

The Beach Beneath the Street

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52,534 words

In memory of:

Helen Mu Sung
Andrew Charker
Stephen Cummins
Colin Hood
Shelly Cox

in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni

"Monsters of all lands unite!"
Michele Bernstein

Leaving the 21st Century

A giant inflatable dog turd broke loose from its moorings in the grounds of the Paul Klee Center in Switzerland and brought down power lines before coming to a halt in the grounds of a children's home. The Paul McCarthy sculpture, the size of a house, reached a maximum altitude of 200 meters. Other civilizations had their chosen forms: from the Obelisk of Luxor to Michelangelo's *David*. The futurist poet Marinetti found his crashed motor car more beautiful than the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, but he might have balked at flying dog shit.¹ In the twenty first century, the insomnia of reason does not breed monsters, but pets. No wonder there are no longer any Gods, when what is expected of them is that they descend from Mount Olympus with plastic baggies and clean up.

We are bored with this planet. It has seen better centuries, and the promise of better times to come eludes us. The possibilities of this world, in these times, seem dismal and dull. All it offers at best is spectacles of disintegration. Capitalism or barbarism, those are the choices. This is an epoch governed by this blackmail: either more and more of the same, or the end times. Or so they say. We don't buy it. Its time to start scheming on how to leave the twenty-first century. The pessimists are right. Things can't go on as they are. The optimists are right also. Another world is possible. The means are at our disposal. Our *species-being* is as a builder of worlds.²

Sometimes, to go forwards, one has to go back. Back to the scene of the crime. Back to the moment when the situation seemed open, before the gun went off, before the rat race started. This is a story about a small band of artists and writers whose habits were bohemian at best, delinquent at worst, who set off with no formal training and equipped with little besides their wits, to change the world. As Guy Debord, not the least of their number, later wrote: "It is known that initially the Situationists wanted at the very least to build cities, the environment suitable to the unlimited deployment of new passions. But of course this was not easy and so we found ourselves forced to do much more."³

Where now does one find this kind of ambition? These days art is happy to settle for a little notoriety, a good dealer and a retrospective. It has renounced the desire to give form to the world. Having ceased to be modern, and finding it too embarrassing to be postmodern, art is now merely *contemporary*, which seems to mean nothing more than yesterday's art at today's prices.⁴ If anything theory has turned out even worse. It found its utopia, and it is the academy. It is a colonnade adorned with the busts of famous fathers: Jacques Lacan the bourgeois-magus, Louis Althusser the throttler-of-concepts, Jacques Derrida the dandy-of-difference, Michel Foucault the one-eyed-powerhouse, Gilles Deleuze the taker-from-behind. Acolytes and epigones pace furiously up and down, prostrating themselves before one master – Ah! Betrayed! – and then another. The production of new dead masters to imitate can barely keep up with consumer demand, prompting some to chisel statues of new demigods while they still live: Alain Badiou the Maoist-of-the-matheme, Giorgio Agamben the pensive-pedant, Slavoj Zizek the neuro-Hegelian-joker.⁵

In the United States the academy spread its investments, placing a few bets on women and people of color. The best of whom – Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Gayatri Spivak, Susan Buck-Morss – at least appreciate the double bind of speaking for difference within the heart of the empire of indifference. At best theory, like art, turns in on itself, living on through commentary, investing in its own death on credit. At worse, it rattles the chains of old ghosts, as if a conference on 'The idea of communism' could still shock the bourgeois. As if there was still a bourgeois literate enough to shock. As if it was the idea that ever shocked them, so much as the practice.⁶

Beneath the pavement, the beach. It's a now well worn slogan from the May-June events in Paris, 1968. It's the moment when two kinds of critique seemed to come together. One is communist, and demands equality. The other is bohemian, and demands difference.⁷ The former tends to get erased from historical memory. Its as if one of the world's great general strikes never happened.⁸ The latter is rendered in a language that makes it seem benign, banal even. As if all that was demanded was *customer service*. What is lost is the combined power of a critique of both wage labor and of everyday life, expressed in acts. What has escaped the institutionalization of high

theory is the possibility of *low theory*, of a critical though indifferent to the institutional forms of the academy or the art world, which devotes itself instead to the creation of critique and the production of practice.

And so: two steps back, that they might make possible three steps forward. Back to the 50s and 60s, when another twenty-first century seemed possible. Back to the few, the happy few, who thought they had discovered how to leave the twentieth century for happier climes, though not quite as warming as ours. Its not as if there are not already accounts of the Letterist International (1952-1957) and the Situationist International (1957-1972) that succeeded it. *The Beach Beneath the Street* claims no originality whatsoever. Rather, it's a question of creating a past specific to the demands of this present. An account which resists the sorting and selecting which parcels out a movement into bite size morsels, each to be swallowed by a specific discipline: art history, media studies, architecture or philosophy. The Situationist project implied the overcoming of separate and specialized knowledge, and has to be recalled in that spirit.

It is also easy prey for biographers, who excise this or that figure, creating little subjective narratives, like the plot of a novel or (dare we hope to sell the rights) a movie. The Letterist International and the Situationist International were collective and collaborative projects. Sure, some figures stand out, first among equals Guy Debord, but to reduce a movement to a biography or two is to cut a piece free from what made it of interest in the first place: the game of tactics and ruses, moves and cheats by which each played with or against the other.

Even when the Situationists are treated as a movement, it is the supposedly minor figures who drop out of the story, or become mere props to the *great men* among them. Or, in order to make some coherent narrative out of it, to write a biography of a movement as if it were a subject, the differences among its members are either suppressed or turned into the stakes of a mere drama of personalities. Here instead is a large cast of disparate characters, some well known, some not, where Guy Debord and Asger Jorn rub shoulders with Patrick Straram, Michele Bernstein, Ralph Rumney, Pinot Gallizio, Jacqueline De Jong, Abdelhafid Khatib, Alexander Trocchi, or René

Viénet. Where they come together, where they create something, is a *situation*. But situations are temporary moments, singular unities of space and time. They call for a different kind of remembering.

Some artifacts produced by the Situationist International are perhaps too well remembered. Do we really need another commentary on Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*? Is not the one he wrote himself enough?⁹ Perhaps today one could only do it justice by ignoring it. *The Beach Beneath the Street* will bypass more than one of the well known landmarks on its route through the Situationist International, but it will also draw attention to some less well known moments. The criteria for inclusion is not historical importance but contemporary resonance. Mention will be made in passing to prominent landmarks of high theory: Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault and so forth. But only in passing. *The Beach Beneath the Street* will not engage them on their own terrain. Rather, it opens toward another terrain.

Guy Debord spent a lot of time working on how to remember situations, how to document them and keep them in a way that could ignite future possibilities. For the most part, he created legends. With the collaboration of Kevin C. Pyle, *The Beach Beneath the Street* offers its own visualizations of two legendary moments: the Saint Germain scene of the 50s, and the May-June 1968 situation, or at least its Paris epicenter. The Situationists were fond of taking comic strips and replacing the words within the speech bubbles with their own slogans. Here we do the reverse: the words are nearly all from texts by Guy Debord or the Situationist International. It's Kevin's art that is new.

"When legend becomes fact, print the legend," as the newspaperman says at the end of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1962). Much of the literature on the Situationists seems designed to be disabling, to prevent any real creative use of this body of work for critical practices in the twenty-first century. The authorities on this period delight in drawing attention to the follies then committed, as if their own complacency of thought was in some sense a higher achievement. Or it is all safely consigned to the archive, a time one can visit like a tourist before returning back

home to the workaday world. *The Beach Beneath the Street* makes more than occasional reference to events of a more recent past, in which the cogency of Situationist thought and action still registers. Leaving the twentieth century was the aim the Situationist International once ascribed to itself. Leaving the twenty-first century might not be a bad ambition. On paper at least, we have longer to achieve it.

Street Ethnography

It is a few years after the end of the second world war. Europe is in ruins. Out in its colonies the will and the means come together to start throwing off its yoke. The Russians and the Americans brandish their biggest bombs at each other. Meanwhile in Paris, the city of light, the curfews and rationing slowly come to an end. The lights are lit again. The black market fades to grey. A time to shoot movies rather than collaborators. Formerly banned pleasures still have a special quality: American jazz, gangster movies and crime novels seem to promise unknown pleasures, a sort of cultural correlate of the Marshall Plan for European reconstruction. There is a world to build, out of books and mortar.

Existentialism is all the rage. All the papers say so, even if they don't approve. A doctrine that puts such a premium on freedom seems somehow both frightening and delicious. The philosophers credited with creating it – Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty – refuse the label while selectively exploiting the attention. Self-styled existentialists turn up in their Paris neighborhood of Saint Germain des pres. They hang out in the famous cafés, hoping to rub shoulders with intellectual celebrities. After the cafés close, its on to the cellar clubs. The wire service journalists started this fad. Working odd hours, in need of a drink when all else is closed, they end up in the cellars, and with a certain inevitability, the cellars end up in the news.

The most famous was Le Tabou. As Simone De Beauvoir writes: "People drank and danced and also brawled a great deal, both inside and out front. The neighborhood declared war... at night, people threw buckets of water on the customers and even on people just passing by."¹⁰ De Beauvoir claimed never to have been there. She did not like the way its front people, Anne Marie Cazalis and Juliette Greco, traded on the existentialist craze. But she was friends with Boris Vian, who played the trumpet in the band there. Vian was a man of parts. Besides his passion for jazz,

he wrote a fake American crime novel to cash in on that craze, and he wrote the *Manual of Saint Germain des Prés* (1949).¹¹

The *Manual* is a mock ethnography of the place. Saint Germain has its natives, those who ply respectable trades, pouring cold water on the bohemian effusions they consider beneath them. It has its incurionists, new money people, who probably got rich off the black market and come looking for ways to spend it. It has its permanent invaders, American and Scandinavian and the occasional English.¹² And it has its *trogodytes*, the nocturnal residents of the cellar clubs. Boris Vian (1920-1959) sees himself and his friends as none of the above. The real Saint Germain is to him a small coterie of creative individuals, some now forgotten, some not.

Here are some of them, with their dates, since time is a key to this story: poet Tristan Tzara (1896-1963), composer Georges Auric (1899-1983), writer Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), writer Jacques Prevert (1900-1977), artist Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), writer Raymond Queneau (1903-1976), writer Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), writer Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986), philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), writer Jean Genet (1910-1986), saxophonist Don Byas (1912-1972), actress Simone Signoret (1921-1985), singer Juliette Greco (b. 1927). None of whom shall feature much in our story – with one slight exception: the poet Gabriel Pomerand (1925-1972).

Simone Signoret describes in her memoir her entrée into Saint Germain in 1941. She quite her job on a collaborationist paper and came to hang out at the Café Flore, hoping to get into the film business. Of the people she met there “some of them Jewish, many of them Communists or Trotskyites, Italian anti-fascists, Spanish Republicans, bums, jokers, penniless poets, sharers of food ration tickets, ambulatory guitarists, genial jacks of all trades, temporary no-goods...” – many would not survive the war.¹³ Of those who did, a few would become celebrated figures of a new postwar culture, with Saint Germain as their symbolic home. Saint Germain was where the forces for the postwar restoration of the spectacle gathered.

American pop mixed with youthful irreverence was not to everyone's taste. Vian took great exception to the portrayal of Saint Germain in both the conservative and Communist press. Gullible cellar-dwelling troglodytes, he suspects, can be cajoled into saying pretty much anything for the price of a drink. They give the place a bad name. The legend the press have going is that Sartre is the magus and jazz the pied piper of an evil cult. Worse, Simone De Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1949) ruins the morals of impressionable girls. Vian quotes some choice bits of journalese: "Beginning of the legend: an amateur existentialism of destruction. The whole story: blood, sensuality, death." Poor troglodyte existentialists, mere teenagers, living in cheap hotels where they can't pay the bill. They are "unwholesome" and "violent" and "intoxicated" by American crime novels (or perhaps Vian's copies of them). In the clubs they can be found "screaming like banshees." The press has in its clutches a *folk devil* here, about which to whip up a *moral panic*.¹⁴

"These zealots recognize each other through thousands of little items of clothing: cowboy shirts flapping in the breeze: red, yellow and green, plaid shirts that hang open down to the belly button." The troglodyte existentialist belongs to a *subculture*.¹⁵ "The women of the tribe are fond of smocks that come in maybe two or three colors: their hairstyles give them the look of a drowning victim.... they are none too fond of soap or hairbrushes, but they dance one hell of a boogie-woogie." The press can't decide if they have too much sex, or not enough, but either way their desire is out of line, a threat to bourgeois enjoyment.¹⁶ They gather in Saint Germain, in the shadows cast by its luminaries, to reinvent themselves, by means both fair and shady. Bohemia's other side is *delinquency*.

She loved to dance. Vali Myers (1930-2003) left home at 14 and found her own place in seamy St Kilda, a waterside neighborhood in the Australian city of Melbourne. She worked in a hair salon for a while, and as an artist's model, but preferred factory jobs. What money she made went toward study with the Melbourne Modern Ballet company. In 1950 she left Australia at the age of 19 to dance in Paris. She found a ruined city, cold in winter; poor all year around. The war had shattered one way of life, and another had not yet arisen out of the ashes. She gave up on ballet

and went dancing in the cellars where African drummers played. Tourists threw money at her feet. She learned very little French but picked up the argot of the streets.

This is what she wrote about those times: “The kids who survived after the war years in our quarter, Saint Germain des pres, can be counted on one hand. It was... a world without illusions, without dreams. It had a dark stark beauty like a short Russian story of Gorky that one doesn’t forget. They were uprooted kids, old for their years, from all over Europe. Many had no home or parents, no papers (stateless), no money.... We lived in the streets and cafés, like a pack of ‘bastard dogs’ and with the strict hierarchy of such a tribe. Students and workers were ‘outsiders.’ The few tourists on the lookout for ‘existentialists’ were ‘game’ (for a meal or a drink), but no one sold himself. There was always cheap booze and Algerian hashish to get by on. What we had we shared, even the butt end of a cigarette.”¹⁷

Sometimes she slept in cafés or movie houses, sometimes she slept rough. For a while she had a tiny room at the Hotel D’Alsace Lorraine, where the concierge was reputed to have worked for Marcel Proust in his last years. She slept by day and danced in the night as if consumed by fire. The whole delinquent *tribe* was nocturnal.¹⁸ There was Kaki, the beauty of the quarter, a former Dior model, the daughter of collaborators who killed themselves after the war. Kaki joined them at age 19. There was Fred, the big blonde Corsican, in and out of prison, who later became a *success*: artist, husband, father. There was Robert the Mexican, about whom it was said that he had killed a man. There was Eliane, who had run away from home and the reformatory. There was Ralph Rumney, dodging military service back in Britain. Vali Myers lived on and off with Pierre Feuillet, who was known as the Chief. Unpredictable, with a walk like a cat, he was not the sort of character it pays to romanticize. He cut her once, in a fight. When she danced, it was he who collected the money the tourists threw. These were the scenes and characters from what she called her “opium years” – which lasted until 1958.

Gabriel Pomerand introduced her to opium. He was one of several men of the quarter who made of Myers a sort of bohemian muse. Pomerand wrote that “she disobeys every last law of

conventional beauty,” and compared encountering Myers to meeting a “cheetah on a leash.” The Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken (1925-1990) gave her the leading role in his book *Love on the Left Bank*. “She danced like a Negress,” he says. George Plimpton (1927-2003), the expatriate American, wrote in *Paris Review*: “Her dancing is remarkable – a sinuous shuffling, bent-kneed, her shoulders and hands moving at trembling speed to the drumbeats.” Plimpton quotes another admirer: “You saw in her the personalization of something torn and loose and deep-down primitive in all of us...” Even the great gay Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo (b. 1931) idolized the “solemn, hieratic girl, systematically dressed in black, with her face painted like a mask” who declared that she lived in a “damp cave with mice and called on the most daring to try her one night in a cemetery.”¹⁹

Myers said that for her Saint Germain was “like a little battlefield.” Rather than parry the glances of so many attentive men, she left Paris for a secluded valley in Italy. She would henceforth prefer the company of animals. The remarkable thing is that she survived. One of the press stories Vian disparages contains at least a kernel of truth: “Existentialism has ripened so quickly that it is already divided by class warfare. In fact it is necessary these days to distinguish the rich existentialists from the poor ones.”²⁰ Bohemia is fine for those who enter it voluntarily, and its legend is sustained by those who succeeded through it. For those who aren’t rich, aren’t men, aren’t white, aren’t straight, for those from the provinces, for those without a home to go back to, it’s no picnic. People like Myers’ tribe were doubly dispossessed, too young and too marginal. There was nothing for it but to stick together. As Ralph Rumney put it: “Our social exclusion made us a closed group.”²¹

It has become an impertinence to say *we*. The collective pronoun is to be distrusted. Only the voice of the self is authentic. This voice declares itself from a billion blogs, whole spider’s nests of self-affirmation: **ME! ME! ME!** It’s a world of free agents vainly attempting to establish themselves on the slender resumé of their own qualities. The twenty-first century is the culmination of two forms of individualism. In the first, individuals are all the same; in the second, they are all different. The first is classically bourgeois, the second distinctively bohemian.

But whether different or the same, in the twenty-first century its the same difference. Bourgeois individualism is now infused with bohemian flourishes.²² In the fifties Vali Myers stood out even in Saint Germain. In the seventies, when she gave the singer Patti Smith (b. 1946) her first tattoo, this might still have been gesture with a point to it. Now you can get your tattoos at the mall. Its romanticism for everybody, a little blood and pain included. The collapse of bourgeois and bohemian individualism into the warm embrace of the commodity is the defining style of the *middle class* sensibility of today's disintegrating spectacle.

There are also two kinds of collective belonging. In the first, we belong because we are the same; in the second, we belong because we are not.²³ The most insistent form of collective belonging in Paris after the war was the Communist Party, which was definitely of the first kind, a collective belonging that obliged of its members a certain unity and identity, as *proletarians*. Wrapping itself in the mantle of the Resistance, the Party exerted a certain gravity upon artists and intellectuals, even if they were not members. While directing a withering criticism at the surrealist old guard, like them Jean-Paul Sartre agonized over how to align himself with the Communists, who he still took to be the *representatives* of the working class.

Saint Germain offered its own alternatives to the collective belonging of the Communists – the collective belonging of the Letterist movement, led by the charismatic Romanian poet and film maker Isidore Isou (1925-2007). The rogue Surrealist George Bataille (1897-1962) once described him as a genius who lacked nothing except talent.²⁴ Sartre hated the Letterists almost as much as he hated Bataille: "Letterism is a substitute product, a flat and conscientious imitation of Dadaist exuberance. One's heart is no longer in it, one feels the application and haste to succeed."²⁵ Yet not the least merit of the Letterists is that they were one of the few groups who managed to stay outside of both bourgeois postwar French culture and its Stalinists alternative. They managed to make something enduring, by seizing control over their own self presentation. These were things for which Myers and her tribe lacked the where with all.

Romania gave the world Tristan Tzara, poet of Dada, and it gave the world Isidore Isou, prophet of Letterism, who first achieved fame in postwar Paris by publicly embarrassing poor old Tzara.²⁶ Notoriety led to the publication of two of Isou's books by the venerable if somewhat compromised house of Gallimard. Saint Germain was at the time the center of the French publishing world, so it made sense for a provincial gate-crasher like Isou to install himself in the cafes there, while finding a way to both scandalize and break into one of the quarter's few industries. Its other industry was cinema. It was no accident a young Simone Signoret chose to hang out there. Isou would tackle that one too, in his masterpiece, the *Treatise on Spit and Eternity* (1951).²⁷

When most people thought of the postwar years as a time of reconstruction, Isou wanted to push the destruction of culture still further. His trans-historical theory of culture took the will to create as its primary axiom. Not Marxist necessity, not Sartrean freedom, but creation is the highest form of human activity. Creation takes us from the spit of unconsciousness to the eternity of a consciously created history, for while the artist creates within history, the act of creation touches the eternal. All forms – aesthetic and social – move from a stage of *amplification* to one of *decomposition*. In the stage of amplification, a form grows to incorporate whole aspects of existence. The amplified form shapes life and makes it meaningful. In the period of decomposition, forms turn on themselves, become self referential. Forms fall from grace, and from history. As the form decomposes, so does the life to which it once gave shape. Form becomes unreal; language becomes tame: "Tarzan learns in his father's book to call tigers *cats*."²⁸

Isou applied this theory to all forms, from art to cinema, but poetry had a central place, for he was interested in both the history of poetry and the poetics of history. In modern French poetry, Victor Hugo (1802-1885) took the amplification stage as far as it could go. Its decomposition then advanced, stage by stage, through Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), and Tristan Tzara (1896-1963). Dada renders all existing forms worthless. Dada was conscious decomposition. Isou's self appointed task was to complete the reduction of the word to the letter, through a self-conscious

chiseling of poetry down to its bare elements. By creating a new alphabet, a new language would be possible, which would build back up, amplify, and retell the story of the world anew. Isou's mission was to gather disciples for an all out attack on spent forms, and the creation in their place of a fresh language.

Gabriel Pomerand's mother was deported to Auschwitz. He spent the war in Marseille, in the Resistance, but still found time to read the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud and the Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1890). He came to Paris after the war. In a soup kitchen for Romanian refugees, he met Isidore Isou. Pomerand quickly enlisted in the Letterists' shallow ranks. In the early postwar years he was a perpetual scandal in motion. He was a mainstay of the Letterist poetry readings at Le Tabou, and produced the first sustained work of *metagraphic* poetry, which synthesized image and word in a visual language. In it he presents a less flattering portrait of Saint Germain than Vian. Pomerand's *Saint Ghetto des Debts* (1950) is a *grimoire* of the quarter, a book for evoking its damned spirits.²⁹

Saint Germain is a ghetto, he says, its denizens all wear a yellow star. It is a "drowned drunk peacefully floating from one bridge to another." It is where American anarchist millionaires cross paths with those swells whose wealth is in castles built beneath the bridges of the river. There is no Saint Germain. "There are only spirits who survey the streets, from terrace to terrace, awaiting the occurrence of unique events," or for someone to pick up their tab. It is an "open air temple," a "bullet holed beauty spoiling in the sun." It is where language is pounded beyond recognition. "How sweet to subsist in a world that is falling apart." Saint Germain is a Letterist ground zero.

Pomerand compares Saint Germain to the imaginary city of Donogoo-Tonga, from a novel by Jules Romains (1885-1972), as a colonial outpost built for foreigners.³⁰ In Romains' novel, a geographer faces professional embarrassment, because a city he describes in the Brazilian jungle does not actually exist. So he enlists the help of an adventurer to create it. The adventurer finds some unscrupulous bankers, who provide the backing for the Donogoo Tonka company, which outfits an expedition to the jungle. The expedition thinks it is off to a prosperous city that already exists, when actually they will have to build it themselves. When they arrive they find that others

have already started work on building the city, drawn their by the publicity campaign of the Donagoo-Tonka company. In Saint German as in Donagoo Tonka: The place makes a spectacle of itself. It is where the spectacle pulls itself up again by its own bootstraps.

Pomerand and Isou were younger than Vian's notables, but half a decade older than Vali Myers. She ran with a younger crowd, some of whom were attracted to the Letterists, some of whom had their own ideas. There was Henry de Béarn (1931-1995), who tried to blow up the Eiffel tower. He lived in loft with Ivan Chtcheglov (1933-1998). The lights from the tower bothered them when they tried to sleep, so they plotted its destruction. There was Jean-Michel Mension, lucky not to be orphaned by the war. First they came for his father, the Communist militant. Then they came for his mother, both a Communist and a Jew. Like many who came to Saint Germain, Mension was drifting away from family, school, the law. But unlike some he had read his Sartre and Prévert. Like Pomerand before, Mension found his way to the poetry of Rimbaud and Lautréamont. After that self-education there was nothing for it but drink and mischief.

Mension (1934-2006), spent his eighteenth birthday on the street, drinking, and talking to Guy Debord (1931-1994). Unlike Mension, Myers and the tribe, Debord had a student allowance, so it was probably he who bought the wine (red for Mension, white for Debord). As Mension recalls it, "we would set the whole world to rights while polishing off a liter or perhaps two liters."³¹ While not paying attention to his courses, Debord studied Mension and others like him closely. Debord was a sort of street ethnographer, although his method was more intoxicant peregrination than participant observation. "He had a particular fascination with young people like me," Mension says. "He must have been searching in me for the kind of trigger that causes someone to snap one day and begin living without rules." Debord was researching a people who were neither bourgeois nor proletarian, nor bohemian, and decidedly not middle class.

A short text Mension wrote in the early fifties called 'General Strike' declares that "nothingness, perpetually sought, is simply, our life." Debord was in search, not of the organic intellectuals of the working class, but what one might call the alcoholic intellectuals of the non-working classes.

He had read his Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894-1961), whose coruscating prose was capable of dispelling most illusions, not least about the nobility of labor: "We're workers they say. Work, they call it! That's the crummiest part of the whole business."³² Mension's strike was not against work but against life, and while it strikes the right note of negativity, it does not quite rise to the level of a critique of delinquency, and this was the least of what Debord had in mind. There are plenty of celebrations of bohemia.³³ What is rare is to turn a critical theory of delinquency into a *delinquent critique*.

The first real statement of what would come to be a properly Situationist writing would come not from Mension but from Ivan Chtcheglov, his celebrated 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' (1953).³⁴ This is the text that pointed the way to the exit from the twentieth century as we know it. It's the key document of the Letterist International (1952-1957), the group Debord cofounded, to which Chtcheglov belonged, as a break-away from the older Letterists such as Isou and Pomerand.³⁵ It would contribute some key ideas and practices to the movement that did not yet bear the name: Situationist.

The Letterist International was a young people's affair. They discarded Isou's self-referential theories and personality cult. They took with them from Isou a certain practice of intellectual seduction and the ambition to chisel modern art down to nothing, to clear the ground for something else. The Letterist International dreamed big. They foresaw the end of the workhouse of modernist form. They discovered a new city via a calculated drifting (the *dérive*) through the old one. Theirs would be a city of play, love, adventure, made for making new passions, a city that might finally justify the conceit that this is a civilization worthy of its predecessors:

"Although their builders are gone, a few disturbing pyramids resist the efforts of travel agencies to render them banal."³⁶ They were the other side to the spectacle of bohemia, its delinquent side, its marginal side. They created out of this marginality a collective being, and rendered that collective being in a low theory specific to it, and as we shall see, in a distinctive kind of practice.

No More Temples of the Sun

“We are bored with the city, there is no longer any Temple of the Sun” declares Chtcheglov. It is unclear whether he means the Temple of the Sun in Beijing, the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan or the Pyramids of Egypt, but he was certainly none too fond of the Obelisk of the Place de la Concorde, either. Besides being fascinated by pyramids (both Egyptian and pre-Columbian), Georges Bataille also had a thing about this Obelisk, which had formerly graced the entrance to the Luxor Temple. Bataille called it a “petrified sunbeam.”³⁷ For Bataille, the Place de la Concorde was the locus from which to announce the death of God, “precisely because the Obelisk is its calmest negation.” The Obelisk stood for the military power of the pharaoh, the pyramid for his union with the eternity of the Gods. The removal of the Obelisk to Paris made the Place de la Concorde a sort of negative sacred site. It gave the finger to what was once the eternal heavens, a gesture to the lost union of earth and sky, the point around which the mundane tumult of the city orbited.

Before the war, Bataille had wanted to create a ritual around this site, to transform its meaning. The idea was to soak a skull in brine until it softened, place it at the base of the Obelisk and alert the press that the King’s skull had mysteriously returned.³⁸ This was the place, after all, where King Louis XVI was executed during the revolution – followed not long after by Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just and not a few others. Chtcheglov had no interest in that. In any case, the death of God had already been announced, and from the pulpit of Notre Dame no less, by a group of Letterists. During a quiet moment of the Easter High Mass in 1950, Michel Mourre (1928-1977) ascended the pulpit of Notre Dame dressed as a Dominican monk to read a sermon written by the Quarter identity and subsequent Letterist International founding member Serge Berna (b. 1925): “Verily I say unto you: God is dead.” The organist quickly pumped out a few chords to drown out the rest. Then all hell broke loose. Mourre and two others were arrested. Pomerand slipped out undetected.³⁹

All that was old hat to Chtcheglov. "For we are in the twentieth century, even if few people are aware of it." It was time to leave the old avant garde gags behind. The failure of the earthly city to renew itself was the problem, not the vanishing heavens. "Everyone wavers between the emotionally still-alive past and the already-dead future." Chtcheglov proposed a quite different approach to the space of the city to Bataille. The problem was to replace God's stabilizing presence with a new relation between the city and the cosmos. The solution was not to fix a place for a ritual sacrifice, but a new arrangement of movement.

Bataille's view of the city took as its starting point the sacred architecture at this centre, which he made the site from which to dethrone God. Chtcheglov's view of the city took as its reference point not its ancient and sacred form but its modern and seemingly rationalist one. His text is aimed squarely against the *radiant city* of Le Corbusier (1887-1965), which if it had its way would erase even more of the city than wartime bombing and replace it with cross-shaped tower blocks aligned along gun-barrel highways and vast open parks. For Chtcheglov, this was the wrong path along which to think the rebuilding of the city after the war. Not the rational city but the playful city, not the city of work but the city of adventure. Not the city that conquers nature, but the city that opens towards the flux and change of the universe.

Le Corbusier was the *bete noir* of the whole Situationist project, but it is worth pausing to consider what the thinking of Corbusier and Chtcheglov had in common. Corbusier wrote that "architecture, which is a thing of plastic emotion, should, in its domain, also begin at the beginning, and use elements capable of striking our senses, of satisfying our visual desires, and arrange them in such a way that the sight of them clearly affects us through finesse or brutality, tumult or serenity, indifference or interest."⁴⁰ This understanding of the city as a totality of sensory and emotional affects, this at least they share. The philosopher Jacques Rancière speaks of a "distribution of the sensible," which "reveals who can have a share in what is common."⁴¹ In these terms Corbusier and Chtcheglov are close, in that both imagine the whole space of the city as something everyone experiences aesthetically. Yet here the Letterist International is already

pushing against the limits of Corbusier's program. Architecture might be for the people, but it is decidedly not of them or by them.

New forms are needed to express a new ruling order. Corbusier's architecture is addressed to power, which does not quite realize the new kinds of forms it needs. The bourgeois at home seem "sheepish and diminished, like tigers in a cage; one sensed clearly that they were happier at the factory or their bank."⁴² The forms he offers them, patterned after bomber planes as much as ancient temples, connect modern technology to a spiritual order. Architecture signals the "trace of an indefinable absolute persisting at the core of our being" and "a unifying management in the universe."⁴³ If for Bataille the temple of Luxor was a sacrifice to an absent God, an impossible order, for Corbusier the harmony of heaven and earth could be reconstituted, but through modern version of Luxor's ancient geometric form, shorn of all ornamental excrescence. Corbusier imposes the geometry of the temple onto the entire space of the city.

For Chtcheglov, Corbusier's city was not modern, it was already out of date. It was a product of a retrograde culture, lagging behind science. The physical world is no longer understood as an orderly geometry, but culture has yet to catch up. The purpose of technology is not to make a city purified of complexity, a Platonic form gleaming in the sun. Spirit is earthy, not heavenly; spirit is movement, not an ideal. Chtcheglov's sources for this way of imagining this city were twofold. One source was a certain strain of art and literature that proposed fantastic landscapes, such as the painters Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) and Claude Lorrain (c1600-1682) in which could be glimpsed a new conception of space and time.⁴⁴ The literature Chtcheglov draws on includes Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859), the Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) story 'The Domain of Arnheim' and most interestingly a Russian children's book by Lev Kassil (1905-1970).

Chtcheglov's Ukrainian father had been exiled from Russia for his political activities, and had been involved in a taxi driver's strike in Paris, but it was probably his mother who introduced him to Kassil. While Kassil had started out as an avant garde writer in the orbit of the great futurist poet Vladimir Maykovsky (1893-1930), he survived the brutal years of the Stalinist era,

like more than a few others, by writing children's books. In *The Black Book and Schwambrania*, two brothers find a novel way to escape from the discipline of family and school: "There was no need to run away, to search for a promised land. It was here, somewhere very close at hand. We had only to invent it." This world they call Schwambrania: "Our world was a bay jam-packed with boats. Life was an endless journey, and each given day was a new voyage. It was quite natural, therefore, that every Schwanbranian was a sailor."⁴⁵

Adventure is at hand. It does not require Rimbaud's "derangement of the senses," but rather, an *arrangement* of the senses. There is nothing exotic about it. It does not require a Surrealist expedition to foreign lands.⁴⁶ What James Clifford calls a Surrealist ethnography still relies on a notional other, an exoteric to contrast to the esoteric, however much it might trouble or surprise accepted notions of which is which. A Situationist ethnography has its own distinct methods. It emerges out of Debord's close study of Saint Germain delinquents. It adopts their habits, their *ethnos*, and turns it into method. The Letterist International were ethnographers of their own difference, cartographers of a whole way of life. This way of life was not outside the modern, western one, but inside, in the fissures of its cities. It did not point to a *primitive* way of life from before history, but rather one that was to come after it. In the life of the Saint Germain delinquents' *tribe* could be found particles of the future, not the past, and not from some colonial Donogoo Tonka, but from the very epicenter of what history had wrought: the colonization of everyday life at the heart of the empire.

Chtcheglov's other source was not previous art or writing, but a certain kind of practice, what he and his friends would call the *dérive*. It's a curious word. A note in the Letterist International's journal *Potlatch* gives some of its resonances.⁴⁷ Its Latin root means to draw off a stream, to divert a flow. Its English descendants include not only the word derive but also river. Its whole field of meaning is aquatic, conjuring up flows, channels, eddies, currents, and also drifting, sailing or tacking against the flow. It suggests a space and time of liquid movement, sometimes predictable but sometimes turbulent. The word *dérive* condenses a whole attitude to life, the sort one might acquire in the backwaters of Saint Germain des prés.

"Note: a certain Saint Germain des Pres, about which no one has yet written, has been the first group functioning on a historical scale within this ethic of drifting."⁴⁸ It is the *dérive*, writes Michèle Bernstein, "from which we expect to draw educationally conclusive results."⁴⁹ Bored with her university studies and her bourgeois background, Bernstein (b. 1932) started hanging around the Quarter in 1952 and found herself in the company of the Letterist International. She was the one who, on a rented machine, typed up the articles for *Potlatch*, which mixed news snippets, in-jokes, theoretical texts and notes on the *dérive*.⁵⁰

"'Alienation' – I know it is there whenever I sing a love song or recite a poem, whenever I handle a banknote or enter a shop, whenever I glance at a poster or read a newspaper. At the very moment the human is defined as 'having possessions', I know it is there, dispossessing the human."⁵¹ Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) introduced many French readers to Marx, but to a Marx not quite containable by party orthodoxy. When Lefebvre published his *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947) he was a member of the party, but – and one can't resist the gesture – he was increasingly alienated from it. The party was an imitation, thing apart, not an expression of proletarian power. Lefebvre's critique of the abstract and mystified disaffections of the Surrealists with everyday life nevertheless implied another critique, of the limits of official Marxist orthodoxy. What he did not yet have was a practice that could produce a knowledge of the relation between the dispossession of the worker of the product of his labor during the working day and the encounter with these same products as potential possessions in the hours of leisure.

Capital is what makes the modern city. The *dérive* restored to space and time dimensions of experience that were obscured by what capital had made of them. Capitalism divides time into work time and leisure time. It further divides work time up into equivalent units – workers are usually paid by the hour – and tries to make each unit as productive as possible. Leisure time is free from work but ends up being used more and more for consumption. The worker is paid to work in the factory and pays to spend free time consuming factory made products. Such is the standard Marxist view of time. It corresponds to a certain experience of space. There is work

space, leisure space, resting space. The worker works in one space, spends free time in another, and then schleps home to sleep in a third.

A graffiti slogan proposed in *Potlatch* for the dormitory suburbs around the factories:

“Remember, you are sleeping for the boss!”⁵² Unlike the Surrealists, The Letterist International put little faith in the dream world. They stayed awake nights. They implicitly accepted the denunciation of the futility of Surrealist gestures mounted from such otherwise incompatible sources as Sartre, Isou and Lefebvre. Rumney: “it was an exquisite corpse that was beginning to give off a bad smell.”⁵³ Their chosen terrain was not the dream, but rather a lucid practice outside of and against work and leisure. Debord’s attack on latterday Surrealists was called ‘The Big Sleep and its Clients’ (1955) which neatly connects the title of a Hollywood movie, the most palpable channel of unconscious desires in postwar France, with the ageing Surrealist champions of radical desire.⁵⁴

Patrick Straram (1934-1988) arrived in Saint Germain in 1950, but left for Canada in 1958 to avoid national service. In that brief time he hung out in the jazz cellars, drank with the tribe, signed texts by the Letterist International and wrote a novel about it. *The Bottle Reclines* (1953) describes *dérives* with characters like Debord and Chtcheglov in a style somewhere between the Surrealists and the Beats: “The wine went to his head. Rambler well led despite himself in a labyrinth of colors and shadowy forms, incapable of assimilating them, distorted interpretation, according to a deformed optic, and however shockingly accurate.”⁵⁵

The *dérive*, with Straram, is a groggy and disorienting affair, continued from night to day: “It was already dirty and bluish whiteness, something lazily mechanic, the chloroformed ambiance of sprawled out rays of a staggering, sleepy sunrise. A nearly medical beam of scraped sun on the heavy walls of unhealthy sleepwalking, perpetual surveillance of the city, clinical guards/prisoners. The battle picked up from the point where it was brutally interrupted yesterday, from the heap of bricks and fire, automatic incubator, and from the perverse perforation, certain, of light. The ultimate everyday renaissance.”⁵⁶ Straram never quite finished

his novel. Perhaps the novel is not quite the ideal form for writing about the *dérive*. Rather than turn it into literature, perhaps it could be a practice that lead to quite another project.

