridique Rapport*¹⁷ is still a mark of his failure (*echec*). We will not judge the book by its public, which appreciates it as a good joke played on the bourgeoisie. These readers are content to repeat that the capitalists are cretins, even that they are contemptible compared to 'real' ruling classes of the past; if we wanted to, they say, we could be far bigger and better bourgeois. Elitism and scorn for capitalism are derisory enough as reactions, but reassuring when revolution does not appear any longer to be an absolute certainty. But complacency in the denunciation of bourgeois decadence is far from being subversive. It is shared by those (like Sorel) who scorn the bourgeoisie while wanting to save capitalism. The cultivation of this attitude is thus absurd in anyone who has the slightest revolutionary pretensions. Let us admit in any case that Sanguinetti scored a good shot.

The problem most commentators fail to deal with (and for good reason) is to know whether he puts forward a revolutionary perspective. If he does not he has only succeeded in letting off a firecracker within bourgeois politics and the game of the parties. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. His analysis of past events is false, and so is the revolutionary perspective he proposes.

First of all, there was no 'social war' in Italy in 1969 nor in Portugal in 1976. May 1968 in France was the upsurge of a vast spontaneous workers' organization: on the scale of a whole country, and in hundreds of big enterprises, proletarians partook at the same moment of the 'proletarian experience', of confrontation with the state and the unions, and understood in acts that working-class reformism only serves capital. This experience will remain. It was an indispensable break, and a lasting one even though the wound now seems to have been closed again.

But the SI took this break for the revolution itself. 1968 realized for it what 1966 realized for *Sou B*: the practical verification of its theory, in fact the confirmation of its limits and the beginning of its getting tangled up. *La Veritable Scission* . . . asserts that the occupation movement¹⁸ had situationist ideas: when one knows that almost all the strikers left control of the strike to the unions, unless one mythologizes the occupation movement, this shows only the limits of

situationist ideas. This ignorance of the state on the part of the movement was not a supersession of Jacobinism, but its corollary, as it was in the Commune: the non-destruction of the state, its simple democratization, went side by side in 1871 with an attempt by some people to create a dictatorship on the model of 1793. It is true that — looking at 1871 or 1968 — one would have to show the strength and not the weakness of the communist movement, its existence rather than its absence. Otherwise the revolutionary only develops a superior pessimism and an abstract negation of everything which is not 'the revolution'. But the revolutionary movement is such only if it criticizes itself, insisting on the global perspective, on what was missing in past proletarian movements. It does not valorize the past. It is the state and the counterrevolution that take up the *limits* of past movements and make their program out of them. Theoretical communism criticizes previous experiences, but also distinguishes between proletarian assault as in Germany in 1918-21, and attacks that were immediately bogged down by capital as in 1871 and in Spain in 1936. It is not content to describe positive *movements*, but also indicates the *ruptures* which they had to effect in order to make the revolution. The SI did the opposite. Moreover, starting in 1968, it theorized a rising revolution. But above all it denied the question of the state.

When the workers are able to assemble freely and without mediations to discuss their real problems, the state begins to dissolve (The Real Split, p.33).

All of anarchism is there. Far from wanting, as one would expect, to demolish the state, anarchism is most precisely characterized by its indifference to it. Contrary to that 'Marxism' which puts foremost and above all else the necessity of 'taking power', anarchism in fact consists of a *neglect* of the question of state power. The revolution unfolds, committees and assemblies form parallel to the state, which, emptied of its power, collapses *of its own accord*. Founded on a materialist conception of society, revolutionary marxism asserts that capital is not only a social force spread out thinly everywhere, but that it is also concentrated in institutions (and first of all armed force) which are endowed with a certain autonomy, and which never die by themselves. The revolution only triumphs by bringing against them

an action at once generalized and concentrated. The military struggle is based on the social transformation, but has its own specific role. The SI for its part, gave way to anarchism, and exaggerated the importance of workers' assemblies (in 1968, *Pouvoir Ouvrier* and the *Groupe de Liaison pour l'Action des Travailleurs* were also preoccupied essentially with calling for democratic workers' assemblies).

In the same way, to say that in Portugal the pressure of the workers hindered the construction of the modern capitalist state, is to have only the viewpoint of the state, of capital. Is capital's problem to develop in Portugal, to constitute a new and powerful pole of accumulation there? Wasn't the objective of the 'revolution of the carnations' to channel confused popular and proletarian aspirations toward illusory reforms, so that the proletariat would remain quiescent? Mission accomplished. It is not a matter of a half-victory for the proletariat, but of an almost total defeat, in which the 'proletarian experience' was almost non-existent, because there was not, so to speak, any direct confrontation, any alignment of proletarians around a position opposed to capitalism. They never stopped supporting the *democratized state*, even at times against the parties, which they accused of 'treason'.¹⁹

Neither in Italy in 1969, nor in Portugal in 1974-5, was there a 'social war'. What is a social war if not a head-on struggle between classes, calling into question the foundations of society — wage labor, exchange, the state? There was not even the beginning of a confrontation between classes, and between the proletariat and the state in Italy and Portugal. In 1969, the strike movements sometimes spread into riots but not every riot is the beginning of the revolution. The conflicts born of demands could become violent and could even provoke the beginning of a struggle against the forces of Order. But the degree of violence does not indicate the *content* of the struggle. In battling the police, the workers continued to believe no less in a left-wing government. They called for a 'real democratic state' against the conservative forces supposedly dominating it.

Explaining the failure of the 'social war' by the presence of the C.P. is as serious as attributing everything to the absence of the party. Should one ask whether the German revolution miscarried in 1919 because of the S.P.D. and the unions? Or should one rather ask why the S.P.D. and the unions existed, why the workers continued to support them? One must begin from inside the proletariat.

Certainly, it is comforting to see a book which presents the C.P. as one of the pillars of capitalism undergo a wide distribution. But this success is ambiguous. If capital no longer has any all-encompassing thought, or even no thinkers at all (which is in any case incorrect), the SI thinks well enough in its place, but badly for the proletariat, as we shall see. Sanguinetti finishes by reasoning in capitalist terms. In fact, he has constructed an analysis such as a capitalist who had assimilated vulgar marxism would have. It is the bourgeoisie who speak of revolution where there is none. For them, occupied factories and barricades in the streets are the beginning of a revolution. Revolutionary marxism does not take the appearance for reality, the moment for the whole. The 'heaviness' of marxism is preferable to a lightness without content. But let us leave the readers to choose according to what motivates their reading.

The SI has succeeded at an exercise in style: the final verdict for a group that mocked the cult of style in a style-less world. It has come in the end to play capitalist, in every sense of the word. Its brilliance is unimpaired, but it has nothing else left but brilliance. The SI gives good advice to capitalists and bad advice to proletarians, to whom it proposes nothing but councilism.

Veridique rapport contains two ideas: (i) the governmental participation of the C.P. is indispensable to Italian capitalism; (ii) the revolution is the workers' councils. The second idea is false, the first one true; capitalists like Agnelli have also expressed it. In a word, Sanguinetti manages to grasp the totality as a bourgeois and *nothing more*. He wanted to pass himself off as an enlightened bourgeois: he has succeeded all too well. He has beaten himself at his own game.

Recuperation

At the same moment, Jaime Semprun, the author of *La Guerre sociale au Portugal*, published a *Precis de recuperation*. Here is what the SI once said about 'recuperation':

It is quite normal that our enemies should come to use us partially . . . just like the proletariat, we do not pretend to be unexploitable under present conditions (I.S. #9. p. 4).

The vital concepts undergo at one and the same time the truest and most lying uses . . . because the struggle of critical reality against apologetic spectacle leads us to a struggle over words, a struggle the more bitter as the words are more central. It is not an authoritarian purge, but the coherence of a concept's use in theory and in practical life which reveals its truth (I.S. #10, p. 82).

The counterrevolution does not take up revolutionary ideas because it is malign or manipulative, let alone short of ideas, but because revolutionary ideas deal with *real* problems with which the counterrevolution is confronted. It is absurd to launch into a denunciation of the enemy's use of revolutionary themes or notions. Today, all terms, all concepts are perverted. The subversive movement will only reappropriate them by its own practical and theoretical development.

Since the end of the 19th century, capitalism and the workers' movement have engendered a fringe of thinkers who take up revolutionary ideas only so as to empty them of their subversive content and adapt them to capital. The bourgeoisie has, by nature, a limited vision of the world. It must call on the vision of the class, the proletariat, which is the bearer of another project. This phenomenon has been amplified since marxism has been officially recognized as having public usefulness. During the first period, capital drew from it a sense of the *unity* of all relations and of the importance of the economy (in the sense in which Lukacs rightly said that capitalism produces a fragmented vision of reality). But to the extent that capitalism comes to dominate the whole of life, this vision — broadly speaking, that of old-fashioned economic vulgar marxism — is inadequate to its complexity and to the extension of conflicts to all its levels. During the second period, the one we are living in today, determinist orthodox marxism has been rejected by the bourgeoisie itself. At the universities, it was good fun to shrug one's shoulders at *Capital* fifty years ago: around 1960, it became permissible to find 'interesting ideas' in it, the more so as they were being 'applied' in the U.S.S.R. . . . To be in fashion today, it is enough to say that *Capital* is in the rationalist and reductionist tradition of Western philosophy since Descartes, or even since Aristotle. The new official marxism is not an *axis*; instead one puts a little bit of it everywhere. It serves to remind one of the 'social' character of all practice: the 'recuperation' of the SI is only a particular case.

One of the natural channels of this evolution is the university, since the apparatus of which it is a part backs a considerable part of the research on the modernization of capital. Official 'revolutionary' thought is the scouting party of capital. Thousands of appointed functionaries criticize capitalism from every direction.

Modernism expresses the social crisis of which the crisis of the proletariat is only an aspect. Out of the *limits* which the subversive movement encounters at every step, modernism makes its *objectives*. It serves in particular to justify immediate reformism at the social level. In fact, traditional working class reformism no longer needs justification inasmuch as it has become the rule. The reformism of customs and daily life still needs to be theorized, both against the revolutionary movement from which issues the bias toward it, and against backward capitalist fractions which reject liberties that are nonetheless inoffensive to capital. Modernism thus gets developed because it helps capital to free itself from the fetters on capitalist liberty (sic). The reformism of the everyday is still in its ascendant phase, as economic and working class reformism was seventy years ago.

The common trait of all modernism is the taking up of revolutionary theory by halves; basically its approach is that of 'marxism' as against Marx. Its axiom is to call, not for revolution, but for liberation from a certain number of constraints. It wants the maximum of freedom within the existing society. Its critique will always be that of the commodity and not of capital, of politics and not of the state, of totalitarianism and not of democracy. Is it by accident that its historical representative, Marcuse, came from a Germany forced to turn away from the radical aspirations revealed in 1917-21?

It is conceivable to denounce deformations in revolutionary theory in order to make things absolutely precise — on the condition, however, that there is more than just a denunciation. In Semprun's book, there is not an ounce of theory to be found. Let us take two examples. In his critique of G. Guegan,²⁰ Semprun shows what he considers important. Why demolish this personage? To demarcate oneself, even with violent language, has no meaning unless one puts oneself at a higher level. Semprun spreads Guegan's life over several pages. But if it is really necessary to talk about Guegan, there is something that must be got straight concerning *Cahiers du futur* (*Future Notebooks*), the journal he edited. If the first issue was use-

lessly pretentious, the second, devoted to the counter-revolution, is particularly detestable. It presents the fact that the counter-revolution feeds on the revolution as a paradox, takes pleasure in pointing out the mix-up without explaining anything, as something to revel in amid complacently morbid drawings, and sends everybody into a tailspin. This (intentional?) derision for all revolutionary activity mixes in a little more and fosters a feeling of superiority among those who have understood because they have been there: 'That's where revolution leads . . .' (read: 'That's what I was when I was a militant . . .'). One can only dream of what the SI in its prime might have written about this.

Semprun also shows how Castoriadis²¹ has innovated in taking it upon himself to 'recuperate' his own past revolutionary texts, striving to make them unreadable by heaping them with prefaces and footnotes. This is amusing at first sight, but becomes less so when one knows what the SI owes to *Sou B*. Semprun even shows condescension toward Chaulieu's 'marxist' period. The ultra-left was indeed dry as dust, but not enough to stop Debord from joining it. Whether one likes it or not, this is falsification: one amuses the reader while making him forget what the SI's bankruptcy owes to Chaulieu before he went bankrupt himself.

In these two cases as in others, individuals are judged by their attitude, not by their theoretical evolution, from which one might profit. Semprun presents us with a gallery of moral portraits. He does not analyze, he *judges*. He pillories a number of assholes who stole from the SI. Criticizing these attitudes, he is himself nothing but an attitude.

Like every moralistic practice, this one leads to some monstrosities. The most striking is the aggravation of the *practice of organization* already mentioned in relation to *The Real Split* . . . As Debord's new bodyguard, Semprun settles accounts with former members of the SI. Reading these works, the uninitiated wouldn't think that the SI was ever much of anything. Busy with his self-destruction, Debord now unleashes a sectarianism which reveals his fear of the world. Semprun's style can thus only insult everything that comes within its scope and which is not Debord. He is nothing but a demarcation. He does not know either how to approve or to scorn. Of radical criticism, he has retained only the contempt.

Spectacle

The SI always valued its trademark and did its own publicity. One of its great weaknesses was wanting to appear to be without weaknesses, without faults, as if it had developed the Superman within itself. Today it is no more than that. As a critique of traditional groups and of militantism, the SI played at being an International, turning politics into derision. The rejection of the pseudo-serious militant who achieves only the spirit of the cloister today serves to evade serious problems. Voyer²² practices derision only to become derisory himself. The proof that the SI is finished is that it continues in this form. As a critique of the spectacle, the SI shows off its bankruptcy by making a spectacle of itself, and ends up as the opposite of what it was born for.

For this reason, the SI continues to be appreciated by a public in desperate need of radicality of which it retains only the letter and the tics. Born from a critique of art, the SI winds up being used (despite and because of itself) as a work of literature. One takes pleasure in reading the SI or its successors, or the classics which it appreciated, as others take pleasure in listening to the Doors. In the period when the SI was really searching and self-searching, when the practice of derision clothed real theoretical and human progression, when humor did not serve merely as a mask, the SI's style was much less fluid and facile than that of these current writings. The rich text *resists* its author as well as its readers. The text which is nothing but *style* flows smoothly.

The SI contributed to the revolutionary common good, and its weaknesses also have become fodder for a public of monsters, who are neither workers nor intellectuals, and who *do* nothing. Barren of practice, of passion, and often of needs, they have nothing between them but *psychological* problems. When people come together without doing anything, they have nothing in common but their subjectivity. The SI is necessary to them; in its work, they read the ready-made theoretical justification for their interest in these relations. The SI gives them the impression that the essential reality resides in immediate intersubjective relations, and that revolutionary action consists in developing a *radicality* at this level, in particular in escaping from wage labor, which coincides with their existence as *declassés*. The

secret of this radicality consists of rejecting everything that exists (including the revolutionary movement) so as to oppose to it whatever seems farthest away from it (even if this has nothing revolutionary about it). This pure opposition has nothing revolutionary about it but the words. The life-style has its rules, which are just as constricting as those of the 'bourgeois' world. Most often, bourgeois values are inverted in apologetics for not working, for marginal existence, for everything that seems to transgress. Leftism makes apologetics for the proletariat as something positive in this society: the pro-situs glorify themselves (as proletarians) as pure negation. As for the ones who have some theoretical substance, their watchword is always the 'critique of the SI', a critique which is impossible for them because it would be also the critique of their milieu.

The vigor of the SI was not in its theory but in a theoretical and practical exigency which its theory only partially recovered, which it helped to locate. The SI was the affirmation of the revolution. Its rise coincided with a period when it was possible to think that there would be a revolution soon. It was not equipped to survive past that period. It was successful as the self-critique of a social stratum incapable of making the revolution by itself, and which denounced this stratum's own pretensions (as represented for example, by leftism which wants workers to be led by 'conscious' drop-outs from the middle class).

Radical Subjectivity

The SI had in relation to classical revolutionary marxism (of which Chaulieu was a good example) the same function, and the same limits, as Feuerbach had in relation to Hegelianism. To escape from the oppressive dialectic of alienation/objectification, Feuerbach constructed an anthropological vision which placed Man, and in particular love and the senses, at the center of the world. To escape from the economism and factory-fetishism (*usinisme*) of the ultra-left, the SI elaborated a vision of which human relations were the center and which is consonant with 'reality', is materialist, if these relations are given their full weight so that they include production, labor. Feuerbachian anthropology prepared the way for theoretical communism such as Marx was able to synthesize during his own time, via

the transition of the *1844 Manuscripts*. In the same way, the theory of 'situations' has been integrated into a vision of communism of which the SI was incapable such as is shown today in *Un monde sans argent*.²³

For the same reason, Debord read Marx in the light of Cardan, considering the 'mature' Marx to have been submerged in political economy, which is false. Debord's vision of communism is narrow in comparison to the whole problem. The SI did not see the human species and its reconciliation with Nature. It was limited to a very Western, industrial, urban universe. It located automation wrongly. It spoke of 'dominating nature' which also bespeaks the influence of *Sou B*. When it dealt with material conditions, in relation to the organization of space, it was still a matter of 'relations between people'. *Sou B* was limited by the enterprise, the SI by subjectivity. It went as far as it could, but on its original trajectory. Theoretical communism is more than a revolutionary anthropology. The *1844 Manuscripts* assimilate Feuerbach's vision by putting Man back into the totality of his relations.

The SI owed a great deal to the texts of the young Marx, but it failed to see one of their important dimensions. While other communists rejected political economy as a justification of capitalism, Marx superseded it. The comprehension of the proletariat presupposes a critique of political economy. The SI had much more in common with Moses Hess and Wilhelm Weitling, with Feuerbach and Stirner, the expression of a moment in the emergence of the proletariat. The period which produced them (1830-48) greatly resembles the one in which we live. Putting forward a radical subjectivity against a world of commodity objects and reified relationships, the SI expressed an exigency which was fundamental, yet had to be superseded. Becker, a friend of Weitling's, wrote in 1844:

We want to live, to enjoy, to understand everything . . . communism concerns itself with matter only so as to master it and subordinate it to the mind and spirit.

A large part of current discussions reproduces these pre-1848 debates. Like *Invariance* today, Feuerbach made *humanity* into a *being* which permits the breaking of isolation:

Isolation signifies a narrow and constricted life, while community, by contrast, signifies an infinite and free one.

Though he conceptualized the relation between Man and Nature (reproaching Hegel for having neglected it), Feuerbach made the human species into a being over and above social life: *The unity of I and Thou is God*. The 1844 *Manuscripts* gave the senses their place in human activity. By contrast, Feuerbach made sensualism (sic) into the primary problem:

The new philosophy rests on the truth of feelings. In love, and in a more general way, in his feelings, every man affirms the truth of the new philosophy.

The theoretical renaissance around 1968 renewed the old concept within the same limits. Stirner opposed the 'will' of the individual to Hess's moralism and Weitling's denunciation of 'egoism', just as the SI opposed revolutionary pleasure to militant self-sacrifice. The insistence on subjectivity testifies to the fact that proletarians have not yet succeeded in *objectifying* a revolutionary practice. When the revolution remains at the stage of *desire*, it is tempting to make desire into the pivot of the revolution.

Translator's Introduction to Critique of the SI

This text was written as a chapter of a much longer work, as yet unpublished, which is essentially a critical history of revolutionary theory and ideology, beginning with the work of Marx. The chapter's subject, the Situationist International (SI) existed in Europe (and briefly the U.S.) between 1957 and 1971. Since 1968, the year of its essential disintegration, the SI has exerted a profound influence on the post-war generation of revolutionaries in Europe. This influence, as the following text indicates, has been far from purely beneficial. Certainly the work of the SI has become known in the U.S. largely through its epigones, the 'pro-situ' groups which flourished briefly in New York and on the West Coast during the early 70's. Such groups continue to exist and to come into being, here and in Europe. However, the older ones are vitiated of almost all content and significance

by their persistent attachment to the most superficial and *ideological* aspects of the SI. The newer ones tend either to disintegrate very rapidly or else evolve towards a communist perspective often, regrettably, without retaining some of the best aspects of the SI's thought which are absent from more orthodox revolutionary perspectives. By these I mean first of all the SI's *visionary* quality, its attempt to bring the revolutionary project up to date with the post-war development of productive forces such as telecommunications, electronic data processing and automation. I also mean the SI's restoration to this project of a critique of alienation and a concern with the freeing of individual producers and needs which were so prominent in the work of Marx and other communists during the mid-nineteenth century. These aspects were reflected in the SI's assaults on art and urbanism and in its persistent assertion of the revolution as inaugurating a *new way of life*, a complete transformation of human activity, as well as a new mode of material production.

In the meantime, some original texts of the SI, such as Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Vaneigem's *Treatise on Living for the Use of the Young Generation*, have achieved a limited U.S. circulation as privately-printed editions, often very badly translated. In the last two years a not particularly representative sampling of the SI's French-language journal *Internationale Situationniste* has appeared in English under the title *Leaving the Twentieth Century*, poorly rendered and with an execrable commentary by an ex-member of the British section of the SI. In spite of this dissemination, the SI's contributions have either been ignored or recuperated by the Left, which was briefly forced to acknowledge its existence during the late sixties because of its importance in the most coherent and aggressive wing of the French student movement. (This judgment regrettably also applies to most U.S. anarchists and 'libertarian socialists' who denounce the SI's 'abstractness' while remaining trapped in a precisely *abstract*, because superficial, critique of capitalism and the Left. For all its faults, the SI at least tried to grasp the laws of motion of these phenomena; without such a grasp, 'libertarianism' leads easily back into the stifling embrace of social-democracy.)

The significance of the text which follows for U.S. readers lies not only in the acuteness of its criticism of situationist theory and practice, but also in the historical context which it provides for the SI,

the tracing of the influences which formed and deformed it. The SI, like any other historical phenomenon, did not appear in a vacuum. An appreciation of the SI's much-vaunted originality is here balanced with a critical revelation of the currents, notably *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (*Sou B*), which were decisive in its evolution and conversely, of other currents, such as the classical 'Italian' communist Left, which it ignored to its own disadvantage. In fact, in the book of which this text forms a chapter, the critique of the SI is preceded by analyses of both *Sou B* and the Italian Left. Since I have not seen these two chapters, I cannot provide a summary of their content here. However I will attempt to provide from my own knowledge and viewpoint a brief introduction to both currents.

Socialisme ou Barbarie was a journal started by a small group of militants who broke with mainstream Trotskyism shortly after World War II. The grounds for this break were several. Firstly there was the fact that the post-war economic crisis, and the war itself, had failed to provoke the revolutionary upheaval predicted by Trotsky. Secondly, there was the situation of the Soviet Union, where the bureaucracy had survived and had consolidated itself without the country having reverted to private capitalism. This also ran counter to Trotsky's predictions as did the extension of Soviet-style bureaucratic rule to the rest of Eastern Europe. Thirdly, there was the miserable internal life of the so-called 'Fourth International' which by now constituted a mini-bureaucracy of its own, torn by sectarian rivalry and also thoroughly repressive.

From this practical and historical experience, *Sou B* commenced a profound questioning of 'Marxism' the ideology which runs through the words of Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky, appears as a caricature in the writings of Stalin and his hacks, and has part of its origin in the late work of Engels. Out of this questioning, *Sou B's* leading theoretician, Cornelius Castoriadis, writing under the pseudonyms first of Pierre Chaulieu and later of Paul Cardan, derived the following general conclusions:

- (i) that the Soviet Union must now be regarded as a form of exploitative society called state or bureaucratic-capitalist;
- (ii) that, in this, the Soviet Union was only a more complete variant of a process that was common to the whole of capitalism, that of *bureaucratization*;

(iii) that, because of this, the contradiction between propertyless and property-owners was being replaced by the contradiction between 'order-givers and order-takers' (*dirigeants et executants*) and that the private bourgeoisie was itself evolving via the concentration and centralization of capital into a bureaucratic class;

(iv) that the advanced stage this process had reached in the Soviet Union was largely the result of the Leninist-Bolshevik conception of the Party, which seizes State power from the bourgeoisie on behalf of the workers and thence necessarily evolves into a new ruling class;

(v) that capitalism *as a whole* had overcome its economic contradictions based on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and therefore the contradiction between order-givers and order-takers had become the sole mainspring of revolution, whereby the workers would be driven to revolt and achieve *self-management* only by the intolerable boredom and powerlessness of their lives, and not by material deprivation.

This theory, which undoubtedly had the merit (not shared by Trotskyism since the War) of internal consistency, was strongly reinforced by the Hungarian uprising of 1956. Here, without the intervention of a Leninist 'vanguard', workers' councils formed throughout the country in a matter of days and assumed the tasks of social management as well as those of armed resistance to the Russian invasion and the AVO military police. *S ou B* took the view that . . . *over the coming years, all significant questions will be condensed into one: Are you for or against the action and the program of the Hungarian workers?* (Castoriadis, 'La Revolution proletarienne contre la bureaucratie', cited in Castoriadis, 'The Hungarian Source', *Telos*, Fall 1976).

Here the views of *S ou B* converged sharply with those of the remaining theorists of the German communist Left, such as Anton Pannekoek, whose *Workers' Councils* (1940) had reached very similar conclusions some fifteen years earlier (although it must be said in Pannekoek's defense that he would have taken a much more critical view of the *program* of the Hungarian councils, which called for parliamentary democracy and workers' management of the national economy, than did *S ou B*). At any rate, out of these two currents came the ideology of councilism, which dominated virtually the entire theoretical corpus of the revolutionary minorities between 1945 and

1970. I will not here attempt a critique of councilism or *S ou B*; this has been done quite ably by Barrot himself in *Eclipse and Reemergence of the Communist Movement*, and also by other groups such as the International Communist Current. Suffice it to say that Castoriadis went on from the conclusions outlined above to reject the whole of marxian theory (which he persisted in viewing through the distorting lenses of Kautsky and Lenin) and to re-found the revolutionary project entirely on the subjective discontent of workers, women, homosexuals, racial minorities, etc., who no longer form a class (the proletariat) opposed to the 'order-givers' (capitalists and bureaucrats) but merely a mass of oppressed *individuals*. The revolution which they will carry out on this basis will be a matter of creating new organs of management which will federate and organize *commodity exchange* between themselves while supposedly 'transforming' society. The similarity of these views to both American New Leftism of the SDS/Tom Hayden/Peoples' Bicentennial Commission variety and certain types of classical anarchism will be readily apparent: their disastrous political consequences will be even more so.

The 'Italian Left' presents at first sight merely the thesis to which the radical anti-'marxism' of *S ou B* was the antithesis. Far from rejecting Lenin's theory of the Party, it has defended it more vigorously than almost anyone else. From its contemporary manifestations, notably the 'International Communist Party' (ICP), it would seem to be the last word in sectarian Leninist dogmatism, distinguished from the more hard-nosed varieties of Trotskyism only by its insistence on the capitalist nature of the USSR, China *et al.* This appearance, however, is deceptive. In order to understand the real significance of this current it is necessary first of all to understand its historical origins.

The 'Italian Left' was born out of the revolutionary wave which swept Europe from 1917 to 1920. This places it in sharp contrast to both Trotskyism and *S ou B*, which came into being as attempts to comprehend and combat the *counter-revolution* which followed that wave. The 'Left' began as a few hundred of the most resolute and clear-sighted members of the Italian Socialist party (PSI) who came together in response to their party's vacillations vis-a-vis the World War and the crisis of the workers' movement in general. They formed themselves into the 'Abstentionist Communist Fraction' of the PSI

around positions very similar to those of the German Left. These were basically that capitalism had entered a severe crisis in which the reformist tactics of the pre-war period would no longer work (particularly participation in electoral politics, hence the label 'Abstentionist') and in which revolution had become the order of the day. The Left's 'abstentionism' at once set it apart from Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who attacked it, as well as its German counterpart, in the infamous pamphlet '*Left-Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. It was also distinguished from the Bolsheviks by its insistence, against Antonio Gramsci and the *Ordine Nuovo* faction, that the new communist party must be from the beginning constituted entirely of theoretically coherent militants who would make no concession to the backwardness of the rest of the class, and who would therefore make no alliances with the Social Democracy whether Right, Center or Left. This also gave it a commonality with the German Left, which insisted (c.f. Gorter's *Reply to Lenin*) that the proletariat was now alone in its struggle and could no longer rely on even temporary alliances with the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie or with so-called 'workers' parties' which repressed strikes and shot workers in the name of democratic Order. However, unlike the German Left, the Italian communists had no real critique of the labor unions, which (like orthodox leninists) they regarded as being merely badly led. Nor did they make any distinction, at least much of the time, between the party, the political organizations of the consciously revolutionary minority, and the class organs like workers' councils which, according to the German Left's conceptions, would actually hold power in the proletarian dictatorship. For the Italian Left, at least as it emerged from Mussolini's completion of the Italian counter-revolution, the organ of this dictatorship was the party and it alone.

But these crucial weaknesses aside, the Italian Left was distinguished from its German counterpart in positive ways as well. For one thing, it had a critique of democracy that was more sophisticated than that of the Germans who formed the KAPD [German Communist Party]. To be sure, this critique tended to be expressed in a rigid authoritarian centralism within the party as well as in a rejection of parliamentarism. But it did preserve the Italian Left from errors of the councilist type; as early as 1918 the Abstentionists were criticizing the *Ordine Nuovo* faction for its equation of socialism with workers'

management. They insisted from the start that the goal of the communist movement was the *suppression of wage labor and commodity production*, and that this could only be done by destroying the separation between units of production as enterprises. This makes them virtually unique among the revolutionary tendencies of the period. Such a clear view of the communist program emerges only rarely in the work of the rest of the 'lefts' (e.g. in Sylvia Pankhurst's 1920 critique of the newly-formed Communist Party of Ireland).

The Italian Left is thus revealed as a profoundly contradictory tendency, combining a rigorous and coherent grasp of marxian theory in the abstract, and a principled position on practical questions like parliamentarism and frontism, with an extreme voluntarism and substitutionism of the classic leninist variety. If the revolutionary wave had managed to advance further and establish a proletarian power in Germany, it is probable that the Italians would have overcome these confusions, just as the necessity of carrying out communist measures would have forced the German revolutionaries to abandon any vestiges of councilism and federalism. Instead, however, the majority of the European proletariat failed to break decisively with Social Democracy. Following the Bolshevik-assisted degeneration of the Comintern and the expulsion of the KAPD, the 'Lefts', both German and Italian, were reduced to tiny groups which attempted to maintain their theoretical coherence under the tremendous pressure of the counter-revolution. Here and there a few, like the French section of the international Communist Left around the journal *Bilan*, managed to preserve a considerable degree of clarity. Elsewhere the twin fetishisms of party and councils took hold. The elements of a theory which had never been fully united were further fragmented and turned into ideologies.

It was this wreckage that the SI confronted when it began its attempt to recover the legacy of the 1917-21 period. Under the circumstances it was perhaps understandable that the SI gravitated toward the councilist modernism of *S ou B* rather than attempting to penetrate the decidedly unattractive surface of the ICP or its by-products, in order to mine them for the still-valuable elements of the Italian Left tradition. Ironically, it was only after the SI had already reached an advanced stage of decomposition in late 1968 that other tendencies began to emerge which reclaimed the best aspects of the

Italian Left and attempted to synthesize them with the German Left's complementary contributions (e.g. *Revolution Internationale* and the journals *Le mouvement communiste* and *Negation*, both now defunct). By this time the SI's theoretical inadequacies had themselves already merged into an ideology, 'situationism', which prevented the Situationists from comprehending the very crisis they had predicted years earlier. This process and its further evolution are well documented by Barrot in his critique.

In conclusion, it must be said that I am by no means in complete agreement with everything Barrot says about the SI or even its veterans and successors such as Sanguinetti and Semprun. I particularly consider Vaneigem to have been underestimated. However, I support the general argument of the critique — and most of its particular conclusions — wholeheartedly.

— L.M.

Notes

1. *Invariance*: journal published by a group which split from the International Communist Party, itself the most dogmatic and voluntarist byproduct of the 'Bordiguist' Italian left. After several years of obscure, though occasionally brilliant theoretical involutions, *Invariance's* editor Jacques Camatte arrived at the position that capital has 'escaped the law of value' and that therefore the proletariat has disappeared. For a presentation in English of his views, see *The Wandering of Humanity* published by Black and Red, Detroit. (Tr.)
2. The term 'sign' is used in structuralist writing to mean a signifier (representation) that has become separated from what it originally signified (a phenomenon in the world. A 'sign' thus implies a representation which refers only to itself, i.e. is 'tautological'. One example of a 'sign' would be the credit extended in ever greater quantities to bankrupt nations by large banks, credit which cannot possibly be repaid: it is a representation of commodities which will never be produced.) (Tr.)
3. Joseph Dejacque: French communist artisan active in the 1848 rising. A collection of his writings is available under the title *A Bas les chefs* (Champ Libre, Paris 1974).
4. Translator's footnote: The struggle over Radio Renascensa in Portugal during 1975 bears out this point.
5. Appeared in English as *The Totality for Kids*.

6. In a series of articles in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, it was shown how capitalist industry needs the active and creative cooperation of workers in order to function. The most telling example of this is the British rank-and-file workers' tactic of the 'work to rule' in which all jobs are carried out precisely according to union contract and employer specification. This usually results in a decline in output by anywhere up to 50 percent. (Tr.)
7. This concept was central to the 'unitary urbanism' of the early SI. Loosely translated it means drifting around, usually on foot, in a city, and exploring and analyzing the life of the city thereby. (Tr.)
8. *La véritable scission dans l'Internationale*: Editions Champ Libre. Documents by various members of the SI concerning the splitting and dissolution of the group.
9. Henri Lefebvre: at one time the most sophisticated philosophical apologist for the French CP (c.f. his *Dialectical Materialism*, Cape Editions, London). Lefebvre broke with the Party and during the late '50's and early '60's began to construct a 'critical theory of everyday life'. His work was important to the SI although he never transcended a fundamentally academic and sociologicistic viewpoint. The SI denounced him after he published a text on the Paris Commune which was largely stolen from the SI's earlier 'Theses' on the same topic. (Tr.)
10. Published in the U.S. as *Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Economy*.
11. Internationalist Communist Party (founded in 1943). Their English journal is *Communist Program*.
12. *Ratgeb*: pseudonym used by Vaneigem for his book, *De la greve sauvage a l'autogestion generalisee* Editions 10/18, Paris, 1973.
13. This fetishism of 'autonomy' developed into a nasty little game among the 'pro-situ' groups. They would solicit 'dialogue' from people who 'saw themselves' in one of their texts. When naive sympathizers responded, they would be encouraged to engage in some 'autonomous practice' so as to prove that they were not 'mere spectators.' The most sincere among them would then attempt this. The result would invariably be savagely denounced by the pro-situ group as 'incoherent', 'confusionist', etc. and relations would be broken off. (Tr.)
14. Such as the subversive effect of the mass refusal to pay and the free distribution of goods and services carried out by the Italian 'self-reduction' movement. Naturally, in a full-fledged revolutionary situation, this would go much further and would include the immediate communization of key

means of production both to provide for the survival of the proletarian movement and to undermine the resource base of the remaining capitalist forces. (Tr.)

