How the Situationist International became what it was

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Declaration

I, Anthony Paul Hayes, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

The Situationist International (1957-1972) was a small group of communist revolutionaries, originally organised out of the West European artistic avant-garde of the 1950s. The focus of my thesis is to explain how the Situationist International (SI) became a group able to exert a considerable influence on the ultra-left criticism that emerged during and in the wake of the May movement in France in 1968. My wager is that the pivotal period of the group is to be found between 1960 and 1963, a period marked by the split of 1962. Often this is described as the transition of the group from being more concerned with art to being more concerned with politics, but as I will argue this definitional shorthand elides the significance of the Situationist critique of art, philosophy and politics.

The two axes of my thesis are as follows. First, that the significant minority in the group which carried out the break of 1962, identified a homology between the earlier Situationist critique of art — embodied in the Situationist 'hypothesis of the construction of situations' — and Marx's critique and supersession of the radical milieu of philosophy from which he emerged in the mid-1840s. This homology was summarised in the expression of the Situationist project as the 'supersession of art' (*dépassement de l'art*). Secondly, this homology was practically embodied in the resolution of the debates over the role of art in the elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis, which had been ongoing since 1957. However, it was the SI's encounter with the ultra-left group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* that would prove decisive. Via Guy Debord's membership, the group was exposed to both the idea of a more general revolutionary criticism, but also ultimately what was identified as the insufficiently criticised 'political militancy' of this group. Indeed, in the 'political alienation' found in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, a further homology was established between the alienation of the political and artistic avant-gardes. This identity would prove crucial to the further elaboration of the concept of 'spectacle'.

By way of an examination of the peculiar and enigmatic 'Hamburg Theses' of 1961, and the relationship between these 'Theses' and the Situationist criticism of art and politics worked out over the first five years of the group, I will argue that the break in 1962 should be conceived as one against politics as much as art (rather than just the latter, as it is more often represented). Additionally, I will outline how the SI, through the paradoxical reassertion of their artistic origins, attempted to synthesise their criticism of art with the recovery of the work of Marx beyond its mutilation as Marxism. Indeed, it was the synthesis of these critiques that enabled the considerable development of the concept of 'spectacle', opening the way to the unique influence the SI exerted in the re-emergence of a revolutionary movement at the end of the 1960s.

Contents

« … RIEN… N'AURA EU LIEU… QUE LE LIEU… »

(… nothing will have taken place other than place…)

— Stéphane Mallarmé

Introduction: Gambling on the passage of time

> *[A]ll the hypocrites on the artistic side feign to treat us as politicians, and, on the political side, reassure themselves by reproaching us for being artists and dreamers. Their common point is that they speak in the name of artistic or political specialisation, the one as dead as the other.*
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> — *Situationist International, 1963[1]*

The Situationist International (1957-1972) was a small group of communist revolutionaries, originally organised out of the West European artistic avant-garde of the 1950s. The focus of my thesis is to explain how the Situationist International became a group able to exert considerable influence on the ultra-left criticism which emerged during and in the wake of the May movement in France in 1968. My wager is that the pivotal period of the group is to be found between 1960 and 1961. It is in this period that the project of cohering an avant-garde 'within *and* against art' gave way to the project of 'realising art' through its 'supersession' as a distinct practice in everyday life. The recovery of Marx's work against Marxist orthodoxy was a crucial part of conceptualising this 'supersession'. Such a perspective was summarised in the enigmatic "work" composed by some of the Situationists, known as the 'Hamburg Theses'.

The struggle against political alienation in the group from around 1961 was an extension of the earlier conflict over the artistic and anti-artistic elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis. In 1957, Guy Debord's 'hypothesis of the construction of situations' (what I also call the *Situationist hypothesis*) was offered as the solution to the impasse of the active and repetitive decomposition of culture. However, often lost in the secondary literature is that Debord's vision of the 'constructed situation' was a *hypothesis* regarding the possible organisation of life on the basis of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Thus, he suggested that Situationist practice in the capitalist present (as opposed to the communist future) would be limited to the elaboration of experimental practices that entailed the critique of the capitalist use of urban

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[1] Internationale Situationniste, 'Sur l'exclusion d'Attila Kotànyi [1963],' in *Guy Debord : Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006.

space-time — what Debord called 'unitary urbanism'. By means of unitary urbanism, the SI would elaborate the Situationist hypothesis, to the end of establishing conditions conducive to its realisation; however, such 'realisation' was, perforce, only possible in a hypothesised communist future. Thus, the movement of the SI from its first to second period should not be conceived as the movement from an artistic to a political problematic, but rather the movement from posing the supersession of art, to a more general sense of supersession, aimed at an entailed philosophical and political supersession. Invoking Marx, this perspective was pithily expressed in the 'Hamburg Theses' as 'now, the SI must realise philosophy'.[2]

A persistent opinion regarding the periods of the SI, has been to consider its first period as one more clearly focused on artistic practices (1957-1961) and the second period as being more clearly focused on political practices (1962-1968). In a crude way, the 'surpassing' or 'supersession of art' (*dépassement de l'art*) is seen as one of movement from the first, artistic period to the second, political period. But this is to misapprehend the Situationist notion of 'supersession' altogether. Common to much of the secondary literature on the SI available in English, is an undue emphasis on the so-called 'artistic' SI. As already mentioned, this view fits in with the common doxa of splitting the SI into two distinct phases (at least up until 1968): the so-called artistic SI of 1957-1961, and the political SI of 1962-1968. Certainly, such a divide exists, and was even accepted by Debord, among others. However, the shorthand 'artistic/political' obscures, rather than clarifies, the nature of the break, its causes and its aftermath. Put simply, this perspective misunderstands the non-, or rather anti-artistic nature of the so-called artistic phase, as much as it misapprehends the anti-political nature of the so-called political phase. Indeed, it appears to be motivated by an undue concern with elements of the Situationist hypothesis, particularly such 'para-artistic' practices like urban drifts (*dérives*) and psychogeographical research, at the expense of Debord's and others attempt to unify these practices in an overarching theory and practice: namely the Situationist hypothesis of the construction of situations. To some extent this can be seen as a result of the distrust of 'master

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[2] Guy Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' in *Internationale situationniste : Édition augmentée*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997.

narratives' that has been fostered in recent decades. But usually it is manifest by simply ignoring or bracketing the hypothesis as too abstract or irrelevant (much like Constant did at the time — cf. chapter three, below, in this regard).

Nonetheless, there are real differences among the pro-art critics of the SI. At its worst, it manifests in the work of Stewart Home, whose account of the 'specto' Situationists and the break in 1962 is, at best, mythological.[3] More recently, McKenzie Wark has unfortunately shown some sympathy for Home's fictions; but at least Wark appears to more clearly reckon with the work of the Situationists, and pay them some due.[4] Better, by far, is the historical approach of scholars like Tom McDonough, whose attention to detail is only undermined by his inability to reckon with the Marxian turn of the SI.[5] Indeed, this tendency to focus almost solely upon the artistic SI also undermines the work of Simon Ford and Simon Sadler. In the case of Sadler, he is mostly concerned with the artistic and architectural exegesis of unitary urbanism, so perhaps it is understandable.[6] In the case of Ford, his general history of the SI suffers from his failure to clearly understand the nature of the 1962 break, and his inability to treat the post-1962 SI in the same detail he lavishes on the pre-1962 SI (a fault Wark suffers from to, despite his claim of offering an account of the 'glorious times' of the SI).[7] Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen have offered accounts focusing upon the artist-members of the SI, and, in

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[3] Cf. Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, Edinburgh: AK Press, 1991.

[4] McKenzie Wark, *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008; McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, London: Verso, 2011; McKenzie Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration*, London: Verso, 2013.

[5] Thomas F. McDonough, 'Rereading Debord, Rereading the Situationists,' *October*, no. 79 (Winter 1997); Tom McDonough, 'Introduction: Ideology and the Situationist Utopia,' in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004; Tom McDonough, *The beautiful language of my century: reinventing the language of contestation in postwar France, 1945–1968*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007; Tom McDonough, ed. *The Situationists and the City* (London: Verso, 2009). McDonough has noted that conceiving of the SI in terms of the artistic versus political wings — among other things — simply 'hinder[s] any understanding of this group'. Whereas he is surely right about such a reductive perspective, he makes this move in order to denounce what he sees as an unnecessary exceptionalism regarding the SI. However, such an exceptionalism really exists, if we mean by it the difference between the SI's plans to put into practice the radical demands of the artistic and political avant-gardes of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the various perspectives of then contemporary political and intellectual life — even, and especially, what passed for a 'leftism' dominated by the large French Stalinist Communist Party. Cf. McDonough, 'Introduction: Ideology and the Situationist Utopia,' p. xvii.

[6] Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999.

[7] Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide*, London: Black Dog, 2005.

particular, the Scandinavian sections of the SI, the German Spur group, and the so-called 'Second Situationist International'.[8] Rasmussen and Jakobsen seem to be more engaged with the political dimensions of the Situationists critique, but less so with the anti-political and anti-artistic dimensions. Their translations and publication of hard to find documents are to be applauded; however much of the material that is labelled 'Situationist', particularly that pertaining to the Second Situationist International and its avatars, is so tangentially related to the Situationist hypothesis, that one is tempted to agree with Debord, Vaneigem, et al., when they accused many of the artist members of the group of being primarily interested in the label as a mark of artistic distinction rather than critical engagement.

The flip side of the 'pro-art' commentators are what, with some caution, we can call the 'pro-political' commentators. Two works in particular come to mind in this regard: Sadie Plant's *The Most Radical Gesture*, and Richard Gilman-Opalsky's *Spectacular Capitalism*.[9] Plant's work is perhaps the better of the two as her account gives a lot of space to the avant-garde antecedents of the SI. However, she appears to be overly concerned with the postmodern issue of the SI, and the debt owed the Situationists for this parentage. Whereas it is true that post-structuralists like Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard and even Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari derive aspects of their work from the SI (though largely unacknowledged), it is questionable that their work constitutes a continuation of the SI. Considering her thesis, Plant appears more comfortable with the Nietzscheanism that appears in some of the SI's work, particularly Raoul Vaneigem's. However, she is less sure when dealing with Marx, definitely the more important reference for the SI. Gilman-Opalsky, on the other hand, sets out to address what he considers to be the problem of those that 'ignore [the] political core' of the SI.[10] However, like Plant, he is less sure about the anti-political nature of this 'political core'. And, more bizarrely, he takes up the entire, long, first chapter of his book considering the work of Jean Baudrillard, though it is

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[8] Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, eds., *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandanavia and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen: Nebula, 2011); Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, eds., *Cosmonauts of the Future: Texts from The Situationist Movement in Scandanavia and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen: Nebula, 2015).
[9] Richard Gilman-Opalsky, *Spectacular Capitalism: Guy Debord and the Practice of Radical Philosophy*, London: Minor Compositions, 2011; Sadie Plant, *The most radical gesture: The Situationist International in a postmodern age*, London: Routledge, 1992.
[10] Gilman-Opalsky, *Spectacular Capitalism: Guy Debord and the Practice of Radical Philosophy*, p. 23.

never clear how Baudrillard figures in Gilman-Opalsky's desire to 'rescue' Debord, let alone contribute to the reinvigoration of a revolutionary movement. Indeed, in the middle of this chapter he asserts, as if from nowhere, and incredibly, that 'Baudrillard makes, in a very general sense, a wrong turn', leaving one wondering why he even set out on this particular diversion (the subtitle of his work is '*Guy Debord and the Practice of Radical Philosophy*').[11] In this regard, one would be better off reading the short article by Anselm Jappe, '*Baudrillard, détournement par excès*', in which Jappe demonstrates that Baudrillard's key "insight" into the modern organisation of appearances is taken almost entirely from Debord.[12]

Nonetheless, there are signs of a more just appreciation of the SI, particularly with regard to the nature of the break with the artists. Frances Stracey (2014) has pointed out the fallacy of the neat division of the SI, drawing attention to the 'first […] collective exhibition of so-called "Situationist" works within a gallery context' was made in 1963, more than a year after the break with the artists, and some two years after the debates over what constituted 'anti-situationist' art.[13] Indeed, Stracey goes some way to drawing out the continuity across the divide of 1962, and putting forward a thesis of the entailed political and artistic nature of the SI from the outset. Unfortunately, missing from her account is a more considered reckoning with the Situationist sense of the supersession of art and politics.

Readers of my thesis will notice certain lacunae, even and especially for the time I am dealing with. The most notable is the almost complete absence of a discussion of Henri Lefebvre and

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[11] John Lepper, in his 2012 review of Gilman-Opalsky's work similarly noted this *non-sequitar*, pointing out that if one concludes that we should 'selectively' forget about Baudrillard after spending so much time remembering him, as Gilman-Opalsky does, why not rather cut to the chase and 'just completely forget him?' John Lepper, 'The Situationist International: Forty Years On,' *Socialism and Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2012), p. 163.

[12] Anselm Jappe, 'Baudrillard, détournement par excès,' *Lignes*, no. 31 (février 2010). I hope to make available an English translation of this article in the near future.

[13] Frances Stracey, *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International*, London: Pluto Press, 2014, pp. 3, 44. For a detailed account of the Situationist exhibition, cf. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, 'To Act in Culture While Being Against All Culture: The Situationists and the "Destruction of RSG-6",' in *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandanavia and Elsewhere*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, Copenhagen: Nebula, 2011. Stracey, unfortunately believed that the "Destruction of RSG-6" was the 'first and last' collective anti-art exhibition of the SI. There was another, *Ny-Irrealisme* [neo-irrealism], in 1967. Cf. J.V. Martin et al., 'Neo-Irrealism: The Decline and Fall of the Fourth Reich (1967),' in *Cosmonauts of the Future: Texts from The Situationist Movement in Scandanavia and Elsewhere*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, Copenhagen: Nebula, 2015.

Georg Lukács. To deal with Lukács first. There are two works that are presently available in English, both of which deal with the question of the SI's relations to Lukács (among other things), and his brand of 'Hegelian-Marxism'. These works are Anselm Jappe's critical biography, *Guy Debord* (1999), and the forthcoming work of Tom Bunyard's, *Debord, Time and Spectacle: Hegelian Marxism and Situationist Theory* (Brill, 2018). Both of these works I heartily recommend; in the case of Jappe's, it remains the standard work for an understanding of the influence of Lukács upon Debord's concept of spectacle. If it is to be faulted, it is that Jappe tends to downplay Debord's rediscovery of a Marxian critique of Lukács' more Hegelian inflected sense of alienation (i.e. objectification as alienation) — a fault shared by Bunyard. However, Jappe and Bunyard are not unaware of this problem. And, without doubt, both of these works are by far the best accounts so far of the often complex question of the theoretical debts of the SI. Nonetheless, I will leave the argument regarding Lukács and the SI up to a future author who chooses to once again focus upon this rewarding subject. To return to the question of the lacunae in my thesis, I have bracketed the question of Lukács only so that I can better address the question I have set myself with regard to the SI. No doubt, Lukács's work played a role. However, the more important role he played was as a conduit of sorts for the Situationists to reach the source: Marx. And, indeed, the early Marx that the Situationists leant upon in particular, contained material which critically led beyond the overly *Hegelianised* Marx that Lukács presented in *History and Class Consciousness* (something that Lukács came to understand himself some years after the publication of that work — cf. Bunyard's work in particular for more on this). Thus, Marx plays a much more significant role in my thesis than Lukács.

In the case of Lefebvre, I have avoided what is again a rich and rewarding topic for two main reasons. First, Lefebvre's relationship has been thoroughly addressed by other writers, and even Lefebvre himself.[14] However, many of the current works on Lefebvre which deal with his

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[14] Of the two most recent critical biographies on Lefebvre, Stuart Elden's Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (2004) and Andy Merrifield's *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction* (2006), Merrifield's contains the better, and more just account of Debord and Lefebvre's encounter. Elden's account is exceedingly brief, which, considering the importance of Debord and the

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relationship to the SI are deficient, particularly with regard to their conceptions of the influence Lefebvre exerted upon the SI, as opposed to the little understood and even less investigated Situationist influence upon Lefebvre. Second, in general, I have tried to focus on the SI itself, and the arguments had by Situationists. Though at times relatively close to the SI, and certainly influential upon the group, Lefebvre was never a member. One need only consider the last section of the final chapter of his work, *Introduction to Modernity* (1961) to gauge the extremely important influence that Debord and the SI exerted upon Lefebvre, not to mention Lefebvre's wholesale adoption of the SI's critique of urbanism as his central theoretical project throughout the rest of the 1960s and into the 1970s.[15] Lefebvre fitfully acknowledged this influence, though at the time and in the immediate aftermath of the end of his relationship with the SI he emphasised the debt they owed to him.[16] However, and despite Lefebvre's unfortunate plagiarism of Debord, Kotányi and Vaneigem's theses on the Paris Commune in what was the detestable (to the Situationists) journal *Arguments* in late 1962, he was not a significant "player" in the pivot under discussion in my thesis. Thus, for the sake of brevity and clarity of argument, I have decided to mostly leave Lefebvre aside.

This brings me to the relations between the SI and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (which I deal with in chapter seven of my thesis). With notable exceptions — in English, the work of Not Bored! and Stephen Hastings-King — this relationship has received little attention. However, even in French the accounts are few, and in the cases in which the relationship is dealt with in some detail, such as in Phillipe Gottraux (1997) and Bernard Quiriny (2003), the authors suffer from a

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Situationists at this point in Lefebvre's life, does little to help one understand why Lefebvre made such a concerted turn to the question of the critique of urbanism.

[15] Other mutual influences abound. For instance, in the second volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life* (1961), Lefebvre speaks of the 'poetics' of everyday life in a remarkably Situationist register. Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. John Moore, London: Verso, [1961] 2002, p. 106.

[16] This is particularly the case in a work of Lefebvre's from 1967, *Position : contre les technocrates*. Here, his acknowledgement is clear though filtered through an emphasis on the importance of his work for the SI. In any case, the comment is backhanded, as he described the group as possessing a 'neurotic intelligence' (p. 195). Additionally, he accused the group's notion of a revolutionary revolt against modern urbanism as an impossible, 'abstract utopia': 'Do they truly expect that on one beautiful morning or night, the people will see and say "Enough! Enough of toil and boredom! Let's end it!" and then they will enter into the immortal festival, into the creation of situations?' (ibid.). Needless to say, when the May 1968 events erupted less than a year after the publication of Lefebvre's comments, the SI could not help but point out their maladroit quality (cf. Internationale Situationniste, 'Le commencement d'une époque,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 12 (Septembre 1969), p. 6.

relatively poor understanding of the SI's contribution to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and, in the case of Quiriny's account, what appears to be little more than outright mendacity.[17] However, because I have limited my account to the pivotal period of the SI, a period that I do not pursue beyond early 1963, but mostly not beyond 1962, I have unfortunately left out of account what can be considered the pivotal period of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, i.e. the period in which the group split in two. Certainly, this period overlaps somewhat the pivot of the SI, if we consider that the split in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* took place over the last half of 1962 and the first half of 1963. However, its most interesting "issue", in terms of theory, would be Castoriadis' long article '*Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire*', published in five parts over 1964 and 1965. Indeed, I believe that this article reveals interesting aspects of the possible influence of the SI upon Castoriadis' work — previously unacknowledged — particularly with regard to Castoriadis' discovery of Marx's original sense of ideology criticism (a sense, moreover, Castoriadis appears to be largely oblivious to before 1963). Unfortunately, a more generous engagement with this is beyond the limits of my current work. I hope to return to this question in more detail in a future article.

Finally, a word on my influences. Apart from the Situationist themselves, and, in particular, the work of Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, Karl Marx is almost certainly the central figure in this thesis. However, my Marx — and there are so many Marx — is based on a long if often sidelined interpretation (that goes back to Marx himself, of course!).

An outline of the argument

1. The Situationist hypothesis and the supersession of art

The central idea of my thesis is that the Situationist International, must be understood as an attempt at acting in the *mode of supersession* (*dépassement*) — i.e. the *supersession* of art, research and political contestation, as they exist in capitalist society. Without doubt, it is possible to understand the Situationist International as more or less 'artistic' or 'political'. However, one should still proceed cautiously in the process of exhuming their still radioactive

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[17] Cf. 'Whose Spectacle?' in the appendices to this thesis, for more detail on Bernard Quiriny and Cornelius Castoriadis' claims regarding the provenance of the concept of spectacle.

fallout — despite the now general prevalence of practices inspired by the Situationists, for instance so-called 'culture jamming'. The Situationists not only advised their contemporaries on the immediate possibilities for revolution, but also the virtues of waiting. To rush in and claim the Situationist International for either the artistic or the political, as is too often the case, is to misapprehend or ignore the significance of acting artistically, politically or philosophically in the *mode of supersession*. For the SI, 'supersession' was considered in terms of the supersession of politics as much as art. Indeed, the chief lesson of Debord's brief dalliance with the ultra-left political group, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, over 1960 and 1961, was that despite the advanced theoretical critique this group made of modern capitalism, its internal organisational regime mirrored the very capitalist hierarchy it sought to criticise.

The Situationist 'realisation of art' was not the realisation of art objects, but rather the realisation of the art of living, of the 'self-management of everyday life' as Vaneigem has put it (pointedly mashing up *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and Henri Lefebvre, in a Situationist *détournement* and critique).[18] Such 'realisation' was not a move against representational forms, or even art objects, as it is often misunderstood (for instance, by Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Rancière and Jean-Luc Nancy). Rather it was a question of the subordination of art-objects, or any element of the 'dead past' to the art of living the present, i.e. the re-use, or *détournement* of the past objectifications of human activity. Debord first outlined the Situationist idea of the 'realisation of art' in his hypothesis of the construction of situations (what I will also call the *Situationist hypothesis*).[19] Debord's Situationist hypothesis was offered as the solution to what he identified as the impasse that had resulted from the active and passive 'decomposition' of art and culture.

For the purposes of the introduction, I will only discuss the 'active' phase of decomposition (c. 1870-1930), and the 'repetitive' phase that has emerged in its wake (c. 1930/1937 to the

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[18] Raoul Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014],' (Translated & *détourned* by Not Bored from the French *Rien n'est fini, tout commence* [2014]: 2015). http://www.notbored.org/caricatures.pdf.

[19] Cf. G.-E. Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' in *Guy Debord Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006.

present).[20] By 'decomposition', Debord meant that writers and artists had problematised the role of art, the art-object and even the artistic process itself, through the 'decomposition' of the art-object, in particular calling into question the *mimetic* or representational function of art and literature. Such decomposition was 'active' insofar as it was consciously posed in opposition to past conceptions of the role of art, and anticipated a new state of affairs, up to and including the dissolution of art itself.[21] Debord identified the phase of repetition as the direct consequence of the failed revolutionary wave of 1917-1937. Cultural repetition — the multiplying variations of "new" and "neo" versions of abstraction, Dada, surrealism, and realism — was a part of the price of this failure; of the artistic and political avant-gardes becoming unstuck in the wake of the final defeat of the Spanish Revolution in 1937, buried by the Stalinists "allies" as much as its Fascist enemies.[22]

The period 1917-1937 corresponded almost exactly to the high point of the politico-artistic avant-gardes of Dada and Surrealism. Debord's wager from the outset, was that Dada and Surrealism — insofar as they signified the apotheosis of the active phase of decomposition — must necessarily be understood with reference to the contemporaneous revolutionary contestation. Dada and Surrealism signified not only the confluence of the longer lived active phase of decomposition with the revolutionary insurgency of 1917-1937; they also signalled the end of a solution to 'decomposition' in purely artistic terms. By Debord's reckoning, the inability of the Dadaists and Surrealists to successfully complete their desired escape from the

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[20] Debord first noted 1930 as the beginning of the phase of repetition, dating it from around the time the Surrealists briefly adhered to the Stalinist French Communist Party (i.e. from around 1929). Later he would date it from around the time of the end of the 1930s, associated with the defeat of the Spanish Revolution by the Stalinist accession to the effective leadership of the Republican forces (c. May 1937). By the 1980s, Debord seemed to have pushed the date forward to the early 1950s, congruent with the International Letterists experiments that he was involved in. Under this revised schema — from around 1954 — Debord's 'repetitive phase' is almost exactly coincident with what many now call the 'postmodern' phase of culture, post-avant-garde culture from the 1950s and on. Thus, it is hard not to detect a distorted echo of Debord's theory of decomposition in Jean-François Lyotard's report on the postmodern condition.
[21] 'Decomposition' also came to refer, in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), to a longer period commensurate with the progressive development of the modern sense of art as the product of "independent" artists, i.e. from the period of art's emergence from its religious apprenticeship in early modernity. In this sense, we can, perhaps, pose the 'passive' decomposition of artistic production, from its emergence from its entailment in religious practices, up until the 19th century. Such a phase would be 'passive', only in the sense that 'decomposition' was not posed consciously, or 'actively', but would nonetheless be implicit insofar as art's "independence" vis-à-vis the rest of everyday life, remained ambiguous.
[22] As opposed to the Civil War that raged on until the defeat of the Republican government in 1939.

confines of an artistic horizon, was intimately related to the failure of the contemporaneous revolutionary contestation. In the absence of a revolutionary movement, the experimental works of these avant-gardists were ultimately compatible with the commodity-fetish of an advanced capitalism that could 'recuperate' (or recover) such works for a rapidly expanding market in commodity 'spectacles', while effectively ignoring or obscuring the more radical practice of living from which such works often emerged (for instance the anti-work 'bohemianism' favoured by much of the artistic avant-garde).