While a critical theory of commodified experience of time and space would become a commonplace in the postwar years, Chtcheglov, Debord, Bernstein, Straram and friends were one of the few groups to imagine a *critical practice*. The *dérive* cuts across the division of the space of the city into work, rest and leisure zones. By wandering about in the space of the city according to their own sense of time, those undertaking a *dérive* find other uses for space besides the functional one. The time of the *dérive* is no longer divided between productive time and leisure time. It is a time that plays in between usefulness and uselessness. Leisure time is often called *free time*, but it is free only in the negative, free from work. But what would it mean to construct a positive freedom within time? That is the challenge of the *dérive*. The break-away Letterist International created a new practice, a new way of being in the world, out of which to derive a new kind of thought.

Strikingly, both capital and labor accept the division between work time and leisure time. Capital extends or intensifies the working day; labor struggles to shorten it, and within in to resist speed-ups and other attempts by capital to extract more value from it. Perhaps it is this shared fixation on productive time that will draw both capital and labor toward the middle class cultural norm.⁵⁷ While they are at odds as to its use, both take for granted a certain functional concept of time, and a certain acquisitive and accumulating approach to everyday life that comes with it. The Letterist International sought a quite different concept of time, resolutely based on non-work. Here it connects to what Debord would later consider his first major intervention – a simple three word graffiti that translates as “Never work!”⁵⁸ Rather than reduce the working hour, avoid it as much as possible. But if there is no work, then there is no leisure either. It is rather like Nietzsche’s annunciation of the death of God, which in also the death of a certain understanding of Man, as God and Man form a conceptual couple, the one made in the other’s image.⁵⁹ Debord’s “Never work!” frees time from its binary form of work time and leisure time.

The *dérive* then becomes the practice of lived time, time not divided and accorded a function in advance, a time inhabited neither by workers nor consumers. Chtcheglov's text announces some forthcoming books, including one his friend Henry de Béarn which provisionally names the people of the *dérive* and their passion: *The New Nomadism*. This book would never be written, or at least not by de Béarn. In the seventies, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) would get together with the psychiatrist and activist Felix Guattari (1930-1992) to write *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), and its sequel, *A Thousand Plateaux* (1980), which among other things would propose a *nomad thought*.⁶⁰ They start with a burlesque of psychoanalysis and expand it into a whole world view based on the productive powers of desire. As they write: "A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on that analyst's couch."⁶¹ By the time they wrote this much of what had once been critical thought had laid its weary head on the analyst's couch – depressed, anxious, irritable, neurotic. Obsessed with old wounds. Unable to forget. Unable to get up. At its melancholy end.

Deleuze and Guattari's exemplary walkers were literary characters, but it turns out Chtcheglov was that schizophrenic out for a walk, and he already had a theory of his own nomadism. Years before Deleuze and Guattari, he already saw the *dérive* as a kind of analysis. "The *dérive* is certainly a technique, almost a therapeutic one." Unlike psychoanalysis, it did not sever language from the continuum of practices in which it is embedded. "The *dérive* (with its flow of acts, its gestures, its promenades, its encounters) was to the totality exactly what psychoanalysis (in the best sense) is to language," Chtcheglov writes. The Letterist International refuse the separation of urban space from urban culture, each assigned to their own specialists. They refuse the separation of the external, social space of the city from the internal, private space of subjectivity. The subjective belongs to the city and can be analyzed experimentally, just as much as the city is subjective and can be reconstructed to expand with our desires.

The *dérive* is an intervention against town planning as much as against psychoanalysis. Debord mentions the Chicago School urban sociology of Ernest Burgess (1886-1966) and Robert Park (1864-1944).⁶² The city of the Chicago school is a rather more mundane one, arranged in

concentric zones, like the rings of Saturn, orbiting what they christened a *central business district*. (A notion that would have horrified Bataille). The qualities of the zones are determined by the price of land within them, which is a function of their distance from the center. Their city was a complex beast, always in process, with its own rhythms and life cycle, but in this conception somewhat lacking in a qualitative dimension. What Chtcheglov and Debord add to this is a certain turbulence. The city also has subjective qualities which are nevertheless interpersonal. Debord: “from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.” The *dérive* discovers these contours.

The Surrealists brought psychoanalysis to the streets, but it was only a detour, on the way back to literature.⁶³ The Letterist International invent a new kind of knowledge, a street ethnography, whose primary method is the *dérive*. What the *dérive* discovers is *psychogeography*: the lineaments of subjective space. In place of the chance encounters of the Surrealists, they create a practice of play and strategy which invents a way of being, outside of commodified time, and outside of the separate disciplines of knowledge. Henceforth the city will be a site not for field work but a playing field, in which to discover intimations of a space and time without the division of labor. The goal was nothing less than to invent a new civilization which would make a mark in historical time with the grandeur of the Temple of the Sun.

The civilization of play had already left some traces. Even little Saint Germain – a few mere city blocks – made its mark. The artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005) will feature in our story a bit later, but he had a rather different experience of the place to either Vian’s bohemians, Vali’s tribe or Chtcheglov’s renegade Letterists, for he was there with his little boy: “The Parisians are not so nice, that is why they paint abstracts, and that is also why they slam the door when, with Victor holding my hand, I ask for a room. Yes, everything is abstract here...” – even compassion. And yet writing about it later Constant could not but agree with Chtcheglov: “The atmosphere of this bourgeois quarter of Paris was so profoundly altered by a small group of intellectuals, the so-called existentialists, that it acquired international fame and even became a tourist attraction.”⁶⁴

The model, in negative, for a city of play is Las Vegas. A city in the desert, with no harbor, no river, which since 1931 was dedicated – if not consecrated – to wasting time. To Chtcheglov, the ideal setting for a new avant garde was not the metropolis of commerce or industry, but *tourism*. Las Vegas would eventually sprout its own pyramid, and take on all the pretensions to immortality that to Bataille already seemed ridiculous, and are perhaps even more so in the twenty-first century. In 2003 the United States government issued a warning that if nothing was done, Las Vegas would no longer have enough water by 2025.⁶⁵ As much as it fascinated Chtcheglov, Las Vegas was not the prototype of the Situationist city.

In the jungle is a city that moves. When it's inhabitants build new districts it is always to the west. Each time they cut the ribbon opening a new district, an old one to the east is abandoned. Gradually it disappears beneath the overgrowth of tropical vegetation. This is more like it! The moving city would burst the bubble of the *sustainable* city, the fantasy that the city can become one with its environment, a pure homeostasis, outside of history.⁶⁶ It would lay bare the process by which the city transforms nature into second nature, in the process making nature appear as a resource for the city's consumption. And besides, the ruins left behind in the east would be perfect terrain for the *dérive*. Why can such a city not exist? The conceit of private property is that it is something fixed, eternal. Once it comes into existence it remains, passed in an unbroken chain of title from one owner to the next. Yet in the course of time whole cities really do disappear. We live among the ruins. We later cities know we are mortal. And yet in the name of property we would hold back the very sea.

The village of Siasconset sits atop a bluff on the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts, a prize location for those of means, except for one thing. Erosion, like Marx's old mole, is burrowing away underneath, threatening to topple the palaces perched above.⁶⁷ So twenty or so owners of such mansions joined together to form a Beach Preservation Fund, which intends to spend at least \$25 million of its own money to dredge 2.6 million cubic yards of sand from a site offshore and pump it onto the beach below the cliff. "They realize that the sand will inevitably wash

away, so they are prepared to do much of the work all over again, perhaps as often as every five years." There seems now more merit than ever in the proposal for a city in the jungle, a city that records its own consumption of the terrain. Chtcheglov's intuition of the opening of the city to the temporality of the cosmos was perhaps more profound than even he knew. Even the great city of Teotihuacan failed to stop time. "Today much of the city is buried under five towns, one of Mexico's largest military bases, numerous farms, commercial centers and a string of highways."⁶⁸

What the Letterist International intended was not a new kind of urban planning, but a critique of it. "We need to flood the market – even if only for the moment the intellectual market – with a mass of desires whose fulfillment is not beyond humanity's present means of action on the material world, but only beyond the capacity of the old social organization."⁶⁹ They had the old Marxist faith that the development of the force of production, the machinery of industrial capitalism, would produce the means to free us from necessity. Yet as early as 1953 they realized that capital could not go on treating all of space and time as resources for its own quantitative expansion. They had lived through the war as children and knew, at least second hand, of the enormous destructive power of modern technology. Why could that power not be used to build a different kind of civilization in the ruins? In the twenty-first century we live more and more with the consequences of the failure to make just such a qualitative break.

It may well seem that the moving city is impractical, impossible. But is it any less impossible than holding back the sea? Is it any less impossible than building garden suburbs in the Nevada desert? The Letterist International discovered the power of a kind of *negative action*. They show what cannot be done within the limits of actually existing capitalism. As Debord writes: "The greatest difficulty in any such undertaking is to convey through these apparently extravagant proposals a sufficient degree of serious seduction."⁷⁰ As with any seduction, a kind of strategic game is in play, the key move in which is to act as if the new desire already exists. What will emerge out of *dérive*, as practiced by the young Letterists, is a quite different concept of space and time, which, like the *dérive*, would be outside of property. It may only exist in a few

interstitial moments out and about in Saint Germain des pres, but those few moments marked the exit to the twentieth century.

Having failed to take that exit, now we are trapped on an expressway that seems to keep going until the end of the world. There could be worse plans than turning back, to look for the last exit, for which the Letterist International thought it saw the signs. Actually, the Letterist International scouted at least two exits. One exit points to a small scale, local and temporary situation, discovered via the *dérive*. Another exit points to a larger scale, a longer duration, perhaps to history itself, but grasped by its most tenuous emanations – language, images, the sign.

The Torrent of History

The Marquis de Vauvenargues (1715-1747) once wrote that “old discoveries belong less to their original inventors than to those who put them to use.” So it is with some justice that lines lifted from the soldier-aphorist should show up, with some slight but key corrections, in the *Poesies* (1870) of Isidore Ducasse, the self-styled Comte de Lautréamont. The purpose of the *Poesies*, he wrote, is to take the most beautiful poetry and “correct it in the direction of hope.” For instance Vauvanagues’ maxim “one can be just, if one is human” becomes “one can be just, if one is not human.” In a celebrated passage, Lautréamont expands on his distinctive poetics: “Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It closely grasps an author’s sentence, uses his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with the right one. To be well made, a maxim does not call for correction. It calls for development.” It’s a passage which is often taken as saying something about poetics, less often as saying something about history. Lautréamont corrects, not back to a lost purity or some ideal form, but forward – to a new possibility.

Lautréamont’s better know work is *The Song of Maldoror* (1869), a giddy fringe-romantic epic, which includes the murder of children and sex with a shark. A drunk God presides from a throne of gold and shit. The works of Man don’t amount to much either. The pyramids of Egypt are “those anthills reared by stupidity and slavery.” It was a Surrealist favorite. In a famous line, set to become a cliché, Lautréamont formed the Surrealist aesthetic, and so many years in advance: “As beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella.”

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In the early 50s something of a scandal ensued when it turned out that Lautréamont had lifted some of *Maldoror*’s most thrillingly poetic passages from natural history text books. The method announced in the *Poesies* had already been practiced in *Maldoror*. Some, like the literary critic Maurice Saillet (1914-1999) felt the need to defend Lautréamont.⁷² Saillet was one of the founders of the self-styled College of ‘Pataphysics. He was a noted scholar of the works of Alfred Jarry

(1873-1907), to whose memory the College was consecrated. Started in 1948, the College was a playful, armchair version of the avant garde impulse. Some of instigators had day jobs. Others, like Jacques Prévert, Raymond Queneau or Boris Vian were well known writers. While Saillet could defend Lautréamont in the spirit of linguistic play, the Letterist International credited him with the discovering of a more far-reaching method. Their name for it is *détournement*, as in to detour, to hijack, to seduce, to appropriate. And it was no joke. The task was to systematize it and – more to the point – practice it.

If there was a precedent in avant garde poetics for *détournement*, it came not from the Paris Surrealists around André Breton (1896-1966) or even the dissidents around Georges Bataille (1897-1962), but from their Belgian contemporary Paul Nougé (1895-1967). It was Nougé who saw in Lautréamont not a prophet of excess but the inventor of a method. There is, he says, “a certain inclination common to a few minds which leads them to find the elements of creation as close as possible to the object to be created; to the extent that the thing to be desired would come into being by the introduction of a single comma in a page of writing; of a picture, complex in its execution, by the animation of a single stroke of black ink.”⁷³ The texts Nougé corrected ranged from a Baudelaire poem to porn. Some were originally published in *Les Lèvres Nues*, a magazine edited by his friend Marcel Mariën (1920-1993), as was the text that gave this method its name: ‘A User’s Guide to *Détournement*’ by Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman.

Gil Wolman (1929-1995) was not entirely of the Saint Germain tribe. He had a home to go to – and often took others home to crash there. He lived with his mother. His father, deported during the war, never returned.⁷⁴ Unlike Debord he had a real gift for Letterist poetry. Where Isou chiseled it down to the letter, Wolman pushed on, to a poetry of pure sounds, and on again, to a performance art of the diaphragm, of the epiglottis, of corporeality itself. He also pushed Letterist cinema past Isou’s comfort zone. Isou’s film *Treatise on Slime and Eternity* contained stock footage, scratched images, discrepancies between image and sound. Wolman’s *Anti-Concept* (1950) contained no images at all. Unlike Isou’s macho posturing, the voice-over of Wolman’s film evokes in gentle and sensuous terms the experience of wandering the streets and making love

where one can: "in the rain we kiss in the parks I caress you through your dress our muscles tense on the grass..."⁷⁵

Debord and Wolman both pushed Letterism against itself. "Negation is the transitional term to a new period," as Wolman had written in the preface to *The Anti-Concept*. "Negation of the intrinsic, immutable, pre-existing concept, projects this concept outside of matter, reveals it after the fact to an extrinsic reaction, becomes mutable by as many reactions." Which could be a somewhat abstract way of formulating Isou's theory of the poetry of history and the history of poetry, which was a key point of reference for both Debord and Wolman. For a moment in the mid 50s, Wolman and Debord's projects flowed together, but the smallest differences would end up pushing them apart. For the moment they were comrades in a civil war against a culture intent on settling for some warmed-up left-overs, banalities such as abstract painting, Beat writing, or existential philosophy, as if these would do to fill the void opened up by the war itself.

In 'Why Letterism?' (1955) Debord and Wolman characterize the first decade after the war as a time of generalized failure to effect change, to retreat into merely *formal elaboration*. "One knows, moreover, to what laborious phenomenological refinements professors devote themselves, who otherwise do not dance in cellars."⁷⁶ Art and thought appear as a dismal mess – although a profitable one. "On a spiritual level, the middle class are always in power." It matters little whether the work takes the form of the bourgeois novel, socialist realist art, the literature of commitment, or the (pseudo) avant garde, each is just a tactic for restoring middle class sensibility. "It is necessary to finish with this spirit." This is why there was nothing for it but to join the Letterists, who at least unleashed a potentially fatal *inflation* in the arts, with their reduction of all its forms to the elementary particles of the letter. But the Letterists got caught up in their own fame. Isidore Isou and his factotum Maurice Lemaître (b. 1926) happily appear in a light entertainment called *Around the World with Orson Welles*. They don't notice Welles' sly glance toward the camera, in which he makes the viewer at home complicit in silent ridicule.⁷⁷

Letterism at least pushed formalism to the limit, where it collapsed of its own accord. It was proof of the relative independence of formal development within the arts from social and economic determination. In 'Why Letterism?' Debord and Wolman steer between the purely formal theory of art of Isou and Marxist determinism. Art has a relative autonomy, its forms develop in their own time, partly coinciding with a wider historical process and partly not. Isou's theory of the formal development of art is linear and autonomous. For Debord and Wolman, development might require going back in order to go forward. For instance, the Precocity movement of the 17th century might now reveal itself as a great precursor, a critique in advance of capital's separation of living space from work space according to function. Despite the slanders of Molière (1622-1673), Precocity's devotion to strolling, to conversation, its ideas about décor and architecture, are a resource for the construction of a whole new way of life.⁷⁸

"We write so that our works – which are practically nonexistent – remain in history." This is the hint, in 'Why Letterism?' of the significance of *detournement*, which Debord and Wolman only begin to grasp later in 'Detournement: A User's Guide.' The originality of the Letterist International consists in understanding form not as literary form, as genre, style, poetics and so forth, but as material form, as the book, the film, the canvas. Materiality is the key to the lag by which past culture shapes present culture. If this effect in the architectural domain are mostly negative, there might be some hope in the lag effect of certain texts. But for past works to become resources for the present requires their use in the present in a quite particular way. It requires their appropriation as a collective inheritance, not as private property. All culture is *derivative*.

Rather than chiseling language down to its bare elements, Debord and Wolman propose something else. Not the destruction of the sign, but rather destruction of the *ownership* of the sign. "It is necessary to eliminate all remnants of the notion of personal property in this area." Detournement offers "an ease of production far surpassing in quantity, variety and quality the automatic writing that has bored us for so long." The Surrealist appropriation of Lautréamont's *Poesies* took up his cry that "poetry should be made by all" and read it through *Maldoror* as a poetry that bypassed the conscious intention of the individual poet in the interests of the

collective imagination. The Letterist International's version of a poetry made by all meant two quite different things.

One was that it should be made by and for all the senses at once. Thus the *dérive* as method would create psychogeography as a knowledge, via which to design whole new poetic ambiances – the *unitary urbanism* anticipated by Chtcheglov. The other sense of a poetry made by all is a poetry made by the communal appropriation of the past in the present: “clashing head on with all social and legal conventions,” *detournement* “cannot fail to be a powerful cultural weapon in the service of the real class struggle. The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through the Chinese walls of understanding. It is the real means of proletarian artistic education, the first step towards a literary communism.” The text is true to itself. Debord and Wolman took more than a few lines from Saillet's defense of Lautréamont, and corrected, or rather, *developed* them. Where Saillet spoke of a communism of genius, this becomes a literary communism. The term genius still clings a little to the romantic idea of the text as the product of an individual author's unique gift.

A more crucial *detournement* is from Marx and Engels' famous 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' (1848): “The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.”⁷⁹

The inflation introduced by *detournement*, even more than that of Letterism, is the development that undermines bourgeois culture in turn. Capital produces a culture in its own image, a culture of the work as private property, the author as proprietor of one's own soul. *Detournement* sifts through the material remnants of past and present culture for materials whose untimeliness can

be utilized against bourgeois culture. But rather than further elaborate modern poetics, détournement exploits it. The aim is the destruction of all forms of middle class cultural shop-keeping. As capital spreads outwards, making the world over in its image, at home it finds its own image turns against it.

It's easy to miss the significance of this claim, buried as it is in a text that spends quite a bit of time on the poetics of détournement. Debord and Wolman discuss a metagraphic composition by Debord, a memorial for Kaki, and talk about the way classified ads about bars for sale contribute to the affect of a remembrance for a suicide. 'Detournement: A User's Guide' could be reduced, in other words, to a somewhat limited and clinical statement about *intertextuality*. Tom McDonough: "To carry class conflict into the realm of language, to insist upon the central place that realm occupied in the collective construction of the world to be made, to announce the arrival of a 'literary' communism' – these were the inseparable aims of Situationist détournement."⁸⁰ Quite, but it is all too easy to elide the significance of literary communism, which is not merely something added to modernist poetics. It is its undoing. It brings class struggle both in to and out of language.

Détournement is merely a means to an end. Literary communism is a precursor to architectural communism, to the détournement of built form and the ambiances it can generate. A poetry made by all, and a poetry made for all the senses come together in a proposal for the "exact reconstruction in one city of an entire neighborhood of another." An idea which, bizarrely, almost happened, if not entirely as Debord and Wolman intended. In 2008, Dubai businessman Saeed al-Gandhi signed a £350m agreement with the French city of Lyons to build a replica of it in Dubai. "He fell in love with Lyons while strolling along the river-bank," according to José Noya, a Lyons bureaucrat. "He wants to recreate Lyons's soul." The idea sprang from a plan to build a university in Dubai in partnership with the University of Lyons that would rival Abu Dhabi's version of the Louvre. This second Lyons would cover an area of about 700 acres, about the size of the Latin Quarter of Paris. The reproduction would not include Lyons' sub-Corbusian tower blocks.⁸¹

Detournement is the opposite of quotation. Like detournement, quotation brings the past into the present, but it does so entirely within a regime of the proper use of proper names. The key to detournement is its challenge to private property. Detournement attacks a kind of fetishism, where the products of collective human labor in the cultural realm can become a mere individual's property. But what is distinctive about this fetishism is that it does not rest directly on the status of the thing as a commodity. It is, rather, a fetishism of *memory*. It is not so much commodity fetishism as co-memory fetishism. In place of collective remembrance is the fetish of the proper name. Detournement restores to the fragment the status of being a recognizable part of the process of the collective production of meaning in the present, through its combination into a new meaningful ensemble.

Key to any practice of detournement is identifying the fragments upon which it might work. There is no necessary size or shape to an element to be detourned. It could be a single image, a film sequence of any length, a word, a phrase, a whole paragraph. What matters is the identification of the superior fidelity of the element to the ensemble within which it finds itself. Detournement is in all cases a reciprocal devaluing and revaluing of the element within the development of a unifying meaning. Detournement is the fluid language of anti-ideology, but ideology has absolutely nothing to do with any particular arrangement of signs or images. It has to do with ownership.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) undermines the romantic theory of authorship by speaking of *discourse* as a distribution of author functions.⁸² For Foucault, a statement is authorized by a particular form of discourse, a regime of truth, a procedure for assigning truth-value to statements. Its not hard to see why this captivated the minds of academics. It made the procedures in which academics are obsessively drilled the very form of power itself. It is as if that by which academics are made, the shaping of their bodies to desks and texts, that about which they know the most, even more than they know their allotted fields, was the very fiber of power. Reading Foucault is like coaching, a master class on how the game of scholarship is to be played,

and with the reliable alibi that this knowledge of power, of knowledge as power, is to be used in the interests of *resistance*, to something or other. Detournement, on the other hand, turns the tables, upends the game.

The device of détournement restores all the subversive qualities to past critical judgments that have congealed into respectable truths. Detournement makes for a type of communication aware of its inability to enshrine any inherent and definitive certainty. This language is inaccessible in the highest degree to confirmation by any earlier or supra-critical reference point. On the contrary, its internal coherence and its adequacy in respect of the practically possible are what validate the symbolic remnants that it restores. Détournement founds its cause on nothing but its own practice as critique at work in the present. Détournement creates anti-statements. For the Situationists, the very act of *unauthorised* appropriation is the truth content of détournement.

It goes without saying that the best lines in this chapter are plagiarized. Or rather, they are detourned. (It hardly counts as plagiarism if this text itself gives notice of its own offense – does it?) Moreover many of these detourned phrases have been corrected, developed as Lautréamont would say. Plagiarism upholds private property in thought by trying to hide its *thefts*.

Détournement treats all of culture as common property to begin with, and openly announces its rights. Moreover, it treats it not as a *creative commons*, not as the *wealth of networks*, not as *free culture* or *remix culture*; but as an active place of challenge, agency, strategy and conflict.⁸³

Détournement dissolves the rituals of knowledge in an active remembering that calls collective being into existence.

Not surprisingly, official discourse has a hard time with it. The decline in critical theory in the post-war years is directly correlated to the refusal to confront detournement as the most consistent approach to a knowledge made by all. The meandering stream that runs from the Letterist International to the Situationist International and beyond is the course not taken, and remain a troubling memory for critical thought. The path not taken poses the difficult question:

what if one challenged the organization of knowledge itself? What if, rather than knowledge as a representation of another life, it was that other life?

Meanwhile, detournement has become a social movement, outside of official discourse, in all but name. Here the Situationists and their Letterist International precursors stand as a prophetic pointing of the way towards a struggle for the collective re-appropriation and modification of cultural material. One that need only become conscious of itself to re-imagine the space of knowledge outside of private property. Every kid with a bitorrent client is an unconscious Situationist in the making. What remains is the task of closing the gap between a critical theory gone astray, still caught up in the model of knowledge as property, and a popular movement that cannot quite develop its own consciousness of its own power. As Wolman wrote in his preface to *The Anticoncept*, “there is no negation that does not affirm itself elsewhere.” There might be a link between so-called plagiarism and progress after all.

At stake is the viability of history itself. Officially, history is a spiritless chronicle of events, one damned thing after another. It is so unsatisfying that apocalyptic thinking about time has made a big comeback. To some it seems more plausible that they will shake hands with Jesus than that they could have a hand in their own destiny. But there is official history and there are other histories, including a history of the desire, not to end history but to partake of it. Greil Marcus: “The desire begins with the demand to live not as an object but as a subject of history – to live as if something actually depended in one’s actions – and that desire opens onto a free street.”⁸⁴

The very idea of history as a process of collective self-making has itself been through a few historical stages.⁸⁵ First came Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) and his mechanical time, grinding on. Then came György Lukács (1885-1971) and his expressive time, history as totality, the parts reflecting the whole. Then came Louis Althusser (1918-1990) and structural time, differences meshing and permutating. Then, in desperation, some brought back from the dead Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and his messianic time, which recasts history from the perspective of its redemption.

As the twentieth century flopped from one catastrophe to the next, many gave up on history, but what looked to them like defeat was to others the napalm smell of victory. Sure, the Marxists had their history, which developed through its own internal laws of motion from feudalism to capitalism to socialism, but for Walt Rostow (1916-2003) the latter is just a wrong turn, the industrial state gone mad, the real terminus of historical action was American liberal capitalism. Or perhaps there was a stage to come, is what Daniel Bell (b. 1919) called the *post-industrial society*.⁸⁶ The computer will overcome all the alienating shortcomings of capital. Work itself will become playful and creative. Commodities will not be mass produced but custom made. Not socialism with a human face but capitalism with a smiley face.

The cold war was a clash of historical fictions, Marxist versus ant-Marxist. The outcome seemed far from certain. But with the memory of the Communist role in the Resistance fading, Moscow's grand narrative seemed less and less appealing. This left fellow traveling western artists and intellectuals with few choices. One was to attach themselves to another promised land. For Régis Debray (b. 1940) this was Cuba. For Louis Althusser this was China. The renewal of history would come via the third world's overthrow of imperialism. The revisionists left the destination of socialism intact, just changed its address and the route to get there. Another choice was to return to the past, to try to find the turning point where the narrative of history went wrong, and to become, if not the actual, then at least the spiritual inheritor of the October revolution. This was the choice of the Trotskyites. Another path was to abandon historical time altogether, as Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) did, and announce the postmodern as a time beyond all these versions of the grand narrative of history.⁸⁷

The Situationists will take another tack. They will not abandon historical thought, nor make their peace with one or other power as the representative of its destination. To them all the capitals of this world, from Washington to Moscow to Beijing are all capitals of the same spectacular society. This tiny band would set themselves against power in its totality. A futile project, perhaps, but powerful in its very futility, in casting the whole century in stark relief. Against the abandonment

of historical possibility on the left and the triumphant declaration that this is the best of all possible worlds on the right, its time to step back into the current. The other history, the historical practice left unexplored, restores causality but renders it fluid, complex, turbulent. But not for all that arbitrary or formless. History is no machine, no structure, nor does it call for the solace of a merely figurative redemption.

A scandal: historian Stephen E. Ambrose admits that many passages *The Wild Blue* (2002) were plagiarized. Ambrose's books on Custer and Nixon also turned out to contain a few choice sentences lifted from other works. More scandal: The historian Doris Kearns Goodwin admits that she borrowed passages in her book, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, from three previous works. Still more scandal: She then concedes that in 1987 her publisher, Simon & Schuster, paid to settle a legal claim by another author under a confidentiality agreement. She said she confused verbatim notes with her own words.⁸⁸ Take pity on our poor authors! Not even they can tell their own words from another's. They are caught between the monotonous consistency of official middle class historical narratives and the demand that the middle class author have a unique vision that is his or her personal property. No wonder they resort to copying each other and covering up the fact. Hypocrisy is the hush-money that vice pays to virtue.

By the mid-fifties, Guy Debord achieved some notoriety with his film *Howling for Sade* (1952), and drawn around himself the motley collection of drunks, drifters and geniuses known as the Letterist International. He painted its slogan by the banks of the river Seine: "Never work!" And did his best to live up to that injunction. He discovered that it implied another, and even harder discipline, the unwritten slogan: "Make no art!" In later life Debord would turn the milieu from which the Letterist International into a legendary counterpoint to the spectacle, perhaps even more central than the legend of May '68. In 1957 the Letterist world was more of a constraint on its own ambitions for upending the world. The Letterist International too had to die in the war of time. It was no longer adequate to its own discoveries.

The Letterist International passes on to the Situationist International the practice of a negative action, which lays bare the gap between everyday life in twentieth century capitalism, and what it leaves to be desired. What the Letterist International have going for them is the consistency of an everyday life lived as negation. What they do not have is either a depth of experience or the consistency of theoretical invention that might come with it. That will come from the encounter with Asger Jorn.

Extreme Aesthetics

Once upon a time there lived a beautiful dancer, whom some called Tintomara, but who went by many names, all pinched from novels and plays. Tintomara was very striking, and both men and women could hardly help but be captivated by her. Or by him, for Tintomara had both a male and a female aspect, like one of those eight-limbed beings of Aristophanes, who met all their own desires and lacked for nothing.⁸⁹ One day Tintomara the dancer was rehearsing with the ballet master a piece based on some primitivist fantasy or other. Dressed as a Native American *savage girl*, she was to be pinned to the floor by four of the chieftan's men, only to break free and turn away from her captors.

Only she did not just break and turn. "Like a rose that does not want to come into bloom, the savage girl had indeed gone noticeably outside the turn... A movement clearly due neither to forgetfulness nor ineptitude." Was this too part of the drama? "The savage girl's movements were so exquisite, so charming, that only quite exceptional art or simple nature, whilst transgressing the whole sense of the dance, could yet excite the ballet master in so strange a fashion that he, delighted to see it, was unable to intervene and hinder her from committing so gross a breach of the pantomime's design."⁹⁰

This fable comes from an extraordinary novel by Swedish writer Carl Jonas Love Almqvist (1793-1866). Regardless of whether Asger Jorn ever read *Tintomara*, he was fond of Almqvist and shared with him commitments to a distinctive Scandinavian cultural tradition, to a peculiar combination of mystic and materialist thought, and to a radical conception of aesthetics which could combine extremes of romanticism and realism. All are expressed in Tintomara's gesture. Neither male nor female, nature not culture, flesh nor spirit, form nor feeling, Tintomara is Almqvist's image of an undivided being which is yet not reducible to any form or essence. Tintomara's fate is not to be a happy one. In the end her lifeless body will be left to twist in the wind. But from Almqvist to Jorn there is a line of thought, of creation, of cultural action that tries to make a world fit for its Tintomaras.

Asger Jorn (1914–1973) is admired as an artist. The art historian and former Situationist T. J. Clark calls him “the greatest painter of the fifties.”⁹¹ He is less well known as a theorist, and certainly not often acknowledged as a key theorist of the Situationist International. It is possible to extract from Jorn’s texts a quite unique take on the Situationist project, one he was more entitled to claim as his own than most. Jorn the theorist is intimately connected, not just to his art, but also to his extraordinary life. In 1936 Jorn took off for Paris on a motorcycle. He joined the studio of Ferdinand Léger (1881-1955) and worked briefly for Le Corbusier. He spent the war years in Denmark, secretly printing the monthly Communist journal and working with the group Hellhorse, whose project fused leftist politics, modernist aesthetics and pan-Scandinavian culture. After the war he returned to Paris. He met Constant Nieuwenhuys at an exhibition of the Catalan surrealist Joan Miró (1893-1983). Jorn and Constant, together with Belgian surrealist poet Christian Dotremont (1922-1979) would be central figures in the Corba movement, which lasted from 1948 to 1951.⁹²

Dotremont and Jorn would end up in 1951 in a Danish sanitarium, recovering from tuberculosis. It was here that Jorn found time for an extensive reading of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), in volumes borrowed from a priest at the sanitarium who had the collected works with him. It was here that Jorn wrote *Luck and Chance*, the first of a series of strange, intense theoretical works, blueprints of a sort both for his art and more importantly for his continued attempts to create collaborative forms of action.

The Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus was Jorn’s next attempt. Started in Italy in 1954, it’s impetus was Jorn’s antipathy to the Swiss artist and designer Max Bill (1908-1994).⁹³ Like Jorn, a person of credible anti-fascist credentials, Bill was in charge of restarting the famous Bauhaus design school, which had been shut down by the Nazis. Jorn took exception to the relentlessly functionalist approach to design Bill advocated. With Imaginist Bauhaus Jorn wanted to begin again, or a broader footing, the experimental aesthetic practice begun with Cobra, and which he saw as an essential component of the Bauhaus legacy. It would merge with the Letterist

International into the Situationist International in 1957, in the process losing its most famous member, the noted designer Ettore Sottsass (1917-2007).⁹⁴

Jorn was seventeen years older than Debord, who he met in 1954. His intellectual, artistic and activist formation had come earlier. His politics came from arguments on the Scandinavian left. His practical abilities emerged in the cultural resistance to Nazi control of his native Denmark. His intellectual formation is a more complicated matter. Jorn developed an original and extensive aesthetic and political theory of art, abreast of, but outside, the established avant garde patterns of the time. If one wants to find the precursors to the Situationists, maybe it is not to be found at the Parisian epicenter but in the peripheries, in Isou's Romania, in Nougé's Belgium, and in the Denmark of Asger Jorn.

The suns around which Jorn's thought orbits are, as for so many others, Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx, although his path was more elliptical than most. The Marxist in Jorn expects capitalism to collapse, but not through class struggle so much as *ontological* struggle. Its inability to grasp its own nature condemns it. For Jorn, "the socialist way of life is the natural way of life"⁹⁵

Everything about Jorn's thought and actions can be read through this statement, including his critique, and eventual break, with Marxism. Class division is original sin, and the struggle, on the aesthetic, political and philosophical planes alike is to restore, not a lost unity but a lost process, an open, creative, play of differences in which collective human endeavor transforms nature without imitating it, but without dominating it either. Being is just like Tintomara's dance, where the turn becomes embellished, ornamented, shaped with and by desire.

Marxist aesthetics was still in thrall to the classical. Marx and Engels had not thought through the consequences of their own discoveries. Their idealized view of classical – particularly Greek – culture will have consequences for the whole of Marxist thought and practice. Here Jorn turns to Nietzsche, and his distinction in the *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) between an Apollonian aesthetic of form and the Dionysian aesthetic of process. Jorn views Apollo and Dionysus as a tension between the aristocratic and folk life. When the cultural representatives of the ruling classes make

war against serpents, dragons, sirens, they are at war with nature, including human nature, our species-being. At war, more precisely, with the Dionysian aspect of our species-being that the subordinate classes embody. Jorn: "it is precisely this distaste for the freedom and richness of life, its color and variation, which one calls *good taste*."⁹⁶ Expression, like Tintomara's turn, is for Jorn the key to a Dionysian aesthetics. The Apollonian version of classical culture represses creation, process, difference, and leads to a slavish reduction of flux to static and ideal forms, to representation rather than expression. This might apply as much to Greek vase painting as to Plato's eternal forms.

It is not so much that there is a conflict between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, but that they are two different ways of understanding and practicing conflict. For Jorn there are two kinds of *dialectic* – dualist and monist. The dualist dialectic is an external conflict between irreconcilable differences. The monist dialectic is a more subtle kind of movement. This is key to Jorn's critique of Marxism: "the defective concept of the whole determines the defective grasp of economic wholeness."⁹⁷ The Dionysian experiences antagonism in a quite particular way, as alternation, flux, turbulence, complexity, and Marxism has not quite internalized this. While Jorn still speaks in a Marxist vein of a dialectic, he reads the dialectic as flux. Creation emerges out of giving oneself over to the play of alternating and ramifying movement, out of which something new can arise organically. Strangely enough, he sees in Engels *Anti-Duhring* (1877) a critique of metaphysical thinking that can be extended to a critique of classical conception of form – and turned against itself.⁹⁸ Engel's dialectic is not quite as mechanical as it was often taken to be.

Here a space opens up for an *artistic materialism*. Parallel to the Marxist tradition runs an aesthetic one, from Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) to Joan Miró and the Bauhaus artist Paul Klee. Crucial to Jorn's reworking of Marxist thought is his radical revision of the locus and significance of the aesthetic. Art belongs to the infrastructure of society, not to the superstructure. Art is a fundamental kind of social production. Marxism breaks with classical tradition by assigning priority to action rather than contemplation, but its error is to consider art only as a form of contemplation. Art is also a key form of action.

Engels wrote that "...the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period."⁹⁹ Jorn would agree with this, but with the proviso that aesthetic practice is part of the economic structure, it not just one of the "other ideas" within the superstructure. The qualitative practice of art is as much part of the base of the capitalist social formation as its quantitative production process. The ontological failure of capital, its inability to perceive and produce its own reality, stems from the domination of the quantitative over the qualitative process.

Jorn breaks with the privileging of science that he finds particularly in Engels. Jorn distinguishes between what he calls a *worldview* and an *attitude to life*. Both, he insists, can be materialist, but they do not always go together. Science has a materialist world view, but often not a materialist attitude to life. It remains Apollonian. It sees matter as reducible to quantitative data which in turn measure abstract forms and yield eternal laws. The materialist attitude to life is precisely materialism which takes the qualitative transformation of matter into life as primary. "Artistic materialism presupposes a materialistic attitude to life, but in reality it does not presuppose a materialistic world view, whereas objective scientific analysis, when you look closely at it, must presuppose a materialistic world view but not necessarily a materialistic attitude to life..."¹⁰⁰ The limit for Jorn to *scientific* socialism is that it embraced a materialist world view, but not a materialist attitude to life. His artistic materialism proposes to fill this gap.