15. Published in 1975. Distributed by Editions de l'Oubli, Paris.

16. A left-wing intellectual French weekly.

17. *Veridique rapport sur les derniers chances de sauver le capitalisme en Italie.*

18. i.e. The movement of occupation of workplaces and campuses during May '68.

19. The translator disagrees with this estimation; c.f. the account of the TAP strike in *Portugal: Anti-Fascism or Anti-Capitalism*, Root and Branch, 1976.

20. Geugan was the manager and the real founder of Champ Libre Publications until he was fired in 1975. He is now a fashionable figure in literary and avant-garde circles.

21. Cardan-Chaulieu's real name.

22. Jean-Pierre Voyer, author of 'Reich: How to Use' (available from Bureau of Public Secrets, P.O. Box 1044 Berkeley, Ca. 94701) and other texts published by Champ Libre.

23. *Le communisme: un monde sans argent* (3 vols.) by Organization des Jeunes Travailleurs Revolutionnaires. Paris, 1975.



The End of Music

Dave and Stuart Wise

*Originally published as a pamphlet
(Calderwood 15, Glasgow n.d.)*

The following article was written around 1978 and circulated in typescript form among people associated with Solidarity and Infantile Disorder, mainly in the Leeds area.

We used it to focus our discussions and subsequently decided to make it available to a wider audience than it had hitherto received, despite some reservations.

1) Those aspects of the text dealing with contemporary musical styles have dated considerably as would be expected. In some places we have provided updates in the right hand columns.

*2) A page of our only copy of the original text is missing. This section immediately preceded **Music all day, helps you work and play**.*

3) While those sections dealing with the evolution of the English 'pro-Situ' scene are, in our opinions, among the most interesting in the text, we don't think that the emphasis on the actions/thoughts of these few individuals can be taken in any way as a full history of the development of Punk Rock. We have also got some considerable reservations about the Marxist residues in the text (and from the little we know about the author this is the direction in which he is moving).

*The number footnotes are the authors; the typeset notes are updates and comments from us; the * are concepts we find particularly open to question; the note in the last page was probably an alternative ending written by a critic of the draft text.*

*The original title was **Punk, Reggae; A Critique**.*

— Calderwood 15

The Revolution of Everyday Alienation

A taste for change, satisfied by a change of taste.

—Vaneigem

For sale anarchy for the masses.

— Rimbaud, *Clearance Sale*

Punk rock/new wave, or something similar had inevitably to come about. Pop music was getting jaded and many people from the record consumer to the journalist wordsmiths of the musical trade papers were aware of that. The wordsmiths at least breathed a sigh of relief — the jobs were no longer in jeopardy for another season at least — as the record buying public were consuming again with something like enthusiasm. In retrospect what is amazing is that the insipidness, (within of course its own terms) of early 1970s/mid '70s rock, didn't produce an active revolt against the musical spectacle but *merely* the urge to update it.

There had been similar downturns in rock history but this time around, it took ex-revolutionaries from the late 1960s to make the spectacle compelling again, and some moreover who had embraced one of the most radical revolutionary perspective of the late '60s — that of the Situationists.

Punk coincides with the long, protracted end of post-second world war capitalist re-construction. The relatively affluent base of previous rock eras is no longer there. Primary poverty is returning with a vengeance after an epoch of capital expansion. It was thought there was no end to a surfeit of commodities — hence the critique of the poverty of abundance in the '60s which was a major factor in the potentially revolutionary explosions of the '60s among alienated youth (though not necessarily of the productive working class, where, combatting productivity deals played a greater part as a subversive departure, than, immediate aesthetic/ecological objections to frozen chickens, mini cars and TV shows).

Punk, like previous rock movements is based upon youth but a youth which has in increasing numbers been thrown out of work and has become part of the growing surplus population which is allowed minimally to consume through welfare relief and various scrounges.

Punk rock uses the desperation of this social base but only finally to reinforce this desperation. As long as the spectacle lasts, it will equally be superseded by something different but which sounds really very familiar.¹ Probably, more desperate and schizoid — if only more frantically to try and hold some attention.

Because of the sound and fury, (also signifying nothing), the left have been forced to take note of punk with differing degrees of emphasis. The Communist Party with its fossilised commitment to archaic forms of art has again missed the boat.²

The Trotskyists (particularly the SWP), quicker off the mark and more hiply opportunist, rushed to 'recruit punk by setting up front organisations', (*Rock Against Racism*) and appallingly banal photo news sheets, (*Temporary Hoarding* and *Rentamob*) to bring together punk and reggae in a pathetic pseudo attempt to combat racism, seeing that blues-drenched rock stars like Eric Clapton were sounding off about 'wogs'.³

But, the common factor which seemed to underlie the debates from the left to the ultra-left was the *fear* of fascism which again is making a reappearance amidst all the modernizing tendencies in post '68 capitalism. Having first gagged at the image of punk, the left and ultra left quickly realized that the content was all about lousy social conditions and therefore OK.⁴

This meant the material processes behind punk and reggae consumption were left without comment. That is, the quantitative technical changes in the mode of production of the music in the '70s, its form of capitalization — the relation/antagonism between small and big capital and marketing outlets. As usual, the left concentrated on the content of the lyrics and not the form of production and what makes them even more pathetic was their pitiful analysis of the sources of content with the spectacle unchanged in its essential dictatorship.

Periodically, pop music has floundered into no-go periods. But it did seem as if it had reached an ideological, if not economic dead end in the 1970s. It was the most severe ideological rock crisis ever and the next will be even better for us. The Golden Age of Protest of Dylan, the Stones, Sly and the Family Stone, etc., had come to an end. The large music companies, with their periodic sclerosis had again turned their backs on innovation even within a recuperated capitalist

framework. More fundamentally, the revolutionary hopes of the '60s lay in schizoid turmoil with some hesitant forward movement. Some of the most famous superstars lay dead, (read: some of the most sacrificial, fucked over and naive victims of capital). Others, had simply cracked up and were trying to play some fine tricks on madness. But amidst this grave yard-cum-asylum, some aspects of capital, particularly film, were willing to explore with a greater objectivity, the structural relations vis-a-vis exploitation in musical capitalism. *Stardust*, accurately portrayed the musician as a highly paid, surplus value producing worker, (perhaps part of a new labour aristocracy?) who is virtually forced to sell every part of the 'self' to the company and is suicided by this total alienation.

Any person in today's music scene knows that rock, classical, folk and jazz are all yesterday's titles.

— sleeve cover remark on Ornette Colman's
new LP *Dancing In Your Head*.

Even such a jazz superstar, has been forced to accept some of the inevitable but leaves a suitable opening back into the artistic fold.

At such an impasse where to turn? Part of the answer came from a not totally unexpected quarter. The most revolutionary critique of the late '60s — that of the Situationists — suddenly had a *raison d'être* for capital. After being suitably doctored, such a critique could be used as a force able to keep pop music kicking as a pacification agent of the young proletariat both in terms of channeling energy into hierarchical aspiration, fake liberation from drudgery and the goal of a higher level of wage slavery with all its alluring but alienated sexual appeal.

A musical situationism was born in a dressed up rebel imagery of punk and new wave. While, the situationist influence can only be thoroughly credited in the one specific instance of the Sex Pistols, the rebellion of modern art forms, first expressed pictorially and in literature, though now recuperated, have increasingly been applied to the production of music through intermediaries like The Velvet Underground and Lou Reed. Antecedents from the old cultural avant-garde run into and feed the musical new. Ms. Patti Smith, 'radical' star, all the way from New York to Barcelona, quotes on the

cover of her LP *Radio Ethiopia*, Andre Breton's clarion call in *Nadia*, *Beauty will be convulsive or not be at all*. People like Patti Smith play a clever lethal game more deadly than the relative naivities of earlier phases of pop consumerism. These new stars are doubly dangerous because someone as sophisticated as Patti Smith will in all probability have access to real revolutionary material and the skill to market it with a few essential lobotomies. Not that Patti Smith wants to transcend either art or politics, for she has a great respect for bourgeois specializations. Where would her money, audience, bogus rebel charisma be without it?⁵

Nihilism idealizes in the direction of disgust.

— Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*

Part of the genesis of punk goes back 16 years to the English section of the Situationists and the subsequent King Mob — a loose affiliation (hardly a group) of disparate though confused revolutionary individuals in England in 1968.

King Mob lauded and practised active nihilism. *Revolutionaries, one more effort in order to be nihilists* but most of the active nihilism was directed against the pseudo-revolutionary pretensions of the extreme left of capital, and those who insisted on abiding by a straight job. A tremendous interest was shown in the praxis of deviants — psychotics, the mentally collapsed, (it was somewhat hip to have been through a mental asylum) and petty crooks.

The most deranged manifestations of hate against the present organisation of society were greeted with fascination. Jack the Ripper, John Christie, (*Christie lives* slogan opposite former Rillington Place mews) and child killer Mary Bell.

Look at the monstrosities produced by bourgeois society — isn't that sufficient to condemn the golden afternoon of hippy ideology? There was a greater emphasis on such horrific negatives than the revolutionary negative. Socialism or barbarism? Rosa Luxembour's stark choice was giggled at — better barbarism. Better to be horrible than a pleasant, altruistic hippy, as a kind of undialectical over-reaction to hippy. Chris Gray had the idea of creating a totally unpleasant pop group — those first imaginings which were later to fuse into the Sex Pistols and a spoof, hip, in depth, sociological report

of utter degeneration in the subcultural milieu to be published by Penguin books and then exposed for the farce it was.

Ideas were mooted in '68, which were sufficiently tasteless to horrify the prevalent hippy ideology and its older, more conservative forms—romantic English pantheism. For instance, the dynamiting of a waterfall in the English lake district was suggested, with a message sprayed on a rock: 'Peace in Vietnam'—not because there was a deep going interest in the war like there was in the United States but because the comment was an absurdist response to ruralism and the revolution had to be aggressively urban. There was a suggestion to blow up Wordsworth's house in Ambleside, alongside the delphic comment: *Coleridge Lives*. Inevitably ideas for action, produced the psychotic suggestion also: hanging the peacocks in Holland Park. That much beloved brilliantly plumed bird of the aristocracy, (largely nationalized) hanging on a rope, in front of a huge graffiti, *peacocks is dead*. But the detournement of this physically maimed, active nihilist critique was to be found within itself—that of a tranquilising agency. Laughing at the nature mystique was combined with a subconscious love for it.⁶

Even rain on a window pane was fetishized as conceptual art. In terms of revolutionary critique however, no sound basis was there and neither did one gradually unfold. History was too frowned upon and the spontaneous act was sufficient unto itself. The name King Mob itself, came from the Gordon Riots in London in the late 18th century when on the walls of the newly built gutted prison of Newgate the signatories of the insurgents, *His Majesty, King Mob* were placed. On the one hand, King Mob applauded uncritically the Black riots and the activities of the Motherfuckers in the USA, while on the other hand, opportunistically collaborated with a whole consortium of Trotskyists and Maoists (Maoist spontaneists), under the umbrella of the Vietnam Solidarity Committee. The actions only could have (and did have) reformist conclusions. Powis Square in Notting Hill was aggressively opened up as a children's playground, really a kind of King Mob guerrilla theatre, bringing imagination to the assistance of social democracy. Such activity was well recuperated in advance, supplying the muscle against the cops for the benefit of the Labour left and also providing a cunning debut for the future career of Adventure Playground Leaders. In

themselves, adventure playgrounds limit and contain a youthful sense of play (as vandalism or whatever), to an area designated by the social worker-cum-artist under the guidance and money of local councils and charities.⁷

King Mob's hysterical over emphasis (without adequate explanation) of violence, whether Futurist, or contemporary hooligan outbursts, played into the hands of a charismatic romanticism of deeds which, mistakenly equated genuine theoretical development with the dead hand of academia. Without such a distinction the way was open for the grotesque return of English philistinism and the renewed acceptance of the university salon. It was energy itself that was needed, an excess of energy which fostered an apocalyptic fear of the imposed extending passivity; the big sleep; the hunkering down under; the steady job. Fear too, that this fate lay around the corner for each individual who wasn't seen to be radiating personal energy. Do something: it didn't matter that you carried Vaneigem in one pocket, while the other contained a manual on the 'new' participatory social democracy. (Peoples Associations, Law Centres, Neighbourhood 'soviets'-sic-in twilight areas, with a 'militant' market research con for finding out 'the wishes of the people'). In any case, one could always threaten bombs and call for the arming of the working class. The superman/woman militancy and the subsequent terrorism came with the tragic loss of the sense of game and vandalism through theoretical and practical confusion caused by having to confront a fresh series of problems.

From the breakdown of King Mob other tendencies developed. One trying to live out the ideologies of a politically conscious hippy life style (akin to the Yippies but more honest), became openly terrorist (the tragedy of The Angry Brigade) while others became careerists in the university set up. Those arseholes, *The Sociology of Deviancy* able to maintain Trotskyist (International Socialist) connections, dealt with all kinds of issue problems generated by capitalism (modern or otherwise): sabotage, survival in high security prisons, drug taking, thieving, suicide, soccer violence, Weatherman bombing, (uncritically clapped on the safer sidelines) with dubious paradigms derived from the Chicago sociology school. An academic *sociological situationism* there to promote reforms; to awaken top State functionaries to their own glaring insufficiencies and more pointedly

keeping sociologists on relative sinecures as intelligence spies of the State. Others settled for obscurity but even as they accepted lowly positions as low grade social workers, teachers, shop stewards, production managers — they were all suffering from a 'schizophrenic' attitude. Only a small minority avoided recuperation, and they were mainly the women in one parent families.

Chris Gray continued with the same opportunisms but on a well publicised level, as his charisma was very appealing to dippy rich women whom he could then part from their wealth, in smart parts of the city. To keep up his own image, Chris Gray increasingly glamorized forms of social breakdown and vandalism before moving on to a neo-religion which puts together scraps of Reich, Vaneigem and some aspects of Eastern religions and money making.

Chris Gray preferred to cover up the social relations involved in his invocation of how great it was to be a 'self made man' and was always upset with the straight forward objection *no he's a capitalist*. The small entrepreneurial capitalist extended in this milieu from Benny Gray's Antique Emporium, Alan Marquason and his carpet business (*We're only ripping off the rich*), the small Reichian mystical firm (*here's mud in your third eye*) to the 'situationist' spiv, McLaren (but there are others). This form of hip capitalism coming from the overt recuperation of a bowdlerized situationist critique in the U.K. was really the capitalizing of deceased active nihilism inherent in the activities of King Mob continuing to exist as a nostalgic, dearly beloved memory, static and unself-critical. In the case of punk, returning active nihilism to a consumed passive nihilism via rock venues, King Mob eventually gave an extra fillip to the marketing of disintegration, and ironically, became more noticeable in the late '70s than in the late '60s because of the sale to the mass market of artistic anti-art.⁸

The Sex Pistols

Malcolm McLaren, manager of The Sex Pistols had been friendly with individuals versed in the situationist critique in England and had picked up some of the slogans and attitudes of that milieu. Realizing not much money was to be made through revolutionary subversion, after taking over Goldsmith's College of Art union and freely distributing NUS cards to who ever needed them (like some

mini Strasbourg), and heckling James Baldwin as 'the black man's Billy Graham'. By the early '70s McLaren had turned to the sale of a chic sado-masochism, (a growing market with the '70s accelerating sexual chaos and the flip side to the Reichian therapy relaxation sessions). His shop SEX was opened up in Kings Road, Chelsea, which sold T-shirts on which were stenciled, *Be reasonable demand the impossible*, or *Take your desires for reality* (slogans from Paris 68), which now meant, buy some of my kinky gear — that rubber suit on your left for example — and help make me a rich man. Capitalizing on the miseries of fucked up sexuality and love, McLaren nevertheless had a mission. Under an ostensible 'liberation', he wanted to promote repressive de-sublimation voyeuristically. Get your repression out on the street for everyone to have a look at with the aid of various sexual commodities. Loosen up repressive de-sublimation, and give it a more rebellious image vis-a-vis more archaic forms of sexual sublimation and practice. Make your alienated privacy into a public thoroughfare, but don't try to supersede repression as that would not be good for business.

The Sex Pistols were merely the musical extension of SEX. McLaren spotted the kid who was to become Johnny Rotten, loafing around next to the juke box in SEX. Not that McLaren was a stranger to avant-garde pop, for in addition to managing the shop, he managed briefly The New York Dolls still flashing on about the situationists. So two pro-situ's who had worked on Suburban Press in Croydon, (a marginally better underground paper which had printed texts of Lefebvre and Vaneigem) became roadies for the Sex Pistols. Others among the pro situ's produced sleeve cover designs and prepared blurb paperback promotion books.⁹

Rotten and Company were fed lyrics from these formidable sources now on the side of reaction. The title of the Sex Pistols first EP *Anarchy in the U.K.*, a vinyl blaring out a message of destruction (in fact, the opposite of destruction) was lifted straight from the title of an anarchist magazine. Iggy Pop's *No Fun* — the B side to *God Save The Queen* was fronted by a snarling, *Here's a sociology lecture, a neurology lecture, Fuckology* read — a '60s subversion of specialisms and the lecture bazarres turned into the music of salesmanship. A subversion that was lived directly, active though confused has been turned into its opposite — consumerism for a passive audience. No

longer an incitement to the destruction of the university but an adjunct to the university as Saturday night entertainment, fitting in neatly with the present conformism of students scared by the presence of high unemployment. Posters advertising Sex Pistols records were imitative of the situationist comic strip. The EP *Pretty Vacant* was promoted through a poster campaign displaying cut out photos of two long distance coaches heading for 'BOREDOM' and 'NOWHERE' — lifted straight from the pages of *Point Blank*, the now defunct US situationist group. *Holidays in the Sun*, well, the musical cache of the bubble speak of *Ten Days that shook the University*, ten years on. Accurate revolutionary comments, *Culture, ugh, the one commodity which helps sell all the others, no wonder you want us all to go for it* — become cultural again, the *raison d'être* behind bubble diversion now lost in a welter of meaningless bubbles.

Wanna see some history cos I got a reasonable economy

I don't want a holiday in the sun, I wanna go to the new Belsen

The only reasonable line is the last one:

A cheap holiday in other people's misery

The sleeve cover itself is decorated with an almost straight lift from an early situationist drawing, reproduced in Free Fall's publication of *Leaving the 20th Century*.

McLaren, having a situationist pedigree knew only too well what the image of the Sex Pistols should be as against other punk groups. Anti-traditional academia, he snidely said, *The Stranglers will work well on the college circuit* — probably because they are 'good' accomplished musicians for 'good' accomplished students. Anti-intellectual as befits a capitalist inclined pro-situ, McLaren chides The Clash for being the intellectuals of the movement. There's only one real forte left after that spontaneity. For McLaren, the Sex Pistols are disturbing because *their spontaneity is something people feel a little threatened by*, (all quotes from NME — March 19, 1977) — no matter that it is another variation of spontaneous substitutionism — terrorist substitutionism. Re: The Who, Barker said, *we contemplate other*

people destroying the environment we want to destroy (Birmingham, *Radical Arts* mag 69).

The society of situationism is in the process of appearing in the Anglo-American world, largely through recent tendencies in pop music, academic situationism in sociology and art history, the new religions (Sri Bagwan and the insertion of Vaneigem into Taoism), the sexuality which says anything goes, in production the mystique of 'self-management' and workers control which the experiences of the last few years (Clyde, Lip and the Portuguese co-operatives), has called into question and affects the validity of workers councils, at least as they have been previously conceived — e.g. the Workers Parliament in Russia and the broadly social democratic content of all previous workers councils. Unlike France or Italy, there are no Vaneigemist town planners or Debordist economists writing for influential journals or ensconced in the State apparatus. But no matter, their practice will be broadly the same, that is some kind of modernism whether their forlorn inspiration comes from Schumacher or Debord. The extent of the recuperation is slowly emerging in spite of the economic crisis which one mistakenly assumed would have curtailed such experiment. The gaps in previous revolutionary critique are becoming painfully obvious.¹⁰

Punk is the admission that music has got nothing left to say, but money can still be made out of total artistic bankruptcy with all its surrogate substitutes for creative self-expression in our daily lives. Punk music, like all art, is the denial of the revolutionary becoming of the proletariat. When the Situationists said 'art is dead' they weren't wrong, merely, that the capitalization of music wasn't developed as a critique preferring instead to concentrate on 'The Angry Young Men' rather than Bill Haley and his Comets. 'Art is dead' had something of the aura of revolutionary nostalgia about it. (The Dada period and the failed German revolution of 1918-20, Russian constructivism and early Surrealism). With the Situationists, the critique of art had developed from traditional activities confined to the studio or garret, to include the film maker of nouvelle vague persuasions, The Happener, the Architect, the Town Planner but music was left without explanation. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that France and Italy were effectively insulated from the rock n' roll craze of the '50s and '60s.¹¹

Intervention against music was almost totally absent, as far as can be ascertained. Frank Zappa, at the LSE was heckled and disrupted, to the point where he could no longer perform and shouts of *Up against the wall Mothers* were heard at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

In this identification, the participants were still marked by the pop era. A number of pro-situ's hung for awhile expectantly around Max's Kansas revue bar in New York, venue of Lou Reed and The Velvet Underground. There was no desire to negate music (*great music falls short of our desire* — Rimbaud) merely to make it free, but leaving intact the antagonistic structure which turns audience against performer, creator against consumer and vice versa in a relationship of near reciprocal alienation. The violent clashes at rock concerts (e.g. the Isle of Wight 1970), were attempts to have the commodity without the cash nexus. It was not really an active critique of the capitalization of music. Only now, is a more developed critique shaping up.

White Dopes on Punk

Yeah, like man, I do think Baader-Meinhof should be given independence

Although, situationist theory was a general theory of subversion against world capitalism, as a movement, it nevertheless did not encourage any investigation of particular differences vis-a-vis national capitals. It's long been recognised but never developed, that U.K. revolutionaries influenced by the situationists should develop a critique of the peculiarities ('the swamp') of U.K. society. Failure to have done so, is precisely what helps punk acquire rebel status with minimal contestation of that status.

The much lauded punk politics is more accurately an attempt to update the mores of a fossilized bourgeois structure in the U.K. through a form of guerrilla tactics in music, (placed in terms of the capitalist mode of production) which is meant to shake awake England's dreaming. Vinyl violence bred its predictable mirrored response in everyday life. Thus, although Johnny Rotten had his face slashed by Queen and Country mobs and Paul Cook had to spend time in hospital with head wounds received from thugs wielding iron bars, it is still a movement through trends in consumption for modernizing capitalism, which even Tom Nairn with his desire for

an efficient meritocratic capitalism in the U.K. shouldn't find that amiss. It is an attack by capital against *the enduring quintessentially English archaisms*.

How is this expressed? It is expressed, not only in 'rebellion' against the influence of the aristocracy (*God Save The Queen*) but pretends to contest the cachet of social provenance and its fall out — the know your place, 'lurid class fetishisms' of English obsession with genealogies which usually is an effective barrier to a scientific analysis of class structures. As punk is a populist spectacle, the popular responses are reflected there too — even though the demagogic anti-county, anti-horse-and-hounds bias is merely good rhetorical cover for punk musicians to head in the very direction they criticize — thus making a mockery of class vengeance. Expressing venom against public schools, inherited privilege based on birth, accent, manner and pleasant behaviour, can in a minority of instances be the entrance ticket to that very domain.

Initially, punk expressed itself as a musical class-in-itself ouvrierism encapsulated by capital. Ironically, even in the beginning, it was already typical demagogic ouvrierism, as the musician who emphasised class the most — Joe Strummer of The Clash — went to public school. Punk is merely another response, this time in terms of art, to the complex miseries of the 'social apartheid' in the U.K. Middle class is working class in this tortured state of affairs. At one and the same time class is emphasised in order to promote careers stridently, through resentment of the more traditionally cultured and secure middle and upper classes, who are prepared to give way to, be turned on to, the new members to their ranks with all their slovenly habits, natty dress and coarse accents, because these new members have relinquished all desire to rid society of classes and the wages system and therefore their ouvrierism can be acknowledged as exciting entertainment. On the other hand, the loudly proclaimed working class emphasis while one is in fact, middle class — in whatever profession — is often used as a rhetorical gambit to confuse the proletariat — to keep them in their place and engage in manipulation. One of the more subtle, subjective reasons for the success of the 'social contract' and the management of increasing austerity since the Labour Government came to power, has been PM's Callaghan's often repeated comment — like some subliminal ditty —

that he is working class himself, because he came from a working class background.

A critique of the monarchy and the aristocracy in general, is not irrelevant, because as a class fraction, it is still the focal point of privilege in the U.K. The snooty, Oxbridge, amateurish ways, a Civil Service of Eng Lit. persuasions and, most importantly, the Official Secrets Act, which is there to protect the public school product from any public scrutiny, *floats free from its social base and spreads through the whole fabric of society enforcing secrecy and deviancy everywhere in everyday life*. Ironically, the Sex Pistols, *God Save The Queen*, though banished by the State, did more to harm the image of the monarchy in the Jubilee Year than any of the campaigns of the left, which again demonstrates their nullity when in competition with a rebel spectacle they invariably support. The banning of *God Save The Queen* by radio and TV (both private and State) even caused a ripple of interest on the continent where it was sometimes said that the function of the British Monarchy applied to other European monarchs. The comparisons were arbitrary for the simple reason that European monarchs are far more common — the Swedish and Norwegian monarchs queue at bus stops.

Gut hostility against the aristocracy outside of the U.K. produces more incomprehension than anything else, even American anglophiles find it difficult to understand. Randy Newman: *Why get worked up about a goddam Queen anyway?* and apropos of Rotten and Company, *I thought it was funny for anyone to come on that vicious* (NME September 24, 1977).

For the West Indians, things are different. Gut hostility against the aristocracy is well understood but through the refracting lens of an old ultra-colonialist perspective, which helps the rebel reggae spectacle on its way emphasising past roots and slavery which is now a sentimental cultural diversion from the real problem — the abolition of wage slavery — which could never be conceived of in terms of 'progressive' racial identification. In Third World's, *Slavery Days*, the taught, sleek and spare voice of English upper class command is imitated — *prices are at an all time low, I think we should free them niggers actually*. But the demagoguery is again to the fore for the reggae artists who take on that accent like the professional spokesmen/women at black meetings in Britain, grieved by the bone hard

hierarchies (of the fossilized, almost pre-bourgeois superstructure in the U.K.) which will not fully accept them.

In parenthesis, however, this musical nostalgia must be seen also in terms of a democratization of the music market, where many different types of 'Roots' culture has been recently promoted to keep the near corpse of rock n'roll alive by countless blood transfusions. A near corpse which moreover, will try anything to keep interest in sales alive — like bringing punk and reggae together in a fine gesture of anti-racist sales hype (sic). But this democratization must be seen in terms of world changes in capitalism and the necessity of finding ever new consumer markets. When Island Records look to the Nigerian market with African hopefuls, it is not out of whimsy but because advanced Black African nations with growing and powerful working classes (e.g. Ghana and Nigeria), have experienced a consumer take off, which takes them out of the category of third world countries.

Although, punk is political, it has hardly been used excepting the Trotskyists *Rock Against Racism*. An SWP front organisation — for example, arranged a gig in Wigan Casino, Lancashire, on September 8, 1977, to coincide with the arrival of the *Right To Work* march on their way to the TUC conference at Blackpool. Fossilized protest and fossilized rock together — 800 marches with 800 boppers. But this use of white rock by politicians, or aspiring politicians is in its infancy when compared with reggae. Where would the clever, cunning, social democratic PM of Jamaica, Michael Manley be without reggae. As Manley said, *reggae is much more accurate than a political machine when it comes to gauging mass reaction.*

In the 1972 election campaign, Bob Marley and the Wailers, like the majority of Jamaica's musicians, musically supported him — a factor enabling him to win at the polls. (Marley's campaign song was *Better Must Come*). The same was true for the '76 election, one of Marley's concerts was scheduled to take place in front of the Presidential Palace before the December election in Jamaica. One of Manley's political tactics was to watch a whole reggae concert clearly visible and without protection at the Cayamanas race track so the vast crowd could dig his courage. Marley's election song in '76 was *Under Heavy Manners* — the phrase used by Manley (and repeated ad nauseam) when he introduced his draconian security measures against the gunmen in '76. There had been 300 political murders

before the bill was passed. The use of the term 'gunmen' was quite arbitrary — it didn't matter if you were left, right or revolutionary. Marley acted as faithful apparatchik.

*This is a State of Emergency in a Jamdown.
Gunmen, you better change your plans.*

Marley paid the price with a bullet in his head but he wasn't the only reggae musician to be tailed by a hit man. Jah Stitch working in Marley's Tugg Gong record shop was also shot in the head. Both recovered. This seemed like the realization of leftist wish fulfillment — artists for radical politics even to the death. In spite of the real ferment below which found its musical recuperation through reggae, the violent conflict in Jamaica is between two formations of capital. One, the Jamaican Labour Party supported by the United States and the CIA, the other, Manley's Peoples Progressive Party, which seems more 'independent' with its programme of social democratic, state capitalist nationalizations, and increased monetary benefits for the huge and growing surplus population. It is a social democracy which is attractive to the economically deprived rasta base from which reggae has largely drawn its audience and performers. Manley merely used the music for his own electoral ends, as his strongest constituency support comes from those Jamaican middle classes supporting an emotionally nationalistic, primitive anti-imperialist perspective and, more importantly, the surplus population, who have remained more conned by him than the Jamaican middle classes frightened by the flight of capital from the island and who may now, prefer a more right wing solution. Manley can use reggae as a ploy to keep in with the surplus population, precisely because reggae cannot be a revolutionary force and is only Rastafarian chic sold under the guise of Dred rebellion. For example, capital was made out of the shooting of Jah Stitch by his promoter Bunny Lee who even produced a record of the event to boost Stitch's record sales. *No Gun Can't Dead a Man Wid a Dread Pon Him Head.* (Oh really.) Drama must never be taken at face value and for good measure, the dub group, The Revolutionaries are in every way pillars of the reggae establishment.

Rebel music has been inserted as propaganda into the State apparatus of Jamaica — more or less — as a stabilizing ingredient,

even though the production of the music continues to remain in private hands. Until recently, maximum surplus value was often extracted from Jamaican musicians who didn't get paid. (c.f. Perry Hensell's film *The Harder They Come*). This manipulation by the State of rebel music, is without precedent in western type social democracies but in the more thorough going, totalitarian, State capitalist regimes it's fairly common. (Mao's China and Castro's Cuba).

Consider the use Castro has made of subversive music — *la trova cubana* — and note how a form can be turned into its opposite by skillful manipulation. The following is from *El Pais* 24th of July, 1977.

la trova cubana, commenced some years ago when popular singers lacking the means to get a piano, (the dominant instrument of the epoch) made their own guitars mostly from materials as basic as boxes of packing. Going from town to town like real troubadours inventing a song for each bend in the road utilizing the particular materials and themes of the places through which they passed. This music was a mixture of African that was imported with slavery and Spanish themes, (above all Andalusian) that came with colonization.

These first troubadours had never complied with the general public that was under the sway of the demoralizing effects of melodramatic songs called La Habana. But in spite of it, the first troubadours introduced new forms — its basic innovation was the 'filin' (degeneration of the English word — feeling). Filin was marked by popular language and was slow in being accepted by fashionable singers.

But with Castro's putsch, things changed. On the cultural terrain, spectacular advances were made ('El Pais' *ibid*).

Singers like other branches of the arts came to be considered as elements of cultural dynamization receiving a fixed salary and having access to the mass communication media. Many troubadours applied themselves henceforth to singing about the revolution and its successes. . . . the great majority threw themselves into this new employment utilizing the same colloquial expressions and the same expressive simplicity as always.

In reality of course, the troubadours were helping cement together the fabric of a Cuban society which was to become more totalitarian and oppressive than Batista's Cuba.¹² Cuba's, army managed state capitalism, with its countless spies it had to maintain the illusion of social revolution and the troubadours assisted this image. In 1967, a festival was held in Havana named *Protest song get together* which resulted in the creation of a movement by young Cuban authors and singers that has come to called *Nueva trova* which uses new styles of latin american songs, jazz and el rock while retaining the same 'radical' content in love songs and elegies to fallen revolutionaries.

In terms of social democracy, reggae fills something of the same function in Jamaica — rebellion becomes a pacification agent. It was so, even before reggae was used by the political machine. Marley's first record *Simmer Down* was a tranquilizer for unemployed Kingston 'rude boys'. A few years later *Curfew* asked *How many bridges do we have to cross, before we get to talk to the boss* even though the chorus was *burnin' and lootin' tonight*. Lacking a theory of structures, Marley's records are now regarded as a 'sell out' by Rasta youth who formulate their dislike by objecting to Marley's Swiss bank account and refusal to invest his money in Jamaica. On a similar footing is the naive bitterness of black writers like Henderson Alrymple who object to Marley moving from Trenchtown to hilly, wooded, uptown Kingston to join the likes of Noel Coward and Ian Fleming. Both are in a quandary through their romantic personalizing of structures which are *lost to capital in the first place* which they think can magically be changed by 'radical black' personnel. The Rasta base will move on from Marley to apparently more radical, ethnic, roots bands who presumably won't 'sell out'. It's one of the oldest and saddest illusions of all.

Pop musicians through their superstar status and wealth defend the spectacle. Nevertheless when under contract with recording companies, the structure is that of musician worker producing wealth for the capitalist. Often too, the degree of exploitation is much higher than that of an industrial worker selling his labour power to an industrial enterprise. Elvis Presley in his working life produced a massive amount of surplus value. (In terms of profit \$160 million for the record companies and \$130 million for the film companies). He will probably produce as much again through his death with the recycling of Elvis product.

Between musician and owner, the bitter antagonism of capital and labour is again reproduced. Socially however, the hyped musician is isolated within the reality of exploitation and to achieve success must defer to capital more than a mass of industrial workers gaining confidence through numbers. Thus the revolt against capital by pop stars is more bizarre and histrionic (e.g. — the endemic freak out, or clandestine obtuseness — Clapton refusing to play until his recording contract ran out/guitarist Peter Green dropping out and working on a building site). The frustration has never been expressed as a direct, generalized assault on musical capital as such. In all probability, it never will be because the junction of art in modern day capitalism is pivotal and this 'new' labour aristocracy would it successfully revolt against its employers, will also have to revolt against its own role. As Gianfranco Sanguinetti said, *All rebellion expressed in terms of art merely ends up as the new academy*. Punk and reggae are merely the latest recruits to enter the new academy.

Rebel Music and State Morality

Fossilized representatives of capital tried to silence punk. Who are they? Various formations of the State apparatus — the BBC/Greater London Council/Local Councils in the provinces and Parliament where MP's like Marcus Lipton said, apropos of *God Save The Queen*, *if pop music is going to destroy our established institutions, then it ought to be destroyed first*. (Although punk was against certain fuddy duddy institutions, it accepted others that are rooted in capital.) Who else tried to silence punk? Various distribution outlets in influential private hands — the IBA/the chain store of W.H. Smith's and some venue ballrooms.