The Situationist hypothesis was proposed as the solution to the impasse reached by these avant-gardes. Rather than trying to either repeat or continue the merely formal experiments of these avant-gardists, Debord argued that everyday life itself must become the field of experimentation. In this sense, the object of transformation must be the art of living itself. Following on from the results of the urban drifts (*dérives*) carried out by the Letterist International, Debord came to believe that the creation and transformation of the 'geography' of the space-time of everyday life was the only way to move on from the artistic impasse of the avant-gardes.[23] Such a project, perforce, required the revolutionary transformation of the enclosing capitalist society. And, in keeping with the critique of art, and the need for its supersession, Debord came to pose the art-object in problematic terms. No doubt the Situationists would and did make use of such objects; but the priority was given to experimental living. To fall back into prioritising the "works" of the group — apart, that is, from their theoretical 'proselytising' — was to risk the shoals of the burgeoning cultural 'spectacle', that appeared to be an increasingly important aspect of the capitalist recovery after the Second World War.

The idea of supersession contained in the Situationist hypothesis, was not initially phrased in Marxian terms. Debord described the SI as being 'with and against' art in 1957.[24] He would later conceive of this, in a more Marxian register, as the ineluctable outcome of the Dadaist

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[23] Cf. Debord, 'Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine [1955].'

[24] G.-E. Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes : L'I.S. dans et contre la décomposition [1957],' in *Guy Debord : Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006. No doubt the formulation of 'with *and* against' is also Marxian in influence. Nonetheless, the 'dialectical' register was less nuanced in the early work.

desire to destroy art, and the Surrealist desire to realise art in everyday life: 'The critical position later elaborated by the *Situationists* has shown that the abolition [*suppression*] and the realisation of art are inseparable aspects of a single *supersession of art* [*dépassement de l'art*].'[25] However, already in 1957, as we can see in the idea of the 'decomposition' of culture, Debord conceived of going beyond the impasse of active and repetitive decomposition. Indeed, the experimental practice of 'unitary urbanism', which would figure prominently in the group between its foundation and 1960, was precisely an attempt to pose such a beyond, on the basis of the appropriation of the theory and practices of the capitalist present. Later, in the wake of the experience of repetitive decomposition within the SI itself, Debord, Vaneigem and other Situationists would emphasise the moment of being 'against' art, but only insofar as it entailed the project of its 'realisation' (for instance, as outlined in the Situationist hypothesis). Indeed, the emphasis on the negative moment was conceived as necessary on the face of the artistic positivity of many artist-Situationists. However, this was a relative gesture, rather than an absolute negativity (as it is often misapprehended). As Vaneigem has noted recently, against the political alienation the Situationists found in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the SI emphasised the artistic dimensions of the project of supersession, of what could be fruitfully taken up amidst such political alienation. For the SI, supersession always entailed abolition *and* realisation; to valorise one over the other was to risk the dangers of nihilism and capitalism recuperation.

2. Political and philosophical supersession

The supersession the group came to speak of should be understood in what is known as the 'Hegelian-Marxist' fashion. However, I prefer to call this 'Marxian', in the sense that the supersession Marx posed was not a transcendental law of historical progression, as it is in Hegel, but was rather clearly aimed at describing the revolutionary practices which had emerged along with, and were implicated in, capitalism and the revolutionary classes associated with it ('petty bourgeois' burghers, artisans, peasants, and the fitful emergence of an urban proletariat).[26] As Debord would note, in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), '[t]he only two

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[25] Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, Third ed., Paris: Éditions Gallimard, [1967] 1992, thesis 191.
[26] For instance, Marx in his early writing described historical development in terms of the successive 'alienations' of private property. By the time of *Capital*, Marx still spoke of such alienation, but more

classes which effectively correspond to Marx's theory, […] the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, are also the only two revolutionary classes in history'.[27] In this sense, the problematic of dialectical supersession is strictly delimited to capitalist modernity. The development of capitalism, then, was seen in terms of the way the human subject is produced, Marx's social individual, the very embodiment of the antagonistic binary of the individual and the social, under the conditions of alienation as capital, the commodity labour-power and the capitalist state. This development is a 'dialectic', in the Hegelian sense, insofar as the perspectives of capital and labour, which become predominant in the industrial societies of the 20th century, struggle for recognition. However, unlike orthodox Marxists, the SI — following the insights of some 'Left Communists' from the 19th and 20th centuries — called into question the positive valorisation of 'labour' as commensurate with the revolutionary working class. Following the early Marx, Debord came to conceive of the 'revolutionary proletariat' as the self-organised negation of human capacity to mere labour-power for capital. The moment of 'realisation' in this sense, is a revolutionary proletariat as the possibility of 'free activity' beyond the impasse of labour-power and capital, i.e. a revolutionary proletariat as the process of superseding capital *and* labour. A revolutionary proletariat is both a break from the reduction of human to mere labour-power for sale, and the immanent critique of this reduction (of people reduced to labour-power becoming a revolutionary proletariat). Thus, the possibility of a revolutionary proletariat is implied in the alienated life of humans under conditions of capital, labour, and generalised commodity production — albeit negatively — as the solution to these alienated forms of everyday life. In this sense, the revolutionary proletariat comes to be, it does not pre-exist as the 'essence' of labour so much as it is a possible constitution of labour, albeit in a 'conscious' fashion as self-negation, as the abolition of labour. Such a negative constitution of labour is at odds with positive conceptions, whether of the social democratic 'labourite' varieties, or revolutionary positivists like Lenin. However, what is remarkably singular about the SI was the way they rediscovered this negativity through the emergence of a radical artistic avant-garde

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circumspectly. Thus, it appears as the 'commodity-fetish', and the associated idea of the alienation of a worker's 'peculiar commodity, labour-power'. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, [1867] 1976, p. 274.
[27] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 88.

and the 'dissolution' and 'decomposition' of the art-object and practice in the later 19th and 20th centuries.

For Debord, the 'phase of cultural repetition', signalled by the defeat of the Spanish Revolution, was itself a symptom of the effective suspension, rather than end, of the dual revolutionary project — i.e. of the workers' movement and the artistic avant-gardes. As the Situationists later put it, the failure of the project of the most advanced moments of artistic supersession, of the Dadaist destruction and the Surrealist realisation of art in everyday life, was rendered inevitable with the defeat of the mass, revolutionary means of securing such a realisation.[28] In some ways, this situation mirrored what Marx criticised among his Young Hegelian confreres, though "in reverse". Marx had posed the possibility of realising and abolishing the philosophical critique of emergent capitalism in Germany in the 1840s. Such a 'supersession' was posed in terms of realising the theoretical critique of philosophy in the similarly emergent practical critique and contestation of proletarians. Marx saw such 'realisation' as a lever for abolishing the separated existence of philosophical critique, suspended as it were above the concerns of everyday life. In the case of the development of artistic negativity in the first half of the 20th century, the most advanced artists found themselves effectively isolated insofar as the revolutionary movement of 1917-1937 was defeated and dispersed. Thus, the position these artists found themselves mirrored, to an extent, that of the radical philosophers of the 1840s, however, in the former case, in the wake of the defeat of the 1930s; whereas in the latter case, on the verge of the constitution of the revolutionary movement of 1848. Thus, "in reverse", as it were.

If we recall the idea of active decomposition, Debord believed that the negativity Marx identified in the constitution of a revolutionary proletariat — a negativity largely lost in orthodox Marxism's positive conception of working class politics — had been posed more forcefully in the 20th century among the artistic avant-gardes. For Debord, this re-emergence of negativity, albeit in (anti) artistic terms, was a consequence of not simply the developments in artistic decomposition, but also the latter as an expression of the immanent negativity in the

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[28] Cf. Mustapha Khayati, 'Les mots captifs (Préface à un dictionnaire situationniste),' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 10 (March 1966).

movement of capitalist history. In this sense, the negativity of the artistic avant-gardes was a more fitting complement to, and expression of the revolutionary insurgencies of 1917-1937, than their Stalinist and social-democratic "leadership", which not only participated in the material destruction of the most advanced moments of this insurgency (for instance in Germany in 1919, China in 1926 and Spain in 1937), but in so doing also contributed to the rise of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, this is the key lesson of what the SI meant by their continued adherence to the project of the 'realisation of art' — even after the break with most of the artist members of the group in 1962. That is, it was in the artistic avant-gardes of the first half of the 20th century that the importance of negativity was rediscovered as the thought and practice of a revolutionary movement.

Debord would come to see the significance of these events as something other than "betrayals", in the sense that Trotskyists and some other Marxists have represented them.[29] Rather, Debord argued that the Stalinist and social democratic destruction of the revolutionary insurgencies of the German, Russian, Chinese and Spanish proletarians signified that counter-revolutionary forces now appeared under the banner of anti-capitalist revolution itself, in which 'the spectacular organization of the defence of the existing order' came to prominence, and in which, consequently, 'no "central question" can any longer be posed "openly and honestly".'[30] The significance of this insight proved decisive for the SI; the rise of the dissimulation of the rule of capital — in this case, "communism" apparently in the service of the hierarchy of capitalist production and consumption — marks out the 'commodity-spectacle' from the rule which preceded it. However, Debord's assessment of this 'spectacular organisation of the defence of the existing order', was first made with regard to the idea of the 'repetitive phase' of cultural production, in which the 'spectacular' function of such cultural spectacles, was related not only to their repetitive form and content, but crucially to their presentation as commodities for consumption. Thus, the results of previous avant-garde experimentation, for instance

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[29] Such a defence of Marxism is often made in the name of the "real tradition" of Marxism, as opposed to its Stalinist deformation. However, such "real traditionalists" rarely look into the questionable origins of "Marxism" itself, and so end up conflating the distinct, albeit related issues of Marx's intellectual project extended over 40 years, and its relationship to Marxism.
[30] Cf. Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, theses 101.

Surrealism's quest to 'impassion life', were reduced to so many objects for consumption or largely passive contemplation. This hierarchy, what Debord initially described as that between 'actors' or 'heroes' of cultural production, and 'spectators' who contemplated, was the principle object of negative criticism of the Situationist hypothesis.[31] Later, under the impact of his encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Debord would extend his critique of the cultural spectacle to the political spectacle of 'militancy', and the hierarchy of leading 'militants' and rank and file militants within *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Indeed, it was the latter that would prove crucial to the development of Debord's mature critique of the spectacle, as contained in his 1967 work, *The Society of the Spectacle*.

Around the time of Debord's encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 1960-1961, the question became for the SI not so much one of who possessed the "correct" theory, but rather the appropriation and correction of already existing theories in the light of the development of spectacular relations across the first half of the 20th century. In this sense, the 'theory' of the spectacle is also the story of Debord, Vaneigem and others' reappropriation and correction — and thus '*détournement*' — of Marx's conception of 'ideology' and the 'commodity-fetish'. What was significant about the appellation 'spectacle' and 'spectacular', was the idea of representations becoming opposed to, or ideally hierarchised as superior to the object so represented, rather than the vulgar misunderstanding that associated 'spectacle' with representation as necessarily false.

3. The pivot of the 'Hamburg Theses'

My account of this period of transition in the SI focuses upon the 'Hamburg Theses'. As far as I can ascertain, apart from the original Situationists who composed this enigmatic work, I am the first commentator to go into detail regarding its form, content and import for the group. No doubt others, if not oblivious to the real existence of these 'Theses', have been put off by the absence of a document to investigate. Such purely formal considerations have merely spurred

[31] Cf. Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957].'; P. Canjuers and G.-E. Debord, 'Preliminaires pour une definition de l'unite du programme revolutionnaire [20 juillet 1960],' in *Guy Debord Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006.

me on, such that I have felt at times much like the Bellman in *The Hunting of the Snark*, who, upon presenting the 'large map […] without the least vestige of land' to the crew, declares that the captain's map is certainly the best because it is a 'perfect and absolute blank!'[32] The 'Hamburg Theses' in their absence are the perfect and absolute Situationist "document", impossible to find and thus beyond the travails of recuperation. Indeed, even my efforts at outlining their import still leaves them beyond such a fate, beyond the reach of all the collectors and intellectual undertakers, unwitting or not, whose hobbies and obsessions are just so many symptoms of an era in which 'the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own'.[33]

It is the sense of transition that has been most badly served by many past commentators. By addressing this period by way of the 'Hamburg Theses', and so addressing the transition itself in Situationist terms, I believe we can gain an important insight into this transition itself. This approach offers a singular insight into this pivotal, albeit confusing and often misunderstood period of the SI. Nonetheless, I have found the process of entering into the work and "works" of the SI, long after the fact, in order to, in some case, reconstruct the Situationist sense of process and collaboration against the ever-present prospect of recuperation, an extremely difficult endeavour. In this sense, the greatest problem I have faced, apart from the obvious and unavoidable temporal displacement, has been in my attempt to remain faithful to the revolutionary thread of the Situationist criticism of their contemporaries, whether friend or foe, while being painfully aware that I ran the risk of simply adding to the misapprehension of their project.

4. Conclusion of the Outline of an argument

By examining this period of the SI, we are better able to understand the development of Debord's concept of the spectacle. It is important to recall, at this point, that Debord's critique of spectacular representation was not a general critique of representation as the falsification of

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[32] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Snark*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, (1876) 1977, pp. 55, 56 (Fit the Second).
[33] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, p. 165.

reality (as Jacques Rancière and Jean-Luc Nancy have asserted against Debord).[34] Rather, the spectacle signifies the falsification of representations, the 'becoming ideological' of material representation. In this sense, the critique of the spectacle was the *détournement* of Marx's notion of ideology, insofar as Marx originally deployed it to describe the false autonomy of cognition and ideas from the social-material relations in which they are embedded and are expressions of. By Debord's reckoning, insofar as modern capitalist society valorised the representation of reality over reality itself (which, perforce, 'contains' such representations), representations had been rendered spectacular.

With the association of the 'spectacle' with Marx's original conception of ideology, ideology critique and the associated conception of the 'commodity-fetish', I reach the end of my argument regarding the SI. In the year after the Debord's encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* — 1962 — most of the remaining artists had resigned or been expelled from the group. In a way, the 'Hamburg Theses' had fulfilled their dual purpose, i.e. as the formal summation of the Situationists struggle with the impasse of cultural decomposition, while outlining the broader project of contesting alienating practices, whether artistic, political, philosophical, etc. However, the significance of the development of the concept of the spectacle through the encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was, perhaps, the most important result for the immediate future. The *détournement* of Marx's critique enabled Debord, Vaneigem and others to supersede the critique of the spectacle of culture and move toward a conception of modern capitalism as instantiating a commodity-spectacle, in which commodities as the reified results and representation of human activity operate like *synecdoches*, i.e. via the presentation of the 'wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails […] as an "immense collection of commodities"', capital tends to reduce life as such to the production and consumption of commodities.[35] The idea that the spectacle falsifies life, not by virtue of *mimesis*, but rather via rendering the commodification of life apparently autonomous of, and in opposition to the life so commodified — 'the autonomous movement of the non-living' — is

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[34] Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne, Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1996] 2000; Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott, London: Verso, [2008] 2009. Cf. chapters six and seven, above.
[35] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, p. 125.

crucial to differentiating Debord's concept of spectacle from such notions as Cornelius Castoriadis' 'simulacrum' and Jean Baudrillard's 'hyperreality'.[36] The significance of the spectacle, insofar as it marks the apparent 'distancing of all that was directly lived into representation', is not an indictment of representation (or the possibility of representation), so much as it is the calling into question of the nature of this retreat and the seemingly autonomous "realm" of the commodity-spectacle.[37] What is egregious regarding the spectacle, in Debord's estimation, had nothing to do with any purported defects in *mimesis* as such, but rather the uses to which representations are put in the service of *capital's use*, and its falsification of everyday life. Thus, we can see the kernel of the early critique of artistic and cultural decomposition which remains in the later critique of the spectacle.

A question of methodology and focus

It is impossible to talk of the SI without direct and constant reference to Guy Debord. Without doubt Debord was the central figure of the SI, and perhaps worked hardest to cohere the group around a set of ideas and practices from the outset. However, in the secondary literature on the SI, Debord is often represented in a polarised fashion: either, as the most important Situationist at the centre of a collaborative project, or as the petty dictator of a largely small and insignificant group — and often both! Certainly, my sympathies lie with the former representation of Debord. However, if we emphasise the singularity of Debord we risk obscuring the collaborative relations and friendships which determined and enabled his work — a "work" which was in many respects the result and embodiment of such collaboration. I believe it is best to situate Debord's role as the producer of much of the literary and theoretical expression of Situationist practice, within the context of the Situationist project as one that was irreducibly collaborative in its outlook and direction.

It was the practice of the SI to publish articles which resulted from collaborative discussions under the name of the group itself. When an article did not represent the results of collaborative discussion, for instance an article that was an individual contribution to an ongoing debate or

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[36] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 2.
[37] Ibid., thesis 1.

discussion, then such articles would usually have the authors name appended. However, and keeping the latter exception in mind, in most cases, we can consider the editorial committee for a particular issue of the *Internationale Situationniste* as possessing authorial responsibility for the articles contained within. Nonetheless, Debord's role as the 'editor in chief' of all 12 issues of the journal, placed him in a central position of responsibility, a task he was charged with from the founding of the SI.[38] Debord placed a great deal of importance in synthesising the collaborative discussions of the group. For instance, some of those who have collaborated with him have noted that he would often synthesise collaborative discussion afterward into a written form.[39] And his correspondence has revealed that he worked hard to find ways to integrate the often disparate members of the group (this is particularly notably with regard to the artists that constituted the majority of the German section of the SI up until 1962). I believe that the best way to conceive of Debord's role in the SI is to consider him a central 'node' of the collaborative work of the group, in which he was simultaneously responsible for the 'the ideological coherence' of the journal, while committed to fostering and participating in the collaborative elaboration of the Situationist project. [40]

Those accounts of Debord and the SI that place an undue emphasis on Debord's singularity and centrality, without attending to the idea of Debord as a participant in a collaborative project, tend to replicate the very perspective of individualism and proprietary concerns that the SI aimed to call into question and overthrow. Such accounts can be more or less hagiographic — for instance, respectively, Vincent Kauffmann's and Andrew Hussey's biographies of Debord.[41] But they are of a kind insofar they tend to undermine the Situationist critique of the substantial bourgeois individual in favour of focusing on the genius of Debord (evil or otherwise).

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[38] Cf. Guy Debord, 'Letter to Piet de Groof (aka Walter Korun), 16 June 1958,' in *Correspondence: The foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 125.

[39] Notably, Gil J Wolman and Raoul Vaneigem.

[40] Debord, 'Letter to Piet de Groof (aka Walter Korun), 16 June 1958,' p. 125. Vaneigem has recently noted that Debord would often 'take notes that he later synthesized' from his discussions with Vaneigem and others. Cf. Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.

[41] Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2001; Vincent Kaufmann, *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, trans. Robert Bononno, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [2001] 2006.

McKenzie Wark has attempted to address such an undue emphasis on the singularity of Debord by attending to members of the SI who have been obscured in Debord's shadow.[42] However, in doing so, Wark effectively presents an incoherent picture of the SI, emphasising the differing visions and competing singularities at the expense of what was conceived, even by the most reluctant Situationist, as a collective endeavour. For instance, the central role of Debord's Situationist hypothesis of the construction of situations tends to recede into the background of Wark's account, despite being the touchstone of the collaborative debates and individual contributions to the group in the period with which Wark deals. Indeed, the Situationists anticipated Wark's strategy, at a time when the group was less well known than today. In 1964, while drawing attention to one of the peculiar aspects of the silent treatment given to the group among the 'leftist' French intelligentsia, the SI commented, 'one speaks most willing about situationists as individuals in an attempt to separate them from the [group's] collective contestation, without which — among other things — they would not even be "interesting" individuals'.[43] By sidelining Debord, rather than addressing the significance of Debord as both collaborator, and advocate and enabler of collaboration, Wark perversely affirms the brute facticity of the malodorous 'cult of Debord', as if it were a natural phenomenon, unavoidable and only deserving of adulation or despair. By such a reckoning, one can be more or less "for" Debord, while failing to understand that Debord the "exceptional individual", interchangeably mummified, hailed and vilified alongside other "greats", is more a product of the failure of the Situationist project than its ambiguous success.

In order to address the consequences of this largely unacknowledged cult, I will speak of the 'SI' or 'Situationists' as the agents or authors of the group's "works", unless I need to draw attention to the perspective of a particular Situationist. By doing so, I will draw attention to the collaborative nature of the SI, something that the Situationists themselves were singularly attached to via its effacement of individual authorship for much of its output. Sometimes I will refer to 'Debord's circle'; however, in doing so I do not intend to imply that Debord was the

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[42] Wark, *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International*; *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*; *The Spectacle of Disintegration*.
[43] Internationale Situationniste, 'Le questionnaire,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 9 (Août 1964), p. 26.

sole, significant member, but rather use it as a shorthand for the faction Debord helped constitute within the group, particularly before the final break with most of the artist members in 1962. And, of course, I will often refer to Debord simply because much of the written material left to us was either written by him, whether solely or as the synthesiser of discussions. As we will see, Debord was, nonetheless, the crucial elaborator of the Situationist hypothesis and the concept of spectacle.

Because the focus of my thesis is on what I consider the pivotal period for the SI, particularly that between 1960-1962 — though such a pivot necessarily takes in the entire period 1957-1962 — I will focus almost exclusively upon the primary, Situationist sources. No doubt I am engaged in a debate with those who have emphasised, usually with little or no justification, the so-called political turn of the SI at the expense of its purportedly artistic origins (e.g. perhaps most notoriously by Peter Wollen in his 1989 article).[44] However, common to all of these accounts, at least those written originally in English, is a poor command of the original documents — even of those that were accessible at the time (for instance, the *Internationale Situationniste* journal). Except where it is warranted, I have generally avoided setting out to debate with those who, by reason of poor scholarship or bias, have rendered only the most impressionistic accounts of the SI during this period. It is for this reason I believe that we must attend to the SI, and let the Situationists speak for themselves. Such a focus, today, has been greatly aided by the wider availability not only of the original journals, but additionally by the more recent availability of Debord's correspondence, and his collected works in 2006. Again, this raises the question of the focus on Debord. However, so far, the correspondence of other members, most notably Raoul Vaneigem, remains inaccessible. Thus, there are real limitations that remain in place for understanding the work of the SI. Nonetheless, and with due attention to the idea of Debord as the chief 'node' of collaboration, the greater access to his work helps us to better understand precisely this role and its import for the group.

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[44] Peter Wollen, 'The Situationist International,' *New Left Review*, no. 174 (March/April 1989).

A summary of the chapters

Chapter one examines the enigmatic "document" of the SI, the 'Hamburg Theses'. As already intimated, the most peculiar aspect of the 'Hamburg Theses' is that they were never written down. I will demonstrate that both the form and content of the 'Hamburg Theses' allows one to better understand the SI as contesting both artistic and political alienation, rather than the more vulgar understanding of the SI as successively an artistic then political group. In the first half of the chapter I will examine the context of the "composition" of the 'Hamburg Theses'. As a direct result of the argument over the role of artistic practice in the group at the 5th conference in Göteborg, in August 1961, the 'Hamburg Theses' were simultaneously an attempt to resolve this issue, and the capstone to the extended debate over art conducted within and around the group since its founding four years before. From a consideration of the historical context of the 'Hamburg Theses', I move in the second half of the chapter to an examination of their form and content. The form of the 'Hamburg Theses' is perhaps the easier of the two to deal with, in the sense that the absent 'Theses' were meant to be an expression of the Situationist project of the 'realisation of art' as the abolition of the fetish of the art-object. On the other hand, the content of the 'Theses' is perhaps even more elusive, requiring a certain amount of reconstruction, based on the scant references, and the undoubted influence they exerted on later written works of the Situationists. By examining the 'Hamburg Theses' in this way — an examination that has hitherto not been attempted by any critics of the SI — I lay the basis of a more thorough examination of the Situationist critique of art that was not dispensed with in 1962, but rather was sublated in the more general Situationists critique of politics and philosophy.

Chapter two, three and four deal with aspects of the four years prior to the composition of the 'Hamburg Theses'. This will enable us to understand the 'Theses' as both an attempt to embody the core critical conceit of the Situationist hypothesis of the construction of situations, as outlined by Debord in 1957, and as the attempt to resolve the debates over art which had beset the group from 1957.

In chapter two, I explore in more detail the early, 'pre-Marxian' Situationist critique of art. The chapter will begin with an account of the 'impasse' reached by the Dadaists and Surrealists

before moving on to a more detailed account of this 'impasse' in the context of Debord's theory of 'cultural decomposition'. The latter will be examined, not only in terms of what Debord called the 'active' and 'repetitive' phases of decomposition, but also his later sense of decomposition by which he accounted for the longer-term "independence" and emergence of artistic practices in early capitalist modernity from their domination by feudal-religious concerns. Debord identified this 'active' phase from around the time of the middle of the 19th century, though more obviously congruent with the work of Isidore Ducasse (aka the Comte de Lautréamont) and Arthur Rimbaud, before, during and immediately after the Paris Commune of 1871.[45] Debord contrasted this active phase of artistic decomposition, that lasted roughly from around 1870 through to 1930, with the 'passive' phase, 'a phase of [artistic and cultural] repetition that has prevailed since that time'.[46] I conclude the chapter with an examination of what has been considered, both within and without the SI, as the 'signature style' of the group, namely the practice of '*détournement*'.