In 2009 Australian scientists discovered that bees will be much more enthusiastic about sources of food they have found, when given cocaine.¹⁰¹ The cocaine for these experiments was kept locked away by the university's ethics department, which brought only enough for each experiment, thus ensuring that no cocaine would be consumed by scientists, making them more enthusiastic than otherwise about their results. This surely would qualify as an instance of the materialist world view at work – scientific procedure, falsifiable results – without the materialist attitude to

life. Everything about it is to remain partitioned from the everyday, which continues in its routine form, free from any whiff of the experimental.

Aesthetic experiment is the necessary complement to scientific experiment, but it is not an imitation of science. While science extends knowledge and expands the materialist world view, art creates a way of life by shaping material characteristics according to desire. If science concerned itself with objective truth; art would search for subjective truth. "Rather an entangled and chaotic truth than a foursquare, beautiful, symmetrical and finely-chiseled lie."¹⁰² But crucially, Jorn sees subjectivity as non-individualistic. The art that matters is a subjective realism that extends beyond the individual and invokes a collective practice: "art, therefore, is not a representation, a mirror, of nature but a direct transformation of nature."¹⁰³ Art is experimental social practice which transforms nature into second nature, but without reducing nature to an essence or form.

Aesthetics is prior to ethics. Aesthetics is about desires; ethics about duty. The capacity that matters in art is that of stimulating actual desires. What is best in the aesthetic is not the *work of art* as a representation of phenomena. Rather, the aesthetic has the capacity to become a part of people's habits of life. The aesthetic is a *cultivating* factor, forming and transforming habits of life. As such, the aesthetic is prior to science, which extracts regularities from the aesthetic, but is dependent on a given stage in its development for its materials. The aesthetic is also prior to all the branches of philosophy. It is that within which philosophy is situated. It is that which philosophy begins to think.

Ruling class art – the Apollonian – represents the world as made in its own image, and assigns a subsidiary role in that representation for that which it fears. What it fears is the alignment of popular power with the forces of nature as open-ended process, as the capacity to overthrow form, including political form. Dionysian art is folk memory of the social capacity to merge the processes of nature and desire. This is what attracted Jorn to ritual and mysticism. Unlike Bataille he was not looking for traces of an ineffable absolute, but rather for a form of knowledge of the

capacities latent in the social apprehension of nature. Art is a particular kind of knowledge and practice of the possible: “the highest achievement in art must lie in an orchestration of all our senses together in a communal expression.”¹⁰⁴ This will become a core program of the Situationist International, at least in its early years.

Art is playful; play is social. Play may take nature as its object, but not as a means to an end: “play is not consciously directed to any goal but is a delight, an identification with things themselves. This is why play develops best in community.”¹⁰⁵ To paraphrase Lautréamont, art should be made by all. While Jorn aligns himself with the popular against ruling class art, he does so critically. In a famous exhibition of 1958 called *Modifications*, Jorn took amateur pictures he bought in the flea market and added to them, but without obscuring the figures and landscapes of the Sunday painters. While Jorn approved of the democratization of art, it fell short of its own power. “The art of naïve adults in our society represents nothing more than the clumsy attempt to master the current forms of classical art.”¹⁰⁶ The mistake lay in the imitation of existing forms, which tended also to preserve the idea of art as something separate from life. Popular art risked losing its playful quality. Following the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872-1945), Jorn thought that “if play lacks its vital purpose then ceremony fossilizes into an empty form.”¹⁰⁷ The solution was a popular art which did not imitate isolated forms but which applied itself to the transformation of matter. Art can extend the cooperative qualities of nature into social life.

Like Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin (1848-1921), Jorn sees nature not as Darwinian struggle but as cooperation, but Jornian nature does not really yield an ethical model to imitate. His nature, like that of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) “subjects all things to a certain indifferent will.”¹⁰⁸ Nature has no final cause, no end determined for it. Without at this time quite realizing it Jorn is heading away from the historical determinism of his Marxist training. In some respects he anticipates the Spinozism of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Against the conventional image of one organism competing against another of the same kind, Deleuze proposes the image of the wasp and the orchid, two different organisms who cooperate to reveal and increase each other’s powers.¹⁰⁹

A pataphysical reading of the natural sciences still has some critical work to do, however. From it Jorn extracts an ontology of nature as flux, difference and also cooperation on the basis of which Jorn asserts that class struggle is an aberration, and that the social Darwinist model of nature as competition is false. For Jorn, "man's nature is just to cultivate and nourish his urges."¹¹⁰ Our species-being is *homo aestheticus*, close to what Huizinga called *homo ludens*, the playing kind. It is not *homo economicus*, or the war of all against all. This image of nature is merely a distorted image of capitalist society: "there is nothing so unnatural for man as what the bourgeoisie calls naturalness."¹¹¹

It is Engels who leads Jorn down the slippery slope of a dialectics of nature, and like Engels he risks a somewhat vapid generalization of certain figures from scientific literature which, while in some ways different to capitalism's ideological recourse to images of itself as natural, are no less partial and fragile. But what distinguishes Jorn from Engels is not just that his readings in scientific literature are more contemporary; they are readings of a different kind. Jorn does not aspire to a materialist world view, as Engels did, but a materialist attitude to life. He wants not a metaphysics legitimized by science but a *pataphysics* that reads science creatively. His texts do not imitate scientific writing, but like the inventor of pataphysics Alfred Jarry, Jorn appropriates from scientific writing according to his own desires.¹¹² Truth for Jorn is subjective, but subjective truth is social. His ontology is true to the collective experience he lived through, of Hellhorse, Danish socialism, the Resistance. His version of Marx diverges from all the main currents of what would come to be known as *western Marxism*.¹¹³ Unlike Lukács he embraces Engel's dialectic of nature; unlike Althusser he distances himself from the scientific world view.

"All that we know of life is that it is organized movement." Chaos and complexity: Tintomara's turn. The aesthetic begins by organizing the powers of matter and elaborating then in a way that responds to their complexity. A word for this might be *ornament*, but where ornament is not an exclusively human phenomenon: "we see air currents forming ornaments across the earth." Jorn was drawn to those highly ornamental styles that modernism generally repudiated: Gothic,

Rococo, Jugendstil. But the modern moment had its uses, and here Jorn's thinking comes close to Isidore Isou: "The tremendously consistent purge of empty ornamental elements of form is in reality classicism's Pyrrhic victory. It is a *tabula rasa* for what is to come; for an art of the future." That art will return to ornament not as addition to nature or its representation, but as a process of drawing it out and turning it toward the expansion of the possibilities for social life. At its best, ornament demonstrates a "pact with the universe"¹¹⁴ Ornament in art extends and distends the line as it is discovered in the social practice of qualitative engagement with matter. Ornament is the aesthetic key to Jorn's monism, the signature of a being that is univocal, and the reminder that history has diverged from coherence in flux.

Jorn's thought is opposed to art as representation, but also to abstraction. His problem with Le Corbusier is that while he also drew inspiration from nature, he understands nature in Apollonian terms, paring away at complexity – nature's own ornamentation of itself – to get at an eternal geometrical essence. Corbusier aligns the aesthetic with a materialist world view, but not a materialist attitude to life. Perhaps it is no surprise then that Corbusier took a top down approach to building new worlds. Abstract art for Jorn became dominant because a new ruling class that could not tolerate either the symbols of the old one or the express desires of the people. But the problem for the development of a popular art is a split between the symbol and the community. The symbols artists can come up with now are diagrams of personal forces, not social ones. This is a problem even for radical artists. Paul Klee (1879-1940) found symbols, but not popular ones; Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930) became the voice of the people, but at the expense of the symbol.¹¹⁵

Jorn took his distance from both socialist realist art and from abstraction, of Max Bill and others, thus dodging the aesthetic fissure of the cold war. He found a way to reconcile them in what is best described as the diagram. He shared with Debord an attachment to the beauty of Paris street plans and subway maps, and saw them as part of a larger aesthetic tradition. "A map of the metro is not naturalistic, but it certainly cannot be said that it is unrealistic. We know the same method of working from modern [comic] strips in color magazines as well as from bronze age

rock-carvings, from Chinese and Egyptian murals, from the drawings of Australian aborigines as well as from the modern art of people like Klee and Miró, and all this is in glaring contrast to the whole classical tradition of composition.”¹¹⁶ The goal must be a pictorial process free and open to the whole of life, a diagram of forces, trajectories, possibilities, rather than a representation of an object, cut from the world as a frozen moment.

Jorn was almost but not entirely seduced by the *primitive*. Natural culture for Jorn does not date from the Paleolithic, which is rather a time of alienation: “Class society arises when an unproductive tribe of hunters, specialized in weaponry, comes to dominate a cultured people and forces them into servile labor.” The historical precedent for a natural culture is rather agrarian society, with its experimental transformation of nature via agriculture, and its combination of the division of labor with a rough equality. Here humans “found the key to nature’s way of developing”¹¹⁷ Naturalism for Jorn is not a question of imitation but of qualitative development. Jorn’s is a mystical materialism, in that he sees mystery as the intuition of the unity of being, of totality. But the significance of mystery has been betrayed by the course of historical development. “Instead of the materialist’s ecstatic love for matter, life, mankind and himself, religions have turned to the non-existent, which is really to be equated with death but which religion calls God.”¹¹⁸ The sense of the univocity of being is lost, and with it the intuition of difference and flux.

Religion emerges because of the deviation from a truly naturalistic and social human development. In class society, religion replaces an open totality with a closed and imaginary one. Most strikingly, Jorn asserts that “communism is much older than all religions.”¹¹⁹ By communism Jorn means both a consistency between the spiritual and the temporal, and a collaborative practice of aesthetic transformation of nature. Originary mysticism is the worship of fertility, the materialistic cult par excellence. A modern reinstatement of mystery can supply a cultural ideology to Marxism which encourages everyone towards a cultural activity. Put simply: “Art is cult.” Culture is our species’ love affair with the earth. This was the idyllic line of thought Jorn proposed in the wake of an era of mass destruction. “We have lost our paradise on earth and

what is worse those who seek to restore this paradise are seen as idiots estranged from life or individuals who are dangerous to society.”¹²⁰

Dualism comes from class society: ruling class spirit pits itself against subordinate class matter. From his – eccentric – reading of Kierkegaard, Jorn derived class society’s three perversions: art, ethics, religion. Each produces a world view of illusory unity in isolation from social processes. Against this, Jorn asserted the vitality of a spontaneous, creative aesthetics and a series of three revolutionary forms from below: the anarchist, syndicalist and communist. But Jorn’s attachment to the Communist Party waned quite quickly after the war. Cobra failed as a movement at least in part because it positioned itself as a Communist art form, only to be rejected and vilified by party art commissars.¹²¹ It is not hard to see in his feverish theoretical activities of the 50s and his various organizations an attempt to create a new form of radical monism, one for which Debord would propose the name – Situationist.

Jorn’s amateur Marxist theories from the 40s and early 50s went largely unpublished at the time and received scant attention.¹²² The most influential appropriation of Marxist thought would be that of his contemporary Louis Althusser (1918-1990). They could hardly be more different.¹²³ Althusser spend the war in a prisoner of war camp, not the resistance. Althusser’s thought was in Jorn’s terms clearly that of a materialist world view. It took science rather than aesthetic practice as its model. Althusser stayed within the Communist Party (in its Maoist fraction) rather than break with it. He made Marxism respectable within the space of the academy rather than attempting to found a new nexus between theory and practice outside if it. Althusser was much more interested in history as objective process than as subjective practice. Where Althusser became a respected academic philosopher, Jorn’s academic advisor gently suggested that his thesis was not really the sort of thing that could even be submitted.

And yet these are precisely the reasons why Jorn is now worthy of attention and his thought of development. It points towards the question of practice, outside of, and now after the eclipse of both the Communist and bourgeois versions of history. If Althusser cements a place within the

academy for developing Marxism as a critical postwar discourse, he does so at the expense of aligning it with high theory. Marx is absorbed into the conventions of academic thought, into its spaces of authority, its codes of discipline, its temporality of semesters and sabbaticals. Jorn offers something in addition to all that. His is a development of Marx as a critical postwar discourse that creates its own games, makes its own rules, answers to a quite different time, and belongs to a more marginal but more interesting space, the space not of an institution but of a provisional micro-society, within which the practice of thought might be otherwise.

A Provisional Micro-Society

The Situationist International was founded at a meeting of three women and six men in July 1957. All that remains of this fabled event are a series of stirring documents and some photographs, casual but made with an artist's eye, by founding member Ralph Rumney.¹²⁴ The Situationist International dissolved itself in 1972. In its fifteen years of existence, only 72 people were ever members. It was born out of the fusion of two and a half existing groups, the Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, the Letterist International and the London Psychogeographical Society, (the last was represented by its only member, Rumney). Its founding conference took place in Cosio d'Arosca, a little Ligurian town where founding member Piero Sismondo's family had a small hotel. Or at least that is the official story. Debord writes in a letter to Jorn: "I think it is necessary for us to present the 'Conference at Cosio' as a point of departure for our distinct organized activity."¹²⁵ From the beginning, Debord has a fine hand for the tactics of appearances.

Debord the tactician saw the Letterist International as something of a dead end. The *dérive* could only be taken so far. After he was institutionalized Chetchevlov would write to Debord and Bernstein from the sanatorium, explaining that the *dérive* has its limits, and cannot be practiced continually. "It's a miracle it didn't kill us. Iron infected our blood."¹²⁶ To even propose a new architecture for a new way of life took more resources than they possessed. The complete renunciation of what one might now call middle class life cut them off from vital resources. "To reach this superior cultural creation – that which we call the Situationist game – we now think it necessary to be an active force in the actual terrain of this era's culture (and not on the fringes of it, as we cheerfully were...)." Hence a change of policy from the "pure (inactive) extremism" of the Letterist International.¹²⁷ Going forward called for taking a few steps back. The program would – temporarily – require some resources to advance its program and its propaganda. The Situationist game must proceed "by all means, even artistic ones."¹²⁸

Debord skillfully positioned himself as the secretary for a new movement, the Situationist International. Of all the roles Debord chose for himself, not to mention those assigned to him by

posterity, the one that receives the least attention is that of secretary. Late in life he was to say: "I have been a good professional – but of what?"¹²⁹ While the question was meant to be rhetorical, one not entirely implausible answer would be – secretary. Not the least interesting thing about him might be the tactics with which he ran the Situationist International, and the best way to approach them is via his *Correspondence*. Prepared by his widow, Alice Becker-Ho (b. 1941) and published posthumously, the *Correspondence* presents a carefully vetted and selected account of Debord the secretary.

The secretary's task, as Debord conceived it, involves the organizing of exhibitions, provocations, occasional publications, and above all the journal, *Internationale Situationiste*. It is, Debord writes, "our 'official organ', the ideological coherence of which was made my responsibility." Debord will act as its secretary with remarkable tenacity and industry. *Internationale Situationiste* would not be a duplicated flyer like the Letterist International's *Potlatch*, but a beautifully edited, illustrated, designed and bound affair. By 1960 the author of "Never work!" would be complaining: "I am overwhelmed with work." Here he is discussing the use of a material called Lumaline for the cover, in a way that will bring a smile to anyone who has ever labored over manufacturing something beautiful: "The effect is obviously superb. But the price is terribly high: 100,000 for the cover (for only 1,600 copies of the journal), but especially 60,000 for supplementary expenses to the printer, representing a lot of work in folding and sewing, entirely by hand -- the machines break the Lumaline, which soon tears. And then we will have nearly lost the stock at that stage of fabrication (in this process, one loses at least 10% due to badly sewn copies)."¹³⁰

Debord labored in the service of producing *Internationale Situationiste* as a collective expression, a document of a provisional micro-society whose practice is to treat all of culture as collective property. "Our editorial committee has a heavy hand (and, as you imagine, no respect for literary propriety." Détournement was both a signature Situationist practice and a theory of how culture as a totality works. Debord writes to Straram in Canada: "All the material published by the Situationist International is, in principle, usable by everyone, even without acknowledgement,

without the preoccupations of literary property. You can make all the détournements that appear useful to you.”¹³¹

One makes a movement with what one has. The practice of the *exclusion* of members from the Situationist International began very soon after its founding. As a good secretary, Debord has little tolerance for opportunism or ineptitude. As Debord wrote to Walter Olmo, a founding member: “I reproach you for having accepted, in particular circumstances, several ideas that are stupid.” Olmo would not last long. Ralph Rumney lasted almost a year. Debord writes to him in March 1958: “you still haven’t done any real work with us.”¹³² To compound Debord’s annoyance, Rumney boasted of his Situationist connections to art world acquaintances.

Rumney’s official offence was to submit his psychogeographical report on Venice too late for inclusion in the journal. Between harassment by his mother in law, Peggy Guggenheim (1898-1979), and the birth of his son, Rumney had his hands full. Since he was the one at Cosio who advocated no tolerance for anyone not fully committed to the cause, his expulsion was not without justice. Rumney’s ‘The Leaning Tower of Venice’ went unpublished at the time, but it is not without interest. It took the form of a détournement of the photo romance strips then particularly popular in Italy, and is an early example of Situationist detournement of narrative graphic art.

Rumney took photographs of the Beat writer Alan Ansen (1922-2006) and arranged them as a narrative with captions. “It is our thesis that cities should embody a built-in play factor,” reads one. “We are studying here a play-environment relationship.” Rumney’s photographs follow Ansen on a “trajectory through the zones of psycho-geographic interest.” Its subject is specifically play, as “play and game are not synonymous.” Ansen’s gambols are not constrained by formal rules. There is no boundary marking of the space of a game from the space outside it. Play has no conditions of winning or losing, and no end condition determined in advance. Play comes to an end when Rumney spots Lawrence Alloway (1926-1990), the English art critic, and in this case spoil-sport.¹³³

Becoming a Situationist required a certain rigor. Debord: "I am still with the Situationist International and, as long as I am in it, I will keep a minimum of discipline that excludes all collaboration with uncontrollable elements..."¹³⁴ To today's middle class sensibility, submission to a discipline for reasons other than getting paid seems like some kind of perversion, and for that reason membership in the Situationist International seems as unintelligible a sacrifice as the mysteries of religion. A more common model for what remains of the artist in today's disintegrating spectacle is that of the small business proprietor. Take as an example Jeff Koons (b. 1955), who "staked his budding penchant for expensively fabricated art by working as a commodities broker on Wall Street for six years.... Today he has a factory in Chelsea with ninety regular assistants...."¹³⁵ To be an artist, it seems, has become just another kind of middle class ambition.

The exclusion of members is sometimes taken to reveal some sinister side to Debord's character, so it is interesting to read in the *Correspondence* that "Jorn was the first partisan of the measure of exclusion." Asger Jorn, like Debord a founding member, was unlike Debord one of the few Situationists who had ever been a member of an orthodox Communist party. But while the Situationist International is often compared to such a party, this parallel is usually made by people who were never members of one. Certainly to an ear trained by the cold war to protect its precious individualism the Situationists can sound like invasive body snatchers, as for example in this telegram to an excluded member: "The I without we falls back into the prefabricated mass."¹³⁶ What the Situationists were struggling to achieve was a new kind of collective being, unlike either the Communists or previous avant gardes such as the Letterists.

Situationists were expected to know what was expected of them and without being told. Debord's policy as secretary was "to place *a priori* confidence, in all cases, and only until the first proof to the contrary, in a certain number of recognized comrades, based upon objective criteria." The reason for most exclusions is not mysterious. It was a failure to live up to expectations. Members are what they do: "No problem in our collective action can be resolved by good will."

A certain unsentimental understanding of how friendships form and dissolve, of how character becomes different to itself as it struggles in and against time underlie the distinctive quality of Situationist subjectivity, where “neither freedom nor intelligence are given once and for all.”¹³⁷

Bataille had thought that what binds community together is the experience of death.¹³⁸ Under the guidance of the Surrealist turned Stalinist Louis Aragon (1897-1982), postwar Communist culture created a real cult out of its dead Resistance fighters. The red flag shrouds its martyred dead, whose blood dyes its every fold. The Situationists borrowed at least this much from the Communists – that the exclusion of living members meant social death. Given that Communist culture really did comprise an entire social world, to be excluded from the party really did mean excommunication. The Situationists had no such power. But they wrestled with the problem of how to make collective belonging meaningful, as something requiring some sacrifice. The possibility of exclusion made participation in the Situationist game meaningful.

Not the least difference between the Situationists and the Communists is that the former rarely recruited. “I have no need of fabricating false disciples.” Nor did it require adherence to doctrinal orthodoxy. “Quite surely, never any doctrine: perspectives. A solidarity around these perspectives.” Indeed, doctrinaire postures could be grounds for exclusion. Debord writes to Sismondo: “situationism, as a body of doctrine, does not exist and must not exist. What exists is a Situationist experimental attitude.” This is the paradox of the doctrine of no doctrine. To Pinot Gallizio, the key figure among the Italian founders of the Situationist International, he writes: “We have always been sure that you are strongly opposed to the metaphysics of which Sismondo currently reveals the dogmas.”¹³⁹ The exclusion of Gallizio would take a while longer than that of Sismondo.

In his letters, Debord speaks often of “propaganda”, and even of “internal propaganda.” Both for external and internal purposes, statements were to be formed and made tactically. The Situationist International formed itself in part out of the material of the art world, but anticipated the overcoming of art as a separate practice. What is hard to grasp via the middle class sensibility

of what Debord will call “bourgeois civilization” is that there really might have been a threat to the organization in the form of the opportunistic exploitation of the potential caché of the Situationist International, particularly by its artist-members. The Situationists were never an *artistic* avant garde. Debord: “we already have amongst us too many artistically old men who have missed out on their own 19th century.”¹⁴⁰ Artists were only accepted as members if they appeared ready to move beyond art in a “brutal evolution” – as Debord said of ill-fated German artists of Gruppe Spur.

Situationists struggled to create new collaborative play-forms out of the old materials of the separate creative practices, of which art was just one. The moments of inclusion and exclusion within the Situationist International are best explored in relation to this strategy, rather than attempting to decode them as banal dramas of personality. “The most urgent problem, tactically, is to firstly balance, then as quickly as possible surpass the number of painters in the Situationist International with the largest possible number of architects, urbanists, sociologists and others.” This ambition came with its own dangers. “We can hardly have confidence in ‘specialized collaborators’ who do not share Situationist experimental positions. If not, we will discover bitterly that the architects, sociologists, urbanists, etc are as limited as the painters in their defense of the particular prejudices of their separated sectors.”¹⁴¹ The Situationist International was not a collaboration between specialists, but the overcoming of specialization in the name of a new kind of collective activity.

As secretary, Debord tacks this way and that, trying to keep the International together. Debord’s problems are compounded by the presence of several powerful personalities, all of them his senior. Around the time the Situationist International was founded, Guy Debord was 25, Constant Nieuwenhuys was 37, Asger Jorn was 43, Pinot Gallizio was 55. These discrepancies should be born in mind when reading his letters to each of them. Given his relative youth, the self-confidence of the letters is extraordinary. The tone of Debord’s writing changes considerably in his attempts to mesh with each of these outsize personalities, even if he does not lack for confidence in calling all of them to account. As one of Debord’s favorite writers, the Cardinal De

Retz says, “the talent of insinuation is of more service than that of persuasion, because one can insinuate to a hundred where one can barely persuade five.”¹⁴²

Giuseppe Gallizio (1902-1964), Pinot to his friends, was, by his own account, an “archaeologist, botanist, chemist, parfumeur, partisan, king of the gypsies.”¹⁴³ It was he, together with Asger Jorn, who brought together the Congress of Free Artists in 1956 in Gallizio’s hometown of Alba. This was the event which laid the groundwork for the formation of the Situationist International the following year in Cosio, where he would become a founding member. Gallizio’s approach was consistently experimental, and he saw the materials and practices of an experimental comportment as available to everyone: “the masses have understood and already the breathlessness of a new poetic moment is anxiously beating at the doors of people bored by the tired ideals fabricated by the self-righteous incomprehension of the mysterious powerful of the earth.”¹⁴⁴ Gallizio’s called his work *ensemble painting*. His goal was what he called an *anti-patent* process for the sharing and modification of life.

Gallizio’s ensembles did not just produce rare and singular works like other artists. They produced *industrial painting*. These were only very minimally the product of actual machines. The idea was more that painting could be made using mechanisms of repetition and variation to undermine the unique gesture. The result would bring together the creative and singular with the serial and repeated. He invented, in short, a synthesis of the two opposed strands of the avant-garde: the Surrealists and the Constructivists, in what Michèle Bernstein called “a shrewd mixture of chance and mechanics.” As art historian Mirella Bandini says, his project was to “unleash inflation everywhere.”¹⁴⁵

Debord puts considerable energy into arranging Gallizio’s debut in the French and German art worlds. At first all goes well: “The tumult over your glory grows great, despite the discretion we maintain.” Art world success is Gallizio’s downfall within the Situationist International. This is less the fault of the exhibition itself than of the way it is used tactically: “The most serious deficiency was that Pinot, in his practical attitude towards the Parisian public, more or less

consciously accepted the role of a very ordinary artist recognized by his peers (by contrast, the exhibition of détourned paintings by Jorn was, I believe, a very rough break with this milieu....” The upshot was the exclusion of Gallizio and his son Giors Melanotte for “sickening arrivisme.”¹⁴⁶ As Debord would comment later: “the Situationist International knew how to fight its own glory.”¹⁴⁷

While Debord could recognize, even in retrospect, Gallizio’s “virtuosity”, he was nevertheless the *right wing* of the Situationist International.¹⁴⁸ Its *left wing* was Constant Nieuwenhuys, known as Constant. He had been a member of the avant garde painting and poetry group Cobra with Jorn, but had moved away from painting towards experiments in new kinds of potential urban form. In the ‘Amsterdam Declaration’ of 1958, Debord and Constant called for “the development of complete environments, which must extend to a unitary urbanism”, which they saw as “the complex, ongoing activity that consciously recreates man’s environment according to the most advanced conceptions in every domain” which would be the “result of a new type of collective creativity.”¹⁴⁹ A poetry made by all; an *all* made by poetry.

It was Gallizio who set Constant on the path to his famous New Babylon project of *unitary urbanism* when the two of them were together in Alba. Gallizio, who was on the local town council, solved the problem of the town’s antipathy to visiting Romani, or *gypsies*, by making some land he owned available for their camp. It was an idea not without precedent. As Alice Becker-Ho writes, quoting from a 1569 text: “Their sojourns in particular villages are always sanctioned by the local squires or dignitaries.”¹⁵⁰ Gallizio commissioned Constant to design a new kind of mobile architecture that might house them. Constant’s model was never built, but it set Constant on a new path. Constant will come to reject art in general, and painting in particular, and like Gallizio posit the machine as the central fact of contemporary creativity. As Constant writes: “A free art of the future is an art that would master and use all the new conditioning techniques.”¹⁵¹

Yet Constant and Gallizio were in many respects quite incompatible figures, and not just as personalities. For Constant, art had come to an end. A unitary urbanism of constructed situations supercedes all of the separate arts. "The artists' task is to invent new techniques and to utilize light, sound, movement and any invention whatsoever which might influence ambience. Without this, the integration of art in the construction of human habitat remains as chimerical as the proposals of [Ivan Chitchevlov]."¹⁵² In principle, Debord agrees. "No painting is defensible from a Situationist point of view." But where Constant insists on the principle, the secretary does not want to get too far ahead of the level of consciousness of the membership. "Yes, any spirit of the 'pictorial' must be hounded and this, though obvious, isn't easy to get everyone to acknowledge."¹⁵³

Debord looks to Constant as a tactical ally, but tries strenuously to keep him from pushing the organization too far too fast. He wants Constant to work on the editorial line for the journal with this in mind: "This will certainly help the really experimental faction in the Situationist International." But Debord is initially not ready to break with Gallizio or Jorn, both of whom are earning Constant's stern disapproval as *artists*. "I don't have the right – and I do not have the least desire – to try to impose directives on the painters (for instance) in the name of a real movement that is no more advanced than their work."¹⁵⁴ A shrewd move, since for Debord to attempt to direct the painters would only draw him – and the Situationists – deeper into the obsessions of the art world.

The unraveling of Debord's relationship with Constant is the great moment in the early life of the Situationist International, and it shapes the whole space of what will be possible for it. Debord is caught between the left and right wings of the movement. And while the artists are, one by one, excluded, Constant is hardly appeased and resigns anyway, and the movement, so to speak, moves on. But this is the moment, like the opening scene in a novel or film, where circumstances are fluid, where many things are possible. One discovers, in the first three years of the Situationist International many possible versions of it, besides the ones of legend or even

historical record. This is perhaps why so many keep returning to them, and to these early years in particular, as the scene of a moment in still-living movement, or in other words, a situation.

Debord's judgments in the *Correspondence*, whether one agrees with them or not, were not purely capricious. Against Constant and the Dutch section, Debord makes two charges, both in many respects perspicacious. The first is that there is a certain strand in Constant which, despite his denials, is close to the utopian legacy of Comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Auguste Comte (1789-1857), particularly in the way it privileges an intellectual class as the only agents for bringing about a new world: "when you only find progressive forces in the 'intellectuals who revolt against cultural poverty', you yourselves are utopians. What can intellectuals do without liaison with an enterprise that brings global change to social relations?"¹⁵⁵ Liaison, in short, with the proletariat. While Jorn was starting to rethink class in interesting ways, the Situationist International was at something of an impasse, caught in the old dilemma, between romantic revolt and class struggle.

The second issue concerns the status of unitary urbanism. Where Constant is focused on the way unitary urbanism realizes and overcomes the more limited achievements of the separate arts, Debord points already to realizing and overcoming unitary urbanism in turn: "Our necessary activity is dominated by the question of the totality. Take note of it. Unitary urbanism is not a conception of the totality, must not become one. It is an operational instrument to construct an extended detour."¹⁵⁶ While Debord and Constant are allied in their embrace of technicity (against the rather technophobic Jorn), Debord does not think it enough any more to just break down the arts and combine them in the construction of new ambiances, new terrains of play. Unitary urbanism is much less a positive, constructive modeling and more a negative and critical tactic for opposing the kind of tower block mentality that characterized postwar reconstruction. The chimerical quality of Chtcheglov's version of unitary urbanism still has a tactical value.

Legend has it that when Debord broke with people he simply cut them dead and moved on. With Constant this is not the case, and for once the correspondence continues on, to the stage of a love

gone wrong. "Passion leads you astray" writes Debord to Constant, sounding for all the world like Madame de Merteuil in *Dangerous Liaisons*. Playing Valmont, Constant retorts by telegram: "If passion misleads me, indecision causes you to be lost." Debord resorts to threats: "it is up to you to choose the terrain."¹⁵⁷ At stake are 200 copies of Constant's book which Debord feels are owed to him. It may sound like just a pretext, but one of the essential components of the existence of the Situationist International was the internal exchange of documents and their *donation* to external parties. As this incident highlights, it was held together by the gift.

The gift enters Situationist via the writings of the socialist anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), which were taken up and expanded into a theory of the general economy by Georges Bataille. Both drew on anthropological work by Franz Boas (1858-1942) and others among Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest, and their concept of *potlatch*. This version of the gift linked it closely to reputation. The gift is not selfless charity, nor is it a Christmas present.¹⁵⁸ Rather, it is a very special kind of donation, in which the donor gives away time, matter or energy in order to acquire reputation. The journal of the Letterist International was called *Potlatch*, and despite the meager resources of the group it was given away for free.

The Situationists sold their journal in bookshops, but many were given away and for the same reasons: to exchange their time, energy and materials for reputation. The Situationist International was a provisional micro-society founded on its own quite particular economy of donation and reputation. While various of its activities might be supported by selling art to collectors or other banal forms of compensated labor, there is a sense in which the Situationist International was a grand potlatch, putting to the fire the thought and work of a whole little community of people, daring the world to match its extravagant consumption of its own time. Hence the donation of copies was no mere pretext in Debord's falling out with Constant, for if Constant refused to donate them it would constitute a real break in the economy of this micro society.

In the end, the impetuous left of the movement is no better for Debord's purposes than the *sprezzatura* of the easygoing right. Here, in a couple of sentences addressed to Constant, Debord speaks all at once of a crisis of friendship, of tactics and thought, of **moments of decision**: "I am sure that, here, we have arrived at the point where the Situationist International must immediately **choose** (or must be abandoned). Because you know well that I have always thought that 'there are **moments at which it is necessary to know how to choose**.'; that you haven't needed to teach this to me; and that, if there has been a certain opportunism in the Situationist International, I have been among those (you, too) who have counter-balanced it."¹⁵⁹ The collapse of the Situationist International into the art world that Debord feared did not happen, at least not yet. The vigorous application of the principle of exclusion took care of that.

The early years of the Situationist International are ones in which it may develop itself, elaborate itself, ornament itself – in many possible directions. This movement exercises a certain fascination on art historians for this reason. All of the major figures of the early years have their favorites, who excise them from the game and hoist them up as their champions. What is perhaps more interesting is to keep these figures in play, to view what passes between them as what matters. And perhaps also what passes unnoticed, undetected in this flux of passions between temperamental men. When Michèle Bernstein writes in her two novels of exactly this remarkable time in which the Situationist International was born, it barely rates a mention. It is just something a character not unlike Debord takes a train to Amsterdam to attend to, before hurrying back to a quite different kind of game. A game in which women not only figure, but which they may even win.

Permanent play

On the subject of love, bourgeois novels are variations on two themes. The first is the couple in love getting together despite all obstacles; the second is how unhappily they live ever after. "Marriage seems to have been invented to reward perversity," as the utopian socialist writer Charles Fourier (1772-1837) once said.¹⁶⁰ Marriage, says the bourgeois novel, is the worst of all institutions for a woman, except for all the others. In the novel, a woman can refuse marriage. She may be drawn toward sexual ecstasy, but that way lies poverty, misery and social exclusion. Proper love is the sacred domesticated, placed in the service of reproducing the heterosexual family and passing on property. Socialist writers, from Fourier to Friedrich Engels to Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952) had long opposed marriage as a relation which makes women property, and pointed to the hypocrisy of the bourgeois gentleman who polices the sexual fidelity of his wife yet goes adventuring in bohemia for a bit on the side.

And yet in postwar France, the figure of the monogamous, heterosexual couple became even more widespread. Kristin Ross: "The construction of the new French couple is not only a class necessity but a national necessity as well, linked to the state-led modernization effort. Called upon to lead France into the future, these couples are the class whose very way of life is based on the wish to make the world futureless and at that price buy security."¹⁶¹ The couple was a modern alternative to both the more reactionary order of the wartime collaborationist Vichy regime and the autonomous female sexuality embodied by Saint Germain figures like Juliette Greco or François Sagan, and promulgated as a whole theory in Simone DeBeauvoir's *The Second Sex*. The couple refuses both the patriarchal past of Vichy and the feminist future of *The Second Sex*, and secures a private place where the good life of the spectacle can be brought home and domesticated.

In the third issue of *Internationale Situationiste* is a reproduction of the 'Map of Tenderness' by the Precocity movement writer Madeleine De Scudery (1607-1701). This famous drawing was included in her popular multi-volume novel *Clelie* (1654-1661). The map charts three possible

journeys from the town of New Friendship at the bottom to three possible destinations.

Friendship could take the paths of Inclination, Esteem or Gratitude to one of three destinations in the middle of the map. Or, it could wander off course, and end up in other places, such as the Lake of Indifference. Or, the journey could go too far, and end up in uncharted territory. For De Scudery, love requires skill and tact if it is not to veer too far toward great ecstasy, which also brings great pain.

The goal was not marriage. De Scudery was more interested in erotic friendship between women. Hers was a Sapphic alternative to Platonic relationships between men, a tenderness that can be sustained, developed, transformed, without rupture. De Scudery initiates a counter tradition, skeptical of the sacred quality of ecstasy, indifferent to questions of property and outside the heterosexual norm.¹⁶² While acknowledging the power of feeling, it can nevertheless be crafted and directed. It can become the material of play and strategy.

How is a modern woman who lives in a so-called *open relationship* with a man supposed to retain her hold on him if he starts an affair that has a little more intensity than affairs usually do?

Affairs are allowed. They are within the rules, but they are not supposed to break with a fundamental agreement the man and woman maintain. And if this man is coming too close to breaching that agreement, what stratagems can the woman employ to see that he returns to it? This scenario can be found in what Debord calls Michèle Bernstein's "fake novel" *All the King's Horses*, and its sequel *The Night*.¹⁶³ The novels, which both describe the same events, concern the lives of three characters who are not unlike Michèle Bernstein, her husband Guy Debord, and his lover Michèle Mochot. Bernstein borrows from socialist, bohemian and aristocratic writings to create an alternative to the middle class ideal of the married couple.

Both novels cover the same events in the lives of Gilles and Geneviève but from different perspectives and in different styles: *King's Horses* the style of Françoise Sagan (1935-2004); *The Night*, that of Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922-2008). Saint Germain identity Sagan's racy novels coincided with the arrival of mass paperback publishing in France in the '50s. Those of Robbe-

Grillet were a high-modernist analogue of the new consumerist and technocratic France of these years. Lefebvre called them “pure spectacle.” As the great literary critic Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003) pointed out at the time, what was once a cultural rhythm to the diffusion of writing had with the arrival of the paperback been replaced by a technical one. The technical purported to solve all problems. “There is no need for political upheaval, and even less for changes in the social structure. It suffices to reproduce works.”¹⁶⁴ Even radical works started appearing in paperback. Literature discreetly integrated itself into the spectacle.

Bernstein’s strategy was a *détournement* of the spectacle of the novel, first in its popular form, then its esteemed form. “There is not much future in the *détournement* of complete novels,” declared Debord and Wolman, “but during the transitional phase there might be a certain number of undertakings of this sort.” Elsewhere, Debord sets out the tenets of a Situationist approach to literature in the transitional phase: “In the novel, the fundamental question of time resided more in the liberty of beginning and ending the story at significant points, rather than in the choice of including certain moments and excluding others... I believe it is this form of sovereignty (used derisively in the novel) that everyday life aims at appropriating.”¹⁶⁵ In the absence of the means to construct situations, the detoured novel might at least gesture toward the liberty of beginnings.