While the State is necessary for business, it is generally so for the production of the means of production (heavy machinery etc.).¹³ Often however, State functionaries are at loggerheads with some tendencies which they regard as distasteful in the arena of consumer capital. Punk and pornography are just two examples. In spite of the hysteria which spills over into the media, it is still an internecine conflict between bourgeois archaisms and those modernising representatives of capital who are more daring in terms of marketing lurid possibilities.

Appearances to the contrary, the State is always fighting a losing battle. As Marx said, in a different context (that of the industrial bourgeoisie against feudalism), *profit is a born dissenter* and punk is profit. Zombies in the U.K. State apparatus finally have to recognise the real interests of an important fraction of capital — even if it is marketing the disintegration of moral values. As Mr. Al Clarke, press officer for Virgin Records said on November 9, 1977, with reference to *Never Mind The Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols*,

The LP was released 11 days ago. It brought in 250,000 pounds before it was even released and went straight to number 1 in the charts.

Punk was initially suppressed through a moral force present in the U.K. State apparatus. No law in Parliament was needed after the moral outrage of some (mainly) Labour MP's who ensured through their diatribe, that the English puritan consensus was respected.

This morality was faithfully driven home by intermediary bodies of the State, hypocritically using safety regulations to ban punk concerts in local council halls, virtually ensuring that insurance companies no longer financially cover concerts in private halls. But what a loud silence. Punk music got a wider and wider audience the more the thumb screws were turned, the more the cash registers jingled. The U.K. State, once able to enforce bans on music it regarded as popularly subversive (c.f. the fate of calypso and festivals in the Caribbean up to 1850), was made a mockery of. Now, in spite of real threats, the State lost because music has become a far more capitalized medium since the early phases of industrial capitalism. With the unprecedented development of the production of the means of consumption after the second inter-imperialist world war, the State cannot maintain any effective ban on a musical style which is capitalized by private companies. Only if a State has full control over marketing and distribution outlets can pop music be silenced. In Czechoslovakia, where the State has far greater control over pop music than in the west, the pop group 'The Plastic People' has been silenced through the cover of a smear campaign suggesting that pop musicians are against 'communist' society (e.g. potential fascists, etc.)

Punk rock has been promoted by small entrepreneurial record companies like Stiff Records etc. These are companies in a kind of

semi-competition with the big monopolies like EMI and CBS who tend to handle the record distribution of the smaller companies through their superior servicing outlets. (c.f. the arrangement between United Artists and Island Records) Thus competition is more in terms of hip image promotion with the small record companies winning hands down because they have their ear to the ground unlike the cumbersome, bureaucratic ways of the large companies. As companies, they seem more liberal and hip but when the going gets tough the tough get going.¹⁴

However they end up, the point is, small capital is generally the innovator but the big companies don't remain outside of the mad scramble for long. CBS quickly signed up The Clash and United Artists signed up The Stranglers and the Buzzcocks. EMI, in chagrin after their cold feet and the aborted contract with the Sex Pistols promoted the Tom Robinson Band — of all the new wave bands the most obviously leftist supporting George Ince, gays and blacks.

Punk managers want to modify the superstar system but they can only do so in terms of the spectacle itself. Some of their more sophisticated apologists confront the problem of the spectacle but in a very half hearted way. After all, their jobs would be at stake if they went any further. Rock wordsmith Charles Shaar Murray said in *NME*, July 9, 1977:

We have a new kind of rock star now, and — like all other new kinds of star — it arose out of an attempt to break down the star system.

He goes on to note what the star system does to those caught in its veritable Pandora's box and its the predictable, frightening conclusion (but without analysing the essential compulsion which drives individuals to become stars).

'So it's not surprising that people get pissed off with stars, except it was exceptional naiveté to believe that those folks who hit the Stardom Jackpot wouldn't get affected by it' (Murray ibid).

Then the big comedown.

Radio, television, movies, rock and roll, politics and sport alike all create stars by their very nature: stardom is implicit and unavoidable. To talk of destroying the star system is completely and utterly utopian. (ibid).

On the contrary, what is demonstrated is C.S. Murray's utopian cum-social democratic perspective because he does not recognise the spectacle as an historical category which will be superseded by a communist mode of production. Like all previous modes of production, the society of the spectacle exists as an historical finite and there's nothing eternal about its existence.

The spectacle is in flux and because capitalist society has become more dire, its image reflects this misery and questioning. Thus, the new superstars must somehow be ordinary people, e.g. Elvis Costello isn't allowed by Stiff managers to have a fan club as it would *look* like an earlier era of rock n'roll. Nor would it fit in with the contemporary superstar populism of dole queue artists. Because of these glaring contradictions manifested in the spectacle effect — in the programmed marketing of a schizophrenic image, punk/new wave is literally forced into being more dishonest than any previous rock n' roll epoch. They must be poverty stricken but necessarily rich. They ride in Rolls Royce's and wear bin liners.

If the new stardom is too obviously into conspicuous consumption, it will lose the support of a no longer marginally affluent social base in comparison to the '60s. Already, the recuperated fall out from '68 had made its impact before the dawn of punk.¹⁵

With the birth of record company graffiti, many musical stars followed — *I fought the Law/Whatever happened to Slade*, etc. Punk promotion followed on from this tendency but with a DIY kit. Punk musicians had to be more sacrificial and do their own street wall graffiti promotions. They were forced into being the living embodiment of image rebellion. Thus Joe Strummer ended up in a Kentish Town magistrates court for spraying The Clash on a wall in Camden Town.

Why was punk/new wave treated with such hysteria? The U.K. State reared itself up in a frenzied religio-secularized frothing at the mouth at the excesses of a licentious and amoral capitalism over which it pretends to preside. What greeted punk was not a critique of its pro-capitalist role but a quintessentially English moral outrage

which unites in uneasy alliance, State functionaries, managers of record companies, hip musicologists, journalists and ex-revolutionaries gone respectable. Although the American record companies were for the Sex Pistols — i.e. CBS and WEA — their local English managers were not, obviously realising they would offend the morality of the English state. In spite of the fact that the major record companies are international corporations, they nevertheless have to take into account national ideologies.

Punk gave aspects of capital an illusory radicalism again. Small record retailing businesses — owned by Virgin Records — were unsuccessfully prosecuted by the State for exhibiting *Never Mind The Bollocks, etc.* in shop windows. Dusty laws were brought from out the Statute books — the 1889 Indecent Advertisement Act. In Notting Hill and Marble Arch, managers of record shops (owned by Virgin) were charged and cleared with contravening the indecent advertisement section of the 1824 Vagrancy Act. Victorian morality? It points to the State's antediluvian character as a moral if not as an economic force in the era of State Capitalism. With the disintegration of values, the State must insist on the antediluvian to make the fabric of bourgeois society *appear* intact, as it must also act economically to maintain many an archaism.

State Capitalism has moved into the arena of culture. Once various Arts Companies can no longer survive economically through the aid of Trusts, private donations and Charities, the State then becomes the most important benefactor. Artistic forms which are entering into a social and historical demise (Opera/Theatre, etc.) have then a preservation order taken out on them by the State which artificially arrests their decline. (Sadler's Wells, The Royal Court Theatre, Glynbourne, etc.). These artistic events must be maintained in the major metropolitan centres if not in the provinces. If it adhered to its logic (always somewhat ideological anyway) *laissez-faire* capitalism would have allowed them to die an artistic death but the State confronted with the decay of bourgeois (and even pre-bourgeois) aesthetics, has a moral necessity to maintain their existence and the semblance of a higher aesthetic order. The State and State Capitalism generally and ineffectually opposes changes in the mode of artistic production (e.g. the opposition to rock 'n' roll). Moreover, the State must try and *enforce the separation between high and low art* but has great

difficulty in so doing. Consequently, private capital is credited with the image of rebellion in the Arts because it operates as a subversive force against more traditionally bourgeois attitudes. It is this tendency which holds the attention of youth (Elvis Presley, Pirate Radio stations and now new wave/reggae). Absolutely contrary to the leftist faith in State Capitalism, culturally it is private capital which is the progressive force, as it records more accurately the bankruptcy and potential of supercession at the heart of the last phase of bourgeois society. It is therefore not surprising that leftist parties like the C.P. and the Trotskyists with a large theatrical/artistic membership support culturally archaic etatist tendencies and folk music.¹⁶

The modern State oscillates between acknowledging the revolt of artistic forms encompassing the 20th Century and suppressing them. Is it possible for a highly developed modern state to thoroughly abandon outmoded art forms and emphasize modernist forms like Jamaica? We will have to wait and see. As it stands, entrepreneurial capital will more readily acknowledge the void at the centre of modern survival, if it is good for business.¹⁷

The State subsidises avant-garde experiments but rather more in the period of capitalist expansion than in the present period of economic contraction. Only those States with a greater economic power (West Germany, United States and Japan), can still with something like aplomb, finance the nothing exhibition (*c.f.* Kassel 76 and the construction of expensive earth works funded from the proceeds of taxation). But precisely because these exhibits are not directly profit making and largely act as a drain on that part of accumulated surplus value deposited in the coffers of the State, the fury expressed over such events is more successful in preventing follow ups, than journalist-cum-T.V. diatribes against a profit making punk rock (e.g. 1976: Genesis P. Orridge/Cossi Fanni Tutti and Prostitution In the Mall at the I.C.A.). The ensuing campaign in the media and Parliament, centered around the frittering away of taxpayers monies, re: 'good' and 'bad' causes for State funding, was effective in curbing the funding of such future ventures by that State aesthetic body, the Arts Council. Here media persecution worked in suppressing avant-garde events, whereas for private capital, scurrilous persecution of avant-garde commodities generally acts as incitement to surplus value realisation.

Why do youth continually fall for the myth of stardom in rock, what is its recurring attraction? Because it seems more exciting than most other things, because it appears to breakdown accepted patterns of socialisation? What has to be reckoned on is the enormous attraction of punk/new wave and glib dismissals of its ability to grab will leave the revolutionary perspective tailing the dominant spectacle.

In England, in response to every little emancipation from theology one has to reassert one's position in a fear-inspiring manner as a moral fanatic. . . . For the Englishman morality is not yet a problem'.

— Nietzsche *The Twilight of the Idols*

To what extent has punk put English morality into a tighter corner than it has been put in for sometime? Has it really put morality in a corner, or is it really making chic play of the horrible? The anti-morality is stage managed as a new sales gimmick — the 'bad' language, the cheapo cheapo clothes, the recuperated revolutionary contempt for the audience and journalists and the presentation of states of mind of the deranged '70s psyche. The blistering, almost psychotic nihilism encountered everywhere — no fun, no feelings and the savage dreams of mayhem — even in those closest to you — becomes the language of cash registers. Bourgeois society has bred its monsters. It objects to them at the same time as it makes money out of their deformations. Punk/new wave blandly accepts sado-masochistic sexuality almost as a riposte to the leftists who denounce it with such moralistic vehemence. Militant feminism and red puritanism have ironically added to this syndrome by 'purging' (sic) the repressions through a noisy moral outrage which has merely succeeded in burying repressions deeper and as a fall out, ironically, increasing S/M compulsions.

Though at loggerheads with each other, there is a connection between Victorian morality a la Mary Whitehouse and the moralism of militant feminism. In their methods both want the State to act against sex exploitation — a de facto recognition of the State — and the excesses of the capitalization of fantasy.¹⁸ The problematic of sado-masochism and fetish sexuality is extremely complex. It seems to move in terms of epochs too. The late '60s and the potential revolutionary upheavals was a glimpse of the overcoming of

repression. Punk is part of the '70s return of the repressed and the return of fetish. As against, the idealist, almost Feuerbachian concept of love, of hippy mythology, S/M is recognised, though it is not explained, essentially as the savagery of commodity relations promoted visually. S/M, in major or minor manifestations, is a form of sexuality which imperfectly adapts itself to commodity society, at the same time as the bourgeoisie must denounce it as a form of sexual 'sickness'.¹⁹

While the left must retain their hip image and support the latest trends, they feel somewhat uneasy about the S/M characteristics of punk and the manipulation of 'depraved' tendencies outside of a conscious self-control. It clashes too starkly with the purified sexuality of Christ dyed red, socialist martyr syndrome, which, in reality of course, testifies to the existence of a powerful masochistic momentum, which must have at times, a 'lurid' sexual manifestation — if only in fantasy. It's not a question of being for or against S/M in major or minor manifestations but recognising a powerful determinant in bourgeois society which is difficult to transcend. While it may be contested in theory, in practice, the difficulties are enormous.²⁰

The '70s, an epoch where the revolts of the '60s in the loosening of everyday life (marriage, etc.), has reached something of an impasse. A growing number in the highly developed world are coming to the conclusion that all relationships are now virtually unworkable, whether of the old or new varieties. While such a position may encourage a false despair, it should not be dismissed lightly, as it could be the negative frontier of new fulfillments. Certainly militant lesbianism and women's separatism have revealed their limitations, when the same violent dominated/dominating syndrome of orthodox, heterosexual relationships have been reproduced in the supposed avant-garde of sexual relationships. Revolutionary love will be something different but we can only know what that will feel like with either, a prolonged break with existing conditions, or, a general insurrection. Dialectically too, the failure of the new experiments and more terribly the failure of the new love could be a factor in scraping together an insurrection.²¹ Generally however, failure in love and its shattering pain, brings nothing but the wistfulness of unrequited longing, which was the despair of romantic poets and is the misery of their many kitsch, but no less real, successors.

Although punk has reflected the changing status of women in bourgeois society — in career possibilities and their greater integration-cum-independence, largely in the professions, it has done so with no subversion in view. In the new wave, there are more women's pop groups than in previous rock n' roll eras and not just á la Diana Ross and the Supremes. These new women's groups have taken the commodity in all its barbarity at face value (e.g. The Slits), and at one and the same time, accepting economic feminism and their ensconcement in the brutality of the commodity. How can the moralism which Women's Lib uses with such crusading zeal and which is a factor in creating punk notoriety, be explained. . . . A moral force has become an inherent part of the State apparatus in the U.K. *which has rarely to resort to law* (Recent exceptions — *Gay Lib* news).

What is the source of this moralism? Seeing the Church is now (and has been for a long time) a weak institution morally in the English State apparatus, there has developed throughout the last 100 years or so, a formation of self appointed, elite guardians of public morality.²² It is important to focus on this general tendency and not on the cranky individuals of far-right persuasions (e.g. Mary Whitehouse), the lefts *bete noire's*, which so often, are nothing more than a noisy smokescreen for their own acceptance of a modified moral consensus. For, on the contrary, the over-publicity afforded to the rightist cranks, means that the self appointed elite, which aims for the heart of the official representatives of the Labour movement, are let off the hook. This elite, which generally holds 'leftist' sentiments garnished with Christian sympathy, cannot be separated from a moral control of the aesthetic.²³ Basically, this elite wants a moral austerity in consumer habits, as against a consumption which is 'vulgar'. Their psyche is one of salacious puritanism, together with a romantic feudal idyll of anti-consumerism which is popularly translated into predilection for craft now transformed into D.I.Y., as against passive, laid back entertainment (e.g. a haughty dismissal of TV). It's really a patrician transmission of English aristocratic values to the literate/skilled working class which keeps alive the moral skill equation. This transmission and class extension of the puritan revolution, applied to industrial capitalism, is one of the main factors in keeping together the austerity in the present epoch, as well as force which can try to obstruct developments in consumer capital (e.g. the

CBS workers strike in London against producing *God Save The Queen*).

In all its recuperated display, punk/new wave in the consumer musical-cum-fashion syndrome has again upset the seemingly intractable English moralist dualism of good/evil, ugly/beautiful, right/wrong. Bad taste has again been promoted in a country obsessed with the 'good' when the continent of Europe and the United States, has periodically delighted in the pleasures of bad taste.²⁴ Why does bad taste have a subversive potential? Surely because it reduces ideological standards and the social base of these 'standards' — the pretense of state ideologists and professionals (teachers who insist on Good English, etc.).

As a leveller, it reduces elitism and the vanity of vanguardist theories of revolution *à la* Lenin/Trotsky and the residual forms of Jacobinism in Marx and Bakunin and thus helps to reduce self-appointed leaders of the proletariat to ashes. More broadly bad taste is a factor undermining the obsession with craft so dear to moralist olde Englande — an obsession which extends from craft trade unionism to technically expert guitar playing so beloved of musical moralists like Charlie Gillet.

I kind of hate the way the Sex Pistols remove all musical standards
Randy Newman, NME September 24, 1977.

Punk has been termed 'Minimalism' by that slippery opportunist Mick Farren (ex-leader of the the 'White Panthers', strike breaker at NME, musician — punk and otherwise), promoter of grotty, gestetnered mags which complain about the official Music Press. Although an accurate description in so far as it consciously equates minimalism in the plastic arts of '60s with the one minute, three chord performance of some punk bands, as usual, the description remains at the level of empiricism. Not minimalism but a theory of artistic dilution is needed and how (and if?) it parallels dilution of skill in the industrial working class. While there may be similarities technically, in terms of personal mystique, there is a great deal of difference — art is 'sexy', in spite of its anti-art overtures while skilled work (e.g. on a lathe) is decidedly unglamorous. When Marcel Duchamp said in the early years of the 20th Century, *there's*

no point in creating a work of art unless it shocks he had the minimalism of the 'ready mades' and the concept of 'aesthetic inertia' in mind. Music had yet to shock in terms of the mass consumer market — rock was still 40 years away — and when it came, it was to be more policed than any previous historical art form (the live rock venues which no doubt could provide a good subject for some aspiring sociologist). Punk is the most extreme form of dilution in the trajectory of rock n' roll, even more so than skiffle. Malcolm McLaren was right when he said, *Christ if people bought the records for the music this thing would have died the death long since*. Youth listens to punk for the 'attitude' and not for the quality of performance. But it is the capitalization of a rebel 'attitude' and in terms of surplus value, is a bowdlerized realization of Lautremont's maxim: *poetry must be made by all and not by one*. Anyone can be a punk musician but (the catch 22 and the bourgeois detournment) only those singled out for promotion.

The effect of modern art experiments on pop music has become of increasing significance. By the late '60s, pop musicians were finally beginning to experiment with techniques which avant-garde artists had used in other fields of artistic expression years earlier though for a more isolated coterie (isolated in terms of the mass consumer market). Natural sounds used by John Cage appeared in Beatles/Pink Floyd recordings and Hendrix imitated the sound of a machine gun, etc. It has been in the 1970s however, that technical innovations in the mode of musical production has made the greatest strides making manual dexterity on an instrument the legacy of prior historical period. It has also eroded the difference between the black musical 'genius' and the poor white musical imitator. Sounds have been produced in the 1970s which nearly bear comparison with Hendrix's skill (e.g. the reggae reverb ricochet) and increasingly, records are processed which use all the techniques of a recuperated dada montage (e.g. David Bowie borrowing from Burroughs). Mixing, dubbing, tracking are gradually becoming more necessary than 'individual' genius, with the production managers having a more central function in music. The electronics expert has become more of a musician at the same time, as the musician has had to become more acquainted with electronics. The greatest impetus to this development has come through the evolution of reggae in Jamaica where the processed recording has played a greater part than live performance.

Dub grew from the mobile discos and sound systems. King Tubby, one of the first innovators was originally, by trade, an electrical engineer who built sound systems and was able to use the essentials of bass and drums, keyboards and vocals and drop them in and out of the mix in random sequence shot through with massive voltages of reverb, echo and ricochet. No wonder black kids in the U.K. are more interested in sound systems than in becoming musical artists themselves and in contradictory ways have already left behind the concept of the artistic individual. Moreover in terms of artistic dilution, the development of synthesizers have played a hidden and subtle role. Now a novice can make a sound like a skilled musician in 15 minutes—even with a one finger melody. Inevitably, the Trade Fairs promote these technological developments. For instance, the Skywave Synthesizer was launched in August '77 in London at the British Musical Instruments Trade Fair. The guy who designed the Skywave also developed an instrument called the Bio Activity Translator which translates a plant's natural electrical signals into sound and was exhibited at the Festival for Mind and Body at Olympia, London, in the spring of '77 (new thing — minimalist plant music with a beat??). Dealers can now customise organs to suit individual customers needs (e.g. Thomas Musical Instruments in California). In a sense, music already heralded its own demise. In jazz, the importance of sound was favoured much more than the actual music as such (e.g. Coltrane's later music), when under the influence of African music, it was necessary for the music to follow the pitches of the language. Now music has to follow the pitches of voltage and musicians can sound entirely different according to which producer mixes the product.

The more pop music experiences and repeats the conflicts of modern art (Duchamp's double barrel effect) and the more it is processed by the application of scientific technique to a musical mode of production which is capitalized, the more the possibility is there for pop music to move to the point of negation. This time, it will no longer only be of relevance to the private affairs of an aesthetic elite but through its extensive capitalization in the mass music market, the end of music will be of relevance to the mass of the proletariat.

Music All Day Helps You. . . Work and Play

Even if there is a partial economic upswing, fewer workers will be needed in newly built, capital intensive plant. Marx suggests that there is no definite certainty as regards numerical reduction in the working class in terms of the valorisation of surplus value. However, the history of capitalism has provided adequate evidence (with the advent of relative surplus value) that fewer workers are needed to produce the requisite surplus value, and exploitation increases.²⁵ Such a process of capital formation is truer of the West with its greater technological developments than at present in the East where extensive exploitation of the proletariat (rather than intensive exploitation), is the rule. Over the years, extensive exploitation has combined increasing productivity of labour with a shortening of the working day. Any renewed Stakhanovism in Russia would be an embarrassment to the bureaucrats where 'going slow' on the job has given way to gangs of painters and decorators working so minimally that many sleep 3/4 of the day on the job.

In the more highly developed economics of Europe and the U.S.A., 'never work' acquires a harsher reality because of the economic penalties involved, though this penalty is virtually eliminated in those countries where earnings related benefits are up to 90 percent of the previous wage. However 'never work', is no longer the trajectory of the voluntaristic anti-work of the English hippy and pro-situ milieu of the late '60s and early '70s but a never work *also* imposed by the dictates of capitalist economy in severe crisis. 'Never Work' as practiced by the English situationist elite was merely an extension of class privilege and moneys from rich parents. Money from the fruits of exploitation gave them space to look ultra radical and not for these situationist gentry the humiliation of the Labour Exchange. In reality, it was more a cultural challenge with its antecedents in La Boheme, even though, it was flung as a challenge to capital and propagandized as such. In Notting Hill Gate, Rimbaud's *Oh we shall never work, oh seas of fire* was sprayed on a wall and as quickly painted out by a property conscious owner occupier. 'Never Work' was never thought through or explained by the Situationists in the U.K. and it was experienced by many as a high handed gesture.

One cannot doubt the radicalism inherent in the never work perspective, as such a refusal does not reproduce capital unlike the working class submitting slavishly to the boss but there is a difference between proletarian non-workers and those who have been cushioned from the despotism of capital through being directly in receipt of surplus value through family inheritance. Such a refusal of work can, however, be open to all kinds of manipulation through intermediary bodies of the State, such as becoming the unpaid, voluntary social/community worker, particularly intense now with the cuts in State expenditure, and the 'show people their rights' syndrome. Through the use of guilt — the great panacea of presumptuous leftist State bureaucrats and the aristocratic and imitative aristocratic, feminist pollyannas of social work for the benefit of the liberal aspect of the State you are coerced into falling into line. Unfortunately, the sheer marginality of those forced into the surplus population/never work positions make them particularly prone to the pseudo involvement of community politics. The commendable inability and refusal to cope with alienated social roles, which often expresses itself in a kind of delirium, can be slightly pacified by the many faceted aspects of community politics, which so often traps those with the beginning of a negative perspective (because of their naiveté) fifth column social workers. This is often the trap laid for the ex-educated members of the surplus population.

The stagnant population is also one of the formations where 'bogus' alternatives make their appeal and where 'small is beautiful' schemes find their mug workers, with, for example, the ruralization of the inner cities (c.f. Ed Burnham's county type, cabbage patch in Camden Town). In Notting Hill, Meanwhile Gardens was built by cheap labour from the surplus population who built 'their' hippy-cum-O.D. park with wages almost at the level of pauperization.

Capital does not want a permanent welfare proletariat and where possible, is prepared to go to considerable lengths to conceal the evidence. Thus President Carter's proposals for the creation of social work type jobs for kids who would be more likely to kick (rather than help) old ladies across the street.

Here economic imperatives are not to the fore, as it costs the treasury of the State more than expenditure on welfare. In the U.K., because of the economic crisis, expenditure is more limited, but the

Queen's Jubilee year (1977) provided a few paternalist gestures (e.g. the making of Portobello Green by a largely Black labour force). However, the *most important factor* for the State, is to instill the work discipline into youth and the long term unemployed, in order to renew in the workless proletariat, the necessary *submission demanded* by capital vis-a-vis its regular time schedules. The job creation schemes, although meant to provide a pseudo labour intensive work experience, are, in fact, merely cosmetic surgery, unlike in underdeveloped capitalist economies where subsidised jobs, are of necessity, labour intensive (e.g. in Jamaica, where some of the unemployed are used on sugar plantations). Consequently, in the highly developed economies reactions of work nihilism are bound to increase. For example, youths daily clean up Sunderland beach, even when there's no rubbish to be disposed of.

The logic of capital is however to try and 'do' (sic) something for the unemployed, particularly the young unemployed before they become a revolutionary force, or before they become an overtly tragic, vandalistic-cum-suicidal fraction of the proletariat. Either outcome will not do much for the promotional image of capital. At the moment, the unemployed are a disintegrating force in capital, prone to looting, mugging and more generally, an important factor in precipitating a break down of the fetishism of law so dear to Olde Englande and the tiresome rituals of workers lobbying parliament. Having no definite target to react to everyday — unlike the wage worker — the situation of the workless is often chaotic, and they can easily take their aggressions out on each other when the commodity is *not* there to hit at clearly. For instance, the shutters on all the big supermarkets in the Notting Hill Carnival/riot of 1977 was one of the main factors which turned the battle against the police in 1976 into the sad inter-personal fracas with heavy black racist overtones of 1977.

There is a third possibility for capital, apart from growing unemployment and the sop of job creation schemes and that is, job sharing. But, this will involve many difficulties — not the least of which would be the unlikely acceptance of wage cuts by the unemployed. If proposed, it would be a tacit recognition by capital that the long working week is historically complete.

The permanent welfare proletariat is no longer the 'industrial reserve army' of productive workers, ('the floating population')

forced out of the factory because of periodic economic crisis, but also those middle class, unproductive wage labourers, forced into the surplus population because of cuts in State expenditure. Also it is essential to recognise the hidden employment of many aspects of higher education.²⁶ The unemployed do not suddenly become an undifferentiated mass with a like identity or common aim. The ex-middle class often remain the same by becoming a new elite — as Claimants Unions organizers, left party cadres at dole offices and even aspiring punk rock journalists. The blacks have a similar elite of pukha Locksmen and pukha Natty Dreads and have spawned the growth of black social worker agencies, run no longer by Johnny too Bads but Johnny *do Goods* (e.g. the Black People's Information Centres).

The present unemployed are however in an ambiguous stage for capital; either it recognises them as workers or reluctantly as the harbingers of 'anti-workers'. These workless proletarians, although prone to recuperation on other levels (social work, job creation, punk and reggae music), are forced to claim social security, and whenever possible, to augment the meagre offerings of the State, work on the side and off the insurance cards. They are therefore (along with many others), fighting for a living wage but under a criminal guise where there are often less restrictions placed on them than in the trade union policed work-a-day world. But because of their petty criminal position re: the State and the resultant paranoia, open communication, even among themselves, is hindered. The rule rather than the exception is 'who's a cop, who's going to shop me to the Inland Revenue', etc. Consequently, groups of friends discuss their position with each other but are quite legitimately afraid to open up communications with other proletarians because of the ever present fear of the nark.

It is a socio-economic position which acts as a damper on forthright proletarian anger, as no one wants to get busted by the State's welfare detection agencies. The main aim is the maintenance of the smoke screen from the authorities. Many whiles are forthcoming. The constant changing of names has become a feature of the surplus population and was even reflected in the punk spectacle, as Mark P. and Gaye Advert were busted by the S.S. (before they made the big time and could look on such practices as juvenile) for earning money on the side as punk artists. The supercession of such paranoia is necessary, but it cannot be done through an idealistic ignoring of the

obstacles. The material and subjective basis must be there. For instance, one of the commendable effects of cuts in State expenditure and of use to the proletariat, has been the redundancy notices meted out to Social Security visitors and detectives (*revised 1981). Furthermore, the process of criminalization of the employed proletariat is also developing. Due to inflation and the social contract, many workers have taken second jobs where there's no tax or insurance cards. Increasingly too, members of the armed forces have been forced to do the same and will thus help to break down the separation between the professional army and the proletariat — a factor which could have great weight in an insurrection. There's no accurate statistical record of how many workers are involved in such rackets, but it's obviously a large movement, and workers quite rightly are reluctant to come forward and tell those plain clothes cops of State Accountancy — the statisticians — just how they earn their money.

The subjective factor is more difficult to evaluate within the proletariat as a whole. For workers to lose any identification with trade unionism would, of course, open up all the possibilities for real dialogue between the employed and the unemployed over work/non work, the possibilities of large automation, unrestricted pleasure, etc. Increasingly, the objective position is there, now that the trade unions have become a State monopoly of variable capital (of wages). A rather more favourable terrain has been created for this historic conjuncture between the waged and the unwaged because increasingly, trade unions will be identified with the State as boss.

But that is only so theoretically. Practically, for now, the gap between the waged and the unwaged has never been so wide. The employed are *hostile* to the unemployed as having an easy time, because more cushioned by welfare benefits than in previous eras of mass unemployment. *The unemployed are scroungers* in the process of forming a more-or-less anti-work life style through various fiddles, even within the terms of the capitalist monetary economy. The unemployed are *hostile* to the employed because they view them as straight, caught in the web of capitalist drudgery and hardly distinguish between the exploiters and the exploited. *All are mugs therefore and worth mugging.* Mugs because they have no sense of riot and adventure, lack spontaneity and the grand passions which lefties see narrowly as self-destruction. On the contrary, so-called self-destruc-

tion is often a prerequisite for a higher, more lucid grasp of life. Many of the employed undoubtedly have genocidal fantasies towards the unemployed, perhaps because they jealously resent their negative perspective. When long-termers sign up for Xmas post, the regular workers increasingly give them a very hard time and are often particularly vindictive to the ex-middle class, (only economically speaking) who have dropped out from a professional role, because generally, the working class still has some respect left for the professions.

Workers in this process of re-orientation must lose all sense of social democratic moralism — something much easier said than done. It has been one of the major factors in hindering their attempts at self activity in the past. A moralism about money must be superseded in the productive working class, as it has had such a deforming effect upon insurgent perspectives when accepted as a permanent historical reality. For example, a lot of the venom in the building workers strike in '72 was directed against 'The Lump' by shop stewards who said that Lump workers depressed the earnings of unionized workers. By this ploy, the stewards were able to whip up a false aggression against 'The Lump', which was really nothing other than a foil for their own respectability because the building trade was held in such contempt by various fractions of the bourgeoisie, in particular the trade unions.

The number one reason in the declamations against 'The Lump' and writ large on agitational posters, was that Lump workers did not pay taxes and were little better than criminals. That 'The Lump' was often divisive and often a counter tendency to unified class action was really not part of the strike strategy. The action of U.C.A.T.T. in '72 shows only too typically the tendencies in the early '70s to redirect strikes onto the terrain of social capital and stratifications by aspiring leftist politicians who demagogically insisted that taxation was primarily for the subsidising of the welfare state. In the building workers strike of '72, a typical comment of a shop steward organizer of left labour persuasions was: *workers must put their own house in order first by paying taxes correctly before we can fight capitalism and tax havens for the rich.* The idealism is terrifying because bourgeois political economy is accepted with a Keynesian face lift. When will it become obvious to the proletariat, that taxation is only minimally for the welfare state, (about five percent of taxes) and the rest is spent on the repressive State apparatus (the police, civil servants, politicians, etc.) and *more*

importantly supplies the necessary extra revenue required by the huge corporations to fund their long-term investment programmes, guided by State technocrats with the aim of making British capital competitive again on the world market? But this moralism is not only an English phenomenon. The trade union structure world-wide exhibits a similar moralism. In the West German state, it has probably been a factor which has grimly termed those forced into a position of social marginality, as 'schwartz arbeiters' (black workers) with all its suggestions of black legging and strike breaking.

Precisely because the unemployed are no longer quite the moral force to be pitied as they were before the second world war, certain breaks with past traditions have been made. These breaks are one of the reasons why *The Right to Work* marches have got nowhere and working on the side is experienced as a better deal than job creation.²⁷ The musicians cannot show the way for the unemployed.

Delroy Washington's *The Streets of Ladbroke Grove*, is a Rasta Jarrow March set to music. *Give them their fair share, Give them what is theirs*, which ironically buttresses that great English social democratic, fairness ideology again. Until all those factions who make up the unemployed recognise that their common interest lies with all those consigned to surplus oblivion (young and old alike) and are able to overcome their reactive, futile opposition to the employed and grasp the potential of the revolutionary becoming of the industrial working class, their potential radicalism will defeat itself in a plethora of media-charged false oppositions, of which music is the blackest dead end.

Alternative Ending

The unemployed must become part of the revolutionary movement against the commodity and wage labour but at the moment in the U.K., the unemployed are sorting out a deviant survival, are low profile (excepting black youth) and remaining well laid back. For the unemployed white youth, this is surprising, considering punk's emphasis on energy but not surprising when it is seen that punk energy is more stage style than a factor of its social base, which is more withdrawn in terms of self-expression and more contained than the hippy base of ten years ago. But the unemployed have a long

way to go in comparison to their Italian counterparts, who are increasingly tending to refuse all mediators and representatives and where anonymity is proclaimed. Truly, no more heroes.

Although, somewhat lost in a yearning for the idyll of crafts, small cooperatives, a utopianism about money ('wages for laziness') and an elaborately garnished language reminiscent of Yippie/Motherfucker poetics, the marginalized Italian insurgents are now an ever present violent and armed threat to the very existence of the Italian State.

1982: Whether the optimism of the 'ever present' threat of post-hippy culture in the Mediterranean countries — Italy, Spain, Greece — can now be sustained is questionable, although it is true to assert that the movement of 'autonomous' youth reached a concerted higher pitch than say the English riots of 1981 and other episodes in Zurich, Oslo, and Amsterdam 1980-81. Perhaps only the 'counter-culture' revolt that has emerged in Berlin and other German cities through 'squatting' and 'green' movements could be placed on a par.

