

to the memory of the greatest massacrers of history, from Tamerlane to Ridgway. Here we see reappear one of the main demands of this generation: educative value.

In fact, there is nothing to be expected until the masses in action awaken to the conditions that are imposed on them in all domains of life, and to the practical means of changing them.

"The imaginary is that which tends to become real," wrote an author whose name, on account of his notorious intellectual degradation, I have since forgotten. The involuntary restrictiveness of such a statement could serve as a touchstone exposing various farcical literary revolutions: That which tends to remain unreal is empty babble.

Life, for which we are responsible, encounters, at the same time as great motives for discouragement, innumerable more or less vulgar diversions and compensations. A year doesn't go by when people we loved haven't succumbed, for lack of having clearly grasped the present possibilities, to some glaring capitulation. But the enemy camp objectively condemns people to imbecility and already numbers millions of imbeciles; the addition of a few more makes no difference.

The first moral deficiency remains indulgence, in all its forms.

GUY DEBORD

From *Les Lèvres Nues* #6, September 1955

METHODS OF DETOURNEMENT*

All aware people of our time agree that art can no longer be justified as a superior activity, or even as an activity of compensation to which one could honorably devote oneself. The cause of this deterioration is clearly the emergence of productive forces that necessitate other production relations and a new practice of life. In the civil war phase we are engaged in, and in close connection with the orientation we are discovering for certain superior activities to come, we can consider that all known means of expression are going to converge in a general movement of propaganda which must encompass all the perpetually interacting aspects of social reality.

Regarding the forms and even the very nature of educative propaganda, there are several conflicting opinions, generally inspired by one or another currently fashionable variety of reformist politics. Suffice it to say that in our view the premises for revolution, on the cultural as well as the strictly political level, are not only ripe, they have begun to rot. It is not just returning to the past which is reactionary; even "modern" cultural objectives are ultimately reactionary since they depend in reality on ideological formulations of a past society that has prolonged its death agony to the present. Only extremist innovation is historically justified.

The literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes. It is, of course, necessary to go beyond any idea of scandal. Since the negation of the bourgeois conception of art and artistic genius has become pretty much old hat, [Duchamp's] drawing of a mustache on the *Mona Lisa* is no more interesting than the original version of that painting. We must now push this process to the point of negating the negation. Bertolt Brecht, revealing in a recent interview in the magazine *France-Observateur* that he made some cuts in the classics of the theater in order to make the performances more educative, is much closer than Duchamp to the revolutionary orientation we are calling for. We must note, however, that in Brecht's case these salutary alterations are held within narrow limits by his unfortunate respect for culture as defined by the ruling class—that same respect, taught in the primary schools of the bourgeoisie and in the newspapers of the workers parties, which leads the reddest worker districts of Paris always to prefer *The Cid* over *Mother Courage*.

In fact, it is necessary to finish with any notion of personal property in this area. The appearance of new necessities outmodes previous "inspired" works. They become obstacles, dangerous habits. The point is not whether we like them or not. We have to go beyond them.

Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations. The discoveries of modern poetry regarding the analogical structure of images demonstrate that when two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed. Restricting oneself to a personal arrangement of words is mere convention. The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy. Anything can be used.

It goes without saying that one is not limited to correcting a work or to integrating diverse fragments of out-of-date works into a new one; one can also alter the meaning of those fragments in any appropriate way, leaving the imbeciles to their slavish preservation of "citations."

Such parodical methods have often been used to obtain comical effects. But such humor is the result of contradictions within a condition whose existence is taken for granted. Since the world of literature seems to us almost as distant as the Stone Age, such contradictions don't make us laugh. It is therefore necessary to conceive of a parodic-serious stage where the accumulation of detoured elements, far from aiming at arousing indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity.

Lautréamont advanced so far in this direction that he is still partly misunderstood even by his most ostentatious admirers. In spite of his obvious application of this method to theoretical language in *Poésies* (drawing particularly on the ethical maxims of Pascal and Vauvenargues)—where Lautréamont strives to reduce the argument, through successive concentrations, to maxims alone—a certain Viroux caused

considerable astonishment three or four years ago by demonstrating conclusively that *Maldoror* is one vast detournement of Buffon and other works of natural history, among other things. That the prosaists of *Figaro*, such as this Viroux himself, were able to see this as a justification for disparaging Lautréamont, and that others believed they had to defend him by praising his insolence, only testifies to the intellectual debility of these two camps of dotards in courtly combat with each other. A slogan like "Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it" is still as poorly understood, and for the same reasons, as the famous phrase about the poetry that "must be made by all."

Apart from Lautréamont's work—whose appearance so far ahead of its time has to a great extent preserved it from a precise critique—the tendencies toward detournement that can be observed in contemporary expression are for the most part unconscious or incidental; and it is in the advertising industry, more than in a decaying aesthetic production, that one can find the best examples.