Debord met cabaret singer Michèle Mochot in 1955, at a Paris opening for the Belgian Surrealist painter Jane Gaverol.¹⁶⁶ Bernstein’s fictional Gilles meets Carole a few years later, also at an opening of a Surrealist painter, only Bernstein makes Carole the painter’s step-daughter. In *The Night* we learn of the sexual tension between them. The painter covets his stepdaughter. “Though by her spite she showed that she wanted no part of it, still she encouraged it a little, admitted it was there.”¹⁶⁷ With a little prompting from Carole’s mother, Gilles and Geneviève whisk Carole away from the old man. Gilles takes her wandering around the streets of Paris, and in the morning finally makes love to her.

In *Horses*, we only hear in general terms about Gilles and his art of wandering. Geneviève goes home to sleep and the story picks up again the next day. *The Night* is structured around the *dérive* itself. “They pass beside a column, a streetlight rather, on which is fixed, above their heads, a blue and white sign indicating by an arrow: Cluny Museum. On the same column, another signal, luminous and blinking, is the only one that attracts the glance of the passersby. At regular intervals, for the pedestrians, the permission to pass or the order to wait flashes. Gilles and Carole pass near the column without seeing it. Gilles waits, before crossing, for the cars to stop. Carole follows Gilles, who holds her by the nape of the neck. They take the direction indicated by the sign Cluny Museum, and skirt the railings of the garden of the museum.”¹⁶⁸ The *dérive* is Carole’s initiation into the knotted streets of the sleeping city. “I’d like to be in a labyrinth with you,” says Carole. “We already are,” says Gilles.¹⁶⁹

A Galton machine is a grid of equally spaced pins, arranged vertically, above which is a single slot that releases balls, and below which is a series of slots that catch them. If the top slot is positioned in the middle and balls are released into the grid of pins, the chances are that most balls will deviate a bit when they hit the pins but will fall in one of the center slots below. A few of the balls will end up bouncing farther off the center line, but overall the device will show a *Gaussian distribution*. It’s essentially pinball without the fun. Pinball arrived in Saint Germain bars such as the Mabillon and the Old Navy after the war, and became a favorite way for quarter people to waste their time. Arthur Adamov (1908-1970), wrote an Absurdist play about it, called *Ping-Pong* (1955).¹⁷⁰

In pinball, the ball is always going to end up passing through the middle between the flippers, but some balls—through luck or skill—will take a long time to do so. The Galton machine, or pinball, is Jorn’s image of a situology, both ludic and analytic, “as a game device, this machine that tilts, can be found in most Paris bistros, and is the possibility of calculated variability.”¹⁷¹ Time and space are not smooth and even. There are tilts, there are eddies, there are zones that attract the balls and zones that repel them. Debord and Wolman had already proposed a *detournement* of pinball, in which 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 Cluny Museum Around an Hour After Sunset in November.*"¹⁷² They gave up on the idea. Paris was already the pinball machine. All that remained was to bounce around it like a shiny silver ball, and find its psychogeographic centers of gravity.

The Galton machine is like a street pattern or a telephone network, a flat and even field, a distributed network.¹⁷³ A ball could land anywhere; a call could connect any two points. There are infinitesimal eddies and fissures shaping the ball's movement, or the call's circuit, or the swerve of someone on a *dérive*, who takes this street rather than that one. Some passages are more likely than others, but only by playing the game does this become clear. *The Night* is structured around the passage of Gilles and Carole through the streets of Paris, bouncing from one trajectory to the next. *The Night* subordinates the narrative of the affair to the description of the *dérive*. *Horses* is rather more conventional, and the *dérive* there is just a moment. It reverses the relationship between situation and story.

Gilles's affair with Carole causes at least two rifts in the libidinal universe. Carole's girlfriend Beatrice is jealous and possessive. Geneviève's feelings are perhaps more complicated. It is not the first time Gilles has had other lovers, but Geneviève is a little worried about this one. *The Night* can be read as an account of the disturbance the affair causes Geneviève. Her character is in the habit, on waking in the morning, of putting the events of the previous night in order, but in *The Night* events refuse to fall into place. The novel jumps from one fragment of time—charged with affect—to another. It is a beginning that doesn't end.

Horses presents a rather more straightforward version of Geneviève's strategies for keeping her hold over Gilles. One tactic is to become Carole's intimate friend, establishing a relationship independent of Gilles between the two women. It is an emotional intimacy – Sapphic in De Scudery's sense – that is perhaps greater than the sexual one between Carole and Gilles, if rather one-sided. Carole confides in Geneviève but not vice versa. It's a tactic on Geneviève's part, to be sure, but not quite as coldly manipulative as the similar move in *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782), a book

from which Bernstein freely borrows.¹⁷⁴ Another tactic is to take the same liberties as her husband. Whereas Gilles found Carole at a party hosted by passé old Surrealists, Geneviève finds her love interest at the rather more advanced soirée hosted by Ole, an artist perhaps modeled on Jorn. (Ole is the name of Jorn's son). There she hooks up with a young man called Bertrand, fucks him in a hotel, throws him out next morning, then telephones Gilles to tell him about it. Bertrand is handsome enough, but if anything bringing him into the picture only gives Gilles more license to love Carole.

Both Carole and Bertrand make bad art. Carole dabbles at painting but she merely repeats the clichés current in the art world. Bertrand's poetry is worse, in thrall to experiments that have long since lost their charge. As Debord once wrote to his old Letterist comrade Patrick Straram: "poetry, yes, but in life. No return possible to surrealist or preceding poetical writing."¹⁷⁵ What neither Carole nor Bertrand quite realizes is that they already embody the aesthetic. Neither knows that they are in play in a game of everyday life. Of the two, Carole comes closer, at least when she sings. She has a small repertoire of old French songs. When she sings for Gilles she appropriates their words as her own, detourns them, and reveals a capacity that leads Geneviève to suspect that here might be a rival.

The four of them, Gilles and Carole, Geneviève and Bertrand, go off on vacation. They meet Bertrand's friend Hélène, a slightly older and very sophisticated woman from the literary scene. On returning to Paris, Geneviève discards Bertrand and takes up with Hélène. This gets Gilles's attention. Gilles drops Carole. The trio of Geneviève, Hélène, and Gilles hang out together for a while, but it doesn't last. In the end it is just Geneviève and Gilles again—for now. But the game has changed. *Horses* ends with letters from Carole and Hélène in which it is clear that Carole, while still young, is beginning to appreciate a new way of thinking about life, and that Hélène, encrusted with habit, is left to her fate.

In her letter to Bertrand, Hélène dismisses Gilles and Geneviève as "damaged people," but she does not really understand them.¹⁷⁶ Neither Gilles nor Geneviève are really heartless libertines.

They appreciate beauty but not just as an object, a thing apart. "I wasn't built like a Greek statue," Geneviève remarks, and not just out of modesty.¹⁷⁷ Their romantic strategies are not about conquest or possession. Gilles really does fall in love, and often. Geneviève's strategies are aimed at sustaining Gilles' love for her because she cannot help loving him. This love is hardly romantic. Their feelings are genuine, but feelings can be shaped aesthetically, in pursuit of adventures, in the creation of situations, in the river of time.

Love is temporal, an event. There is nothing eternal in it. Timeless Love, like God, like Art, is dead. All that remains is the possibility of constructing situations. Odile Passot: "In Bernstein's universe, there is no transcendence, divine or diabolic; humans are subject to their own negativity, which they cultivate to destabilize their century's received truths."¹⁷⁸ Like the devils in Marcel Carné and Jacques Prevert's film *The Devil's Envoys* (1942), Geneviève and Gilles trouble the sheets of the bourgeois bedchamber by disregarding property and propriety in the name of a quite different ethic of love.¹⁷⁹ *The Devil's Envoys* affirms in the end that love is eternal; in Bernstein's world it is not.

As Geneviève says of Gilles: "When I met Gilles three years ago, I realized quickly that he was far from the cool libertine most people took him for. His desires always contain as much passion as he can put into them, and it's this same state that he always pursued in various love stories that you'd be crazy to call unserious. The climate he created everywhere is one of honest feelings and a heightened consciousness of the tragically fleeting aspect of anything to do with love. And the intensity of the adventure was always an inverse function of its duration. Trouble and breakups happened with Gilles before any valid reason appeared: afterward, it was too late. I had been the exception, I was immune."¹⁸⁰ Strategy, as Debord says, "tends to impose at each instant considerations of contradictory necessities."¹⁸¹ Geneviève's strategies aim at the very least to maintain her immunity, but perhaps she has other ambitions as well. She might surpass her master at his own game.

Geneviève trumps Gilles's desire for Carole when she presents him with her affair with Hélène. While Gilles is intrigued by Carole's now lost love of Beatrice, he is much more attracted to Geneviève's for the elegant Hélène. The reconciliation between Gilles and Geneviève entails not so much a renunciation of their desire for others, but rather a gift of the renunciation of that desire to each other. But while this ending has the appearance of equity, it is really Geneviève who wins the game. She secures her alliance with Gilles, puts her rival in her place, and does it without invoking proprietary rights. And all the while taking her pleasures with Bertrand and Hélène. She does not insist that Gilles be hers, or that she is his.

Horses highlights this story of Geneviève's triumph. *The Night* puts the story back into the situation of multiple and parallel encounters. While Carole or Bertrand are part of Geneviève's story, she is also part of theirs. The reader glimpses a whole glistening playing field. Jörn would later co-author an elaborate mock ethnography of Paris bohemia, which would do for structuralist theories of myth what James Joyce did for the myth of Ulysses. The elaborate kinship diagrams of his imaginary tribes seem puzzling at first, 'til the reader decodes the forest of symbols and realizes that anyone can fuck anyone. It could be a mock-theoretical diagram of the world of *The Night*.¹⁸²

The soundtrack to the lives of these characters, besides the American jazz popularized by Vian, was a distinctively French version of the folk music revival. The title *All the King's Horses* refers to an old song, 'Aux marches du palais.' Carole sings it on the night when she and Gilles and Geneviève fall into each others' lives. It is a song about a queen and her lover. One evening, the knight steals into the king's castle and lies with the queen in her bed. Together they make a river that all the king's horses cannot cross. Greil Marcus: "It is as deep and singular an image of revolution as there has ever been, but in *All the King's Horses* so distant an element it is barely an image at all."¹⁸³ When one is bored with the desire for mere things, there is only the desire for another's desire. Gilles desires Geneviève's desire for Hélène. But what if one could create a desire so strong that it put a river between it and its other? A desire that, like a river, has to keep moving, has always to change, a desire that can play out in time and play in the end into the sea.

Tin Can Philosophy

Abdelhafid Khatib, a comrade of Debord's from the Letterist International days, wrote a detailed psychogeography of the Les Halles district of Paris, noting with care how its ambiances morph from one place to another, from one time to another. Here the *dérive* starts to yield definitive results. Particularly appealing to Khatib is the way the carts of the vegetable vendors make temporary barricades in the streets at delivery time, forming a changeable maze. Shifting from psychogeography to the prospect of the construction of situations, Khatib declares that "any solution aimed at creating a new society requires that this space at the center of Paris be preserved for the manifestations of a liberated collective life."¹⁸⁴ It is a model for "perpetually changing labyrinths" constructed consciously for drifting. It hints at a space and time free of necessity, in which a liberated life could be free to create its own necessities, its own games.

Khatib's text comes at a time when other necessities imposed themselves. Since it began in 1954, the Algerian war of independence had been met with increasing French repression. Colonial war destabilized the French state, and brought Charles de Gaulle to power in 1958. But rather than strengthen French power in Algeria as some of his supporters wished, de Gaulle began searching for an alternative policy. This led in turn to assassination and coup attempts against de Gaulle. As the war reached its peak, Paris became the scene of bombings and reprisals. A curfew was declared. It would not be healthy for an Arab man like Khatib to be wandering the streets at night, jottings things down in a notebook.

Opposition to the war among French intellectuals generally took one of four positions. One was Catholic, and appealed to conscience. One was republican, and appealed to the rights of man. A third was third-worldist, and put the anti-colonial struggle in place of class struggle as the motor of history. Another was revolutionary, and scripted the line the Communist Party ought to take if it really was the representative of the international proletariat.¹⁸⁵ Situationist thought and action always conceived of itself outside of the conscience-talk of public intellectuals, and was never

romantic about under development. Debord's *Correspondence* of the late 50s shows a skeptical engagement with the would-be Bolsheviks and non-party Marxists of the French left.

The anti-colonial struggle, the crisis of the French state, and the theoretical debates of the time converge to force a more profound articulation of Situationist theory. Initially skeptical of the Socialism or Barbarism group, Debord would gradually warm to their consistent critique not only of capitalism and colonialism, but also of the socialist states. They saw in the wildcat strikes and periodic irruptions of revolt in both Eastern and Western Europe the signs of a new revolutionary movement. Debord would read them together with the leading theorists of what Lenin had once described as the "infantile disorder" of left wing communist thought of a previous era: Georgy Lukacs, Karl Korsch (1886-1961), Anton Pannekoek (1873-1960).¹⁸⁶ This would result in the text that is Debord's masterpiece: *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).

In deciding between the competing Marxist currents of the time, there are many paths not taken. Debord would be close to, then estranged from, the veteran Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. He would also encourage and collaborate for a time on the development of a distinctive Marxist project by Asger Jorn. His pamphlet on the *Critique of Political Economy* (1960) was published with a cover to match Debord's *Report on the Construction of Situations* (1957), as if to give it the same status as a statement of principles. It seems some of the copies were seized by customs agents, so it never achieved the level of circulation intended for it.¹⁸⁷ In this often overlooked text, Jorn tries to draw together his earlier pataphysical rewritings of Marx with the results of the Letterist International's experiments in a new synthesis which goes beyond the project of the construction of situations to a new theory of value that might embrace them.

The burden of Jorn's critique of political economy is to show that something is left out of Marx's equation of labor with value. It is not labor alone that creates value. On the one side, Jorn restores a role for nature, for materiality. On the other, he insists on the role of another class in the creation of value, even if he does not quite have a language with which to describe it. This other class he occasionally calls the *creative elite*, in contrast to "the delicious name of the power elite."¹⁸⁸

When C. Wright Mills (1916-1962) published *The Power Elite* (1956), it was a powerful restatement, in the teeth of the cold war, of the existence in the west of a ruling class, in control of modern means of production and communication.¹⁸⁹ Mills exposes corporate, state and military power as an integrated nexus, in the hands of a ruling caste with a consistent world view. The same people circulate through the commanding heights of all of the institutions at the disposal of the power elite. Democratic governance has become a sham. The mass parties no longer control their leaders. One way communication has usurped the space of civil dialogue.

Jorn's creative elite is something else. It has no power, but its significance is that it can give form to value. It renews the form of things. The term creative elite seems at first ill-chosen, even for Jorn, who has very little time for the elites of the art world. The sources of creation in Jorn are popular. He happily describes himself as a vulgar Marxist – after *vulgus*, from the people.¹⁹⁰ Where Marx identifies himself with another class – the proletariat – and reconstructs the world from its point of view, Jorn sees the world from the point of view of his own class, or at least from his own milieu – the bohemia of Saint-Germain and the extensive network of other creative bohemias with which the peripatetic and multi-lingual Jorn was quite familiar.

Like William Morris, and drawing on his own anthropological studies, Jorn thinks something has come between art and life. Unlike Morris, his response is a socialism that is not utopian, but nor is it quite what Marx and Engels would recognize as scientific. Rather, Jorn's socialism is *experimental*. Where Marx begins with a critique of bourgeois economics, Jorn begins with a critique of socialist economics. Unlike most critics of the Stalinist regimes from the left, Jorn sees them not as wrong in implementation, but in essence. The Trotskyites saw them as deformed worker's states. The Socialism or Barbarism group dispensed with this formula, but not (yet) with the socialist ideal. Probably without knowing it, Jorn picks up the critical thread of Marcel Mauss and others who thought the problem with the socialist states was not just a political deformation, but fundamentally economic.¹⁹¹

Marx was fascinated by capital, almost seduced by it.¹⁹² He marveled at its astonishing productivity, its vast accumulation of wealth. While denouncing its violence and inequity, Marx could still love capital's productivity, which the revolution would deliver to the proletariat as its rightful inheritance. Jorn sees capital quite differently. He thinks it has not increased but abolished true wealth, which is variability in consumption. In abolishing difference, the wage relation and the commodity form impoverish the world. For Jorn, the bourgeois revolution of 1789 and the proletarian revolution of 1917 were "two sides of the same affair."¹⁹³ Jorn makes the astonishing claim that in their effort to abolish poverty, socialism abolishes wealth along with it. Socialism is a permanent politics of devaluation. This was not inevitable. This was the significance of Gallizio's industrial painting: it showed, experimentally at least, that difference was not incompatible with abundance.

For Marx, wealth and value are the same, and value is derived from labor. Jorn sees Marx's writings as critique only of the capitalist form of value, not value in general, and certainly not value forms to come. Jorn wants a concept of value more in line with the pataphysical writing on natural science he developed in the 40s and 50s. Marx's theories assume a nature in which form, complexity and difference can be spirited away by the white hot flame of reductive analysis. Marx's scientific socialism rests on a materialist worldview which reduces the complexity of forms to an underlying essence. Jorn's materialist attitude to life intuits the possibility of a science of forms, and of the centrality of this science of forms in connecting natural science not only to social science, but to an experimental practice. Elements of such an experimental practice persist in modern art but its roots are ancient. It continues a communism of the collective making and unmaking of forms.

Marx lacks a sense of the materiality of forms. The concept of form is never placed in relation to that of *substance*. Marx thinks instead of form and *content*. A content is what is enclosed in a form. Marx insists that the content of the form of value is always labor. Labor is the truth hidden within the form. In Marx, "The transition from use value to exchange value happens by the devaluation of the article of utility's material actuality." Use value and the article of utility are the same. But,

says Jorn, “if we accept that the use value is the commodity’s actual substance, then it is impossible to perceive an article of utility as being identical with a natural form. An article of utility is not a natural form but a cultural form.”¹⁹⁴ The question of form cannot be discarded.

Use value is the same as the article of utility for Marx. In Jorn, use value is the opposite of article of utility. Use value is the negation of an article of utility, of its form. Use value is the using up, the consumption of an article of utility. Use value is a negation of a quality. This brings us to Jorn’s most striking conclusion: “The market value of things is not conditioned by their quality, far less by their amount. It is conditioned by their *differences*, their variability.”¹⁹⁵ Form is not a mere husk from which can be shucked off, revealing some essence that is an independent content, the universal essence that is labor. “The exchange value of two commodities is thus not their equivalence but their dissimilarity...” Jorn restores the claim of form, and at two moments in the production process: natural form and the form of the article of use.

Having dispensed with Marx’s dialectic of form and content, he does not pursue the complexity of Marx’s value theory much further. Rather, he unfolds his own subtle analysis of value. One is tempted to say that Jorn’s value is equally subtle as Marx’s, but that would of course mean in Jornian terms that, being equivalent, it had no value. The point might be rather to stress its incommensurable difference. If Marx discards the question of form, Jorn stresses it. There are many kinds of form in Jorn. Money, as pure equivalence is actually valueless, except as a form. It is empty form. The form that matters to Jorn is the form of substance, but there are others, notably container form and cultural form.

Jorn replaces political economy with *aesthetic economy*. He does not want to reduce the appearances of value as form to the content of labor, and in so doing make the working class at the exclusive heart of economy. The working class are present in Jorn. Unlike bourgeois economics, he does not want to hide them away behind the surface-effects of exchange. Rather, he shifts attention away from exchange to production, but not to production as quantity, but production as quality, as difference. The key to this is not labor as the universal content of value,

but form as difference, as the production of differences. Labor may be the content of value, but creation is its form. There is both a laboring class and a creating class. Capitalism is the alienation of labor from creation.

In short: Substance is value, value is process, and process is difference. Substance is something that can't be measured. It is a materiality of differences, without number or dimension.

"Dimension is nothing more than the quantity of a particular quality. However, value is a particular quantity of qualities undergoing a process or change." Natural form becomes substance in a process that makes not quantity but other kinds of form, or qualities. Substance is the material reality of the change or transformation. Substance is the ornamentation of natural form. Tintomara's turn is the transformation of natural substance into aesthetic substance.

To complicate things somewhat, Jorn proposes seeing substance as having its own form, or rather, that substance is potential for transformation. In an article of utility, the volatile form of substance is held in a certain tension with another kind of form, what Jorn calls container form. Jorn reads Marx as seeing all form as container form, a form which, analytically at least can be opened to reveal a universal and homogenous substance – labor. But not all form is container form. Substance has its own form which is different from container form and works against it. A substance form is volatile; a container form relatively inert.

"A substance is a possibility of value." But only a possibility. Value is not a state of things, but comes and goes. One cannot own value. Quality is an attribute of matter; value is the dynamics of matter. "The value of a form... thus depends upon the ease with which one can dissolve the form and liberate its latent energies, whilst its character of quality consists in its resistance to this."¹⁹⁶

Form as container is thus only a special case of form, an instance where value can be easily produced, the quality of the thing readily overcome.

Viewed in quantitative terms, container form seems desirable. Containers yield their contents readily. Container form maximizes the amount of value that can be extracted. But for Jorn the

failure of socialist economics lies in actually attempting to realize Marx's conceptual separation of value from form as mere container. Socialist economies measure their progress in terms of rising quantities, all the while presiding over a massive devaluation. The extinction of difference, of the qualities of substances, is an impoverishment of the world. Jorn's critique might apply in attenuated form to socialist economies. Now that most of these have ceased to exist, the salience of Jorn's critique for capitalist economies is all the more acute.

Jorn challenges the central tenet of socialist thought: that the worker alone makes value, that value is labor power. He even claims that mechanical and industrial work is without value at all. The equivalence of units of labor time under industrial conditions, for all its efficiency, does not make more value, it abolishes value altogether. It is not labor, but time that is alienated from the worker. "Surplus value is not created in the work but in the variability of the work."¹⁹⁷ Difference is value. But who creates difference? The creative elite. There are two classes that make value. One is exploited by commodity production; the other marginalized. Jorn's is a recognizably romantic critique of the modern world, but what is distinctive is how far into the realm of the economic Jorn is prepared to pursue it.

Jorn's is perhaps a perverse kind of Leninism. It is not the party that brings class consciousness to the workers from without, but bohemia. The nucleus of a radical form of action is not the specialists in political praxis, but the connoisseurs of the free use of time. His is not a politics of work, but an aesthetics of leisure. Both capitalism and socialism make free time over in the image of work. Sounding a theme that will be a major one in Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Jorn claims that the industrial worker's life is eventless, as s/he does not transform or change things. Leisure time has the same quality, or rather lack of quality as work. Leisure is as much as sham as work.

Both socialist and capitalist societies have parallel ideologies of form: that container form appears to abolish differences. The container appears to function as a unit, making the substance form equivalent. Differences are – apparently – abolished as the units increase in number. Jorn calls this "tin can philosophy."¹⁹⁸ It equates the abolition of difference with progress. Both socialist and

capitalist societies specialize in the efficient delivery in uniform containers of what has no value. In place of which Jorn wants an ecology of forms.

The article of utility becomes a commodity when the producer has no use for it. It can either be given away as part of a gift economy of rivalry and recognition, or potlatch. Or it can be exchanged. Either way, the problem is what to do with the surplus. Jorn's economics, like that of George Bataille, is not about economizing, or efficiency, but expenditure, or wealth. Not scarcity but abundance is the key to his thinking: "wealth is surplus, abundance, multiplicity."¹⁹⁹ Where he differs from Bataille is in this emphasis not just on quantitative surplus, but a surplus of difference. Bataille sees both capitalist and socialist economies as distinct from all hitherto because they accumulate rather than disperse surplus, thereby reproducing the problem of surplus at ever higher levels. Jorn sees both capitalist and socialist economies as distinctive for their impoverishment of surplus as multiplicity.

The politics Jorn practiced is also about surplus rather than scarcity, politics is surplus fellowship. For Jorn, the state is an anti-politics. The statesman is the prototype of the *manager*, and whatever else they may be, socialist states are fanatically managerial. In Engels' phrase, in socialism, the administration of men ought to be replaced by the "administration of things." It became the management of men as if they were things, not least during what Henry Lefebvre called "Stalin's assault on the universe." The socialist vision, from Alexander Bogdanov (1873-1928) forward, is for cybernetics to replace politics. "Statistical robots will compute, guided by effective soundings of public opinion, in accordance with the wishes or otherwise of the majority." Socialism abolishes the state only to make it universal, a container for everything. The socialist goal is in opposition to interests of working class, "for bureaucracy is the container system of society."²⁰⁰ As Debord was increasingly turning toward a political conception of praxis, Jorn was turning away from it. The parting of the ways, this time, would at least be amicable.

If there is a situationist praxis, it has to take time in a quite difference sense to a Marxist one. It is not that capital quantifies time and cheats the worker of the value of it. Rather, it is that the

quantification of time suppresses the qualitative aspect of the transformation of one substance into another. The slogan “live without dead time” comes to mean something quite specific here. It is not that the situation is the spontaneous irruption of a pure event, severing all ties with the past, freeing itself from the grip of technologies, built spaces, all the massive forms of dead labor. As Debord wrote to Jorn: “I am in agreement on the question of time. To put the accent on non-preserved art or all other deliberately ‘direct’ situationist activity is not – has never been – a choice between amnesia and refusing history.”²⁰¹ But this leaves open the question of what a *progressive* orientation might be, if it is neither the purely quantitative piling up of wealth, nor the sudden revolutionary break that abolishes the old world in one instant.

For all their differences, Jorn like Marx is wedded to the notion of progress, and this is instructive. It is perhaps the key to resisting the slide of critique towards certain kinds of conservatism, not to mention mere *resistance*. It’s a question of redefining what progress might mean. In Jorn, progress is transport, progress is movement. “In order to give possibilities of orientation, progressive movement must be movement collected from within in relation to the surrounding element.”²⁰² Orienting action is like turning the rudder of a boat in a swift and uncertain current. It is not an act of domination, of imposing a will on time. It’s an act which works both with and against the current of the times, ornamenting it.

It may seem quixotic to talk, in the twenty-first century, about Marx, and certainly much now escapes the contemporary reader not only about the collective practices of the Situationists but also its theoretical obsessions. But perhaps there is something to be said for a Marxism, the memory of which one cannot abandon, just as one cannot abandon the memory of a certain lover, or of one’s home-town. But one lives on. In place of the memory of that lover, another love. In place of the home town, an adopted city. In place of that memory of the Marxists, the memory of the Situationists. Fidelity, or rather solidarity, outlives that with which it stands. Not the least virtue of speaking at length about Situationist versions of Marxism is that it is a bulwark against the collapse of their legacy into art history, even Marxist art history.²⁰³ Better to tilt at windmills than pawn the lance.

The Thing of Things

Henri Lefebvre was swimming in the ocean one sunny day. He was alone, and the water rather choppy. He swam far, far out from the shore. Clouds obscure the sun. Anxiety grips him. He turns back. While swimming hard against the rip, a vision unfolds, borne of real danger, and of quite a different order to the spectacle of waves and sun. It becomes “a shifting totality, roaring, buffeting, overwhelming; the sea.” He no longer looks at the waves, he is amid them, “each new one taking up the terrifying void left by its forerunner.” And yet this ocean of danger is not formless void. “The duration of each wave is strictly determined by its objective logic, which leave us with an indeterminable wealth of contingencies, accidents, appearances, and – I was about to say – ornaments. Logic and splendor. Before me, around me, I have space-time.”²⁰⁴

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) was a contemporary of Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), but their trajectories could not be more different. In the late twentieth century, Lacan would become the apotheosis of secular bourgeois thought, raising the practice of psychoanalysis to a high pitch of Delphic profundity. Meanwhile, Lefebvre would leave the Communist Party by the rarely used left-ward exit. Lacan sought to acquire the dignity of the status of philosopher; Lefebvre pushed philosophy out into the streets. If Lefebvre was at the peak of his influence in the blazing years of the sixties, Lacan would eclipse him in long dark decades that followed.

If there is one abiding purpose to psychoanalysis it is to make dull bourgeois lives seen fascinating, not least to those who live them. That it is a form of bourgeois thought is attested by the status of *the real* in Lacanian thought. The real is always something terrible, formless, lawless, which the *symbolic order* tries to shield from awareness, but which keeps slithering in, unbidden, nonetheless. It is a modern version of the serpents that on Jorn’s account Apollonian thought has to slay, again and again. The symbolic preserves for the ruling class, to whom it classically belongs, an order that keeps at bay the self-ornamenting powers of nature and labor, working together, worming their way into the cracks in Apollonian form.

In Lefebvre the real is the fulcrum of action rather than an apprehension of terror. His vision of it comes to him while swimming against the current, the body acting on raw need to survive. "The real can only be grasped and appreciated via potentiality."²⁰⁵ It is by attempting to transform everyday life that the contours of the real are revealed. The real is not entirely formless, even if its forms are not an order that reveal themselves in the clear light of day. The encounter with the real, because it is active, informs the *imaginary*. From the struggle in and with the real emerges a imagining of what might be possible. The object of study for both Lacan and Lefebvre is in a sense always everyday life, but in Lefebvre study is a stage in the project of transforming it.

Lefebvre was from the Landes department, in the western Pyrenees. He joined the Communist Party in 1928. He was active in the resistance during the war in the countryside near where he was born. An unofficial blacklist kept him from returning to teaching after the liberation, so his friend Tristan Tzara found him a job working in radio in Toulouse. It was not until 1961 that he became a professor at Strasbourg, before moving in 1965 to a post at Nanterre, on the outskirts of Paris, which would become one of the flashpoints of May 1968. His was a lively, diverse, but hardly orthodox career.²⁰⁶

Henri Lefebvre was 56 when Debord met him in 1957, via Lefebvre's girlfriend Évelyne Chastel, who knew Michèle Bernstein. Lefebvre was at the time the most talented philosopher of the French Communist Party, if hardly the most trusted. He left the party in 1959, the year he published *The Sum and the Remainder*, in which he advances his theory of *moments*. Lefebvre's moment is closely related to Debord's attempt to think the situation. Lefebvre starts from the observation that the leading strategists of advanced capitalism recognized the futility clinging to colonies such as Algeria and advanced instead a strategy of colonizing everyday life. Formerly outside the sphere of capitalist social relations, everyday life had become a new site of both commodification and its contestation. Out of everyday life, even in its commodified form, crystallize a series of moments – of work, but also of play, love, rest, justice, contestation – each of which presses towards the absolute realization of a specific possibility. The moment is "the absolute at the heart of the relative."²⁰⁷

A welder welding and a weaver weaving perform quite different acts, but Marx had shown in elaborate detail how the qualitative particulars of such concrete labors became the quantifiable substance of abstract labor through the imposition of the wage relation, the commodity form and the *general equivalent* of money. The Situationists tried to think what one might call the *specific non-equivalent*, and its name was the *situation*. But the very word resisted becoming a concept. The relationship between Lefebvre and the Situationists would dissolve before they got very far with their parallel investigations and experiments with it. It was, as Lefebvre later said, “a love story that ended badly, very badly.”²⁰⁸

Shortly after his encounter with the Situationist International, Lefebvre published two books which invoke them. The second volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life* (1962) opens with Debord and his *Introduction to Modernity* (1962) closes with the Situationist International. The books are as different as day and night. The former is almost a classic of the sociology of culture, as systematic and structured as anything Lefebvre ever wrote. The latter is wild ride, a romantic medley of genres, mixing memoir, critique, essay, letter, myth, and even science fiction. Between them can be found the practical results and problems of the Situationist International raised to the level of method and comprehended in a long and deep context of the moves and movements that try, in Rimbaud’s words, to change life.

Lefebvre the sociologist invents hypotheses and images as much a concepts, and nothing in his writing matches the formal beauty of Lacan the psychoanalyst’s topological knots. The proof or refutation of Lefebvre’s ideas lies not in the elaboration of a coherent discourse, but in *transduction*, in which the practice of encountering the necessities and contingencies of the real elaborates on it in the direction of the possible.²⁰⁹ “To know the everyday is to want to transform it.”²¹⁰ Knowledge is a strategy, whose tactics are concepts, forged for discovering the options latent within the everyday. Lefebvre’s work encompasses at least five concepts, around which others cluster, which respond to and inform the Situationist project: the everyday, totality, moment, spectacle, and the total semantic field.

Freedom is not the opposite of necessity in Lefebvre. Freedom is born out of *need*, and the starting point is a theory of needs. Without the experience of need, there can be no being. Needs are few; desires are many. There is no desire without a need at its core. Need can be terrifying: hunger, thirst, sex. Need without desire, without play, artifice, luxury, superfluity, is no longer human. It is human poverty. Desire abstracted from need loses vitality, spontaneity, and ossifies into the mere accumulation of things. It is abstract and alienating, another kind of poverty. His critique aims to bring together a presentation of needs and a determination of desires to arrive at a theory of situations, as they arise in the everyday.

The *everyday* overlaps with what Heidegger calls the *ontic*. But rather than bracket it off in favor of a more fundamental ontology, Lefebvre takes the trivial and seemingly superficial aspects of the everyday seriously. The everyday can be a realm of genuine being, if it yields situations for a collective *praxis*. Praxis here might mean a coming into being through the encounter with something other. Labor is a form of praxis, but not a privileged one. Praxis is the struggle to overcome need, but also the game of creating and satisfying desires, of desires collapsing back toward need, and so on.

In modern times the free creation of relations between desire and need has come to an end. Lefebvre: "As Guy Debord so energetically put it, everyday life has literally been 'colonized.'"²¹¹ The imposition of the commodity form on one aspect of everyday life after another breaks the tension between desire and need. A people unable to discover for itself a relation between need and desire is cut off from its own being, alienated from an active encounter with the real. Hence the need for negative concepts, for *negation*, to reveal not just what everyday life is, but what it isn't. It isn't all that praxis can be imagined as becoming.

The everyday is a mediating level. It is where people appropriate for themselves not nature but a *second nature* of already manufactured articles. It is where needs confront goods. It is not just a functional sphere of consumption and the reproduction of labor power. Nor is the prisoner of a

pervasive disciplinary power, of cops and social workers, psychologists and sociologists intent on prying into people's lives. There is always something unformed in the everyday, something that exceeds and escapes both commodity and power. It is a strategic terrain for experimenting with practices and possibilities. "Today, what is the aim of utopian investigation? The conquest of everyday life, the recreation of the everyday and the recuperation of the forces which have been alienated in aesthetics, scattered through politics, lost in abstraction, severed from what is possible and what is real."²¹²

Two kinds of time meet and mingle in the everyday. One is a linear time, the time of credit and investment. The other is a cyclical time, of wages paid and bills due. This is how class makes itself felt in everyday life. The former is ruling class time; the latter is working class time. The workers spend what they get; the bosses get what they spend. Cyclical time is the time of needs and the struggle to meet them. But it is also the experience of a certain kind of desire, for example in the patient waiting for the festival to return, and with it the glorious consumption of goods in the name of desire. Linear time imposes its own distinctive necessities, its booms and recessions, and this is not the least aspect of the colonization of the everyday by the commodity form. It introduces a distinctive kind of desire as well, desire deferred, not until festival time and its potlatch of goods, but in the interests of accumulation.

The everyday also has another kind of time, the time of adventure, which is perhaps a remnant of an aristocratic time. A notable characteristic of the Letterist International, which continues in the Situationist International, is a longing for this time of adventure. It is not because they are titled nobility that they expend time freely in search of adventure; it is because they expend time freely that they consider themselves entitled to style themselves with a certain louche nobility. This is not the least aspect of them that would appeal to the Lefebvrian sensibility. "On the horizon of the modern world dawns the black sun of boredom, and critique of everyday life has a sociology of boredom as part of its agenda."²¹³ Adventure is nothing if not the practical refutation of boredom.

What could the everyday be? "Could it be some sort of grand game without any precise objective?"²¹⁴ The colonization of everyday life by the commodity form diminishes the role of collective experience, yet groups persist. Within groups, individuals have tactics and strategies, as the early years of the Situationist International makes abundantly clear. Groups also have tactics and strategies in relation to other groups. The everyday is the level of tactics; history that of strategy. Whether or not traditional societies were governed by the gift, as Mauss and Bataille thought, Lefebvre thinks modern societies are governed by the *challenge*. "Challenge is a means of exerting pressure beyond the group, but its actions reverberate within it."²¹⁵ The classical bourgeoisie loved a challenge. It overcame feudalism while staving off the challenge of the working class. Postwar technocrats seem challenge averse. They prefer to manage challenges rather than confront them. Not the least pleasure of Lefebvre is his sense, won from his own remarkable experience, that history had still more challenges up its sleeve.