Chapter three examines the early attempts to cohere a distinctly Situationist practice. First, I outline the nature of the Situationist hypothesis, and its significance in the arguments regarding the nature of Situationist practice in the capitalist present, particular with regard to the experimental elaboration of 'unitary urbanism'. I then turn to an examination of how the attempt to cohere the SI around the Situationist hypothesis and unitary urbanism unravelled over the course of the first three years of the group, particularly with regard to an ongoing debate between Debord and Constant Nieuwenhuys over the uses to which artistic practise could be put in such a project. The results of this debate, most obviously Constant's resignation in 1960 and the effective cessation of unitary urbanist experimentation, would precipitate a protracted crisis in the group that was only resolved with the 'Hamburg Theses' in 1961 and the final break with the artists in 1962.

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[45] Nonetheless, we can chart a longer prehensile tale of artistic negativity scattered among the more extreme Romantics, like Hölderlin, William Blake, and Gerard de Nerval Cf. (Guy Debord), 'Le Surréalisme : une révolution de l'irrationnel,' in *Cahiers de l'encyclopédie du monde actuel* (Lausanne: Editions Rencontre, Septembre 1968); Jean-François Martos, *Histoire de l'internationale situationniste*, Paris: Éditions Ivrea, [1989] 1995; Timothy Clark et al., 'The Revolution of Modern Art and the Modern Art of Revolution,' (1967).

[46] Internationale Situationniste, 'Définitions,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (Juin 1958).

In chapter four, the sad end to which the debate over art led becomes the focus. In contrast to the debate between Debord and Constant, the debates between Debord's circle and the artists in the German section of the SI, appear as the pathetic denouement to the former — the farcical continuation beyond the real tragedy of 1960. Indeed, it is the obviously inferior quality of these debates that necessitate discussion, because too often they are understood by virtue of their termination rather than their content. In 1962, in the wake of the 5th conference and the 'Hamburg Theses', the majority of the Spur group were expelled from the SI. Soon after, they were followed by Jørgen Nash and Jacqueline de Jong. It has become a doxa, particularly among those critics who favour these artist members over Debord and his circle, to decry this expulsion as a political move of an almost Machiavellian character. However, if one pays attention to the inferior quality of the arguments that preceded the expulsions, at least on the part of the Spur artists, not to mention the almost complete disengagement of many of the Spur artists from the Situationist hypothesis of the SI, we can begin to understand the growing frustration of Debord and others. The so-called break with the artists in 1962 is too often represented as the victory of the political over the artistic. I will demonstrate that in fact the debate was about resolving an impasse that had been, in many respects, born alongside the group in 1957: the question of realising art through its supersession.

In my last three chapters, what I consider the critical content of the pivot of the group from its first to its second period comes to the fore: the investigation of the different dimensions in which the 'supersession of art' came to be understood in the SI

In chapter five I begin with the turn to a more identifiably Marxian problematic with regard to the Situationist notion of the 'realisation of art', by way of an examination of 'poetry, in the Situationist sense of the term'. In chapters two and three, the Situationist critique of the impasse of Dada and Surrealism, as embodied in Debord's conception of the movement from the active to the repetitive phase of cultural decomposition, was used as the basis for the formulation of the Situationist hypothesis. The hypothesis, via the attempts to 'experimentally verify' it in unitary urbanist practices, was conceived of in terms of the use of artistic and other practices beyond the merely artistic. In this sense, the Situationist hypothesis was envisaged as both the

hypothetical solution to the impasse of the 'traditional arts', and a projection of what would be possible via the 'integration' of disparate arts in the creation of everyday situations. In this sense, the 'arts' would no longer exist, but artistic practices would be taken over and elaborated on the grander canvas of the everyday. When Debord, Vaneigem and other Situationists intensified their engagement with Marx, as well as contemporaneous expressions of Marxist political practice, they 'revalorised' their 'artist past' (in Vaneigem's words) because of what they identified as the insufficiencies of the Marxist critique of human activity as 'labour' and 'labour-power'. In opposition to the orthodox Marxist reduction of human activity as such to 'labour', the SI, and Debord and Vaneigem in particular, attempted to reclaim Marx's early conception of 'human activity' and 'free activity' under the idea of 'poetry, in the Situationist sense of the term'. Indeed, the idea of a 'new type of free activity' *superseding* labour, not only resonated with the earlier Situationist hypothesis, but further enabled the critique of political alienation which Debord found under the sign of 'political militancy', during his time in the influential group, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (a question more fully taken up in chapter seven). Thus, in chapter five, I set out the SI's conception of 'poetry': what in effect became a shorthand for the 'new type of activity' they proposed against capitalist labour, against the more orthodox conception of the self-management of labour proposed by Cornelius Castoriadis and the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group.

In chapter six I turn to a consideration of the emergence of more obviously 'Marxian' problematic, with Debord and Vaneigem's (re)discovery of Marx's conception of the 'realisation and abolition' of philosophy. It is important to note, that the Marxian problematic in this regard was the discovery, by Debord and Vaneigem in particular, of the ongoing importance of the young Marx's ideas with regard to labour, revolutionary praxis, ideology criticism, and the way these remained concerns of the older Marx. Indeed, the SI's wager in this regard was not only against Marxist orthodoxy, but also against the more orthodox conception of Marxism that the SI had previously embraced. From around 1959 Debord's engagement with a problematic borrowed from the early Marx, namely the 'realisation and abolition of philosophy', began to appear in the discussion over what constituted the 'realisation of art' in

the Situationist hypothesis. This soon gave way to such 'realisation and abolition' being summarised as the 'supersession of art' (*dépassement de l'art*). By examining the way Marx came to pose the 'realisation and abolition of philosophy' against his milieu of philosophical radicals — aka the Young Hegelians — we can better understand how the Situationists took up this in their criticism of the artistic impasse that the SI continued to confront. Thus, the Situationists critique of art began to be phrased increasingly in terms of its 'realisation and abolition', i.e. as the 'supersession of art'. However, the resonances with the young Marx did not end there. His consequent "discovery" of a mass, proletarian subject as the potential agent of this 'realisation and abolition' — i.e. its supersession — was mirrored in Debord and Vaneigem's posing of a 'new proletarian' subject, identifiably a product of the new 'spectacular' conditions, as the real agent of the 'supersession of art'. Such a turn marked the definitive end of the merely cultural research of the SI and the beginning of a revolutionary practice aimed at surpassing artistic and political alienation.

The final chapter, chapter seven, brings us to the culmination of this process, namely the rapid development of the concept of spectacle under the impact of Debord's encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The two most important aspects of this chapter are as follows. First, the concept of spectacle is brought fruitfully into relation with Marx's original conception of 'ideology' and 'ideology' critique. This is done by way of (i) the already existing Situationist critique of the separation of the art-object from the process of its production (summarised under the pejorative term 'situationism' by Debord); and (ii) by taking over Marx's conception of 'ideology critique' from its reduction to the vulgar sense of 'ideology' as a neutral term for a system of ideas. At its pithiest, Marx used the term ideology to denote 'thought separated from life'.[47] In this sense, 'ideology' was the positing, on the basis of a practical division between mental and manual labour, of the *idea* of practice in opposition to, or autonomous from, the *material conditions* of practice itself. It is based on this recovery of ideology criticism that we can understand the second important aspect of this chapter. During his brief membership of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Debord found that despite the advanced state of this group's theoretical

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[47] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.

critique, particularly of the hierarchy of 'directors' and 'executants' in modern, bureaucratic state capitalism, the group nonetheless functionally instantiated just such a division. Perhaps most interesting in this regard is that, despite using elements of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*'s theories in the development of his concept of spectacle, Debord's recovery of ideology criticism was made through recourse to Marx, not *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Indeed, and despite patently false claims that Debord 'forged' his concept of spectacle from a reading of Cornelius Castoriadis, Castoriadis at this point held to an orthodox conception of ideology, as opposed to the original sense which Debord recovered. Thus, the encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was both important and ambiguous; in the former case, for the development of the concept of spectacle, and in the latter case because Debord, while finding much of theoretical worth, found a defective conception of revolutionary practice.

Chapter one: Now, the SI must realise philosophy

The project of realised poetry is nothing less than creating simultaneously

and inseparably events and their language.

— Guy Debord, 1963[48]

The realisation of art, of poetry (in the situationist sense), signifies that one cannot

realise oneself in a "work", but on the contrary one realises oneself — full stop.

— Mustapha Khayati, 1966[49]

In early September 1961, Guy Debord, Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem spent a few days in

Hamburg 'in a series of haphazardly chosen bars'.[50] Members of the Situationist International

(hereafter 'SI'), the three were returning to France and Belgium from the just concluded Fifth

Conference of the SI held in Göteborg, Sweden. This conference was marked by heated

arguments between, on the one hand, the Scandinavian and German sections of the SI, and on

the other, the Belgian and French sections. These arguments centred on the role of art amongst

Situationists, whose group had up until that time been known, when it was known, as primarily

an avant-garde group of artistic origins.

What was significant about the pub crawl in Hamburg, what to a passing stranger may have

seemed like just another group of men on a drinking binge, was what the three Situationists

discussed and composed during these few days.[51] The fruits of these discussions came to be

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[48] Internationale Situationniste [Guy Debord], 'All the King's Men,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (Janvier 1963), p. 31.

[49] Khayati, 'Les mots captifs (Préface à un dictionnaire situationniste),' p. 51.

[50] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.

[51] If I occasionally emphasise drunkenness in this project of surpassing or supersession it is only because the Situationists, like Baudelaire, believed that drunkenness was a necessary not optional component of the drift across days and years against capitalism: '*Il faut être toujours ivre*' ('It is necessary to always be drunk', from Baudelaire's prose poem *Enivrez-vous* [Get Drunk]). Debord would late in life speak of how he quickly grew to 'like what lies beyond violent drunkenness, […] a terrible and magnificent peace, the true taste of the passage of time' — Guy Debord, 'Panégyrique - tome premier [1989],' in *Guy Debord Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006., p. 1669 (part III). For Debord the unfolding becoming of being in time was the quintessence of 'surpassing' and what he called the 'necessary alienation' — Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 161. Perhaps more importantly, for him 'writing should remain rare, since it

known as the 'Hamburg Theses' in the SI, and though a direct consequence of the arguments at the Fifth Conference, their aim was more general. Indeed, they were directed at resolving the impasse the group had reached as a whole, what Debord would later describe as 'a theoretical and strategic discussion that concerned the totality of the conduct of the SI.'[52]

The conjuncture that produced the 'Hamburg Theses' is central to the history of the Situationist International. Coming, as they did, only a few days after the bitter arguments of the Fifth Conference of the SI, the 'Hamburg Theses' became the central 'document' of the group.[53] As Debord would write many years later,

> the "Theses of Hamburg" marked the end of the first era of the SI — that is research into a truly new artistic terrain (1957-61) — as well as fixing the departure point for the operation that led to the movement of May 1968, and what followed.[54]

What will become apparent, and indeed crucial for consideration of the 'Hamburg Theses', is that they were never written down. As we will see, the Situationists left the objectification of the 'Hamburg Theses' in the ephemeral act of their sometime drunken 'composition' on purpose; not only to ridicule the increasingly specialised and bureaucratic practice of even the most apparently critical intellectuals, but more importantly to draw out the intimate relation between means and ends in their revolutionary practice. In the latter sense the 'Hamburg Theses' can be considered a leitmotif of Situationist practice, an attempt to conjure the ephemeral Situationist 'work' of a future communist society in the midst of capitalism and the fetish of the

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is necessary to have drunk for a long time before one can find what is excellent' — Debord, 'Panégyrique - tome premier [1989],' p. 1670 (part III).

[52] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989].'

[53] The exact timing of the production of the *Hamburg Theses* is hard to establish. Additionally, it appears that the discussions, mostly taking place in Hamburg, also continued back in Paris and possibly elsewhere — but almost certainly all around the summer-spring of 1961. We will return to this question below in the section 'Reading the *Hamburg Theses* as supersession'.

[54] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989].'

commodity-object. Indeed, the 'Hamburg Theses' are almost certainly the key instance in the practice of the group of what was called the 'surpassing of art' (*dépassement de l'art*).[55]

I argue that the 'Hamburg Theses' is the central "document" of the SI. In this chapter I will examine the 'Theses' as the pivot upon which the SI turned toward the 'realisation of [their] philosophy', namely the 'supersession of art'.[56] Rather than signifying the end of the artistic phase of the group, or the turn away from art (what we will find is unfortunately the most common doxa regarding this period of the SI) the 'Hamburg Theses' signified, partly, a return to the Situationist project as it was outlined in the founding document, the *Report on the Construction of Situations* (1957) — the proposed use of artistic means for non-artistic ends. As Debord would later phrase it, 'for a poetry *necessarily* without poems'.[57] In this sense, the 'Theses' signified what Raoul Vaneigem has recently called the need to 'revalorise the artist past of the SI' at precisely this moment.[58] Such a revalorisation was made necessary for two reason: first, the tendency of many Situationists to subordinate the elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis to their own artistic practice; and secondly, as an artistic inflected critique of the political alienation that Debord and others found in ultra-left groups close to the SI (most notably *Socialisme ou Barbarie*). In chapter two to four, I will look at how 'Hamburg Theses' rather than signifying a break with the early Situationist critique of art, emerged precisely from

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[55] The idea of 'surpassing' is somewhat complicated by the terms used in the original French and the words used to translate this. For instance, the SI, after 1960, tended to use '*dépasser*' and '*surpasser*' (and their derivative nouns '*dépassement*' and '*surpassement*') to indicate the positive, revolutionary surpassing or overcoming of the alienated conditions of capitalism, whereas they would use the noun '*transcendance*' to indicate the alienated and ideological posing of powers separated from people and society (i.e. the hierarchical and religious positing of transcendent powers over society and life). However, some translators have chosen to translate '*dépasser*' and '*surpasser*' and their derivatives as 'transcend' and 'transcendence', without paying attention to the negative connotation that the SI attributed to the French word '*transcendance*' — a connotation moreover that is also associated with the English word 'transcendence'.

Additionally, I will note that there are Hegelian associations with '*dépasser*' and 'to transcend'. For instance, Jean Hyppolite translated Hegel's '*aufheben*' as '*dépasser*' which has been, in turn, translated as 'transcend' in English (though this is controversial). Cf. Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak & John Heckman, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, [1946] 1974.

It is a controversial question whether or not 'to transcend' and 'transcendence' continue to be redolent with their religious and otherworldly (and thus 'alienated') senses in English. Without doubt the SI avoided using the French '*transcendance*' to indicate the revolutionary surpassing of alienated conditions. I believe we should try and follow their lead and reserve the English equivalent for the religious and hierarchical associations that it most certainly has.

[56] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.

[57] I.S. [Debord], Debord], 'All the King's Men,' p. 31.

[58] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.

this criticism. In this sense, they were artistic to the extent that they signified the use of art in the *mode of supersession*. In chapters five to six, I will look in more detail at Marx's ideas of 'revolutionary practice' and the 'realisation and abolition of philosophy', in order to gauge Marx's influence upon the group, particularly with regard to the SI's turn to a critique of Marxist orthodoxy. And finally, in chapter seven, I will examine how Debord's encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* lead to one of the least understood aspects of the 'Hamburg Theses', namely that the SI 'no longer [needed to] pay the least importance to any of the [organisational] conceptions of revolutionary groups' that then existed.[59]

During the life of the Situationist group — 1957 to 1972 — Situationists engaged in a variety of practices. Apart from their cultivation of play, indolence and drunkenness in the face of work-obsessed capitalism (and the so-called 'communist' East), Situationists were also painters, poets, playwrights, musicians, architects, film makers, sculptors, critics, revolutionists, pataphysicians, students and teachers.[60] However the *Situationist project*, from its beginnings as an organised venture was presented in opposition to all of the various separated and alienated activities of capitalist society. Crucial to such a project carried out under the (then) present conditions of capitalist social relations and their general dominance, lay the *Situationist hypothesis*.

The idea of Situationist practice, as conceived by the SI, had two distinct but interrelated meanings. First, Situationist activity, strictly conceived, lay in a future classless society. Members of the SI hypothesised the 'construction of situations' in such a future. However, a necessary component of the Situationist hypothesis was the idea that general conditions would prevail enabling such constructed situations to be carried out by the vast majority of people (as opposed to, say, the present specialised activity of artists). Such future 'constructors' would, perforce, be the true Situationists. Nonetheless members of the SI were Situationists, but in an anticipative sense. They were Situationists because they were, (1) members of the SI; (2) they were engaged collectively and collaboratively in developing and experimenting with the

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[59] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.
[60] This is not an exhaustive list of the various 'specialities' of particular Situationists.

Situationists hypothesis; and (3) they advocated the overthrow of capitalist society to the end of realising the Situationist hypothesis. As Guy Debord would write some years after the founding of the group, '[t]he SI is still far from having created situations, but it has already created Situationists, which is a lot.'[61]

Soon after the founding of the SI, the group adopted the term 'pre-situationist' to define their present activity. Such a term was deployed to make absolutely clear the social implications of the Situationist hypothesis, and the general transformation of society that would be necessary in order to bring about the 'construction of situations'. Thus, the practice of Situationists (as in members of the SI) in the capitalist present were 'pre-situationist' to the extent that their aim — the Situationist hypothesis — was yet to be realised.[62]

The Situationist hypothesis, more commonly known as 'the hypothesis of the construction of situations', was the closest that the group came to producing a distinctive Situationist work in its early years; and yet at the heart of such a 'work' was the clear rejection of alienable products. For the Situationists, increasingly so after 1961, the only work worthy of the name was the work of bringing about the end of capitalism and the establishment of a social order conducive to the construction of situations. Indeed, the Situationist hypothesis embodied the SI's notion of the 'surpassing of art', both as critique and as hypothetical projection.

For the SI, in opposition to contemporary artistic and political practice, the practice of being a revolutionary was necessarily more important than the objectifiable, and thus alienable, results of such a practice. Which is to say that to the extent to which such practices become objectified as so many 'works', 'manifestoes', 'theses', etc., is the extent to which the apparent results of such activity can be separated from the process of their production, and alienated as cultural commodities. In the refusal to set down the 'Hamburg Theses' for all time the SI were taking a stand against the increasing complicity — consciously or not — of critical intellectuals in the development and consolidation of the 'commodity-spectacle'. However, such formal considerations do not exhaust the importance of the 'Hamburg Theses'. In the letter to Levin,

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[61] I.S. [Debord], 'L'avant-garde de la présence,' *International Situationniste*, no. 8 (Janvier 1963), p. 22.
[62] We will return to the question of 'pre-situationist' below.

Debord revealed the one remaining fragment of the discussions that constituted the 'Hamburg Theses', their summarised conclusion: 'Now, the SI must realise philosophy'.[63] As he pointed out the words are derived from a 'celebrated formula' of Marx's: the realisation and abolition of philosophy.[64]

In an article co-written with Gil J Wolman in 1956, one year before the SI's founding, Debord and Wolman had spoken of *détournement* as often 'marking […] our indifference toward an original emptied of meaning and forgotten'.[65] Certainly the 'Hamburg Theses' fulfilled this criterion. However, this is not to say that the Situationists were uninterested in the 'original'; indeed, Debord and Wolman distinguished such interest, but not on the basis of aesthetic value or scandalous innovation. Instead they proposed the 'literary and artistic heritage of humanity' being 'used for the purposes of partisan propaganda' as sufficient criterion of judgement — and so use, whether disinterested or not, was marked as superior to aesthetic respect.[66] For instance Debord and Wolman valued Bertolt Brecht's practice of making 'cuts in the classics of the theatre in order to make the performances more happily educative' over the Dada scandal of Duchamp's moustachioed Mona Lisa.[67] And yet *détournement* was closer to the spirit of Duchamp's ready-made than Brecht's 'misplaced respect for culture, as defined by the ruling class'.[68] Debord and Wolman were not interested here in defending a particular 'tradition' but rather arguing for a 'revolutionary orientation' for the use of culture, and the need to follow the anti-artistic gestures of Duchamp and the Dadas 'up until the negation of the negation'.[69]

Indeed, this idea of surpassing the negation of Dada, and its resonance with Marx's thought, was flagged in Debord's pointed 'summary' of the 'Hamburg Theses' by way of Marx's pithy

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[63] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989].'

[64] Karl Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' in *Karl Marx & Frederich Engels Collected Works Vol. 3*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 181. Such a formula would become common amongst Situationist writing in the years to follow; indeed it served as a type of shorthand for the SI's critique of art, politics and all other specialised and 'separated' activity under the 'commodity-spectacle'.

[65] Debord & Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement [1956],' in *Guy Debord Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006, p. 223. For more on this see the section 'How not to misunderstand the Hamburg Theses' below.

[66] Ibid., p. 221.

[67] Ibid., p. 222.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., pp. 221-22.

formula of the realisation and abolition of philosophy. Of course, crucial to such *détournement* is both an 'indifference toward an original' and an acknowledgement that the significance of the original is only preserved in its correction and adaptation to altered circumstances.[70] In the 1840s the practice of philosophy proved to be an important moment of the theoretical radicalisation in the German states, which accompanied the 'practical' radicalisation throughout Europe and the United Kingdom in the decade before 1848. In 1961 the role of dissident intellectual life, within and outside the academy, was once again accompanying and even announcing the radicalisation of the 1960s. However, the important difference here is precisely *within* and outside the academy. Unlike Marx's circles in the 1840s, many of the radical intellectuals in France in 1961 (and the rest of the 'advanced' industrial world) operated within the state sector of a transformed 'bureaucratic' state capitalism. This is not to judge such individuals in a moral sense, but rather point to the marked difference in relations between Europe in 1848 and 1961. Here I will only mention the idea of 'realisation and abolition' in passing, and its relationship to the 'surpassing of art', in order to return to this important question in chapter five.

The 'Hamburg Theses' were a response to two of the main practices within the group. On the one hand the ongoing debate over artistic practice and the SI's relation to such; on the other the increasing engagement amongst some SI members with 'ultra-left' revolutionary groups (notably *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) and the related possibilities and actualities of insurrectionary proletarian activity (notably during the General Strike in Belgium over the Winter of 1960-61).

Hitherto most commentary on the 'Theses' has reduced their importance to the question of art and their role in the upcoming break with the artist members of the SI.[71] Not only do such perspectives make such a reduction at the expense of their critique of political specialisation, but can overlook and ignore the real general import of the 'Hamburg Theses' for the SI, and indeed for the reconstitution of a revolutionary movement. Thus, the 'Hamburg Theses' are dismissed

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[70] Ibid., p. 223.
[71] For instance, in Christophe Bourseiller (1999), Andrew Hussey (2001), McKenzie Wark (2011) and Jakob Jakobsen (2011). We will return to the question of the various interpretations of the *Theses* below.

as being merely a peculiar and needless to say sectarian result of an arcane dispute that is of little or no consequence.

In an article written around the time of the break with the artists, one that is obviously influenced by the 'Hamburg Theses', the SI wrote that 'Situationist theory is in people like fish are in the sea.'[72] The point of such a claim, carefully drawn out over the course of the article, was the rejection of the perspective that conceived of the SI as bringing a radical perspective from without. Thus Debord's point about the significance of the 'Hamburg Theses': on the one hand they were aimed against the perspective of those 'ultra-leftist' groups close to them, like *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, who were then tending to become lost in the arcane and scholastic elaboration of a theory to explain the apparent quiescence of the working class; and on the other hand against those Situationists (primarily the artists) who believed that workers had ceased to be potentially revolutionary through their 'incorporation' — via the dubious benefits of work and commodity 'satisfaction' — into bourgeois society.

Common to both perspectives was the belief that capital had triumphed to such a degree that an autonomous revolutionary perspective on the basis of the experience of capitalist alienation was no longer possible. What those Situationists who composed the 'Hamburg Theses' offered instead was the argument that the apparent 'victory' of capitalism, manifest in the burgeoning commodity abundance, was in fact a deepening of the process of alienation, not its alleviation; thus, the ground was being more thoroughly prepared for a revolutionary insurrection. Indeed, the 'Hamburg Theses' offered a stark alternative to those artists and political radicals who retreated in despair into their respective 'ghettoes': the realisation *and* abolition of art, politics, and wage-labour, i.e. of all alienated and separated activities. Needless to say, such a revolutionary task was and must be the task of the alienated masses themselves.[73]

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[72] Internationale Situationniste, 'Du rôle de l'I.S.,' *Internationale Situationniste* no. 7 (Avril 1962), p. 17.
[73] Karl Marx had written '[t]hat the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves' (from 'Provisional Rules of the [International Workingmen's] Association [1864],' in *Karl Marx & Frederich Engels Collected Works Vol. 20*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1985, p. 14.). The IWA, or 'First International' was later cited as the actual foundation of the Situationist International. The SI was attracted to its anti-Leninism *avant la lettre*.