We can first of all define two main categories of detourned elements, without considering whether or not their being brought together is accompanied by corrections introduced in the originals. These are *minor detournements* and *deceptive detournements*.

Minor detournement is the detournement of an element which has no importance in itself and which thus draws all its meaning from the new context in which it has been placed. For example, a press clipping, a neutral phrase, a commonplace photograph.

Deceptive detournement, also termed premonitory proposition detournement, is in contrast the detournement of an intrinsically significant element, which derives a different scope from the new context. A slogan of Saint-Just, for example, or a sequence from Eisenstein.

Extended detourned works will thus usually be composed of one or more sequences of deceptive and minor detournements.

Several laws on the use of detournement can now be formulated:

It is the most distant detourned element which contributes most sharply to the overall impression, and not the elements that directly determine the nature of this impression. For example, in a metagraph [poem-collage] relating to the Spanish Civil War the phrase with the most distinctly revolutionary sense is a fragment from a lipstick ad: "Pretty lips are red." In another metagraph ("The Death of J.H.") 125 classified ads of bars for sale express a suicide more strikingly than the newspaper articles that recount it.

The distortions introduced in the detourned elements must be as simplified as possible, since the main force of a detournement is directly related to the conscious or vague recollection of the original contexts of the elements. This is well known. Let us simply note that if this dependence on memory implies that one must determine one's public before devising a detournement, this is only a particular case of a general law that governs not only detournement but also any other form of action on the world. The idea of pure, absolute expression is dead; it only temporarily survives in parodic form as long as our other enemies survive.

Detournement is less effective the more it approaches a rational reply. This is the case with a rather large number of Lautréamont's

altered maxims. The more the rational character of the reply is apparent, the more indistinguishable it becomes from the ordinary spirit of repartee, which similarly uses the opponent's words against him. This is naturally not limited to spoken language. It was in this connection that we objected to the project of some of our comrades who proposed to detourn an anti-Soviet poster of the fascist organization "Peace and Liberty"—which proclaimed, amid images of overlapping flags of the Western powers, "Union makes strength"—by adding onto it a smaller sheet with the phrase "and coalitions make war."

Detournement by simple reversal is always the most direct and the least effective. Thus, the Black Mass reacts against the construction of an ambiance based on a given metaphysics by constructing an ambiance in the same framework that merely reverses—and thus simultaneously conserves—the values of that metaphysics. Such reversals may nevertheless have a certain progressive aspect. For example, Clemenceau [called "The Tiger"] could be referred to as "The Tiger called Clemenceau."

Of the four laws that have just been set forth, the first is essential and applies universally. The other three are practically applicable only to deceptive detourned elements.

The first visible consequences of a widespread use of detournement, apart from its intrinsic propaganda powers, will be the revival of a multitude of bad books, and thus the extensive (unintended) participation of their unknown authors; an increasingly extensive transformation of sentences or plastic works that happen to be in fashion; and above all an ease of production far surpassing in quantity, variety and quality the automatic writing that has bored us so much.

Detournement not only leads to the discovery of new aspects of talent; it addition, clashing head-on with all social and legal conventions, it cannot fail to be a powerful cultural weapon in the service of a real class struggle. The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of understanding. It is a real means of proletarian artistic education, the first step toward a *literary communism*.

Ideas and realizations in the realm of detournement can be multiplied at will. For the moment we will limit ourselves to showing a few concrete possibilities starting from various current sectors of communication—it being understood that these separate sectors are significant only in relation to present-day techniques, and are all tending to merge into superior syntheses with the advance of these techniques.

Apart from the various direct uses of detourned phrases in posters, records or radio broadcasts, the two principal applications of detourned prose are metagraphic writings and, to a lesser degree, the adroit perversion of the classical novel form.

There is not much future in the detournement of complete novels, but during the transitional phase there might be a certain number of undertakings of this sort. Such a detournement gains by being accompanied by illustrations whose relationships to the text are not immediately obvious. In spite of the undeniable difficulties, we believe it would be possible to produce an instructive psychogeographical detournement of George Sand's *Consuelo*, which thus decked out could

be relaunched on the literary market disguised under some innocuous title like "Life in the Suburbs," or even under a title itself detourned, such as "The Lost Patrol." (It would be a good idea to reuse in this way many titles of old deteriorated films of which nothing else remains, or of films which continue to stupefy young people in the film clubs.)