End of Music Notes

1. Who knows — Megadeth rock/Happening-cum-suicide rock where the lead guitarist slowly electrocutes his cock to cinders. A splendid media sensation and total sacrifice, an act, long since thoroughly colonized by capitalism. And what an exit for a very highly paid wage labourer.
2. The *Morning Star* still retains a greater coverage of theatre than any other art form — at the very moment theatres are thankfully being closed down by capital through the cuts in State expenditure.
3. The libertarian ultra left quickly grabbed the content of punk lyrics and the movement was discussed with approval in the pages of *Social Revolution*.
4. After all, the photo of The Clash on their first CBS recording suggested all the complex trajectories of the '70s. A kind of melange of the Red Army, the Manchester United red army (we're the worst behaved supporters in the land) and a suggestion of Ernest Rohm's Storm Troopers.
5. 'The colonial year is dead. Rock and roll is not a colonial art. We colonize to further the freedom of space'. Pure mumbo jumbo, as Patti Smith colonizes the imagination of wage slaves, to limit the freedom of space. Not that Patti Smith is a stranger to the real owners of capital. A backer, before

he pulled out, of the film version of William Burrough's *Junky* in which Patti Smith will star was Stern de Rothschild, heir to the Rothschild fortune.

6. The lines from Coleridge's *Ode to Dejection* graffitied on a wall in Moorhouse Rd. Will, already contained the seeds of a passage back into rural romanticism — *a grief without a pang, void, dark and drear, a stifled drowsy unimpassioned grief*. With the degeneration of the King Mob, the tranquilising acceptance, largely won out, bringing about a delayed fusion with hippy ideology and junk clamourings (at the instigation of Chris Gray playing the sounds of Leonard Cohen) and Alastair Crowley. The Brethren of the Free Spirit directed towards the new mysticism.

7. From a critic of the original text: administered imagination — firmly suppressed when the kids get older.

8. Eddie and the Hot Rods use of Crowley's photo of himself wearing Mickey Mouse ears and looking like a pervy Oxford don as an example, and pop music gone futuristic/dadaistic.

9. Fred Vermorel who had once produced the intelligent and witty *International Vandalism* and amusing one-off gestetnered sheets.

10. From a critic of the original text: Could the almost one-dimensional view of situationism be its downfall?

11. But such neglect did mean that pro-situs in Anglo-America could flirt with rebel musicians of the spectacle and enjoy the romantic posturings of the latest American films *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid*, *Easy Rider*, *The Wild Bunch*, which had an effect on the style of active nihilism and on The Angry Brigade.

12. c.f. Sam Dolgoff's *Cuba: A Critical Perspective* in spite of the anarcho-syndicalist illusions.

13. Department I, exceptions of course are giant monopolies like Br. Leyland, Rolls Royce which falls in the category of Department II, the production of the means of consumption.

14. *Biba* was a trendy clothes boutique catering for the '60s swinging London. Once class conflict erupted in the early '70s in the U.K. and the fall of sterling had made 'the right little, tight little island', the troublesome sick man of Europe, *Biba's* for safety sake, moved to the calmer situation of Brazil where fascism more abruptly guaranteed profits.

15. Chris Jagger informed big brother and radical chic Bianca (famous daughter of Nicaraguan latifundist/Paris barricade fighter) of the subversive use of graffiti in '68. Mick Jagger (in admiration?) then hired down and outs (sic) to promote his new record, *It's only Rock and Roll*.

16. And promote alternative theatre, etc.
17. Perhaps a paradigm may be drawn from Yves Klien selling the void of air drawn with his finger at \$300 a throw.
18. The capitalization of fantasy being an important factor in Department II, the production of the means of consumption . . .
19. It is to be noted in passing, that Freud never used the term 'sick' except with reference to those physically ill — precisely because it was too morally loaded a word.
20. Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization* recognised some of the basis of a free sexuality in the complex conflict between Eros and Thanatos. In parenthesis, possibly it can be put that the '60s was Eros-life-in-death, the '70s death-in-life and Thanatos. (This is merely a hypothesis.)
21. c.f. the written intro by the Surrealists to the film *L'age D'or*.
22. Typically in the Jubilee year, they all took offense at the Sex Pistols' *God Save the Queen*. What they protect is a traditional, inflexible, morality — a secularized absolutism which, though very formidable, is still not as inflexible as Catholic morality. Those few thinkers who have commented upon this morality — Nietzsche being perhaps the most incisive — have only made profound observations and have never gone on to formulate a theory of this stifling phenomenon (part of its basis is in Ruskin and the doctrine of good works incorporating attractive labour and skill which has carried over into the ideology of the labour aristocracy — the most important foundation of morality in the U.K. and the backbone of the Labour Party).
23. Which is why, apropos of certain developments in Department II, they react with such vehemence (e.g. visual 'pollution' in advertising, the banning of 'sex' shops, and cinema front displays).
24. *In the bad taste of my epoch, I wish to go further than anybody*. A Breton.
25. c.f. *Solidarity* motor bulletin on the labour shake out in Ford, Valencia.
26. A friend, cynically accurate, called the Art Schools, *a cross between the Labour Exchange and Tesco's Supermarket*.
27. In fact rather less than the *Right to Work* e.p. by punk group Chelsea.



Basic Banalities

Stewart Home

from Smile#8 (London 1985)

In the West time has always been linear. However, it was not until the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century that a dynamic notion of progress was effectively coupled to this. Once the bourgeoisie installed itself in power, the implications of this coupling invaded every area of life. In the arts, this manifested itself in a fetishising of 'originality' in the form of stylistic innovation. The upshot of this is that eighteenth century rationalism became nineteenth century romanticism which, in turn, became twentieth century modernism. It should be emphasised that these 'innovations' were always in terms of style and never in terms of content. That is to say, they were essentially hollow and that beneath surface appearances, there was no change at all.

Having looked at the 'broad' categories, we will turn our attention to the sub-divisions which art historians make a living from elaborating. The first modernist sub-division of any consequence is futurism, which was essentially a fusion of cubism, expressionism and the ideas of Alfred Jarry. The futurist obsession with shock, originality and innovation, mark the movement as a typical product of bourgeois society. It was only natural that the futurists should develop from such criteria a love of speed, machines and war.

Due to the bourgeois demand for continual pseudo-change, futurism was soon overtaken by dada as an artistic force. Dada was basically futurism with knobs on — but where futurism balanced its negative aspects with a belief in technological progress, dada embraced an entirely nihilistic perspective. Dadaistic negation reached

its peak with Club Dada in Berlin — after which its nihilism was negated by the Parisian dadaists who went on to rename it surrealism.

The surrealists achieved their negation of dadaist nihilism by rationalising the irrational with badly digested fragments of Marxist-Leninism and Freudian psycho-analysis. Where dada had destroyed the language of alienation elaborated by de Sade, Lautreamont and Rimbaud — surrealism held up these pornographers of the human soul as liberators of repressed desire.

As surrealism faded into academicism, it was replaced by fresh groups of avant-gardists. The first of these, the Lettriste Movement, was founded in 1946 by Isidore Isou — a Romanian living in Paris. The Lettristes identified creativity as the essential human urge and then defined this solely in terms of originality. Their interests were initially literary and resemble inferior works of concrete poetry. Isou believed he had superseded all aesthetic structures and re-systematised the sciences of language and sign into a single discipline which he named 'hypergraphology.'

The left-wing of the Lettristes, led by Guy Debord, disrupted a Charlie Chaplin press conference at the Paris Ritz in the summer of 1952. Isou denounced them to the newspapers which resulted in the left-wing splitting from the main body of the movement, renaming itself the Lettriste International and issuing its own bulletin 'Potlatch.'

The main activities of the Lettriste International were 'drifting' and 'psychogeography.' The former consisted of wandering around a city following the solicitations of the architecture. It was an attempt to find types of architecture one desired unconsciously. Psychogeography was the study and correlation of the material obtained from drifting. It was used to draw up new emotional maps of existing areas and plans for Utopian cities.

While the Lettriste Movement was primarily a literary phenomena and the Lettriste International was chiefly concerned with urbanism, there existed other groups whose energy was focused on painting. One such movement was COBRA, formed in 1948 out of the Dutch Experimental Group, the Danish Spiralen group and the Belgian Bureau Internationale de Surrealisme Revolutionaire. COBRA's work was a European reaction to abstract Expressionism. The movement lasted three years and was partially reconstituted when Asger Jorn, a former member, founded the International

Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus in 1953. Jorn was assisted in his formation of the Imaginist Bauhaus — which was set up in opposition to the New Bauhaus of Max Bill — by Enrico Baj, who was at that time, the leading light of the Nuclear Art Movement.

Nuclear Art had been founded in 1951 by Baj and Sergio Darnello. The membership was drawn from a number of Italian avant-garde groups including MAC, T and Group 58. It also included as members or close collaborators former futurists, dadaists and surrealists (for example Raoul Hausmann). Between 1953 and '56, there doesn't appear any clear distinction between the membership of the Imaginist Bauhaus and Nuclear Art. And membership seems to be the only thing which differentiated Nuclear Art from the Spatialists — a Milanese group who, like COBRA and the Nuclear Artists, were experimenting with a European style of abstract painting.

In September 1956, a conference was held in Alba, Italy, to bring together members of the European avant-garde. In reality, this meant members of the Lettriste International, Nuclear Art and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. Before the conference began, there was a split with the Belgian representative Christian Dotremont, a former surrealist and ex-member of COBRA. Enrico Baj was excluded on the first day and the conference then confirmed its break with the Nuclearists. The meeting created an accord which formed the basis for the unification in 1957 of the Lettriste International and the Imaginist Bauhaus. The amalgamated groups adopted the name Situationist International.

Nuclear Art, like Isou's Lettriste Movement, continued to develop its own theses and ignored the formation of the Situationist International (SI). Indeed, 1957 — the year of the SI's founding — was to prove the high water mark of the Nuclearists' activities. It was at this time that they issued their *Against Style* manifesto, whose signatories included Piero Manzoni, Yves Klien and at least one member of the College de Pataphysique. The manifesto stated that *every invention becomes convention: it is imitated for purely commercial reasons, which is why we must begin a vigorous anti-stylistic action in the cause of eternally 'other' art.* It concluded, *'Impressionism helped painting to get rid of conventional subject matter; cubism and futurism later got rid of the need for realistic reproductions of objects; and abstraction finally removed the last traces of representational illusion. A new — and final — link today*

completes this chain: we Nuclear painters, denounce, in order to destroy, the final convention, STYLE.

In March 1962, the Situationist International split into two factions. Most of the Situationists based in Northern Europe — slightly more than half the movement's members — broke with the French speaking faction and formed the 2nd Situationist International. Those whose activities were centred on Paris, responded by 'excluding' the Northern Europeans from 'their' group and became — in effect — a fringe organisation on the margins of the French ultra-left. Deriving their theory from Paul Cardan, Henri Lefebvre and the Frankfurt School, this group developed a politics based upon the concept of 'the Spectacle.' The idea being that under Capital, the consumer is reduced to the level of a passive spectator who observes life rather than participates in it. The Spectacle is treated simultaneously as a generalised and a localised phenomenon. By offering a series of overlapping — but hardly regimented descriptions — the French Situationists were unable to arrive at a uniform notion of their theoretical construct. They appraised the various movements of the Spectacle without demonstrating any real relationship between them. Fortunately, the resulting theoretical fall-out has only contaminated a very small section of the revolutionary movement.



The Situationist International: Its Penetration into British Culture

George Robertson

from Block #14 (London 1988)

It is not enough to know the ensemble of relations as they exist at any given time as a given system. They must be known genetically, in the movement of their formation.

Antonio Gramsci

A spectre is haunting the Left, the spectre of the Situationists. Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of references to the Situationist International; across a spectrum from *Marxism Today* to *The Face*, the importance of the Situationist International (SI from now) in contemporary cultural politics is finally recognised. These references range from the enthusiastic (*Vague* magazine) to the theoretically critical (*Smile*); from the mind-boggling (*Art and Language* complaining that Situationist texts 'are difficult to read, very difficult to concentrate on') to the mind-numbing (Stuart Cosgrove in *i-D*).¹ This recognition is in sharp contrast to the position in the late-sixties/early-seventies, when the SI, if mentioned at all, were hysterically dismissed as:

*arrogant, condescending and super-macho (appealing only) to upper class drop-outs and certain sections of the artistic intelligentsia.*²

What, one may well ask, are the reasons for this volte-face? I would suggest that the reasons are threefold. Firstly, many of the 'class of '68', whether Maoist, Althusserian Marxist or one of the fifty-seven varieties of Trotskyist, have been exposed to the bankruptcy of their preferred ideology. In consequence, they have been forced to recognise

the currents which had a coherent critique of their positions at the time. Reinforcing this is the post-Gramscian realisation that any real political work must transcend the realm of the purely economic or political, and must contest dominant power in the social, cultural and intellectual sphere; in other words, in everyday life. Secondly, and somewhat overlapping, the latest ('in') wave of French intellectuals (Baudrillard, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari et al.) have admitted their indebtedness to the SI. And lastly, the experience of punk, which made explicit (if superficial) use of situationist tactics and rhetoric, although easily recuperated, revealed the radically transformative possibilities of situationist praxis.

However, there is a danger of moving from one extreme to another; a view of the SI is beginning to emerge which sees them as some sort of Occult International, the hidden puppet-masters behind every event in '68 and many since; the 'perfect' revolutionary formation who manage to combine a rigorous theoretical critique with an effective, innovatory practice. But, as Vaneigem argues in another context:

*the more we contemplate, as spectators, the degradation of all values, the less likely we are to get on with a little real destruction.*³

This respectful, contemplative attitude negates a central theme of the situationist discourse: the demand for coherent critical autonomy. Autonomous practice requires a skeptical, critical attitude towards the activities, texts and history of the SI. A critical attitude means that the SI should not be mystified; it must be recognised as a product of the conditions of its time, rather than some transcendental doctrine of revolution that sprung fully formed from the heads of a few privileged individual 'geniuses'.

If uncovering the history of a formation is demystifying, then in this paper I want to demystify the SI. I want to examine the conditions and currents from which it evolved, to locate them historically, socially and culturally, and to identify the concepts and frameworks within which the situationist project was formulated. This means that the bulk of the work will be of an archival, or archaeological, or genealogical nature; the tracing of lines and connections, the uncovering of obscurities, the excavation of buried detail, the construction of a history.

I will not spend much time in describing or defining the theoretical position of the SI; either the reader has some knowledge of this already, or, if not, then the tenor of the quotations and references should indicate what these positions may be. I will also not be referring to 'situationism':

*the world of ISMS is never anything but a world drained of reality, a terribly real seduction by falsehood.*⁴

Therefore this article will be filled with tentative, hesitant, words — each in visible or invisible parenthesis — 'ideas', 'project', 'programme', 'theses' — to stand for and represent an absent situationist 'discourse' — an open-ended discourse, a type of speech/way of life which refuses the fixity of an ideological 'line'. What follows is a mapping of its formation, and the 'place' from which it was 'spoken'.

In post-war Europe, the re-discovery of dada and surrealist negation became the starting point for a new wave of avant-garde groups. The relation of the Situationist International to avant-garde art movements is often overlooked or deliberately obscured by the selective translation of 'political' texts. To understand the situationist project one needs to be aware of the role of these groups in the formation of the SI, and the importance of avant-garde theoretical positions in the emergence of situationist discourse. As Debord explains:

*Dadaism wanted to suppress art without realising it. Surrealism wanted to realise art without suppressing it. The critical position later elaborated by the situationists has shown that the suppression and realisation of art are inseparable aspects of a single supercession of art.*⁵

In 1946, Isidore Isou, a Romanian living in Paris, announced the formation of the Lettrist Movement. Lettrism, he claimed, would be the first movement to:

*revolutionise every aesthetic discipline of its time, from poetry to the theatre, by way of painting, and then to renovate the other cultural domains, whether philosophical or scientific.*⁶

The central tenet of lettrism was that language —the *word*—had been exhausted as a creative source, and that aesthetic production should therefore be based on *a purer and more profound element of versification — the letter*.⁷ Similarly, they believed that figuration (and abstraction) in painting should be superseded by the letter or sign. Eventually, all disciplines should be re-sytematised into a single discipline which he named ‘hypergraphology’. Hypergraphology, Isou declared, with an aggressive megalomania characteristic of all lettrist pronouncements, would produce a new form:

*enriched by graphology, by calligraphy, by all types of riddles and picture puzzles, by photography, by the possibilities of superimposed printing, by sound reproduction, by the cinema, by architecture, as well as by every sort of symbolic matter that exists in life, before it integrates all the philosophies and sciences, from the Sign, to grammar, up to printing techniques, by way of mathematics.*⁸

Within the lettrists, two divergent currents began to emerge; one, crystallising around Isou and the writer Maurice LeMaitre concerned itself with art and aesthetics;⁹ the other centred on Guy Debord immersed itself in dada-type ‘anti-art’ and cultural sabotage. This second group gained notoriety in France when they ‘hijacked’ a priest and one of their number (an ex-seminarian) took his place to disrupt the Easter High Mass at Notre Dame. When they then went on to wreck a 1952 press conference for Charlie Chaplin at the Paris Ritz, Isou denounced them to the press: this resulted in the group splitting from the main lettrist body and founding the Lettrist International with its own magazine, *Potlatch*.

Although within the Lettrist International, individuals still produced ‘avant-garde art’ (Debord’s sandpaper-bound book *Memoires* or his lettrist film *Hurléments en Faveur de Sade*),¹⁰ their main activities were ‘derive’ (drift/drifting) and ‘psychogeography’.¹¹ The former consists of *transient passage through varied ambiences* (i.e. wandering randomly about the city, following only the subconscious ‘pull’ of the architecture one encounters); the latter being the study and correlation of the ‘drift’, and the construction of new emotional maps of the city which would be the basis for the creation of new Utopian environments. This in turn led to a desire to supersede contemporary

town-planning (*not a doctrine of town-planning but a criticism of town-planning*)¹² by the creation of 'unitary urbanism':

*by which we mean a living criticism, fed by all the tensions of the whole of everyday life, of this manipulation of cities and their inhabitants.*¹³

The key text for this utopian project is *Formula for a New City* written in 1953 by the nineteen year-old Ivan Chtcheglov, and published in the first issue of the journal *Internationale Situationiste*:¹⁴

*Everyone will live in their own cathedral. There will be rooms awakening more vivid fantasies than any drug. There will be houses where it will be impossible not to fall in love.*¹⁵

The motivation of unitary urbanism, the conception of the city as a totality; in Chris Gray's phrase, *the total work of real life so long sought for*¹⁶ became the starting point for the critique of the totality of social relations as experienced in everyday life. Unitary urbanism ('true urbanism') means the

*destruction of contemporary conditioning (and) simultaneously the construction of situations. It is the liberation of the boundless energy trapped under the surface of everyday life.*¹⁷

While the lettrists were essentially a French based literary movement, a parallel North European group operated from similar theoretical positions within the plastic arts. This group, COBRA (from the initial letters of their main operating centres: COpenhagen, BRussels and Amsterdam), was founded in 1948 by the Belgian poet Christian Dotremont. Basically, COBRA was a merger of the Dutch Experimental Group, the Danish Spiralen group and the Belgian Bureau International de Surrealisme Revolutionaire, formed after a conference at the Centre International de Documentation sur l'Avant-Garde in Paris.¹⁸

COBRA artists laid stress on spontaneity, the unconscious, the primitive and the authentic experience: like the expressionists and the surrealists before them, they saw art as a means to liberate the imagination, and reveal/create new modes of social life. The Dutch architect Constant summed up their position thus:

*To speak of desire for us, men (sic) of the twentieth century, is to speak of the unknown, because all we know of the kingdom of our desires is that it comes down to an immense desire for freedom.*¹⁹

COBRA, as a body, only survived until 1951, but its aims (*the unity of deed and dream* to quote Dotremont), were to surface again.

A key member of COBRA was the Danish painter Asger Jorn, who, to cite Siedrich Diederichsen, *was able to develop fully only in the realm of the social. He seems to have been compelled to found movement after movement.*²⁰ Following the dissolution of COBRA, Jorn contacted the Swiss Concrete artist Max Bill who was in the process of creating a new Bauhaus at Ulm in Germany. Jorn proposed a collaboration, but was rebuffed by Bill on the grounds that the new Bauhaus had no use for visual artists, as it had *freed itself of subjectivity*. In retaliation, Jorn with the help of Enrico Baj, a member of the Italian Nuclear Art movement, founded the Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. The aims and members of these various groups over-lapped to such a degree that it was decided to hold a conference to bring together members of the European avant-garde in a new unified body.

This conference in September 1956 in Alba, Italy was attended by delegates from the Lettrist International, the Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, Nuclear Art, the London Psychogeographical Association²¹ plus assorted interested individuals. Before even the conference began, there was a split with the ex-COBRAist Dotremont; then, on its first day, Enrico Baj was excluded, which led to the withdrawal of Nuclear Art. Those remaining agreed to dissolve their various groups and replace them with a single organisation; on the 27th of July 1957, representatives of these three groups — Lettrists, Imaginist Bauhaus and London Psychogeography — met at Cosio d'Arroschia in Italy, and formally amalgamated; the new movement was to be called L'Internationale Situationiste.²²

The Situationist International which emerged at this time was still primarily an avant-garde art movement, but holding to the thesis that *all aware people of our time agree that art can no longer be justified as a superior activity.*²³

However, even those members whose aim was the *supercession of art* continued to produce, exhibit and sell 'art' works. An example is Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, who, in 1958, constructed a machine for

creating 'industrial paintings'. SI member Michele Bernstein produced an accompanying leaflet which read:

*Among the advantages . . . no more problems with format, the canvas being cut under the eyes of the satisfied customer; no more uncreative periods, the inspiration behind industrial painting, thanks to a well-contrived balance of chance and machinery, never drying up; no more metaphysical themes, machines aren't up to them; no more dubious reproductions of the Masters; no more vernissages. And naturally, very soon, no more painters, not even in Italy.*²⁴

When these 'paintings' were bought and collected by sections of the 'progressive' bourgeoisie, Pinot-Gallizio and Bernstein were content merely to celebrate their 'tricking' of the audience. What was lacking from the SI at this point was a coherent critique of commodity production (in which 'Art' is the cultural commodity par excellence): when such a critique was forthcoming, with its theoretical explanation of how capital can recuperate even the most radical of gestures, the SI entered its 'political' phase.

Before this move could be made however, it was necessary to attempt to resolve a serious internal contradiction between those who sought the *supercession of art* and those members who were accused of simply *salvaging . . . decomposed art*.²⁵ In a later analysis of these divisions it was recognised that from its inception the SI had an:

*ambiguous and risky policy of consenting to act in culture while being against the entire present organisation of this culture and even against all culture as a separate sphere.*²⁶

That this ambiguity should have led to internal ruptures seems in retrospect, inevitable. The arguments came to a head at the Fifth SI Conference in Gothenberg, where Raoul Vaneigem presented a report which argued that there could be no such thing as a situationist art, and that they must not concern themselves with

elaborating the spectacle of refusal, but rather of refusing the spectacle. In order for their elaboration to be artistic in the new and authentic

sense defined by the SI, the elements of the destruction of the spectacle must precisely cease to be works of art. ²⁷

The outcome of these debates was a break with the Spur group (the German section of the SI),²⁸ closely followed by the expulsion of most of the Scandinavian section.²⁹ The SI that emerged from these ruptures was now in a position to develop a new revolutionary critique of the totality of consumer society, a project which reached theoretical maturity in 1966 with the publication of major works by Debord and Vaneigem.

The 'political' theses which were eventually developed by the SI have their roots in the crisis in the revolutionary communist movement in the immediate post WWII years. Trotsky's predictions that the war and the post-war economic crisis would provoke international revolutionary upheavals had failed to materialise: more importantly, the Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union had produced Stalinism and a ruling-caste of bureaucrats in whose hands all power resided. These conditions led several militants to initially question, and then to profoundly re-evaluate traditional 'Marxism' (ie. the ideology elaborated in the works of Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky).

One group which set itself this task was *Socialisme ou Barbarie* whose leading theoretician, Cornelius Castoriadis (aka Paul Cardan), produced a radical critique of orthodox communism. Castoriadis' (and thus S. ou B.'s) thesis was this: Soviet Communism had failed because of the Leninist concept of the vanguard Party, this had led to state power being concentrated in the hands of a bureaucratic elite and had produced a new form of exploitation — State/Bureaucratic capitalism. In modern societies, the central contradiction between the owners of the means of production and the labour force is replaced by that between 'order-givers' and 'order-takers' ('dirigeants et executants'). This contradiction should be recognised as the sole mainspring of revolution, in which the 'order-takers' would rise up against the 'order-givers' to take control of their lives through autonomous, self-managed Workers Councils.³⁰ This perspective was reinforced by the events of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, where the Hungarian workers, without the leadership of a vanguard party, were creating self-management councils in their factories, assuming

tasks of social management and autonomously resisting the Soviet invasion. For *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, councilism seemed the only positive hope for revolutionary change. As Castoriadis declared:

*over the coming years, all significant questions will be condensed into one: Are you for or against the action and the programme of the Hungarian workers?*³¹

Socialisme ou Barbarie's influence spread throughout a wide section of the 'disillusioned left': in Britain a number of ex-members of the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League, centred around Christopher Pallis (aka Martin Grainger) formed the Solidarity group. Their political statement *As We See It* sums up succinctly the position of the advocates of self-management:

*Meaningful action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others — even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.*³²

In the late 1950s, Guy Debord was introduced to *Socialisme ou Barbarie* through another of its key theorists Pierre Canjuers; together Debord and Canjuers produced the *Preliminaries Towards Defining a Unitary Revolutionary Programme* (1960), which was described in *I.S.* no. 5 as *a platform for discussion within the SI, and for its link-up with revolutionary militants of the workers movement.*³³

Although nothing came of this proposed link-up Debord did join S. ou B. for a short period, and was part of their team sent to Belgium during the big strike of 1960. Given this degree of involvement, it comes as no surprise to read in *I.S.* no. 6 (1961) that the situationists have adopted the idea of workers councils, the thesis on the division between 'order-givers' and 'order-takers' and have set themselves the task of *a study without illusions of the classical workers movements.*

This latter project involved a systematic re-evaluation of European revolutionary history, 'rediscovering' the Utopianism of Fourier, the young Marx, the Spartacists, the Spanish anarchists, the 'terrorism' of Rachavol and the Bonnot Gang, the Enrages and the Communards.

Coincidentally these latter *Theses on the Commune* became the trigger for the break between the SI and another source of influence, the French Marxist-philosopher Henri Lefebvre. After breaking with the PCF in 1958, Lefebvre initiated a new sociological project with the Group for Research on Everyday Life; this theoretisation of everyday life shares with the SI a concern for a totalising critique of contemporary society, and thus led to some collaboration between the two groups. However, in an address to a conference of the Group for Research on Everyday Life in 1961, Debord signalled a divergence when he declared:

To study everyday life would be a completely absurd undertaking unable even to grasp anything of its object, if this study was not explicitly for the purpose of transforming everyday life.³⁴

And, Debord seemed to imply, that where the SI worked for the *perpetual re-creation of the totality of everyday life*, the 'sociologists' were content to simply 'hypotheticise' it. Certainly the collaboration did add to the eventual 'programme' which was elaborated by the SI. The break with Lefebvre occurred when he was accused of plagiarising the SI *Theses on the Commune* in an article in the 'pseudo-leftist' journal *Arguments* (of which the SI had already initiated a boycott).³⁵

Other 'influences' on the SI 'programme' are less easily identified although it seems apparent that the writings of Huizinga on play, Maus on exchange and the Gift (cf. the leftist journal *Potlatch*) and Bataille on 'expenditure'³⁶ were assimilated. Debord does directly allude to Daniel Boorstin's *The Image*, but rejects him on the grounds that he:

never reaches the concept of the spectacle because he thinks he can leave private life, or the notion of the 'honest commodity', outside of this disastrous exaggeration. He does not understand that the commodity itself made the laws whose 'honest' application leads to the distinct reality of private life as well as to its subsequent reconquest by the social consumption of images.³⁷

Whatever the importance of these 'influences', by the mid-60's, the SI had developed a coherent analysis of contemporary society. This critique was presented in two major texts — Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *Traite de Savoir-Vivre a l'Usage des Jeunes Generations* (published in Britain as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*). Without wishing to be oversimplistic, it is fair to say that Debord's concern is with the material conditions of contemporary existence, while Vaneigem deals with the subjective relations of the present, and the creation of radical subjectivities.

The central concept of their critique is that of the spectacle: *the spectacle is the moment when the commodity has achieved the total occupation of life*.³⁸ The spectacle 'enslaves' the consumer; reduces him or her to the level of passive spectator, observing life rather than participating in it:

*The spectacle, grasped in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production . . . it is the heart of the unrealism of the real society.*³⁹

The situationists 'solution' to this unrealism, the motor of change which will allow us to *live authentically and without restraint*⁴⁰ is a world proletarian revolution, which by creating workers councils, will *supersede capitalist production and abolish alienation*.⁴¹

With the publication of *Society of the Spectacle* and the *Traite*, the SI entered a new (public) phase of notoriety. The situationists had first gained headline attention (1961) when members of the Scandinavian section decapitated the statue of the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen harbour. Their second appearance in the headlines heralded the events of May '68.

In 1966 a small group of students at Strasbourg University, tired of pseudo-revolt, approached the SI with a request for assistance. These students had got themselves elected, amid typical student apathy, to the moribund Student Union. Once in control they used the S.U. funds to found a Society for the Rehabilitation of Karl Marx and Ravachol; circulated Andre Bertrand's detoured comic-strip *The Return of the Durutti Column*⁴² and ran-off ten-thousand copies of Khayati's *On the Poverty of Student Life*⁴³ (a sustained attack on the passivity of the average student — *the most universally despised creature in France, apart from the priest and the policeman*). When this modest

tract was distributed at the official opening ceremony of the new term, there was a wave of public outrage which led to the instigators being charged with misusing Union funds. The comments of the judge at their trial not only fuelled their notoriety, but displayed remarkable (if somewhat hysterical) perceptiveness:

Rejecting all morality and restraint, these cynics do not hesitate to commend theft, the destruction of scholarship, the abolition of work, total subversion, and a world-wide proletarian revolution with 'unlicensed pleasure' as its only goal.⁴⁴

One key tactic which the SI retained from their avant-garde past was the concept of 'detournement', and in the months that followed the 'Strasbourg Scandal'⁴⁵ detournement became a powerful and significant medium for the dissemination of the situationist 'message'.

Detournement — *the re-use of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble*⁴⁶ — has a long history within the avant-garde, from Lautremont, through dada and surrealism to the situationists. The power of detournement to subvert the meaning of a text was seized upon by the situationists and it became in effect *the signature of the situationist movement, the sign of its presence and contestation in contemporary cultural reality.*⁴⁷

After Strasbourg, this 'sign of its presence' appeared on walls and campuses throughout France (and throughout the rest of Europe), as extracts from *Poverty of Student Life* were inserted into romance comics, advertisements, cartoons, pin-up photographs and other such ephemeral products of mass-culture.⁴⁸ While it may have been the humour and playfulness of these detoured texts that initially attracted an audience, it must be recognised that we live in an age in which *the greatest seriousness advances masked in the ambiguous interplay between art and its negation,*⁴⁹ and that beneath the playful negation, they sensed that they were being presented with an innovative form of political action. In contrast to specialised protest against the Bomb, hunger, automation, poverty or whatever, which were merely symbols of a general dissatisfaction with the oppressive monotony of everyday life, they saw in the SI texts and slogans a totalising assault on the misery of modern existence; an assault moreover that liberated the repressed desires of its participants.

Throughout the following months, situationist-type politics became a growing presence across Europe. The actions of the Dutch Provos (among whose leading figures was the excluded SI member Constant) brought 'credibility' to situ-type tactics. Whilst the Watts riots in America were seen as a violent corroboration of the situationist theses, the SI analysis of these riots, *The Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Economy*, which was widely translated and distributed, brought a new perspective to these events — the poetry of insurrection.

In response to this exposure of situationist 'ideas', a growing number of groups and individuals made contact with the SI: as their position on 'followers' had always been to

*absolutely refuse disciples. We are only interested in participation at the highest level; and we let loose upon the world those who are their own masters.*⁵⁰

They insisted that most of these 'contactees' should develop their own autonomous, self-sufficient groups. One such group who they *let loose upon the world*, were a few students from Nanterre who were soon destined to become almost as notorious as the SI itself.

Enough words have been written recently about the 'events' of May '68: the details are well enough known. The Nanterre group — Les Enrages (including the future SI member Rene Riesel) began to 'create situations' in their bleakly functional University; demanding reforms, threatening 'Vandal Orgies', disrupting lectures, taunting the authorities and so on. Out of this 'situation', evolved The 22nd March Movement which became the motivating force in spreading the disruption to the Sorbonne and beyond. Enrages members, along with the situationists Debord, Khayati, Riesel and Vaneigem, became the permanent core of the Council for the Maintenance of the Occupations, who, operating out of the Centre Censier, concentrated their efforts in spreading the occupations beyond the campuses into the factories and workplaces. During this period, when it seemed that the *world wide proletarian revolution* so long desired could be realised, Debord declared:

*The Situationist International must now prove its effectiveness in a subsequent stage of revolutionary activity — or else disappear.*⁵¹

With the return of Gaullist 'normalcy', the SI began a rapid disintegration. Exclusions followed tactical disagreements and bitter personal attacks, until, by 1972 the SI comprised of four members (one of whom, Ivan Chtcheglov, remained incarcerated in an asylum), and Debord dissolved the organisation. The SI 'disappeared'; in its place appeared a contemplative, spectacular situationism.

Tracing the history and trajectory of the SI is comparatively straightforward: trying to trace the penetration of the situationist discourse into British culture (or counter-cultures) presents many more problems. The trace is less direct, more diffuse, more tentative, more capillary; their influence enters at different points, in different spheres of activity, and often at second or third remove. The following notes can do no more than indicate the most easily identifiable and direct connections.

We have already seen how Solidarity through its involvement with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* assimilated some situationist theses (or perhaps it is better expressed, the SI and Solidarity both assimilated the theses of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*). Through the interlocking network of anarcho-syndicalist libertarian currents, the situationistic elements of Solidarity's programme gained widespread currency in some sections of the British Left.

Concurrently with this circulation of the more overtly 'political' theses, the British avant-garde was being exposed to the situationist 'programme' through the conduit of the Scottish SI member, the self-styled *astronaut of inner-space*, Alexander Trocchi. Trocchi had joined the SI while living the 'bohemian-exile-in-Paris'; on his return to Britain in the early sixties, he set out to link-up counter-cultural artists and dissidents in a project to synthesise art and politics. This Project Sigma as it became known, operated with the knowledge and approval of the SI: *IS* no. 10 contains this note:

Upon the appearance . . . of Project Sigma, it was mutually agreed that the SI could not involve itself in such a loose cultural venture, in spite of the interest we have in dialogue with the most exigent individuals who may be contacted through it, notably in the U.S. and England. It is therefore no longer as a member of the SI that our friend Alexander Trocchi has since developed an activity of which we fully approve.⁵²

Part of Trocchi's Sigma project entailed an extensive mailing of position papers: The Sigma Portfolio; two of his documents in particular, *Sigma: A Tactical Blue-print* and *The Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds*, contain versions of SI theses, and one, Document no. 18, was the first English translation of the 1960 *Manifeste Situationiste*, the first direct dissemination of SI material in Britain. Among the recipients of the Sigma material were several individuals who were to have key roles in the emerging counter-cultural 'Underground': Tom McGrath (*International Times* Editor), Jim Haynes (cultural entrepreneur and Arts Lab founder), John Latham (D.I.A.S. etc), Joan Littlewood ('fun-palaces'), R.D. Laing (anti-psychiatry), Jeff Nuttall ('People Show' etc), Allen Ginsberg, et al. They also reached a wider audience through being re-printed in the *Journal of the Architectural Association* and the *American City Lights Annual* (the link between beatnik and hippie). The Sigma project began to wither away in 1966, as the counter-cultural 'Underground' began to crystallise; but Trocchi's hyper-enthusiasm had ensured that the situationist discourse was embedded (albeit unrecognised) in this new formation.