Lefebvre sees everyday life as a mix of *agon* and *alea*, of contest and chance. "In the beginning was action; in the end action is recognized... Every human life is a progress or a process toward a possibility, the opening up or closing down of what is possible, a calculation and an option based upon random events and the intervention of 'other people.'"²¹⁶ As with linear and circular time, there is a class basis to the experience of the everyday as contest or chance. Experiencing life as a contest to which to apply strategies is a view far less available to the individual members of the working class. Only through collective action can the proletariat enter history at the level of strategy. In decline, its forces lose their grasp on the game of history. All that remains is are the tactics of the everyday.²¹⁷

If there is a distinctive experience of modern life, it is the *aleatory*. It is rather like Gallizio's industrial painting, a mix of necessity and chance. Confronted by the aleatory, people gamble with their lives, making moves in a game that may be based on tactics and even strategies, but where the variables are not all known, the outcomes far from predictable. No move in a game can be considered a rational choice. This is the lesson Lefebvre takes from game theory and other technocratic attempts to annex the everyday to social science. They reduce the experience of the

everyday to signals and calculations. They describe what everyday life is not: a rational totality. Rather: "Everything becomes disjointed, yet everything becomes a totality, Everything becomes reified, yet everything starts disintegrating. The aleatory is triumphant."²¹⁸

Johan Huizinga thought that vigorous civilizations had the capacity to elaborate new forms of play. In decadent ones play became codified into more formal games. Where Lefebvre differs from Huizinga is that he thinks modernity is a time in which play can flourish. "But it is certainly rather surprising that it should be our era, the era of functionalism and technology, which has discovered homo ludens."²¹⁹ Writing at the high water mark of rational and functional social science, Lefebvre thinks history is still capable of objective irony, of confounding order and revealing contingency. History is a game in Lefebvre, the rules to which are never clear, and which in any case keep changing. It is not a machine or a structure, but neither is it random. Groups play each other with more or less awareness of the historical stakes.

Within everyday life, groups challenge one another, and not the least part of the challenge is the tactic of appearances. "The secrets of groups, their opacities, which are what give the illusion of substance, are made up of anxieties or audacity with regard to what is possible, of entrenchments or offensives, of retreats and advances in relation to other groups, of courage or of weakness of will in response to problems."²²⁰ Here Lefebvre and the Situationists are very close, and close also to Huizinga, for whom play always has an element of the secret about it. The game within the group ought not to be apparent to the group's rivals.

Play is a misunderstood aspect of praxis. Play "uses appearances and illusions which – for one marvelous moment – become more real than the real."²²¹ Through the concept of play, Lefebvre manages to bypass two of the great theoretical fetishes of his times: *structure* and *sign*. Structure is just a reified apprehension of play, its fossilized remains. "Structure itself is nothing more than a precarious and momentary success, a win or a loss in a complex gamble."²²² The sign is just one aspect of play, that which a player brandishes, the better to conceal a secret – and to display that a secret is concealed.

The concept of *totality* would become the great boo-word of late twentieth century thought, linked, through an often rather casual association, to the *totalitarian* state of the Soviet Union. Particularly for the so-called *new philosophers*, totality reeked of Stalin's gulags. Some genuine conceptual objections were turned to the service of legitimating the status quo. For Lefebvre, totality has a somewhat different sense. Not totality as achieved philosophical system but as an orientation for praxis. "Discourse strives for totality. It must strive for totality, yet it is never more than incomplete."²²³ What Lefebvre calls *totalization* is praxis revealing itself in terms of its tendency. Every praxis wills its own totalization. "Every totalization which aspires to achieve totality collapses, but only after it has been explicit about what it considers its inherent virtualities to be."²²⁴ The concept of totality directs research. "If there is no insistence upon totality, theory and practice accept the 'real' just as it is, and 'things' just as they are: fragmentary, divided and disconnected."²²⁵ Totality is negative concept, it is the gap between what is possible and what is impossible. The critique of everyday life hinges on thinking certain moments within it as far as they will go.

Groups acting within everyday life pursue their strategies as far as they will go. Praxis is at once repetition and creation. Creation emerges out of repetition. Inventiveness is born from the everyday, through the action not of individual genius but of collective play. "Could not inventiveness – or the seeds of inventiveness – be a product of the limited and daring praxis of small-scale groups: sects, secret societies, political parties, elective groups, laboratories, theatrical troupes, etc?"²²⁶ As in Jorn, the sources of creation are popular, but this does not lead to an uncritical celebration of all things popular. The everyday is vital for what it can be, not for what it is.

Praxis has its dangers. What was once a living form of collective self discovery and self invention can harden into a thing-like routine. It can, in short, become *alienated*. Lefebvre differs from much of the Hegelian Marxist writing of the time in thinking of alienation as something less than a total, remorseless, one-dimensional and one-directional descent into a well-equipped hell.

Modern life is not all alienation. Rather, it's a game in which certain tactics prove dis-alienating for a time, then fall short of their own totalization, cease to work, forcing groups to either come up with new tactics or lose sight of their self-affirming praxis. Praxis can fail both by falling short in its totalization and by exceeding it. "Beyond a certain limit, the negative becomes a fetish, a vision of nothingness; radical critique becomes hypercritique, and nihilism is established as a truth without that truth having been legitimated."²²⁷ It's a critique that could be applied with some justice to the Situationist International after the exclusion of the artists.

Everyday life is to be transformed according to its own tendencies. When a group discovers a dis-alienating practice in everyday life, it may crystallize into a *moment*. Possible moments might include love, play, rest, knowledge, although nothing prevents the creation of new moments. Philosophy might be nothing other than making contemplation into a moment. The moment emerges out of the cyclical time of repetition, but creates a time of its own. The moment constitutes its own kind of space, and enables the stabilizing of determinable relations with otherness. A moment is constituted in space and time by a decision which singles it out from ambiguity.

The moment weaves itself into and out of the everyday. The moment tries to achieve the total realization of a specific possibility. It exhausts itself in the act of pursuing its own goal to the very end. "It wishes to perceive the possibilities of everyday life and to give human beings a constitution by constituting their powers, if only as guidelines or suggestions."²²⁸ The moment wants to endure. It wants to gather its own temporality. The moment requires a certain amount of ritual and ceremony. It makes for itself a special time and place. It creates its own specific form of memory. But these forms the moment creates run the risk of repeating themselves, of no longer serving the moment but enclosing it. The moment provokes its own specific alienation. The gamer or the lover become obsessed. Like the Korean man who died in 2005 after playing the game *Starcraft* in an internet café for fifty hours, with only brief naps and toilet breaks.²²⁹ The gamer forgets to eat, sleep, commits everything to beating a level. The lover spends sleepless

nights thinking about the object of affection. At which point alienation is complete and the moment disappears.

Moments may have different scales. *Festival* might be the grandest scale to which the moment can aspire, an historical scale. "Festival only makes sense what its brilliance lights up the sad hinterland of everyday dullness, and when it uses up, in one single moment, all it has patiently and soberly accumulated."²³⁰ Lefebvre thought of the pre-war leftist Popular Front, with its mass demonstrations, equal parts celebration and desperation, as festival. At the other end, Lefebvre writes movingly of a working class painter from his home town whose work was shunned even by the provincial museum, but who was a decisive influence on the young Lefebvre. "There are men who are not artists and not philosophers, but who nevertheless emerge above the everyday, in their own everyday lives, because they experience moments: love, work, play, etc."²³¹ Just as there is a tomb for the unknown soldier, there should be one for the unknown artist, whose moments are unrecognized and fade clean away.

The term *situation* is a persistent one in philosophy, if always a marginal one. From Hegel to Kierkegaard to Sartre it designates a zone in which otherwise different elements confront each other.²³² Those elements can be isolated, defined, made into concepts, but the situation within which they meet and mix has a singular quality. Lefebvre's procedure is in some respects the other way around. "The moment is not exactly the same as a situation. The result of a decision or a choice – of an endeavor – the moment creates situations."²³³ Thinking aloud, Debord tries to specify the situation in its difference from Lefebvre's moment: "The difficulty of the 'situationist' moment is... marking the exact end (its reversal? And another), its transformation into a different term of this series of situations that (can?) constitute such a Lefebvian moment."²³⁴

Here, in this hesitating language, Debord gropes toward an understanding of the Situationist practice of creating collective experiences of space and time that have their own singular coherence but neither collapse back into the dead time of routine nor ossify into mere art artifacts. Unlike the moment, the situation "...must unify falsely separated categories (love, play,

expression, creative thought). And each of these formations – as conscious and calculated as they can be, that is to say, brought into play with superior chances – inevitably move towards their own reversal, because each one is entirely lived in time along with its negation and permanent supersession.”²³⁵ For Debord all of the singular moments, of love, play, work, knowledge, can be combined within a situation.

Between writing *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 2* and *Introduction to Modernity*, Lefebvre appears to lose faith in the possibilities of the moment. “You used to think that an auto-critique of everyday life through its own transpositions was possible: a critique of the slimy animal by its delicate shell and vice versa – a critique of the everyday by festivals, or of trivial instants by moments, and vice versa – a critique of life by art and of art by life, of the real by its double and its reverse image: dreams, imagination, fiction. The times changes. Technology began penetrating everyday life. There were new problems.”²³⁶ Modern life might not give rise to its own critical agent of transformation – what Lefebvre terms *modernity* – and praxis might be foreclosed, and with it being, the engagement with the real. “It is not that God is absent, but something worse: modernity is like a shell to hide the absence of praxis...” Modernity is the “ghost of revolution”²³⁷

What forecloses the possibility of praxis is what Lefebvre, citing Debord, calls the *spectacle*. The spectacle makes totality visible, but only in fragments, and visible only within the space of the private. It does not make the private social as well. The spectacle is a one-way street, the public privatized. “It is the generalization of private life. At one and the same time the mass media have unified and broadcast the everyday; they have disintegrated it by integrating it with ‘world’ current events in a way which is both too real and utterly superficial.”²³⁸

Lefebvre calls the spectacle the great pleonasm, The Thing of Things. Thought in terms of its totalizing tendency: “It would be a closed circuit from hell, a perfect circle in which the absence of communication and communication pushed to the point of paroxysm would meet and their identities would merge.”²³⁹ What is real is what is known; what is known is what is real. The illusion of permanent novelty occludes the possibility of surprise. It is a world of incessant

redundancy, everything is always the same, only better. It makes the same special offer to everyone, all the time: "the faked orgasms of art and life."²⁴⁰

The challenge of the colonization of the everyday by the spectacle calls for a reassessment not just of tactics but of strategy. Lefebvre takes a step back to the terrain on which the challenge appears, the *total semantic field*, of which the spectacle is an alienated form.²⁴¹ Everyday life takes place not just in the streets, but also in total semantic field. It has three registers: signals, signs and symbols. *Signals* form closed systems of redundant messages which appear mostly in the form of commands. A traffic light is a signal. It commands the driver to stop or go. *Signs* form a region within the semantic field of relatively open networks, a mix of information and redundancy. *Symbols* cannot command and are not particularly legible. They irrupt into the semantic field as noise. Symbols may have faded and gone into hiding, but can still be glimpsed through the spectacle. The total semantic field is "complex, differentiated, polarized, alive with the fluxes and tensions which come and go from one pole to the other. Language tries to equal this totality, but is never more than one of its parts."²⁴²

Cybernetic theories totalize the whole of the semantic field as signals, and imagine it can be made self-regulating. Semiotic theories totalize the semantic field as if it was composed entirely of signs and governed by the grammar of their combination. Lefebvre's strategic move is to counter the spectacle's reduction of communication more and more to the level of signal and sign by moving onto the terrain of the symbol, or rather of treating the whole semantic field as the space of the challenge. "Communication in depth implies the totality of the semantic field. The more it incorporates that totality, the more aesthetic it becomes."²⁴³

The legacy on which Lefebvre draws is a certain understanding of *romanticism*, which might be the memory of a series of practices for crystallizing the total semantic field itself into moments. Lefebvre is sometimes thought of as an Hegelian Marxist, but his understanding of romanticism departs from Hegel (1770-1831) and owes more to Stendhal (1783-1842). From Stendhal's *Racine and Shakespeare* (1823), Lefebvre draws out a theory of the romantic as the precursor to a critical

modernity, and like it the product of defeated revolutions. Romanticism brings everything into art. Everything classical art excluded is drawn into it, to the point of exhaustion. Romanticism occupies the total semantic field, gravitates particularly to the pole of the symbolic, to stimulate the creation of works of art, which in turn would condense the total semantic field. "Living romanticism reveals a totality."²⁴⁴

If there are symbols through which the romantic and its antithesis, the classical, might first be approached, they are the knight and the king. The king stands first and last for order, if also for an unknown range of things in between. The knight is the figure of adventure, driven by a certain goal but of uncertain outcome. The knight submits to a vow and has a life lived in the name of an ideal, but one which is constantly challenged by circumstances. The knight's horse raises him above all things earthly, but when he falls he comes crashing down into the horseshit. The knight is a figure of the aleatory, and for all those who live in an ambiguous or shadowy milieu, which perhaps explains Debord's taste for *Prince Valiant* comics.²⁴⁵

The classical assumes a legitimate order, revealed by the light of the sun. God in his heavens, the king on his throne, all is right with the world. And when it isn't, it can be put right. Like Corbusier's plans, it favors the right angle and the straight line. It favors the form of the myth, in which order is destabilized, restored, legitimated. Its privileged medium is architecture. Its method is *imitation*. Everyone imitates the one above them in the social order, just as the king imitates God, and the whole social order imitates nature. Classical humor, from Moliere to Sasha Baron Cohen, ridicules failed attempts at imitation. In Moliere's satirical attack on the Precious movement, provincial ladies shun some noblemen as beneath them, so they retaliate by having their grooms pretend to be Precious sophisticates. Classical humor serves order.

The romantic is a corrosive fluid that attacks the classical on every front. It is a refusal of obedience. It lurks in the dark, in the mist, within the eclipse. Time is out of joint. It favors the wave, the vibration, the curlicue. It mixes forms, detaches symbols from myths, and puts them in play against all that is legitimate. Its privileged medium is usually music. Its method is *creation*,

which is a human potential, not a divine attribute. For Lefebvre the romantic intersects with a certain strand of irony. Unlike Jorn he idolizes the achievements of the Greeks, not least Socratic irony, which is the undoing of any order of belief. The subjective irony of Socrates anticipates the objective irony of history, which sweeps order away in its aleatory currents.

Romanticism can be both pre- and post-revolutionary. Lefebvre acknowledges that most notable French romantics sided against the revolution. Its key tension is between the ideal of bourgeois life, and its pallid reality. Romanticism became a bourgeois art in the sense that they were the class that consumed it. This kept romantic artists from pursuing romanticism to its logical conclusion. The romantic lives outside bourgeois society yet within it, "like a maggot in a fruit."²⁴⁶ Or like the grit within the oyster, forcing it to make the classical pearl. The fate of the romantic gesture if not obscurity, is to become classical, to harden into a calcified form.

From the symbolic pantheon, romanticism draws on figures who rarely occupy central and active roles in classical culture: the knight, the prince, the seer, the child, the witch, the devil, the stranger, not to mention some even more strange, like Tintomara. Those who can't find their place in the classical world might find it here. But while one aspect of romanticism is otherworldly, an escape from this alien world to one more hospitable, the symbols drawn from the total semantic field can also be brought back to the everyday. They can be lived. And while isolation might be one practice favored by romanticism it is also an initiation into deviant or secret groups. Although Lefebvre does not use the term, its homeland is *bohemia*. Romanticism includes a desire for communion in some kind of lived utopia. A desire which, at the limit, feeds into utopian socialism.

"The best man of action is one who chooses his moment well.... His decision simplifies the complex situation and the ambiguity, and by the very act of simplifying them, transforms them."²⁴⁷ If Guy Debord was not that man, it was certainly who he aspired to be, at a time when even the aspiration was becoming rare. The Situationists were not the only group working over the remains of romanticism in postwar Europe. But if there was a dominant strategy, it was to

pursue the romantic exploration of the total semantic field only so far, before turning back and setting up new classicism in the resulting ruins. This was the trajectory of absurdist theatre, modern jazz, the new novel, or new wave cinema. What the Situationists acquired from Isou and the Letterists was a commitment to pursuing a certain romantic decomposition to the limit, if not his claim to build a new classicism of entirely new forms on the ruins. What Lefebvre perceives as the open path is to pursue the romantic farther in two directions, farther into the semantic field, and farther back, not into new art forms like Isou, but into everyday life. "The most brilliant Situationists are exploring and testing out a kind of lived utopianism."²⁴⁸

The romantic strategy is not without difficulties: "contradictions are thick skinned, and their bones are even thicker."²⁴⁹ Some that Lefebvre identifies are between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, between futurism and the middle ages, between religiosity and revolt, and between subjectivity and the outside world. These all pass through the Situationist International. These contradictions are traceable to a central tension, between two worldviews: an anthropological natural and a cosmological nature. The roots of anthropological nature are in the enlightenment philosophies of 18th century France. It is optimistic, it stresses human perfectibility and equality. The worldview of cosmological nature are more German than French. Here nature appears as wildly other, as an inaccessible external world. It enters the French semantic field in force relatively late, with Surrealism. Can what is real become rational? Can what is rational become real? This might be the terms of this irresolvable tension. It passes through the very scope of possibilities for our species being.

In playing with the devil, with romanticism and its symbols, the Situationist International inherited its contradictions, which would play out through the movement in the splits and fissures of the sixties. The relationship with Lefebvre was also a casualty of the tensions of the times, both personal and political. And yet he provided the Situationists not only with the concept of the everyday, but also engaged with them in thinking through the two key concepts of the spectacle and the situation (or moment). And while it was not a welcome insight, Lefebvre as

seer foresaw the necessity for the formation within the everyday of multiple forms of group action. The one monolithic party of labor would not have as its counterpart one party of play.

Divided We Stand

“Newell Street, London, E14 7HR: £1,250,000: A beautiful Grade 2 listed house formerly headquarters of The British Sailors Society. Built circa 1802 for one of Horatio Nelson's captains the property retains many naval features including one of London's only Victorian swimming pools, originally built to teach sailors to swim. The property is laid out over three floors and consists; large entrance hallway, drawing room, conservatory, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, studio room, sauna, private garden and two parking spaces. The property has also been used for filming, including *Beginners Luck* and *Dead Cool* and has been graced by stars such as Roseanna Arquette, Liz Smith, and Julie Delpy.”²⁵⁰

It's easier to sell a apartment in a building with a story, but beneath these stories are others. The ad neglects to mention that it formerly housed the homeless, or that it was disgraced by the anti-celebrities of the Situationist International. In preparation for the 1960 London conference, Debord and Jorn embarked on a *dérive* of the city looking for a suitable venue. They settled for this hall in the slightly sketchy Limehouse district, the place mythologized by Charles Dickens and so many others as a seedy warren of opium dens.²⁵¹ With them was Jacqueline De Jong (b. 1939), one of the handful of women who, like Michèle Bernstein, was able not only to put up with men like these, but make vital contributions of her own.

De Jong's was a sophisticated family from provincial Holland. Her father's company made seamless stockings for Dior. When the Nazis invaded Holland the family tried to leave by boat for England, but luckily they missed it. That boat struck a mine and sank. Two year old Jacqueline crossed over the Jura mountains with her mother, while her father hid out in Amsterdam. After the war De Jong moved to Paris. Her father found a position for her at Dior. She met Jorn in the company of her father, when he bought one of Jorn's pictures. The collection included works by several Cobra artists, a Franz Kline, and many other fine contemporary works. In 1957 De Jong was in Holland, working as an assistant to Willem Sandberg at the Stedelijk

Museum. The Situationists were involved in an somewhat fraught collaboration with the Stedelijk, which brought De Jong into contact with them.

Gruppe Spur (1957-1966) was one of the real signs of life in postwar German culture. It formed in 1957 in Munich. To Spur, art was the last free domain from which to oppose the rationalization of social life. Spur defended art against attempts to rationalize it as well, a last redoubt against administered life. They had read their Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), and while the cardinal of critical theory would hardly recognize them, they were his mutant offspring. "We are against truth, against happiness, against satisfaction, against good conscience, against fat stomachs, against HARMONY." De Jong joined Spur in 1959. Something about Spur appealed to Jorn, who found them a dealer and brought them into the orbit of the Situationists. Its not as if they would return the favor. "If you pick a strange baby, don't be surprised if it craps on you!" Or so the artist Roberto Matta (1911-2002) advised Jorn, when he became their champion.²⁵²

Gruppe Spur became the German Section of the Situationist International in 1959, and found themselves caught in the same tensions as the Italian section around Gallizio. The artists might see their creative efforts as aligned with the Situationist International, but artists need collectors, and to find collectors they need dealers. For dealers their adherence to a movement only has value in giving the work a certain cachet, not to mention some free publicity. To the dealer the actual aims of such a movement are neither here nor there. To the extent that the movement promotes the artist and the artist succeeds, the artist is then pulled out of the orbit of the movement and into that of the artworld – dealers, collectors, curators, art critics. This would happen to Spur as to Gallizio. Vincent Kaufmann: "If a... Situationist art exists, it functions as an invisible model: all representation is treason, including when it is the product of a real... situationist..."²⁵³

Meanwhile Debord was gathering forces that would enable him to dispense with the nettlesome presence of artists altogether. The Brussels-based writers Atilla Kotányi (1924-2004) and Raoul Vaneigem (B. 1934) replaced Constant as the anti-art left wing of the movement.²⁵⁴ The tensions

between the mostly francophone theorists and the mostly German speaking artists were papered over at the London conference, where De Jong was both translating and taking the minutes. The French were turning toward the proletariat, just as the Germans were abandoning the idea of its revolutionary force. The conference did manage a statement of support for Alexander Trocchi, facing serious drug charges in New York. Following the conference the Situationists made a farcical appearance at the ICA, something of a replay of Debord and Trocchi's appearance there three years earlier to show Debord's film *Howls for Sade*.²⁵⁵

After the London conference, the energetic and able De Jong found herself active on the central council of the Situationist International at twenty-one years of age. She made the pilgrimage to Alba to learn from a somewhat over-attentive Gallizio. After the exclusion of the group around Constant she effectively was the Dutch section. She proposed to the central council that it needed an English language journal. The other agreed, and appointed her co-editor with Trocchi. It never appeared -- at least not as planned.

In an extraordinary letter of 1960, Jorn discussed the status of his gift to the movement should he leave it: "my interest in the situationist movement is purely personal and passionate, in a direct fashion, and, if the inevitable developments of social circumstances necessitate my exclusion from the movement this changes absolutely nothing in my purely economic attitude towards this movement. The economic surplus that my social situation, insofar as I am a painter, gives me is best placed with the situationist movement, even if this movement is obliged to attack me for being in a situation from which I can't escape, but which embarrasses the movement."²⁵⁶ Jorn declare himself a strategic ally of the Situationists even if the Situationists turn against him tactically. Jorn left the Situationist International, officially at least, in 1961, and with him went certain interesting tensions between aesthetic and theoretical practices. It was time to move on. As Debord wrote to Jorn in 1962: "I only want to work on a 'moving order,' never constructing a doctrine or an institution." Then he quotes Jorn back at himself. It's a question, he says, of "creating veritable disequilibria, departure points for all [future] games."²⁵⁷

The Reeperbahn district of Hamburg is best known today as the place where the Beatles really learned to play. While George Harrison was probably on stage somewhere, playing with a toilet seat around his neck, Debord, Kotanyi and Vaneigem put together the 'Hamburg Theses', although it was probably more of a booze-up than a document. As Debord wrote soon after to Vaneigem: "As a profound theoretical justification of our indolence... we agreed not to write the 'Hamburg Theses', so as to impose all the better the central meaning of our entire project in the future. Thus, the enemy cannot feign to approve it without great difficulty. Moreover, one can certify that this is the height of avant-gardism in the formal presentation of ideas, perhaps opening the way for the explication of Lautréamont's *Poesies* by schoolboys? One adds the most fortunate confusion to all this if one bears in mind that it will be necessary to rank among the authors of this constellation of situationist theses (a very nebulous theoretics, out of reach and imprecise where its frontiers are concerned, but nevertheless bright and shiny) Alex Trocchi, who follows the same path but without being in nor being seen in Hamburg, at least not at the moment."²⁵⁸ Old style style revolutionaries like Louis August Blanqui (1805-1881) plotted in secret. Marx and Engels chose instead to declare their aims to the world. With the 'Hamburg Theses' the Situationists take the novel path of openly declaring that henceforth they will maintain certain secrets.

Art was henceforth officially anti-situationist. *Spur* were excluded. There was no procedure, no consensus. They were out. The timing wasn't brilliant, as Bavarian police had seized copies of the *Spur* journal and arrested the group. De Jong shared some of Debord's reservations about the quality of *Spur*'s output, but she resigned from the Situationist International over the high-handed way in which a faction within it had rorted them out. Together with Jorn's brother Jorgen Nash (1920-2004) and Swedish ceramic artist Ansgar Elde (1933-2000) she wrote a protest against Debordian treachery. The letter sets the stage by describing the Paris of 1962 as a "cauldron of political instigations and demonstrations, armored cars in the streets, the bloody shadow of the Algerian war... strikes, police raids, censorship... shootings and reprisals..."²⁵⁹ This is the atmosphere in which they accuse Debord's faction of turning on their own comrades.

What Spur, De Jong and Nash had in common was a rejection of model of organization of the Situationist International. The Second Situationist International put together by Nash, Elde and other Scandinavian Situationists, whose founding document de Jong signed, claimed that “now everyone is free to become a Situationist without the need for special formalities.” Gone were the structural forms: the sections, the central council, the direct democracy, the vetting of potential members, and above all the principle of exclusion. While this seems in some respects a step forward, something is also lost. The possibility of exclusion binds a member to a group in a quite particular way. The game is not the same.

This same text, ‘The Struggle for the Situcratic Society’ (1962) was rather philosophical about the split between what it saw as the French and Scandinavian approaches. While the First Situationist International denounced the ‘Nashists’ in harsh terms, they did not return fire. Debord’s practice they identified as that of *position*, in opposition to the Scandinavians’—one is tempted to say Jorn’s—of *mobility*. “In the argument neither side can claim to have a monopoly on the right ideas.”²⁶⁰ The distinction does not seem quite right. Perhaps it is rather one between an analytic conception of mobility in a fixed space and a ludic conception of mobility in an open and variable space. Here the Second International seems justified in its self-awareness as a fragment of a wider movement. The fitting together of a low theory and a critical practice that could evade, if not avoid, capture by the institutions of art and the academy is still a challenge.

The Second International hung together for a decade or so, producing extraordinary work and one or two interesting situations.²⁶¹ They took the practice of art directly into everyday life to create situations as experiments in ways of behaving and being together. Among them was Jens Jørgen Thorsen (19332-2000). An artist and anarchist, he was also for a time a tabloid journalist, and had a knack for provocations that could puncture the routine of the spectacle. He proposed a communicative approach to art, with “the disappearance of the spectator and his replacement by the participator. A communicative art is an art which lives between. In the space between people.”²⁶² With Thorsen’s help, the Second Situationist International managed at least two great feats of this communicational art.

Out on an island in Copenhagen harbor sits the statue by Edvard Erikson (1879-1959), the *Little Mermaid*. In 1964 its head mysteriously disappeared. The Second Situationist International put out a press release claiming to know its whereabouts. They invited the media to beach location, where they watched a diver swim toward them from a boat, but stop midway on a reef. In view of the assembled media, the diver drop a bag, containing a heavy object, into the sea. When anarchists besieged the 1968 Venice Biennale, Thorsen and friends used fake press passes to bypass the blockage and occupy a pavilion, complementing the siege without with an occupation within. They issued a statement denouncing the art concentration camp, which concluded with the slogan “divided we stand.”²⁶³

The Second Situationist International set itself up as both a rival and a replacement for the Situationist International. Its principals had in mind the relationship between the Workingmen’s Association of which Marx was a somewhat cantankerous member and the more Social Democratic Second International that succeeded it. Their sophistication was at the level of participatory experiments. As Thorsen said, “The situationist idea is based on utilisation of art and the forces of creativity within art being used directly in the social environment.”²⁶⁴ Nothing in their writing stands comparison to what T. J. Clark once called the “chiliastic serenity” of Debord’s key texts.²⁶⁵ And while the contempt of Debord was a given, they also managed to lose the support of Jorn, who disapproved of Thorsen’s antics. While no doubt fun at the time, the *Little Mermaid* and Venice Biennale pranks do not seem to advance much on the Notre Dame affair the Letterists pulled off back in 1950.

In a handwritten note about the improper expulsion of the Spur group, De Jong wrote, perhaps addressing Debord: “I’m proud you call us gangsters, nevertheless you are wrong. We are worse: we are Situationists.”²⁶⁶ She goes on to articulate, for the first time, an accurate formula for the impasse into which the Situationists had wandered: “The Situationist International has to be considered either as an avant-garde school which has already produced a series of first-class artists thrown out after having passed through their education OR as an anti-organization based

upon new ideology which is situationist and which has not yet found in details its clear formulations in the fields of science, technique, and art."²⁶⁷ The Situationist International had indeed functioned as a school for scandal, through which many fabulous (one would not say distinguished) writers and artists passed. But it could not function as an anti-organization.

De Jong adds the first principle of the new anti-organization to come: "Everybody who develops theoretically or practically this new unity is automatically a member of the situationist international and in this perspective the *Situationist Times*."²⁶⁸ Here De Jong dispenses with the notion of organization altogether. The Situationist International could henceforth be taken as just one example of a collaborative game. Perhaps it was more of a *detournement* of the form of the organized avant garde than an avant garde, anyway. This begs the question of what other kinds of organization might be detoured, or whether there is a need for organization at all. Here a new kind of relation appears, perhaps with new dangers. If the Situationist International acquired the vices of collective being, anti-organization might be just one step toward the vices of an all too familiar individualism. *Situationist Times* would head that off for now by documenting a network of related experiments, steps toward what it called the *situcratic society*.

Revenge is a dish best served from a great height. The *Situationist Times* that de Jong edited from 1962 to 1967 is a remarkable set of documents. The early issues were edited jointly with Noël Arnaud (1919–2003). A hospital administrator by profession, he was a member of Dada and Surrealist groups, of Cobra and Oulipo, a Satrap of the College of 'Pataphysics, and Boris Vian's biographer.²⁶⁹ Collaborating with him perhaps suggests de Jong's awareness that the Situationists' recuperation of their own immediate avant-garde past was by no means complete. *Situationist Times* would pointedly include texts by Dufrene and Sismondo, a discarded Letterist and Situationist respectively. Produced outside of the Situationist International and without Trocchi, it turned out to be a somewhat different beast. It was multilingual rather than English language, and even as such written in what one might now call *netlish* – transnational English unapologetically cast as a second language patterned after the writer's first language.²⁷⁰ The era of French as the *lingua franca* of the avant garde was almost over.

Situationist Times pursued a different course to the experimental practice of the excluded artists and the strategic logics of the Debord faction. It offered resources for thought, action, creation, rather than a consistent line. It was more about suggesting possible connections than pronouncing on fault lines. De Jong was interested in a logic of images, of concepts that might be discovered and presented through the proliferation of images. Stewart Home: “issue of *Situationist Times* resemble contemporary printed editions by Fluxus. Both represent a non-art approach to what can only very loosely be termed *artistic activity*.”²⁷¹ If one took seriously Lautréamont’s injunction that “poetry should be made by all,” then perhaps a journal – any reproducible media – should distribute both finished art and raw materials with which others could make art. Or perhaps there could be no difference between a raw material and a finished work.

Each issue contained the statement, consistent with established Situationist practice, to the effect that “all reproduction, deformation, modification, derivation, and transformation of the *Situationist Times* are permitted.” This was similar to the *copyleft* statement published in *Internationale Situationniste*, and connects Situationist practice with the hacker and pirate practices of twenty-first struggles around free culture as a fitfully acknowledged if still barely understood precursor. As we shall see Trocchi had a quite different approach to this same problem. He also circulated writing, in a sense for free, but as an *internal* communication practice.

The first issue of *International Times* defended the Spur group, expelled from the Situationist International at a time when charges were being brought against them for their supposedly *licentious* publication. In a little dossier of texts is included a strong editorial from Arnaud, a statement by Debord and others from the First Situationist International and some fragments of a comic strip called ‘Spur: Paintings and Sculptures.’ It includes a panel with a Situationist last supper, the elements of which include: Bauhaus, shit, violins, birds, beauty, belches, mercilessness, coffee, and kisses. The issue also documents the expulsion of the ‘Nashists’ of the Second Situationist International with a crude détournement of pages from the *Internationale*

Situationiste journal.²⁷² There is letter in Danish from J. V. Martin, the only Scandinavian to remain loyal to Debord, attacking Nash. Where the *Internationale Situationiste* always aimed at a consistent line, *Situationist Times* is interested in the relationships between positions.

Several issues present what remained of *Mutant*, a post-Situationist International collaboration between Jorn and Debord that aimed to turn away from the then current spectacle of the *space age* toward a prescient intervention in the technological transformation of earthbound life.²⁷³ Never set foot in a fall out shelter, *Mutant* declares. "it is better to die standing with all the cultural heritage of humanity, the perpetual modification of which must remain our task." Nuclear weaponry's main function is to deter not the enemy but the state's own population. Contrary to the then-popular ban-the-bomb movement, this position sees not nuclear annihilation as the main threat, but the disarming of critique. The channeling of critical energy into the anti-nuclear movement serves the interests of existing political forces. Hence: "I... pledge myself not to expect the necessary upheavals of society by any of the existing formations of specialized politics." One wonders how much the twenty-first century's obsession with things environmental might likewise play a demobilizing role.

A consistent project in *Situationist Times* is an ongoing investigation of topology, in keeping with one of Jorn's abiding interests.²⁷⁴ The mathematician and Surrealist collage artist Max Bucaille (1906-1996) contributed a whole series of texts on the subject. Topology is a geometry of transformations, and it exercised a fascination over a number of postwar artists, architects, and writers, including Henri Lefebvre, who were looking for a more modern understanding of space than perspective drawing. Topology seemed to better describe the geometric imagination of folk art, with its knots, rings, spirals and labyrinths, all of which *Situationist Times* documented with copious photographs from cross-cultural sources. While many were interested in its formal properties, in *Situationist Times* topology becomes something else. It points towards a way of diagramming practices in space and time, a *situology* of singular and variable forms. De Jong: "that is the beautiful thing about topology, that everything can be changed at any time."²⁷⁵

Jorn's interest at the time was an attempt to document what he took to be a Nordic spatio-temporal folk culture, quite at odds with the formal geometry bequeathed to modern art and science by the Renaissance. For this purpose he created yet another organization, the Institute for Comparative Vandalism (1962-1965). Guy Atkins: "The unattractive name was deliberately chosen to put of art lovers."²⁷⁶ It took its name from graffiti found in Normandy churches in which Jorn saw the hand of his ancestors. The idea was to follow the Viking trail from Norway to the South of France documenting the remnants of this alternative worldview. The project was to culminate in a massive publication project – *10,000 Years of Nordic Folk Art* – but Jorn failed to find willing academic partners for the project and abandoned it.

Some of the extraordinary photographs Jorn collected ended up in *Situationist Times*. They are a key part of the journal's attempt to gather materials for a situology to come, a critical practice in time and space no longer dependent on the language or the forms of art or politics. The Situationist International had little to say about situations. Drawing on Jorn's extensive researches, *Situationist Times* would at last attempt a more explicit inquiry. Perhaps the abandonment of the more rigid geometry of the organization, with its static national sections, opened up the possibility of a variable field of collaboration, and hence to a more explicit formulation of what it meant to create a situationist practice.

"Situation: Life space or part of it conceived in terms of its content (meaning). The life space may consist of one situation or two or more overlapping situations. The term situation refers either to the general life situation or the momentary situation."²⁷⁷ Situation is essentially a hinge between subject and objective space. "Situation, overlapping: Two or more situations which exist simultaneously and which have a common part. The person is generally located within this common part." Once space and time are thought in terms of situations, then an assessment of the potential of such spaces and times is possible. "Space of free movement: regions accessible to the person from his present position. The space of free movement is usually a multiply connected region. Its limits are determined mainly by (1) what is forbidden to a person, (2) what is beyond his abilities." Situations and the regions they compose can be not only thought but appropriated

according not to boundaries of function or ownership, but relations of contiguity and continuity. "Structure of a region: Refers to (1) degree of differentiation of the region (2) arrangement of its part regions, (3) degree of connection between its parts." *Situationist Times* is, among other things, elementary research into space and time that can be self-composing.

"The new concepts of physics introduced by quantum mechanics flow naturally from and into Whitehead's organic description of the world in experience and as experience," writes the artist Fanchon Fröhlich.²⁷⁸ Like De Jong, she studied with the Surrealist print maker Stanley William Hayter (1901-1988) in Paris.²⁷⁹ Fröhlich also studied philosophy with Rudolph Carnap and Peter Strawson, and had entrée to the scientific world through her physicist husband Herbert Fröhlich. The process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) could without difficulty be read as the situation writ large.²⁸⁰

A situology might be a theory and practice of intervening in the currents of a turbulent time, an art of the event, a politics of the event, but one that seeks out the limits of art and politics. With the irrevocable split between Paris and everyone else, the conditions were not ripe for sharpening such practices and experiments against the blade of critique. Howard Slater: "In many ways the conflicts with Spur and the [Nashists] were to some degree encouraged and used by the First Situationist International to prune itself of contradictions that may have eventually lead to a deepening of the theory of the spectacle, a politicization of the practice of art and a productive extension of its notion of class.... The problem of creativity – the right to productive socialization as a counter value – was not resolved, it was polarized."²⁸¹

The contradictions the Situationist International attempted to prune may well be those inherent in romanticism, the strategy that Lefebvre thought was the headwaters of the movement. The Situationist International never worked through the terms of this tension. It relied on the romantic staple of a poetics to bring together anthropological and cosmological nature. A poetics, or in Jorn's case an aesthetics, opens the anthropological toward the cosmological and vice-versa.

Chtcheglov's writings on unitary urbanism, with their heavy debts to Rimbaud and the Surrealists, are a resonant statement of such a project.

The tension proved too great. Debord and Constant stuck close to the project of an anthropological nature, indeed Constant will make the entire world over in its image. Nash, De Jong and Spur head in the opposite direction, where a wild and woolly cosmological nature can irrupt into the social. Yet the Situationist project, taken as a whole, is relatively rare. It advanced a new romantic agenda on the least likely terrain, that of architecture, the most steadfastly classical of forms. At the same time it made the fateful leap beyond romantic revolt to class struggle. It was not content to remain as strategy merely within the total semantic field, and within the economy of tolerable middle class dissent.