As we will see the 'transition' from the first to the second phase of the SI that was enacted over 1961 and 1962 is not so much a movement from art to politics but a movement *against* artistic and political specialisation in favour of a distinctive conception of revolutionary practice — what the SI conceived of as the realisation *and* abolition of art, politics, philosophy — which is to say their *surpassing* (*dépassement*).[74] The 'Hamburg Theses' have a crucial role to play in understanding such a pivotal change as well as to disabuse the common misconception of the second phase (1962-1968) of the SI as political in opposition to the earlier so-called artistic phase. Such misconceptions lie at the root of the ignorance, misunderstanding and indeed deliberate falsification of the 'Hamburg Theses', as well as the admittedly subtle notion of 'realisation and abolition' which the SI borrowed from Hegel by way of Marx and their experience of the artistic avant-garde.

We are left with the elusive nature of the 'Hamburg Theses'. This need not prevent a reconstruction of the general lines of the argument of the 'Hamburg Theses', by way of examining those debates that produced it and crucially the practice that the 'Hamburg Theses' informed in the following years. What is most remarkable about the 'Hamburg Theses' is how much can be derived from their absent form — indeed their absence is crucial to understanding their importance. Further the 'celebrated formula' of Marx's evoked by the 'Hamburg Theses' also points us to the significance of this particular work of Marx's.

To this end, I will first consider other accounts of the 'Hamburg Theses' before turning to an examination of the immediate background to the 'Hamburg Theses': the arguments at the Fifth Conference in Göteborg in August 1961. The point of briefly examining the background is to draw out the nature of the continuity and break which the 'Hamburg Theses' represented in the SI. On this basis, I will turn to an examination of the form and content of the 'Hamburg Theses'

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[74] Debord and the SI were not opposed to all specialisation, rather what they considered alienating specialisations that reinforced an ideological worldview and practice. Thus their opposition to specialised philosophy, politics and art was motivated by the limitations of these specialisations, in particular their susceptibility to reinforcing hierarchical divisions in society on the basis of the separation of theory from its practical, everyday uses. Thus technical specialisations were not the target of their criticism — for e.g. the knowledge required to build bridges, deliver babies, etc.

in order to demonstrate that they were an attempt to embody the idea and practice of the supersession [*dépassement*] of art and philosophy.

How not to misunderstand the 'Hamburg Theses'

In a private letter to Raoul Vaneigem in 1962 Debord wrote 'we agreed *not to write* the Hamburg Theses, so as to impose even better the central meaning of our entire project in the future. Thus, the enemy cannot feign to approve them without great difficulty.'[75] In his 1989 letter to Thomas Levin Debord reiterated this, while publicly admitted the 'Hamburg Theses' for the first time: '[d]eliberately, with the intention of leaving no trace that could be observed or analysed from outside of the SI, nothing concerning this discussion and what it had concluded was ever written down.'[76] It appears that Debord and the other authors had been strikingly successful. In the 1960s the true nature of the 'Hamburg Theses' was hidden in order to impose their significance, i.e. to insist upon the Situationist struggle against the spectacular reification and alienation of their 'work' — and human practices considered generally — and to deny those who would aid in this reification and fetishisation an object to work upon. So successful was this move that nothing of significance was written until Debord revealed the truth of the 'Hamburg Theses' to Levin in 1989.

Debord's letter did not gain a larger audience until it was reproduced as 'Annex 3' in the Fayard republication of the facsimile edition of the entire run of the SI's journal in 1997.[77] However, if we turn to a representative sample of commentary on the 'Hamburg Theses' since 1997 we are struck, in the main, by the misunderstanding of the commentators.[78]

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[75] Guy Debord, 'Lettre à Raoul Vaneigem, 15 février, 1962,' in *Correspondance volume II septembre 1960 - décembre 1964*, ed. Patrick Mosconi, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001, p. 127.
[76] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.
[77] Internationale situationniste, *International situationniste: Édition augmentée*, Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1997, pp. 703-04.
[78] Even though there are a few elusive references to the 'Hamburg Theses' in the works of the SI, I limit my brief survey to those works published after 1997 simply because of the difficulty faced by the investigator before this time.

The majority of commentaries fall into the following categories. Most simply do not mention the 'Hamburg Theses', raising the possibility that they are unaware of them. [79] The most unfortunate example of these is to be found in Vincent Kaufmann's 2001 work, in which he admirably draws attention to Debord's early 'art without works' among the Letterists and the Letterist International, and its impact on the later SI.[80] Of those that do mention the 'Hamburg Theses', commentary ranges from more to less awareness of their nature.[81] For instance among these commentaries it is often unclear if the 'Hamburg Theses' were written down or published in any form.[82] More rare are commentators who understand the unwritten nature of the 'Hamburg Theses', but attribute little or no importance to them vis-à-vis the SI's practice.[83] Rarest of all are those commentators who understand both the formal nature of the 'Hamburg

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[79] Thus, Kaufmann, *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*; McDonough, 'Introduction: Ideology and the Situationist Utopia.'; Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide*; Andy Merrifield, *Guy Debord*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2005; Gilman-Opalsky, *Spectacular Capitalism: Guy Debord and the Practice of Radical Philosophy*; Stracey, *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International*.

[80] For instance Kaufmann correctly identified the Letterist '*dérive*' as the 'art without works' which formed the core of the later Situationist practice of 'unitary urbanism' (Kaufmann, *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, p. 115, 127). However, he ultimately laments the SI's turn away from the 'beautiful' elaboration of unitary urbanism, as embodied in Constant's New Babylon, and the SI's more consistent embrace of an 'art without works, an art of idleness, an art of pure critique, and of destruction and self-destruction' after 1961 (ibid., p. 147). We will return to the question of unitary urbanism, the *dérive* etc. as being 'art without works', and thus 'pre-situationist', below and in chapter three.

[81] For instance, Christophe Bourseiller acknowledges that they were 'unpublished', but he places them before not after the 5th conference, and shows more interest in incidental details tenuously related to the 'Hamburg Theses' — such as Alexander Trocchi's heroin addiction and association with Leonard Cohen — than in the 'Hamburg Theses' themselves. Cf. Christophe Bourseiller, *Vie et mort de Guy Debord 1931-1994*, Saint-Malo: Pascal Galodé éditeurs, [1999] 2012, p. 195.

[82] Andrew Hussey believes the 'Hamburg Theses' was 'a text for internal circulation'. However, more bizarrely he attributes a quote that does not exist to Debord in his 1989 letter to Levin about the 'Hamburg Theses' (perhaps a stab at homage?). Additionally, he associates the 'Hamburg Theses' with Debord's purported drive to oust the artists from the SI, despite Debord's denial that this was the purpose of the 'Hamburg Theses'. Cf. Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord*, pp. 171-72.

[83] Similar to Hussey, McKenzie Wark and Jakob Jakobsen associate the 'Hamburg Theses' with Debord's purported drive to expel the artists. Cf. Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*; Jakob Jakobsen, 'The artistic revolution: On the Situationists, gangsters and falsifiers from Drakabygget,' in *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist movement in Scandinavia and elsewhere*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen & Jakob Jakobsen, Copenhagen: Nebula, 2011. Of the three, Jakobsen has the best grasp of the longer term nature of the argument over the role of art in the SI group. However, this is mitiagted by his erroneous beliefs that 'Debord's circle' moved to impose a hierarchical division in the group around the poles of 'theory' and 'practice'; that the 'experimental attitude' of the earlier group was dispensed with by Debord et al.; and that Asger Jorn's *Pour la forme* (1958) was 'the first theoretical work to delineate a radical experimental attitude […] in the Situationist movement', despite the existence of the long founding document written by Debord in 1957, which, moreover, foregrounded just such an 'experimental attitude'. Ibid., pp. 244, 217.

Theses' and the singular importance they held for the group at this pivotal moment in their development.[84]

Of recent commentaries on the 'Hamburg Theses', that of Jean-Marc Mandosio's stands out. In his work *In the Cauldron of the Negative* (trans. 2014, orig. 2003) Mandosio is sensitive to the form and content of the 'Hamburg Theses'.[85] He quotes extensively from Debord's 1989 letter to Thomas Levin, and leaves no one in doubt of the stated intent and method of composition of the 'Hamburg Theses'. Indeed, he clearly sides with the idea of the importance of the 'Hamburg Theses', going so far as to single them out as containing 'the only "truly vital conclusions" of situationist theory' — even if his is wrong in attributing this claim to Debord.[86]

The most interesting claim put forward by Mandosio is with regard to the way he connects the 'Hamburg Theses' to an earlier work of Debord's, and thus to both the early SI and the late Letterist International: '[T]he late — and even posthumous — insistence on the importance of the 'Hamburg Theses' would tend to place the entire situationist enterprise in the category of the "parodic-serious", to borrow an expression coined by Wolman and Debord'.[87] Whereas Mandosio is wrong about the 'late […] insistence on the importance of the Hamburg Theses' (consider, for instance, Debord's 1962 letter to Vaneigem cited above), he has, perhaps inadvertently, stumbled upon an aspect of their real significance — the attempt to push *détournement* so far that there is literally nothing left to *détourn* (or, more importantly, recuperate).

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[84] Positive signs of perhaps a more general change for the better can be found in two recent PhD theses: Tom Bunyard, 'A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of the Spectacle' (University of London, 2011), p. 76; Alastair J. Hemmens, 'The Radical Subject: An Intellectual Biography of Raoul Vaneigem (1934 - Present)' (University of London Institute in Paris, 2013), pp. 169-72.

[85] Jean-Marc Mandosio, 'In the Cauldron of the Negative,' (Translated by Alias Reclus: [2003] 2014). http://libcom.org/library/cauldron-negative-jean-marc-mandosio.

[86] Ibid. Unfortunately Mandosio mangles his citations in his presentation of the vital nature of the *Hamburg Theses*. Debord never wrote that 'the only "truly vital conclusions" of situationist theory were contained in […] the Hamburg Theses' (ibid.). If we consult Debord's letter to Levin which Mandosio quotes from we find that Debord is writing about the 'truly vital conclusions' not of the Situationists but of agents of Nation States in which 'the procedure [of the *Theses*] had encountered a bizarre success at the highest levels' (Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],'). Indeed if we were to agree with Mandosio here, we would run the risk of nullifying all of the critical work of the SI after the *Hamburg Theses*. Indeed, the idea of such a reversal is the theme of Mandosio's work, i.e. the reversal and abandonment of earlier Situationists perspectives by the later, post-SI Debord and Vaneigem.

[87] Mandosio, 'In the Cauldron of the Negative'.

In the document Mandosio cites, 'Instructions for the use of *détournement*' (1956), Debord and Gil J Wolman contrasted the mere parody of literature to the 'parodic-serious' *détournement* of culture, which 'far from wanting to arouse indignation or laughter by referring to the idea of an original work, mark[s] on the contrary our indifference toward an original emptied of meaning and forgotten'.[88] Via this definition Mandosio interprets Debord's revelation in 1989 as an attempt to recast the *entire work* of the SI between 1957 and 1972. One could perhaps follow Mandosio if the 'Hamburg Theses' were in fact an invention of Debord's, *post festum*.

Debord's and Wolman's model in the 1956 article was Lautréamont, whose plagiaristic technique was aimed even more at the transformation of the original 'sources' then merely plagiarism:

> [i]t goes without saying that one is not limited to correcting a work or integrating diverse fragments of out-of-date works into a new one, but also to change the meaning of these fragments and fix them up in any appropriate manner — what fools obstinately call citations.[89]

In his letter to Levin, Debord noted that in the 1960s the 'Hamburg Theses' 'were evoked several times in Situationist publications, but a single citation was never given'.[90] Indeed, unlike many of the more artistic productions of Situationists, the 'Hamburg Theses' cut to the core of the notion of *détournement*, eschewing cheap gags and parodies for a 'parodic-serious' composition which was in fact *sui generis*, despite being composed of the assorted detritus of critical theory and drunken drifting through the streets of Hamburg. Although Mandosio misunderstands Debord's intention, even so far as to represent the 'Hamburg Theses' as a mere gag or literary hoax, he unwittingly draws attention to the 'Hamburg Theses' as an exemplar of *détournement* and thus, perhaps, being the most Situationist 'document' of them all.

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[88] Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement [1956],' p. 223.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.

Combatants caught between two worlds

At the Fifth Conference of the SI in late August 1962 an argument erupted over the status of art and more specifically the results of artistic practice and their relationship to Situationist practice.[91] The immediate cause of the argument was the reaction of some Situationists to comments made by Raoul Vaneigem in his orientation report.[92]

Vaneigem's report made suggestions for Situationist activity on the basis of a developing hostility to the Situationist project in capitalist society. In essence he argued that those Situationists engaged in artistic work (primarily the painters concentrated in the Scandinavian and German sections) ran the risk of elaborating 'the spectacle of refusal'. His worry was that the creation of artistic works, under conditions of an expanding global market in cultural artefacts, risked reifying the work necessary for elaborating a radical and critical Situationist practice. He wrote, '[i]n order for their elaboration to be *artistic* in the new and authentic sense defined by the SI, the elements of the destruction of the spectacle must precisely cease to be works of art.'[93] Vaneigem was clear that Situationist practice would entail defending all that was best about artistic production.[94] Primarily this entailed the prioritising of the creative relations of artistic production over the resulting objects that were susceptible to the fetish of commodity logic; i.e. art-objects were easily alienated from the process of their production for potential sale. However, the attribution of the importance of such a defence was made on the basis of the present predicament of the Situationist: 'that of combatants between two worlds: one that we don't acknowledge, the other that does not yet exist.'[95]

In the following conference session Jørgen Nash of the Scandinavian section of the SI responded by posing a question in relation to film-work he was engaged in with other

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[91] Internationale Situationniste, 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (Avril 1962). We will return to the subject of the Fifth Conference in chapter four, below.
[92] Ibid., pp. 26-7.
[93] Ibid., p. 26.
[94] The Situationist notion of the 'free artist' as a harbinger of a post-capitalist subjectivity (i.e. an artist who operates without any unnecessary restraints, particular commercial ones) is relevant in this regard. We will return to the notion of 'free artist' in greater detail in chapter three, below.
[95] I.S. 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 27.

Situationists: what constituted a Situationist film?[96] Following on from Nash, Dieter Kunzelmann of the German section expressed doubts regarding the ability of the Situationist group to engage in the far reaching critical activity outlined by Vaneigem. By way of a response to Nash and Kunzelmann, Attila Kotányi suggested that the term 'anti-situationist' should be appended to any artistic work or production by members of the SI.[97] However, Kotányi clearly drew out that such a description did not mean that Situationists 'should stop painting, writing, etc.' or that such activity was without value.[98] Rather Situationist activity lay in the elaboration 'of certain truths which have an explosive power'.[99] Such truths lay primarily in the Situationist critique of the capitalist use of work-time and free-time, such as their critique of the then rapid transformation of cities around the needs of the production and consumption — i.e. of 'mass', 'consumer' commodities.[100]

Kotányi's suggestion of the term and use of 'anti-situationist' was accepted by the conference, almost unanimously; notably Nash objected alone. However, this near unanimity belied the tensions at the conference, which frequently exploded into argument 'not without violent agitation and uproar'.[101] What was made clear was that differences that had emerged at the previous conference, the Fourth in 1960, still remained. At the Fourth Conference the German section had argued that that in the absence of a revolutionary proletariat the SI must 'realise its program on its own by mobilizing the avant-garde artists'; at the Fifth conference they reiterated their belief that the proletariat as a potential revolutionary force was effectively disarmed by the 'comfort and conveniences' of modern capitalism and that 'the SI systematically neglects its real chances in culture'.[102] However it was precisely this cultural perspective that would provide the main breaking point at the Fifth conference. For even as Heimrad Prem of the German section argued that the 'real chances' for the SI 'in culture' were in opposition to the apparent

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[96] Ibid. Even though the question posed was specifically about film-work the argument resulting focused on the problem of artistic practice more generally.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] The car was the preeminent commodity in this regard according to the Situationists. Cf. Guy Debord, 'Positions Situationnistes sur la circulation,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (Décembre 1959).
[101] I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 29.
[102] Ibid., p. 28.

sterility of 'theoretical power', he nonetheless admitted that he found Situationist theory 'incomprehensible to say the least'.[103] Needless to say there was general uproar that a Situationist of two years could admit to finding the theoretical elaborations of his organisation 'incomprehensible'.

From 'pre-situationist' activity to art as 'anti-situationist'

To Nash's seemingly innocent question regarding the criteria for what constitutes a Situationist film, Guy Debord mordantly pointed out that despite the films he had made while a member of the SI he had yet to make a Situationist film.[104] Debord's point harked back to an earlier Situationist concept: 'pre-situationist'. The term '*pre-situationniste*' appeared a handful of times in the group's publications, from shortly after its formation until the 5th issue of its journal in December 1960. However, the term does not appear in the founding document of June 1957. It is almost certain that the term 'pre-situationist' was introduced on the basis of confused interpretations of what Debord called 'the hypothesis of the construction of situations'.[105]

In the founding document of the SI, *Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Conditions of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency*, Debord wrote that '[o]ur central idea is the construction of situations, which is to say the concrete construction of momentary ambiences of life and their transformation in a superior passionate quality.'[106] In the first issue of the journal this definition was further elaborated as 'a moment of life, concretely and deliberately constructed through the collective organisation of a unitary ambience and play of events'.[107] However the *hypothetical* nature of the 'the construction of situations' was emphasised from the outset. Such a 'construction' was projected as a possible and desirable organisation of human activity on the basis of the revolutionary transformation of the capitalist mode of production. Crucial to such a hypothesis was the belief that the present capitalist use of the city and social life more generally already contained and at the margins

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[103] Ibid., p. 29.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 325.
[106] Ibid., p. 322.
[107] I.S., 'Définitions,' p. 13.

expressed critical, 'alternative' uses. Thus, the initial activity of the group was directed toward the experimental verification of such a hypothesis via the development of critical practices already pioneered under the aegis of the Letterist International — e.g. the urban '*dérives*' and psychogeographical criticisms of the capitalist city. The 'construction of situations' was a sort of negative image of capitalist urbanism; where capital reorganised ancient cities, and built new ones in the name of productive efficiency and the flow of commodities, the Situationists proposed the playful elaboration of life.

The construction of situations was opposed to the phenomenal results of previous artistic avant-gardes: painting, poetry, prose, sculpture, cinema, etc.; indeed, the production of any object that could potentially be isolated and fetishized as a commodity for sale. This was not to say that the Situationists were opposed to the production of artistic objects as such; rather they saw the very artistic techniques as necessarily being appropriated by the future Constructors of Situations, reappropriating such diverse practices and others in order that they would be combined in new totalities, new 'ambiances' for living as opposed to objects solely for spectatorship or sale. Such a hypothetical construction could not be reduced to present artistic activity, even if the results of the present-day experimental elaboration of such a hypothesis were (for instance Constant's architectural models and plans of 'New Babylon'). Implicit in the hypothesis, though explicitly drawn out in numerous articles in the SI's journal, was the alienation and ghettoization of creative activity under capitalist conditions.

The term 'pre-situationist' was introduced in order to clarify both the *present* hypothetical nature of 'the construction of situations' as well as the difference between Situationist and other, so-called avant-garde artistic practices amongst their contemporaries. The term first appears in the article '*Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes*' (One more effort if you want to be Situationists) published in *Potlatch* no. 29 in November 1957 shortly after the founding of the group.[108] In the article Debord wrote that the principle danger faced by the SI was twofold:

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[108] *Potlatch* was originally a publication of the Letterist International. With the formation of the Situationist International *Potlatch* was published one more time (no. 29, 5 November 1957) before its original run ended. However, it was restarted as an internal bulletin of the Situationist group for one

'the pursuit of fragmentary works combined with naïve proclamations of a so-called new stage.'[109]

This brings us to a central though often misrepresented aspect of the idea of the 'construction of situations'. Most often it has been conceived as a type of artistic 'happening' or, to use a term favoured by art criticism, a type of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or 'total work of art'. One could perhaps envisage the Situationist notion of unitary urbanism under such a term, but not the Situationist hypothesis.[110] In the early years of the SI an argument emerged precisely over this question: was the Situationist hypothesis reducible to unitary urbanism? Debord, during the extended argument and discussion with Constant in 1959 argued that unitary urbanism was an 'instrument' of the Situationist hypothesis and thus could not be reducible to it.[111] Unitary urbanism, insofar as it proposed the 'integral' use of artistic and other techniques, was conceived as the experimental means for the investigation of the Situationist hypothesis in the capitalist present. The Situationist hypothesis of the construction of situations is best understood as at once the overarching theoretical criticism of the situations of capitalist life and a hypothetical projection with regards to their 'solution'. Unlike unitary urbanism — which was a direct engagement with the problems of contemporary 'urbanism' — the Situationist hypothesis could not be practiced short of the attainment of general conditions for the construction of situations (i.e. a post-capitalist, 'communist' society).

As befits a 'hypothesis', the construction of situations projected a solution to the criticism of the ephemeral 'situation' of everyday capitalist life. Certainly, this critical practice was a

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further issue (no. 30, no. 1 in the new series, 15 July 1959). No other issues of *Potlatch* appeared after this one.

[109] Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes : L'I.S. dans et contre la décomposition [1957],' p. 346.

[110] Simon Sadler describes the hypothesis of the construction of situations as a type of '*Gesamtkunstwerk*'in his book, *The Situationist City*, pp. 105-07. His mistake appears to stem from the confusion of the Situationist hypothesis with the associated notion of unitary urbanism. This is, however, a common mistake. For instance Peter Wollen in his long essay on the SI does not seem to be aware that there is a distinction to be made: 'Artists were to break down the divisions between individual art-forms, to create *situations*, constructed encounters and creatively lived moments in specific urban settings, instances of a critically transformed everyday life.' Wollen, 'The Situationist International,' p. 68. Such errors originate in the debates between primarily Debord and Constant in the SI during 1958-60, in which Constant held to such a position. We will return to this question in chapter three, below.

[111] Internationale Situationniste, 'Discussion sur un appel aux intellectuels et artistes révolutionnaires,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (Décembre 1959), p. 24.

component of contemporary, Situationist practice. But here we begin to approach the peculiarities and paradox of the notion of 'pre-situationist' activity. Insofar as the Situationist hypothesis was both criticism and proposed solution to the problem of the situations of capitalist life, it was 'pre-situationist'. The problem the SI faced was the question of transforming their critical means to the end desired. Thus, to reduce the Situationist hypothesis to a *Gesamtkunstwerk* would be akin to rejecting the possibility of its central conceit: 'the concrete construction of *momentary* ambiences of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality.'[112] The Constructed Situation, as envisaged by Debord, was not to be understood vulgarly as the mere construction of things, no matter how expansively understood — for instance, cities — but rather the conscious construction of the passage of one's life in collaboration with others. Thus, the construction of life, insofar as it is considered a social-natural complex. Such 'constructions' put a premium on the ephemeral, never to be repeated qualitative aspects of living. Indeed, central to the Situationist hypothesis was the rejection of the fetish of the finished 'object' abstracted from unrepeatable 'unities' of time (i.e. Constructed Situations).

Debord accepted that Situationist practice in the capitalist present was doomed, after a fashion, to being recuperated. Indeed, he was clearly aware and accepted the fact that some of the critical activity of the SI was specialised, artistic activity (for instance his own film work, 'botched tracking shots' and all).[113] Insofar as such activity was guided by the critical orientation of the Situationist hypothesis, and conceived and carried out under such an 'orientation', it was Situationist, even as the alienable results of such practice were 'pre-situationist' or 'anti-situationist'. Here lies the paradox of Situationist practice in the bourgeois present, gesturing at a future yet to be fashioned, caught in the passing present of the inherited, historical, natural and gloriously artificial 'constraints' of capitalist social relations.

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[112] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 322. My emphasis.
[113] Cf. Debord's film, 'Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps [1959],' in *Guy Debord Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006.

As Debord put it in the founding document, '[t]he construction of situations begins beyond the modern ruins of the spectacle'.[114] Certainly such a conception is different from Jean Paul Sartre's *ontological* conception of the 'situation', precisely because it eschews the invariant notion of 'situation' in favour of a historical one.[115] In fact we can consider the Situationist's theory of the 'construction of situations' as both a critique of and an inversion of Sartre's idea of the situation. For the SI, the 'situations' of everyday capitalist life were endured rather than created, imposed by the logic of the invading market rather than freely determined or experienced; thus the 'construction of situations' was implicitly a critique of a life determined by capitalist social relations and explicitly a hypothetical projection of the free construction of everyday life beyond such relations.

Because the SI operated 'within and against' the present cultural milieu it suffered the danger of its activity falling back into the mere production of art-objects for sale, or its reduction to one of the many escalating but largely empty proclamations of novelty in the arts. Indeed, in opposition to the repetitive recasting of the formal discoveries of the recent past under such titles as the 'new novel', the 'new poetry' or the 'new wave' in cultural production considered more generally, the SI proposed that the only true novelty in the cultural realm must be directed toward the revolutionary surpassing of capitalist social relations; and thus, the establishment of conditions conducive to the construction of situations.[116] Debord proposed that,

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[114] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 325.

[115] It is unclear how the positive association of the contrary theories of 'situation' espoused by Jean-Paul Sartre and the Situationists arose — for instance, it is described this way in similar terms in two works from 1999: Steven Best & Douglas Kellner, 'Debord, Cybersituations and the Interactive Spectacle,' *SubStance*, no. 90 (1999), p. 131, fn. 4 p. 153; Sadler, *The Situationist City*, p. 45. Cf. below, footnote 278, chapter three, and footnote 530, chapter five.