At the same moment that Sigma was disappearing, an embryonic British Section of the SI was coming together. A small group — Donald Nicholson-Smith, Chris Gray, Charles Radcliffe and (the soon to be 'new' art historian) Tim Clark — translated Vaneigem's *Banalites de Base* (as *The Totality for Kids*) and produced a magazine, *Heatwave*. Soon after making contact with the SI, they were admitted to membership as the British section: they did not however remain in for very long. Because they had developed their positions without the SI and had not taken part in ongoing theoretical and tactical debates, they soon came into conflict with the 'official' SI 'line'.

Apart from the SI, the Heatwave group had been in close contact with the American Black Mask group. Black Mask had been formed in 1966; its leading activists were, (according to King Mob's account)⁵³ *kids straight off the street, not middle-class drop-outs*. After passing through delinquent street gangs, the hard-drug scene and the U.S. prison system they discovered the legacy of the revolutionary avant-garde; they espoused a:

*real futurism . . . the post-artistic way of life. . . the futurism of Marinetti
beating up Wyndham Lewis in an all-night urinal . . . Marinetti*

*imprisoning a bevy of wealthy culture-vultures in a bell-tent and driving his motor-bike over it full throttle time after time.*⁵⁴

They saw the true artist of the twentieth century in Johann Baader, the Berlin dadaist: *the Idiot/Madman/Guerilla in life . . . the man without aim or prospects, the 'lowest' of all, the shit of America.*⁵⁵

But they saw that the spirit of the 1920's negation of 'art' had been recuperated by the museum and academy; they had emerged from an official 'experimental' art culture, and they *loathed its guts*. They did not want simply to read about or passively contemplate revolution — they wanted to live it. For Black Mask, Tristan Tzara's dictum that *life and Art are one: the modern artist does not paint, he creates directly* was taken as a blue-print for a new mode of existence. To this end, Black Mask made almost daily interventions into the heart of the American Spectacle; 'trashing' Wall St.; forging tickets to cultural events (gallery openings, conferences, etc.) and distributing them to down-and-outs with the promise of free food and drinks; organising mill-ins' at department stores, looting, damaging and 'giving away' the commodities of the American Nightmare; releasing half-starved dogs in expensiverestaurants; 'liberating' the Fillmore East ballroom and admitting everyone for free; the list of actions goes on and on. With the arrival of 'youth revolt' and 'drop-outs' they decided to move from a position of cultural critique into the streets. They dissolved Black Mask, stopped producing their magazine of the same name, and emerged reformed as the Lower East Side chapter of the S.D.S. — Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers. As the Motherfuckers, one of their prime tasks was the creation of a new form of self-expression beyond art and politics; a new revolutionary language. Where a few months earlier they had been writing:

*The poverty against which man has been struggling constantly is not merely the poverty of material goods; in fact, in industrially advanced countries the disappearance of material poverty has revealed the poverty of existence itself.*⁵⁶

they now expressed the same critique thus:

*Your community represents Death. You eat dead food. You live dead lives. Everything about you is dead . . . the struggle is for real life. Fight foul, life is real.*⁵⁷

Back in Britain, this Black Mask/Motherfucker strategy was applauded by the Heatwave group; in France it was not. Several different explanations exist for the break which now occurred between the SI and Heatwave,⁵⁸ but essentially they come down to a difference in style and tactics. Heatwave and Black Mask argued that a theoretical perspective and critique of contemporary society was, on its own, not sufficient; they wanted *political subversion and individual 'therapy' to converge in an uninterrupted everyday activity*.⁵⁹ The Heatwave group, because they sided with the Americans against the SI were excluded in December 1967.

It may seem that I have dealt with the details of the SI/Heatwave/Black Mask split overmuch; but in retrospect, this episode can be seen to illustrate an important facet in the development of the British situationists (pro-situs). For various reasons — a traditional British suspicion of intellectualism, the historical presence of a Romantic element in the British left avant-garde, etc. — it seems that in Britain there was an attraction to the superficial, subjective and spectacular aspects of the SI. Here a quote from Jamie Reid is especially telling; discussing Chris Gray's *Leaving the Twentieth Century*, a compilation of situationist texts, which he helped produce and did the graphics for, Reid explains; *I never really read it, but I loved the one-liners like the 'corpse' metaphor*.⁶⁰ It is also worth realising that Vaneigem's analysis of radical subjectivity and Khayati's inflammatory *Poverty . . .* had an earlier and more widespread distribution than Debord's more rigorously theoretical work.

After their exclusion, the Heatwave group re-emerged as King Mob (named from the 18th century Gordon Riots) consciously modelled on Black Mask/Motherfuckers as a *street gang with an analysis*. A peculiarly English Romanticism is evident from their graffiti (which was the most obvious sign of their existence):

The Road of Excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom (Blake)
The Tygers of Wrath are Wiser than the Horses of Instruction
(Blake)

*A Grief Without a Pang, Void, Dark, Dreary, a Stifled, Drowsy
Unimpassioned Grief (Coleridge).*

This Romanticism, coupled with an active Nihilism:

Revolutionaries, one more effort in order to be Nihilists

and an infatuation with the praxis of 'deviants':⁶¹

Crime is the Highest Form of Sensuality

characterised King Mob and its offshoots. A later very shrewd auto-critique by two of its instigators, Dave and Stuart Wise, sums them up thus:

King Mob's hysterical over-emphasis (without adequate explanation) of violence, whether futurist, or contemporary hooligan outbursts, played into the hands of a charismatic romanticism of deeds which mistakenly equated genuine theoretical development with the dead hand of academia. Without such a distinction the way was open for the grotesque return of English philistinism and the renewed acceptance of the university salon.⁶²

Separate from these developments, other disparate individuals had been exposed to the situationist discourse through their experience of, or involvement in, the May 'events' in France.⁶³ Amongst these were a few students from Cambridge, who returned to Britain with the intention of creating a situ-type group in Cambridge. This small nucleus, including John Barker and Jim Greenfield, initially formed *The Kim Philby Dining Club*, named in honour of the man they regarded as having done more than any other in recent times to undermine and embarrass the Establishment.⁶⁴ After 'dropping-out' of Cambridge, Barker and Greenfield linked up with other like minded revolutionaries, and took seriously these words of Vaneigem:

Let ten men (sic) meet who are resolved on the lightning of violence rather than the long agony of survival; from this moment, despair ends

*and tactics begin. Despair is the infantile disorder of the revolutionaries of everyday life.*⁶⁵

These 'revolutionaries of everyday life' became the Angry Brigade and it was they who first brought to widespread public notice (in Britain) the existence of the situationists. The range of targets of the Angry Brigade — from the Miss World contest through Biba's to the GPO telecom tower, by way of banks, cabinet ministers, company directors, police computers and the Spanish Embassy — signalled a new type of politics. Their first communique to the media:⁶⁶

*Fascism and Oppression will be smashed Embassies (Spanish
Embassy Machine-gunned Thursday)
High Pigs
Spectacles
Judges
Property*

gave a clue as to what this new form of politics would be. The Special Branch 'homed-in' on the word 'Spectacles' and eventually identified the anarcho-situ milieu as the source of the bombers. At their trial, much was made of the 'Spectacles' 'clue' and the language and rhetoric of their communiques; in turn the media investigated the situationist link as a way to 'explain' the actions; in doing so the theses and rhetoric of the SI gained a wider currency in Britain.⁶⁷

Although King Mob and the Angry Brigade are the only two groups which gained any notoriety, throughout the 1970s a range of pro-situ 'groupescules' were active in Britain. In the late sixties, the Manchester-based Hapt group produced a magazine which attempted to combine a Digger position with a King Mob style analysis; Newcastle also had a King Mob offshoot in the community-politics Black Hand Gang. The early seventies saw the emergence of a series of pro-situ formations, which although representing themselves as groups, were usually little more than one or two individual activists.

Ex-King-Mobbers, Dave and Stewart Wise as Blob issued and continue to issue a range of texts, most recently (1988) *Once Upon a Time There Was a Place Called Notting Hill Gate*. Paul Sieveking and John Fullerton translated various SI texts which they published in

Omphalos and the first British edition of Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life*. The early pro-situ group Isadore Ducasse/Ducasses mutated into Piranah('72/'76) and then Big Brothers Anonymous who produced the interestingly paranoid *Catalyst Times*; however, these name changes essentially 'disguised' the activities of two people: Mike Bradley and Michel Prigent. Prigent continues to issue a plethora of pamphlets under a range of names: *The Thunderer*, *Ripple Press*, *The Horses Mouth*, etc., and with Lucy Forsyth as *Chronos*, has translated and published late/post SI texts by Debord and Sanguinetti.

Probably the most consistent and productive British situationist is Nick Brandt who, as Spontaneous Combustion/Combustion, produces a range of pamphlets, leaflets and magazines, and distributes publications by the American pro-situs based round Ken Knabb (Bureau of Public Secrets), including Knabb's *Situationist International Anthology*.

While these groups and publications have been relatively numerous, they have (often) inherited the lettrist/situationist legacy of 'aggressive megalomania' and incestuousness, and have tended to have little impact outside the pro-situ milieu.⁶⁸ Paradoxically, what is probably the most superficial British pro-situ publication has had the greatest distribution. Larry Law's *Spectacular Times* set of mini-handbooks, a mish-mash of quotes from Debord and Vaneigem interspersed with newspaper clippings and advertisements, have had a widespread and influential circulation in the anarcho-punk/animal-lib nexus.

Recently a new wave of what may be termed post-situ groups have emerged; the most interesting are the Scottish Here and Now collective, the Leeds-based Pleasure Tendency and the group based round Stewart Home and *Smile* magazine.

But one must return to 1974 to identify the publication which historically was to have the crucial role in the penetration of the situationist discourse into British culture. This was *Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*, a compilation of translated texts from the SI journal. Not only did it provide the first English language versions of a number of key texts, but also (and perhaps in retrospect, more importantly) an anecdotal account of situationist practice. In doing so, it provided what in effect became a blueprint or source-book for punk.

The history of punk, of Malcolm McLaren and his relation to, and use of situationist discourse is fairly well known. McLaren had been

on the fringes of the King Mob 'scene' and had assimilated the rhetoric, tactics and theory of the situationists. When he made his foray into the music business, he put this knowledge to practical use; assisting him in this project were a small team of British pro-situ — Jamie Reid (ex *Suburban Press*), Sophie Richmond (ex *Solidarity*), Fred Vermorel (ex *International Vandalism*). It is fair to say that McLaren's 'use' of his situationist 'knowledge', apart from the obvious 'borrowing' of graphic styles (detournement) and sloganeering rhetoric, centred round the theoretical implications of the Spectacle's ability to recuperate oppositional practices. He knew that the more he refused incorporation, the more they would try to recuperate him (here 'they' are the entertainment and leisure industries, 'he' stands for the punk project). In his role as the artist-as-businessman, McLaren used the insights and analysis of the SI to do 'good business'.

Likewise, Tony Wilson (of *Factory Records*) raided *Leaving the Twentieth Century* for marketing devices; he named one group (a la *Strasbourg*) *The Durutti Column*, whose L.P. was released packaged in a sandpaper covered sleeve (c.f. *Debord's Memoires*), recalling *Chtcheglov's Formula for a New City*, with its utopian demand *the hacienda must be built*, he opened ('built'?) a night-club called *The Hacienda*. The marketing of these commodities is overlaid with a post-industrial rhetoric.⁶⁹

Leaving aside the politics or morality of these 'Pop Situationists',⁷⁰ the undoubted fact is that through promotional material, interviews, music press articles, etc., the situationist discourse (even if it was only used as a promotional tool) was available to an extended audience. And that, irrespective of the motivation for articulating this discourse, a critical utilisation was possible by those who recognised themselves spoken to by it. Recognising and taking seriously the analysis and formulations 'spoken' by the situationists, means translating into reality the demand for coherence and autonomy; and autonomous coherence is not passive consumption, but entails a reciprocal demand of coherence from the source of the discourse. When this is not forthcoming, the only coherent choice is to supersede in practice the critique it offers.

So, a new post-punk, post-situationist awareness is now operant/accessible in Britain today. The project for contemporary post-situ 'revolutionary' formations is to analyse the situationist discourse and

assimilate the positions and formulations that may prove most productive in the new political/economic configuration of the eighties.

Any contemporary revolutionary project (i.e., an assault upon, and abolition of a society based on commodity production and consumption), must attend to the concrete changes in present society. Just as capitalism has mutated and transformed through several stages, so too has revolutionary theory and practice evolved to meet the changing historical conditions. The theory of the classic workers movements of the First and Second Internationals had to be re-thought in the light of the revolutionary defeats of the 1910s/20s and the parallel rise of social democracy and fascism. In turn, this reformulated critical praxis has failed to halt the advance of capitalism in its new multi-national service-based variant. In retrospect, 1968 can be seen as the final demonstration of the inadequacy of this second phase and signals the need for a new mode of revolutionary critique. The question that then arises, is: are the texts of the SI the final theoretics of the second phase, or do they herald the immanent eruption of a yet-to-be realised third phase?

I would argue that the SI emerged on the cusp of two distinct phases of capitalist production: we now live in an age of leisure-based commodity capitalism where different conditions of production and consumption exist than in the 50's/60's. The fact that progressive/libertarian positions have been so easily assimilated into the dominant culture (ie. Thatcherism's 'anti-statism' — 'rolling back the state') requires a complete re-examination and re-evaluation of previous 'progressive' critiques. It may well be that the SI's demand for *the total work of real life so long sought* for will be the model for a 'post-work' (no work) leisure based future. Just as the theorists of the 'second phase' had to re-think the positions, critiques and strategies of the 'classic' first phase texts, so the theorists of the yet-to-be-written texts of the next phase of revolutionary praxis will have to 'read' the texts of the Situationist International through post-situationist 'spectacles'.

Notes

1. Art and Language, 'Ralph the Situationist', *Artscribe* November/December 1987 p.59. Stuart Cosgrove's article 'Spectacle', *I.D.* no.58, May 1988,

claims Charlie Manson, Warehouse parties and hip-hop graffiti as situationist.

2. R. Lewis, *Outlaws of America* (Pelican, London, 1972) p.86.

3. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (Practical Paradise Pub., London, 1975) p. 173.

4. *Ibid.* p.8.

5. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Practical Paradise Publications, London, 1977) Thesis 191.

6. I. Isou, 'The Creation of Lettrism', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 Aug. 1964.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. For a fuller account of Isou and lettrism, see Carol Rutter, 'Paris: The Lettrist Movement', *Art in America*, Jan/Feb 1970. The Musee D'Art Moderne in Paris opened a lettrist room in 1968, since when they seem to have disappeared from the avant-garde scene.

10. *Memoires*, his first essay in 'subversion', was a book put together entirely from prefabricated elements whose happiest touch was its binding in sheets of sandpaper. The book couldn't be put away in book-shelves because whenever it was taken out it ripped the covers of books on either side. The same period saw his first film, *Hurllements en Faveur de Sade* (1952). This was a featurelength film which, far from being pornographic, lacked any images at all; the audience being plunged into complete darkness from beginning to end apart from a few short bursts of random monologue when the screen went white. The last twenty-four minutes were uninterrupted silence and obscurity.' (Gray, p.4).

11. From the first issue of the journal (*I.S.* no.1) come these *Definitions: Derive: 'A mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. Also used to designate a specific period of deriving'. Psychogeography: 'The study of the precise and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.'*

12. M. Bernstein, 'The Situationist International', *T.L.S.*, 6 Aug. 1964.

13. Gray, op. cit., p30.

14. I. Chtcheglov, *Formula for a New City*, Chris Gray, *Leaving the Twentieth Century* (Free Fall Pub., London, 1974). Two translations of selected SI texts are available: Gray's, and the more complete Ken Knabb (ed. and tr.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, 1981). Both are used in this article.

15. Gray, *op.cit.*, p.19.
16. Gray, *op.cit.*, p. 4.
17. *I.S.* no.6 in Gray, *op.cit.*, p.30.
18. For a concise but informative survey of the bewildering range of post-war avant-gardes and their histories, see John A.Walker *Glossary of Art, Architecture and Design since 1945*, (1973).
19. 'C'est notre desire qui fait la Revolution'— *Cobra* no.4.
20. *Artscribe*, Nov/Dec 1987 p.55. This article by Siedrich Diederichsen is an interesting and informative account of Asger Jorn's career from COBRA to the present.
21. The London Psychogeographical Association/Committee was a largely figmentary creation of the artist Ralph Rumney. Although he was 'excluded' from the SI in 1958, he has recently re-emerged in the post-situ milieu. An exhibition of his new polaroid works was accompanied with an essay by the English 'historian' of the SI, David Dunbar; Rumney has also collaborated with the post-situ *Smile* and Karen Eliot network.
22. An account of the merger and exclusions is available as *The Alba* platform (*Potlatch* no.27) reprinted in Knabb pp.14-15.
23. Debord and Wolman, *Les Levers Nues* no.8, May 1956, Knabb p.8.
24. Gray, p.6.
25. Questionnaire, *I.S.* no.9, Knabb pp. 138-142.
26. The Countersituationist Campaign, *I.S.* no.8, Knabb p. 111.
27. Knabb p.88.
28. Some of the Spur Group later became involved in the German SDS, and one of their number, Dieter Kuzelmann, helped establish the Red Army Faction 'associate' 'Kommune 1'. His SI background was apparent when he affronted the 'specialised' sections of the German left by announcing *I don't care about Vietnam, I care about my orgasm* (J.Becker, *Hitler's Children* p.56).
29. This Scandinavian group, the self-styled 'Seven Rebels', 'led' by the poet Jorgen Nash (Asger Jorn's brother) founded a rival SI, the Bauhaus Situationiste Drakabygget (*a situationistic centre for experiments*) in Southern Sweden. Their manifesto declared that not only would they promise *never, personally, under any circumstances, set foot in an atomic shelter*, but also *never drink in the company of an owner or builder of an atomic shelter* (*T.L.S.*, 3 March 1964 p.10).
30. Castoriadis' (as Paul Cardan) theses are available in Britain in the Solidarity pamphlets *The Meaning of Socialism; Modern Capitalism and Revolution; Redefining Revolution; The Fate of Marxism and Socialism or Barbarism*.
31. 'The Hungarian Source', *Telos*, Fall 1976.

32. *As We See It* Solidarity pamphlet 1961. Solidarity's early sixties critique of CND, *Beyond Counting Arses*, urged a campaign of direct-action resistance of the State and its spectacles: Solidarity 'associates' were then involved in the 'Spies for Peace' scandal (saluted by the SI as a *beautiful action* one of the *few examples of acts of which we totally approve*, Knabb p.318); others were later involved in producing 'detoured' dollar bills as an action against U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

33. Knabb p.376, footnote 310.

34. *I.S.* no.6, Knabb p.68.

35. In retrospect it may be that Lefebvre was relevant less in the production than in the circulation of Situationist 'ideas'. One of his assistants was Jean Baudrillard who has admitted the significant influence of the SI in his work; his conception of 'simulation' owes much to Debord's theory of the 'spectacle'. One of his 'outstanding' students was Dany Cohn-Bendit who was well acquainted with SI positions before the May 'events'.

36. *Those who denounce the absurdity of the perils of incitement to waste in the society of economic abundance do not know the purpose of waste* (Debord *Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 198).

37. *Debord Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 198.

38. *Ibid.* Thesis 42.

39. *Ibid.* Thesis 6.

40. Vaneigem, p.9.

41. Jean Barrot, *What Is Situationism* (Unpopular Books, London, 1987) p.54. This paper is not concerned with a critique of the SI, but it must be said that a crucial contradiction within the discourse of the SI is apparent in their promotion of councilism. Debord's analysis is offered as a critique of the totality of capitalism (where capitalism is understood as the existing relations of production, and thus includes Soviet Communism, i.e., State Capitalism); however, he seems to interpret capitalism only in terms of alienated consumption, and forgets/ignores the fact that consumption is only one aspect of an alienated society which is based on alienated production. Perhaps the contradiction is best illustrated by the two situationist slogans: 'All Power to the Workers Councils' and (simultaneously) 'Never Work'.

42. The original Durutti Column was an Anarchist militia commanded by Buenaventura Durutti in the Spanish Civil War. Vaneigem writes of the SI: *Our guiding image could be the Durutti Column, moving from town to village, liquidating the bourgeois elements and leaving the workers to see to their own self-organisation* ('Basic Banalities' *IS* no.8).

43. *On the Poverty of Student Life: Considered in its economic, political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy*, Contradiction (Berkeley 1972), Black and Red (Detroit 1973).
44. *Ibid.* back cover.
45. The SI's account of the Strasbourg episode — *Our Goals and Methods in the Strasbourg Scandal*— appears in the *SI Anthology* pp.204-212.
46. 'Detournement as Negation and Prelude' *IS* no.3, Knabb p.55.
47. *Ibid.* p.55
48. See Steef Davidson, *Penguin Book of Political Comics* (Penguin, London, 1982) for a selection of examples from France and across the world.
49. Knabb p.56.
50. 'Questionnaire', *I.S.* no. 12, Knabb p. 140.
51. 'Theses on Organisation', *I.S.* no.12, Knabb p.299.
52. Knabb p.373, footnote 136.
53. *King Mob Echo* no. 3 is taken up entirely with a eulogising account of the history and practice of Black Mask and the Motherfuckers. After 1968 their energies were taken up in defending themselves in a series of court cases, and they eventually disintegrated.
54. *King Mob Echo* no.3 (London, 1968/9).
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*
58. At least three versions exist; according to Chris Gray, it was solely to do with tactical differences; the official *IS* version, *The Latest Exclusions* (*IS* no. 12) lays the blame squarely on Black Mask activist Ben Morea. Vaneigem had visited America with the intention of developing contacts with potential members of a U.S. sections. Morea and Vaneigem obviously had a major disagreement, but each reported a conflicting version; the British did not automatically believe Vaneigem's account, and thus in the eyes of the *SI* were suspect. Gray, it is then discovered, had been 'complaining' that the British *had not felt sufficiently appreciated and felt isolated* and eventually became *consciously obstructive*, so they therefore had to go. Fred Vermorel's account, *Sex Pistols* (Star, London 1978) pp.273-4, is funnier; Chris Gray it seems had boasted of *at least 30 trained and combat hardened street-fighters* awaiting his call to arms. Debord, on hearing this, rushed across the Channel to inspect the 'troops' only to find Dave and Stuart Wise well-equipped with cans of Export. The British section were then duly expelled for the *heinous political crime of lying*. All three accounts are probably true.

59. Gray p.165.

60. J.Reid, *Up They Rise: The Incomplete Works of Jamie Reid* (Faber and Faber London 1987) p.40. This comment is not as cavalier as it may at first seem. Jamie Reid is in fact expressing a characteristic way of approaching the SI: a slogan, quotation or metaphor can often illuminate an idea more directly and succinctly than dozens of densely argued pages of text.

61. For the 1969 Notting Hill Carnival, King Mob organised a float in which Miss Notting Hill 69 was represented as a junkie with an over-sized syringe sticking in her arm. While it may have been *a comment on the fact that there was junk and junk, the hard stuff, or, the heroin of mindless routine and consumption* (Wise, op.cit.,p.11), it also illustrates King Mob's glamorisation and romanticisation of 'deviants', whether junkie, football hooligan, petty criminal or the 'mentally collapsed'.

62. *The End of Music* (informal circulation, 1978) p. 3. It is interesting to note in connection with the recuperation by academia of situationist critiques, that Phil Cohen (of the sociology of deviancy, etc.), was close to King Mob through his involvement with the 144 Piccadilly commune/squat.

63. The best account of the perspective of British 'students' on/in the May Events is *Paris: May 1968*, Solidarity Pamphlet no.30.

64. G.Carr, *The Angry Brigade* (Gollanz, London 1975) p.38.

65. Vaneigem p.16.

66. Angry Brigade communiques in their original, somewhat eccentric form are collected in *The Angry Brigade*, Bratach Dubh Documents no.1 (London, 1978).

67. The full story of the formation of the Angry Brigade and their involvement with situationist-type politics is in Carr, *op.cit.*

68. *A nasty little game among the 'pro-situ' groups. They would solicit 'dialogue' from people who 'saw themselves' in one of their texts. When naive sympathisers responded, they would be encouraged to engage in some 'autonomous practice' so as to prove that they were not 'mere spectators'. The most sincere among them would then attempt this. The result would invariably be savagely denounced by the pro-situ group as 'incoherent', 'confusionist', etc. and relations would be broken off.* Barrot, *op.cit.*, p.49.

69. See *ZG Magazine* no.1 p.15.

70. The 'pop situationists' are dealt with at length in Frith and Horne *Art into Pop* (Methuen, London, 1987). Fred and Judy Vermorel, *Sex Pistols* (Star, London, 1978) has the 'low-down' on the McLaren/punk/situationist interface. The best critique of the punk phenomenon is probably Dave and Stuart Wise, *Punk, Reggae: A Critique* (a.k.a. *The End of Music*), privately published and distributed.



The Situationist International and Its Historification

Ralph Rumney in
conversation
with Stewart Home

From Art Monthly
(London June 1989)

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the Situationist International. While situationist theory has gained popularity in anarchist and other circles, the movement's painting is still very much an unknown quantity. The exhibition *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Period of Time: about the Situationist International 1957-1972* which opens at the ICA on June 21 will rectify this state of affairs. Ralph Rumney was a founder member of the Situationist International and has been associated with many European avant-garde groups. *Constats: 1950-1988*, Rumney's first retrospective, was held at England & Co. in March.

Stewart Home: I'm curious to know how you feel about a situationist exhibition being held at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Ralph Rumney: My feelings are rather mixed. We held protests against the Stedelijk and the Triennale because we wanted to do our own thing. That was a long time ago. What's happened now is that our work has entered the public domain and so we can't really stop museums taking an interest in it. It's there, it's history, it's recuperation, it's whatever you like. At the same time, I thought the title of the exhibition was quite nice. I especially liked the subtitle, *About the Situationist International*. And now that I'm getting older and I want to earn a living, it's nice to see this work doing something for me after all these years.

Stewart Home: I notice there's been little support for the show from Bernstein or Debord.

Ralph Rumney: There wouldn't be. Michele Bernstein because she doesn't need it. It's pointless to her, it's something she did and from which she now more or less dissociates herself. Not that she's ashamed of it, or disagrees with it, but because she's doing other things and that's it. Debord just has to keep up this view of himself as being totally intransigent.

Stewart Home: Whereas the Scandinavians, the Situationist Bauhaus and Group Spur would seem more supportive of the exhibition.

Ralph Rumney: They all turned up at the private view and were doing little happenings, which I rather disapproved of. I went to the opening to see the exhibition and because I wanted to meet old friends and learn a few things. There's a lot of work in the show which I'd not seen before.

Stewart Home: I think the exhibition is going to surprise a lot of people in London. Situationist theory is considered relatively sophisticated whereas most of the painting is extremely primitive.

Ralph Rumney: Gallizio was a total primitive. Jorn was not an unsophisticated painter, but he created the Institute for Comparative Vandalism, he was an intellectual primitive. Primitivism had a very strong influence on COBRA and also on the Germans. I don't know if I'm wrong to make this distinction but I think of myself as a completely different kind of painter. I could never have joined COBRA.

Stewart Home: But it's this type of painting which dominates the exhibition.

Ralph Rumney: Yes, it does, it's very strong painting. The curators asked me to lend paintings and I said no, my paintings aren't anything to do with it. I would have been inclined to lend some of the erotic things, but the dates are wrong.

Stewart Home: These are the polaroids and plaster casts that you exhibited at Transmission Gallery in 1985 and which were also included in your recent retrospective at England & Co.

Ralph Rumney: Which I regard as more situationist, more political, than most of my other work.

Stewart Home: To return to the situationist exhibition how do you see the public reacting to it?

Ralph Rumney: I read the visitors' book and that was very interesting. Almost everyone who'd written in it had said this is disgraceful, situationists in a museum, what a load of rubbish! I, however, believe that history should be recorded. I have also come to believe in museums. One of their functions is to make ideas available to people. When we were making our work, the last place we wanted to find it was in a museum. But it's all over now and I don't see why it shouldn't be recorded, catalogued, documented and so on.

Stewart Home: One of the good things about the exhibition is to demonstrate that there's post-war work which stands up alongside the achievements of the futurists, dadaists and surrealists. It's as strong as anything they did. What are your feelings about this?

Ralph Rumney: My feelings are somewhat mixed because I regard my painting as very much distinct from Nordic, COBRA-based, expressionist works. I don't like this type of painting very much. I liked Asger Jorn's work, it's extremely distinguished, I liked Gallizio as a person but I'm not crazy about his work.

Stewart Home: I thought his Anti-Material Cave was the strongest thing in the show.

Ralph Rumney: Of course it was, it's amazing. There's this primitive reality about Gallizio. I think the splits within the movement were due to it containing both intellectuals and these rather marvellous primitives. I'm not convinced that the intellectuals necessarily made the greatest contribution to the group. It was what was actually done

that was important, far more important than the theory. Theories are evanescent. Situationist theory was intentionally inspissated, to make it difficult to understand and extremely difficult to criticise.

Stewart Home: And also to give an impression of complete originality! But what about influences?

Ralph Rumney: The College Of Pataphysics was an influence on the situationists. Debord hated anything which could be seen as having influenced him. He saw the College Of Pataphysics as a wretched little coterie. I declined to become a member of the College because of the situationists. I liked their publications, they had a coherence and a persistent line of thought running through them which, if you look at the twelve issues of *Internationale Situationiste*, is not there. Now then, that may actually be in favour of the IS and say something rather good about it, because where I would criticise Debord is that he wanted to be in charge of the group, he wanted to set up a party line and he wanted everyone to toe it. In fact, he never really achieved this and consequently you get this amalgam of divergent ideas which did amalgamate in the first three days of May '68 and in the punk movement. It's not every little group of twelve that can lay claim thirty years later to having had any influence on two events as important as that.

Stewart Home: To return to Debord, what I find interesting about him is this sense that he always needs a collaborator, whether it be Wolman, Jorn, Vaneigem or Sanguinetti.*

Ralph Rumney: Sanguinetti is where he met his match. He got a collaborator who was smarter than he was. Sanguinetti is absolutely brilliant.

Stewart Home: There's a figure who I feel is always lurking in the background of the situationist saga and that's Michele Bernstein. I get this feeling that she played a key role within the movement, but I can't specify exactly what it was she contributed.

Ralph Rumney: You can't put your finger on it because she won't tell you and she wouldn't thank me if I told you. Since she was my wife, I've got to respect her wishes. I can tell you various little things. She typed all the *Potlatches*, all the IS journals and so on. One of the curious things about the IS was that it was extraordinarily anti-feminist in practice. Women were there to type, cook supper and so on. I rather disapproved of this. Michele had, and has, an extraordinarily powerful and perceptive mind which is shown by the fact that she is among the most important literary critics in France today. A lot of the theory, particularly the political theory, I think originated with Michele rather than Debord, he just took it over and put his name to it.

Stewart Home: Something I found strange about the exhibition was that there was no real acknowledgment of influences. There was very little about the Lettristes or the International Movement for An Imaginist Bauhaus.

Ralph Rumney: That's the fault of the curators. They might have found it very difficult to do in any other way.

Stewart Home: The presentation of the exhibition is very low-tech, the books are displayed on weathered boards. How do you feel about this?

Ralph Rumney: I don't feel anything one way or another, they can present it how they like. It's their exhibition. It's not my exhibition, it's the curators', Beaubourg, they've done the exhibition. Apparently there was a vast shortage of money for the show. On the one hand, Beaubourg's been crying out about this. On the other hand, they're apparently charging the ICA an absolute fortune to have it. It seems extremely odd that they didn't have enough money to do a little bit more. I think the curating was wrong because whatever one says or feels about Isou, it should have started with him. That would have made the historical exhibition I'd have liked to see. I feel that the situationists have somehow achieved this trick of commandeering and imposing a version of history, rather than allowing it to be told as it was.

Stewart Home: I found the inclusion of Art and Language and NATO rather mystifying.

Ralph Rumney: That's the curators, Peter Wollen and Mark Francis. I met them both and neither of them struck me as a serious expert. They were asking questions about things I'd expect them to know. The English tend to be a bit soft intellectually. You could say they are supermarket intellectuals, anything that'll go in the trolley, let's have it.

*Wolman played a central role in the Lettriste International (LI), a tiny splinter group which broke with Isou's Lettriste Movement in 1952. He represented the LI at the congress organised by the International Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB) held in Alba, Italy, in September '56. This conference laid the groundwork for the unification of the LI and the IMIB the following year. The new organisation was called the Situationist International (SI). Wolman was expelled from the LI shortly before it merged with the IMIB in July 1957.

The IMIB consisted of Jorn and whoever else happened to be around. When the SI was founded, Jorn played a leading role in it. He resigned in 1961 but continued to assist in the funding of its publications.

Vaneigem joined the SI in 1961. In 1962, there was a split within the organisation, leaving Bernstein, Debord and Vaneigem in control of its political faction. The more culturally oriented fraction formed itself into the Second Situationist International, centred on the Situationist Bauhaus — a farmhouse in Southern Sweden. The Debordists referred to themselves simply as the Situationist International. I use the term the specto-SI to differentiate them from the original International. Vaneigem resigned from this group in November 1970.

In 1972, Debord, Martin and Sanguinetti dissolved the specto-SI. Sanguinetti and Debord then jointly wrote *The Veritable Split in the International*, a rambling text in which they denounce the backsliding of their former comrades.



Aesthetics & Resistance: Totality Reconsidered

Stewart Home

From Smile #11 (London 1989)

I'd like to begin by addressing the question as to why there is currently a massive revival of interest in the activities of avant-garde groups of the fifties and sixties such as the situationists and fluxus. There are a number of interrelated reasons for this interest:

1) Now that post-modernism is no longer fashionable, many people find themselves attracted to the iconoclasm and sense of purpose offered in the work and ideas of the situationists, fluxus, etc. Support for this work is in part a reaction to the emphasis on the loss of meaning, the proliferation of margins and the decentred subject within post-modern discourse.

2) Related to the iconoclasm of these groups is the aura of radicality (and by inference authenticity) which surrounds them. Since much academic discourse is grounded in notions of the authentic (and its loss), individuals engaged in cultural and media studies find the prospect of assimilating the 'radicality' attached to 'avant-garde' ideas a very attractive proposition. The book *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* by Hal Foster, in which a bastardised version of specto-situationist theory is wielded in defense of blue-chip art may be taken as a typical example of this trend.