Metagraphic writing, no matter how backward may be the plastic framework in which it is materially situated, presents far richer opportunities for detourning prose, as well as other appropriate objects or images. One can get some idea of this from the project, devised in 1951 but then abandoned for lack of sufficient financial means, which envisaged a pinball machine arranged in such a way that the play of the lights and the more or less predictable trajectories of the balls would form a metagraphic-spatial composition entitled *Thermal sensations and desires of people passing by the gates of the Cluny Museum around an hour after sunset in November*. We have since, of course, come to realize that a situationist-analytic work cannot scientifically advance by way of such projects. The means nevertheless remain suitable for less ambitious goals.

It is obviously in the realm of the cinema that detournement can attain its greatest efficacy, and undoubtedly, for those concerned with this aspect, its greatest beauty.

The powers of film are so extensive, and the absence of coordination of those powers is so glaring, that almost any film that is above the miserable average can provide matter for innumerable polemics among spectators or professional critics. Only the conformism of those people prevents them from discovering features just as appealing and faults just as glaring in the worst films. To cut through this absurd confusion of values, we can observe that Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* is one of the most important films in the history of the cinema because of its wealth of new contributions. On the other hand, it is a racist film and therefore absolutely does not merit being shown in its present form. But its total prohibition could be seen as regrettable from the point of view of the secondary, but potentially worthier, domain of the cinema. It would be better to detourn it as a whole, without necessarily even altering the montage, by adding a soundtrack that made a powerful denunciation of the horrors of imperialist war and of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, which are continuing in the United States even now.

Such a detournement—a very moderate one—is in the final analysis nothing more than the moral equivalent of the restoration of old paintings in museums. But most films only merit being cut up to compose other works. This reconversion of preexisting sequences will obviously be accompanied by other elements, musical or pictorial as well as historical. While the filmic rewriting of history has until now been largely along the lines of Guitry's burlesque re-creations, one could have Robespierre say, before his execution: "In spite of so many trials, my experience and the grandeur of my task convinces me that all is well." If in this case a judicious revival of Greek tragedy serves us in exalting Robespierre, we can conversely imagine a neorealist sort of sequence, at the counter of a truckstop bar, for example, with one of the truck-drivers saying seriously to another: "Ethics was in the books of the

philosophers; we have introduced it into the governing of nations." One can see that this juxtaposition illuminates Maximilien's idea,* the idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The light of detournement is propagated in a straight line. To the extent that new architecture seems to have to begin with an experimental baroque stage, the *architectural complex*—which we conceive as the construction of a dynamic environment related to styles of behavior—will probably detourn existing architectural forms, and in any case will make plastic and emotional use of all sorts of detourned objects: calculatedly arranged cranes or metal scaffolding replacing a defunct sculptural tradition. This is shocking only to the most fanatic admirers of French-style gardens. It is said that in his old age D'Annunzio, that pro-fascist swine, had the prow of a torpedo boat in his park. Leaving aside his patriotic motives, the idea of such a monument is not without a certain charm.

If detournement were extended to urbanistic realizations, not many people would remain unaffected by an exact reconstruction in one city of an entire neighborhood of another. Life can never be too disorienting: detournements on this level would really make it beautiful.

Titles themselves, as we have already seen, are a basic element of detournement. This follows from two general observations: that all titles are interchangeable and that they have a determinant importance in several genres. All the detective stories in the "Série Noir" are extremely similar, yet merely continually changing the titles suffices to hold a considerable audience. In music a title always exerts a great influence, yet the choice of one is quite arbitrary. Thus it wouldn't be a bad idea to make a final correction to the title of the "Eroica Symphony" by changing it, for example, to "Lenin Symphony."

The title contributes strongly to a work, but there is an inevitable counteraction of the work on the title. Thus one can make extensive use of specific titles taken from scientific publications ("Coastal Biology of Temperate Seas") or military ones ("Night Combat of Small Infantry Units"), or even of many phrases found in illustrated children's books ("Marvelous Landscapes Greet the Voyagers").

In closing, we should briefly mention some aspects of what we call ultradetournement, that is, the tendencies for detournement to operate in everyday social life. Gestures and words can be given other meanings, and have been throughout history for various practical reasons. The secret societies of ancient China made use of quite subtle recognition signals encompassing the greater part of social behavior (the manner of arranging cups; of drinking; quotations of poems interrupted at agreed-on points). The need for a secret language, for passwords, is inseparable from a tendency toward play. Ultimately, any sign or word is susceptible to being converted into something else, even into its opposite. The royalist insurgents of the Vendée, because they bore the disgusting image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, were called the Red Army. In the limited domain of political war vocabulary this expression was completely detourned within a century.

Outside of language, it is possible to use the same methods to detourn clothing, with all its strong emotional connotations. Here again we find the notion of disguise closely linked to play. Finally, when we

have got to the stage of constructing situations, the ultimate goal of all our activity, it will be open to everyone to detourn entire situations by deliberately changing this or that determinant condition of them.

The methods that we have briefly dealt with here are presented not as our own invention, but as a generally widespread practice which we propose to systematize.