[116] The rediscovery and generalisation of many of the formal techniques of the avant-gardes of the first years of the twentieth century often became known as the 'new wave' throughout the 1960s in the industrialised world. To cite one example among many, there was the self-proclaimed 'new wave' in science fiction which emerged from the authors associated with the *New Worlds* journal in the 1960s. No doubt the French 'new wave' ('*nouvelle vague*') in cinema from around 1959/60 became the model for the surge of new *waves* in the following decade.

[t]he awareness of our real possibilities requires both the recognition of the pre-situationist character (in the strict sense of the word) of all that we can attempt, and the rupture (without the thought of return) with *the division of artistic labour*.[117]

Simply put any present experimental work in the elaboration of such a hypothesis perforce meant that such work was necessarily 'pre-situationist'. Not only did the SI hypothesise, but it practically worked toward the establishment of conditions conducive to the construction of situations by breaking with the present 'division of artistic labour'. An early example of such a practice was unitary urbanism. Defined in the founding document as 'the use of all arts and techniques as means contributing to the integral composition of a milieu', unitary urbanism was the organising principle for the experimental elaboration of the construction of situations.[118] As such it was like a 'bridge' between the hypothetical aim of the group and its current activities. Unitary urbanism encompassed the SI's critique of contemporary capitalist urbanism and the practice of experimenting with alternatives. In proposing the integration and unification of the practice of the individual arts at the level of entire cities the SI argued that unitary urbanism 'no longer correspond[ed] to any of the traditional definitions of aesthetics'.[119] Unitary urbanism was 'the rupture […] with *the division of artistic labour*' Debord wrote of; it was the 'pre-situationist' practice of members of the Situationist International ranged within and against capitalist society. Indeed, it was the present practice that aimed at the experimental verification of the hypothesis of the 'construction of situations' short of a full scale anti-capitalist revolution.[120]

Seven months later, on the eve of the first full year of the Situationist International, 'pre-situationist' was further elaborated in the first issue of the SI's journal, in the collectively signed

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[117] Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes : L'I.S. dans et contre la décomposition [1957],' p. 348.
[118] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 322.
[119] Ibid., p. 323.
[120] As noted above we will return to the important question of unitary urbanism and its relationship to the Situationist hypothesis in more detail in chapter three, below.

article 'Preliminary Problems in the Construction of a Situation'.[121] The SI argued that the

construction of situations would not merely consist of the 'unitary use of artistic means [which]

contribute to an ambience' but also, and at the same time they must be 'a unity of behaviour in

time.'[122] The point of this emphasis appears twofold: to caution the reduction of experimental

unitary urbanism and the construction of situations to merely artistic means and techniques; and

to draw attention to the total transformation of human life that is implicit in such practices. In

opposition to contemporary 'new' avant-garde practices that proposed to 'integrate art', the SI

wrote,

> We are not going to settle for empirical tests of environments in which we wait for
>
> mechanically provoked surprises. The really experimental direction of Situationist
>
> activity is the establishment — based on desires more or less clearly recognized — of a
>
> field of temporary activity favourable to these desires. […]
>
> Such research only has meaning for individuals practically working toward a
>
> construction of situations. Thus, they are all, either spontaneously or in a conscious and
>
> organised manner, *pre-situationists*, which is to say individuals who have sensed the
>
> objective need for this construction via the very state of empty culture and through
>
> similar expressions of experimental sensitivity […].[123]

Debord was keen to differentiate between general trends in the cultural milieus and the social

field more generally. 'Pre-situationists' are not only members of the Situationist International,

they are all people whose practices entail a sensitivity to the need for a revolutionary 'beyond'

to capitalist society, and so for conditions suitable for the construction of situations. Perhaps

what is more interesting is the implication that such a critical attitude to the present constrained

conditions of artistic activity and activity more generally necessarily implied the construction of

situations as their 'solution'. Here is the hypothesis at its most expansive, never the sole

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[121] Internationale Situationniste, 'Problèmes préliminaires à la construction d'une situation,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (Juin 1958). The term also appears in the article 'Avec et contre la Cinema' in the same issue (p. 9); however it is not clearly defined in that article.
[122] Ibid., p. 11.
[123] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

property or invention of the SI but rather the clarification of tendencies present in capitalist society, and all those attempts that have projected a beyond — hitherto primarily by artistic means.[124]

As mentioned earlier the term 'pre-situationist' was still used by the group — at least in published form — as late as December 1960. Significantly 1960 marked a pivotal transition in the group. In June, Constant Nieuwenhuys, perhaps the most single minded advocate and elaborator of unitary urbanism, resigned from the SI. His resignation had come after the expulsion of members from his Dutch section as well as other Situationists from the Italian section. Both expulsions had followed on from extensive discussions within the group and on the basis of, on the one hand, the Dutch members collaborating in the construction of a church, and on the other hand the Italian members who had become more closely associated with the very artistic milieus the SI was attempting to distinguish itself from. However with Constant's resignation the practical elaboration of unitary urbanism began to wane in the group, despite the continued presence of the Bureau for Unitary Urbanism as an arm of the SI.[125] Concurrent with this resignation, the French and Belgian sections began to become more closely involved with the ultra-left political milieus, notably the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group and its political organisation, *Pouvoir Ouvrier*.[126] Artists continued to be involved in the group, mostly based in the German and Scandinavian sections, but their activity was overwhelmingly determined by the very 'individual arts' that the hypothesis of the construction of situations and the practice of unitary urbanism were aimed at overcoming. By the time of the Fifth Conference in August 1961 'pre-situationist' artistic activity as components of experimental unitary urbanism was a moot point. Such was the environment in which 'anti-situationist' was proposed as the term to describe those works produced by Situationists practicing the individual arts. In some ways, 'anti-situationist' is a marker of the retreat of the group from the earlier conception of 'pre-

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[124] Certainly the foundation of the SI was via the confluence of the critique of art and the possibilities offered by the reorganisation of urban environments arrived at by different groups and individuals; notably Asger Jorn of the International Movement for an Imagist Bauhaus, Guy Debord of the Letterist International, and Constant Nieuwenhuys former member (alongside of Jorn) of the CoBrA group.
[125] Originally established by Constant and the expelled Dutch architects, but after their departure headed up by the new Situationist and trained architect Attila Kotányi.
[126] Respectively, 'Socialism or Barbarism' and 'Workers Power'.

situationist' associated with the practice of unitary urbanism. Debord had warned the young Situationist group in 1957of the danger of 'the pursuit of fragmentary works combined with naïve proclamations of a so-called new stage [in the arts]'.[127] With the end of collaborative unitary urbanist experiments, such 'anti-situationist' 'fragmentary works' had come to dominate in the German and Scandinavian sections of the group.

And so, returning to Jørgen Nash's question of what constituted a Situationist film at the Fifth Conference, we can see that such a question was far from innocent. Debord's hostile response and Kotányi's suggestion of describing artistic activity carried out by Situationists as 'anti-situationist' was more than an elaboration or 'rebranding' of the earlier 'pre-situationist'; it was offered in opposition to what they perceived as the actual fragmentation or even dissolution of the Situationist project.

Looking back on the 1962 break with the artists from the vantage point of 1963, the SI in the collaboratively written 'Counter Situationist Operation in Diverse Countries' wrote that the emergence of perspectives like those of Nash, Prem, Dieter Kunzelmen and Jacqueline de Jong in the group 'expressed an objective tendency resulting from the ambiguous and adventurous politics for which the SI had to take the risk, by accepting to act *within* culture while being against all of the current organization of this culture and even against all culture as a separate sphere'.[128] Conceived as such, the break with the artists in February and March of 1962 was made in order to protect and defend what was revolutionary about the Situationist project as it was originally conceived. It was not so much that '[a]rt was now anti-situationist' as McKenzie Wark has remarked about the Fifth Conference and the break of 1962.[129] Rather, art had always been anti-situationist, insofar as the practice of the 'individual arts' had been conceived from the outset as falling outside of strictly Situationist activity. All that had changed in 1961 were the

[127] Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes : L'I.S. dans et contre la décomposition [1957],' p. 346.
[128] Internationale Situationniste, 'L'Operation Contre-Situationniste Dans Divers Pays,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (Janvier 1963), p. 24.
[129] Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, p. 113.

terms of the debate within the organisation and the consequent invention of the term 'anti-situationist'.

On the form of the Hamburg Theses

In a private letter to Raoul Vaneigem, written five months after the 'composition' of the 'Hamburg Theses', Debord wrote:

> As a profound theoretical justification of our laziness on certain issues since [the conference at] Göteborg, 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 them without great difficulty. Moreover, one cannot dispute that this is the height of the *avant-gardism in the formal presentation* of ideas, perhaps opening the way for the explication of Lautréamont's *Poesies* by schoolboys?[130]

Twenty-seven years later Debord reiterated the same point in his letter to Levin: 'the intention of not leaving any trace' was so that nothing of the 'Theses' 'could be observed or analysed from outside of the SI'.[131] Such concern raises the spectre of recuperation — the adaptation or 'partial annexation' of aspects of the SI's critical practice.[132] However before turning to a consideration of such concerns it is worth noting the subtle changes in Debord's emphasis between 1962 and 1989. In his 1989 letter to Levin, Debord wrote:

> The "Hamburg Theses" have had a considerable importance, in at least two respects. First, because they mark the most important choice made [*qu'elles datent la principale option*] in the history of the SI. But also as an experimental practice: from the latter point of view, the "Theses" were a striking innovation in the succession of artistic

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[130] Debord, 'Lettre à Raoul Vaneigem, 15 février, 1962,' p. 127.
[131] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989].'
[132] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 310. The SI considered the 'partial annexation' of the ideas and practice of the previous avant-gardes, such as Dada and Surrealism, at its founding. Later this would be further theorised as 'recuperation', under the impact of the 'partial annexation' of the SI's own ideas and practice. I will briefly deal with the question of 'recuperation' in chapter two, below.

avant-gardes, who hitherto had all given the impression of being eager to explain themselves.[133]

Clearly different is the understanding of the historical content of the 'Hamburg Theses'. Debord looks back from 1989 with the hindsight of the events of 1968 and after, and the role the SI played in them; in 1962 the break had only just been enacted and the future of the SI was anything but certain. However, the continuity is more striking.

Debord drew attention to the 'the height of avant-gardism' and the 'striking innovation' of the 'Theses' across the years. He is even more keen to point out that it was precisely the form of the 'Theses' that allowed the SI to also protect itself from those enemies who 'feign to approve' the SI's published statements; thus, the need to take aim at the 'succession of artistic avant-gardes, who hitherto had all given the impression of being eager to explain themselves'. By precisely reducing the published evidence Debord and the other "authors" (in the sense that the concept of authorship can apply even without concrete tokens) did more than make it difficult for mere approval of the 'Hamburg Theses'. They clearly posed that the avant-garde practice they were advocating was not commensurate with the passive consumption of radical manifestoes, theses, etc.

Primarily such a criticism was aimed at an 'internal audience' as much as the small but growing audience for the SI on the margins of the artistic and political milieus of the day. Directly this concerned the artists in the group and the informal division of labour which located the bulk of the work of elaborating the theory of the SI in the hands of members of the French and Belgian sections (primarily Debord, Vaneigem, Kotányi and Michèle Bernstein in 1960 and '61, and less often Alexander Trocchi). What Debord was driving at in his letter was not only the fragmentation of experimental unitary urbanism since 1960 and the tendency of the artists to do little more than fetishize their own production of art-objects, but the further reduction of the development of Situationist practice to the status of an object for mere contemplation by those refusing to participate in its distinctive elaboration.

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[133] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.

This brings us back to the idea that the initial work of the SI, via such practices as experimental unitary urbanism, was directed at the overcoming of the art-object to the end of a society conducive to the 'construction of situations'. Thus, the SI, even when it resulted as it often did in art-objects, articles, journals etc., prioritised its activity such that the practice of being a Situationist was subordinated to those results that were easily reified. As Debord put it in 1960 at the very point that the practice of unitary urbanism had begun to fragment,

> [t]he previous avant-gardes presented themselves by declaring the excellence of their methods and principles, which were to be immediately judged on the basis of their *works*. The SI is the first artistic organisation to base itself on the radical inadequacy of all permissible works; and whose significance, success or failure, can only be judged with the revolutionary praxis of its time.[134]

This is a difficult idea to accept as long as we do not attend to the specific practice of the SI. As I outlined above, the SI's practice insofar as it was directed toward the elaboration and experimental verification of the Situationist hypothesis (aka 'the hypothesis of the construction of situations') emphasised the practice of being a Situationist as opposed to the production of "Situationist" objects; thus, it rejected the latter, ultimately describing the production of artistic objects by Situationists as 'anti-situationist'. Certainly, the SI produced objects; primary amongst them was their eponymously named journal. The journal, however, was necessitated precisely because the Situationist project was incomplete; indeed, its primary purpose was for the diffusion of the Situationist critique and also their claim that the avant-garde must disappear in its revolutionary practice.

Perhaps this is most clearly drawn out in an article written by Debord in February 1961: 'For a revolutionary judgement of art'.[135] In the article Debord takes issue with the film criticism of a comrade in the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group.[136] For our present purposes the most important aspect of the piece is Debord's correlation of the impasse of the artistic avant-garde with the

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[134] Internationale Situationniste, 'Sur l'emploi du temps libre,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (Juin 1960), pp. 4-5.
[135] Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art [février 1961].'
[136] We will deal with this article in more depth below, in chapter six.

aftermath of the defeat of the workers movement in the 1930s. Central to this defeat is the abstraction and reification of the workers movement itself in its organisations and 'leadership': primarily the unions, parties and even the so-called 'workers state' of the Soviet Union.[137] To those who called on the Situationists to fashion a 'positive' project, as much as those who located the questionable 'success' of the revolutionary working class movement in trade unions, parties and state power, Debord wrote,

> […] if one truly insists on finding something positive in modern culture, it must be said that its only positive character appears in its self-liquidation, its movement of disappearance, its testimony against itself.[138]

This sense of the 'positive' project of 'self-liquidation', of the *negation* of modern capitalist culture, lay at the heart of the SI's project. Debord argued that the 'decomposition of culture', i.e. the devaluation of all the received values of bourgeois culture, was an achieved fact in the time of the SI. To the present imitators and practitioners of 'neo-Dada' and other "new" art forms Debord wrote, '[i]t is no great thing to be *contemporary*: one is only more or less *decomposed*.'[139] As Khayati remarked about the literary experimentation of the first half of the twentieth century, in the face of the collapse of the revolutionary contestation of 1917-1937 'there has not even been its abolition, since after [Marcel] Duchamp, Dada and [James] Joyce, a new "spectacular" literature continues to proliferate.'[140] The question the SI posed, in opposition to the various repetitions of "anti-art" art, was how to use the decomposition in order to go beyond it — 'victory will be for those who make the disorder without loving it'.[141] One way we can summarise the Situationist attitude toward the use of art is by looking at it as an attempt to push the cultural decomposition to the point of undermining the possibility of re-establishing an 'anti-art' aesthetic — or at least to call such a project into question by drawing out the

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[137] Thus, by the late 1950s if there was such a thing as a revolutionary workers movement it existed outside those groups who claimed its leadership, such as the Stalinist communist parties in the East and West.

[138] Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art [février 1961],' pp. 558-63.

[139] Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes : L'I.S. dans et contre la décomposition [1957],' p. 347.

[140] Khayati, 'Les mots captifs (Préface à un dictionnaire situationniste),' p. 51.

[141] G.-E. Debord, 'Thèses sur la révolution culturelle,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (Juin 1958), p. 21.

immanent and explicit revolutionary perspectives in the earlier anti-art avant-gardes.

Nonetheless we must be clear of the *positive* dimensions of such negation.[142] As I have outlined, the Situationist hypothesis proposed the appropriation of all of the techniques of human artifice to the ends of creating new ensembles, new situations. Short of such conditions, which is to say short of the establishment of a classless society beyond the horizon of capitalist social relations, the constitution of a merely positive project (such as the 'anti-art' aesthetic of the "neo" avant-gardes of the 1950s and 60s) would simply be in danger of being absorbed by the vast capitalist market.

Indeed, this project of 'self-liquidation' in art was the pivot by which the Situationists identified both the resonance between their critique of art and Marx's of philosophy, but perhaps more crucially the limits of Marx's criticism (a 'limit' I will turn to in chapters five and six below). Under the rubric of 'surpassing' or 'supersession' [*dépassement*], the Situationists would adopt Marx's critique of the 'realisation and abolition' of philosophy. Indeed, more than anything this was the 'meaning' that Debord spoke of imposing in his letter to Vaneigem. The 'Hamburg Theses' as an attempt to evoke the project of supersession via its form was as important, possibly more so than the content of the discussion which made up the 'Theses'.

The 'Hamburg Theses' as content and as supersession

The 'Hamburg Theses' as a non-document is its most important "content". As we will see more clearly in the chapter six, for Marx the realisation of philosophy is also its abolition. The SI also spoke of 'surpassing' or 'supersession' — *dépassement*, the French word used to translate Hegel's '*aufheben*'.[143] The 'Hamburg Theses' were realised (as so many theses) in their abolition (in their non-redacted existence). As a formal manifesto, they existed only in their supersession. For instance, as so many concepts immanent to the ephemeral nature of their production.[144] There is *nothing here* apart from the concepts and the passing, historical practice through which they emerged. This is not, however, to say that even still the practice which

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[142] Such a conception resonated with Marx's early conception of '*communism* [a]s the *positive* expression of the abolition of private property' — cf. Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844),' in *Early Writings*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975, pp. 345-46.

[143] For instance, in Jean Hyppolite's translation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Cf. footnote 54 above.

[144] And as a title, a signifier whose signified has vanished into the "beyond" of their past signification.

constituted the 'Hamburg Theses' cannot be reified — my thesis, among others, is more than enough proof against that. Rather it is both the analogical and literal existence of the 'Hamburg Theses' that are important. The 'Hamburg Theses' are a unique work of art that barely leaves a trace; the 'Hamburg Theses' are more than a name, and yet we barely have more than that. Where is this work? The point of the 'Hamburg Theses' is precisely this shadow existence, this phantom objectivity, this ambiguity of the becoming of being and not being.

When Debord revealed the truth of the 'Hamburg Theses' to Thomas Levin in 1989, he revealed the single remnant of the discussion, 'the simplest summary of its rich and complex conclusions could be expressed in a single phrase: "*Now, the SI must realise philosophy*".'[145] However, no matter that Debord apparently presented for the first time a literary fragment of what had previously 'remained hidden', some of the remnants of the 'Hamburg Theses' were in truth on public display in the *works* of the SI from 1962 and onwards. However, the chief 'remnant' of the 'Hamburg Theses' was its existence as the restatement of the revolutionary project of 'surpassing' or 'supersession' [*dépassement*] of capitalism. The authors of the 'Hamburg Theses' 'agreed *not to write*' them 'so as to impose even better the central meaning of our entire project in the future'.[146] But nonetheless they were still faced with the task of imposing their meaning. To utterly bury the 'central meaning' of the 'Hamburg Theses' would have been as effectively disabling as to publicise them directly.

So, should we reconstruct the 'Hamburg Theses' even if we could? The good news is that the 'Hamburg Theses' are gone for ever. Nonetheless we know their general conclusions thanks to Debord's letter to Levin in 1989. Additionally, he wrote in the same letter that the 'Hamburg Theses' were mentioned directly in two articles, and indirectly in one.[147] However, the best

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[145] As we have seen the source of the *détournement* was Marx's 'celebrated formula'. Cf. Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703; Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44].'

[146] Debord, 'Lettre à Raoul Vaneigem, 15 février, 1962,' p. 127.

[147] In fact, he wrote that it was directly mentioned in three articles in the seventh issue, but he is wrong. For instance, on one of the pages cited in the letter to Levin the *dérive* to Hamburg after the Fifth conference is mentioned, but not the Theses which resulted. Cf. Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703; I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 31.

place to start is with Debord's pithy rendering of what the conclusion of the 'Hamburg Theses'
— "Now, the SI must realise philosophy" — meant in the "present" context:

> The summarised conclusions evoked a celebrated formula of Marx in 1844 (in his
> *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel Philosophy of Right* [— *Introduction*]). At that
> moment, it meant that we should no longer pay the least importance to any of the
> conceptions of revolutionary groups that still survived as heirs of the old social
> emancipation movement destroyed in the first half of our century; and therefore that we
> should instead count on the SI alone to relaunch as soon as possible a time of
> contestation, by revitalising all of the starting points which were established in the
> 1840s.[148] Once established this position did not imply the coming rupture with the
> artistic "right" of the SI (who feebly wanted to continue or only repeat modern art), but
> rendered it extremely probable. We can thus recognise that the "Theses of Hamburg"
> marked the end of the first era of the SI — that is research into a truly new artistic
> terrain (1957-61) — as well as fixing the departure point for the operation that led to the
> movement of May 1968, and what followed.[149]

As we will see more clearly in chapter seven, below, not 'pay[ing] the least importance to any
of the conceptions of revolutionary groups' was aimed squarely at the old conceptions
revolutionary organisation based upon the figure of the political militant. Thus, Raoul
Vaneigem has recently noted that in the case of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, it was not the theory

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[148] The second clause of the forgoing sentence has been particularly hard to translate accurately in English. Earlier English translations have rendered it the opposite of my translation — i.e. 'therefore that we should instead *no longer* count on the SI alone to relaunch as soon as possible a time of contestation'. I had used such renderings unquestioning (for instance in my article, 'Three Situationists walk into a bar: or, the peculiar case of the Hamburg Theses', *Axon: Creative Explorations*, no. 8), and indeed the fault of this use lies only with myself. Thanks to Tom Bunyard I was alerted to my error. Nonetheless I have not been able to shake off completely the ambiguity of this sentence. It makes sense that after deciding 'that we should no longer pay the least importance to any of the conceptions of the revolutionary groups that still survived', the SI would 'count on' itself '*alone* to relaunch as soon as possible a time of contestation' [my emphasis]. I believe that my confusion in this regard was produced by the corollary belief that the SI also began to see its project as emerging directly from the lived experience of alienated, everyday life — i.e. that 'Situationist theory is in people like fish are in water' — I.S., 'Du rôle de l'I.S.,' p. 17. Thus I thought it was reasonable that the SI would no longer count on itself alone. However, upon reflection this conclusion makes no sense; further, the comment of Debord was pointedly aimed at what he perceived as the failure of other ultra-left groups like Socialisme ou Barbarie and to a lesser extent the *Arguments* group.

[149] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989].'

which was lacking, but rather the practice of the group based on the idea of 'political militancy' which it had inherited from its Trotskyist and Leninist progenitors.[150] Additionally, soon after the 'Hamburg Theses', the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group moved into its final crisis, namely the split carried out over 1962 and 1963, that weakened both sides and led to their eventual demise.

What's more, by Debord's lights the SI was proved correct by the May movement of 1968. And indeed, it is hard to disagree. Not only did the PCF prove to be one of the main impediments to the surpassing of the May 1968 movement into a revolutionary situation, but also the SI became better known and influential in the student movement after the Strasbourg scandal of November 1966.[151] On the basis of the influence of their radical critique and the patent influence it exerted on the revolutionaries of 1968 and after, we can argue that in the French context the SI alone 'relaunched' a 'time of contestation'.[152]

However, Debord's letter is not the only source for information on the 'Hamburg Theses'. I have already mentioned another letter Debord wrote to Raoul Vaneigem in 1962 regarding 'impos[ing] […] the central meaning of our entire project in the future'.[153] This letter confirms Debord's latter comments regarding the central meaning of the 'Hamburg Theses' lying in the project of 'supersession' — in particularly of art, philosophy, politics and the economy. In doing so Debord invokes the 'Hamburg Theses' as the 'height of avant-gardism' — the latter-day progeny of Rimbaud's silence and Malevich's white square on white.[154] However there is

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[150] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'. I will return to this question in more detail in chapters three and six, below.

[151] Although the claim that the SI helped launch the movement of May 1968 is controversial for some (mostly for those who had successfully given up working for revolution by 1968 and their latter-day disciples) it is undoubtedly true that the SI deeply influenced much of the student "trigger" of the movement of May 1968. For instance, the Situationist pamphlet, *De la misère en milieu étudiant*, and the resulting scandal around its publication at the University of Strasbourg in 1966 became a touchstone for the marked spike in student radicalism in France in 1967 and 1968. Additionally, Situationist ideas were well represented among those students who sparked the May 1968 events, in particular the Situationist inspired *Enragés*, as well as many of the participants in the March 22nd Movement, at the University of Nanterre.

[152] Although this is far from saying that the SI was alone responsible for the movement of May 1968, just that in the face of the Stalinist PCF and a dissident far-left that either retreating into the academy or ideally fought the battles of the past, the SI alone turned to the project of relaunching a revolutionary movement on a new basis.

[153] Debord, 'Lettre à Raoul Vaneigem, 15 février, 1962,' p. 127.

[154] Ibid.

another source of (in)direct information on the 'Hamburg Theses', namely two articles by the Situationist Attila Kotányi, written in 1962 and 1963.