3) As Colin Gleadell notes in the June '89 issue of *Art Monthly*: *As more collectors seeking major works turn from the thin pickings on the Old Master market or from the astronomical costs involved in Impressionist and modern paintings, post-war and contemporary art seem to offer the greater potential.* The situationists and fluxus have been caught up in this process and as the prices paid for paintings, objects and publications

rise, there is an accompanying increase in publicity — much of it stimulated and/or financed by the collectors and dealers trading in the work of these groups.

It has become something of a tradition that early commentaries historifying avant-garde groups should be produced by individuals who actively participated in the events they later eulogise (c.f. *En Avant Dada: A History Of Dadaism* and *Dada Lives* by Richard Huelsenbeck and Ken Friedman's commentaries on fluxus). In the case of the situationists, the form of this historification has been particularly biased due to Guy Debord gaining the patronage of Gerald Lebovici. Among other things, Lebovici's money financed the publishing house Champ Libre which disseminated propaganda advertising Debord's supposedly intransigent lifestyle.

Before addressing the issue of recuperation, I'd like to repeat two observations which have been made about the situationists.

1) Writing in *Here and Now* #6/7 (Spring 1989), Gus McDonald suggests that *Debord's Society of the Spectacle is a perfect art object for a specialised audience, complete with homage, pastiche and reference to tradition, designed for the contemplative pleasure of its formalistic perfection.*

2) As Laura Romild and Jacques Vincent note in *Echecs Situationistes* (Paris 1988), the keystone of the Debordist myth is the famous appeal for a general occupation strike and the formation of workers' councils published by the first Sorbonne Occupation Committee, with specto-situationist participation, on 16th May 1968. However, what Debord's supporters tend to overlook is that the appeal, coming after the start of the strikes, had no effect on the unfolding of events! And so, while the specto-situationists have always claimed they played a key role in the May events and cited them as a vindication of their theory, any informed and objective observer is unlikely to take such assertions seriously.

In view of this, I would suggest there is no question of specto-situationist ideas having been recuperated by a 'spectacular' (or indeed any other sort of) society. To suggest that situationist theory has been hijacked by the capitalist media is to credit the former with a critical rigour it did not achieve and the latter with a totalising power it does not possess. It's manipulation, and not recuperation, when those with a vested interest in the status quo make claims about the situationists having produced the total revolutionary critique. If

we take onboard such disabling beliefs, then we could well end up living out one of the ideologies created by our parents generation; and if we accept that the situationists not only created the total revolutionary critique but that this critique has been recuperated, then we resign ourselves to whatever fate society allots us.

Notes made for a panel discussion held at the Institute Of Contemporary Arts, London 24/6/89.*

*I agreed to participate in the ICA's *Situationist Conference* because it's readily apparent that those who want to control their own lives have to face the fact that this involves getting their hands dirty. The ICA provided a platform from which I opposed the tendency for the traditions of the dead generations to dominate the lives of the living. Outside the building, Michel Prigent and his self-styled 'Reception Committee' handed out a leaflet entitled *The Misadventures of the Situationist International in the Temple of Doom*. When they'd exhausted their supply of this tract, an ICA administrator ran off another batch on her office xerox machine. While Prigent and his grouplet presented themselves as being 'radically' opposed to the event, the reality of the situation was very different since they readily accepted the ICA's assistance in carrying out their activities. If Prigent had lived in Paris two hundred years ago, his pseudo-revolutionary purity would have led him to the guillotine. LONG LIVE DEATH! [Note added 26/6/89]



The Realization and Suppression of Situationism

Bob Black

*From Art Paper Vol. 9 #6
(Minneapolis, February 1990)*

The situationists, whose judges you perhaps imagine yourselves to be, will one day judge you. We are waiting for you at the turning.

On this vague note Maurice Wyckaert, speaking on behalf of the Situationist International, wrapped up a rant by SI members at London's Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) in 1961. One baffled member of the audience (or was he a shill?) asked just what 'situationism' was all about. SI co-founder Guy Debord arose to announce, in French, *We're not here to answer cuntish questions*, whereupon he and the rest of the situationists walked out. Nearly three decades later, in a recently published brochure, the ICA recalls the event as *a conference whose chairman was stone deaf, whose main speaker spoke no English, and whose participants denied that the meeting existed*. (Actually, the situationists only denied the existence of the meeting's topic, since they defined situationism as a nonsense word invented by anti-situationists). The ICA has now taken its revenge, but of this, more later.

The Situationist International (1957-1972) was an international but Paris-based group that re-created the avant-garde tradition on a high plane of intelligence and intransigence. Best known today for its ultra-leftist politics, the SI was formed by the merger of two tiny bands of artists, the Lettrist International (or LI, starring film maker Debord and his wife, collage artist Michele Bernstein) and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (or IMIB, which included the painters Asger Jorn and Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio). IMIB, whose anti-functional credo might have been 'form follows fun,' was itself a reunion of artists from the defunct COBRA group. Former

COBRA member, painter and urbanist Constant brought to the SI his notion of unitary urbanism, *the theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior.*

Although it always presented itself as a monolith, the SI experienced several schisms and over a period of time 'excluded' 45 of the group's 70 members. The fundamental contradictions of the SI was between aesthetes and political theorists. The aesthetes, with the prominent exception of Pinot-Gallizio, were usually Scandinavian or Germanic; the political theorists were for the most part Latin and soon gathered under the leadership of Debord.¹ The aesthetes, faithful to the program of unitary urbanism, took an interest in urban planning and architecture: they called for a democratized art, for the reunification and universalization of high and popular culture, and for an aesthete eruption to transform the city into an ensemble of gratifying ambiances. The politicians, to quote a formulation by the first non-artist to become important in the SI, Raoul Vaneigem, demanded the *realization and suppression of art* — that is, a revolution of everyday life.

Both the artists and the politicians rejected art as being too specialized and too commodified. Every situationist was anti-capitalist. But where the aesthetes aspired to infuse art into all aspects of life, the politicians wanted to transform social relations directly. As Mustapha Khayati, an Algerian SI politician and possibly the most accessible situationist polemicist, put it: *The realization of art — poetry in the situationist sense — means that one cannot realize oneself in a 'work', but rather one realizes oneself period.* In other words, after art comes the art of living.

Not to ask a cuntish question, but what's the difference, practically speaking? Neither of the SI's two tendencies ever got the chance to build what Constant called *another city for a different life.* If they had, existing conditions would probably make it impossible to tell the two sides apart. But in the pre-revolutionary here-and-now, the competing orientations implied divergent practices. At the fifth conference of the SI in Sweden in 1961, the aesthetes and the politicians clashed openly. The politicians had recently immersed themselves in the history of the revolutionary workers' movement, and they had adopted as their political line the council communism advocated by the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie.* The aesthetes, on the other hand, were

not so much averse to as skeptical about the prospects of renewed proletarian revolt, given the prosperous quiescence of the early '60s. For the time being, they proposed to deploy their power where it was already being felt, in the art world. The politicians retorted that the aesthetes (represented by the Germans who comprised the SPUR group) overlooked signs of refusal in their own backyard, such as recent wildcat strikes, as well as international episodes like the Zengakuren student demonstrations in Japan and the Katangan uprising in the Congo (which the politicians optimistically — and erroneously — supposed contained some implicit situationist content). The politicians called the aesthetes *cultural pimps*. The aesthetes told the politicians that *your theory is going to fly right back in your faces!* Could be they were both right?

In 1962, with the ejection of the Germans and the 'Nashists' (Scandinavians so named after Jorgen Nash, younger brother of Asger Jorn), the situationists assumed the political posture they would maintain for their final decade. Debord made no more films until the SI dissolved, and situationist art was narrowed to overtly propagandistic collages, cartoons, and altered originals. The Teutons formed their own Second Situationist International based in the Netherlands, where they published the *Situationist Times* (edited by Jacqueline de Jong) and exerted what has turned out to be a lasting influence on Scandinavian culture. Bernstein made a series of collages that reversed the verdicts of history (they had titles like *Victory of the Paris Commune* and *Victory of the Workers' Councils of Budapest*). Unfortunately, these were lost when the group's headquarters in Denmark was torched in 1965.

Although the situationists boasted that theirs *was the best effort so far toward getting out of the twentieth century*, they never actually made it over the wall. It so happened that their foil, the London ICA, recently aided in returning them to the cells from which they'd made their break. Situationist art has been assembled in an exhibition that has made the rounds at three prestigious avant-hip venues: *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time* (named after a Debord film he won't allow to be shown) went from the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris to the London ICA and on to the ICA in Boston, where I took it in. As delicately phrased by the catalog, the show posed *a unique museological challenge*, much as the remains of a

downed UFO pilot would present a funeral home with a unique mortuary challenge.²

No avant-garde tendency ever tried harder to escape the curator's clutches than the situationists, even during the group's initial phase of intervention in the art scene. Four generations removed from dada, the SI knew that their futurist, dadaist, surrealist, and lettrist forebears had been, in their words, *recuperated* by and for the existing order, which in their day (and ours) shows itself as the *spectacle*, the *organization of appearances*. Art — already image — is the easiest of all specialties to recuperate; all you have to do is ignore it or, if that doesn't work, buy it. As Vaneigem declaimed, the SI was not *working for the spectacle of the end of the world, but for the end of the world of the spectacle*.

The situationists' strategy was to incorporate fail-safe mechanisms into their productions. Wyckaert's word-fetishism at the ICA about 'situationism' was just part of the ambush the sits laid for their audiences — situationist texts harped on parts of speech as protective amulets against recuperation. *Memoires*, a graphics-and-text collaboration by Jorn and Debord when both were probably in their cups, is bound in sandpaper covers to thwart the librarian or bibliophile who dares to treat it as just another book by shelving it between others. (The London ICA, with mindless mimicry, also bound its catalog³ in sandpaper covers, the sandpaper donated by English Abrasives & Chemical Ltd. In the exhibition, anything abrasive about *Memoires*, inside or outside the book, was smoothed over by its being kept under glass, along with all other specimens of situationist publishing.) Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio's 'industrial painting' parodied mass production — his work came off a roll and sold by the meter (what remains of one roll, 145 meters long, is part of the exhibit). The idea was to devalorize art by literally cranking it out. But even in the '50s, the market ruled — when Pinot-Gallizio raised the price of his glorified wallpaper, demand actually *increased*.

Pinot-Gallizio's ambition to drape entire cities with his industrial painting was never realized. The closest he came was the *Cave of Anti-Matter*, 1959, a dimly lit room lined with his unspooled painting.⁴ I enjoyed this part of the Boston show because it was the only place where I couldn't be watched by the staff. The Boston ICA also displayed examples of Jorn's 'modifications' — kitsch paintings by

unknown artists given phantasmogoric additions. The last thing the ICA wanted was for anybody to get ideas and start behaving like a situationist — by overpainting the overpainting, for instance.

The futility of the situations' precautions recalls a story related by Suetonius about an enemy of Caesar's who consumed gradually increasing doses of poison to immunize himself. Hearing of this, the Emperor laughed, *There is no antidote against Caesar*. Still, whatever else may be said about the situationist exhibition and its companion volumes, they at least correct the self-serving interpretation of the SI circulated by its own regnant political faction since 1964. Part of the indignation about these productions is reflexive anxiety that the SI, which boasted of being ignored by the mainstream and the left, is now being translated, interpreted, and exhibited by specialists who don't even purport to be pro-situationist. Former sit Ralph Rumney has even complained of the way the group 'commandeered history', writing its own self-congratulatory version. So some review of the actual history of situationism's dispersal into England and America seems in order to better situate the current situationist fad.

Although the Englishman Rumney was a cofounder of the SI, Anglophones were the most likely to fall out with the SI control group. Rumney himself was soon expelled. Alexander Trocchi, a Scot, resigned in 1964. The nascent English Section of the SI was expelled en masse in 1967 for equivocating over the Parisians' resolve to break off contacts with several Americans who had the temerity to expound to Raoul Vaneigem a 'mystical' interpretation of his book *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. The expunged English formed King Mob, which included the future manager of the Sex Pistols, Malcom McLaren; the Americans concocted a sort of hippie-situationist amalgam called the Motherfuckers. Later, the American Jon Horelick and the Dutchman Tony Verlaan formed an American Section of the SI in New York. It was this 'scission' of the Americans — leaving the SI with only four European members, one of them in an insane asylum behind the Iron Curtain — that convinced Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti to liquidate the SI in 1972.

As the SI decomposed, 'pro-situ' groups formed in New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area under names like Negation, Point Blank, and Bureau of Public Secrets. Less situationist-like grouplets (Upshot, Aurora, Narcissus) followed, and without mean-

ing to they insinuated situationism into American anarchism, which at the time was experiencing something of a resurgence. In Detroit, the Black & Red publishing project (and later the vintage underground newspaper *Fifth Estate*) published situationist literature, including the translation, as early as 1970, of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, the SI's most important theoretical treatise.

Americans also had access to some contemporary British translations. Expelled situationist Christopher Gray published a translated SI anthology, titled *Leaving the 20th Century* in 1974. Vaniegem's book appeared in translation first in 1979, then again in a joint Anglo-American authorized translation in 1983. In 1981 Ken Knabb, veteran Bay Area pro-situ (he was the sole member of the Bureau of Public Secrets), self-published a *Situationist International Anthology* containing about one third of the material in the SI's magazine *Internationale Situationiste* along with many other texts. I suspect it was Knabb's book that did the most on the literary front to precipitate the current situationist craze.

For better or for worse, only months after Knabb's book appeared, rock critic Greil Marcus, after being tutored by pro-situ Tom Ward,⁵ ended the media blackout of situationism with an article in the *Village Voice*. Situationism was now on its way to becoming, if not quite a household word, an avant-hip buzzword. Marcus followed up on his article with his 1989 volume *Lipstick Traces*, an uncritical, disorganized, but not uninformative treatment of situationism, punk rock, etc., published by Harvard University Press. After that, the ICA's itinerant mausoleum seemed only a matter of time.

The thing about this accretion of texts is that they were just that — texts. Nobody knew about the artistic origins of the SI or the aesthetic concerns of its earliest years. The Debordists had their reasons for concealing their own artistic roots — the better to come off as political theorists — and it was as political doctrine that situationism captivated Anglo-Americans from the mid-'70s onward. The Teutons of the Second Situationist International, who disdained to conceal that they were artists, never got a hearing in the English-speaking world, even though their scandals and provocations compare favorably to those of the Debordists. Constant, the major theorist of unitary urbanism, joined with several anarchists to create the Provo movement in Amsterdam (1965-67), putting some fire in the belly of the

counterculture there. Members of the German SPUR group were prosecuted for pornography. One of them, Dieter Kunzelmann, founded Kommune 1 in Berlin, which introduced hippie culture to both Germanys and also incubated several terrorists of the June 2 Movement.

Back in England, King Mob was targeting art students, and in 1974 its veteran Jamie Reid designed Gray's *Leaving the 20th Century*. Faulted for its casual translation and shallow commentary, the book is in one crucial respect superior to Knabb's SI anthology: it incorporates enough of the cartoons and graphics to resemble the layout of the original *Internationale Situationiste*. Even after the Debordist consolidation, sit productions reflected the integrated aesthetic practiced by the COBRA and IMIB artists. But the English translations of most situationist and pro-situ texts tilt sharply toward the suppression of art rather than its realization, diminishing the holism of the tendency and perhaps contributing to the SI's exaggerated reputation for overly arid theory.

In addition to designing Gray's book, Jamie Reid also placed his collage style at the disposal of promoter Malcolm McLaren, whose management of the Sex Pistols and manufacture of punk fashion looks suspiciously like a cynical experiment in situationist social engineering. Some of the graphics that adorn Sex Pistols album covers Reid previously placed in pro-situ publications. Although not many knew it at the time, punk derived its comprehensive negativity from the situationists, though most of the groups particulars, like council communism, fell by the wayside.

By the late 1970s, with the help of cheap and ubiquitous xerography, punks and other marginals were transforming the fanzine (borrowed from the sci-fi underworld) into the preferred medium of the do-it-yourself marginals milieu. There are said to be 5,000 to 10,000 fanzines currently published in the U.S. alone. Many of them look like SI publications except in their punk sloppiness, and some of them were dealing with situationist ideas long before the ICA or even Greil Marcus got hip. Having glanced at every page of every issue of the SI journal — the ICA stapled them up — I can safely say that the best SI collages are markedly inferior to the work of a number of American collagists, such as Dadata, Multinø-tionalist, Kansas College of Collage, and the Out of Kontrol Data Institute. Why weren't

any of the works of these North Americans placed under glass with the rest of the relics at the ICA, although recent nondescript art by such postmodernists as NATO and Art & Language, which owes a lot less to the SI, were?

Probably because the marginal materials aren't *relics* — at least not yet. For this kind of art (posters, postcards, fanzines, tabloids) the copy *is* the original; therefore, their small press runs count for less than the likelihood of their infinite reproduction in the minds of museologists, whose dismal science is predicated, like economics, on scarcity. Pinot-Gallizio was indeed on to something with his industrial paintings, but the material conditions for the mass production and *distribution* of art weren't around yet. The suppression of art — and of work — is not a matter of unitary urbanism or workers' councils, but of an entirely different system of social and cultural exchange, one symbolized by the gift, solvent of all separations. On this point the SI's practice was for once in advance of its theory. Its slick journals were inexpensive, and during the French uprising of May 1968 — the SI's moment in the sun — the situationists churned out hundreds of thousands of posters and publications, their *don gratuit* to the proletariat.⁶

The SI was forever discovering *unconscious* situationism in everyday events — in the conduct of Watts rioters, juvenile delinquents, Katangan rebels, even Berkeley students. This is a hazardous walk between the Scylla of substitutionalism (imputing your pet fancies to every expression of orneriness) and the Charybdis of construing appearance as essence (things *are* what they seem). But you can't just talk the talk; you gotta walk the walk *on the wild side*. There's as much implicitly situationist — and more explicitly situationist — activity in the marginal milieu of 1990 as there was in the punk milieu of the mid '70s. But the mortician's client must first be dead.

Situationism is dead. Long live situationism.

Footnotes from the Underground

1. Jorgen Nash related the SI's major schisms of 1964 to differences in national character: *The Franco-Belgian situationists base themselves on the same principles as Pascal, Descartes, Croce, and Gide. Action precedes emotion. You only begin to feel religious after you have muttered your prayers. According to Scandinavian*

situationist philosophy action is the result of emotion. . . . We are not saying that the French method is wrong or that it cannot be used successfully. We merely say that our two outlooks are incompatible, but they can be made to supplement one another. 'Who are the Situationists?' *Times Literary Supplement*, Oct. 3, 1964, reprinted in Iwona Blazwick, ed., *An Endless Passion . . . an Endless Banquet: A Situationist Scrapbook* (London: ICA/Verso, 1989).

2. Elizabeth Sussman, ed., *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International, 1957-1972* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press for the ICA, Boston, MA, 1989). The London show elicited a protest flyer by Michael Prigent. *The Misadventures of the Situationist International in the Temple of Doom*, castigating the belated academic discovery of the SI as *would-be SI specialists from the capsizing world of decomposed thought . . . falling over themselves to grab a place on the SI lifeboat in a desperate attempt to shore up their bankrupt careers*. The Boston show inspired a similar, unsigned jeremiad, *On the Attempted Gentrification of the Situationist International*; both are available from me for a self-addressed stamped envelope. P.O. Box 2159, Albany, NY 12220.

3. Op cit.n. 2. As I do not own an emery board, I have found the cover useful in doing my nails. This is an example of the situationist aspiration to reintegrate art and everyday life.

4. In its original form, this was a multimedia project including sounds that varied according to the movements of people in the 'cavern', plus a live female model. In the Boston show, the room was soundless and the model replaced with a dummy. Besides practical considerations, squeamishness over the model might have troubled progressive/puritan Boston. One need not be hyper-feminist to wince at a liberatory tendency whose worst epithet is, as we have seen, *cuntish*. Only 10 percent of the situationists were women, and only two of them were acknowledged as playing significant roles — Michele Bernstein, Debord's wife, and *Situationist Times* editor Jacqueline de Jong. According to Ralph Rumney, the SI *was extraordinarily anti-feminist in practice. Women were there to type, cook supper, and so on*. Rumney adds that he thinks Debord took credit for theory produced by Bernstein. See 'The Situationist International and its Historification', *Art Monthly* #127, June 1989. Then again, this may be sour grapes — after Bernstein left Debord, she married Rumney (they're now divorced). Bernstein is, according to Rumney, *among the most important literary critics in France today*.

5. May 11, 1982. Ward complained of Marcus's aestheticization of the SI, but Marcus was no more one-sided than politicians like Ward himself who, as I

elsewhere relate, regressed into the Marxism they had never really escaped. Tom Ward, *Class Struggle is for Real*, Greil, available from me.

6. For the SI's view of its part in the French May Days of '68, see *The Beginning of an Era* in the Knabb anthology. Academics like Bernard B. Brown, Alfred Willener, and Richard Gombin have attested, with sympathy or hostility, to saliency of situationist themes in the uprising. In *The Assault on Culture* (London: Aporia Press, 1988), the first attempt to debunk the SI, Stewart Home argues: *When it's considered that millions of workers and students participated in the May events, such a minuscule grouping cannot be deemed of much significance.* Home ignores the fact that the SI's allies provoked the student demonstrations at Nanterre which precipitated the general strike. No one denies this. Perhaps the best rejoinder to Home's number-crunching is the SI's answer to a query about how many members it had: *A few more than the original guerrilla nucleus in the Sierra Madre, but with fewer weapons. A few less than the delegates in London in 1864 who founded the International Workingman's Association, but with a more coherent program.* For a critique of Home's book, see Bob Black, *Taking Culture with a Grain Assault*, now available from Counter Productions, P.O. Box 556, London SE5 OR1, United Kingdom.



The Situationist International: A Case of Spectacular Neglect

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The recent exhibitions of situationist art and paraphernalia in London, Paris, and Boston, have given the Situationist International (SI) an unprecedented academic and cultural profile. Even during the movement's most active period, when many of its ideas and practices were realised in the events in France 1968, it received little serious appraisal; to some extent this was because of its insistence that it should be incapable of definition in terms other than its own, but it was also due to the unique quality and nature of its research and the uncomfortable implications of its theses for the cultural and academic establishment. The Situationist International was established in 1957 and published twelve issues of a journal, *Internationale Situationniste*, until 1969.¹ Bringing together the marxist and avant-garde traditions in a critique of the totality of everyday life, the movement developed a project of extraordinary scope and ambition which transcended traditional demarcations between disciplines and at the same time developed an overt commitment to social revolution.

There remains a reluctance to consider the full spectrum of situationist ideas today. The movement is still presented as an artistic or cultural school akin to surrealism, and the philosophical and political problems with which it engaged are largely ignored. The following discussion goes some way towards correcting this neglect with an indication of the relevance of situationist ideas to contemporary political and philosophical debate and a consideration of the historical and intellectual contexts in which the situationists worked.

The Society of the Spectacle

Many political theorists of the post-war period produced critiques of the 'consumer society' in their efforts to adapt or supersede the marxist analysis of capitalism. Marcuse, Cardan, and Lefebvre were amongst those who considered the buoyancy of the economy and the apparent changes in class and political structure to be the real and enduring features of capitalist society: for some, such as Marcuse, this involved the postulation of the end or transformation of the working class and necessitated a radical revision of ideas about social revolution. The situationists agreed that consumption was assuming an unprecedented significance in the postwar period, but they used this position to argue for an extension of the notion of the proletariat to include all those who experienced a loss of control over their lives, whether as consumers or producers of commodities. They applied the marxist conception of alienation to every area of everyday life and argued that the development of capitalism entailed the extension of the means, the objects, and intensity of alienated experience. For the situationists, no area of experience is free from the permeation of capitalist relations of production and consumption; the members of capitalist societies are reduced to the level of spectators of a world which precludes their participation.

The SI argued that every experience of absence and alienation is produced by the capitalist system of relations. So that, although specific to class society, alienation appears to bear all the attributes of an inevitable and all-pervasive human condition. They characterised capitalism as the society of the spectacle: a realm in which everything is removed from real experience and becomes an inverted representation of itself. The spectacle circumscribes reality and any experience or discourse which arises within it becomes spectacularised. Ordinary gestures and the activities of daily life are packaged as glamorous and seductive; commodities come complete with preordained roles and lifestyles; and even dissent and critique are commodified and sold to those who experience and produce them. The conformist, the nihilist and the revolutionary are amongst the roles which can be chosen within the spectacle; commodified and alienated, they have an equivalence which denies their intrinsic significance. The most banal of gestures is glamorised and imposed:

washing powders, confectionery, drinks and household appliances are advertised along with idealised images of those who use them and the homes, relationships, and patterns of behavior in which they do so.

This makes it increasingly difficult to use an advertised commodity without assuming or rejecting the projected image; either way, one acts with reference to it. *The mechanism of the spectacle wields such force that private life reaches the point of being defined as that which is deprived of spectacle; the fact that one escapes roles and categories is experienced as an additional privation.*² Similarly, just as new students acquire superfluous collections of paper, pens, books which will never be read, filofaxes, suitable wardrobes and record collections, any role is accompanied by a host of often unwanted commodities, attitudes and gestures which constitute the badge of participation and promise some reality to one's life.

The situationists argued that such spectacularised roles are offered as the end of isolation and alienation: consume these goods, and you will be really in the world. The consumption of alienated goods, roles, and lifestyles is the only available antidote to alienation, and this means that the experience of the spectacle is intrinsically unsatisfying. Even in the midst of the appropriate commodities, life remains empty and unfulfilling. Nevertheless, the proliferation of goods and roles responds to desires for real participation: commodities are marketed as the key to an exciting/interesting/respected/dignified life of real social involvement. Cars, holidays, and washing powders promise the fulfillment of dreams and the realisation of fantasies. Such goods are quickly superseded by their new and improved counterparts, and more dreams of salvation through consumption are hopelessly chased. Regardless of people's ability to acquire them, the proliferation of commodities ensures that the imperative of work for survival is maintained even in the absence of its material necessity. Everyday life is impoverished, and the available means for its improvement are products of the same system of alienated relations.

Emerging out of a number of avant-garde currents, the Situationist International developed the dadaist and surrealist attempts to subvert the banality of daily life by realising artistic experience within it. The transcendence of the distinction between art and life has long

been the dream of the avant-garde — both the dadaists and surrealists had advocated a poetry made by all, an environment of artistic experience, and the end of cultural elites and specialism. The situationists equated the free creation of art with the free creation of society, and developed these ideas in their agitations for a world of genuine participation in which people would control their own lives and literally 'create situations'.

These ideas were furthered in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, which pursued many of the ideas in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* to argue that capitalist society must be conceived not as an immutable and discontinuous given, but an interconnected totality constituted by a system of alienated production and always open to historical change. Consciousness of the historical nature of the spectacle is constantly subject to a denial which precludes the possibility of wholesale and structural change. The spectacle, wrote Debord, presents itself as the end of history, whereas it is really a mere moment in historical time, capable of transformation and supersession no less than any other epoch.

Debord argued that historical consciousness is inevitably produced by the exigencies of the system: constant change and innovation, as Marx and Engels pointed out in *The Communist Manifesto*, are the hallmarks of bourgeois relations. The accelerated production of gadgets, entertainments, and lifestyles means that the possibilities of fundamental change are increasingly obvious. In the post-war period, new technology presented the possibility of a world of unalienated labour, and the capacity for the alleviation of material and spiritual impoverishment was clear. This situation necessitated the development of unprecedented mechanisms of concealment and distortion of the possibilities of social change; for the situationists, this was achieved through the commodification of criticism and dissent, in which all attempts to reach consciousness of the possibilities of structural change are thwarted at their inception. The process of commodification presents all aspects of experience — events, goods, roles and issues — with an equivalence which denies their peculiarity. Items of news are presented without regard for their significance, issues come and go with the apparent whim of fashion, and even the most critical of ideas can assume the banality of a weather forecast.

The situationists defined this loss of meaning as *recuperation*, a term which, popularised by Raoul Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life*, has since assumed some currency in debates about the fate of critical discourse. Recuperation signifies not merely the integration or co-optation of criticism, but suggests that it is actually turned to the advantage of the structures and institutions it intends to negate. The use of revolutionary propaganda to advertise such commodities as beer (Watney's Red Label in the 1960s) or commercial services (Nat West's 'Student 88' campaign) are amongst the most blatant examples of this process, but the term also expresses more subtle diversions of discourse and suggests that critical ideas and practices are subjected to the same alienation as that faced by material commodities: removed from the control of those who developed them, they are packaged and sold back in spectacularised forms.

This scenario presents huge difficulties for critical discourse. Intending to place itself in a relation of contradiction to its object, critical thought or practice finds itself in an internal relation in which its role is supportive rather than hostile. According to the situationist thesis, recuperation constitutes one of the most subtle and important ways by which the capitalist system of relations perpetuates itself beyond the period of its legitimacy as a guarantor of material improvement. Having achieved the potential for the satisfaction of basic material needs, on which the early capitalist economy was dependent, the imperative of work for survival is maintained with the extension of commodification to all areas of life. Requiring the continued circulation of goods, capitalist society brings all experiences and discourses into this alienated play. Dissatisfaction is packaged and returned to those who experience it in the form of badges and T-shirts: critical theory is conducted within the confines of an academic establishment which extends a form of Marcusean 'repressive tolerance': and critiques which identify a totality of mutable relations are diffused and defused by their fragmented reception and presentation.

The Avant-Garde Tradition

There were problems faced by the avant-garde tradition which formed an important part of the situationist heritage. Dada and

surrealism were continually presented with the integration of their critiques of the totality of social and discursive relations within its confines, and both movements were engaged in a constant battle for autonomy and self-definition. The surrealists, for example, continually claimed that they were not an artistic movement, and yet their onslaught on the totality was diverted into the structure of art and literature against which they worked. These problems determined the course of both dada and surrealism: everything was done with the intention of evading such recuperation on the grounds that it weakened and fragmented their attack.

To some extent, the surrealists were already confined to the cultural realm by the nature of their practices; the success of their attempt to realise art was dependent on the achievement of a social revolution with which they had every sympathy but little influence. Asserting that the surrealist project to transform the experience of everyday life was fundamentally that of the proletarian revolution, they enjoyed a problematic relationship with the French Communist Party: willing to work as surrealists within the Party, they were less receptive to the PCF's insistence that the surrealist project should be abandoned until 'after the revolution'. They argued that the subversion of the totality of capitalist relations should be conducted on any and every front.

The difficulty and necessity of maintaining such a broad opposition to the totality was the primary concern of the situationists. Much situationist theory developed out of the techniques used by the avant-garde; where these had been used in the artistic and literary realms, the situationists applied them to all areas of criticism. The practice of *détournement*, a turning round or subversion, was developed as the most effective means of countering recuperation. The found or 'ready-made' objects presented by both the dadaists and surrealists provide excellent examples of this practice. Marcel Duchamp's infamous *Fountain*, a urinal turned on its back and signed R. Mutt. was shocking because of its challenge to the artistic values of creativity, originality, and form. For Duchamp, the urinal illustrated the essentially ready-made character of all art: he pointed out that every painting uses 'ready-made' materials and merely decontextualises and rearranges familiar objects. Another of Duchamp's well-known images, the moustached *Mona Lisa*, subverted

a hallowed incarnation of genius with the subtlest of alterations. Such practices undermined the pejorative meaning of plagiarism by bringing the notions of originality into question, and challenged notions of genius and talent by their presentation of a creativity open to all. They provided a constant challenge to art to justify itself as a specialised and elite practice separated from everyday existence.

The situationists advocated this sort of *détournement* of all established values, symbols, and relations. The city environment, with which the dadaists and the surrealists had already played, was subverted by the situationist *dérive*, a drifting walk which put the functional design of the city to a poetic use in accordance with the wanderer's desires. This was developed into the 'psychogeographical' study of subjective relationships with the city which facilitated much imaginative exploration of the possibilities for environmental transformation. Chtcheglov's *Formula for a New Urbanism* declared *we are bored in the city*, and presented a world in which *everyone would live in his own cathedral*, in a changeable environment developed harmoniously with the desires of the inhabitants and conducive to the *construction of situations*. Such speculations furthered the situationist intention to bring even the wildest dreams into the realm of the possible and *flood the market with a propaganda of desire*, raising expectations far beyond those realisable within the capitalist system of relations.³

This was also true of the situationist conception of poetry as a *détournement* of functional language, exemplified by the dadaist subversions of official propaganda during the First World War, when newspaper articles were cut up and rearranged with wild variations in type face, and photomontages and collages of published photographs and advertisements were accompanied by the repetition of 'dada', whose very meaninglessness was a *détournement* of cultural convention. The surrealist engagement in automatic writing was a similar subversion; although the situationists distrusted the Freudian principles with which the surrealists had worked, they were interested in surrealist practices because they were conducted on principles other than those of artistic, literary and social convention. The International Lettrists, one of the groups which had formed the Situationist International, had practised the *détournement* of the comic strip, and the situationists delighted in adding revolu-

tionary dialogue to cartoons. The emphasis was always on the use of existing material to ends other than those for which it had been intended, and the situationists produced a stream of illustrations of the possibility of a new world built *on the ruins of the spectacle*.

The situationist development of both the avant-garde and marxism was not uncritical. Applauding the avant-garde techniques and tactics, they argued against its confinement to the literary and artistic sphere, and in relation to marxism, they rejected vanguardism and advocated a system of workers' councils and direct participation. The SI was always small, and it had no pretensions to an embryonic revolutionary organisation. Its members were propagandists working towards *a new revolution that must surge over that central terrain which until now has been sheltered from revolutionary upheavals: the conquest of everyday life. We will only organise the detonation: the free explosion must escape us and any other control forever.*⁴ The situationists defined themselves as the 'last specialists', and were determined not to be stars of any revolutionary movement, seeking notoriety for their ideas rather than themselves. This course resulted in a series of exclusions and internal disputes: some of these were exaggerated by Debord's assumption of unofficial leadership, but mostly they were the consequence of the situationists' attempts to avoid recuperation as 'spectacularised' revolutionaries, intellectuals, artists, or any other fragmented and specialised role.

This preoccupation with the maintenance of an effective critical role has undoubtedly contributed to the obscurity of the movement: they were so successful in sidestepping categorisation and integration that they were largely ignored. Nevertheless, the situationists' awareness of the vulnerability of critical discourse to recuperation within the structures they addressed gave many of their insights an unusual quality. The situationists were perhaps the only theorists who were not surprised by the revolutionary situation in 1968. Unconvinced by arguments that the relative prosperity of the working class heralded its end, they argued that life was becoming more and more impoverished: *to be rich today is to possess the largest number of poor objects.*⁵ The situationist conviction that this poverty would not go unchallenged by those who experienced it bemused those who argued before and after the events that they were *impensable*, unthinkable. Henri Lefebvre, with whom Debord had studied, wrote

of the group: *Do they really imagine that one fine day or one decisive evening people will look at each other and say, 'Enough! We're fed up with work and boredom! Let's put an end to them!' and that they will then proceed to the eternal Festival and the creation of situations?*'⁶ For their part, the situationists declared: *We had prophesied nothing. We simply pointed out what was already present.*⁷ Indeed, in the strike pamphlets, the practices, and the theoretical preoccupations which emerged in 1968, the political attitudes cultivated by the situationists in the preceding decade emerged with an unprecedented clarity.