Only Jorn comes close to appreciating the necessary tension between the anthropological and cosmological nature, although in Lefebvre's terms, Jorn's Dionysian proclivities rule out the possibility of superceding the tension between them. Lefebvre: "the Dionysian dance is not always a round."²⁸² Sometimes it destroys rather than creates. Lefebvre really thought that the Situationists had opened a new path, extending romanticism in a new direction. Perhaps he was, and is, right. "The most brilliant Situationists are exploring and testing out a kind of lived utopianism."²⁸³ The key for Lefebvre was the critique of architecture and town planning. Lefebvre had nothing to say about their other key innovation, *detournement*. This was a real advance on the romantic cult of the genius of the author. A challenge to the Thing of Things on its own terrain.

Considered as a wreckage of a once-viable unitary project, Situationist materials may yet have some juice left in them that has not been sucked dry in a three-way necrophilia with the museum and with scholarship. But there might be other projects, spun off out of internal tensions with the Situationist International, that also might be considered as materials for a future critical practice. Two other projects exemplify the possibilities and limitations of a practice after Art. Both were nurtured within the Situationist International, and in both cases extend beyond it. One is mostly a

project for the overcoming of literature, the other for the overcoming of architecture. They are otherwise quite different and are the product of former members of the Situationist International who had very little to do with each other.

After literature comes project sigma, whose instigator was Alexander Trocchi (1925-1984). After architecture comes New Babylon, the lifework of Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005). Constant and Trocchi were roughly contemporaries. They were both products, among other things, of Saint Germain. About the only other thing they had in common was that at one time or another they had earned Guy Debord's respect – and he had earned theirs. Just as Nash and De Jong parted ways with Debord and spun off into their own collaborative practices, so too did Alexander Trocchi. Or at least he gave it a go.

Project sigma

Better known as a novelist, Trocchi tried and failed to form a much more ambitious movement. He called it project sigma, after the mathematical sign which can stand for the sum or the totality. He thought it “free of bothersome semantic accretions.” He set out his sigma project in two luminous texts, ‘The Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds’ and ‘Sigma: A Tactical Blueprint’. “Revolt is understandably unpopular,” he writes, and generally conceived in a somewhat backward way. Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) knew enough to seize the railways and the power stations while the old guard persisted in defending the offices of the state. “So cultural revolt must seize the grids of expression and the powerhouses of the mind.” Rather than a frontal confrontation, Trocchi suggests a more subtle practice of installing the material basis for a new practice of creation. Its no longer a question of a new journal or art movement. “Art can have no existential significance for a civilization which draws a line between life and art and collects artifacts like ancestral bones for reverence.”²⁸⁴ It’s a question of new relations of creation.

The key he picks up from a stray quote from his contemporary Raymond Williams (1921-1988), founding figure in cultural materialism and British cultural studies: “The question is not who will patronize the arts, but what forms are possible in which artists will have control of their own means of expression, in such ways that they will have relation to a community rather than to a market or a patron.”²⁸⁵ Williams is most known for the project of democratizing the practice of critical reading. Here he takes up the production side of the creation of a people’s culture. This appealed more to Trocchi, who found proletarian culture rather more stifling than Williams. In what must have been a charming thought to Debord, Trocchi wanted to bypass the brokers of the culture industry – the publisher and art dealers. In an extraordinary mix of the practical and the sublime, he plots the means of creative autonomy within capitalism itself.

Trocchi’s project sigma is partly inspired by Black Mountain College (1933-1957), the famous North Carolina school, where Franz Kline, Robert Creeley (1926-2005), Merce Cunningham (1919-2009), John Cage (1912-1992) and so many other transformative figures of the American avant

garde once taught. Trocchi also conceives of sigma as “a continuous, international, experimental conference.”²⁸⁶ Spaces of free creation, of ongoing and unfolding situations, could be based just outside metropolitan areas, a network of experimental sites in constant communication. The actually existing university has become a microcosm of spectacular society. It reproduces and reinforces a strictly functional approach to creation.

Trocchi mentions a contest at Cambridge University to come up with a use for its neglected chapels. Many are quite beautiful and once functioned as the unitary heart of their respective colleges. The winning suggestion was to turn them into canteens or student housing. Trocchi thought brothels would at least be a more *spiritual* solution. The postwar university was rapidly becoming a mere functional support for the spectacle, training the mediators who would manage its desires. What is lacking is a point at which to start making situations.

The sigma texts are part manifesto, part manual. The practical side to Trocchi’s proposal is the means of funding it. Project sigma is not just a university, it is also an agency for what Jorn called the creative elite. Those who join it become part of an agency controlled by the creators themselves. Sigma lives off residuals, patents, commissions, even what one would now call consultancy fees. Its network of spontaneous universities function as advertisements for themselves. One might almost say that they are brands. Trocchi’s solution is a weird kind of Leninist dual power.²⁸⁷ An autonomous, self-managed, unalienated power of seamless creativity exists alongside the old commodified spectacle until such time as it can subsume it within its new means of creation. It is both science fiction and a business plan, a utopian future and an almost exact description of sophisticated spectacular business in the twenty-first century. It could almost be the model for the Blue Ant agency of Hubertus Bigend (b. 1967), the fictional son of a Situationist in the novels of William Gibson.²⁸⁸ It is a summation of Trocchi’s own extraordinary experience yet it is also a program he in no sense fitted to carry out in person.

Trocchi survived a genteel-poor upbringing in Glasgow. During the war he sailed on convoy ships taking supplies to the Soviet Union. After a stint at Glasgow University he took advantage

of a scholarship to ship off to Paris. He was an editor of the English language journal *Merlin* (1952-1954), which co-existed in friendly rivalry with the *Paris Review* of George Plimpton (1927-2003) and friends. In Paris he fell under the spell of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) and managed to get Beckett published, together with Jean Genet (1910-1986) and Eugene Ionesco (1909-1984), with Olympia Press, a Paris-based English language imprint best known for its porn. Like more than a few expats Trocchi wrote porn novels for Olympia's charming but deeply dodgy impresario Maurice Girodias (1919-1990).²⁸⁹

The best of Trocchi's porn novels is *Helen and Desire*. Growing up in the far North of Australia, Helen is a bored teenager with only her own immediate sensations to amuse her: "I count the sea as my first love... it was an impersonal one." She takes off on the adventure of renouncing her own will, her subjectivity, her interiority. Instead she allows herself a terrible and ungovernable joy of annihilation. And yet Helen remains a writer. The book purports to be a found manuscript, a diary not of a person but of a process of depersonalization. The body becomes a surface for the replacement of self with sensation: "Riven now at twin poles of delight, my glistening torso slithered under discs, flats, and surfaces, under flanges of containment and protusion, all seeking the weld of female union. My breasts, charged with ambiguous alluvial sensations, slipped to and fro under their counterparts..."²⁹⁰

Helen's writing recounts the steps by which the very possibility of authorship is undone. Her diary ends when there is no longer a subject to be writing it: "And gradually the whole desire to commit my experiences to history has been outflanked by the terrible pleasure I experience in approaching the unconscious state of an object... It is indeed doubtful whether I can still usefully use the word 'I.'" ²⁹¹ Helen gives herself over to the situation, and abolishes the act of writing, the possibility of literature as a separate art, in the process.

Self destruction seemed preferable to self construction, to the institutional forces that pinned the self in place. Trocchi wrote about such agencies in a short story for his *Moving Times*, a literary journal that was supposed to appear as posters in subway stations: "At the third jolt the patient's

body was seen to shudder like a tall jelly within the leather harness, and a wisp of blue smoke issued from his nostrils, a reaction generally regarded as a symptom of what, in technical nomenclature, is called 'reintegration'. The patient reintegrated slowly, the shuddering subsided gradually over a period of two and a half hours, after which he was returned to the deepfreeze as a precaution against pong."²⁹² The construction of the stable subject requires a huge effort of disciplinary force, but it is not as if there is a natural self that such techniques suppress. Rather, it's a choice between two kinds of process, between the psychiatric techniques of the subject, or the crafty whittling of the body into sensate being within the unstable, unfolding embrace of the situation.

As a writer Trocchi connects Beckett to William Burroughs, and both to Debord. His great book, *Cain's Book* (1960), is often considered a Beat classic, but it is rarely read as a Situationist text. Debord was an admirer of Malcolm Lowry (1909-1957), author of *Under the Volcano* (1947), with whom Trocchi had at least two things in common. One was that they both produced only one book that was a literary success. The other was that they preferred to destroy themselves rather than inflict more literature on the world. Lowry was an alcoholic; Trocchi a drug fiend. Both explored in depth the practice of playing with time, with time outside of both labor and leisure. Trocchi's advice to ambitious writers: "Let them dedicate a year to pinball and think again." Both were adepts at what Trocchi called "the chemistry of alienation."²⁹³ Both found the limits to becoming a professional in the art of intoxication.

"Tomorrow is an age of Doctors," Trocchi says prophetically. By 2007 the American Environmental Protection Agency will announce that what it calls the *emerging contaminants* in drinking water come mostly from anti-depressants, painkillers, antibiotics, hormones and blood pressure remedies.²⁹⁴ It's the effluent of the affluent world of spectacular medicine. The disintegrating spectacle has inadvertently medicated not only whole populations of humans but of other species as well, a whole biosphere rendered comfortably numb. It's a byproduct of constantly reintegrating the human body into the uniform time of production and consumption,

for a time that repeats the same steady intervals without end, and rendered efficiently, without the blue smoke.

The central character in *Cain's Book* avoids work as best he can, and takes to its extreme the practice of playing with his own life. This play is far from a joyful distraction. It is an immersion in one intensity after another. "To mean everything and for everything to be a confidence trick, tasting power coming into being for others; I had often thought that only through play could one taste that power safely, if dangerously, and that when the spirit of play died there was only murder."²⁹⁵ From Sartre, Trocchi took the idea of being condemned to freedom. Unlike Sartre, he did not limit himself to discussing banal situations in which one might be confronted by this freedom. Rather, new situations had to be created. For Debord this creation of situations was always a collaborative project, of love and play and boisterous rivalry as a means of effacing bourgeois individuality. For Trocchi it is a much more grim and solitary business, a lone self-purgation amid the purgatory of other people.

Cain's Book was, for all its brilliance, something of a dead end. It lacks the self-annihilating power of *Helen and Desire*. It allows itself the one masochism the earlier book did its best to refuse: that of becoming the plaything of *literature*. Its failure to put an end to literature leads the critic James Campbell to declare with a certain self-satisfaction: "The novel didn't die, after all, but, following *Cain*, Trocchi's part in it did."²⁹⁶ This is not the least reason that Trocchi's post-*Cain* writing calls for a fresh appreciation. Borrowing in part from his friend and contemporary Wallace Berman (1927-1976) and his attempt to redefine the circuits of communication for poetry and visual art with his home-made journal *Semina* (1955-1964), Trocchi shifts attention from form as a question of arranging words on the page to form as the question of the medium and economy by which words are communicated.²⁹⁷

While *Cain's Book* is now a captive of its own literary success, the same cannot be said of the *sigma portfolio* (1964). The *portfolio* allowed Trocchi to abandon literature and yet keep writing. It's a project he hatched in New York, but brought back to London with him, "close under his eyelids,

an electronic load, an unwritten book, a plan in four dimensions, a shadow one, including time..." This puckish, punkish project would be self generating and self-published. "The *sigma portfolio* is an entirely new dimension in publishing, through which the writer reaches his public immediately, outflanking the traditional traps of publishing-house policy, and by means of which the reader gets it, so to speak, 'hot' from the writer's pen, the photographer's lens, etc."²⁹⁸

Through a probably deliberate misunderstanding, Trocchi presents the early Letterist movement as being based, not on chipping writing down to the letter in the typographic sense, but on the sending of letters in the postal, or perhaps topographic sense. He borrows from the Letterist International the name *Potlatch*, but designates by it what he calls an *inter-personal log*. It is to be an open-ended series of simple typed and duplicated documents. "This gambit, a round-robin which includes *n* participants, an interpersonal experiment in expression; a man responding as and when he pleases; copies of his response at once roneo-ed for circulation; individuals chiming in, checking out at any time."²⁹⁹

Trocchi calls it a log to stress the temporal aspect, the sequence of statement and rejoinder: "it should literally discover many things, including the dialectical process of its own growth." Where the book puts an end to the transformations of the text and sets up a distinction between author and reader, the inter-personal log keeps transforming itself, and makes of its readers writers and of its writers readers. "Essentially ludic, and calling, it seems to me, for a particular kind of gesture, it might be called *potlatch*." It might also be called *blogging*.³⁰⁰ Trocchi invented a web of logs before there was even an internet.

Or it might be called sigma, that blank, elusive, all-embracing one-word poem that Trocchi put at the heart of the enterprise. "For, sigma is a word referring to something which is quite independent of myself or of any other individual, and if we are correct in our historical analysis, we must regard it as having 'begun' a long time ago."³⁰¹ The term sigma stands in for a process, without beginning or end, without subject or goal, and yet which is not a mere abstract force, but something experienced within the lived time of everyday life. This willful and collaborative play

within and against creative forces is the thread becomes lost under the conditions of spectacular society.

And so “it is the object of sigma to bring all informations out into the open.” The *sigma portfolio* is a kind of residue of a process, which leaves behind a diagram of the ephemeral forces that make and unmake situations. Passing through the interstitial spaces of spectacular society, not least its literature, *sigma portfolio* finds light, cheap, temporary means to bypass the spectacular and yet, for all its evanescence, to become an exemplary instance of the new power at work in the world. Sigma is a new power which is at the same time the ancient power of homo ludens, joining into the ineffable play of the world.

Trocchi quotes Debord: “Everything being connected, it was necessary to change it by a unitary struggle, or nothing.” Trocchi’s sigma texts abound in tactical maxims. The round robin of roneoed texts is an outflanking gesture, it exploits a loophole in the technical apparatus of mechanical reproduction. But where Debord’s tactics are always elusive, seductive, Trocchi wants to create a center, which he sometimes calls the *box office*, as if it offered tickets to the end game of the spectacle itself. “The box-office will be a primitive micro-model of a possible future.” This plan for a consciously constructed environment would include audio-visual media, as well as Trocchi’s *futiques* (future antiques), objects designed for open-ended play. The resources of all the arts are to be integrated into the conscious construction of situations.

The *Portfolio* includes Trocchi’s détourned version of a ‘Situationist Manifesto’. What he adds and subtracts from this ‘orthodox’ Situationist document is instructive. Like Constant, he stressed the role of automation in clearing the way for a ludic world. “Automation, and a general ‘socialization’ of vital goods will gradually and ineluctably dispense with most of the necessity for ‘work’: eventually, as near as dammit, the complete liberty of the individual in relation to production will be attained.” In place of surplus value, a play value. But play meets resistance. Just as the church resisted the festival, so the authorities seize *Cain’s Book*. The unions resist automation and defend work. Sigma has to take place outside of all forms of existing power: “we

propose immediate action on the international scale, a self-governing (non-)organization of producers of the new culture beyond, and independent of, all political organizations..."³⁰²

No matter how euphoric his theory, Trocchi's practice is modest in scale: "so long as our techniques for the passing on of informations grow with the passage of time more and more effective, etc., our insurrection will snowball of its own momentum."³⁰³ The means of dissemination for sigma was the stencil duplicator, or mimeograph machine. Ironically enough, it was a popular medium for the kinds of organization sigma eschews, such as churches, schools and social clubs. It was the original medium for science fiction fanzines. Duplicating was an easy and cheap means of making copies by the hundreds without recourse to a professional printer. Popular makes include Gestetner and Ditto. Trocchi uses another trademark as a verb – to Roneo – although strictly speaking this brand used a slightly different process.

Trocchi says at least some sigma texts were composed directly on the stencil. He would have taken the ribbon out of the typewriter, inserted the stencil and typed away. The stencil has a stiff sheet of card backed with wax, and attached to it a thin sheet of tissue paper. The impact of the keys cuts the letters into the wax, with the residue sticking to the tissue paper. Judging by the *sigma portfolio*, Trocchi and his associates were good stencil cutters. Type too hard and the enclosed circles within the letters turn to black blobs. Once Trocchi cut the stencil, he removed it from the typewriter and attached it to the drum, which is filled with ink. He would then turn the crank by hand, each rotation drawing a sheet of paper under the drum, through the pressure rollers, copying his text in the process. On most duplicators, it takes a bit of fiddling with various settings to get good copies. Judging by surviving copies, Trocchi and his sigma associates mastered it.

Constant: "Freedom is the most difficult way of living that man can lead. For freedom can only be realized in creation and creation means discipline."³⁰⁴ Trocchi was not exactly master of his own life. The quest for extreme situations quickly collapsed into the sheer habit of junkie life. When he was living in Venice Beach, California, hanging out with the Beats, he was visited one

day by Irving Rosenthal (b. 1930), who wrote down his impressions of Trocchi's materialist and experimental attitude to life there in his very own *Musee Imaginaire*: "Everything functional had been drafted into the service of art, taken apart and reassembled, and many things looked subjected to more than one transformation, as if the lust to create had been so overpowering as to become cannibalistic, or as if each object of art, once created, became as stupid as a lamp or bookend, and had to be destroyed and built anew. The whole room seemed to belong to another world, to whose inhabitants these uncanny furnishings were the beds and chairs of everyday life."

Rosenthal quickly soured on Trocchi and his miniature version of unitary urbanism: "Even the little true beauty I picked up there, to pop in my mouth and suck on, was mixed with a slow acting poison to make the eyes opaque and dreamless..." It would not be long before the whole place burned to the ground.³⁰⁵ It has to be said: Trocchi was an addict, and like many addicts, left a wake of casual violence behind him. The poet, artist and jazz musician Jeff Nuttall (1933-2004), who assisted him for a time, left a portrait that has the rare quality of being critical but non-judgmental: "Trocchi once told me he first took heroin for the sense of inviolability it gave him. If the cool hipster is severed from identificatory processes and thus from other people's pleasure and pain, he is nevertheless an athlete of time. ... No user is punctual."³⁰⁶

In his novel *Tainted Love* (2005) Stewart Home (b. 1962) is not so kind. "Alex liked women, but clearly he preferred getting them fucked up on drugs to any kind of physical intimacy. Trocchi got a kick out of watching beautiful woman like Lyn spiraling downwards through endless cycles of degradation. And when Lyn did die Alex was mortified, and it seemed to me that he'd been killed either with or before her. Trocchi no longer simply took drugs; he had become heroin. Alex was dead and didn't yet know it. I liked and admired Trocchi, he was a visionary who'd written two brilliant novels, but when it came to his relationship with other people he could be a complete cunt." This is written from the point of view of a young woman who is herself hustling for heroin, who is the mother of the novel's narrator, and who dies in sordid circumstances. It's a timely reminder that not everyone survives bohemia, that those who rise to it from delinquency

rather than fall into it out of privilege have rather a hard time of it. The romanticism that still clings to Rosenthal's version is here – almost – expunged.³⁰⁷

For someone like Constant, the failure of Trocchi's project sigma had less to do with Trocchi's personal limitations than with objective necessity. The society of the spectacle required a structural transformation which no mere passing of informations between disaffected hipsters could ever achieve. New Babylon placed its bets on changing with forms within which everyday life s experienced. "The culture of New Babylon does not result from isolated activities, from exceptional situations, but from the global activity of the whole world population, every human being engaged in a dynamic relation with his surroundings."³⁰⁸

New Babylon

Constant built a future out of offcut plexiglass and bicycle spokes. Later, he would say that his marvelous models of New Babylon were appreciated in much the same way as African masks were in Surrealist times, as interesting forms, but stripped of their *magical* significance. What is lost from New Babylon is a passion gone from the world, a desire to seize the world itself as the object of desire, to find a form for the whole of life.

Constant had photographs made of New Babylon, and a film. He produced a newspaper for it, and he gave his famous lecture-performances. All to conjure into being a landscape that envisioned what was possible right here and now, but was merely held back by the fetter of outdated relations of production. It was not a utopia. "I prefer to call it a realistic project because it distances itself from the present condition which has lost touch with reality, and because it is founded on what is technically feasible, on what is desirable from a human viewpoint, on what is inevitable from a social viewpoint."³⁰⁹ The question that lingers is not whether New Babylon was merely a dream, but whether actually existing built form is really a nightmare.

Modern architecture, begun with so much promise, had found its default setting in functionalism. It divided the city between the functions of work, transport, leisure and the home. Its ruling passion was *efficiency*. The city was a machine for the free circulation of capital, labor, materials and their products. Planners merely accepted existing social relations as given. They accepted the division between public and private. On the one hand, private property, the bourgeois family, and the car. On the other, pathetic little Bantustans of public life, hived off to the margins.

New Babylon is a *detournement*, not of art or literature, but of modern architecture and town planning. If there is a key architect that New Babylon can be read as detourning, it is Constant's friend, mentor and patron Aldo Van Eyk (1918-1999). While caught up in the modern movement, he was critical of architecture as pseudo science, and of modern built form with its "miles upon

miles of organized nowhere”³¹⁰ He took his inspiration more from modern art and physics than its architecture. Like Jorn and Gallizio he saw art and science as creative experiments that shattered the last vestiges of a Platonic universe of static order and eternal forms. Once known for the hundreds of children’s playgrounds he built in Amsterdam, he was also an original theorist. He extended the momentum of what he called the “great riot” of modernism into built form.

The key architectural form for Van Eyck was the threshold, which he imagines not as dividing one space from another, say public from private, but as connecting one possibility to another. Rather than an efficient division of space by function, he imagined a landscape of place, occasion, threshold, an architecture in which to tarry. Or as he writes in *The Situationist Times*, “a house is a tiny city, a city is a huge house” The key was to think built form more in terms of time than space, a time that can’t be measured. For a people that can linger there, the city enables times of full participation and rich experience. The city is when “associative awareness changes and extends perception, rendering it transparent and profound through memory and anticipation.” The urban malingeringer becomes aware of *duration*. Here time acquires depth and subtlety, and “awareness of duration is as gratifying as awareness of the passing instant is oppressive. The former opens time, renders it transparent, whilst the latter closes time, rendering it impenetrable.”³¹¹

The sensation of duration is the sense of being itself. Architecture should make one at home in duration, not enclose us in space, nor in time measured out as if it was space. Van Eyck does not want to build a dwelling for being, but a nexus for a homecoming. Such in-between places, or thresholds, can “resolve the conflicts which exteriorize man from time (thereby closing the door on himself).” The people make places, but not with the space of their own choosing. Van Eyck wants an architecture that can imply the capacity for meaning making, for turning space into places. This is why his playgrounds contain only abstract forms, which play makes meaningful in its own inimitable ways. Constant radicalizes Van Eyck’s program. He extends the playground over the surface of the earth. The problem, he realizes, is total, and if the architect planner does

not take on the totality of built form, then as Van Eyck says, “people will spread over the globe and be at home nowhere.”³¹²

While Constant borrows his program from Van Eyck, the architectural language that he détourns comes from French utopian architects of the postwar years. There were at least three such utopias. The Architecture Principe group built on the bunker archaeology of Paul Virilio (b. 1932). They proposed massive forms, sloping floors, all to create an architecture that would arrest and congeal the rapid flux of contemporary life. The Utopie group, which included Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), took the opposite tack, favoring inflatable forms, a temporary and playful architecture. Meanwhile, architects like Yona Friedman (b. 1923) proposed building space frames in the air, hoist aloft on pylons. Like Le Corbusier, Friedman thought this form allows for the separation of networks that move different things at different speeds.³¹³ This was the form Constant favored too, even though he used the elevated space-frame for quite different ends.³¹⁴ Of all the seemingly utopian projects of the time, Constant’s is the only one for which a transformation in built form can only come out of a transformation of social relations.

Rather than demolish the old world to build a *radiant city*; rather than build a *garden city* on green field sites, Constant cantilevers new spaces up above, leaving both city and countryside untouched. Automated factories would be underground, the surface level is for transport, while up above, a new landscape for play, a massive superstructure of linked *sectors*, within which everything is malleable, changeable at whim. Considered vertically, as an elevation, New Babylon makes literal Marx’s diagram of base and superstructure. Its airy sectors are literally superstructures, made possible by an infrastructure below ground where mechanical reproduction has abolished scarcity and freed all of time from necessity. It is an image of what Constant imagines the development of productive forces has made possible, but which the fetter of existing relations of production prevents from coming into being.

New Babylon responds both to the expansion of material resources and the expansion of population. Like a suburban family that adds a new storey when the second kid is born, Constant

builds a second deck – for the whole planet. Rather than suburban sprawl inserting itself into any and every terrain, he leaves much of the old world untouched – including, interestingly, the classic spaces of the *dérive* in the heart of the old cities such as Paris and Amsterdam. The Les Halles of which Afdelhamid Khatib was so fond would remain. His is a new world that expands, not horizontally but vertically. It is a “a new skin that covers the earth and multiplies its living space.”³¹⁵ Not the least charm of New Babylon is that Constant thinks the planet is a robust enough foundation on which to build such a bold addition.

Like many of the time, Constant was influenced by the *cybernetic* theories of Norbert Wiener (1894-1964), particularly his notion of a second industrial revolution. After wandering the streets of London and Manchester, Friedrich Engels movingly recorded the human misery that resulted from the first one. It confounded modern artists, who felt compelled to either reject industry or embrace it. The alternate utopian visions of William Morris (1834-1896) and Edward Bellamy (1850-1898) represented these two seemingly incompatible options.³¹⁶ But this debate was now moot. The first industrial revolution had given way to the second, a revolution in the use of information as a means of control.

Cybernetics might just provide the means of mitigating the damage of the first industrial revolution, while building on its enormous expansion of productive potential. Or, it could result in what Wiener called the “fascist ant-state.”³¹⁷ Constant takes to heart Engels’ formula that communism reduces the state to the administration of things. Cybernetics as control is pushed down below ground, to the world of the administration of things. Cybernetics as freedom, as the ability to connect anywhere, anytime, is in play up above. Constant pushes the debate about technicity to both extremes at once: both total control and total freedom. By pushing the instrumentalizing tendencies of cybernetic control to the limit, freedom from necessity appears in the realm of the possible.

Constant was not alone in imagining cybernetic automation to be a transformative development, but he was in rarer company in seeing it in the context of a social revolution. “Well then, how

could such far-reaching automation be achieved without social ownership of the means of production?"³¹⁸ Automation changes the relations of production, which in turn changes social structures. The increase in productivity wrests freedom from necessity, but generates a surplus which needs dissipating somehow. New Babylon address the prospect of a new kind of necessity. As Constant says, "automation inevitably confronted us with the question of where human energy would be able to discharge itself if not in productive work."³¹⁹ It addresses a major theme of Georges Bataille: that surplus presents more fundamental problems for human societies than necessity. Where for Bataille the solution tends to involve orgiastic sacrifices to an impossible absolute, for Constant it is more a question of enabling playful and challenging social relations to take place.

The multi-level layout Constant creates borrows a recognizable figure from modern architecture – the space frame suspended in the air on pylons – but greatly expands its significance. In Constant's hands it becomes the image of a world in which the time of free movement takes priority over the space of private property. Fencing off one space for another as private property is for Constant a "dehumanization of the earth," against which New Babylon presupposes "the socialization of the earth's surface"³²⁰ Rather than lines that make borders, Constant's *experimental geography* proposes lines that make connections. His vast aerial sectors, the size of little cities, link up and spread out over the landscape, like reinforced concrete crab-grass.

Owning property affords someone a house in which to be at home, at the price of being homeless in the world. Dispense with property, dispense with separation, and the feeling of being merely thrown into the world goes with it. Our species-being can give vent to its *wanderlust*, at home in a house-like world. Constant thought modernity was already accelerating a return to a nomadic existence. New Babylon is nomadic life fully realized. It is an architecture of duration, of thresholds, of collaborative place-making, writ large. Freed from the fixity and uniformity of property, space could again have its qualities. A short trip in New Babylon should offer more variety than the most interminable journeys through the concentrated city of spectacular society. "Life is an endless journey across a world that is changing so rapidly that it seems forever

another.” The New Babylonians could wander over the whole surface of a world that was ever changing, ever different. “New Babylon ends nowhere (the earth is round).”³²¹

Beneath the ground, the automatic factories; across the surface, endless highways; and up above – a global network of infrastructures, within which play takes place. Without borders, without centers, without a state, it snakes and forks all over the map. New Babylon “is organized according to the individual and collective covering of distance, of errancy: a network of units, linked to one another, and so forming chains that can develop, be extended in every direction.”³²² And above that, figuratively at least, up in the ether, is another network, of communication. Constant intuites at least a few things about what will turn out to be the internet. “The fluctuating world of the sectors calls on facilities (a transmitting and receiving network) that are both decentralized and public. Given the participation of a large number of people in the transmission and reception of images and sounds, perfected telecommunications become an important factor in ludic social behavior.”³²³ Interestingly, Constant’s vertical arrangement also corresponds to his friend Henri Lefebvre’s total semantic field, with cybernetic signaling at the base and symbolic play at the summit.

Through a decentralized network of communication, a nomadic species of play-beings coordinates its frolicking, designs and redesigns its own habitat, and creates a life where “the intensity of each moment destroys the memory that normally paralyses the creative imagination.”³²⁴ Constant experiments with a geography for a world beyond spectacle, where *dérive* and *detournement* are generalized practices, and indeed become the same practice. Both physical space and the space of information belong to everybody, and are resources for a life without dead time. It’s a world not only made for but made by *homo ludens*, whose species being is play. The only question is whether we are, or could become, such beings.

Writing in the 30s, Johan Huizinga offered *homo ludens* as a way of thinking our species being that was outside of the *homo economicus* of political economic discourse. We do not contend with each other to maximize our utility, whatever that means, but for the pleasure of the game, for the

renown a good move brings.³²⁵ Huizinga also opposed his figure of *homo ludens* to the *homo politicus* of Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), whose renewed popularity with scholars is one of the more bizarre signs of failure of critical thought in the early twenty first century.³²⁶ For Schmitt contest cannot be playful, it is to the death. But, says Huizinga, if victory is total, who remains to recognize the victor? Constant's contribution is to propose in spatial form the conditions under which contestation can be playful rather than fatal, by distinguishing contest from control of resources. Automated production makes the surplus available for all, not just the victors. A playful dissipation of surplus energy can then become a pure game, its stakes only recognition, not domination.

Huizinga also opposes *homo ludens* to *homo faber*, the productivist worker-ant of Stalinist discourse. But as Constant discovers, and more through experiment than textual scholarship, what Marx always had in mind was the reconciliation of quantity and quality. The productive surplus generated by the industrial revolution could restore, at a higher level, the qualitative being of the premodern world. In short, something closer to *homo ludens*. The struggle of the proletariat reduces the working day, from ten hours to eight, and – why not? – down to six, four, two, zero. As time becomes free, why should not space be freed also? *Homo ludens* will no longer make art, but will create everyday life, altering the ambience of the world, like programming a new song on a jukebox in a Saint Germain café.

Here is the architecture that Guy Debord and Ivan Chatcheglov only dreamt of as they wandered the streets of Paris: “Every square mile of New Babylon's surface represents an inexhaustible field of new and unknown situations, because nothing will remain and everything is constantly changing.” Constant wanders far beyond his erstwhile comrades, if at the risk of a certain euphoria. For Constant, the Situationist International “did not constitute a real movement. The adherents came and went and the only view they shared was their contempt for the current art practice.”³²⁷ He does credit the movement with contemplating the end to culture conceived as scarcity and property and pursuing this possibility to its conclusions. “Unlike other Situationists, I realized straight away that the theory of unitary urbanism was not primarily concerned with

micro-structures or with ambiances. On the contrary, these depend largely on the macro-structure..."³²⁸ Those who design the future by halves plot their own graves.

In the 1960s, New Babylon came to seem very out of step with the times. "Spontaneous, direct action struck many people as more important than analytical study." Favorite paperback reading switched from Marx to his anarchist antagonist Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876). "This mentality continued until the mid-60s and achieved its apotheosis, but also its end, in... Amsterdam with the appearance of Provo, an anarchic movement that took delight in making the establishment look ridiculous and which attracted international attention."³²⁹ In the early sixties the Provos, like the Second Situationist International, created a style of direct action as performance art, and no matter how much the Situationist International despised them, they embodied a certain spirit that was recognizably their own. While they claimed Constant as an inspiration of sorts, and he contributed to their publications, their projects were different.

"I had given priority to the structural problems of urbanism while the others wanted to stress the content, the play, the 'free creation of everyday life.'"³³⁰ Looking back, peering through the ruins of the disintegrating spectacle, it appears that Constant was right to be skeptical about the political effusions of the sixties. New Babylon is the most thorough negation, not of the world of the late twentieth century, but of a world which is only just now coming into being. It is Constant who seems in touch with the real historical development of the twentieth century, and closer to the possibility of leaving it. He understood the transformative power of the second (cybernetic) industrial revolution, and that its consequences would be a vast reconfiguring of space. In the absence of a social revolution, this transformation of the means of production produced quite the opposite result, New Moloch, rather than New Babylon. Welcome, then, to New Moloch, a global division of functions, which banishes the factory to the sites of cheap labor, in China and elsewhere, while massively concentrating control over networks in the overdeveloped world. The fascist ant-state has gone global.

New Babylon looks less implausible than many of the landscapes that are now supposed to actually exist. "Her first day on the job, Min turned seventeen. She took a half day off and walked the streets alone, buying some sweets and eating them by herself. She had no idea what people did for fun."³³¹ Like a hundred million others, Min came down from the country to find work in one of China's new industrial cities. She came to Dongguan, a city of some ten million people in the Pearl River Delta. She thought it would be fun to work on an assembly line, with people talking and joking, but it was not that way at all. Factory work is noisy, tiring and boring. Factory dorms are full of petty crime, gangs, cliques and doomed romances. All that keeps anyone in touch with anyone is the mobile phone. Time is governed by shifts on machines and the global shopping calendar. When the nights are warm and the days are long, Americans think it time to buy sneakers.

Like so many others in the boom years, Min changes jobs often, but keeps finding much the same thing. It's not so different to the 60s in Europe, only on a vastly greater scale. Young people weaned away from the provinces, from the farm, becoming proletarian, and discover that factory life dulls not just the muscles, but the mind. But the break has been made, cast out of the old life, they make up the new as they go along. The only difference is that unlike so many of the young people of the 60s, Min has never heard of Chairman Mao. The local museum manages not to mention him. When the boom bust, the Chinese government committed billions to propping up New Moloch with vast projects, aimed at building more of the same. Who would have thought, back in the middle of the twentieth century, that in the early twenty-first century, the fate of global capital might hinge, at least in part, on the prudent stewardship of the Chinese Communist Party?

Perhaps Mao's portrait could come down from Tiananmen square now, and be replaced by that of Adam Smith (1723-1790). Or perhaps a more appropriate figurehead would be the great swindler Charles Ponzi (1882-1949). Even the *New York Times* has to admit that the disintegrating spectacle looks like a giant Ponzi scam: "We have created a system for growth that depended on our building more and more stores to sell more and more stuff made in more and more factories

in China, powered by more and more coal that would cause more and more climate change but earn China more and more dollars to buy more and more U.S. T[reasury]-bills so America would have more and more money to build more and more stores and sell more and more stuff that would employ more and more Chinese.”³³² The spectacle built no great pyramids, the best it could manage was this great pyramid scheme.

Is it even possible to imagine collective human agency as productive of something playful, joyous, communal, even beautiful? “The culture of New Babylon does not result from isolated activities, from exceptional situations, but from the global activity of the whole world population, every human being engaged in a dynamic relation with his surroundings.”³³³ New Babylon extends the ethos of the *dérive* to its limit, to world history. It is ultimately a philosophical work. “New Babylon is not a town planning project, but rather a way of thinking, of imagining, of looking at things and at life.”³³⁴ It is the disintegrating spectacle in negative. The great abundance really came to pass, only rather than free itself from labor, our species being decided to labor making more and more things. “The growing presence of excess human energy has started to make itself felt.”³³⁵ But rather than outlets for joy – outlet malls. Perhaps the disintegrating spectacle is the most utopian world of all, precisely because of its savage insistence that it has abolished the very possibility of utopia for all time.

One cannot live forever on borrowed energy, be it in the form of dollars, coal, labor, or creativity. The spectacle is death on credit. As Constant writes, “Technology replaces nature, technology becomes nature, becomes the medium, the sense by which we interpret nature.”³³⁶ Or so he hoped. Constant reveals the distinction between art and technology to be artificial, an artifact of the commodification of technology. Only by a willful blindness to the commodification of art could it appear as some sort of refuge from the technical, a refuge in which all but a few true believers have lost faith in anyway. For Constant the good news is that technology offers the same playful, qualitative margin, but it might take a complete transformation of the relations of production to realize it.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) once drew a distinction between the fascist tendency to aestheticize politics and the revolutionary potential of a politicized aesthetics.³³⁷ Constant retrieves the formula for an era way past the promise of art. It's a choice between a techno-fascist technologizing of aesthetics and the possibility of an aestheticizing of technology. Constant does not make a fetish of technology, either as a saving grace, nor as an iron cage. Rather, it's a question of thinking the possibilities of social and technical transformation together.³³⁸ The essence of technology is nothing technical. But could it be something playful? Could it be a way, not of instrumentalizing nature, but of producing a new relation to it, as a totality? Such were the scale of Constant's ambitions, the ambitions really of a whole way of life. One which leaves behind beautiful objects as unreadable as African masks.

The Old Mole

There is a sixties to suit every taste. It's a truly versatile era. There is a psychedelic sixties, a cybernetic sixties, an anti-colonial sixties. There was the Prague spring. There was the Watts rebellion. August 1965: the black population rises up. Debord: "But who has defended the rioters of Watts in the terms they deserve?" Before Watts, there was Newark, July that same year. Ronald Porambo wrote a first-rate book about it: *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark* (1971).³³⁹ In it Porambo takes the hard boiled American style of journalism to delirious, obsessive lengths, slotting together facts, quotes and anecdotes to create an unrelenting portrait of relentless oppression in a podunk town ruled by what Dashiell Hammett used to call the cops, the crooks and the big rich.