In itself, the theory of detournement scarcely interests us. But we find it linked to almost all the constructive aspects of the presituationist period of transition. Thus its enrichment, through practice, seems necessary.

We will postpone the development of these theses until later.

GUY DEBORD, GIL J. WOLMAN

From *Les Lèvres Nues* #8, May 1956

THE ALBA PLATFORM

From 2 to 8 September a Congress was held in Alba, Italy, convoked by Asger Jorn and Giuseppe Gallizio in the name of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, a grouping whose views are in agreement with the Lettrist International's program regarding urbanism and its possible uses (see *Potlatch* #26). Representatives of avant-garde groups from eight countries (Algeria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Holland, Italy) met there to lay the foundations for a united organization. The tasks toward this end were dealt with in all their implications.

Christian Dotremont, who had been announced as a member of the Belgian delegation in spite of the fact that he has for some time been a collaborator in the *Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française*, refrained from appearing at the Congress, where his presence would have been unacceptable for the majority of the participants.

Enrico Baj, representative of the "Nuclear Art Movement," was excluded the very first day; and the Congress affirmed its break with the Nuclearists by issuing the following statement: "Confronted with his conduct in certain previous affairs, Baj withdrew from the Congress. He did not make off with the cash-box."

Meanwhile our Czechoslovakian comrades Pravoslav Rada and Kotik were prevented from entering Italy. In spite of our protests, the Italian government did not grant them visas to pass through its national iron curtain until the end of the Alba Congress.

The statement of Wolman, the Lettrist International delegate, particularly stressed the necessity for a common platform defining the totality of current experimentation:

"Comrades, the parallel crises presently affecting all modes of artistic creation are determined by an overall interrelated movement that cannot be resolved outside a general perspective. The process of ne-

gation and destruction that has manifested itself at an accelerating rate against all the former conditions of artistic activity is irreversible: it is the consequence of the appearance of superior possibilities of action on the world. . . . Whatever prestige the bourgeoisie may today be willing to accord fragmentary or deliberately retrograde artistic tentatives, creation can now be nothing less than a synthesis aiming at an integral construction of an atmosphere, of a style of life. . . . A unitary urbanism—the synthesis that we call for, incorporating arts and technology—must be created in accordance with new values of life, values which it is henceforth necessary to distinguish and disseminate. . . ."

The final resolution of the Congress expressed a substantial accord in the form of a declaration in six points declaring the "necessity of an integral construction of the environment by a unitary urbanism that must utilize all arts and modern techniques"; the "inevitable outmodedness of any renovation of an art within its traditional limits"; the "recognition of an essential interdependence between unitary urbanism and a future style of life" which must be situated "in the perspective of a greater real freedom and a greater domination of nature"; and finally, "unity of action among the signers on the basis of this program" (the sixth point going on to enumerate the various specifics of mutual support).

Apart from this final resolution—signed by J. Calonne, Constant, G. Gallizio, A. Jorn, Kotik, Rada, Piero Simondo, E. Sottsass Jr., Elena Verrone, Wolman—the Congress unanimously declared itself against any relations with participants in the Festival de la Cité Radieuse, thus following through with the boycott initiated the preceding month.

At the conclusion of the Congress Gil J. Wolman was added to the editorial board of *Eristica*, the information bulletin of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, and Asger Jorn was placed on the board of directors of the Lettrist International.

The Alba Congress probably marks one of the difficult stages in the struggle for a new sensibility and a new culture, a struggle which is itself part of the general revolutionary resurgence characterizing the year 1956, visible in the upsurge of the masses in the USSR, Poland and Hungary (although in the latter case we see the dangerously confusing revival of rotten old watchwords of clerical nationalism resulting from the fatal error of the prohibition of any Marxist opposition), in the successes of the Algerian insurrection and in the major strikes in Spain. These developments allow us the greatest hopes for the near future.

From *Potlatch: Information Bulletin of the Lettrist International* #27

2 November 1956

"The apartments of the helicoidal house will have the form of slices of cake. One will be able to augment or diminish them by shifting movable partitions. The half-floor gradations avoid limiting the number of rooms, since the tenant can request the use of the adjacent section on either upper or lower levels. This system permits the transformation of three four-room apartments into one twelve-room apartment in less than six hours."

(To be continued.)

GUY DEBORD
1956*

DETOURNEMENT AS NEGATION AND PRELUDE

Detournement, the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble, has been a constantly present tendency of the contemporary avant-garde both before and since the establishment of the SI. The two fundamental laws of detournement are the loss of importance of each detoured autonomous element—which may go so far as to lose its original sense completely—and at the same time the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect.