This is not the place for a resume of the events of 1968; 1988 was the year for nostalgic reflection, and even though many of the anniversary discussions succeeded in concealing more than they exposed, there are many reliable accounts available.⁸ Nevertheless, some important aspects of the events continue to be ignored: the student influence is prioritised above that of the workers, in spite of the fact that the general strike lasted for more than three weeks and brought ten million workers out. The prosperity of the time is also often overplayed: French workers were among the lowest paid and the highest taxed in Europe, and the general impoverishment identified by the situationists was often experienced in addition to material privation. In the present context, however, the significance of the situationists' role in the detonation of the events is most striking.

Under the Cobblestones...

The Society of the Spectacle and *The Revolution of Everyday Life* were published in 1967 at a time when the movement had already achieved some practical success in the Strasbourg scandal of 1966. Working with the SI, students at Strasbourg produced a pamphlet, *On the Poverty of Student Life*, which constituted a damning indictment of the student's role as a passive spectator of capitalist society. The text, funded by the Student's Union to which its authors had been elected as a result of the apathy of its moderate membership, provoked the outrage of the authorities and a major court case of the misuse of student funds. Ironically, the judge's summation, which is still published in most new editions of the text, was quite accurate in its condemnation: *perplexed by the drab monotony of their everyday life, and rejecting all morality and restraint, he pronounced, these cynics do not*

*hesitate to commend theft, the destruction of scholarship, the abolition of work, total subversion, and a world-wide proletarian revolution with 'unlicensed pleasure' as its only goal.*⁹

The arguments of *On the Poverty of Student Life* set the tone for agitations in French universities throughout the following year, and in the period of strikes, occupations, and rioting, when de Gaulle travelled to Germany to find loyal army units willing to enter Paris, the situationist analyses seemed entirely appropriate. Within the emergence of a strong mass revolutionary movement, the 'unthinkable' had happened. Parisian graffiti declared: *They're buying your happiness. Steal it!, I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires and Run for it! the old world is behind you.*¹⁰ This injection of surrealism into revolutionary propaganda was indicative of the period's imaginative confusion of previously separated concerns. All aspects of social experience were questioned: footballers demanded the sacking of their managers; musicians called for *wild and ephemeral music*; and doctors and psychiatric nurses demanded the release of their charges. University campuses and factories were subverted by calls for 'self-management'; cars became barricades in the streets and turned the city's conventions upside down; cobblestones became the ultimate 'ready-made' weapons against the CRS; and costumes taken from the occupied Odeon theatre gave the revolutionaries a garb as extraordinary as that donned by the police.

The situationists considered the events to be the realisation of the avant-garde practices of the *dérive*, *détournement* and the wholesale questioning of values and meaning, as well as the culmination of a tradition of working class resistance, sabotage, and forms of organisation. The predominant structures were councillist, with most of the strikes sustained without official union backing. The PCF and its union, the CGT, were hostile to the workers' actions; they repeatedly warned against provocateurs and, regardless of the fact that pay was not a primary concern of the strikers, negotiated the large pay increase which encouraged the eventual return to work. All the documents of the period suggest that the primary cause of the discontent was the loss of control and the absence of participation experienced throughout French society: the events demonstrated the need for participation and the immediacy of real experience, as well as the will to achieve a revolution in the totality of capitalist relations.

These were attitudes as dangerous to the PCF and the unions as to the government.

The hostility to the rigidity of authority and hierarchy which characterised the May events has since received its philosophical expression in the post-structuralist genre, dominated by rejections of theoretical authority, the validity of truth, and a stable and accessible notion of reality. Jean-François Lyotard, who had been involved in the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* movement in the 1950s and was active in the *Mouvement du Mars* in 1968, often refers to the May events in his critiques of dialectical thought, and Foucault's advocacy of autonomous resistance to an infinity of relations of power and knowledge is indebted to the forms of organization developed at the time.¹¹

Their reflections on the pervasion and multiplicity of forms of domination revealed by the May events have led to the assertion that critical theory and practice are always in an internal relation of complicity to their object. The tools and techniques of criticism are 'always already' defined by the dominant system of relations so that the dialectical conception of criticism arising in a logical contradiction to its object is redundant. They also argue that the dialectical identification of a totality of relations is untenable, suggesting that such 'grand narratives' as marxism do not uncover the reality of a system founded upon a particular mode of production but rather constitute and impose it. There is no social whole, and therefore there can be no social revolution.

In Foucault's work, the transformation of the 'general effect' of the networks of power he identifies is not precluded. But the political implications of his work are that tactics of resistance must be cultivated to expose and undermine specific relations of power which, although they are interconnected, are not determined by the economic or any other base. The alienation experienced within capitalism is not specific to it; rather, it is bound up with the discursive nature of reality. Discourse constitutes reality, and the raw immediacy of the experience craved by the revolutionaries of 1968 is forever removed and absent. The beach under the cobblestones made famous by graffiti on the walls of Paris is a chimera; there is no beach, and no post-revolutionary paradise attainable by people fundamentally alienated by their discursive reality.

Surface Similarities, Deep Discontinuities

Many of the political implications of post-structuralism are not particularly innovative: the notion that there is no social whole to criticise has its precedent — and its contemporary manifestation — in all bourgeois theory. Nevertheless, the philosophical foundation of this position requires some consideration. The assumptions and preconditions of dialectical thought have been thrown into question by post-structuralism and the whole post-modernist genre: the possibilities of defining underlying structures, truths, and meaning, and identifying historical purpose, direction, and reality, have all been curiously undermined. These are complex issues to which attention has been turned in detail beyond the scope of this discussion, but the relation between situationist theory and the problems raised by poststructuralism can be identified quite simply.

The SI's analysis of the difficulties of sustaining critical discourse, and the post-structuralist identification of a 'crisis of criticism', share many common foundations. Many of the avant-garde techniques considered above have found their way into post-structuralist philosophy. Lyotard's drifting thought, which accepts no truth value and undermines the legitimations of those discourses which do so, is a theoretical translation of the situationist *dérive*; similarly, the language and multiplicity of desire which underlies his work is a development of the emphasis placed on play, pleasure and adventure by both the surrealists and the situationists. Foucault's work continually returns to the notions of sabotage, resistance, and the possibility of counter-discourse, all of which were developed by the dadaists in relation to the cultural values they attacked.

Moreover, the avant-garde's awareness of the difficulties of criticism has resurfaced in post-structuralism. The necessity of uncovering structures and relations of domination in all areas of social and discursive life is a major preoccupation of both genres. Both developed criticisms of the forms and assumptions of political organisation and the validity of critical discourse in terms of its integration with the structures it opposes. Foucault follows the example of the avant-garde and the situationists in his determination to evade the categorisation of his life and work, and all post-structuralist work has an antipathy to stability and petrification manifest in its hostility to theory.

If traces of this heritage appear throughout post-structuralism, the very tracks of the Situationist International can be read in the work of Jean Baudrillard, whose postulation of a 'hyperreality' develops the spectacle to a point at which there is no notion of reality to which it may be opposed.¹² Baudrillard argues that the discursive nature of reality is complete: the notion of power used by Foucault, and Lyotard's conception of desire, are criticised for their status as prediscursive constructions whose imposition is also illegitimate. The absence of meaning which this entails leads Baudrillard to a position which precludes the validity of any criticism, since there are no structures, values, or purposes with which it can proceed. The spectacle is no longer an alienated inversion of reality, but its total substitution.

Like the situationists, Baudrillard considers that capitalist society offers a form of pseudo-participation, in which only the appearance of involvement is maintained. Whereas the situationists opposed this with arguments for the conscious engagement in the construction of experience, Baudrillard argues that this 'real' participation can have no reality or meaning beyond that presently conferred upon it. The feelings of the loss and absence of real experience are not specific to capitalism: since only appearance is 'real', alienated experience will persist as long as lamentations for a reality which has never existed continue.

Baudrillard effectively takes the situationist thesis to an extreme by arguing that if the spectacle is all-encompassing so that, in Debord's words, *reality rises up within the spectacle and only the spectacle is real*,¹³ there can be no possibility of any critical discourse. Baudrillard considers that the passivity and disengagement of the 'silent majorities' is second only to death in the validity of their resistance. Any active attempts to identify and negate the existing state of affairs is undermined. On what grounds, and with what justification, do they present the 'more real' reality of history? On what basis do they identify class? And how is the definition of society as a unified totality constituted by an economic system legitimated? Such would be the tenor of Baudrillard's criticisms if he but acknowledged his engagement with the Situationist International.¹⁴

The problem of the recuperation of critical discourse identified by the situationists is answered by post-structuralist philosophers in terms of the inevitability of criticism arising in an internal relation to

its object. They argue that if reality is discursive, any discourse will participate in the construction of the world it describes or criticises. To speak of a discourse being integrated or co-opted is to mistakenly assume that it once had a freedom or reality which has since been removed, as though critical discourse is at first in a relation of opposition, and only later assumes one of complicity. From this perspective, a concern with recuperation is quite mistaken. A discourse which sets itself up in contradiction to a dominant structure is 'always already' integrated in the discontinuous series of relations it mistakenly defines as a totality. No values or meanings can bear a truth beyond that which is defined within the complexity of existing discourse.

The implications drawn by post-structuralist philosophers from this argument are that dialectical criticism is impossible since the critical distance it requires is unattainable. Alienation cannot be criticised because the authenticity to which it must be opposed is meaningless. But this position assumes that some sort of Archimedean point, outside and untarnished by the structures it opposes, is necessary to the adoption of a critical perspective. Practitioners of dialectical criticism have always recognised that the language and values with which criticism is expressed are defined by the existing totality of social and discursive relations. The situationists, for example, argued that this situation reinforces the need for a critical attitude to all existing conceptualisations and values, since these are necessarily the tools with which the existing reality must be undermined and must be used against the structures within which they have developed.

Critical theory and practice does not conjure its techniques and materials out of thin air, but subverts and rearranges those which already exist. Its antagonism is developed out of the contradictions it perceives in the existing reality, such as the discrepancy between what is offered within a given society and what it is possible to take. The freedom, choice, and participation offered by the spectacle are responses to the demands and desires produced by this society. Since these remain unsatisfied by the spectacle, commodification is accelerated; new desires are produced whose fulfillment is thwarted once more, and the experience of alienation persists. The criticism of such a society is fueled not by the assertion of any natural desires or

authentic human condition; the values, needs, and desires by which existing society can be measured are those which it promotes itself. A critical discourse cannot pretend immunity to the all-encompassing totality of alienated relations in which it operates, but it can involve itself in the simultaneous subversion and exposure of the alienating reception given to critical ideas. *It is obvious*, wrote Debord, *that no idea can lead beyond the existing spectacle, but only beyond the existing ideas on the spectacle.*¹⁵

The ability to identify and criticise the relations which constitute reality is dependent on the identification of some notion of reality, meaning and truth. This is essential to the maintenance of any discourse, whether critical or otherwise; it is, moreover, a position which even the post-structuralist philosophers considered here cannot completely avoid. Lyotard and Foucault constantly return to some conception of reality on which discourse imposes itself, and Baudrillard's hyperreality is meaningless without some reference to reality, even if this is conceived as an absence or impossibility. This is particularly true of those post-structuralist writings which bear the appearance of radicalism whilst at the same time undermining the legitimacy of their political claims. When Baudrillard, for example, speaks of the masses' passive resistance, he is left without any means by which the purpose or foundation of either the relations they resist or their resistance itself might be defined. Similarly, Foucault argues that a counter-discourse which preserves the specificity and immediacy of reality is possible, but he finds it impossible to identify a reason for this resistance to the relations of power/knowledge which therefore becomes a purely reactive and unintentional response.

The Hype and the Heritage

Regardless of these problems of meaning and purpose, post-structuralist philosophy has found a place in British political theory. *Marxism Today's* characterisation of the 'new times' emphasises the political significance of Foucault's work and gives some credence to Baudrillard's philosophical play.¹⁶ Providing a legitimation for autonomous struggle and refusing the 'grand narrative' of marxism. Foucault's work offers a philosophy of discontinuity, fragmentation, and dispersal to support the notion of a 'post-Fordist' economy; it

nevertheless undermines both the possibility and necessity of a wholesale transformation in the totality of social and discursive relations. There is always the danger that, unwilling and unable to distinguish between appearance and reality, or alienation and real experience, post-structuralism collapses such distinctions and has no reason to choose, evaluate or even deconstruct one phenomenon or relation rather than another. By their own standards, post-structuralist claims about social and discursive relations are without legitimation. Lacking any critical distance from the relations it observes, post-structuralism engages in the affirmation of that which exists. It sees marginalisation and fragmentation, and inevitably assumes that these are not merely the contingent characteristics of a particular historical movement, but the principles on which contemporary relations are based. Some form of alienation is the inevitable attribute of human experience. While it is true that the post-structuralists have no reason to think otherwise, neither have they any reason to suggest this to be the case.

For the situationists, glimpses of authentic experience are present in moments of artistic expression, political struggle, and self-absorbed play; alienation is the experience of removal and absence, the supersession of which is experienced in the practice of the conscious creation of situations. These absences are theorised as inevitable by post-structuralism. But with no material obstacle to the extension of moments of real participation to all areas of experience, the situationists attempted to overcome its political and philosophical barriers by distinguishing the claims made by spectacular society from their fulfillment. They attacked its tolerance as offering a chimerical and debilitating sanctuary to ideas and practices which might undermine it; its choices as being circumscribed by the spectacle's necessity of the reproduction of alienation; and, most significantly, its ability to spectacularise or commodify criticism by separating it from the practice it advocates and placing it in the petrified ahistoricism of the spectacle. Criticism can always be recuperated, but its commodified forms can also be subverted and reclaimed. That the values, practices and conceptualisations with which criticism operates are predetermined by the dominant organisation of social and discursive relations does not mean that there is no possibility of using these constructions to think beyond

the ends to which they are presently employed. Desires, needs, and the resources to fulfill them already exist; they are promoted, in alienated but recognisable forms, within the spectacle. What is denied is the historical consciousness of the possibility of their authentic realisation.

Situationist propaganda in favour of this consciousness may not have had a mass readership, although Debord claims that the movement's work, condemned as unreadable to academic marxists, was widely read and easily understood by workers who *know the subject well enough to have been able to benefit from the theses of The Society of the Spectacle*.¹⁷ Nevertheless, much philosophical discourse is indebted to its terms and its influence on subsequent cultural movements is widely acknowledged by those who pursue its project. Familiar with the SI, Malcolm McLaren and Jamie Reid injected punk with situationist imagery and an enthusiasm for the anarchist tradition of abundant independent publishing, and Tony Wilson's Manchester club, the Hacienda, takes its name and original intentions from Chtcheglov's *Formula for a New Urbanism*.

Some of the most interesting developments of situationist ideas suggest that the movement was too concerned with mediations such as creativity, spontaneity, and desire, so that new pedestals, not least that of the SI itself, were substituted for those it undermined. Magazines such as *Variant*, *Vague*, and the multiple paper *Smile* offer critical developments of the situationists' artistic and cultural concerns, while the Leeds and Glasgow-based *Here and Now* pursues the more pertinent aspects of their awareness of the problems of social and political criticism. While these tendencies often reject and certainly aim to supersede situationist ideas, they continue to further the movement's attempts to expose and evade the recuperation of radical ideas within mainstream culture.

The ICA exhibition of situationist work does of course constitute such recuperation, and an article such as this may also be seen to do so. But the mere discussion of a critical movement does not necessarily undermine it; what is important is that the practice is not divorced from the theory. As long as those who do involve themselves in such discussions continue to engage in the subversions they promote in theory, the problems of a situationist industry akin to that surrounding marxism are easy to avoid. As Vaneigem declared:

What prevents what we say on the construction of everyday life from being recuperated by the cultural establishment . . . is that fact that all situationist ideas are nothing other than faithful developments of acts attempted constantly by thousands of people to try and prevent another day from being no more than twenty-four hours of wasted time. ¹⁸

Some of the intellectual credibility assumed by post-structuralist philosophy and post-modernist art is lost when their debt to the critical tradition they deny is realised. These genres cannot provide the meaning, purpose, and grasp of reality which all discourse requires if it is to be put to any critical use in the understanding and transformation of experience. The situationist thesis does not escape the problems of legitimation faced by any critical discourse, but it does represent one of the few serious attempts to overcome them and provides a valuable legacy for those still willing to address the complexities of contemporary society.

Notes

1. The twelve issues of the journal are collected in *Internationale Situationniste 1958-1969* (Champ Libre, Paris, 1975), and substantial excerpts are collected in the *Situationist International Anthology*, edited and translated by Ken Knabb (Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, 1981). The edition which preceded Ken Knabb's anthology was *Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International* edited by Christopher Gray and published in London by Free Fall Press, 1974. A full index, bibliography, list of members, and chronology of the movement is published by Jean-Jacques Raspaud and Jean-Pierre Voyer, *L'Internationale Situationniste protagonistes, chronologies, bibliographie (avec en index des noms insultes)* (Champ Libre, Paris, 1971), and a thorough history of the movement from 1952 to 1972 is presented in Jean-François Martos, *Histoire de L'Internationale Situationniste* (Editions Gerard Lebovici, Paris, 1989). The major texts published by the movement are Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Black and Red, Detroit, no date), and Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, no place, 1983).

2. Raoul Vaneigem, 'Banalities de Base', *Internationale Situationniste* No. 8, 1963, translated as 'Basic Banalities' in *Situationist International Anthology*, op cit, p. 129.

3. Ivan Chtcheglov, 'Formulaire pour un Urbanisme Nouveau', *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 1, 1958, translated as 'Formula for a New Urbanism' in *Situationist International Anthology*, op cit, pp 1-4.
4. 'L'Operation Contra-Situationniste dans Divers Pays', *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 8, 1963, translated as 'The Countersituationist Campaign in Various Countries. op cit, p. 113.
5. 'Basic Banalities'. op cit, p 92.
6. 'Le Commencement d'une Epoque', *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 12, 1969, translated as 'The Beginning of an Era' in *Situationist International Anthology* op cit, p 228.
7. *Ibid.*, p 227.
8. The eyewitness account published by Solidarity in 1968 and reissued by Dark Star Press and Rebel Press in 1986 remains invaluable. Rene Vienet provides a fascinating account of the situationist involvement in the events in *The Enrages and the Situationists in the Occupation Movement*, May/June 1968 (Tiger Papers Publications, York, no date).
9. *On the Poverty of Student Life, considered in its economic, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy* has been published in numerous editions; the most readily available is issued by Black & Red, Michigan, 1973.
10. For a thorough collection of Parisian graffiti, see Walter Lewino, *L'imagination au Pouvoir* (Le Terrain Vague, Paris, 1968).
11. These ideas can be found in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition, A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 1984), and *Driftworks* (Semiotext(e). New York, 1984); Michel Foucault's *Power/Knowledge*, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mephram, Kate Soper (Harvester, Brighton, 1986) contains the central themes discussed here.
12. Jean Baudrillard's development of these ideas can be traced in *The Ecstasy of Communication* (Semiotext(e), New York, 1988); *Forget Foucault* (Semiotext(e), New York, 1987); and *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (Semiotext(e). New York, 1983).
13. *The Society of the Spectacle*, op cit, para. 8.
14. Keith Reader refers to the 'burglary operation' conducted by Baudrillard on the situationist thesis in *Intellectuals and the Left in France Since 1968* (Macmillan, London, 1987). pp. 131-32.
15. *The Society of the Spectacle*, op cit, para. 203.
16. See, for example, 'Guide to New Times. A user-friendly guide to the new world of the 1990s', *Marxism Today*, October 1988, p. 5, and *Marxism Today*,

January 1989. special issue on post-modernism which includes an interview with Jean Baudrillard.

17. Guy Debord. *Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of 'The Society of the Spectacle'* (Chronos. London, 1979). pp. 7-8.

18. 'Basic Banalities', op cit, pp. 122-23.



Orgone Addicts: Wilhelm Reich versus the Situationists

Jim Martin

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One Monday morning, almost ten years ago, I rose to make myself a cup of coffee. I went to the kitchen to grab a mug from the drying rack when I propitiously dropped a Chinese cleaver on my big toe. Sidelined from my job as a canvasser for a community organizing group, I spent a week off my feet reading the *Situationist international Anthology*. Fantastic. Here, I finally found a voice for my own frustrations with bullshit reformism, and a new vocabulary to insult people with. They appealed to me with their unitary critique, their attack on specialization, and their ruthless rhetoric against traditional leftist politics. Yet when I tried to apply these doctrines in my practical life, I was led down a path of futility.

I soon learned that the situationists were very hip at that time, especially in San Francisco. There were lots of people incorporating their ideas into *detourned*¹ progressive politics. There is not enough space (and I do not have the patience) to give a complete history of the situationists here, but I highly recommend *The Anthology* as well as *Vague #16-17* for its *Boy Scout's Guide to the Situationist International*. I will also discuss other left libertarians who wrote about Reich, as they bear on the general discussion of Reich's ideas. Briefly, Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) was one of the shining young stars of Sigmund Freud's inner circle, until he strained the tolerance of older psychoanalysts with his insistence that orgasmic potency was essential for health. He further strained the connection by pointing to the futility of individuated therapy while the larger society was a veritable factory of neurosis. As a member of the socialist and communist parties in

Germany, he advocated an uncompromising political platform based on larger sexual issues including the sexual rights of young people, legalized birth control, and an end to compulsory sex and marriage laws. This, in turn, upset party functionaries, forcing Reich to re-evaluate his position on marxist politics.

I write neither as a genital character nor as a revolutionary. I am limping along, blindly groping a path littered by casualties. I will not reiterate Reich's writing here for two reasons. First, he ably expresses himself in his books and any attempts to paraphrase his work inevitably collapses into parody (see Vaneigem). Second, the current trustee of his estate, Mary Boyd Higgins, has been wary in giving such permission. Although frustrating for researchers, in many ways this works in Reich's favor, as he is an excellent writer. His prose has a rhythm all his own. He was often perturbed that his translator, Theodore Wolfe, tried to smooth out the crashing climaxes, as Reich termed them. To excerpt Reich's work is to take it completely out of context.

Situationists, on the other hand, never copyrighted anything, consistent with their 'property is theft' attitude. This has worked in their favor as a stunning advertising coup. Quotations, excerpts and translations are appearing everywhere. Unlike Reich, situationese is easy to excerpt. Discrete sentences and phrases may be lifted out almost anywhere, retaining that hammer-on-the-head ambiance. Of all the situationists, only Vaneigem had any flair as a prose stylist.

Paul Goodman: The Anarchist

In 1944, Paul Goodman, author of *Growing Up Absurd*, *The Empire City*, and co-author of *Gestalt Therapy*, began to discover the work of Wilhelm Reich for his American audience in the tiny libertarian socialist and anarchist milieu. The first article that broached the separation of politics and sexuality was the *Political Meaning of Some Recent Revisions of Freud*. After criticizing Freud for his obvious placement of psychoanalysis at the service of civilization and culture, he turns to Erich Fromm and Karen Horney. In contrast to their Stakhanovism,² Goodman declares *there is only one kind of matter that the frank and fearless gaze of a child or of a sane man can infallibly penetrate: his strong desires and daily acts*. Sounds like a pro-situ pronouncement, doesn't it? Yet it predates the situs by more than a decade, directly

inspired by the findings of Reich. Finally, *what a pleasure it is to turn from this philistine ethical culture to a Freudian deviation to the left! I am referring to the work of Wilhelm Reich.* Goodman discusses Reich's conception of orgasmic potency, and the formation of mass psychological society. *It is the psychology of revolution.*

Immediately upon the publication of this essay in an obscure publication, the sacred cause for sublimating workers' desire into activities aimed at social forces and institutions was taken up by C. Wright Mills and Patricia J. Slater in their hilarious essay *The Barricade and the Bedroom*. Evidently Goodman aroused extreme emotional turbulence among marxist theorists.

This gonad revolution is what Mills and Slater called Reich's findings. What contempt! The 'circle of orgasmic potency' is much more likely to be from bedroom to bedroom, than from bedroom to barricade. Right, onward comrades, to the circle jerk at the barricades! If we accept Goodman's concept of the cultivation of biological release, freedom becomes identified with the fixed irrationalities of the leisured and private life. Amen. Freedom, as well as other values for which we should strive, must be viewed in terms of institutional structures and the opportunity for social planning. Zzzzzzzzz.

It is against this brain-dead backdrop that the situationists found their stage. Formed from the remnants of the Lettriste International and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus in July of 1957, the situationists began a propaganda campaign for precisely this kind of *gonad revolution*.

The Situationists

Stewart Home, in his excellent book *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, connects the lineage from futurism and dada to surrealism, lettrisme, the situationists, mail art, punk rock and neoism. In his introduction he states: *Since 'art' as a category been projected back onto the religious icons of the middle ages, it is not surprising that those who oppose it should situate themselves within a 'utopian current' that they, in turn, trace back to medieval heresies.*

Although the situationists had been formed in 1957 (the very year Reich died in prison) they did not gain notoriety until the onset of the student occupations movement during the mid-sixties in France.

Suddenly a generation of youth milk-fed on liberal expectation was ready to blow its lunch. In places like Nanterres, Strasbourg and Paris, students began to question the entire terrain of modern living, to develop a unitary critique, as the situationists put it, of their own subjective alienation. (Reich would call it contactlessness and place the responsibility with the individual, rather than abstract social forces).

*In France, marxist thought had been dominated by The Communist Party, and it was not until after the liberation that there was any attempt at philosophic revision. In many ways the debate was similar to that carried out in Germany in the 20s (Home). In fact, Wilhelm Reich had been a part of those debates in German marxist circles during the '20s, and I believe he carried his ideas further than the situationists did 40 years later. The leading light of the May 22nd Movement at Nanterres University in France was Daniel Cohn-Bendit, or 'Dany the Red.' He was infused with the pro-situ³ spirit. The SI openly criticized him for his spectacular approach in becoming a media star. Perhaps they were jealous of his ability to exploit the media more successfully than they had. How did Danny the Red grab the limelight? Here's how Tom Vague described it in the periodical *Vague* (#16-17):*

The first major incident occurred when the Minister of Sport came to open a new swimming pool. A vandal orgy had been planned for the opening ceremony and the minister's route was sprayed with graffiti. But nothing happened until the minister was about to leave. Then, so the story goes, a red-haired youth stepped out from the crowd and shouted:

'Minister, you've drawn up a report on French youth 600 pages long but there isn't a word in it about our sexual problems. Why not?' The minister replied, 'I'm quite willing to discuss this matter with responsible people, but you are certainly not one of them. I myself prefer sport to sexual education. If you have sexual problems, I suggest you jump in the pool.'

To which Dany Cohn-Bendit countered, 'that's what the Hitler Youth used to say,' and immediately shot into the headlines and secret police files (if he wasn't in the latter already).

Direct references to Reich in situationist writings are few and far between although numerous parallels between their political philosophies exist. It's worthwhile examining the finest situationist writer, Raoul Vaneigem, and his references to Reich in the classic, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

The search for real nature, for a natural life that has nothing to do with the lie of social ideology, is one of the most touching naivetés of a good part of the revolutionary proletariat, not to mention the anarchists and such notable figures as the young Wilhelm Reich.

Note the emphasis on the *young* Reich. Europeans have never understood the later work of Reich, in particular his anti-collectivism and his orgonomy, and may have only been exposed to it through secondhand sources.

The order of things is sick: this is what our leaders would conceal at all costs. In a fine passage of The Function of the Orgasm, Wilhelm Reich relates how after long months of psychoanalytic treatment he managed to cure a young Viennese working woman. She was suffering from depression brought on by the conditions of her life and work. When she recovered Reich sent her back home. A fortnight later she killed herself. Reich's intransigent honesty condemned him, as everyone knows, to exclusion from the psychoanalytic establishment, to isolation, delusion and death in prison: the duplicity of our neodemonologists cannot be exposed with impunity.

As best as I can determine, from the American edition at least, no such passage appears in *The Function of the Orgasm*. As Home has pointed out, the situationists were fond of projecting their own views onto other parties.

There is no pleasure that does not seek its own coherence. Its interruption, its lack of satisfaction, causes a disturbance analogous to Reichian 'stasis.' Oppression by Power keeps human beings in a state of permanent crisis. Thus the function of pleasure, as of the anxiety born of its absence, is essentially a social function. The erotic is the development of the passions as they become unitary, a game of unity and variety

without which revolutionary coherence cannot exist. (Boredom is always counter-revolutionary.)

Boredom may be counter-revolutionary, but it is a function of the level of psychic contact possessed by each individual. Perhaps it was my own lack of psychic contact that first drew me to the situationists?

To examine the roots of the situationist project, one must understand that it represented the tendency to bind psychoanalytic ideas with dialectical materialism. As the surrealists had brought Freudian dream analysis into a Bolshevik artistic putsch, the situationists had their psychogeography and their conception of alienation from the subjective standpoint of desire.

Wilhelm Reich attributes most neurotic behavior to disturbances of the orgasm, to what he called 'orgastic impotence.' He maintains that anxiety is created inability to experience a complete orgasm, by a sexual discharge which fails to liquidate all the excitation mobilized by preliminary sexual activity. The accumulated and unspent energy becomes free-floating and is converted into anxiety. Anxiety in its turn still further impedes orgastic potency.

But the problem of tensions and their liquidation does not exist solely on the level of sexuality. It characterizes all human relationships. And Reich, although he sensed that this was so, failed to emphasize strongly enough that the present social crisis is also a crisis of an orgastic kind. If it is true that 'The energy source of neurosis lies in the disparity between the accumulation and discharge of sexual energy,' it seems to me that such neurotic energy also derives from the accumulation and discharge of the energy set in motion by human relationships. Total enjoyment is still possible in the moment of love, but as soon as one tries to prolong this moment, to extend it into social life itself, one cannot avoid what Reich called 'stasis.' The world of dissatisfaction and non-consummation is a world of permanent crisis. What would a society without neurosis be like? An endless banquet, with pleasure as the only yardstick.

(Vaneigem, The Revolution of Everyday Life, pp. 196-197)

Here, Vaneigem admires Reich's theory of orgasmic potency: the primary biological impulse is a yearning for pleasure and health and is regulated by the capacity of an organism to discharge accumulated tension completely through orgasm. Reich disappoints Vaneigem in his failure to *politicize orgasmic pleasure*. It is unlikely that Vaneigem had read Reich's book *People in Trouble*, since it was not published in English until 1953. Reich describes his participation in the *social irrationalism of Central Europe* and makes precisely the kind of analogy Vaneigem found missing; that between individual and collective intercourse. In a remarkably intense and personal account, Reich conveys his deep conviction that politics is bankrupt. He convicts right-wing mysticism alongside left-wing mechanism with the same gavel. He seems personally hurt by the left's immobilization of healthy aggression, its hiding from life, its emotional stasis. To him, the Nazis seemed more . . . direct.

Later, pamphlets appeared in the United States which attempt to rehabilitate Reich from a situationist standpoint. Ken Knabb, in a touching pamphlet published in 1973, titled *Remarks on Contradiction and its Failure*, evaluated his own participation in an American pro-situ group ('Contradiction') from the standpoint of Reich's character analysis. This was Reich's novel technique of therapy which identified the petrified role played by the neurotic, at the service of defending him or her from total contact with life. It focuses specifically on the resistance to analysis, and used deep breathing along with the physical release of muscular holding (*character armor*) to restore health.

The members of Contradiction might well have confronted their dilemma by enlisting that fundamental tactic of breaking the impasse by concentrating precisely on the resistance to analysis. This would have pointed not only to the basic collective organizational errors I have outlined in 'Remarks,' but also to our individual resistances, that is to say, our characters. . . . Suffice it to say, for now, that if it is indisputable that the practice of theory is individually therapeutic, it seems to me equally true that an assault on one's own character is socially strategic, a practical contribution to the international revolutionary movement. The character of the pro-situ is objectively reinforced by the spectacle (which character, of course is most evidenced by his inability

to recognize its existence, other than as a 'banality', until excessive symptoms, perhaps visibly inhibiting his social practice, force his attention there.) At the opposite pole, all the lucidity of an Artaud, who attacks his character in isolation, does not prevent the 'external' commodity-spectacle he disdainfully brushes aside from reappearing in his internal world as the fantasy of being possessed by alien, malignant beings. Like a revolution in a small country, the person who breaks a block, a routine, or a fetish must advance aggressively to discover or incite radical allies outside, or lose what he gained and fall victim to his own internal thermidor. The dissolution of character and the dissolution of the spectacle are two movements which imply and require each other.

Here Knabb puts his finger on the heart of the matter. He restates Reich's critique of the character rebel. He surpasses anything the situationists ever wrote about pro-situs by this self-referential analysis. Unlike the French philosophers, he has been able to understand Reich's work.

That same year Knabb published a broadside, Jean-Pierre Voyer's *Reich: How to Use*. Voyer discusses the dissolution of character and its role in the dissolution of the spectacle.

In all of the societies in which modern conditions of production prevail, the impossibility of living takes individually the form of death, of madness, or of character. With the intrepid Dr. Reich, and against his horrified recuperators and vilifiers, we postulate the pathological nature of all character traits, that is to say of all chronicity in human behavior. What is important to us is not the individual structure of our character, nor the explanation of its formulation, but the impossibility of its application in the construction of situations. Character is therefore not simply an unhealthy excrescence which could be treated separately, but at the same time an individual remedy in a globally ill society, a remedy which enables us to bear the illness while aggravating it.

We hold that people can only dissolve their character in contesting the entire society (this is in opposition to Reich insofar as he envisages character analysis from a specialized point of view); whereas, on the other hand, the function of character being accommodation to the state

*of things, its dissolution is preliminary to the global critique of society.
We must destroy this vicious cycle.*

In 1975, Black and Red of Detroit republished a Solidarity (UK) pamphlet by Maurice Brinton called *Authoritarian Conditioning, Sexual Repression and the Irrational in Politics*. It contains a worthy recount of three of Reich's books: *The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality*, *The Sexual Revolution* and *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. The first of these three was a study of the relevance of the work of anthropologist Stanislaw Malinowski in uncovering the cultural-specific nature of the oedipal complex, pathology and sexual repression. *The Sexual Revolution* is mainly a report of Reich's visit to the Soviet Union which led toward his disillusionment with the Bolshevik revolution, having retreated from its initial removal of all moralistic marriage and sex laws. From *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Brinton draws on Reich's analysis of *the various methods whereby modern society manipulates its slaves into accepting their slavery*. Although Brinton seems to have done quite a bit of research into the anthropology of Malinowski, he seems to have missed one of the main features of his work: the study of primitive economies in the light of industrial capitalism. One of the most fascinating aspects of Malinowski's work is his discussion of gift-exchange, an economy which was reciprocal, wageless, and pervaded all aspects of cultural life (*unitary*). All production was geared toward the free exchange of gifts on holidays with neighboring clans. Competition was based not on who could get the most but who could give the most. This form of economy was given little serious consideration, although one pre-situationist journal was significantly entitled *Potlatch*, referring to tribal gifts.

The basic problem for Brinton is that he would have rather Reich died in 1936. From Brinton we will search in vain for any mention of the concept of red fascism, the emotional plague or orgone.