In the seventh issue of *Internationale Situationniste* Kotányi penned the article 'The Next Stage', which included one of the few direct references to the 'Hamburg Theses':

> What in the original program of the SI is the most disturbing, that keeps people from sleeping? Responding to this question in philosophical terms is clearly absurd. And yet, as present-day philosophy situates itself entirely within the theme of 'abandoning philosophy' (cf. the *Hamburg Theses*) […].[155]

Why is it absurd to attempt to render the most disturbing aspect of the SI's original program in philosophical terms? Kotányi's reference to the 'original program' is, without doubt, that outlined in the *Report on the Construction of Situations* (1957) and what I have called the Situationist hypothesis. On the basis of the 'original program' he believed it was absurd to render the Situationist hypothesis in philosophical terms, because in its crucial attitude toward bourgeois culture, the hypothesis had already outlined a project effectively coterminous with Marx's 'realisation and abolition of philosophy'. Indeed, one of the results of the 'Hamburg Theses' was precisely the drawing together of the earlier Situationist project of surpassing art, summarised in the ideas of 'pre-situationist' and 'anti-situationist' works, with that of Marx's idea of the supersession of philosophy as the theoretical content and opening gambit in the revolutionary overcoming of capitalism.

How then should we understand Kotányi's idea of the entirety of present day philosophy being situated within the theme of 'abandoning philosophy'? Kotányi did not mean 'supersession', in the sense of either the Situationist hypothesis or the SI's discovery of Marx's notion of the 'realisation and abolition' of philosophy (what they would call 'supersession' [*dépassement*], harkening to the Hegelian tone of Marx's argument). Rather he was arguing that present day philosophy had abandoned the perspective of Marx, which is to say that philosophy can only be realised by being abolished as a separate practice. Thus, the abandonment of philosophy and its

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[155] Attila Kotányi, 'L'Étage suivant,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (Avril 1962), p. 47.

supersession is not the same thing. Indeed, the deeper importance of Kotányi's statement is that the only possible philosophy that can be practiced in the present is one that acknowledges its movement toward supersession, i.e. a philosophy whose realisation is immersed in a revolutionary surpassing of capitalist everyday life.

The corollary of this is that those philosophers engaged in philosophy — whether academic or not, Marxist or otherwise — who do not acknowledge the 'suspended' nature of present philosophy — suspended that is between its 'separate', 'alienated' existence in capitalism and its 'realisation' in everyday life — have 'abandoned philosophy'. One could, like Theodor Adorno, argue that the supersession of philosophy missed its moment of realisation, and so its supersession turns into a philosophical one (which is to say a primarily reflective, contemplative one).[156] However the SI eschewed such a perspective. The end of philosophy announced by Marx in 1844 has not been rendered obsolete in turn by the force of its incompletion. Instead, the continued existence and development of bourgeois society has suspended its supersession, and this suspension is embodied in the apparent "development" of philosophy in the intervening century and more. This, of course, is not to say that philosophy has not developed since 1844. Rather, the condition of philosophy's realisation in Marx and the Situationists' reckoning is its overcoming as an activity apart from the transformation of everyday life. Thus, the project of its "realisation" had been thwarted even as philosophy continued in its official capacity as the "critic" of everything that exists.

If we turn to other parts of the seventh issue of the *Internationale Situationniste*, the issue in which Kotányi's article appeared (quoted above), we can clarify further this idea of 'abandoning philosophy' and 'surpassing' and 'supersession'. Indeed, the seventh issue of the journal, published in April 1962, was the first issue of the journal to be published after the composition of the 'Hamburg Theses' and the break with the artists in February 1962. As such it was a singularly important example of what they called their 'dominant position in culture',

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[156] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Continuum, [1966] 1973, p. 3.

summarising their turn to the 'realisation' of philosophy as it was outlined in the 'Theses'.[157] The SI argued that such a positon was a result precisely of not constituting either a 'positive politics' or a 'positive art': 'our strength is in never having done such'.[158] Here the key to the SI is in their project of surpassing — *dépassement* — the Situationist hypothesis that was not strictly *Situationist*. Situationist 'artistic production', indeed any of the productions of the SI tended toward being 'anti-situationist' insofar as they instantiated 'positive' objects of production (for example, the shiny metal covered issues of their journal). Thus, the SI made explicit their paradoxical relation to current productions. Indeed, we need to go further than Kotányi did at the Fifth Conference at Göteborg and argue that *all productions* of the SI this side of an anti-capitalist revolution were 'anti-situationist' — even and especially the journal. For instance, in a telling comment to his old International Letterist comrade Ivan Chtcheglov, Debord spoke of the paradoxes of publishing the Situationist journal. On the one hand, he spoke of the 'inevitable difficulties' and 'inevitable faults […] of certain types of actions' — difficulties which encompassed the 'very tiresome' nature of 'publishing a slightly "regular" journal'.[159] However such 'faults' were the 'inevitabilities' of acting within and against capitalist culture. Thus, it was necessary, on the other hand, to conceive of the SI's journal as the 'living voice' of the group in order 'to envision more precisely supersessions'.[160] The question then was not one of purity or purely Situationist activity, but rather how best to both draw out the actual movement of potential and real supersession under conditions which tended to both efface and dissimulate such a movement. What then would distinguish such 'anti-situationist' productions under the sign of supersession would be whether or not they would explicitly contribute only to a 'simultaneous destruction and strengthening' of the art and politics of their time.[161]

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[157] I.S., 'Du rôle de l'I.S.,' p. 19. The SI considered themselves to have the 'dominant position in culture', insofar as the dominant culture of capitalism was necessarily fragmentary and largely self-contradictory.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Debord, 'Lettre à Ivan Chtcheglov, 30 avril 1963,' p. 220.
[160] Ibid.
[161] I.S., 'Du rôle de l'I.S.,' p. 19.

The seventh issue of *Internationale Situationniste* was the first in which the SI typified their ideas as 'totally popular': 'Situationist theory is in people like fish in water'.[162] An incredible claim you would imagine, but consistent with Marx's conception of the urgent solution to the problems of Young Hegelianism to be found in the sometime enigmatic figure of the 'proletariat'. Here the SI clearly identified the Situationist hypothesis and the Situationist project with a general revolutionary project as outlined by Marx in the 1840s. However, they also argued that this had, in any case, been the path of the SI from its beginning — at least for some Situationists. From the perspective of 1962, the SI argued that they had already rendered a 'provisional report on surpassing [*dépassement*]' from the first issue in 1958.[163] The real importance of this claim was that the tendency which emphasised not just the 'anti-artistic' aspect of the SI, but the idea of 'a society of realised art', were the same ones most dedicated to the experimentations with surpassing art and capitalist society. As we will see in the coming chapters, Situationists dedicated to the 'art-world' and finding a place for the SI within this world, tended to identify less with the project of 'surpassing'. Indeed, the 'Hamburg Theses' was a clear repudiation of art and the art-work so far by the SI, even and especially as it played with the idea of absence and surpassing in artistic form. Thus, Kotányi's point regarding 'anti-situationist' art at the Fifth Conference should be further understood as the repudiation of all activities which abandoned the project of their own supersession.

The identification of the SI's earlier project of 'realising art' with the 'surpassing' that Marx posed in the 'realisation and abolition of philosophy' is without doubt the most important aspect of the 'Hamburg Theses'. Just as the SI posed a new proletariat like fish swimming in Situationist water, Kotányi wrote in 'The Next Stage' that the argument against abandoning philosophy was 'not solely a question of "our program"', even though, paradoxically, '[e]veryone compulsorily participates, for or against, in the Situationist program'[164]. In words redolent of Marx in 1873 avowing himself both a student of Hegel and the source of Hegel's

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[162] Ibid., p. 17.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Kotányi, 'L'Étage suivant,' p. 47. Note that Vaneigem in the same issue, in his article 'Basic Banalities [part 1]', quoted an uncited source to the extent that 'our ideas are in all the heads'. I believe this is Vaneigem slyly quoting the 'Hamburg Theses'. Cf. Raoul Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (I),' *Internationale situationniste*, no. 7 (Avril 1962), thesis 7, p. 36.

'inversion', Kotányi argued that the 'chestnut' of supersession [*dépassement*] had been dropped by 'surrealism, Marxism, existentialism, etc. […] when it got too hot'.[165] Indeed this 'chestnut' in which everyone 'compulsorily participates' whether they like it or not, is none other than the 'infinitely complicated conflict of alienation and the struggle against alienation' — which is to say the 'supersession' immanent to the conflicts of everyday capitalist life.[166] Here is the 'most disturbing' aspect of the SI's 'original program', the terror which Marx identified in the ruling class when confronted with the 'abomination' of the revolutionary dialectic — which is to say the possibility of the positive negation of bourgeois private property.[167] The SI declared themselves as the 'positive pole' of modern alienation; revolutionary 'mapmakers' whose charting of 'the poverty of [modern, spectacular] wealth' revealed a world growing over-stuffed with modern, spectacular misery.[168]

From the perspective of 1989, Debord emphasised the singularity of the SI's project as on the one hand, 'pay[ing] [not] the least importance to any of the conceptions of the revolutionary groups that still survived as heirs of the old social emancipation movement'; and on the other, that 'the SI alone' would 'relaunch as soon as possible a time of contestation'.[169] However in 1962 Kotányi emphasised the philosophical and anti-philosophical dimensions. And of course, so he would. The 'Hamburg Theses' concluded with the call to realise philosophy. As we have seen, the SI had come to the conclusion that those philosophers who had abandoned the project to 'realise and abolish philosophy' as Marx had argued for in 1844, had in effect abandoned philosophy even and especially as they practiced its Marxist afterlife. Indeed, this perspective would soon have ramifications for philosophers like Henri Lefebvre and militant theorists like Cornelius Castoriadis. The main question for the SI was simply not giving up on Marx's 'ruthless criticism of everything' — for philosophers and intellectuals more generally this necessarily included their specialised role under conditions of modern capitalism. Like Marx,

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[165] Kotányi, 'L'Étage suivant,' p. 47.
[166] The phrase, 'infinitely complicated conflict of alienation and the struggle against alienation', is redolent of Henri Lefebvre's phrasing, particularly in the first volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life*.
[167] Karl Marx, 'Postface to the Second Edition [1873],' in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, [1867] 1976.
[168] I.S., 'Du rôle de l'I.S.,' p. 18.
[169] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.

the SI argued that their 'materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated'.[170] In the face of philosophers and leftists who had given up on this radical criticism, the SI posed themselves as one aspect of the thought to which alienated reality struggled. Thus, perhaps paradoxically, it was the SI that had not given up on philosophy or art in the midst of their project of supersession (as opposed to the abandonment of this perspective):

> It is not difficult for the thought whose role is to call everything into question. It suffices to have not *abandoned* philosophy (like most philosophers), to have not abandoned art (like most artists) and to have not abandoned the contestation *of present-day reality* (like most [political] militants). These questions are thus entailed in the same surpassing [*dépassement*].[171]

The abandoning, then, is what the SI would also call the spectacular and ideological abandonment of everyday life. That is, the abandonment of practising philosophy, art and politics in the mode of their supersession, of realising them in everyday life through the critique and supersession of capitalist everyday life, rather than retreating into their specialised, scholarly elaboration, and thereby contributing to the reproduction of the capitalist social relation (I will return to this problem in the following chapters).

A year later in 1963 Kotányi would helpfully shorten and clarify his previously elusive comments in the 'second version' of the slightly renamed 'Next Stage', for a German language version of the Situationist journal:

> After the intensive discussions which took place between 10 and 18 October 1961 in Hamburg, we came to the general conclusion that:
>
> 1. The specialists of thought, logic, language and artistic language, and of dialectics and philosophy, had in essence abandoned or had not taken on the main themes, results,

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[170] Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' in *Karl Marx & Frederich Engels Collected Works, Vol.5*, New York: International Publishers, 1976, thesis 3, p. 4.

[171] Internationale Situationniste, 'Les mauvais jours finiront,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (Avril 1962), p. 13.

historical ambitions, critical audacity, and methodical hopes, dreams and desires of their

predecessors;

2. For these reasons, we were forced to adopt the following hypothesis: one can

discover in one form or another in every person in industrialised countries, an obvious

aspiration for an interesting everyday life, and a criticism (formulated by us) of its

[present] production [*sa mise en scène*] — even though this aspiration and this criticism

is largely suppressed.[172]

Again, Kotányi mentioned Hamburg, but this time he did not mention the public secret that was

the 'Hamburg Theses'. The date accompanying his words is strange, because it is more than a

month after Debord's later recollection of the 'Hamburg Theses' being composed in 'early

September' 1961. However, these are all possible smokescreens. To add to the confusion the SI

had also referred to their composition in 'Summer 1961', placing the 'Hamburg Theses' before

September.[173] What confirms that these points are a part of the 'Hamburg Theses' is the

reference to the 'intensive discussion', the similarity between these points and Kotányi's

association of them with the 'Hamburg Theses' the year before, and finally their resonances

with Debord's explanation of the 'summarised conclusion' of the 'Hamburg Theses' in 1989.[174]

I suggest that on this basis and the discussion above of the central importance of the idea of

'surpassing' or 'supersession', not to mention the form of the 'Hamburg Theses' as the

attempted embodiment of this central meaning, we can combine Kotányi's 'general conclusions'

with Debord's explanation of the 'summarised conclusion' of the 'Hamburg Theses'.

What remains of the 'Hamburg Theses'

'The simplest summary of its rich and complex conclusions could be expressed in a single

phrase: "Now, the SI must realise philosophy." *At that moment, [this] meant:*

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[172] Attila Kotányi, 'L'étape suivante (Deuxième version, mars 1963)', originally published in "Der Deutsche Gedanke" no. 1, April 1963 http://debordiana.chez.com/francais/gedanke.htm#etape.
[173] I.S., 'Du rôle de l'I.S.,' p. 20.
[174] It is possible that Kotányi's reference to 'October 1961' is a reference to another discussion. However considering that Debord also wrote in his 1989 letter that 'Alexander Trocchi, who was not present in Hamburg, would subsequently contribute to the "Theses"', it is also possible that the 'Hamburg Theses' was a composition that crossed the bounds of time and space — as many compositions do. Cf. Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.

1. 'The specialists of thought, logic, language and artistic language, and of dialectics and philosophy, had in essence abandoned or had not taken on the main themes, results, historical ambitions, critical audacity, and methodical hopes, dreams and desires of their predecessors'.

2. 'For these reasons, we were forced to adopt the following hypothesis: one can discover in one form or another in every person in industrialised countries, an obvious aspiration for an interesting everyday life, and a criticism (formulated by us) of its [present] production [sa mise en scène] — even though this aspiration and this criticism is largely suppressed'.

3. [Thus] 'We should no longer pay the least importance to any of the conceptions of the revolutionary groups that still survived as heirs of the old social emancipation movement destroyed in the first half of our century'.

4. 'Therefore [...] we should instead count on the SI alone to relaunch as soon as possible a time of contestation, by revitalising all of the starting points which were established in the 1840s'.

Conclusion

By eschewing a physical object-form for the 'Hamburg Theses', the SI drew attention not only to the ephemerality of their production, but also attempted to directly gesture at the becoming of their production; i.e. there was no physical residue to be fetishized. It is no wonder that Debord believed the 'Hamburg Theses' were the height of avant-gardism, their 'formal innovation' a striking 'experimental originality'.[175] Here was a theoretical text that argued despite its absence, and through its absence. Indeed, keeping in mind the argument regarding the 'anti-situationist' nature of the works of the Situationists assayed above, the 'Hamburg Theses' is the art work at its limit. It was the deliberate refusal to publish the results, even though a process of creation has taken place — which is to say objectified. Through the 'Hamburg Theses' the "authors" not only formulated what they saw as crucial conclusions for the Situationist project; they also threw down a challenge to those artists both in the SI and on its margins. The 'Hamburg Theses' was a Situationist work that wrestled with its anti-situationist nature; an attempt to conjure

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[175] Ibid., pp. 703, 704.

supersession in a work of art or theory, in both its content and form, in a world hostile to such a project. Nonetheless, like so many innovations of the avant-garde, Debord was disabused of any lasting originality in form. In 1989 he noted that such "documents" made up an increasing part of the discrete operations of capital and the state. Indeed, we should also not forget that the absent object of production was hardly a new topic for Debord, considering his film without images in 1952. Unlike that film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, the 'Hamburg Theses' did not conjure supersession so much as embody it in its very non-repeatability. Perhaps, by way of Walter Benjamin, we can think of the 'Hamburg Theses' as an attempt to eschew the degradations of artistic 'aura' in the wake of the spectacle of mass reproduction.[176]

In the next chapter I will turn to an examination of the development of Debord's critique of art and culture more generally. In particular, I will look at the idea of 'cultural decomposition' by which Debord synthesised and systematised his critique of the artistic avant-gardes that was underway during the time of the Letterist International (1952-1957). As we will see, the idea of a Situationist "work" which problematized the 'fragmentary works' of the traditional arts was developed and presented as the only way to avoid the perils of artistic repetition and the corralling of the avant-garde as producers for the burgeoning art market. However, it was one of the "discoveries" of the artistic avant-gardes in particular, that Debord saw as providing a method and methodology for moving beyond the artistic impasse of 'fragmentary' and thus alienable "works" — what Debord and his comrade Gil J Wolman called '*détournement*'. In essence, *détournement* (from the French 'to divert' and 'to hijack') was the practice of re-using the past results of human activity. First systematised by the writer Isidore Ducasse under the idea of progressive plagiarism, it had been further developed by Picasso, Georges Braque and the Dadaists as 'collage' and 'photomontage'. However, Debord believed its import was far-retching, pointing to both the irreducibly plagiaristic nature of human creation, and thus contrary to the capitalist attempt to delimit the "rewards" of practice via the imposition of intellectual and material property rights. As we will see, *détournement* and the critique of cultural decomposition were the cornerstones of the formation of the SI. Nonetheless, disputes

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[176] Cf. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1936),' in *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, [1955] 1969.

over the nature of realising the Situationist project in the capitalist present would lead ultimately

lead Debord and others to explore methods and perspectives less prone to artistic recuperation.

Chapter two: Poetry necessarily without poems

[T]here will be no more philosophy, no history, Poesy alone will survive all other

arts and sciences. — Friedrich Hölderlin[177]

The social revolution [...] cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future.

— Karl Marx[178]

As we have seen in chapter one, the idea of the *supersession* of art embodied in the 'Hamburg Theses' was itself drawn from the Situationist hypothesis and the practice of unitary urbanism. The hypothesis proposed to solve the impasse encountered by the anti-artistic criticism and practice of the earlier avant-gardes by way of projecting the immediate possibility of a different conception of creative activity based upon the potential and limits of present capitalist society. Thus, the Situationist hypothesis was anticipatory in the sense that this activity — *Situationist* activity properly conceived — would only be possible beyond the 'modern ruins of the [capitalist] spectacle'.[179] In this way the hypothesis proposed to supersede art by way of an activity — the construction of situations — that would draw upon artistic practice without being reduced to the present conception or limited nature of such. Nonetheless the anticipatory nature of the Situationist project remained perplexing for some members of the SI, provoking Debord to argue for the 'pre-situationist' notion of their present practice in order to distinguish it from Situationist activity properly conceived. But such an argument was necessarily ambiguous considering both the *Situationists* of the SI and the *pre-situationist* nature of their practice. But as the SI pointed out, the term 'Situationist' would in any case be a moot point by the time conditions conducive to the Situationist hypothesis prevailed: 'it will disappear when each of us

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[177] G.W.F. Hegel, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Schelling, 'The Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism (1796/97),' in *Essays and Letters*, London: Penguin Books, 2009, p. 342. Note that this document was most likely cooperatively written by Hölderlin and his then friends G.W.F. Hegel and F.W.J. Schelling.

[178] Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852),' in *Marx Engels Collected Works, Vol. 11*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979, p. 106.

[179] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 325.

will be a fully-fledged Situationist, and no longer proletarians struggling for the end of the proletariat'.[180]

The ambiguity was not practically resolved until the expulsion of the majority of the German and Scandinavian sections of the SI in February and March 1962, which followed relatively quickly upon the discussion regarding the 'anti-situationist' nature of artistic production under present capitalist social relations, in August 1961. However, 'practical' is the key here, because the ambiguity necessarily remained in the idea of the *Situationists* of the Situationist International. In the same article quoted above the group declared that 'we are artists only insofar as we are no longer artists: we just realise art'.[181] Considering that this statement was made two years after the 'anti-situationist' declaration and the so-called break with the artists, it is important to remember the ongoing artistic dimensions of the group — i.e. that for the Situationists of the SI, the *supersession* of art was inextricably caught up in what they considered the *realisation* of art.

It is important to note that the Situationist notion of the 'surpassing of art' (*dépassement de l'art*) — which is to say the simultaneous *abolition* and *realisation* of art — was not initially phrased in this Marxian register. At the time of the foundation of the SI, the supersession of art was posed in terms of realising the Situationists hypothesis. Debord had then argued about the present state of culture being fragmented, the result of the 'active' and 'repetitive' decomposition of culture. In particular, he took aim at the 'traditional arts' and the concept of the 'art work'. The production of art-objects were posed as 'fragmented', and in their stead an 'integral art' was proposed, that would draw upon artistic technique, but not be reduced to such (insofar as 'fragmentary', alienable art-objects would not be the aim of such activity).[182] Nonetheless, it is legitimate to pose the Situationist hypothesis in terms of the later notion of the 'supersession of art'. What was encompassed in Debord's critique of 'decomposition', and the

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[180] I.S., 'Le questionnaire,' p. 25.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957].'

method and methodology of '*détournement*', was precisely what came to be proposed under the terms '*dépassement*'.

In this chapter I will examine Debord's early conception of 'cultural decomposition' and '*détournement*', both of which anticipated, and were incorporated into, the notion of the supersession of art (*dépassement de l'art*) of the later, more Marxian SI. My main aim is to demonstrate that this later problematic — often described paradoxically as commensurate with the so-called 'break' with art in 1962 — was already central to the Situationist hypothesis, albeit in a less Hegelian register. Without doubt Debord was 'engaged' with Marx, but at this point his engagement seemed to be bereft of both the Hegelian dimensions and in particular Marx's conception of the philosophical roots of revolutionary praxis outlined in some of his early work.[183] Nonetheless, the supersession of art, already outlined in the Situationist hypothesis, is the thread of continuity in the Situationist project envisaged across the first and second phases of the SI. Those critics who have described the 1962 'break' in the SI in terms of breaking from art to politics, have not sufficiently understood the Situationist hypothesis as already posing the 'realisation' and 'supersession of art'. Rather than breaking with art — a perspective, moreover already encompassed explicitly in *The Report on the Construction of Situations* (1957) and the *Amsterdam Declaration* (1958/59) — the SI's project of the realisation of art, by way of its supersession, was put on a more general footing from around 1962. That is to say, in the words of the 'Hamburg Theses', the SI turned to the 'realisation of philosophy' — the idea of supersession already outlined in the hypothesis — a project fitfully elaborated and delayed from the foundation of the SI in 1957. I will more fully deal with this question, and the role of 'poetry, in the Situationist sense of the term', in chapter five.

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[183] I use 'Marxian' here cautiously, simply because Debord was operating within a Marxian problematic from the outset. However, Debord is often described as a 'Marxist' with little or no attention to his critical transformation over time. For instance, he more obviously operated within a fairly orthodox Marxist problematic, at least to around 1960, as is indicated by his adaptation of the 'contradiction between the forces and relations of production' problematic to his notion of decomposition. Additionally, he used the orthodox conception of 'base/superstructure' with an eye to his critique of the cultural superstructure, in these early years. However, few commentators ever pay attention to how he problematized this use, particularly with regard to his explicit rejection of the orthodox conception of the 'superstructure' merely being a secondary, and derivative 'reflection' of the economic base. And, indeed, the idea of such a 'superstructure' is missing entirely from his 'mature' work, *The Society of the Spectacle*. I will return to this question in chapters three and six below.

The idea of 'cultural decomposition' was an important precursor to Debord's later, more detailed elaboration of the concept of 'spectacle'. Certainly, the concept of 'spectacle' was already present in Debord's 1957 elaboration of cultural decomposition; however, at that point the more general sense of spectacular passivity was understood as a function of cultural decomposition, and subordinated to such an understanding. Nonetheless, Debord's conception of the severing of the artistic and political avant-gardes in the 1930s would re-emerge in his conceptualisation of the spectacle, particularly with regards to the pivotal role he attributed to the rise of Stalinism and its ideological representation of the 'revolutionary proletariat' (in a word, its *false* representation). I will return to this important question, and its relationship to the development of the concept of spectacle, in chapter seven.