The book was not the literary success that Porambo imagined. America in the seventies preferred the *new journalism*. The ruling tastes ran more to the minutia of status details than to Porambo's hard luck stories. But this is where the story gets interesting. Like Pierre-François Lacenaire (1800-1836) before him, Porambo would have preferred a literary success, but failing that, chose the infamy of a life of crime. His was not just any crime. He robbed drug dealers. A drug dealer died in an aborted attempt at one such robbery, and a week someone shot Porambo in the head. Arrested and tried for the murder of aforesaid drug dealer, Porambo drew a life sentence rather than the Pulitzer Prize. He died in jail. The prison says he choked on an orange. Criminal acts, as Constant says, are "an expression of a frustrated will to power."³⁴⁰

The Situationists did not write about Porambo, or Newark, but they wrote about Watts. "The Los Angeles revolt was a revolt against the commodity," they said. It was at least partly so. "The flames of Watts consumed consumption." The spectacle, diffusing itself throughout society, presenting back to it the image of the abundance of things, could but appear as a cruel reminder of inequity to Black America. Just as the spectacle ranks its objects in order of desirability, so too it ranks its subjects. Its Black subjects saw through it: "they demand the egalitarian realization of

the American spectacle of everyday life.” They negated the commodity through the unwitting gift. They saw the swag on offer – and looted it.

Of course, there is a lot that is missing from Debord’s account: The thirty dead, the thousand injured, the four thousand arrested. Nor was he aware that, unlike in France, the context here is not the strength but the weakness of the old left, of the Communist Party and its union and popular front forces. The red purge of the fifties created a gap that the Black Nationalists would fill with a quite different theory and practice. Still, it might have interested the Situationists that later investigations upheld their hunch that while the riots were leaderless they were not without organization. Impromptu meetings in the park after dark coordinated movements. Safe conduct hand signals, of gang origin, allowed looters to move outside their home turf. The areas burned and looted correspond to key gang territories. Gerald Horne: “The Watts Uprising was decentralized; it was a mass uprising and not organized in inception and conception.”³⁴¹

It all happened again, in 1992: fifty dead, sixteen thousand arrested. The strenuous efforts of the state to prevent a recurrence were overturned with gas and a match. One scholar sums it up in a statement of the kind that only those who dream of being close to the policy process could love: “Present policies of selective imprisonment are not only the most expensive solutions but also the most counter-productive in the long run.”³⁴² And it happened again, in Paris, November 2005. The biggest riot in Paris since May 68, the papers said. One dead; three thousand arrested. It spread to over two hundred towns.³⁴³

The signature Situationist concept for such – recurring – events is *potlatch*. Where Marx compared the transformation of the object of labor into a commodity to a transubstantiation, the Situationists were interested in a kind of reverse miracle, by which the thing lost its status as commodity and became the gift. The looted object is no longer a commodity. But the perversity of the gesture is that its seizure does not break the spell of exchange and return to things their value. Rather, looting takes the spectacle at its word. In the spectacle, what is good appears and what appears is good. The looter jumps the gap between desire and the commodity. The looter takes

desires for reality, and reality for desire, but freeing the commodity from exchange does not expunge exchange from the commodity.

The riot contains a quite contrary movement as well – arson. The arsonist is not quite the same as the looter. The arsonist's is a negative relation to what appears, particularly to the built environment. The arsonist's actions are marked by the refusal of spectacular form. Constant: "Enormous energy is being withdrawn from the labor process and it finds no other outlet than in aggression prompted by dissatisfaction."³⁴⁴ In the riot, that aggression turns against two of its sources: against the time of the commodity form; against an alienating urban space.

Looting and arson are recurring events within what Viénet calls the "overdeveloped world." They are perhaps a sign of this overdevelopment, of the quantitative expansion of production outstripping the qualitative transformation of everyday life. The proximate causes may vary, and are much more usually to do with the brutality of the police and the indifference of the state. What the Situationists point to is the consistency and persistence of what follows, the twin forks of seize it all, or burn it down. Sometimes, the riot takes a different form, and passes toward rebellion, even toward revolution, or perhaps those in the middle of it think it does. This is why May 68 has a special place in not only the theory but also the mythology of the Situationists. It was more than a riot. It was a general strike.³⁴⁵

The Situationist account of May 68, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* (1968) was issued under the name of René Viénet, although it was probably something of collective effort. The son of a dock worker from Le Harve, Viénet (b. 1944) came in contact with Debord in 1961 via an affair with Michele Bernstein's sister. When he came to Paris to study Chinese, he joined the Situationists. He spent part of the early 60s in China, and saw the beginnings of the Cultural Revolution before being expelled in 1966. As Debord wrote of him, somewhat prophetically: "René's often fallible turn of mind -- resolving problems by trenchant extremism -- becomes obviously just and timely when the real conditions are such that it is necessary to

envision being truly trenchant.”³⁴⁶ It was probably Viénet who wrote some of the more trenchant of the famous graffiti of May ‘68, including: “Beneath the pavement, the beach.”

In Vienet’s version, the proximate cause of May ‘68 is the provocation on the Nanterre campus by the Enragés, a group who had already made contact with the Situationist International. Vienet: “The agitation launched at Nanterre by four or five revolutionaries, who would later constitute the Enragés, was to lead in less than five months to the near liquidation of the state.”³⁴⁷ It’s a hyperbolic statement, but what is distinctive about Vienet’s little book is that it is a subjective account of history, seen from the point of view of an active subject. Like the *Memoirs* of the Cardinal De Retz – one of its literary models – it preserves and extends the moment of insurrection with a form of memory specific to it. Vienet’s text is an account of living not as an object but as a subject of history. An account in which events actually depend on the actions of the Situationist International.

Nanterre at the time was a bleak spot in the western suburbs of Paris. “The scene was perfect: the urbanism of isolation had grafted a university center onto the high-rise flats and the complimentary slums. It was a microcosm of the general conditions of oppression, the spirit of a world without spirit.”³⁴⁸ Dominique Lecourt: “The whiff of cordite hung over the desolate campus adjoining the shantytown, far from the Paris elites.”³⁴⁹ One wonders if it ever improved, given that in 2002 Richard Durn opened fire with two Glock pistols at the end of a town hall meeting, killing eight councilors. Durn: “Because I have by my own will become a kind of living-dead, I have decided to end it all by killing a small local elite which is the symbol of, and who are the leaders and decision makers in, a city that I have always detested.”³⁵⁰

The philosopher Bernard Stiegler makes of this pointless massacre an emblem for what he calls a loss of *individuation*. To constitute the self requires collective belonging, and what the disintegrating spectacle erodes is both the collective and the individual, or rather the process of producing one out of the other. “Today we are enduring an enormous suffering of this individuation.”³⁵¹ Individuation is not far removed the Situationist notion of the kind of

autonomous play that the spectacle displaces. The spectacle makes all of time homogenous – *synchronized*, in Stiegler's terms. The spectacle does not require that we think alike, dress alike or act alike, merely that we act within the same time in relation to the same form, the commodity form, which synchronizes out actions. The triumph of the spectacle erases what Stiegler calls the *diachronic*. It forecloses my ability to connect my actions through time, and through this, to belong, to constitute a collective belonging.

Far from being an individualistic society, the disintegrating spectacle produces the herd – Durn's "living dead." Like the Situationists, Stiegler conceives of desire as a kind of unlimited horizon. This infinite quality of desire is what pushes its frail vehicle, the body – on. This desire is fantastic, but it grounds the possibility of individuation. The spectacle subordinates the free time in which desire might find itself to the synchronic time of the contemplation of the world as a world of things. The spectacle disarms desire. Its goal for Stiegler is not to channel desire but rather to forestall *disgust*. It can only stave off "the coming slowdown of consumption, caused by the consumer's disgust." Would this impasse appear, however, were it not for the failed revolution of 1968? Perhaps it was doomed to fail. Perhaps it was always impossible, a desire out of joint with need. But without the very possibility of that impossible, look at what we are left with: the Nanterre of Richard Durn rather than of the Enragés.

In '68, that handful of Nanterre agitators were brought before a disciplinary committee of the University of Paris. By trying to break up the supporting meeting in the courtyard, the authorities provoked the movement into action. Workers and lumpen-proles join in, daubing slogans on the walls and throwing up barricades. "The construction of a system of barricades solidly defending an entire quarter was already an unforgivable step towards the negation of the state."³⁵² Chlorine gas grenades overcame the barricades. Meanwhile events on the street acquired their inevitable spectacular double. Daniel Cohn-Bendit (b. 1945) became the spokesmodel for the revolt, an honest but limited revolutionary as the Situationists would characterize him. He was the one who could speak acceptably about the unacceptable.

The movement occupied the Sorbonne and called for a general strike.

Prime Minister Pompidou, who was no fool, freed arrested students, and withdrew the police. His strategy was patience rather than confrontation. The Sorbonne became the scene of a wide ranging discussion which attempted to create out of itself some kind of self-organization. The Situationists and the Enrages formed a joint committee. They made posters denouncing the remnants of art, warning against recuperation, and calling for the disinterment of Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642), which would have warmed the ghost of his old antagonist Cardinal Retz. (1613-1679) When it came time for the general assembly to elect delegates, the Enragés member René Reisel gave a rousing speech in which he argued that the struggle was not just about the university and that sociologists and psychologists are the new cops. He was elected to the occupation committee.³⁵³

Elsewhere, workers seized the opportunity with wild cat strikes and occupations of their factories. The Communist union federation, the CGT, tried to limit this development, and to steer it towards the routine demands of wages and conditions. They did their best to prevent contact between striking workers and students. Meanwhile, the Sorbonne Occupation Committee proved ineffective, or as Viénet says, “showed itself incapable of self-respect.”³⁵⁴ The Situationists, Enrages and friends withdrew, and convened their own uninterrupted general assembly at the National Pedagogical Institute in the Rue d’ulm. It set up standing committees for liaisons, printing, and requisitions, the latter to keep it fueled with money, vehicles, food and wine. Among its thirty-odd members were Guy Debord, Alice Becker-Ho, René Reisel and René Viénet.

There is a certain charm to groups such as astronomers and professional footballers declaring themselves for self management. The general air of tolerance made it hard to resist the antics of some other professional groups, such as film makers and museum directors, who recast the revolt as a pretext for reviving some warmed over *radical aesthetics*. “Nonetheless, in the space of a week millions of people had cast off the weight of alienating conditions, the routine of survival, ideological falsifications, and the inverted world of the spectacle.”³⁵⁵

For Viénet this is an idyllic situation: “People strolled, dreamed, learned how to live.” Time assumes a new quality. “For the first time youth really existed. Not the social category invented for the needs of the commodity economy by sociologists and economists, but the only real youth, of life lived without dead time...”³⁵⁶ The outpourings of popular creativity showed just how much creative energy was ordinarily diverted from its self-chosen tasks by necessity. Cars now attracted only the match. People modified the landscape to suit themselves – a spontaneous critique of urbanism. Police stations at Odeon and Rue Beaubourg were “enthusiastically sacked,” as was the stock market. As Viénet says, “the ‘old mole’ spared nothing.”

It was not to last. “The Stalinists began to despair of the survival of Gaullism.” The chain reaction of wildcat strikes did not become a general strike. The unions channeled the inchoate desires of the strikers toward specific demands on wages and conditions. The Trotskyites, the Castroites and the Maoists all wanted to replay one or other revolution they had missed rather than the one they were in the midst of actually having. They drew their lessons from past defeats.

The people did not have the time for an exact and real consciousness of its own actions. The odds were against them. “Everything was to hang on the power relations in the factories between the workers, everywhere isolated and cut off, and the joint power of the state and the trade unions. The movement was dismantled strike by strike, either by negotiations or by force.” The movement divided, was quickly conquered. The occupied factories lacked the means to remain in communication with each other. They would not know what to say even if they were. Viénet puts it down to “backwardness of theoretical consciousness”³⁵⁷ but surely it is more than that. The means were lacking to create social relations of a new kind. Meanwhile the state banned certain leftist organizations while making discreet overtures to the far right.

The old mole was busy that year, burrowing away, undermining the foundations: “The state was ignored for the first time in France.” But theoretical consciousness always lags behind the situation that calls for it. Hegel: “the owl of Minerva flies at dusk,” whereas the shotgun of Dick Chaney fires at first light.³⁵⁸ In the 70s Viénet made two films that obsessively revisit the scene of

May 68 and recall key theoretical lesson to be drawn from it. *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* (1972) and *The Girls of Kamare* (1974) are both détournements which appropriate mundane examples of cinema and use them for partisan purposes. In so doing they unlock the critical potential of narrative cinema itself.

With the failure of the revolution, Viénet turns away from the critique of urbanism and toward the other pole of Situationist action – détournement. *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* takes a kung fu action film and replaces the subtitles with Viénet's own, making of its narrative a rather more pointed allegory for the cooption of radical desires by the supposedly leftist wing of spectacular power. In one scene, two Stalinist bureaucrats lounge in a hot tub. One says: "It seems their latest discovery is to détourn the mass media." The other replies, "That, old man, is the beginning of the end." And the first concludes: "They are capable of reducing our own wooden language to sawdust." In Viénet's hands, détournement is a chainsaw. It becomes a tool for remembering what was and forever could be.

The Beach Beneath the Street

There is a passage by Marx that Lefebvre liked enough to quote twice: "A philosopher produces ideas, a poet poems, a clergyman sermons, a professor compendia and so on. A criminal produces crimes. If we look a little closer at the connection between this latter branch of production and society as a whole, we shall rid ourselves of many prejudices. The criminal produces not only crimes but also criminal law, and with this also the professor who gives lectures on criminal law and in addition to this the inevitable compendium in which the same professor throws his lectures onto the general market as 'commodities'. This brings with it the augmentation of national wealth..."³⁵⁹

Marx goes on to show how the criminal produces the police, the judiciary, a whole division of labor, "creating new needs and new ways of satisfying them." Not to mention technological improvement. "Torture alone has given rise to the most ingenious mechanical inventions." The criminal produces not only criminology but criminal law itself, not to mention popular entertainments, novels and plays and so forth, that take crime as their subject. "The criminal breaks the monotony and everyday security of bourgeois life. In this way he keeps it from stagnation, and gives rise to that uneasy tension and agility without which even the spur of competition would get blunted.

The same could be said of delinquents, radicals, and perhaps especially radical delinquents, such as the Situationist International, who keep a veritable industry alive, including the book you hold in your hands. Reduced to the logic of *productivity*, the activities of the Situationist International "augment national wealth" with the best of them. If mere delinquent radicals can *produce* all this, what then of the social crime of a failed revolution? May '68 did not induce the revolution, but it did produce a whole industry of commentary. Enough books entered the market to rebuild all the barricades many times over. The trick might be to recall this legacy otherwise, to stimulate a quite different kind of production. Not to quote it or imitate it, for *quotation* and *imitation* are classical forms of connecting past to present, here to there, this to that. Let's be done also with

nostalgia for '68 and all it represents. If there's a consistent lesson in the Situationist approach to history, it is to expect surprises. Historical thought has the task of preparing the active subject for the emergence of difference within lived time.

In the novel *2666* (2006), Roberto Bolaño describes the phantom novelist Benno von Archimboldi, possible candidate for the Nobel Prize: "A veteran, a World War II deserter still on the run, a reminder of the past for Europe in troubled times. A writer on the left whom even the Situationists respected. A person who didn't pretend to reconcile the irreconcilable, as was the fashion these days."³⁶⁰ In literature and art, the Situationists are sometimes invoked as if to bestow a certain blessing on the proceedings, as if making a genuflection to the saints could preserve art and literature as it goes about its business.

"Philosophy," says Simon Critchley, "begins in disappointment." After the death of God, the end of Art, the failure of the Revolution, there's nothing left but philosophy, the moment of contemplation of the ruins. For Jacques Ranciere, it is not that literature arises out of failed revolutions, but that revolutions are failed literature.³⁶¹ Certainly the high theory of the post-68 era was born of the disappointments, not just of May 68 but of the so-called *red decade* of 1966-1976, of which it was the high water mark. If other failed revolutions gave us Hegel and Stendhal, Marx and Baudelaire, this one gave us Foucault and Deleuze, Derrida and Lyotard. Whatever interest such thoughts may once have held, they are now no more than the routine spasms of an era out of love with itself.

Low theory is born of boredom. We are bored with these burnt offerings, these warmed over leftovers. High theory cedes too much to the existing organization of knowledge and art. Is it nothing more than the spectacle of disintegration extending into knowledge itself? Rather a negative theory that reveals the gap between this world and its promises. Rather a negative action which reveals the gap between what can be done and what is to be done. Rather a spirited invention of new forms within the space of everyday life than new wine in old bottles. For such

experiments the Situationist legacy stands ripe for a détournement that has no respect for those who claim proprietary rights over it. There is plenty of fruit to be gleaned from the vine.

From the Letterist International onwards, many of the great romantic techniques for discovering the way into the total semantic field detoured, alone or in combination: alcohol (Debord), opium (Trocchi), psychosis (Chtcheglov), mania (Spur), synaesthesia (De Jong), fatigue (the derive), obsession (Constant), love (Bernstein), revolution (May '68), solitude (late Debord). Many of the splinters into which the Situationist project devolved found one or other of the alibis that Lefebvre identified for avoiding the question of how to supercede aesthetics and ethics in praxis. Aestheticism (Jorn, De Jong, Spur); technicism (New Babylon); moralism (The Situationist International sans artists), nihilism (Trocchi again). Yet from every failed remnant of the Situationist project sprouts a host of possibilities.

Its still a fine slogan: Never Work! Perhaps we could add: Never Play! For play is becoming as co-opted as work, a mere support for the commodity form. To the *dérive*, psychogeography and unitary urbanism, what could one add but the question of scale. Where now does the space of the city end? *Détournement* is now a whole social movement in all but name, able to sample anything and everything but unable to know its own provenance. With the commodity form extending even into *social networks*, what could be more pressing than Jorn's contemplation of an extreme aesthetics, an invention of forms as something other than mere containers? With the end of the Situationist International as an organization, its fantasy of being the vanguard of organized form dies with it, but not perhaps the experiment with social form. Let a thousand internationals bloom! Each with their own provisional rules, of labor and donation, inclusion and inclusion, initiations, rituals, forms of remembrance.

Shorn of its chemical romances, project sigma is still a signal instance of creating a counter-network. New Babylon, for all its supposedly utopian grandeur, looks a whole lot more sustainable than the new Moloch that was actually built in its stead. *Situationist Times* is still a remarkable precedent in creating a discourse between languages, and between languages and

different visual practices, within which to propose a new kind of knowledge and practice of aesthetic form. Speaking of forms: Jorn opens up novel ways of thinking about the severing of the production of quantities from the production of qualities as a class division. Supposedly superceded by the structural turn in both philosophy and urban thought, Lefebvre's body of work seems far richer than either its fans or detractors credit.³⁶² In an age which still worships eternal Love, if with a frenzy that belies a still unacknowledged waning of belief, what could be more telling than Bernstein's amorous strategies?

It is not as if the contributions of Situationists and ex-Situationists ended with May 1968. The organization disbanded in 1972, but there were other projects, other adventures. Writing about those will have to wait for another occasion. What continues unabated is the *detournement* of the Situationist project. Beneath the pavement, the beach. Wherever boredom with given forms of art, of politics, of thought jackhammers through the carapace of mindless form, the beach emerges, where form is ground down to particles, to the ruin of ruins. There is the space for the construction of situations. These too might be recuperated into mere art some day, and sooner rather than later. But not before their glorious time. Our species being is as builder of worlds. Should we consent to inhabit this given one as our resting place, we're dead already. There may be no dignified exits left to the twenty-first century, the century of the flying inflatable turd, but there might at least be some paths to adventure.

Notes

¹ *Guardian*, 12th August 2008. Thanks to the *Colbert Report*, 20th August 2008; F. T. Marinetti, 'The Futurist Manifesto', in *Critical Writings*, edited by Günther Berghaus, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 2006, p. 8

² See Karl Marx, 'Estranged Labor', *Early Writings*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 322ff. The concept of species being is not common in Situationist writings, but René Vienet picks up the term in *Enrages and Situationists in the Occupation Movement*, Automomedia, New York, 1993

³ Guy Debord, 'On Wild Architecture', in Elizabeth Sussman (ed) *on the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: The Situationist International 1957-1972*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1989, p. 174

⁴ On the contemporary in relation to the modern, see Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (eds), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity and Contemporaneity*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2008

⁵ On the career of high theory, see Francois Cusset, *French Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008; Sande Cohen and Sylvère Lotringer (eds) *French Theory in America*, Routledge, New York, 2001

⁶ 'The Idea of Communism', Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, 13-15th March 2009. The various revivals of the figure of the *communist*, by Slavoj Zizek, Alain Badiou, Antonio Negri, might not be the least reason to revive the attempt to supercede it in the figure of the *situationist*.

⁷ Here following Luc Bolanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, London, 2007

⁸ On the politics of the memory of May-June 1968, see Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002

⁹ Debord's own commentary is *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, Verso, London, 1998. The two major works not discussed here are Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Zone Books, New York, 1994 and Raoul Vaneigem, *Revolution of Everyday Life*, Rebel Press, 2001. I have already written about both books, if somewhat indirectly. McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2004 is a détournement of *Society of the Spectacle*. McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2007, is, among other things, about how the radical potential of the figure of play has been foreclosed. In many respects *The Beach Beneath the Street* is a prequel to my two earlier books.

¹⁰ Simone De Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, Paragon House, New York, 1992, p128

¹¹ See Boris Vian, *Manual of Saint-Germain-Des-Prés*, Rizzoli, New York, 2005. His fake American crime novels are *I Spit on Your Graves*, Tam Tam Books, 1998 and *The Dead All Have the Same Skin*, Tam Tam Books, 2008. His literary novel *Autumn in Peking*, Tam Tam Books, 2006 is perhaps his quasi-Surrealist take on postwar culture, and *Foam of the Daze*, Tam Tam Books, 2003 includes a delirious scene about the morbid enthusiasm for a celebrity-philosopher.

¹² For the Anglophone invader's perspective, see Elaine Dundy, *The Dud Avocado*, New York Review Books Classics, New York, 2007, p84ff.

¹³ Simone Signoret, *Nostalgia Isn't What It Used To Be*, Harper and Row, New York, 1978, p43

¹⁴ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*, Routledge, New York, 2002

¹⁵ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London, 1988. Hebdige uses Jean Genet as his touchstone for a literature of subculture. The Situationists despised Genet, and not without reason, as his romance of negativity all too neatly worked as a spectacle of negation, rather than as negation of the spectacle.

¹⁶ Here moral panic could be read in the terms proposed by Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, second edition, Verso, London, 2009. The teen existentialists are a threat to bourgeois enjoyment either

because they enjoy too much (sexual depravity, amorality and so forth) or too little (political seriousness, asexual relations between the genders, and so on).

¹⁷ Quoted in Gianni Menichetti, *Vali Myers: A Memoir*, The Golda Foundation, Fresno CA, 2007, p. 20

¹⁸ The dangers of appropriating the term tribe in such an urban context are neatly sidestepped in Wu Ming, *Manituana*, Verso, London, 2009. In this novel, Mohawk warriors visit London as representatives of the Iroquois Federation. The Federation has been loyal to the British crown but seeks assurances that the alliance is mutual before joining forces against the American revolutionaries. While in London they are presented with an appeal from the London Mohocks, fierce exemplars of the dangerous classes, who suggest instead an alliance with them, as both have been dispossessed of their lands and heir traditional way of life by British power. To be *tribal*, then, is not to exist in a state before colonial contact, but rather to have been dispossessed by that contact, whether at the antipodes of empire or at its very center.

¹⁹ Ed Van Der Elsken, *Love on the Left Bank*, Dewi Lewis Publishing, Stockport UK, 1999, unpaginated.; For the Plimpton, Pomerand and the unattributed observation, see George Plimpton, 'Vali', *Paris Review*, No. 18, 1958, pp. 43-47. For Plimpton and the permanent invader culture of Saint Germain, see Nelson Aldrich (ed), *George Being George*, Random House, New York, 2008, p. 83ff; Juan Goytisolo, *Forbidden territory: The Memoirs of Juan Goytisolo 1931-1956*, translated by Peter Bush, North Point Press, San Francisco, 1985, p. 177. Goytisolo recounts in the same volume his wandering with Bernstein and Debord, p. 205-206. Debord detourns a phrase from Goytisolo in his *Memoires*. See Boris Donn  , *Pour Memoires*, Editions Allia, Paris, 2004.

²⁰ Vian, *Manual*, p. 38

²¹ Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, translated by Malcolm Imrie, City Lights, San Francisco CA, 2002, p. 63.

²² The Situationists spotted this convergence of the bourgeois and bohemian fairly early. See 'On the Poverty of Student Life' in Ken Knabb (ed), *Situationist International Anthology*, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2007 and Guy Debord and Giancarlo Sanguinetti, *The Real Split in the International*, Pluto Press, London, 2003.

²³ Thought with considerably more subtlety than is possible here in Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, Station Hill Press, 1988. Blanchot's reference points are George Bataille's Acephale group, Breton's Surrealists, and Marguerite Duras, a Saint Germain identity not mentioned by Vian, for the obvious reason that she was still identified with the Communist Party, to which she adhered during the Resistance.

²⁴ Georges Bataille, 'La Divinit   d'Isou', *Oeuvres compl  tes*, Vol. 11, Gallimard, Paris, 1988, p. 379

²⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? And Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, p. 174

²⁶ On the Romanian connection, see Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2006

²⁷ Isidore Isou, *L'Agr  gation d'un nom d'un m  ssie*, Galimard, Paris, 1947; Isidore Isou, *Introduction    une nouvelle po  sie et une nouvelle musique*, Galimard, Paris, 1947, Isidore Isou, 'Traite   de bave et d'  ternit  ', 1951, in *Experimental Cinema 1928-1954*, Vol. 2, Kino, 2007. It was Greil Marcus who really put Isou into this story, not least for Anglophone readers, but not without a certain embarrassment.

²⁸ Isidore Isou, 'Manifesto of Letterist Poetry' (1942), in Mary Ann Caws, *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln NE, 2001, p. 545

²⁹ Gabriel Pomerand, *Saint Ghetto of the Loans: Grimoire*, translated by Michael Kasper, Ugly Duckling Presse Lost Literature Series No. 1, Brooklyn NY, 2006. Interestingly, Vian also draws a link between Saint Germain and the Jewish ghetto, perhaps with less warrant.

³⁰ Jules Romain, *Donagoo-Tonga*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2009. Romain started a movement called Unamism, based on the idea of collective consciousness and group behavior, and Pomerand's invocation of him is of interest here in this connection as well as for his handling of the exotic. For an illuminating discussion of the relation between fiction and ethnography, see James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2005

³¹ Jean-Michel Mension, *The Tribe*, City Lights, San Francisco, 2001, p. 41. For a seminal if slightly later study of deviance, see Howard Becker, *Outsiders*, Free Press, 1963. The most excluded among the Saint German tribe were probably those taking ether, the aroma of which is all too telling.

³² Louis Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night*, New Directions, 2006, p. 5. This novel and its sequel, *Death on the Installment Plan*, New Directions, New York, 1971 describe the same miserable outer suburban Paris of Debord's early childhood. Céline had something of a paranoid break and turned anti-Semitic in the 1930s. He escaped execution as a collaborator and was back in Paris by 1952, where his outsider status, but not his political deliriums, gave him a certain alternative currency. Even after the war Sartre could write, only half joking: "Perhaps Céline will be the only one of all of us to remain." *What is Literature and Other Essays*, p. 244. Debord détourns the epigram from *Journey* in his *Memoires* (1958), reprinted in facimile by Editions Alia, Paris, 2004.

³³ On bohemia in general, see Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts*, Rutgers University Press, 2001. Thanks to Tony Moore for his insights into bohemian cultural formations.

³⁴ Ivan Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' (1953), in Ken Knabb (ed), *Situationist International Anthology*, Revised Edition, Bureau of Public Secrets, San Francisco, 2006, pp. 1-8

³⁵ The Letterist International had two distinct phases with quite different memberships, which need not concern us too much here.

³⁶ 'Next Planet', *Potlatch* #4, July 1954, in Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa, (eds) *Theory of the Derive and other Situationist Writings*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 1996, p43; Guy Debord, *présente Potlatch*, Gallimard, Paris, 1996, p32

³⁷ Georges Bataille, 'The Obelisk', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, edited by Allan Stoekl, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1985, pp213-212

³⁸ See Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille*, Verso, London, 2002. A particularly interesting attempt to make Bataille relevant again as the philosopher of a symbolic, rather than material consumption of surplus, see Alan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007

³⁹ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, p279ff. Michel Mourre, *In Spite of Blasphemy*, John Lehman, London, 1953. Like Dada founder Hugo Ball, Mourre found his way in spite of himself back to the church, and to a position of power within it. It recalls in its own way Sartre's story 'Childhood of a Leader'. As Marcus says, "He sought a bolt of lightning and gained the right to light a candle."

⁴⁰ Le Corbusier, *Towards An Architecture*, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2007, p. 95

⁴¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Continuum, London, 2004, p. 12

⁴² Le Corbusier, *Towards An Architecture*, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2007, p. 97

⁴³ Le Corbusier, *Towards An Architecture*, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2007, p. 233. The Parthenon and Roman form feature more heavily in this book, but Luxor rates a mention.

⁴⁴ See also De Chirico's novel, *Hebdomeros*, Exact Change Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, Céline already makes literary use of Lorrain's landscape techniques in *Journey to the End of the Night*. See p. 66.

⁴⁵ Lev Kassil, *The Black Book and Schwambrania*, translated by Fainna Glagoleva, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, p. 13, p. 20. See also Jean-Marie Apostolidés and Boris Donné, *Ivan Chtcheglov: Profil Perdu*, Editions Alia, Paris, 2006

⁴⁶ See Robert McNab, *Ghost Ships: A Surrealist Love Triangle*, Yale University Press. New Haven, 2004 for a usefully geographic account of the Surrealist's relation to wandering, travel, and colonialism. The seminal essay on Surrealist ethnography is in James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, Harvard University Press, 2002. See also the *Visual Anthropology Review*, Spring 1991 special issue on ethnographic surrealism, and Martin Roberts, 'The Self and Other' 'Ethnographic Film, Surrealism, Politics', *Visual Anthropology*, Vol. 8, pp77-94 for a critique of the rather depoliticized surrealism at work in Clifford.

⁴⁷ Guy Debord, *présente Potlatch*, Gallimard, Paris, 1996, p. 241; Andreotti and Costa, p. 60

⁴⁸ Knabb, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Michele Bernestein, 'Dérive By the Mile', *Potlatch* No. 9, 1954, Andreotti & Costa, p47, *presente Potlatch*, p65

⁵⁰ Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2001, p. 82

⁵¹ Henry Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Verso, London, p182. The 1947 version of the book has much more to say about rural than urban life. Only after his encounter with the Situationists would the city emerge as the great theme of his writing. No wonder they accused him of plagiarism.

⁵² 'On the Role of the Written Word', *Potlatch* #23, 1955, Andreotti and Costa, p. 55; *presente Potlatch*, p. 203. The slogan was detoured from the Belgian Surrealists.

⁵³ Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, translated by Malcolm Imrie, City Lights, San Francisco, 2002, p. 58

⁵⁴ Guy Debord, 'The Big Sleep and Its Clients', in Tom McDonough (ed), *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2004, p. 21ff; *présente Potlatch*, p. 104ff

⁵⁵ Patrick Straram, *Les Bouteilles se Couchent*, edited by Jean-Marie Apostolides and Boris Donn  , Editions Allia, Paris, 2006, p. 17. The original version known to Debord was lost. This edition is a reconstructin by the editors.

⁵⁶ Patrick Straram, *Les Bouteilles se Couchent*, p. 92

⁵⁷ On leisure and the labor movement, see Brian Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France*, Routledge, London, 1991

⁵⁸ See *Internationale Situationiste*, No. 8, January 1963, p. 42

⁵⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Vintage, New York, 1974; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin, 1983. Both translations by Walter Kaufmann.

⁶⁰ An influential source for nomadism is Ren   Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ, 1970. Originally published in French in 1939, it was reissued many times after the war.

⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, p. 2. The connection between Situationist and what would be known in English as Post-structuralist thought is developed in Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International and After*, Routledge, London, 1992

⁶² See Rolf Lindner (ed) *The Reportage of Urban Culture: Robert Park and the Chicago School*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996

⁶³ See also Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism', in *Selected Writings* Vol. 2, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, pp. 207-221

⁶⁴ *abstract*: Letter from Constant, quoted in Aldo Van Eyck, *Writings: Collected Articles and Other Writings*, Sun, Amsterdam, 2008, p. 64; *Saint Germain*: See Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper Architecture of Desire*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art and 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1998, p. 134

⁶⁵ *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 3rd May 2003

⁶⁶ 'Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s', in Sussman, p. 144; *Internationale Situationiste*, No. 3, December 1959, p. 13. An early incarnation of this ecological model would be Paolo Soleri, *Arcology: The City in the Image of Man*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1973. See Allan Stoekl's *Bataille's Peak* for a useful critique.

⁶⁷ Borrowed (or burrowed) from *Hamlet*, Marx used the figure of the old mole most famously in the 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, Penguin, 1973, p. 237. Bataille contrasts the old mole to 'Icarian' thought, such as Hegel's, which soars above materiality surveying it from outside. See Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, University of Minnesota Press,

Minneapolis, 1985, p. 32ff. It also appears in René Vienet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May, '68*, Autonomedia, New York, 1992, p. 15, p. 73.

⁶⁸ On Siasconset: *New York Times*, 8th July 2007; George E. Stuart, 'The Timeless Vision of Teotihuacan', *National Geographic*, Vol. 188, No. 6, December 1995, p. 11

⁶⁹ Guy Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', in Knabb, p10. It originally appeared in the journal edited by Belgian Surrealist Marcel Mariën (1920-1993) called *Les Lèvres Nues*, No. 6. September 1955. The complete run is reprinted by Editions Alia, Paris, 1995

⁷⁰ Knabb, p. 9

⁷¹ Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror and the Complete Works*, Exact Change Press, Cambridge MA, 1994, *old discoveries* p. 313, *direction of hope* p. 260, *one can be just* p. 249, *plagiarism is necessary* p. 240, *pyramids* p. 85, *umbrella* p. 193.

⁷² See Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2007, and Maurice Saillet, *Les Inventeurs de Maldoror*, Les temps qu'il fait, Paris, 1992. This section was inspired by a paper McDonough gave at Binghamton University in 2001.

⁷³ Paul Nougé, *Works Selected by Marcel Mariën*, The Printed Head, Volume 3, No. 8, Atlas Press, London, 1985. Marcel Duchamp's version of the Mona Lisa would seem indicated here as a precedent as well.

⁷⁴ Jean-Michel Mension, *The Tribe*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 2001, pp. 61-64

⁷⁵ Gil J. Wolman, 'The Anticoncept', in Marc'O (ed) *Ion: Centre de Création*, No. 1, April 1952, reprinted by Marc-Gilbert Guillaumin, Paris, 1999, p. 167ff. This translation is by Keith Sanborn. See also Gérard Bereby and Danielle Orhan (eds) *Gil Joseph Wolman: Défense de Mourir*, Editions Allia, Paris, 2001.

⁷⁶ Guy-Ernest Debord and Gil J. Wolman, 'Pourquoi le Lettrisme?', *présente Potlatch*, p. 175

⁷⁷ Lamaitre, who speaks English, claims the status of co-inventor of Letterism under the nose of Isidore Isou, who clearly can't understand a word that Lemaitre and Welles exchange. Thanks to Alan Stoekl for the Welles suggestion.

⁷⁸ Moliere, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, Hachette, Paris, 2006

⁷⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings Volume 1*, edited by David Fernbach, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 71. See Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, manifestos and the avant gardes*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2006

⁸⁰ McDonough, p49. On intertextuality, see Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1980. Debord's 'Mort de J.H. ou Fragiles Tissus (En Souvenir de Kaki)' (1954), is reproduced as plate 043 in Zweifel, et al.

⁸¹ *London Times* 13th Jan 08

⁸² Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Language, Counter Memory, Practice*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 1977

⁸³ This is the difference between détournement and the creative commons approach. See Lawrence Lessig, *Remix*, Penguin, New York, 2008; Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, Yale University Press, 2006.

⁸⁴ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1989, pp. 5-6

⁸⁵ The question of history in Marxist thought is handled with considerably more subtlety in Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA, 1984

⁸⁶ Richard Barbrook, *Imaginary Futures: From Thinking Machines to the Global Village*, Pluto Press, London, 2007. Barbrook's historical narrative encompasses not only the American and Soviet versions of history but

also the social democratic 'third way' ones as well. As he shows, all draw on a common Marxist stock to very different ends.

⁸⁷ Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, Verso, London, 1987 is a rare account of Althusser which includes the Maoist context for his thinking. Régis Debray, *Praised Be Our Lords: The Autobiography*, Verso, London, 2007 presents, in condensed form Debray's own account of his adventures and misadventures. For a critique of these deviations from Marx's economic thought, see Meghnad Desai, *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of State Socialism*, Verso, London, 2004. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984 is famously where Lyotard abandons Marxist grand narratives of history.

⁸⁸ *Slate*, January 11th 2002; *New York Times*, February 23, 2002

⁸⁹ Of course it is Plato who puts this figure in the mouth of Aristophanes: Plato, *The Symposium*, translated by Christopher Gill, Penguin, London, 1999.

⁹⁰ C. J. L. Almqvist, *The Queen's Tiara*, Arcadia, London, 2001

⁹¹ T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 389. A passing remark in the context of an extended discussion of Jackson Pollock. An exception would be Peter Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth Century Culture*, Verso, London, 2008. Fabian Thompsett and Stewart Home have also done much to promote the memory of Jorn in various avant garde circles.