Reich 'Delusion'

One problem that arises in a discussion of Reich and the situationists is Reich's notion of red fascism. Philosophers have reacted with incomprehension to Reich's critique of the character rebel, the 'movement's' emotional equivalent to the national socialist, or Nazi.

The character rebel fails to dissolve the petrified role of rebelliousness under changing conditions that require a more positive engagement. The *emotional plague character*, whether operating from the left or right, works unconsciously yet tirelessly for the suppression of life, of free movement, of all that is *juicy*.

Traditionally, Europeans have shown great appreciation for Reich's theories developed during the late 1920s and early '30s, when he was an active member of the German left. It was then that Reich wrote his classic, *The Mass Psychology of Facism*. With the same *red thread* of logic, Reich exposed the Nazis' and the Stalinists' emotional foundation in the patriarchal family. He proposed that the same history of sexual repression was the foundation of each tradition's ability to create mass psychosis and mass murder. However, when Reich was forced to seek refuge in the United States from Nazi book-burning and death threats, communist purges and the moralistic legal persecution of the liberal socialist states of Scandinavia, he began a devastating critique against marxism itself that most *progressive* Europeans could not face. Thus, his American period is dismissed as a result of the madness, The 'understandable' paranoia he suffered because of his early prosecution. (Hell, he was reported to *like* Ike.) Hatred of Reich's politics extended into his scientific work, specifically his discovery of a biological energy, the basis for Freud's libido theory, which he called orgone.

Yet it is the issue of orgone which truly disturbs many *progressives*. It is a theme which reoccurs again and again in liberal treatments of Reich's work that one mustn't let Reich's *insanity* and *paranoia* in his later years obscure the sex-economic work he did while a marxist in the '20s and '30s in Germany.

Let me state that this position is dead wrong. At first, I myself was amazed by Reich's prescient analysis of modern politics and at the same time disappointed with his 'later degeneracy into madness' with the 'orgone business'. Suffice it to say that I have since carried out experiments devised by Reich and found, much to my surprise, total agreement with his later findings. The orgone accumulator works.

It creates an environment that is warmer than the surrounding air, in direct contradiction to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. It aids biological processes and healing. His cloudbuster can make it rain where pollution has stagnated the atmosphere. I have used one

in the driest months of the summer in the Bay Area when it never rains. My operations were followed by floods along the Russian River. (I am not necessarily making the claim of a causal relationship here, just stating the facts. It was enough for me to quit fooling around with it.)

Sex-Economy

Reich's early work as Freud's top student in the 1920s centered on the concept of genitality. Unlike older psychoanalysts, who focused their typology on pathological character types, Reich attempted to identify a picture of healthy behavior. Although psychoanalytic typology is often taken literally, these 'types' only refer to idealized exaggerations. Thus Reich's genital character only approaches the ideal of health. Genital character regulates health by complete discharge through orgasm. Potency is not measured by the number of frequency or climaxes, but in the quality of the experience. Genital orgasm is differentiated from ejaculation in the male and from clitoral climax in the female by the total surrender to involuntary contractions of the entire bodily musculature.

Reich brought psychoanalysis into the streets when he began free sexual hygiene clinics in the working class districts of Vienna. The work graduated into what became the 'Sex-Pol' (*sexual-political*) movement when Reich became convinced that individual therapy was useless unless coupled with broad social changes. For instance, many of the psychological problems of his working class patients were the direct result of their economic conditions, i.e. the housing shortages, which compressed the nuclear patriarchal family, had a strong impact on the sexual life of the youngsters. It was at this juncture that Reich became deeply involved in the socialist and communist groupings of his time, which comprised a full two-thirds majority of the parliamentary system in Austria. For this hybrid of sexual and economic freedom Reich coined the term *sex-economy*. This referred not only to the sexual nature of economics, but the economic nature of sexuality, for Reich saw healthy sexuality as well as a healthy economy as primarily *self-regulated circulation*.

Working within the framework of the parties gave Reich a platform to espouse his unique ideas to young, sexually active working

class youth. Sex-Pol handed out free contraceptives, offered sexual counseling, provided abortions, and brought thousands of young people into the parties. For their part, traditional leftists tolerated Reich's novel blend of psychoanalysis and dialectical materialism precisely because of this huge influx of people. It was during this period that Reich wrote *The Sexual Struggle of Youth*, a classic which would later be distributed in France during May 1968.

However, Reich's unyielding advocacy of the sexual rights of youth cost him the confidence of his more traditional comrades, and it wasn't long before they refused to print his writings. In 1933, Reich published his own book, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, which demonstrated the origins of fascism in the neurotic patriarchal family structure, thus exposing the real nature of the crisis that Nazism presented to the German working class. German socialists responded, to the contrary, that Hitler merely represented a 'temporary setback' and as the Nazis burned his books, Reich fled the country.

If Reich's total commitment to the principles of psychoanalysis, not to mention his commitment to the sexual rights of young people, had cost him his 'home' in the socialist and communist parties, so his commitment to dialectical materialism cost him his 'home' in the International Psychoanalytic Association. The IPA expelled Reich in 1934. Reich, then living in Norway, met briefly with Leon Trotsky, who was also living in exile in that country. No record of this conversation is reported, but it can be assumed that beyond their mutual distrust of Stalinism, they found little common ground. I mention this incident only to point to the eagerness with which Reich sought allies, and to make a connection between Trotsky, Reich and the situationists, who adopted many Trotskyist ideas from the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.

Reich's approach to dialectical materialism was much like that of Marx. It was simply a method of functional thinking. Based in Hegelian dialectics, dialectical materialism is the root basis for all of modern scientific experimentation and discovery. The *dialectic* is the counterplay between the original idea, preconception or thesis; when one experiments or interacts with material reality one encounters an *antithesis*; and from this new information one may draw conclusions, or syntheses, which simply lead to more profitable avenues of inquiry. Theory is indispensable to human survival because it allows

us, in a situation where we lack adequate information, to make the best decisions possible. Theoretical questions are life and death questions, despite what is taught in schools.

In Norway, Reich began a profound reevaluation of his psychoanalytic practice and began to search for a *material basis* for Freud's libido theory. This theory postulated that neurotic behavior was the direct result of dammed up sexual energy, the core human impulse. Reich sensed that if this theory was adequate, it would be possible to show sexual energy, *libido*, to be a tangible, measurable energy. He began to test his thesis of 'bioelectricity' by measuring minute changes in the electrical charge on the skin surfaces of subjects experiencing different kinds of pleasurable and unpleasurable stimuli. He discovered that there was indeed an increase in potential charge (expansion) during pleasurable stimulus, and a decrease (contraction) during unpleasure.

Orgonomy

This line of inquiry led Reich into the question of biological energy. Was there a specifically biological energy, different from electromagnetism, that operated under comprehensible laws and that regulated all living things? It was this line of questioning that Reich pursued as he was expelled from Norway and emigrated to the United States.

It is beyond the scope of this article to convey the entire range of discoveries Reich stumbled onto with the advent of his new science, orgonomy. Suffice it to say that if you mention orgone to left-wing social gearheads, they get a rash.

The situationists also attempted to address this gap between ideology and application of functional thinking. While they depended on many of the ideas of Reich's (the vital importance of the subjective alienation of working people, rather than vulgar marxism's alienation of *surplus value*, for instance) it seems that they read Reich's work from his pre-USA days. These works, largely written for the milieu of which he was a part, lack the comprehension Reich developed later of the Modju,⁴ the Red Fascist, and the liberal recuperator. Reich's American writings are so uncompromising on these points that it is nearly impossible for the average liberal to get past the first few pages of any of his books without throwing it down in disgust. Added to this

difficulty is the fact that upon his arrival in the U.S., Reich began to reissue his books in English in completely revised editions that restate his earlier work with the intent of correcting his former position as a marxist. The Europeans have their Reich, and we have ours.

One of the most striking differences between American and European observers of Reich's life and work is the way they each view his late period, beginning with his exile to the United States in the early 40s until his death in prison in 1957. In America, Reich taught himself English and pursued a two-fold departure from his earlier work: he devoted more time and energy to natural research, culminating in the discovery of orgone energy and his new science or orgonomy; and he rewrote and republished his earlier writings with a critical rebuke of his previous marxist revolutionism. Combined, these two features of Reich's later work make him an incomprehensible figure for Europeans raised on a diet of strict sex-economy.

Thus, European pro-situs speak fondly of the young Reich, while Americans interested in Reich are dominated by those interested in free energy machines, universal cure-alls: ideas about secret power and the power of secret ideas. Robert Anton Wilson and William S. Burroughs are representative of the American approach to Reich. Burroughs was excited by the work of orgonomists working with Reich in New York City in the '40s. He owned an orgone accumulator and used it. His writings against centralized authority frequently draw on Reich's analogy of communism as cancer. Robert Anton Wilson is an example of what Judi Bari⁵ has called *California woo-woo*, a spiritualist eclecticism. Here, orgone is another curiosity in the cosmic junk shop.

As someone who came to Reich's work in the same Eurocentric position as did the situationists, Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism* seemed to solve the riddle unanswered by the situationists: why was their dialectical prophecy of subjectively intolerable conditions leading into generalized insurrection *not* fulfilled? It was Reich's point that fascism was not a single party or movement but an *emotional state of being*. It is the premise of this article that everything the situationists based their theories on was preconceived by Reich more than 30 years earlier; and that Reich's *late period* far outstrips situationist theory for its daring and outrageousness, as well as its practical application. Of specific importance was his emphasis on the prophylaxis of neurosis

through the protection of children from compulsory sex morality, his development of a wide range of *tools* to aid in the protection of life (the orgone accumulator, the cloudbuster, and orgone therapy), and his identification of the role of the *emotional plague* in human misery.

Again, I was as dismayed as anyone by Reich's *late period* and his delusion of a biological energy called orgone. Yet Reich's revisions of his early books make it clear that he saw all of his work, including his false left turn, as a whole. Try to take any single element out and it all falls apart. If there is no orgone, then there is no libido, therefore no psychoanalysis. If there is no psychoanalysis, there is no point in speculating about the emotional basis of fascism. So it seemed to me that any real comprehension of Reich's work must include a first hand testing of the experiments Reich described in his later books, for example, the TO-T experiment where Reich claims a positive temperature difference between the air in an orgone accumulator and the surrounding air. Having done so, I satisfied myself that the basic facts Reich describes in his organomic findings can be verified independently. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide arguments for the existence of orgone energy; indeed too much writing in this area has been limited to textual analysis reminiscent of the theological disputes of the middle ages. The only way to understand the phenomena is to try the experiment for yourself. May I say that is dialectical? Science has become the contemporary religion; it is time to translate the Bible into vernacular.

I am no physicist, yet it seems to me, based on everything I learned in high school and on my own common sense, that if you constructed a box and left it in your garage this box should be pretty close to the temperature of the garage. Should it be consistently warmer than the temperature of the garage, you might wonder where this heat is coming from. I have sought an explanation from people I know who work in scientifically-oriented jobs, in particular *progressive scientists* involved in solar energy who choke with purple rage at the notion of orgone. For anyone interested in an introduction to the basic experiments Reich used to demonstrate the existence of a biological energy, the only book in print dealing directly with it is James DeMeo's *Orgone Accumulator Handbook*.

I believe that in Reich's later writings, the toughest element for *progressives* to swallow is his rants against red fascism and the

emotional plague. (Although they never fail to claim the *prima facie* evidence of the absurdity of orgone energy, they merely hide behind this to prevent the revelation of their true characters.) Beginning with *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Reich drove home the point that Nazism (black fascism) and Stalinism (red fascism) were functional equivalents. Like the anarchists, he noted the authoritarianism of each. Unlike any political writers, however, Reich was able to draw on his years of experience as a pro bono psychoanalyst in the slums of Germany to discover the emotional underpinnings of red and black fascism. He found that the authoritarian, sex-negative and patriarchal family reproduces the kind of desensitized, petrified and frozen adults necessary to carry out routine and banalized labor of industrial capitalism. The emotional plague, or the organized suppression of life, represented the mass psychology of fascism. In his later years, Reich saw a greater threat from the left than from the right, and indeed, it was an article published in the leftist *New Statesman* that precipitated his prosecution and imprisonment, culminating in the burning of his books and research materials. For a progressive unwilling to confront the fascist *little man* dwelling inside his or her own body, reading Reich's books is intolerable.

By the time he had relocated to America, Reich had long been expelled from both the Communist Party and the International Psychoanalytic Association for trying to find a way each could help the other end human suffering. It was here that he realized the difficulties of political change. Reich was more deeply involved in socialist politics than is currently understood in this country. Reports from those working in orgonomy in East and West Germany include references to the minutes of party meetings in the late '20s indicating Reich's adherence to the most extreme revolutionist positions of that time.

It takes one to know one. Much of Reich's later writings was aimed at guarding his position from recuperators of his work, from commie symps and freedom peddlers. Alongside his honest reappraisal of his early positions as a marxist-leninist, there was the desire to defend himself against attacks by Christian defenders of the morality of youth, who wanted him deported. To his credit, he never stooped to opportunism and to his death advocated the rational elements of dialectical materialism as a method of functional thinking.

Work Democracy vs. Worker's Councils

After his rejection of marxist politics, Reich proposed a theory of labor he called *work democracy*. Ironically, worker democracy is the step-child of various Trotskyist formulations that were orphaned during W.W.II but found new importance with the rise of independent trade movements in Eastern and Central Europe, as in the Hungarian worker's councils in Hungary in 1956. Work democracy implies that those who labor hold the reins within their province of activity. It is a critique of Stalinism, democratic centralism, and state capitalism. Repugnance for bureaucracy, political ideology and religious moralism tie Reich's work democracy to the situationist brand of council communism.

Each claimed to lean neither left nor right, though each would dispute it of the other. Both derided specialization. Each believed that their proposals had nothing to do with existing political movements, and favored lively, spontaneous responses to real life conditions as opposed to forced repetitive labor and banalized sexual living.

While Reich was intensely pragmatic yet uncompromising, the situationists are criticized for the impossibility of their solutions. Reich was a member of the revolutionary movement when there actually was one. Contemporary developments have made it impossible to rationally speak of taking state power as in the Bolshevik revolution. The plasmoid translucence of capital and national sovereignty make the old social mechanics of traditional marxism archaic. The situationists returned to the point where Reich left the revolution, to the point of sale. They understood consumption, the subjective feeling of alienation and the suppression of desire. In my view they failed to grasp Reich's sense of the inability of individuals to take charge of their own lives. Reich called this tendency to advocate insurrection without addressing the real capacity of the public for tolerating true life *freedom peddling*.

Reich's conception of work democracy was based on what he called the natural organization of work. Drawn from his study of the natural processes of life, he stated that work democracy precluded dictatorship. There was one important difference between council communism and work democracy: work democracy demands as a prerequisite that citizens become emotionally free, and most impor-

tantly, able to bear full responsibility for their lives. This is in contradiction to the libertinism of the situationists. Mass neurotic societies will always demand paternalist authoritarianism to mirror the internal character structure of the average citizen. For Reich, the burden of proof rested upon the people of any would-be democracy. Reich blamed the foot-dragging do-gooders of the liberal and socialist democracies for the victory of Hitler in Northern Europe. In this, he is in agreement with the situationists' condemnation of false, *parliamentary democracy* as opposed to the democratization of real life, *daily life*.

The crucial difference that Reich pointed out between himself and the anarchists (and it holds true for *situs*, libertarians, and council communists as well) was the question of the emotional capacity for freedom that the average citizen possesses. In the end, I must endorse Ken Knabb's position that the fundamental failure of the situationists was their inability to confront their own characters.

Notes

1. From the French, meaning literally 'hijacking'. Refers to the practice of recombining elements of popular culture with a subversive intent.
2. Stakhanov was a Stalinist-era worker who was rewarded for his superproduction and made a national hero to be emulated by other workers. 'Stakhanovites' were often killed or disabled by their co-workers.
3. Pro-situ, or pro-situationist, was the pejorative term by which the situationists referred to their fans; they denounced the passive idolatry of their spectators. Yet, in the end, even the situationists became pro-situs by their own admission.
4. Reich's term for the most virulent of emotional plague characters. Combines the names of Mocenigo, who persecuted medieval scientist Giordano Bruno, and Stalin's given name Djughashvili.
5. Judi Bari, a northern California Earth First! activist and labor organizer, was recently injured in a bombing while organizing for Redwood Summer in Oakland, California.

Resources

1. *The Situationist International Anthology*; edited and translated by Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public Secrets (1981), P.O. Box 1044, Berkeley, CA 94701.
2. *The Assault on Culture; Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*; by Stewart Home, Aporia Press and Unpopular Books (1988), 308 Camberwell New Road, London, UK, SE5 ORW.
3. *Nature Heals; The Psychological Essays of Paul Goodman*; edited by Taylor Stoehr, E.P. Dutton (1979), 2 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016.
4. *Authoritarian Conditioning, Sexual Repression and The Irrational in Politics*; by Maurice Brinton, Black and Red (1975), See Sharp Press (1988).
5. *Reich: How to Use*; by Jean-Pierre Voyer, translated by Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public Secrets (1973), P.O. Box 1044, Berkeley, CA, 94701.
6. *Remarks on Contradiction and its Failures*; by Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public Secrets (1973), P.O. Box 1044, Berkeley, CA 94701.
7. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*; by Raoul Vaneigem, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Left Bank Books and Rebel Press (1983).
8. *The Orgone Accumulator Handbook*; by James V. DeMeo, Ph.D., Natural Energy Works (1989).
9. *Fury on Earth; A Biography of Wilhelm Reich*; by Myron Sharaf, Hutchinson & Co., 17-21 Conwat St., London WIP 6JD.
10. 1984; *The Summer of Hate*; by Jim Martin, Flatland Books (1989).



The Situationist Legacy

Alastair Bonnett

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In a conservative era extremism can have a strangely unnerving allure. As the banality of our increasingly nostalgic, self-satisfied culture become ever more wearing, so the aesthetics of transgression, of endless subversion can, conversely, become more enjoyable, surprising and irresistible.

What is unsettling about this process is the way it creates a chasm between our day-to-day struggles and intellectual fashion. The latter, cut free from mundane matters such as housing and employment, comes to see the aesthetics of radicalism as an end in themselves, thus stripping the political meaning from subversion.

The loss of the political is apparent in a wide range of recent self-consciously 'extreme' cultural practices and theories, from Baudrillard to punk rock. However, one of the most startling contemporary examples involves the appropriation of the intellectual legacy of the situationists.

Situationism has been rediscovered in the U.K. and America since the mid-1970s but, following a series of exhibitions and extensive coverage in the arts media, now seems finally set to enter the canon of great twentieth century 'isms'. However, in repackaging situationism for post-modern sensibilities, its political aspirations have largely been lost. After outlining the situationist project, I'll give some examples of this process. I'll also be showing why situationism was so ripe for subversion and explain why, potentially, the group's most contemporary legacy lies in the struggle to reshape our everyday environment.

The Situationist Challenge

Active in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the Paris-based Situationist International (SI) developed a form of cultural politics designed to challenge a new phase in the capitalist domination of human relations.

In itself the situationists' obsession with the alienating and passifying power of capitalism was hardly new. But their concern to rethink the way this process worked and could be undermined in the context of an increasingly consumer-oriented, advertising and media saturated society led them to some original theses. Guy Debord, the intellectual leader of the movement, describing the onset of what he termed 'the society of the spectacle',¹ argued that the basis of society has shifted from the production and consumption of things to the production and consumption of images. The situationists argued that, because such alienating images are now all pervasive, merely to oppose them through a series of nonconformist stereotypes is to become part of the spectacle. Thus they dismissed the radical potential of nearly all the oppositional currents of their day, including neo-dadaism, beat culture, and the hippie movement. Such 'alternatives' were seen as playing the spectacle's own game.

Although the situationists developed several strategies to oppose spectacular relations, the mostly widely practised has been *détournement*. *Détournement* involves taking elements from a social stereotype and, through their mutation and reversal, turning them against it so it becomes disrupted and exposed as a product of alienation. It was argued that this parodic destabilization of the commodity-image could shock people out of their isolation and passivity. In the words of another situationist guru, Raoul Vaneigem, *détournement entails a kind of anti-conditioning . . . to reverse perspective is to stop seeing things through the eyes of the community, of ideology, of the family, of other people.*²

Although they employed the technique in films, the most famous use of *détournement* by the situationists was their re-scripting of cartoonstrips with revolutionary messages. *Détournement*, however, only made sense to the SI as a tool of political mobilization and the movement's most influential members became critical of it when, through the 'detoured' paintings of artists such as Asger Jorn, it

became associated with artistic experimentation. Indeed, so fearful were the situationists of such associations that all practicing artists were expelled from the group in the early 1960s and the phrase 'situationist art' declared a contradiction in terms.

In fact, the SI's hostility to a plurality of opinion within its ranks is a measure of the extraordinary atmosphere of 'political correctness' that permeated its tiny body of true believers. When the SI dissolved itself in 1972, it was left with three members, practically everybody else had been expelled! With this stench of moral certitude firmly in my nostrils I want now to consider the contemporary uses and abuses of situationism and explain how it has been depoliticized.

Subversion Subverted

Visitors to the situationist exhibition held at London's ICA (and in Paris and Boston) in 1989 were presented with a seemingly endless collection of 'revolutionary items'. Thus, for example, all 12 metallic coloured copies of the SI's 'legendary' journal, *Internationale Situationiste*, were laid out alongside wall displays reminding us of exactly who joined the group and for what deviationist offenses they were ejected. Neatly catalogued and under glass, the intriguing covers of these tracts were offered for our contemplation like any other assembly of fashionably 'oppositional' art. Other products of the recent boom of interest in the SI have fetishized their activities in similar ways. For example, in Greil Marcus's book *Lipstick Traces*,³ an exhilarating survey of the 'secret history' of obscure avant-garde activity, the situationists' political ideas are again marginalised by an obsession with their image of desperate extremism and glamorous wildness.

Between suitably out of focus photographs of gaunt young situationists, Marcus details the ephemera of the group's early existence — the poorly printed handouts, the calling cards — and calls our attention to the SI's 'hidden' influence upon counter-cultural movements. One of the best known of these 'secret' connections, and the one that Marcus is particularly interested in, is the situationists' role as precursors to punk. Thus, for example, punk's ability to turn the commodities of rock music and youth culture inside out through the grotesque caricature of these forms, is shown by Marcus to parallel and, in part, directly draw from, the situationist methodology of *détournement*.

Yet although pop impresarios, from Malcom McLaren to Tony Wilson, have indeed used situationist ideas — with McLaren's graffiti covered torn clothes and sandpaper record sleeves of Wilson's *Factory Records* being some of the more direct lifts — this intellectual appropriation has shared with the ICA exhibition and Marcus's own book, a refusal to address situationism as first and foremost a revolutionary project. Looking back from the aloof heights of the 1990s it is evident that the 'anti-commodities', created by the promoters of punk and ultra-radicalism, are part of a carefully coordinated consumer package.

Set in this context, the fact that a smoother version of the punk aesthetic of tough cut-up and bricolage became one of the most popular advertising styles of the 1980s can hardly be called an illegitimate heir of the British pop situationists. Cut 'n' mix images in Barclay's adverts merely took the political decontextualisation of situationism to its logical conclusion, the subversion of the commodity sign in the service of the spectacle. Thus, McLaren, who has progressed from managing the Sex Pistols to directing adverts for Cadbury's Twirl, may simply be said to have refined his undoubted ability to flog radicalism as fashion.

Situationism into Art

The radical allure of the SI has also attracted the attention of more conventionally serious cultural workers. This has happened in two main ways, through artists' direct appropriation of situationism and by art critics reading situationist influences into the work of painters and performers.

Some of the most interesting work in the former category has emerged from the Polish-Canadian Krzysztof Wodiczko. Wodiczko's main tool is the slide projector. With this he creates a 'critical public art'⁴ designed to upset the established meanings of urban space. For example, in 1985 Wodiczko projected a swastika on the facade of South Africa House in Trafalgar Square. In the same year he beamed the image of Soviet and American missiles united by a chain and lock onto the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Brooklyn. Quoting Vaneigem, Wodiczko aligns these interventions with the situationists' invocation *to defend ourselves from the poetry of the bards of conditioning — to jam their messages, to turn their songs inside out*. The task of the

critical artist, Wodiczko notes, is to *continue the unfinished business of the situationist urban project*.

However, as I noted earlier, the SI's hostility to the social specialization of creativity led them to declare art, all art, intrinsically anti-situationist. Wodiczko's interest in the group does not extend to this side of their analysis. Yet it is difficult to see how he can legitimately ignore it. Ultimately, for all the stunning simplicity of his methods, Wodiczko cannot convincingly claim to be building on situationist ideas and at the same time subsume them within the tradition of artistic, individual avant-gardism the SI put so much rhetorical effort into denigrating.

However, although Wodiczko's use of situationism is problematic, his work still represents a critique of the mainstream, gallery-based, art market. The same cannot be said of many art critics new found and no doubt, short-lived, fascination with the SI. For the past few years, situationist references have been dropped left, right and centre on the pages of fashion conscious art magazines. Most writers have made do with a few scattered references to Debord but an influential minority, such as the New York critic Edward Ball, have gone one better. Noting the shared emphasis on the playful subversion of the image within both situationism and postmodernity, Ball has argued that the SI should be seen as the 'tutors of current activity'⁵ in post-modern art. Ball draws into his situationist classroom artists as diverse as Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer and Peter Halley. The creators of, respectively, elusive self-portraits, epigrammatic neon slogans and day-glo cell paintings, these artists are all, apparently, drawing on the situationist methodology of *détournement* as a way of making their mark in a post-modern world of total simulation. Thus the SI's revolutionary ambitions are quietly forgotten as their historical role is reinterpreted as an off-shore Research and Developments for the New York art scene.

Unsurprisingly, Ball sees Baudrillard, the ultimate theorist of post-modern superficiality and one-time intellectual king of the New York art crowd, as a conduit for the insights of the situationists. However, despite the philosophical links that exist between situationism and Baudrillard, they divide when it comes to political ambition. For whilst Baudrillard, and his 'attendant' artists, constantly make hair-raisingly radical declarations on the 'end of reality' in the age of simulacrum (Baudrillard's apathetic version of the

spectacle), they don't even pretend to offer any resistance to this process. Of course, the situationists were proper revolutionaries . . .

It's All So Unfair!

So the pure flame of the Situationist International has been corrupted. The progenitors of 'the most radical gesture'⁶ have been emasculated by a load of self-seeking artistic types. It's all so unfair! Well, kind of. It's true that situationism has been depoliticized and aesthetized. It's also true that in many ways the situationists richly deserved this fate. I say this for two reasons, the first of which hinges on the situationists' own view of themselves and the second on the inadequacy of their central concept of the spectacle.

The situationists' carefully nurtured their image as the ultimate radicals. The painful self-consciousness and ridiculous pomposity of their constant denuncements of everybody and everything, including their own members, which fill their journals, make pitiful reading. Indeed, in the 1960s, what *Le Monde* called the SI's 'snarling extravagant rhetoric',⁷ attracted far more derision than respect for its slapdash Hegelianism and unsupportable claims to be *superceding* every other perspective. It is hardly surprising, given the strength of the SI's narcissism, that this current could be developed in the 1970s and 1980s into an apolitical aesthetic of extremism.

This tendency has been supported by a second feature of situationism, its equation of the spectacle with all-encompassing alienation. The trouble with this idea is that it doesn't leave much room for purposeful struggle but only the directionless mutation of present realities, or what Vaneigem called 'active nihilism'. The logical conclusion of this theory is exactly the kind of tedious celebration of meaninglessness seen in the work of Baudrillard and many post-modern artists. Indeed, the fact that the situationists did organise politically and in the late 1960s came to give most of their energies to council communism, is more a testament to their ideological confusion than their commitment to put their own ideas into practice.

I could conclude then by stating that a) the situationists have been depoliticized/post-modernized and b) they had it coming. This would be true enough but would miss what is the most exciting part of the situationist legacy. Apart, moreover, that is generally side lined

by the SI's modern day interpreters. I am talking about the situationist critique of everyday space.

Making Space

Although it is rarely recognised, the situationists made a potentially politically explosive attack on the boundary between specialized, institutionalized creativity and the routine geography of our day-to-day lives.

Unfortunately, the constantly enjoyable games of 'psycho-geography', which first emerged out of the work of their principal forerunners, the Lettrist International, never really complemented the SI's earnest, if confused, critiques of 'the spectacle' and were quietly dropped from the group's overt agenda. However today, when political protest, from the poll tax riots to squatters fighting eviction orders, so often seems to be about who controls city space, the situationists' urban explorations retain a directness and political resonance sadly missing from other parts of their project.

Psychogeography is about the instinctual exploration of the emotional contours of one's environment. It aims to discover and create subversive and anti-authoritarian places and journeys that can be used in the development of new, more liberating, kinds of locales. Situationist psychogeographers adopted the practice of the *dérive* (literally translated, 'drift') as their basic tool. To derive is to go on an unhindered, unstructured wander through the restrictive landscapes of everyday space. To Chtcheglov, who developed these ideas in the late 1950s, the derive is like a political psychoanalysis of the city. Like the psychoanalyst listening to a flow of words, Chtcheglov argued, the person on derive goes with the flow of the city, *until the moment when he rejects or modifies*.⁸

The practical activity that emerged from the SI's psychogeographical theories ranges from seemingly inconsequential rambles around European cities to relatively rigorous and well-documented experiments. An interesting example of the more relaxed approach is the Venice based derive carried out in 1957 by the English situationist Ralph Rumney. In the photo-essay that emerged from this trip, Rumney explains how he followed a line through 'the zones of main psychogeographical interest' in Venice such as the 'sinister' zone of the Arsenale and 'beautiful ambiances' of the Gheto Vecchio.⁹

Rumney goes on to mention, albeit very briefly, how people's 'play patterns' are affected by these zones and how this information may assist in the 'creation of situationist cities'. However, Khatib's psychogeographical study of the 'zones d'ambiance' of Les Halles in Paris provides us with more substantial conclusions.¹⁰ The ambiances of this environment are drawn by Khatib into a plan for the transformation of the area which would establish a new and perpetually changing landscape consisting of different and individually stimulating situations, designed for and by those who use them for the purposes of play and provocation. Khatib is particularly keen to construct a giant labyrinth out of the existing buildings on the site.

In the late 1960s such subversive/constructive suggestions were increasingly directly articulated on the streets of Paris through street riots/carnivals and graffiti such as *Under the pavement — the beach*. Indeed, the art critic Robert Hewison, after arguing that the SI played an influential role in the failed revolution of May 1968, has recently suggested it was a period in which *cars, trees, and cafe tables were 'détourned' into barricades . . . a month long dérive that rediscovered the revolutionary psychogeography of the city*.¹¹

Such rediscoveries have also emerged through contemporary struggles and point the way to the reconnection of the everyday with a reanimated politico-cultural radicalism. In the poll tax riots, for example, we saw how the exclusionary, passifying spaces of London's West End could become sites of communal challenge and adventure. Anyone at Trafalgar Square on the 31st March 1991 won't be able to see that landscape in the same way again, precisely because the riots opened up the rich possibilities of mutation and exploration inherent in that seemingly stable 'heart of empires'. A few years earlier the Stop the City campaign opened up a similar fragility in the day-to-day management of corporate London. Yet it ill serves either event to get too dewy eyed. Both the poll tax riots and *Stop the City* practised their own forms of exclusion. Dominated by the wearily familiar sight of 'angry young men', the diverse aspirations of other groups were left largely unrepresented. Thankfully, the possibilities of less ponderously macho geographies of transgression has been shown through the squatters movement and the Greenham Common peace camp. Squatters' appropriation of the unused houses and offices controlled by the city's power brokers involves exactly the kind of

politically engaged intrusion into the urban environment that the situationists were fumbling for. The Greenham Common peace camp opened up a similarly disruptive yet politically concrete new geography in and around the U.S. army's missile bases. Although, since Cruise left, the peace camp has contracted, the questions it continues to raise about public access, direct action and women's organizational autonomy are now an unavoidable part of the explorations yet to come.

Of course, despite interesting parallels, these critical interventions owe nothing to the situationists. Yet if there is anything worth learning from the SI, it is their ability to explore the potential for libertarian change embedded in our towns and cities. Perhaps then the practice of the derive and other situationist techniques could help turn the urgent, yet often incoherent, engagements with the spatial status-quo seen in recent struggles into something even more exciting and challenging. After all, we shouldn't just aspire to create temporary geographies of disruption but also serious and workable ideas/models for the transformation of urban (and rural) living. It is towards precisely this task that the situationists' psychogeographical investigations were directed and may be used today by those seeking to develop the challenge to everyday space.

Thus while situationist ideas about the 'spectacle' and détournement seem increasingly naive, there remain legitimate parallels between psychogeography and contemporary, genuinely subversive, political movements. What is alluring about such explorations has little to do with the aesthetics of extremism and a lot to do with the very real possibilities of social transformation they open up before us.

Thanks to Alison Kaye for her useful comments on this article.

Notes

1. G. Debord (1977) *The Society of the Spectacle* (Black and Red, Detroit).
2. R. Vaneigem (1983) *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (Rebel Press and Left Bank Books, London) page 144.
3. G. Marcus (1989) *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Secker and Warburg, London).

4. All quotes by Wodiczko are from his essay 'Strategies of public address: Which media, which publics?' in *Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture: Number One* Ed. H. Foster (Bay Press, Seattle) 1987.
5. E. Ball (1989) 'The Beautiful Language of My Century: From the Situationists to the Simulationists'. *Arts Magazine* (63: page 71).
6. *The Most Radical Gesture* is the title of a book by Sadie Plant on the situationists to be published in early 1992 (Routledge, London).
7. *Le Monde* quoted by K. Knabb (1981) *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley): page 382. Connoisseurs of extravagant rhetoric should also read Debord's truly bizarre update of his *Society of the Spectacle, Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (Verso, London), 1990.
8. Quoted by K. Knabb (1981) *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley): page 372.
9. Reprinted in the catalogue for the ICA exhibition: *An Endless Adventure . . .* Ed. I. Blazwick (ICA/Verso, London). A more complete but poorly reproduced version appears in *Vague* (22).
10. A. Khatib (1958) *Essai de description psychogéographique des Halles Internationales Situationistes* (2). The whole run of *Internationale Situationiste* was reprinted in one volume in 1975 by Editions Champ-Libre (Paris).
11. R. Hewison (1989) *Future Tense: A New Art for the Nineties* (Methuen, London): page 28.

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This anthology gathers together a broad range of critical material about the Situationist International. The texts run sequentially according to date of original publication, thereby providing an overview of the way in which situationism has been historicized in the Anglo-American world. A wealth of historical and interpretative information is provided by the various contributors. This plurality of voices ranges from underground legends to art theorists, ultra-leftists to professional academics, whose opinions blend and clash to provide a book that is far more vibrant than a conventional monograph.

Contributors include among others:

Sadie Plant — author of *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in the Post-modern Age*

Chris Gray — member of the British section of the Situationist International and editor of *Leaving the Twentieth Century*

Bob Black — anarchist and author of *The Abolition of Work*

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Jean Barrot — French ultra-leftist and author of numerous works

George Robertson — writing on the influence of situationism in British culture.

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