The impasse of Dada and Surrealism

In his 1967 work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord distinguished the Situationist project from Dada and Surrealism precisely on the grounds of that the Situationist project was at once the negation *and* positive realisation of art:

> Dadaism wanted *to abolish art without realising it*; and Surrealism wanted *to realise art without abolishing it*. The critical position later elaborated by the *Situationists* has shown that the abolition and realisation of art are inseparable aspects of a single *surpassing of art* [*dépassement de l'art*].[184]

Debord's point regarding the original Surrealist group is perhaps more complex and nuanced than the quote here indicates. By 1967 Debord presented the Situationist project as the revolutionary 'surpassing of art' which Dada and Surrealism had at best aspired to, but in their respective one-sided fashions had failed to achieve. In the quote above we find the final Hegel-Marx inflected pronouncement on Dada and Surrealism. However, Debord in the mid-1960s was restating a judgement that had already been passed ten years before, though not couched in the language of the 'realisation, abolition and surpassing of art'. What is perhaps lost in the later assessment was the recognition that Surrealism at its best (that is to say Surrealism at its

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[184] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 191.

commencement in 1924) was both an attempt to continue and resolve the impasse upon which

Dada foundered — namely its exhaustion and self-destruction. In an early 'Declaration'

addressed at disabusing opinions on the Surrealist project, the Surrealists would inadvertently

summarise the crux of their strength and weakness: 'We have nothing to do with literature; but

we are quite capable, when necessary, of making use of it like anyone else'.[185] The tragedy of

Surrealism, in Debord's reckoning, was that their attempt to fashion a practice beyond art

became consumed by the artistic methods — both means and end — they pursued. Thus,

Surrealism's greatest failing was not so much being the direct 'opposite' of the Dada group's

negativity; but rather being largely unaware or at least insufficiently wary of the dangers of

recomposing a 'positive', artistic project in order to overcome the apparent exhaustion of

Dadaist negativity in the early 1920s.

Nonetheless, the experiences of the original Surrealist group held an important place in the eyes

of Debord. In the founding document Debord noted that '[t]he Surrealist program, affirming the

sovereignty of desire and surprise, [and] proposing a new way of life, is much richer in

constructive possibilities than is generally realized.'[186] Despite Debord's and the SI's hostility to

the 'really existing Surrealism' of the 1950s and 60s, the attitude of Surrealism's significance

for revolutionists was precisely that practical and ephemeral aspect of Surrealism that was least

amenable to recuperation and commodification:

> The privileged place of this movement […] comes from the fact that Surrealism
>
> presents itself as a total project, concerning the whole way of living. It is this intention
>
> that constitutes Surrealism's most progressive aspect, which obliges us to compare
>
> ourselves to it, so as to differentiate ourselves […][187]

As Debord makes clear it is this 'total project' that is of most import as opposed to the more

conventionally accepted notion of Surrealism's significance lying in its peculiar aesthetic

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[185] Andre Breton and et. al., 'Declaration of 27 January 1925,' in *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*,
ed. Franklin Rosemont, London: Pluto Press, 1989, p. 317.
[186] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action
de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 312.
[187] Guy Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 8 August 1958,' in *Correspondence: The Foundation of the
Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 149.

sensibility.[188] Thus in 1958 the SI drew attention to the contradiction of contemporaneous

Surrealism as that between the 'profound demand' of its original program 'and the stagnation

accompanying its pseudo-success'.[189] Of some interest in this regard was the extent to which

Debord and the SI's criticism of the Surrealists would be partially taken up by more moderate,

"mainstream" criticism. For instance, Maurice Nadeau in his 1964 history of the Surrealist

project:

> The fact still remains that, thanks to Dada, surrealism in its early days rejected the
>
> literary, poetic, or plastic solution. […] The surrealists' ambition was not to build a new
>
> aesthetic on its ruins. […] The movement was envisaged by its founders not as a new
>
> artistic school, but as a means of knowledge […].[190]

Nonetheless, Nadeau was unable to understand the root of Surrealism's failure to remain

faithful to its original ambition. He merely remarked that '[i]t has been noted that art ultimately

found a place within Surrealism' without understanding the enervating nature of this, or indeed

offering to explain what he meant by such an observation.[191] Worse, from the Situationist

estimation, was his inability to locate the foundational error precisely in the Surrealists idealistic

fetish of the unconscious.

Debord wrote in 1957 that,

> [t]he error that is at the root of Surrealism is the idea of the infinite richness of the
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> unconscious imagination. The cause of the ideological failure of Surrealism was its
>
> belief that the unconscious was the finally discovered grand force of life; and the fact
>
> that the surrealists revised the history of ideas in accordance with that simplistic
>
> perspective and never went any further. We now know that the unconscious imagination
>
> is poor, that automatic writing is monotonous, and that the whole ostentatious genre of
>
> would-be "strange" and "shocking" surrealistic creations has ceased to be very

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[188] Ibid.

[189] Internationale Situationniste, 'Le bruit et la fureur,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (Juin 1958), p. 5.

[190] Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Howard, Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, [1964] 1978, p. 86.

[191] Ibid.

surprising. The formal fidelity to this style of imagination ultimately leads back to the polar opposite of the modern conditions of imagination: back to traditional occultism. […] Opposing an apparently irrational society in which the clash between reality and the old but still vigorously proclaimed values was pushed to the point of absurdity, surrealism made use of the irrational to destroy that society's superficially logical values. […] But we need to go forward, not backward. We need to make the world *more* rational — the necessary first step in making it more exciting.[192]

Debord argued that Surrealism's very success in the art world, and in the Surrealist *imagery* taken up more widely in cinema and advertising, was due to 'the most modern side of this society's ideology' renouncing 'a strict hierarchy of factitious values and openly use[ing] the irrational, including vestiges of surrealism.'[193] It was precisely the *works* of Surrealism, and the appropriation of Surrealist ideas and images in advertising and cultural industries more broadly, that could play a role in defusing the more radical claims of the original Surrealists.

Such works were 'de-fanged' of their critical Surrealist context in the interests of the 'ordinary aesthetic commerce' of capitalism.[194] The Situationist Mustapha Khayati commented in 1966,

> Dada realised all the possibilities of *what to say*, and closed forever the door on art as a specialised practice. It definitively posed the question of the realisation of art. Surrealism was valuable only as the continuation of this demand — in its literary works it was *reactionary*. Because the realisation of art (which is to say poetry, in the Situationist sense of the term) signifies that one cannot realise oneself in a "work", but on the contrary one realises oneself — full stop.[195]

The idea of the realisation of oneself, 'full stop', brings us back to the idea of the form of the 'Hamburg Theses' as their most important aspect; i.e. the meaning of the 'Hamburg Theses' as immanent to their ephemeral production.

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[192] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' pp. 312-13.
[193] Ibid., p. 313.
[194] Ibid..
[195] Khayati, 'Les mots captifs (Préface à un dictionnaire situationniste),' p. 51.

As already noted, in Debord's 1957 criticism of Surrealism the role of the failure of the revolutionary movement of 1917 to 1921 was seen as central to the failure of Surrealism and Dada. The 'ebbing of the movements that had tried to promote liberatory innovations in culture and everyday life' was conceived as following in the wake of the ebb of the 'world revolutionary movement' after 1920.[196] As the SI would mordantly put it some years later, since the 1920s 'artistic movements have only been the imaginary repercussions of an explosion that never took place, an explosion that threatened and still threatens the structures of society' — which is to say a general, worldwide communist revolution.[197] Even though the SI never simple-mindedly reduced Surrealism to the revolutionary period in which it emerged (and was an expression of), they nonetheless drew attention to the subordinate role of the Surrealists vis-à-vis the revolutionary project. To the extent that the Surrealists themselves misunderstood this relationship was the extent to which they compromised with the existing institutions, whether political or artistic. Their 'total project' of a new way of living was much closer, in this regard, to the revolutionary aspirations of their time of emergence, much more so than their artistic evocations and misbegotten political allegiances. The idea that the non-artistic practice of Surrealism, or at least its conception, was more important than the extant works of the Surrealists would find a resonance in the SI's examination of Marx, the history of the revolutionary workers' movement and their criticism of the political expressions of anarchism and communism. It is here that the self-destruction of art and the critique issuing from such met with the experience of a workers' movement being destroyed partly through its own alienated organisations — primarily the Stalinist organisations of the 1920s and 30s, but also the problem of representative organisation more generally. As the SI would say of the revolutionary contestations of the past century, it was "failures" like the Paris Commune more than the ambiguous "successes" like the Soviet Union that proved more instructive and better guides to

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[196] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 317.
[197] I.S., 'Le questionnaire,' p. 24.

the future.[198] In this sense the "success" of Surrealism at the hand of the art institutions of the capitalist West was surely a marker of its failure as revolutionary contestation.

The decomposition of culture

As we have seen, the failure of Dada and Surrealism was seen by Debord as a moment of a more general society wide failure, a part of the 'decomposition of culture' which he initially dated from around 1930. Most significant in this regard was the failure of the revolutionary wave at the end of the First World War and the consequent re-stabilisation of European capitalism and its further extension. Perhaps most significantly for the later development of the theory of the Spectacle, it was this period of re-stabilisation that first saw the capitalist class drawing upon the signs and significations of revolutionary contestation in order to dissimulate and justify the continued rule of capital — what the SI would later call 'recuperation'.[199] As Debord argued later in *The Society of the Spectacle*, it was the appearance of the capitalist counter-revolution in Germany in 1919 under the banner of socialism that marked the functional origin of the Spectacle, and thus of 'cultural decomposition' too: 'the revolutionary *representation* of the proletariat at this stage became both the principal factor and central result of the general falsification of society'.[200]

For Debord in 1957 'culture' in the abstract could be designated as 'a complex of Aesthetics, [and] of sentiments and traditions: the reaction of an era on everyday life'.[201] However, such a designation cannot simply be reduced to an expression of Marxist orthodoxy, even though Debord then appeared to share the language of the 'cultural superstructure' reflecting the 'economic base'. Debord and the SI would more clearly move away from this orthodoxy in the coming years, particularly in the face of their more considered engagement with the works of the young Marx and heterodox Marxists like Henri Lefebvre, Karl Korsch and the early work of

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[198] Cf. I.S., 'Les mauvais jours finiront.'
[199] The terms 'to recuperate'(*récupérer*) and 'recuperation' (*récupération*) were first used in 1960, and became more common in the work of the SI from 1961-2. See the present chapter introduction above for more.
[200] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 101. My emphasis.
[201] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 310. For the sake of clarity of argument, and also because of Debord's focus on criticising the development of artistic and anti-artistic activity, he bracketed his definition of culture, excluding 'the scientific or pedagogical aspects of culture' (ibid.).

Georg Lukács. But even at this point Debord eschewed a simple-minded dualism and crude determinism. In the same document, he wrote of how 'what we call "culture" reflects, but also prefigures in a given society, the possibilities for the organisation of life'.[202] Here 'reflection' and 'prefiguration' are based firmly on the possibility and reality of a struggle over the possible organisation of life. Implicit in this presentation is the possibility and reality of radical agency and subjectivity.[203] Nonetheless the single most important influence on the idea of culture undergoing both 'decomposition' while 'reflecting' the struggles around such a decomposition as well as 'prefiguring' its solution was Marx's idea of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production.

Insofar as the 'decomposition of culture' refers to *artistic* culture, Debord owes a debt to his onetime mentor, the Letterist (and founder of 'Letterism') Isidore Isou — and in particular his theory of cultural 'amplitude' and 'chiselling'. Briefly, Isou argued that from the time of Homer all the arts underwent an 'amplic stage' [*le stade amplique*], in which the development of the content of these arts — e.g. poetry, novels, paintings — reigned over the development of these various forms (that were, nonetheless, extensively developed). Following upon this, the development of art entered into a 'chiselling period' [*une période ciselante*] in which the forms became more important than the content. This was typified as a turning inward of art in which the expressive content of art became subordinated to formal experimentation. Such a 'chiselling' culminated in the literary experiments of Mallarmé and Joyce as much as the painterly experiments of the Impressionists and Cubist. Ultimately it gave way to art's

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[202] Ibid., p. 309.

[203] Without doubt Marx spoke of the need to distinguish 'between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic — in short, ideological forms'. However, he curiously continued: 'in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.' Here we find an ambiguity that cannot be resolved by recourse to the theory of reflection beloved of Marxist orthodoxy. On the one hand Marx argues for the critical need to distinguish between the real nature of 'the material transformation of the economic conditions of production' and the ideas that we have about 'production', both true and false. Nonetheless it is precisely these 'ideological forms' in which people become aware of the conflicts of 'the economic conditions of production' and indeed *'fight it out' in this "realm"*. That is to say it is in the realm of culture and cultural production — 'the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic — in short, ideological forms' in which the material struggle over the conflictual nature of 'the economic conditions of production' is fought out, and hopefully, won. Cf. Karl Marx, 'Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859],' in *Karl Marx Frederich Engels Collected Works Volume 29*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987, pp. 263-64.

autodestruction — i.e. the death of art itself in Dadaist nihilism.[204] What marks out Isou's

theory from Debord's *détournement* of it, are respectively, its more grandiose and more limited

nature. More grandiose in the sense that Isou pictures the seesawing of art from the amplic to

the chiselling stages as taking in the entirety of Western art since its emergence in pre-Classical

Greece; more limited, however, in the sense that Isou's perspective is strictly artistic, in the

sense of the development of poetry, painting and attendant arts. What distinguishes Debord's

theory is that he, on the one hand, delimited the object of criticism to the artistic practices of

capitalist modernity, and on the other, attempted to understand these practices as both reflective

of and a part of the constitution of culture considered more generally.[205] In transforming Isou's

theory into his more general theory of 'cultural decomposition', the influence of Marx was

crucial.

The idea that culture was undergoing a decline was widespread among sections of the Marxist

left in the post-war world, particularly as it pertained to so-called 'Americanisation'. Such a

notion was derived on the one-hand from the burgeoning mass-market dominance of US culture

through cinema, radio and eventually television. On the other hand, it was understood with

recourse to Marx's idea of the conflict between the 'forces' and 'relations of production', in

which strictly capitalist social relations (of private and state property, of commodities and the

market) tended to 'contradict' or 'oppose' the emergent possibilities for new productive and

technical processes in this case (made possible by the industrial relations of production).

Needless to say, the SI's criticism was from the latter, not the former. They did not engage in a

defence of high European culture against low American pulp. Culture was just so much raw

material.

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[204] Cf. Martos, *Histoire de l'internationale situationniste*, pp. 14-15.
[205] Recently McKenzie Wark has argued that Isou's theory was simply one which proposed '[a]ll forms
— aesthetic and social — mov[ing] from a stage of *amplification* to one of *decomposition*' — Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, p. 13.
However this is to pre-empt Debord's *détournement*, and thus critical development and rejection of Isou's
theory. Wark also seems to believe that the 'chiselling' phase is a consequence of the decomposition
rather than its harbinger. The source of his confusion appears to be Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: a
secret history of the twentieth century*, London: Faber and Faber, 2001 [1989].

In the definition of 'cultural decomposition' which appeared in the first issue of the SI's journal, the basis of this decline in the general development of the capitalist social relation was made clear. Decomposition is the '[p]rocess by which traditional cultural forms have destroyed themselves under the influence of the appearance of superior means of controlling nature, which permit and demand superior cultural constructions.'[206] In the same definition the Situationists, drawing upon Isou, distinguished two phases: 'an *active phase* of the decomposition and effective demolition of the old superstructures — which ended around 1930 — and *a phase of repetition* that has prevailed since then.'[207] In the first years of the SI the active phase of the decomposition was associated with the period of the early 20th century avant-gardes, i.e. from the first Futurist Manifesto of 1909 up until the publication of the second Surrealist journal series in 1930.[208]

1. Decomposition as the achieved state of mid-twentieth century culture

Toward the end of the First World War the Dada movement posed the lack of meaning and emptiness at the heart of the moral and aesthetic order of a Western capitalism then engaged in mass slaughter. Dada emerged shortly after the Zimmerwald conference in Berne, at which internationalist socialists proclaimed the war the result of the rivalry and global drive of the

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[206] I.S., 'Définitions,' p. 14. However, unlike the orthodox Marxists the SI did not attribute this solely to the mysterious structural 'agency' of a mode of production abstracted from the actual social agents and often conflictual relations which constituted such a 'mode'.

[207] Ibid. My emphasis. Though note the severely delimited sense of active 'amplification' in this version, which extends no further into the past than the most radical experiments of Romanticism in the 1790s. What will become clearer is that Debord oscillated between understanding artistic 'decomposition' in terms of the historical avant-gardes (1909-1930) and a longer term sense of decomposition which begins either in early modernity with the emergence of artists "freed" from religious subject matter and dependence, or the radical experiments of the early Romantics in the 1790s and later. Cf. Martos, *Histoire de l'internationale situationniste*, pp. 83-100.

[208] I.S., 'Définitions.' The last date itself was disputed by the SI. In the first issue of the SI's journal the apogee of the Surrealist avant-garde was seen to have coincided with its foundation, i.e. in 1924. The Situationists believed that the group around André Breton had almost immediately gone wrong, to the extent that its more interesting proclamations about the need to live differently began to be usurped by the production of art-objects. However, it was the Surrealists ill-fated alliance with Stalinism, signalled by the re-foundation of their journal in 1930 that marked the definitive end of the Surrealist experiment for the SI. 1930 was also the year the Surrealists' renamed journal, *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution*, was first published. Debord would later comment that '[t]he point is not to put poetry at the service of revolution, but to put revolution at the service of poetry. It is only in this way that revolution does not betray its own project. We don't intend to repeat the mistake of the surrealists, who put themselves at the service of the revolution right when it had ceased to exist.' I.S. [Debord], 'All the King's Men.' See also Internationale Situationniste, 'Amère victoire du surréalisme,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (Juin 1958).

imperialist nations of Europe.[209] However the Dadas' international perspective, though undoubtedly influenced by the internationalists and revolutionists who struggled to turn the inter-imperialist war into a revolutionary class war, was primarily aesthetic — or more correctly *anti-aesthetic*. Dada was in essence an artistic rejection and negation of such aesthetic claims of the eternal beauty and truth of art. Indeed, it was Dada's 'anti-aesthetic' which Debord and other Situationists most highly prized, insisting that to recuperate it as a new aesthetic (as was the fashion in the 1950s and 60s) was to precisely negate its critical worth, in particular its rejection of a transcendent notion of beauty.

In the 1950s and 60s the Letterist International (hereafter LI) and then the SI noted the reappearance of the formal concerns of the pre-war artistic avant-gardes under different names. For example, movements called 'Tachism', 'Abstract Expressionism', 'Neo-Dada', 'New Realism', 'Pop Art', the 'New Novel' and the 'New Wave', were marked by the systematic elaboration of formal questions — i.e. matters of artistic form — that had already been pioneered by the pre-war avant-gardes.[210] The LI and the SI pointed out that such elaboration was overwhelmingly repetitive and unoriginal. However, the originality or lack thereof was the least of their concerns. Rather the repetitive unoriginality was a function of the defeat of the pre-war avant-garde projects, particularly the defeat of their most revolutionary aspects: Dada's desire to abolish art and Surrealism's desire to realise art in everyday life. Both of these desires tended to move beyond art as a practice which produced works in order to pose the revolutionary transformation of the conditions of everyday life itself. The Situationists argued that such anti-artistic and artistic projects of the avant-garde rose and fell with the fortunes of the revolutionary proletarian movements between 1917 and 1937. In the absence of a successful mass revolutionary movement the artistic avant-garde tended to be forced back onto the very

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[209] International Socialist Conference at Zimmerwald, 'Manifesto [1915]' https://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/zimmerwald/manifesto-1915.htm.
[210] 'Tachism' was primarily painterly, so was 'Abstract Expressionism'. 'Neo-Dada' and 'New Realism' were primarily Dada-like in their range of what they considered and made as art-objects (e.g. Jean Tinguley's 'meta-machines'); nonetheless their focus was primarily on the fetishized art-object. Similarly, 'Pop Art' drew heavily on Dada and Surrealism in the visual arts (and helped diffuse such visual styles throughout mass culture, e.g. rock'n'roll, cinema, magazines, etc.). The 'New Novel' and 'New Wave', descriptors for various 'neo' groupings of novelists, poets and film-makers, drew upon the literary corpus of Dada, Surrealism and other pre-war avant-garde trends.

artistic terrain they had attempted to overcome or crack open. Such was the basis of the non-revolutionary reconstitution of a so-called 'avant-garde' artistic movement in the post-war period.

The pre-war avant-gardes had tended to decompose the artistic forms they had revolted against, calling into question the often simple minded claims of art's social role, and the part it played in the communication of the ruling ideas of an era. The Dadas and Surrealists contested such ideas, but not just in the realm of 'content'; they also took aim at the status of the art-object, 'decomposing' the received notions of what figured as art by drawing on new techniques: collage, *détournement*, noise poetry, automatic verse, cut-ups, the use of 'found' objects, dream accounts, mock trials, scientific inquiries, stream of consciousness, drug use, games, cinematic experimentation, non-conformist morality, and so on. Indeed many discovered that the formal contestation of the art-object tended to pose the possibility of doing away with specialised artistic activity altogether — a discovery that lead some artists to identify their artistic rebellion with the contemporary insurrectionary revolutionary movements.[211] However their attempts to overcome such art faltered with the defeat of these revolutionary movements. The radical 'decomposition' of the art-object — and the society which ghettoised specialised artistic activity — became suspended on the brink of the revolutionary overthrow of art, defeated alongside the final liquidation of the pre-war revolutionary movement by Stalinism, Fascism and "liberal" capitalism. On such a basis art, culture and bourgeois society more generally was "saved" in the 1930s and 40s.

This is not to say that there were no revolutionary artists who attempted to restart or continue the 'surpassing of art' of the pre-war avant-gardes. For instance, the SI itself was the result of various attempts to understand the impasse of the pre-war avant-gardes, notably Letterism (1945-the present), Cobra (1948-51, aka the International of Experimental Artists), the Letterist

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[211] Such an identification was not universal among these groups. For instance, the movement of Breton and other surrealists toward the French Communist Party (PCF) proved controversial among the extended surrealist circles of the time and lead to resignations, exclusions and heated public denunciations. For Breton's perspective cf. 'Second Surrealist Manifesto [1930],' in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1998. For an alternate view cf. Georges Bataille, 'Notes on the Publication of 'Un Cadavre',' in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, London: Verso, 1994.

International (1952-57) and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (1955-57). Taken as a whole these groups were constituted by both older participants of the pre-war avant-gardes and younger artists who had come onto the scene during or in the wake of the war. Of most interest for our concerns were the ways these groups situated themselves with reference to the pre-war avant-gardes, in particular the perceived failure of these groups and their relation to the revolutionary workers' movement. Even if the spirits of Dada and Surrealism stalked the artistic concerns of these groups they were never resurrected in a merely formal or uncritical fashion. What all of these groups shared to a greater or lesser degree was the belief that a revolutionary art must pose not only the possibility of overcoming the deficiencies of artistic practice in capitalist society, but must rather pose as its 'work of art' the transformation of human activity itself.[212] This was particularly the case with regard to the 1950s trajectory of Asger Jorn, Constant Nieuwenhuys, and Guy Debord (respectively members of Cobra, Cobra and IMIB, and the LI — and later all members of the SI).

With the advent of the LI and the work of Guy Debord in particular, we have the fashioning of the critique of 'the decomposition of culture' that will be carried over into the SI. What this theory allowed Debord and others to establish was that the decomposition of culture was the departure point for the reconstitution of a revolutionary avant-garde in culture; which is to say it was the cultural moment that the Situationists ranged themselves both *within* and *against*. 'For us, surrealism was solely a beginning of the revolutionary experiment in culture, an experiment which almost immediately soured practically and theoretically.'[213] Rather than merely repeating or chiselling away at the artistic forms of the recent past, such an avant-garde, in order to be worthy of the name, must reorient the most advanced workers in the cultural world toward the suspended project of the old avant-garde: the transformation of everyday life. Only the most extreme versions of artistic decomposition which incorporated the conscious critique of their

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[212] This was perhaps less so in Isidore Isou's version of 'Letterism'. However Isou contributed the valuable concepts of the Amplic (*amplique*) and the Chiselling (*ciselante*) phases of artistic development which contributed to Debord's understanding of the repetitive, 'chiselling' nature of the bulk of post-war avant-garde art. Needless to say Debord rejected Isou's idealistic notion of his own role in the rebirth of a modern 'Amplic' phase of art, preferring instead to understand the crisis of art in terms of the success capitalism had experienced in subsuming art and other activities under the principle of the commodity-form.
[213] I.S., 'Le bruit et la fureur,' p. 6.

separate existence as art and the possibility of its overcoming could play a role in such an avant-garde. To that end the Situationist hypothesis was developed in order to draw out the only possible artistic activity under such conditions.

2. *Decomposition as the movement of art freed from Feudal dependence*

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord presented a long view of the development of 'culture' apart from other activities in everyday life. In this regard, he is most concerned with the emergence of 'art' and the 'artist' in the early Modern regimes of Europe; but the picture he paints resonates with Marx's and Raoul Vaneigem's ideas about the alienation that is attendant upon the divisions of labour and class hierarchy that become pronounced with the emergence of class and property in the ancient world:

> In the historical society divided into classes, culture is the general sphere of knowledge and of representations of life — which is to say that it is the power of generalisation existing *apart*, as the division of intellectual labour and the intellectual labour of division.[214]

Here we also gain the sense that Debord's 1957 definition of culture is more clearly cast as a product of capitalist modernity. Cultural production is at once a result of 'the division of intellectual labour' from other types of labour, and is the 'intellectual labour' that represents, oversees and cements such a division. In such a social order, artistic production is one aspect of intellectual labours in general (insofar as we understand by 'intellectual labour' activities which are *predominantly* intellectual in nature). Even though the 'intellectual aspect' of human labour cannot be utterly separated out (and thus a 'non-intellectual' labour is perforce a ludicrous notion), the separation of primarily 'intellectual' tasks have been attendant upon the hierarchical divisions of class society; thus the commanding and supervisory roles of the rulers and mangers of society have more often than not dovetailed with their domination of the thought of their societies.