Detournement has a peculiar power which obviously stems from the double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms by the coexistence within them of their old senses and their new, immediate senses. Detournement is practical because it is so easy to use and because of its inexhaustible potential for reuse. Concerning the negligible effort required for detournement, we have already said, "The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of understanding" (*Methods of Detournement*, May 1956). But these points would not by themselves justify recourse to this method, which the same text describes as "clashing head-on against all social and legal conventions." Detournement has a historical significance. What is it?

"Detournement is a game made possible by the capacity of *devaluation*," writes Jorn in his study *Detourned Painting* (May 1959), and he goes on to say that all the elements of the cultural past must be "reinvested" or disappear. Detournement is thus first of all a negation of the value of the previous organization of expression. It arises and grows increasingly stronger in the historical period of the decomposition of artistic expression. But at the same time, the attempts to reuse the "detournable bloc" as material for other ensembles express the search for a vaster construction, a new genre of creation at a higher level.

The SI is a very special kind of movement, of a nature different from preceding artistic avant-gardes. Within culture the SI can be likened to a research laboratory, for example, or to a party in which we are situationists but nothing that we do is situationist. This is not a disavowal for anyone. We are partisans of a certain future of culture, of life. Situationist activity is a definite craft which we are not yet practicing.

Thus the signature of the situationist movement, the sign of its presence and contestation in contemporary cultural reality (since we cannot represent any common style whatsoever), is first of all the use

of detournement. We may mention, on the level of detoured expression, Jorn's altered paintings; Debord and Jorn's book *Mémoires*, "composed entirely of prefabricated elements," in which the writing on each page runs in all directions and the reciprocal relations of the phrases are invariably uncompleted; Constant's projects for detoured sculptures; and Debord's detoured documentary film, *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Period of Time*. On the level of what *Methods of Detournement* calls "ultradetournement, that is, the tendencies for detournement to operate in everyday social life" (e.g. passwords or the wearing of disguises, belonging to the sphere of play), we might mention, at different levels, Gallizio's industrial painting; Wyckaert's "orchestral" project for assembly-line painting with a division of labor based on color; and numerous detournements of buildings that were at the origin of unitary urbanism. But we should also mention in this context the SI's very forms of "organization" and propaganda.

At this point in the world's development all forms of expression are losing all grip on reality and being reduced to self-parody. As the readers of this journal can frequently verify, present-day writing always has an element of parody. "It is necessary," states *Methods of Detournement*, "to conceive of a parodic-serious stage where the accumulation of detoured elements, far from aiming at arousing indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity."

The parodic-serious expresses the contradictions of an era in which we find ourselves confronted with both the urgent necessity and the near impossibility of bringing together and carrying out a totally innovative collective action. An era in which the greatest seriousness advances masked in the ambiguous interplay between art and its negation; in which the essential voyages of discovery have been undertaken by such astonishingly incapable people.

SITUATIONIST THESES ON TRAFFIC

1

The mistake made by all urbanists is to consider the private automobile (and its by-products like the motorcycle) essentially as a means of transportation. Such a misconception is a major expression of a notion of happiness that developed capitalism tends to spread throughout the society. The automobile is at the center of this general propaganda, both as sovereign good of an alienated life and as essential product of the capitalist market: It is being generally said this year that American economic prosperity is soon going to depend on the success of the slogan "Two cars per family."

2

Commuting time, as Le Corbusier rightly pointed out, is a surplus labor which correspondingly reduces the amount of "free" time.

3

We must replace travel as an adjunct to work with travel as a pleasure.

4

To want to redesign architecture to accord with the needs of the present massive, parasitical existence of private automobiles reflects the most unrealistic misapprehension of where the real problems lie. It is necessary to transform architecture to accord with the whole development of the society, criticizing all the transitory values linked to condemned forms of social relationships (in the first rank of which is the family).

5

Even if during a transitional period we temporarily accept a rigid division between work zones and residence zones, we must at least envisage a third sphere: that of life itself (the sphere of freedom, of leisure—the truth of life). Unitary urbanism acknowledges no boundaries; it aims to form a unitary human milieu in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will finally be dissolved. But before this, the minimum action of unitary urbanism is to extend the terrain of play to all desirable constructions. This terrain will be at the level of complexity of an old city.

6

It is not a question of combating the automobile as an evil in itself. It is its extreme concentration in the cities that has led to the negation of its role. Urbanism should certainly not ignore the automobile, but even less should it accept it as its central theme. It should reckon on its gradual phasing out. In any case, we can foresee that the central areas of certain new complexes, as well as of a few old cities, will become closed to automobile traffic.

7

Those who believe that the automobile is eternal are not thinking, even from a strictly technological standpoint, of other future forms of transportation. For example, certain models of one-man helicopters presently being tested by the US Army will probably have spread to the general public within twenty years.