⁹² On Cobra, see Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra: The Last Avant Garde Movement of the Twentieth Century*, Lund Humphries, 2004

⁹³ *Max Bill: No Beginning, No End: A Retrospective*, Museum Marta Herford & Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, 2008

⁹⁴ See Barbara Radice, *Ettore Sottsass: a Critical Biography*, Norton, 1993

⁹⁵ Graham Birtwhistle, *Living Art: Asger Jorn's Comprehensive Theory of Art Between Helhesten and Cobra, Reflex*, Utrecht, 1986, p. 57. A work to which this chapter is heavily indebted. See also Peter Shield, *Comparative Vandalism: Asger Jorn and the Artistic Attitude to Life*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 1998

⁹⁶ Birtwhistle, p. 85. For Apollo and Dionysus, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated by Shaun Whiteside, Penguin, London, 1994. A striking contemporary version of the Apollonian as fear of popular power is Christoph Spehr's film *Free Cooperation* (2004).

⁹⁷ Birtwhistle, p. 63. Jorn could be usefully compared to Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2002

⁹⁸ Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975

⁹⁹ Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, International Publishers, New York, 2004, p. 51. See Manuel De Landa, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, Continuum, London, 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Birtwhistle 57. Compare to J. M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: late modernism and the meaning of painting*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2006

¹⁰¹ *New York Times*, 5th January 2009

¹⁰² Birtwhistle, p. 69

¹⁰³ Birtwhistle, p. 72

¹⁰⁴ Birtwhistle, p. 97. Jorn's attempt at a mystic materialism recalls that of another Scandinavian artist in Paris: August Stringberg, *Inferno*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979.

¹⁰⁵ Birtwhistle, p. 76

¹⁰⁶ *art of naïve adults*, Birtwhistle, p. 181. On the Modifications show, see 'Modifications Peinture Detournée', in Gérard Berreby (ed), *Textes et Documents Situationistes 1957-1960*, p. 102ff; Claire Gilman, 'Asger Jorn's Avant Garde Archives', in Tom McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*.

¹⁰⁷ Birtwhistle, p. 93

¹⁰⁸ Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Penguin, London, 1996, pp24-25, PP33, S2

¹⁰⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, p. 10

¹¹⁰ Birtwhistle, p. 92

¹¹¹ Birtwhistle, p. 92

¹¹² Alfred Jarry, *Exploits and Opinions of Dr Faustroll Pataphysician*, Exact Change Press, Boston, 1996

¹¹³ See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, New Left Books, London, 1977, the book which really consolidated the idea of western Marxism. See also Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, Verso, London, 1985 for later reconsiderations. Anderson's version of Marxism in the west might be more accurately called academic Marxism, for with the exception of Gramsci, Anderson's canon are mostly scholars, or more to the point, those figures in whom new left scholars took an interest. Absent are the Situationists and the Italian Autonomists.

¹¹⁴ *Organized movement*, Birtwhistle p. 100, *air currents*, Birtwhistle, p. 100, *Pyrric victory* Birtwhistle p. 35, *pact*, Birtwhistle p103. Interestingly, it was Sottsass who would play a major role in reintroducing ornament into modern design.

¹¹⁵ Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898-1918*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973; Victor Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and His Circle*, Pluto Press, London

¹¹⁶ Birtwhistle, p. 114; On the diagram, see Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988

¹¹⁷ *class society*, Birtwhistle, p. 152; *nature's way*, Birtwhistle, p. 157.

¹¹⁸ Birtwhistle, p. 161; See Mark C. Taylor, *The Confidence Game: money and markets in a world without redemption*, University of Chicago Press, 2008

¹¹⁹ Birtwhistle, p. 161; compare to Engels on 'primitive communism', *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978

¹²⁰ *Art is cult*, Birtwhistle p. 166; *lost our paradise*, Birtwhistle, p. 173.

¹²¹ See Guy Atkin, *Jorn in Scandinavia: 1930-1953*, Wittenborn, New York, 1968

¹²² A rare work which takes an interest in Jorn as theorist is Richard Gombin, *The Radical Tradition*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1979, pp119-125

¹²³ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, Verso, London, 2006; Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Verso, London, 2009. The English edition of the latter leaves out the contributions of Jacques Ranciere and Roger Establet.

¹²⁴ A generous selection of Rumney's Cosio photographs are included in my *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2008

¹²⁵ Debord, letter to Jorn 1 Sept 57. Debord's *Correspondance* is published by Fayard. The first volume is also in English as: Guy Debord, *Correspondence: The Foundation of the Situationist International*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2009

¹²⁶ Ivan Chitchevlov, 'Lettres de Loin', *International Situationiste*, August 1964, No. 9, p. 38

¹²⁷ Debord, letter to Straram 3 Oct 58

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- ¹²⁸ Debord, letter to Constant 7 September 59
- ¹²⁹ Guy Debord, *Panegyric*, Verso, London, 1991, p. 59
- ¹³⁰ *our official organ*, Korun 16 June 58; *never work*, Wyckaert 22 June 60; *Lumaline*, Jorn, 16th July, 1960
- ¹³¹ *heavy hand*, Ovadia 30 Mar 60; *all material*, Straram 12 Nov 58.
- ¹³² *I reproach you*, Olmo 18 Oct 57; *any real work*, Rumney 13 March 58
- ¹³³ Ralph Rumney, 'The Leaning Tower of Venice', in Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide*, Black Dog, London, 2005, and also *Vague*, No. 22, 1990, pp33-35 Rumney was involved with the ICA in London at the same time as Alloway, but his thinking took a very different direction to Alloway and the Independent Group, of which he was a prominent member. See also Alan Woods, *The Map is Not the Territory*, Manchester University Press, 2000, which contains Rumney's later elaboration on the distinction between game and play.
- ¹³⁴ Constant, 21 June 60
- ¹³⁵ *The New Yorker*, 9th June 2008
- ¹³⁶ *Jorn the first partisan*, Constant 2 June 60; *I without the we*, Melanotte 10 Feb 59.
- ¹³⁷ *Objective criteria*, Frankin 26 Jan 60; *good will*, Korun 16 June 58; *neither freedom nor intelligence*, Straram 25 Aug 60
- ¹³⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, Station Hill Press, Barrytown NY, 1988
- ¹³⁹ *false disciples*, Gallizio 13 Jan 57; *perspectives*, Straram 12 Nov 58; *Situationism*, Sismondo 22 Aug 57; *dogmas*, Gallizio 23 Nov 57
- ¹⁴⁰ *internal propaganda*, Constant 16 Sept 59; *artistically old men*, Constant 16 Oct 59.
- ¹⁴¹ *Most urgent problem*, Constant 3 March 59; *specialized collaborators*, Constant 28 Feb 59.
- ¹⁴² Cardinal de Retz, *Memoirs*, Societé des Bibliophiles, Paris, 1903, p. 215
- ¹⁴³ Giorgina Bertolino et al., eds., *Pinot Gallizio: Il laboratorio della scrittura* (Milan: Charta, 2005), p. 20.
- ¹⁴⁴ Bertolino, p. 164.
- ¹⁴⁵ Michèle Bernstein, "In Praise of Pinot Gallizio," in McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, p. 70 and Gérard Bereby (ed) *Textes et documents situationistes 1957-1960*, Éditions Allia, Paris, 2004, pp64-68; Mirella Bandini, 'An Enormous and Unknown Chemical Reaction,' in Sussman, p. 72.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Tumult*, Gallizio 30 Jan 58; *deficiency*, Constant 20th May 59; *sickening arrivisme*, Constant 2 June 60.
- ¹⁴⁷ Guy Debord, *Considerations on the Assassination of Gerard Lebovici*, Tam Tam Books, Los Angeles, 2001, p. 78
- ¹⁴⁸ Constant 26th Nov 59
- ¹⁴⁹ Constant & Debord, 'Amsterdam Declaration', Andreotti and Costa, pp. 80-81; *Internationale Situationiste* No. 2 December 1958, pp31-32
- ¹⁵⁰ Alice Becker-Ho, *Princes of Jargon*, p. 39. For Constant's account, see Aleotti and Costa, p. 154
- ¹⁵¹ Constant, 'On Our Means and Our Perspectives' (1958), in *The Decomposition of the Artist*, Drawing Center, New York, 1999, p. a7. See also Debord's letter to Constant of 25 Sept 58.

¹⁵² Constant, 'On Our Means and Our Perspectives', Andreotti and Costa, p p77; *Internationale Situationiste*, Number 2, 1958; Constant was already familiar with Henri Lefebvre's 1947 edition of *Critique of Everyday Life*, which is also a significant influence.

¹⁵³ *No painting*, Constant 25 Sept 58; *any spirit of the 'pictorial'*, Constant 8 Aug 58

¹⁵⁴ *really experimental faction*, Constant 8 Aug 58; *I don't have the right*, Constant 7 September 59.

¹⁵⁵ Constant 4 April 59.

¹⁵⁶ Constant 4 April 59.

¹⁵⁷ *Passion*, Constant 21 June 60; *indecision*, quoted in Jorn 6 July 60; *choose the terrain*, Constant 21 June 60.

¹⁵⁸ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, Norton, New York, 2000, George Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 1, Zone Books, New York, 1989. Claude Lefort, a key figure in the Socialism or Barbarism group, also took up the figure of the gift, but Debord had very little taste for Lefort and his interest in the group postdates Lefort's departure from it in 1958. Two contemporary texts on the gift that draw it, respectively, towards a philosophical and a political register: Jacques Derrida, *Given Time 1: Counterfeit Money*, University of Chicago Press, 1994; David Graeber, *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Dreams*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2001. The titles of which alone give one pause for thought. Derrida shows quite convincingly that the pure gift is an impossibility. But there is nothing pure about the gift as practiced by the Situationists, or one suspects, in traditional potlatch.

¹⁵⁹ Constant 2 June 60

¹⁶⁰ Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 111.

¹⁶¹ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 148. For the characters in Bernstein's novels, its more like fast bodies, clean cars.

¹⁶² See Madeline De Scudery, *The Story of Sapho*, translated by Karen Newman, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003

¹⁶³ Straram 10 Oct 60. The possibilities of détournement novels as a transitional tactic are discussed in 'Detournement: A User's Guide', Knabb, p. 18

¹⁶⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford University Press, 1997, p70. Pure spectacle, Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, Verso, London, 1995, p337

¹⁶⁵ Frankin 15 July 59

¹⁶⁶ Xavier Canonne, *Surrealism in Belgium 1924-2000*, Mercatorfonds, Brussels, 2007, p142. Mochot was the stepdaughter of the brother of another Belgian Surrealist. Paul Bourgoignie.

¹⁶⁷ Michèle Bernstein, *La Nuit* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1961), p. 40.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁷⁰ Arthur Adamov, *Ping-Pong: A Play in Two Parts*, Grove Press, New York, 1959

¹⁷¹ Asger Jorn, 'La Création Ouvert et ses Ennemis', *International Situationiste*, No. 5, p. 45; translated by Fabian Thompsett as 'Open Creation and its Enemies', Unpopular Books, London, 1994, p. 39.

¹⁷² Debord and Wolman, 'Detournement: A User's Guide', Knabb, p. 18

¹⁷³ On networks, distributed and otherwise, see Alex Galloway, *Protocol*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2004

¹⁷⁴ Choderlos de Laclos, *Dangerous Liaisons*, Penguin, London, 2007; Michel Feher (ed), *The Libertine Reader: Eroticism and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century France*, Zone Books, New York, 1997

¹⁷⁵ Straram 12 Nov 58

¹⁷⁶ Michèle Bernstein, *Tous les chevaux du roi* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2004), p. 116. I would like to thank John Kelsey for making his translation of this text available to me. I have modified his translation slightly here and there.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷⁸ Odile Passot, "Portrait of Guy Debord as a Young Libertine," *Substance* 3 (1999), p. 77. Odile Passot is a pseudonym; this text was actually written by Jean-Marie Apostolides. See his *Le Tombeaux de Guy Debord* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006).

¹⁷⁹ See Marcel Carné, *The Devil's Envoys. (Les Visiteurs du soir)*, 1942, with script by Jacques Prévert and Pierre Laroche.

¹⁸⁰ Bernstein, *Tous les chevaux du roi*, p. 36.

¹⁸¹ Len Bracken, *Guy Debord Revolutionary* (Venice, CA: Feral House, 1997), p. 245.

¹⁸² Asger Jorn and Noël Arnaud, *Le Langue Verte et la Cuite: etude gastrophonique sur la marmythologie musiculinaire*, Jean-Jacques Pauvert Editeur, Bibliothèque d'Alexandre Vol. III, Paris 1968

¹⁸³ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, p. 423.

¹⁸⁴ Abdelhafid Khatib, 'Attempt at a Psychogeographical Description of Les Halles', *Internationale Situationiste*, No. 2, December 1958, Andreotti & Costa, pp72-76. While the text is attributed to Khatib, like all texts in the journal others may have had a hand in it.

¹⁸⁵ Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance*, Berg French Studies, New York, 1997; Todd Shepard, *Inventing Decolonization*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 2006

¹⁸⁶ Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, University of California Press, is an excellent reading of the Hegelian-Marxist Debord. For the wider context, see Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1977; V. I. Lenin, 'Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder', *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964

¹⁸⁷ See Debord to Jorn, 16th July 1960

¹⁸⁸ *The Natural Order*, p139

¹⁸⁹ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, Oxford University Press, 1957

¹⁹⁰ *Natural Order*, p. 135

¹⁹¹ On Mauss and his critique of the Soviet economy, see David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*, Palgrave, London, 2001

¹⁹² On Marx's love affair with capital, see Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, Penguin, New York, 1988

¹⁹³ Asger Jorn, *The Natural Order*, p. 132. Jorn anticipates another attempt to deepen the critique of political economy, see Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, Telos Press, 1975

¹⁹⁴ *Natural Order*, p. 126

¹⁹⁵ *Natural Order*, p. 130

¹⁹⁶ *Natural Order*, p. 139

¹⁹⁷ *Natural Order*, p. 141

¹⁹⁸ *Natural Order*, p 135. A Jornian reading of Warhol immediately suggests itself, as an art of pure container value.

¹⁹⁹ *Natural Order*, p. 136. Compare to Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 1, Zone Books, New York, 1991

²⁰⁰ *State as container*, *Natural Order*, p. 138. *Assault on the universe*, Henri Lefebvre, Introduction to Modernity, p31; See also Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2002. The most remarkable writing on Stalin's assault on the universe, is surely Andrey Platonov, see *Soul and Other Stories*, NYRB Classics, New York, 2007 and *The Foundation Pit*, NYRB Classics, New York, 2009.

²⁰¹ To Jorn, 6th July 1960

²⁰² *Natural Order*, p. 142

²⁰³ Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2003. While acknowledging the diminishing returns of avant garde gestures in the postwar context, Buchloh remains wedded to them, and like them, to the institutions of the art world. This now seems even more of a dead end than Jorn's expressionism.

²⁰⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, Verso, London, 1995, pp128-130

²⁰⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 2*, Verso, London, 2008, p49

²⁰⁶ Andrew Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London, 2006. For Lefebvre's own settling of accounts, see *La somme et le reste*, Economica, Paris, 2008

²⁰⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Key Writings*, Continuum, London, 2003, p. 167

²⁰⁸ Kristin Ross, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists: an Interview', in McDonough, p. 268

²⁰⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 2*, Verso, London. 2008, p. 105ff. See Ellie Ragland, *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, Other Press, New York, 2004

²¹⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 98

²¹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 11

²¹² Henri Lefebvre, *Modernity*, pp. 93-94

²¹³ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 75

²¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 81.

²¹⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 227. See Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1999. Lefebvre constructs a concept of modernity without reference to the colonial other.

²¹⁶ Henri Lefebvre, p. 134. Mention of *agon* and *alea* seems to suggest a familiarity with Roger Caillois, *May, Play and Games*, University of Illinois Press, 2001.

²¹⁷ See Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA, 2002. De Certeau deals only with tactics, excluding the strategic dimension.

²¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Modernity*, p. 121

²¹⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 193.

²²⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 134. Frederic Jameson, in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Verso, London, 2006, p. 243, writes that only in Sartre, and in Laclau and Mouffe, is the problem of the group put back at the center of political thought. But perhaps another way opens up if one takes Lefebvre's rather less precise thinking about groups and the practice of the Situationists together.

²²¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 203. On the latterday consequences of the curious ontological status of games, see Jesper Juul, *Half Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2005

²²² Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 160. Lefebvre does not achieve the formal clarity of Derrida's famous essay, 'Structure, Sign and Play', in *Writing and Difference*, Routledge, London, 2001. Instead there is a practical sense of the implications of play in Lefebvre.

²²³ Henri Lefebvre, *Modernity*, p. 5

²²⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 183

²²⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 181

²²⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 240. One branch of media and cultural studies has indeed tended towards an uncritical embrace of the popular, and a populism which upholds consumer choice against the centralizing tendencies of an older form of spectacle. See Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Media Consumers in a Digital Age*, NYU Press, New York, 2006

²²⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 262. A critique that could apply to Jean Baudrillard, for example.

²²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 343

²²⁹ BBC News, 10th August, 2005

²³⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 356

²³¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 357

²³² On *situation*, see Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2007

²³³ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 353

²³⁴ Franklin, 22 Feb 60. The letter is the basis for a later article 'Theorie des Moments et Construction des Situations', *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 4, p. 10-11; Andreotti and Costa, pp. 100-101

²³⁵ Jorn 2 July 59

²³⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *Modernity*, p. 123

²³⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Modernity*, Verso, London, 1995, *something worse*, p. 173, *ghost of revolution*, p. 237. The hauntological quality of modernity, and Marxism catalyzing role at the séance is the subject of Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx, The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International*, Routledge, London, 2006.

²³⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 77

²³⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique*, p. 283. *Great Pleonasm*, *Critique*, p. 77, *Modernity*, p. 164, p. 167. *Thing of Things*, *Modernity*, p. 167. Also to be found here are the seeds of one of his former assistant's writings. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, 1995

²⁴⁰ *Modernity*, p259

²⁴¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Modernity*, p. 123

²⁴² Henri Lefebvre, *Modernity*, p. 283. This could be usefully compared to Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Noonday Press, New York, 1972. Barthes undoubtedly achieves closer and more illuminating readings, but at the price of losing Lefebvre's grasp of the totalizing tendencies of modernity.

²⁴³ Henri Lefebvre, *Modernity*, p. 286

²⁴⁴ *Modernity*, p. 292. See also Michael Löwy, *Morning Star, Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, Texas University Press, Austin TX, 2009

²⁴⁵ Constant attests to Debord's love of American comics in *HuO: Hans-Ulrich Obrist: Interviews*, Charta, Milan, 2003.

²⁴⁶ *Modernity*, p. 302

²⁴⁷ *Critique*, p. 225

²⁴⁸ *Modernity*, p. 364

²⁴⁹ *Modernity*, p. 306

²⁵⁰ thinkproperty.com, 8th September 2008, via Google Earth.

²⁵¹ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Everyman's Library, London, 2004

²⁵² Gruppe Spur, 'Manifest', in Berréby (ed), *Texts et Documents*, p. 90. Matta is quoted in Guy Atkins, *Asger Jorn, The Crucial Years 1954-1964*, Borgens Forlag, Copenhagen, 1977, p. 56. On the role Adorno played in postwar German culture, see Stefan Muller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, Polity, Cambridge, 2009, and his surprise bestseller, Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life*, Verso, London, 2006. Unlike his contemporary Lefebvre, he abandoned faith in the proletariat. Not surprising given the diverging historical experiences of France and Germany in the 1930s.

²⁵³ Vincent Kaufmann, *Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2006, p. 93. This excellent study might stand in for a host of others, some not quite so excellent, which effect the recuperation of *situationism* as either aesthetics, or biography, or in this case – both.

²⁵⁴ Vaneigem makes his presence felt in *Internationale Situationiste* from issue No. 6, but especially with a series of texts titled 'Basic Banalities', starting in No. 7. See Knabb, pp. 117-130; pp. 154-172.

²⁵⁵ Guy Atkins, *Asger Jorn, The Crucial Years 1954-1964*, Borgens Forlag, Copenhagen, 1977

²⁵⁶ from a letter by Jorn to Debord, 12th July 1960, quoted as a postscript to a letter from Debord to Jorn, 16th July 1960

²⁵⁷ To Jorn 23 August 1962. The Jorn quote is attributed to the pseudonym Jorn used, George Keller, in 'La Cinquième Conférence de Il. S. A Göteborg', from *Internationale Situationiste*, No. 7, April, 1962, p. 30.

²⁵⁸ To Vaneigem, 15th Feb 1962. See also letter to Tom Levin, Nov. 1989.

²⁵⁹ 'Danger! Do Not Lean Out!', *Situationist Times*, No. 1

²⁶⁰ 'The Struggle for the Situcratic Society,' signed by Nash, de Jong, et al., *Situationist Times* 2 (1962).

²⁶¹ See Howard Slater, 'Divided We Stand: An Outline of Scandinavian Situationism', *Infopool*, No. 4, 2001, p. 31. Slater makes a good case for the value of the Nashists, and I am indebted to it. See also Howard Slater, 'The Spoiled Ideas of Lost Situations', *Infopool*, No. 2, 2000

²⁶² Jens Jørgen Thorsen, 'The Communicative Phase in Art', in *Situationister 1957-1970*, Jorgen Nash et al eds, Bauhaus Situationist, 1966. Quoted in Howard Slater, 'Divided We Stand: An Outline of Scandinavian Situationism', *Infopool*, No. 4, 2001, p31

²⁶³ see Slater, 'Divided We Stand', p. 32

²⁶⁴ Interview in *Aspekt*, No. 3, Copenhagen, 1963. Translated by Jakob Jakobsen for infopool.com

²⁶⁵ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 10

²⁶⁶ Jacqueline de Jong, 'Critic on the Political Practice of Détournement,' *Situationist Times*, No. 1 (1962).

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Noël Arnaud, *Les Vies Paralleles de Boris Vian*, 10/18, Paris, 1970. On the College of Pataphysics, see Alistair Brotchie (ed), *A True History of the College of Pataphysics*, Atlas Press, London, 1995

²⁷⁰ See Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 226ff.

²⁷¹ Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture*, AK Press, Stirling, 1991, p. 44. Home works (and plays) in the tradition of the historical avant gardes, and has always written in favor of the value of the contributions to the movement of others besides Debord. I am indebted to his tireless championing of the others, if not to his denigration of Debord. I do not see why revaluing one leads to devaluing the other.

²⁷² 'Renseignements Situationistes', *Internationale Situationiste*, Number 7, April 1962, pp. 49-54

²⁷³ A theme taken up ably by Eduardo Rothe. 'The Conquest of Space in the Time of Power', *Internationale Situationniste* #12, September 1969; Knabb, 371ff. Rothe later worked for the Ministry of Communication in Venezuela.

²⁷⁴ On Jorn and topology see McKenzie Wark, *50 Years of Recuperation*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2008. After completing the manuscript for this book, I discovered Fabian Tompsett's translation and commentary: Asger Jorn, *Open Creation and Its Enemies*, Unpopular Books, London, 1994, which had blazed the trail through Jorn's difficult texts, if only I had known it.

²⁷⁵ Jacqueline De Jong, 'The Times of the Situationists', in Stefan Zweifel, et al (eds) *In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igne: The Situationist International (1952-1972)*, JRP, Zürich, 2006, p. 239

²⁷⁶ Guy Atkins, Asger Jorn, *The Crucial Years 1954-1964*, Borgens Forlag, Copenhagen, 1977, p. 127

²⁷⁷ *Situationist Times*, No. 3, p. 30

²⁷⁸ *Situationist Times*, No. 2, p. 32

²⁷⁹ See Peter Black and Desiree Moorhead, *The Prints of Stanley William Hayter*, Phaidon Press, London, 1994

²⁸⁰ Steve Shavero, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2009

²⁸¹ Slater, 'Divided We Stand', p. 8

²⁸² *Modernity*, p. 11

²⁸³ *Modernity*, p. 346

²⁸⁴ Alexander Trocchi, *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, edited by Andrew Murray Scott, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1991, p196. Trocchi did not know that the right wing Brazilian Integralist Action Party had used 'sigma' as its emblem in the thirties. Accretions ,p181; *Unpopular*, p177; *grids of expression*, p178; *ancestral bones*, p181. On the *modern* nature of the October revolution, see Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol. 3, Ch. 43, 'The Insurrection'. 'The Invisible Insurrection' appeared as 'Technique de Coup de Monde' in *Internationale Sitationiste*, No. 8, January 1963, p. 48ff

²⁸⁵ Trocchi quotes Williams from an essay by kitchen sink dramatist Arnold Wesker (b. 1932), founder of the rival Center 42: 'Secret Reins', *Encounter*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, March 1962, p. 5. The Williams quote appears in *Internationale Situationiste*, No. 8, January 1963, p. 52. On Williams of this period, see Dai Smith, *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale*, Parthian Books, London, 2009. Williams' argument for the public ownership (but not state control) of the means of cultural production are most forcefully made in *The Long Revolution*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1961, pp. 335-347, although the exact sentences Wesker and Trocchi quote are not to be found there.

²⁸⁶ Alexander Trocchi, *Invisible Insurrection*, p. 195. See Katherine Chaddock Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities: John Andrew Rice of Black Mountain College*, Louisiana State University Press, 1988 on the famous college.

²⁸⁷ Vladimir Lenin, 'Dual Power', *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, pp. 38-41

²⁸⁸ Hubertus Bigend makes an appearance in *Pattern Recognition* (2003) and *Spook Country* (2007). See the latter, pp. 74-75

²⁸⁹ See Andrew Murray Scott's fantastically unreliable biography *Alexander Trocchi: The Making of the Monster*, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1991 and also Allan Campbell, *A Life in Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi*, Rebel Publishing Co., 1997. On Girodias, see John De St. Jorre, *Venus Bound: The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press*, New York: Random House, 1996.

²⁹⁰ Alexander Trocchi, *Helen and Desire*, Rebel Inc, Edinburgh, 1997, *the sea*, p6; *alluvial sensations*, p33. Kathy Acker's detournement of it is in Amy Scholder (ed) *Essential Acker: The Selected Writings of Kathy Acker*, Grove Press, 2002

²⁹¹ Alexander Trocchi, *Helen and Desire*, Rebel Inc, Edinburgh, 1997, p154. Compare to Deleuze and Guattari on becoming imperceptible in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Continuum, London, 2004

²⁹² Alexander Trocchi, 'The Barbeque', from the Moving Times poster collected in Sigma Portfolio: A New Dimension in the Dissemination of Informations, 1964

²⁹³ Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, forward by Greil Marcus, introduction by Richard Seaver, Grove Press, New York, 1992, *pinball*: p. 60, *chemistry*: p. 33. A rare appreciation of Trocchi as Situationist writer is: Michael Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960*, Edinburgh University Press, 2006. Malcolm Lowry a favorite not only of Debord but of Lefebvre as well. See Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*, Penguin, London, 2000; *The Voyage That Never Ends: Fictions, Poems, Fragments, Letters*, NYRB Classics, 2007

²⁹⁴ *New York Times*, 3rd April 2007

²⁹⁵ Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, p. 72

²⁹⁶ James Campbell, *Syncopations: Beats, New Yorkers, and Writers in the Dark*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA, 2008, p. 204

²⁹⁷ See Michael Duncan and Kristine McKenna, *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and His Circle*, DAP, New York, 2005 and Wallace Berman, *Photographs*, Rose Gallery, Santa Monica CA, 2007

²⁹⁸ *under the eyelids*, 'Potlatch: an interpersonal log', *Portfolio* No. 4; *new dimension*, 'Subscription Form', *Portfolio*, No. 12

²⁹⁹ 'Potlatch: an interpersonal log', *Portfolio* No. 4

³⁰⁰ See Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments*, Routledge, London, 2008

³⁰¹ 'Sigma Informations', *Portfolio*, No. 5

³⁰² Based on the 'Situationist Manifesto', originally published in *Internationale Situationiste*, No. 4, June 1960.

³⁰³ 'Project: projects', *Portfolio*, No. 22

³⁰⁴ Constant, 'Discipline or Intervention?', in Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, 1998, p. 142

³⁰⁵ Irving Rosenthal, *Sheeper*, Grove Press, New York, 1967, pp. 217-237.

³⁰⁶ Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, Dell New York, 1968, p. 150.

³⁰⁷ Stewart Home, *Tainted Love*, Virgin Books, London, 2006, p. 162. The chapter from which this is taken also neatly describes the process of fabricating legends for the consumption of journalists.

³⁰⁸ Constant, 'New Babylon: Outline of a Culture', in Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, 1998, p. 160. Hereafter, cited as Wigley.

³⁰⁹ Wigley, p. 132

³¹⁰ Van Eyck, p. 66

³¹¹ *house-like city*, Aldo Van Eyck, 'Beyond Visibility', *Situationist Times*, No. 4, pp79-85; *awareness of duration*, Van Eyck p. 74 The contrast between objective clock time and intuited duration is perhaps a reference to Bergson. See Henri Bergson, *Key Writings*, Continuum, New York, 2005. Lukacs drew on Bergson and Max Weber's iron cage to form a general theory of reification.

³¹² *Exteriorize man from time*, Van Eyck, pp. 74-75; *at home nowhere*, Van Eyck, p. 87. The (anti)utopia of Superstudio, surely a critique of Constant among others, is an infrastructure for a global homelessness. See Peter Lang and William Menking, *Superstudio: Life Without Objects*, Skira, 2003. And for a brilliant account of Italian utopian architecture and critical theory, Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2008.

³¹³ Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning*, Dover, New York, 1987. Vertical separation of flows is just one of Corbusier's techniques for transforming the city so as to *preserve* its ruling order. Constant's *détournement* is a reversal, and as Debord and Wollman said, the direct reversal of the significance of an element is not always the most effective. Constant was not alone in borrowing the separation of flows. Van Eyck's Team 10 colleagues the Smithsons made particular use of it. See Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1999.

³¹⁴ Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France 1960-1970*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2007; Jean Baudrillard, *Utopia Deferred: Writings from Utopie 1967-1978*, Semiotext(e), New York, 2006; Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archaeology*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2008; Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Crepuscular Dawn*, Semiotext(e), New York, 2002

³¹⁵ ³¹⁵ Constant, 'Lecture Given at the ICA, London' (1963) *The Decomposition of the Artist*, a12. Levittown, the original suburban tract development, a civilian application of techniques learned during the war for the mass production of air strips, had featured in IS.

³¹⁶ Engels, 'The Conditions of the English Working Class', William Morris, *News From Nowhere and Other Writings*, Penguin, London, 1994; Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, Oxford University Press, 2007. H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, Penguin, London, 2005, while clearly referencing the utopian literature, foregrounds the technological question, and interestingly plays on the spatial figure of above and below ground. Wells extrapolated the underground factory from aerial bombing, something which, as Paul Virilio points out, Albert Speer would render concrete in the dying days of the Nazi regime. Constant's underground factories thus have a rather more sinister genealogy than he allows.

³¹⁷ Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, second edition, Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York, 1954, p. 52. Wiener was somewhat more pessimistic than Constant: "In a very real sense we are the shipwrecked passengers on a doomed planet... we shall go down, but let it be in a manner to which we may look forward as worthy of our dignity." (p. 40)

³¹⁸ Wigley, p. 234. On the transformation of capitalist relations of production by automation, see David F. Noble, *America By Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1979 and *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986

³¹⁹ Wigley, p. 233 See Allan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion, and Sustainability*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007

³²⁰ Wigley, p. 209 See Trevor Paglen, 'Experimental Geography', *Brooklyn Rail*, March 2009; Nato Thompson (ed), *Experimental Geography*, Melville House, Hoboken NJ, 2009

³²¹ Wigley, p. 161, p. 161. The most vivid image of the global alienation of space is J. G. Ballard's story, 'The Concentration City', in *The Best Stories of J. G. Ballard*, Picador, London, 2001

³²² Wigley, p. 161. On the wandering: Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Verso, London, 2006; Simon Pope and Claudia Schenk, *London Walking: A Handbook for Survival*, Ellipsis Arts, London, 2001; Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes*, Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2005

³²³ Wigley, p. 162. On power and networks, see Alexander Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2006 and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2008

³²⁴ Constant, 'Lecture Given at the ICA, London' (1963) *The Decomposition of the Artist*, a13. Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, Continuum, London, 2003 contains two texts which are the antithesis of New Babylon, in their radical affirmation of *living labor*.

³²⁵ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*; Beacon Press, Boston, 1950; Jean-François Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1985 offers a quite different revival of the figure of the game, via an détournement of Wittgenstein's *language game*. In neither Huizinga Lefebvre, nor Constant is there a privileging of language, however.

³²⁶ The revival of Schmitt owes a lot to Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, London, 2000

³²⁷ Constant, 'The Rise and Decline of the Avant Garde' (1964) *The Decomposition of the Artist*, p. a26

³²⁸ Wigley, p. 232. See Raoul Vaneigem and Attila Kotanyi, 'Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism', in Knabb, p. 86ff; *Internationale Situationiste*, No. 6, pp16-16, 1961 for the subsequent direction of the Situationist International after Constant' departure.

³²⁹ Wigley, p. 233. See Richard Kempton, *Provo: Amsterdam's Anarchist Revolt*, Autonomia, New York, 2007

³³⁰ Wigley, p. 232 The Situationists once described the Beats, and not without justification, as "mystical cretins," but Allen Ginsburg's contemporaneous critique of "Moloch whose mind is pure machinery" is perhaps most relevant here.

³³¹ Leslie T. Chang, *Factory Girls*, Spiegel and Grau, New York, 2008, p. 6

³³² *New York Times*, 7th March 2009. See Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the 21st Century*, Verso, London, 2009

³³³ Wigley, p. 160

³³⁴ Constant, 'Lecture Given at the ICA, London' (1963) *The Decomposition of the Artist*, p. a9

³³⁵ Wigley, p. 235

³³⁶ Wigley, p. 133

³³⁷ Benjamin

³³⁸ Among thinkers of technology Gilbert Simondon is undergoing something of a revival, even if the main undercurrent is a regrettable over-dependence on Martin Heidegger. The former is far too technocratic even for Constant, and for the latter, famously, only the Gods can save us. See Adrian MacKenzie, *Transductions: Bodies and Machines at Speed*, Continuum, London, 2006 for a useful introduction to Simondon, and Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1998 for a striking synthesis.

³³⁹ 'The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy', in Guy Debord, *Sick Planet*, Seagull Books, 2008, p. 5; also in Knabb, p. 195; *Internationale Situationiste*, Np. 10, March, 1966, p. 3; Ronald Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark*, Melville House, Hoboken NJ, 2007. Originally published in 1971.

³⁴⁰ Wigley, p. 162. See *The Memoirs of Lacenaire*, Staples Press, London, 1952. The poet-criminal Lacenaire was a celebrated figure, everyone from Dickens to Stendhal wrote about him. He inspired the character of Raskolnikov. His legend spans the romantic, surrealist and Situationist movements. Interestingly, Foucault chose to publish *I, Pierre Riviere, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1982, in part to counter the Lacenaire legend. Like Porambo, Lacenaire was a far better writer than he was a criminal.

³⁴¹ Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*, Da Capo, New York, 1997, p. 129. Horne calls it a "potlatch of destruction among those denied the dream." (p. 15)

³⁴² Janet Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots*, Oxford UP, 2007, p. 293

³⁴³ 'Timeline of the French Riots', *BBC News*, 14th November 2005

³⁴⁴ Wigley, p. 236

³⁴⁵ It was Georges Sorel (1847-1922), that unreliable fellow traveler of the syndicalist movement, who proposed the central role of the myth of the general strike: *From Georges Sorel: Essays in Socialism and Philosophy* edited with an introduction by John L. Stanley, translated by John and Charlotte Stanley, Oxford University Press, 1976

³⁴⁶ Letter to Vaneigem, Feb 1966

³⁴⁷ René Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement*, Autonomedia, New York, 1992

³⁴⁸ Viénet, p. 21

³⁴⁹ Dominique Lecourt, *Mediocracy: French Philosophy Since 1968*, Verso, London, 2001, p22. Lecourt juxtaposes the "brand image" of Althusserianism with Debord's "cult book" as setting the scene for May 1968. (pp. 17-22)

³⁵⁰ *BBC News*, 27th March 2002

³⁵¹ Bernard Stiegler, *Acting Out*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2008, *enormous suffering*, p. 41, *consumer's disgust*, p. 60

³⁵² Viénet p. 32

³⁵³ René Reisel (b. 1950) was the son of the Communist militant, and a member of the Situationist International from 1968 until his exclusion in 1971). Later he became a sheep farmer and an activist in the Peasant Federation. See René Reisel and Jaime Semprun, *Catastrophisme, administration du désastre et soumission durable*, Editions de l'Encyclopédie des Nuisances, 2008. The Encyclopédie des Nuisances is a non unworthy continuation of the Situationist legacy.

³⁵⁴ Viénet p. 58

³⁵⁵ Viénet, p. 76

³⁵⁶ Viénet, p. 77

³⁵⁷ Viénet, *despair*, p. 92; *isolated*, p. 59; *backwardness*, p. 86

³⁵⁸ Hegel, Preface to the Philosophy of Right

³⁵⁹ Henri Lefebvre, Introduction to Modernity, Verso, London, 1995, pp. 22-23; Henri Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx*, Random House, New York, 1968, p. 110. Quoting Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, translated by Emile Burns, Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, 1969, p. 376. As Lefebvre remarks, this is clearly a Marxian reading of Balzac.

³⁶⁰ Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, New York, 2008, p105. Or to give another example: Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, Penguin, New York, 2009, the epigram to which is "sur les pavés, la plage!" (Beneath the pavement, the beach!)

³⁶¹ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, Verso, London, 2008; p. 1; Jacques Rancière, *Short Voyages to the Land of the People*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2003

³⁶² Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question*, MIT Press, 1979. Lefebvre responded in *The Survival of Capitalism*, Shocken Books, New York, 1981.