8

The breaking up of the dialectic of the human milieu in favor of automobiles (the projected freeways in Paris will entail the demolition of thousands of houses and apartments although the housing crisis is continually growing worse) masks its irrationality under pseudoprac-

In fact, we want ideas to become *dangerous* again. We cannot be accepted with the spinelessness of a false eclectic interest, as if we were Sartres, Althussers, Aragons or Godards. Let us note the wise words of a certain Professor Lhuillier, reported in the 21 December *Nouvel Observateur*: "I am for freedom of thought. But if there are any Situationists in the room, I want them to get out right now." While not entirely denying the effect that the dissemination of a few basic truths may have had in slightly accelerating the movement that is impelling the lagging French youth toward an awakening awareness of an impending more general crisis in the society, we think that the distribution of *On the Poverty of Student Life* has been a much more significant factor of clarification in some other countries where such a process is already much more clearly under way. In the afterword of their edition of Khayati's text, the English situationists wrote: "The most highly developed critique of modern life has been made in one of the least highly developed modern countries—in a country which has not yet reached the point where the complete disintegration of all values becomes patently obvious and engenders the corresponding forces of radical rejection. In the French context, situationist theory has anticipated the social forces by which it will be realized." The theses of *On the Poverty of Student Life* have been much more truly understood in the United States and England (the strike at the London School of Economics in March caused a certain stir, the *Times* commentator unhappily seeing in it a return of the class struggle he had thought was over with). To a lesser degree this is also the case in Holland—where the SI's critique, reinforcing a much harsher critique by events themselves, was not without effect on the recent dissolution of the "Provo" movement—and in the Scandinavian countries. The struggles of the West Berlin students this year have picked up something of the critique, though in a still very confused way.

But revolutionary youth naturally has no other course than to join with the mass of workers who, starting from the experience of the new conditions of exploitation, are going to take up once again the struggle for the domination of their world, for the suppression of work. When young people begin to know the current theoretical form of this real movement that is everywhere spontaneously bursting forth from the soil of modern society, this is only a *moment* of the progression by which this unified theoretical critique, which identifies itself with an adequate *practical unification*, strives to break the silence and the general organization of separation. It is only in this sense that we find the result satisfactory. We obviously exclude from these young people that alienated semiprivileged fraction molded by the university: this sector is the natural base for an admiring consumption of a fantasized situationist theory considered as the latest spectacular fashion. We will continue to disappoint and refute this kind of approbation. Sooner or later it will be understood that the SI must be judged not on the superficially scandalous aspects of certain manifestations through which it appears, but on its *essentially scandalous* central truth.

THE SITUATIONISTS AND THE NEW FORMS OF ACTION AGAINST POLITICS AND ART

Up to now our subversion has mainly drawn on the forms and categories inherited from past revolutionary struggles, mainly those of the last century. I propose that we round out our contestatory expression with means that dispense with any reference to the past. I mean by this not that we should abandon the forms within which we have waged battle on the traditional terrain of the supersession of philosophy, the realization of art and the abolition of politics; but that we should extend the work of the journal onto terrains it does not yet reach.

A great many proletarians are aware that they have no power over their lives; they know it, but they don't express it in the language of socialism and of previous revolutions.

Let us spit in passing on those students who have become militants in the tiny would-be mass parties, who sometimes have the nerve to claim that the workers are incapable of reading *Internationale Situationniste*, that its paper is too slick to be put in their lunchbags and that its price doesn't take into account their low standard of living. The most consistent of them thus distribute the mimeographed image they have of the consciousness of a class in which they fervently seek their stereotype Joe Worker. They forget, among other things, that when workers read revolutionary literature in the past they had to pay relatively more than for a theater ticket; and that when they once again develop an interest in it they won't hesitate to spend two or three times what it costs for an issue of *Planète*. But what these detractors of typography forget most of all is that the rare individuals who read their bulletins are precisely those who already have the minimal background necessary to understand us right away, and that what they write is completely unreadable for anyone else. Some of them, ignoring the immense readership of bathroom graffiti, particularly in cafés, have thought that by using a parody of gradeschool writing, printed on paper pasted on gutters like notices of apartments for rent, they could make the form correspond to the content of their slogans; and in this at least they have succeeded. All this serves to clarify what must not be done.

What we have to do is link up the theoretical critique of modern society with the critique of it in acts. By detourning the very propositions of the spectacle, we can explain on the spot the implications of present and future revolts.

I propose that we pursue:

1. *Experimentation in the detournement of romantic photo-comics* as well as of "pornographic" photos, and that we bluntly impose their real truth by restoring real dialogues by adding or altering speech

bubbles. This operation will bring to the surface the subversive bubbles that are spontaneously, but more or less consciously, formed and then dissolved in the imaginations of those who look at these photos. In the same spirit, it is also possible to detourn any advertising billboards—particularly those in subway corridors, which form remarkable sequences—by pasting over pre-prepared placards.

2. *The promotion of guerrilla tactics in the mass media*: an important form of contestation, not only at the stage of urban guerrilla warfare, but even before it. The trail was blazed by those Argentinians who took over the control station of an electric newspaper and broadcast their own directives and slogans. It is still possible to take advantage of the fact that radio and television stations are not yet guarded by troops. On a more modest level, it is known that any ham radio operator can at little expense jam, if not broadcast, on a local level; and that the small size of the necessary equipment permits a great mobility, thus easily enabling one to slip away before one's position is trigonometrically located. A group of CP dissidents in Denmark had their own pirate radio station a few years ago. Counterfeit issues of one or another periodical can add to the confusion of the enemy. This list of examples is vague and limited for obvious reasons.

The illegality of such actions makes a sustained engagement on this terrain impossible for any organization that has not chosen to go underground, because it would otherwise entail the formation within it of a *specialized organization*, which cannot be effectual without compartmentalization and thus hierarchy, etc. Without, in a word, finding oneself on the slippery path toward terrorism.* We can more appropriately envision propaganda by deed, which is a very different matter. Our ideas are in everybody's mind, as is well known, and any group without any relation to us, or a few individuals coming together for a specific purpose, can improvise and improve on tactics experimented with elsewhere by others. This type of unconcerted action cannot be expected to bring about any decisive upheaval, but it can usefully serve to accentuate the coming awakening of consciousness. In any case, there's no need to get hung up on the idea of illegality. Most actions in this domain can be done without breaking any existing law. But the fear of such interventions will make newspaper editors paranoid about their typesetters, radio managers paranoid about their technicians, etc., at least until more specific repressive legislation has been worked out and enacted.

3. *The development of situationist comics*. Comic strips are the only truly popular literature of our century. Cretins marked by years at school have not been able to resist writing dissertations on them; but they'll get little pleasure out of reading ours. No doubt they'll buy them just to burn them. In our task of "making shame more shameful still," it is easy to see how easy it would be, for example, to transform "13 rue de l'Espoir [hope]" into "1 blvd. du Désespoir [despair]" merely by adding in a few elements; or balloons can simply be changed. In contrast to Pop Art, which breaks comics up into fragments, this method aims at restoring to comics their content and importance.

4. *The production of situationist films*. The cinema, which is the newest and undoubtedly most utilizable means of expression of our

time, has marked time for nearly three quarters of a century. To sum it up, we can say that it effectively became the "seventh art" so dear to film buffs, film clubs and parents' associations. For our purposes this age is over (Ince, Stroheim, the one and only *L'âge d'or*, *Citizen Kane* and *Mr. Arkadin*, the lettrist films), even if there remain a few traditional narrative masterpieces to be unearthed in the film archives or on the shelves of foreign distributors. We should appropriate the first stammerings of this new language; and above all its most consummate and modern examples, those which have escaped artistic ideology even more than American 'B' movies: newsreels, previews, and above all, filmed ads.

Although it has obviously been in the service of the commodity and the spectacle, filmed advertising, in its extreme freedom of technical means, has laid the foundations for what Eisenstein had an inkling of when he talked of filming *The Critique of Political Economy* or *The German Ideology*.

I am confident that I could film *The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy* in a way that would be immediately understandable to the proletarians of Watts who are ignorant of the concepts implied in that title. And this adaptation to a new form will undoubtedly contribute to deepening and intensifying the "written" expression of the same problems; which we could verify, for example, by making a film called *Incitement to Murder and Debauchery* before drafting its equivalent in the journal, *Correctives to the Consciousness of a Class That Will Be the Last*. Among other possibilities, the cinema lends itself particularly well to studying the present as a historical problem, to dismantling the processes of reification. To be sure, historical reality can be apprehended, known and filmed only in the course of a complicated process of mediations enabling consciousness to recognize one moment in another, its goal and its action in destiny, its destiny in its goal and action, and its own essence in this necessity. This mediation would be difficult if the empirical existence of facts themselves was not already a mediated existence, which only takes on an appearance of immediateness because and to the extent that consciousness of the mediation is lacking and that the facts have been uprooted from the network of their determining circumstances, placed in an artificial isolation and poorly strung together again in the montage of classical cinema. It is precisely this mediation which has been lacking, and inevitably so, in presituationist cinema, which has limited itself to "objective" forms or re-presentation of politico-moral concepts, whenever it has not been merely academic-type narrative with all its hypocrisies. If what I have just written were filmed, it would become much less complicated. This is all banalities. But Godard, the most famous Swiss Maoist, will never be able to understand them. He might well, as is his usual practice, recuperate the above—pick out a word from it or an idea like that concerning filmed advertisements—but he will never be capable of anything but brandishing little novelties picked up elsewhere: images or star words of the era, which definitely have a resonance, but one he can't grasp (Bonnot, worker, Marx, made in USA, Pierrot le Fou, Debord, poetry, etc.). He really is a child of Mao and Coca-Cola.

The cinema enables one to express anything, just like an article, a book, a leaflet or a poster. This is why we should henceforth require that each situationist be as capable of making a film as of writing an article (cf. "Anti-Public Relations," *IS* #8). Nothing is too beautiful for the blacks of Watts.

RENÉ VIÉNET

TO HAVE AS GOAL PRACTICAL TRUTH

In attempting to present to the new revolutionary forces a model of theoretico-practical coherence, the SI can and must at any moment sanction, by exclusion or break, the failings, insufficiencies and compromises of those making of it—or recognizing in it—the most advanced experimental stage of their common project. If the insurgent generation, determined to found a new society, manifests an alertness, based on indisputable first principles, to smash every *attempt* at recuperation, this is not at all out of a taste for purity, but out of a simple reflex of self-defense. In organizations prefiguring in their essential features the type of social organization to come, the least of requirements consists in not tolerating those people whom power is able to tolerate quite well.

In its positive aspect, the "exclusion" and "break" response raises the question of membership in the SI and of alliance with autonomous groups and individuals. In its "Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations" the 7th Conference stressed among other things the following point: "A revolutionary organization refuses to reproduce within itself any of the hierarchical conditions of the dominant world. The only limit to participating in its total democracy is that each member must have recognized and appropriated the coherence of its critique. This coherence must be both in the critical theory proper and in the relationship between this theory and practical activity. The organization radically criticizes every ideology as separate power of ideas and as ideas of separate power."

The coherence of the critique and the critique of incoherence are one and the same movement, condemned to decay and rigidify into ideology the moment separation is introduced between different groups of a federation, between different members of an organization or between the theory and practice of one of its members. In the total struggle in which we are engaged, to yield an inch on the front of coherence is to allow separation to gain the upper hand all the way down the line. This is what spurs us to the greatest vigilance: to never take our coherence for granted, to remain alert to the dangers that threaten it in the fundamental unity of individual and collective behavior, to anticipate and avoid these dangers.

That a secret fraction [the Garnautins] was able to form among us, but also that it was rapidly exposed, sufficiently indicates our rigor

and our lack of rigor in transparency in intersubjective relations. Put another way, this means that the SI's influence stems essentially from this: it is capable of *setting an example*, both negatively, by showing its weaknesses and correcting them, and positively, by deriving new exigencies from these corrections. We have often reiterated the importance of our not being mistaken in judging individuals; we have to prove this continually and thereby at the same time make it more impossible for people to be mistaken about us. And what goes for individuals goes for groups as well.

We recall the words of Socrates to one of the young men he was talking to: "Speak a little so I can see what sort of person you are." We are in a position to avoid this kind of Socrates and this kind of young man if the exemplary character of our activity ensures the radiating force of our presence in and against the reigning spectacle. To the mafiosi of recuperation and to the smalltime jerks who are going to agree to present us as a directing group, we should counterpose the antihierarchical example of permanent radicalization—we must not dissimulate any part of our experiences; we must establish, through the dissemination of our methods, critical theses and agitational tactics, the greatest transparency concerning the collective project of liberating everyday life.

The SI should act like an axis which, receiving its movement from the revolutionary impulses of the entire world, precipitates in a unitary manner the radical turn of events. In contrast to the backward sectors that persistently strive for tactical unity above all else (common, national and popular fronts), the SI and allied autonomous organizations will meet each other only in the search for organic unity, considering that tactical unity is effective only where organic unity is possible. Group or individual, everyone must live in pace with the radicalization of events in order to radicalize them in turn. Revolutionary coherence is nothing else.

We are certainly still far from such a harmony of progression, but we are just as certainly working toward it. The movement from first principles to their realization involves groups and individuals, and thus their possible retardations. Only transparency in real participation cuts short the menace that weighs on coherence: the transformation of retardation into separation. Everything that still separates us from the realization of the situationist project is only the result of the hostility of the old world we live in; but the awareness of these separations already contains their resolution.

Now, it is precisely in the struggle against separations that retardation appears in various degrees; it is there that unconsciousness of retardation obscures consciousness of separations, thereby introducing incoherence. When consciousness rots, ideology oozes out. We have seen Kotányi keep the results of his analyses to himself, communicating them drop by drop with the niggardly superiority of a water clock over time; and others (the most recently excluded) keeping to themselves their deficiencies in all respects, making like a peacock while lacking the tail. Mystical wait-and-see-ism and egalitarian ecumenicalism had the same odor. Vanish, grotesque charlatans of incurable malaises!