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[214] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 180.

The 'independence' of culture is firmly established with the emergence of cultural practices from Feudal-Religious dependence. However, its 'independence' is paradoxical; at once 'the locus of the search for lost unity' and the growing comprehension of its inadequacy as it marches 'toward its self-suppression'.[215]

> Culture emerged from the history which dissolved the way of life of the old world. But as a separate sphere it is still only the intelligence and manifest communication that remains partial in a *partially historical* society. It is the meaning of a world which hardly makes sense.[216]

Debord used 'historical' in a Marxian sense; i.e. that society was historical to the extent that all or almost all of those who constituted such a society were freely and consciously engaged in its production, reproduction and transformation. Thus, capitalism and other class societies can be typified as 'partially historical'. The paradox of 'culture' for the SI, particularly the cultural production of modernity, is to be at once of the world and seemingly outside it. The latter flows from the role of the arts and the artist, whose object of representation is a world held at a distance. However the dilemma of the arts is not ontological but rather *social-ontological*. It is a reflection of the new found 'freedom' of the artist, a freedom moreover that mirrors the 'freedom' of the labourer stripped of their feudal dependence and now free to sell their labour-power on the market.[217]

Debord pictured the struggle within cultural production, between innovation and tradition, as freighted in favour of innovation (mirroring the historical movement of bourgeois production generally). However such a bias is precisely both a reflection of and feature of the 'total historical movement' of these societies.[218] Bourgeois society generates its own gravediggers in Marx's famous image; or as Vaneigem puts it, '[w]hatever is not superseded rots, and whatever

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[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid., thesis 183. The last line can literally be translated as 'It is the sense of a world which hardly makes sense.'

[217] Of course, this idea of 'freedom', in the sense of labour power freed up for sale and exploitation, cannot be reasonably attributed to most people, let alone Western Europeans, until the more extensive development of global capitalism in the second half of the 20th century.

[218] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 181.

is rotten cries out to be superseded.'[219] Culture 'ends' to the extent that the cultural projects of modernity — for Debord these are primarily the philosophical-scientific ('knowledge') and artistic — manifest in two opposite sides: 'the project of its supersession [*dépassement*] in total history, and the organisation of its preservation as a dead object in spectacular contemplation.'[220] Thus, and perhaps more correctly, bourgeois culture ends insofar as it comes to directly manifest a struggle over the nature of culture, one in which the stakes are either the perpetuation of alienated forms (and the tendency toward a repetition of forms) or the possibility of a cultural production indistinguishable from the general production of everyday life (and thus post-capitalist).

The "*détournement* of prefabricated aesthetic elements"[221]

Détournement is a practice that can be simply and clearly defined as 'the reuse of pre-existing artistic elements in a new unity'.[222] The Situationists made no proprietary claim over such a practice, rather they identified it with 'an ongoing trend of the contemporary avant-garde before and since the formation of the SI.'[223] However, *détournement* can also be understood as an attempt to characterise a general conception of creative practice, i.e. that all production involves the appropriation and transformation of past practices and their results. Certainly, we can differentiate between *détournement* as a modern phenomenon and *détournement* as a general conception of creativity. Nonetheless, the Situationists were primarily interested in former sense of *détournement*, insofar as their conception drew upon the potentialities for the creative appropriation of everyday life under the impact of industrial production.

We do well to remember that we should not reduce *détournement* to either mere plagiarism (in the sense of the theft and presentation of pre-existing 'content' as the private property of the thief) or contemporary senses of 'cultural appropriation'. As Mustapha Khayati would remark

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[219] Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oakland: PM Press, [1967] 2012, p. 137.
[220] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 184.
[221] I.S., 'Définitions,' p. 13.
[222] Internationale Situationniste, 'Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (Décembre 1959), p. 10.
[223] Ibid. Nonetheless, Debord and the Letterist International were the first to consistently name such a practice '*détournement*'. Cf. McDonough, *The beautiful language of my century: reinventing the language of contestation in postwar France, 1945–1968*, pp. 26-7.

some years later, to *détourn* Marx, to 'salvage' his work for the present, it was necessary to

'make it more precise, to correct it and reformulate it in the light of a hundred years of

reinforcement of alienation and of the possibilities of negating alienation', much as Ducasse

suggested (who nonetheless called *détournement* 'plagiarism').[224] Such reformulations could

simply be the re-contextualisation of the original, as much as the development of aspects of his

theory or even the rejection of some of it.

The first comprehensive presentation of *détournement* appeared in an article authored by Guy

Debord and Gil J Wolman in 1956: '*Mode d'emploi du détournement*' (lit. 'Instructions for the

use of *détournement*'). Debord and Wolman attempted to systematically present *détournement*,

a task hitherto being performed haphazardly or not at all. Indeed, one can consider their work as

the most sustained presentation since Isidore Ducasse had first presented his 'plagiaristic'

method in 1870.

In Debord's and Wolman's article several examples of *détournement* were provided. They

quickly dismissed any real interest in *détourned* novels or 'metagraphic writing'[225] even while

admitting that it would be possible to carry out.[226] More amenable to *détournement*, at least for

[224] Khayati, 'Les mots captifs (Préface à un dictionnaire situationniste).'

[225] 'Metagraphic' writing was practiced by the Letterists and the International Letterists. In essence it was a version of the collages of the Dadas, mixing words, images and other found objects. Isidore Isou defined it in 1964 thus: 'Metagraphics or post-writing, encompassing all the means of ideographic, lexical and phonetic notation, supplements the means of expression based on sound by adding a specifically plastic dimension, a visual facet which is irreducible and escapes oral labelling.' Isidore Isou, 'Selections from the Manifestos of Isidore Isou' http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/lettrist/isou-m.htm (accessed 6 October 2010).

[226] The Situationist Michele Bernstein would write and publish two *détourned* novels, *Tous les chevaux du roi* (1960) and *La Nuit* (1961). Not Bored has perhaps unfairly called the former a 'trifle' not worth reading today, even though it provided some material for André Bertrand's more famous "Cowboy Philosopher" *détournement*, in which he used dialogue from the novel. Not Bored, 'At Dawn: the Novels of Michèle Bernstein in Historical Perspective,' (1 August 2013). http://www.notbored.org/michele-bernstein.pdf. Both of Bernstein's novels are *roman-a-clefs*, the almost identical tale of young Situationists drifting around Paris and beyond. What is perhaps the most important aspect of these novels is the use to which they were put. Without doubt we can extract valuable information from these novels, information bearing on the lives of some members of the Letterist International on the eve of the foundation of the SI. However, we must also pay heed to the role these novels played in the life of Bernstein the Situationist. Both novels made money for her and thus the group, just as they parodied the 'serious' novels of Françoise Sagan and Alain Robbe-Grillet. As Debord and Wolman had written in 1956 '[w]e have since come to realize that a situationist-analytic enterprise cannot scientifically advance by way of such works. The means nevertheless remain suitable for less ambitious goals' (Debord & Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du detournement [1956],'). Indeed, the novels of Bernstein were never intended to be examples of *Situationist* practice (such as the explicitly Situationist propaganda of the SI). Nonetheless, less cautious writers would attempt to recuperate *détournement* to the end of the novel form. George Perec would explicitly take up *détournement* in his work, particularly as a method used in his first

the Situationist use of *détournement*, was the cinema. 'It is obviously in the realm of the cinema that *détournement* can attain its greatest effectiveness and, for those concerned with this aspect, its greatest beauty.'[227] Debord would soon eschew any talk of aesthetics, at least in terms of the Situationist use of cinema; however, embedded here is the Situationist idea of the use of the arts for propaganda purposes. Cinema was both an appropriately fully industrial art form, one that was clearly and solely the product of industrial capitalist society, and the one most appropriate for *détournement* under present conditions. Cinema's intimate relation to both industrial production and the sometimes large-scale creative collaborations that were required, made it the one artistic practice that clearly pointed toward the transformative potentialities of collaboration.

'The Cowboy Philosopher'[228]

"*What exactly takes up your time?*" "Reification." "*I see, it is a very serious work with big books & many papers on a great big table.*" "No, I go for walks. Mainly I just walk around."

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two novels, *Les choses* (1965) — for which he would win the prestigious Renadot prize — and *Un Homme qui Dort* (1967). His English translator and biographer has remarked on the important influence that Debord and the Situationists exerted upon him (cf. David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words*, Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1993, pp. 280-83). Considering the acclaim that Perec garnered in his life for his playful and challenging novels, it is worth remembering the SI's belief that novels were now only useful for 'less ambitious goals'. Thus, in the eleventh number of the Situationist journal, the group took Perec to task ('Perec, the consumer of *Things*') for posing that the 'crisis of language' could be understood in merely artistic terms, and without explicit reference to '[t]he revolutionary sense that has dominated all truly modern art […] in the context of the struggle against dominant conditions, that is to say, the project of a new communication'. Cf. Internationale Situationniste, 'Décomposition et récupération,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 10 (Mars 1966), p. 59.
[227] Debord & Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement [1956].'
[228] Greil Marcus has called the panel containing the *détourned* passage from Bernstein's novel *Tous les chevaux du roi*, "The Cowboy Philosopher". Bertrand's *détournement* was a component of his *La*

Debord knew that the relation of sound and image in the cinema could be distorted to the point of the complete divorce between the two — such was the lesson of Isou's '*cinéma discrépant*' most radically applied in Debord's own *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*.[229] Debord and Wolman imagined the complete *détournement* of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), 'without necessarily even altering the montage'.[230] However, such *détournement* was considered both 'moderate' and 'in the final analysis nothing more than the moral equivalent of the restoration of old paintings in museums.'[231] What is of prime interest to the authors, cinematically speaking, are more ambitious possibilities. '[M]ost films only merit being cut up to compose other works.'[232] Debord would go on to make precisely such films, reconverting 'pre-existing sequences' to new, critical ends. Even more importantly such cinematic projects, already on a grander industrial scale, are immediately more cooperative and social than the 'traditional' arts, and thus point beyond the production of 'works' to the production of urban milieus and even people.

Debord and Wolman outlined the minimum program of *détournement*:

> The entirety of the literary and artistic heritage of humanity must be used for partisan propaganda. […] It is in fact necessary to eliminate all remnants of the notion of personal property in this area. […] Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can be used to make new combinations. […] Anything can be used.[233]

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retourne de la colonne Durutti comic, which helped advertise the scandalise pamphlet co-written by the SI and students from the University of Strasbourg in 1966, *De la misère en milieu étudiant…*

[229] Isou's 'discrepant cinema' involved the radical decoupling of the image and sound tracks in his Letterist films — even up to their complete divorce. Cf. Kaira M. Cabañas, *Off-Screen Cinema: Isidore Isou and the Lettrist Avant-Garde*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014.

[230] Needless to say, Debord and Wolman were acutely aware not only of Griffiths' innovations but his racism. 'To cut through this absurd confusion of values, we can observe that Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* is one of the most important films in the history of the cinema because of its wealth of innovations. On the other hand, it is a racist film and therefore absolutely does not merit being shown in its present form. But its total prohibition could be seen as regrettable from the point of view of the secondary, but potentially worthier, domain of the cinema. It would be better to *détourn* it as a whole, without necessarily even altering the montage, by adding a soundtrack that made a powerful denunciation of the horrors of imperialist war and of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, which are continuing in the United States even now.' Debord & Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement [1956].'

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid., p. 221.

The last two sentences are perhaps the most explosive; any element — such as those experimentally put to use in the 'ready-mades' of Marcel Duchamp and the Dadas — could serve. Duchamp's 'ready-mades' had already ridiculed the ridiculous arbitrariness of the beautiful and the good. Debord and Wolman saw implicit in the ready-made something more interesting, and even "transcendental" vis-à-vis capitalist social relations — the possibility of re-using all of the results of past human practice (cultural or otherwise) in the planned and conscious construction of everyday life itself.

The Situationist presentation of *détournement* was disabused with regard to aesthetics. For instance, Lautréamont may have proposed that the 'novel' was the form best suited to his formula, but by the time Ducasse turned to write up his outline for a new poetics the novel had already grown stale.[234] What marked out the Situationist use of *détournement* from their artistic contemporaries (e.g. the neo-Dadas, Pop artists and the organisers of 'happenings') was precisely their sense of the pre-situationist nature of this use. *Détournement* heralded the end of art and culture as domains separate from everyday life; however, art was not to be remade on this basis, as an anti-aesthetic, but rather used in the criticism of capitalist society and, indeed, the capitalist fashioning and use of culture itself.

Thus, from the outset the overriding concern was to present the possibility of using art for 'partisan propaganda purposes'.[235] However their conception was not akin to the crudities of Socialist Realism or capitalist advertising. Rather they proposed that the extreme experiments of the artistic avant-garde (to the extent that they consciously espoused *détournement* or not) held the key to both the apparent exhaustion of artistic avant-gardism and the possibility of posing a more creative life beyond the bounds of capitalist production and consumption. Certainly when the SI presented a list of their achievements with regard to *détournement* in 1959, the list consisted primarily of what would have (and since has) passed for artistic works — 'Debord and Asger Jorn's book *Mémoires*, "composed entirely of prefabricated elements," […] Constant's

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[234] Comte de Lautréamont, 'Maldoror [1869],' in *Maldoror & the Complete Works of the Comte de Lautréamont*, Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2011, p. 190. In the decidedly non-novelistic 'Poésies' (1870), Ducasse was more concerned with demonstrating the possibilities of *détournement* in a general theory of poetics.
[235] Debord & Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement [1956].'

projects for *détourned* sculptures; […] Debord's *détourned* documentary film […], [Pinot] Gallizio's industrial painting; [Maurice] Wyckaert's "orchestral" project for assembly-line painting'.[236] But the artistic appearance belied the experimental intent of the group:

> Within culture the SI can be compared, for example, to a research laboratory, or to a party in which we are Situationists but nothing that we do is [yet] Situationist. This is not a disavowal for anyone. We are partisans of a certain future of culture and of life. Situationist activity is a definite craft that we are still not practicing.[237]

When Debord and Wolman wrote up an outline of *détournement* in 1956 they pointedly entitled the article the 'Instructions for the use of *détournement*'. Though it was a self-professed attempt to present *détournement* systematically, such reflections were made to the end of more clearly practicing *détournement*.

> By itself the theory of *détournement* scarcely interests us. But we find it linked to almost all the constructive aspects of the period of pre-situationist transition. Its enrichment, through practice, thus appears necessary.[238]

The emphasis on use over theoretical reflection would remain an ongoing reference in Debord's work. To separate the moment of reflection from the moment of action was to reinforce the ideological processes at work in capitalist society, in particular the bifurcation of the life represented and the life lived. *Détournement* is resolutely a practice, by turns theoretical and practical. To consider it contemplatively, i.e. to consider it as solely an object of enquiry or description would be to act in a way contrary to spirit of *détournement*. Indeed, Debord's and Wolman's rejection of a mere theory of *détournement* (i.e. *détournement* considered solely in a contemplative register) prefigured the later rejection of 'situationism' as a reified doctrine of the practice of Situationists.

It is worth recalling the initial Situationist definition of 'situationism'. The SI declared that there could not be a doctrine of 'situationism' because it would signify an abuse of the meaning of

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[236] I.S. 'Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude,' p. 11.
[237] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[238] Debord & Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement [1956],' p. 229.

'situationist'; specifically, because it would be the sundering of Situationist theory and practice in favour of a merely contemplative theory. When Debord and Wolman spoke of theory being 'scarcely' of interest, it is in the Situationist register; their theory of *détournement* is summary and systematisation, results and instructions for further experimentation. Thus, to understand *détournement* as merely an artistic technique or a new type of artistic technique is to misunderstand it. *Détournement* is not equivalent to what some structuralists and poststructuralists would classify under the name of 'intertextuality' or even a precursor of the present-day pop cultures of 'remix' and reappropriation.[239] Despite such resonances *détournement* in the hands of the Situationists was a part of a much broader criticism of capitalist culture and the effects of industrial production. For the SI did not just propose *détournement* as a methodology but crucially as the consequence of the development of capitalist industry — i.e. more thoroughly enabled by the development of industrial techniques of mass production and reproduction.

However, Debord's and Wolman's conception of *détournement* was never limited to the merely artistic, despite the primarily artistic results they called upon to flesh out their theory of *détournement*. In a definitional list of distinct Situationist terms published in the first issue of their journal, the SI wrote that *détournement* was short for the diversion of 'prefabricated aesthetic elements' into a 'superior construction of' place.[240] 'Prefabricated aesthetic elements' is a term as wide as the productive capacities and reality of mass production; indeed its association with the construction of place ('milieu') helps us to understand that the tension between the pro- and anti-art aspects of the early SI were already in place in their conception and practice of *détournement*.[241] In this regard a particularly suggestive aspect of the early theory was the notion of 'ultra-*détournement*', that is, the tendencies for *détournement* to operate in everyday social life.'[242] Examples provided were forms of playful and creative social

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[239] McKenzie Wark has pointed out that *détournement* 'could be reduced […] to a somewhat limited and clinical statement about *intertextuality*', but to do so would be to 'elide' its significance as something more than a mere addition 'to modernist poetics'. Cf. Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, p. 39.
[240] I.S., 'Définitions,' p. 13.
[241] Ibid. Also cee chapter 4 and 5 below.
[242] I.S., 'Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude,' p. 11.

interaction: the para-literary use of slang, secret languages, and 'passwords', as well as DIY clothing and disguises.[243] In many respects 'ultra-*détournement*' came closer to the imagination of a truly Situationist activity than the (anti) artistic activity surveyed simply because it was unremarkable — which is to say as of the mid 1950s largely *uncolonised* by the capitalist market. In the 1956 article, it was the instance of *détournement* most closely associated with the hypothesis of the construction of situations, 'the ultimate goal of all our activity'.[244]

More than even the Futurists, Dadas and Surrealists, Debord and Wolman singled out Isidore Ducasse, aka the Comte de Lautréamont, as their clearest predecessor. Not only did Ducasse practice *détournement*, described in terms of 'plagiarism', 'improvement' and 'development', he even attempted to theorise it amidst his various *détournements* in his final work written shortly before his death at age 24. Ducasse's advanced use of *détournement*, for instance his often lengthy plagiarism of selected texts in *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868), was the more remarkable for being largely misinterpreted or misunderstood until the 1950s. Prior to the Situationists the work of Ducasse had been considered as the work of a mad genius (for instance hostilely by the writer Léon Bloy and approvingly by the Symbolist Remy de Gourmont), or as precursor of Surrealist automatism (for instance Lautréamont's famous 'he is fair […] as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella!').[245] Such considerations were chiefly built upon his best known work, *Maldoror*. However, it was in his lesser known final work, *Poesies*, that Ducasse clearly and infamously outlined his method and its implications.

> Ideas improve. The meaning of words plays a role in that improvement. 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.[246]

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[243] Debord & Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement [1956],' p. 229.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Cf. Andrea S. Thomas, *Lautréamont, Subject to Interpretation*, Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2015, p. 26; Remy de Gourmont, ed. *The Book of Masks* (London: Atlas Press, [1896] 1994), p. 190; Lautréamont, 'Maldoror [1869],' p. 193 (Sixth Canto).

[246] Isidore Ducasse, 'Poésies [1870],' in *Maldoror & the Complete Works of the Comte de Lautréamont*, Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2011, p. 240. Translation modified.

Ducasse's *Poesies* was unashamedly a work of plagiaristic 'improvement'. The author not only did not hide this fact but, as we can see from the above quote he drew attention to it. The *Poesies*, with its formally aphoristic and prosaic structure, can seem like a negation of his first work *Maldoror*. Ducasse proclaimed to replace the evil of *Maldoror* — the often violent and presciently 'surreal' wanderings of its titular character — with the good of the *Poesies*; and yet the good that is presented is Marxian in its scope, the product of error and human labours, so much material artificially invested with human made myth and religious morality. For Ducasse the 'good' is the result of 'evil', the possibility of the new formation on the basis of the negation of the old. André Breton wrote that evil 'is for Lautréamont (as it is for Hegel) the form in which the motor force of history becomes manifest'.[247] In *Maldoror* transgressing against the good, particularly against the Christian and bourgeois conceptions of the good, is revelled in; it is a work of destruction and clearance, an (anti) novel hell bent on its own self-destruction. In the *Poesies* Ducasse moved onto the 'true' and the 'good', the work of establishing a new poetics, a new way of living poetry.[248] To interpret this movement in a conventionally moral fashion is simply banal. Indeed, a better analogy is the movement of the SI itself, from the utter negativity of the Letterist International to the attempt to experiment with a new poetics of revolution.

The *Poesies* appropriately does not ape the novel form like *Maldoror*. It is, rather, an evocation of Ducasse's conception of a poetic principle in prosaic terms, an elaboration in advance (*avant la lettre*) of the Situationist notion of poetry. It is at once a poetics and poetry in prose. Particularly in the second part of *Poesies* Ducasse deploys from first to last a series of maxims derived — *détourned* that is — from thinkers such as Blaise Pascal, François de La Rochefoucauld, and Luc de Clapiers, marquis de Vauvenargues.[249] Ducasse — much as Debord would do later in *The Society of the Spectacle* — plagiarised, corrected, developed and improved upon his borrowings; when necessary he even quoted from his sources, but usually

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[247] André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, trans. Mark Polizzotti, San Francisco: City Lights Books, [1940/5] 1997, p. 133.
[248] Ducasse, 'Poésies [1870].'
[249] Much like Nietzsche who discovered a little later that maxims and aphorisms are the "poetry" of prose.

only to bolster the arguments contained in his maxims.[250] In the *Poesies* he developed an argument about poetry, presented it as something that subtends and insinuates all literary labours (and perhaps labours *tout court*); for the poet's 'work is the code of diplomats, legislators, teachers of youth.'[251] Ducasse proposed to 'seek [the] laws' of ephemeral poetry, and in doing posed that '[j]udgements on poetry are of more value than poetry. They are the philosophy of poetry.'[252] Indeed though Ducasse argued that such a philosophy or 'science' could not be practically separated from the poems of a poet, he sought 'a science distinct from poetry', a science of its *source*.[253] Such a science or philosophy was not the watchman or spectator of poetry, rather '[p]hilosophy thus understood embodies poetry.'[254] Here Ducasse approached the Situationist conception of poetry, and indeed we can begin to see that his attraction to Debord and others exceeded his avowal of *détournement* as method. The *Poesies* is at once prolegomena to a philosophy of poetry, a work of poetry and the end of poetry as a mere poem. Indeed, Debord imagined that the 'Hamburg Theses', precisely because of their absence, and thus an instantiation of Ducasse's sense of poetry (of a poetry 'necessarily without poems'), could open the way to the 'explication of the *Poesies* of Lautréamont to schoolkids'.[255]

Conclusion

The 'decomposition of culture' is an important precursor and component of a full-blown theory of the 'spectacle' promulgated by the Situationists.[256] As we have seen, by 'decomposition' the SI understood not only the artistic decomposition of forms (i.e. the crisis and destruction of language and representation most obviously instantiated in Dada and Surrealism) but the general cultural decomposition of capitalist society. For the SI, the antagonistic core of capitalist modernity — i.e. the struggle between those forces dedicated to maintaining and extending capitalist society, and those contesting such a project — manifested as decomposition, i.e. the

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[250] 'The maxim has no need […] to prove itself. An argument demands an argument. The maxim is a law containing a set of arguments. An argument is complete in so far as it nears the maxim. [Having] [b]ecome [a] maxim, its perfection rejects the proofs of the metamorphosis.' Ducasse, 'Poésies [1870],' p. 239.
[251] Ibid., p. 237.
[252] Ibid., p. 242.
[253] Ibid., pp. 242, 246.
[254] Ibid., p. 242. 'The writer, without separating one from the other, can outline the law governing each of his poems.' (ibid.).
[255] Debord, 'Lettre à Raoul Vaneigem, 15 février, 1962,' p. 127.
[256] Cf. Bunyard, *Debord, Time and Spectacle: Hegelian Marxism and Situationist Theory*.

fragmentation of a coherent bourgeois culture. However, such fragmentation was not necessarily linked with a wider, mass revolutionary contestation (such as what took place between 1917 and 1937, and more recently between 1968 and 1981). Indeed, the severing of the connection between the artistic contestation of bourgeois culture, and the wider, mass insurrectionary contestation, lay at the heart of Debord's conception of decomposition. Thus, the avant-garde turning point of 1910-30 was conceived as the cultural decomposition commensurate with the general decomposition of capitalist society as evidenced by the First World War and its immediate aftermath — in particular the revolutionary wave opened in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and which was not completely closed until the suppression of the Spanish Revolution by the Stalinists and Fascists in 1937. However, the sense of this 'decoupling' of the artistic and political avant-gardes should be seen through the prism of the destruction of the revolutionary movement of 1917-1937. The chief problem the artistic avant-garde faced, was not merely being severed or decoupled from the mass movements with which they had identified (and in some cases merged), but rather being left suspended in the absence of such movements. Indeed, the confusion over the false representation of the continuation of such a movement (under the guise of Stalinism) proved not only vexing for the avant-gardists of the 1940s and post-war period, but would also provide much of the historical basis for Debord's later elaboration of the concept of spectacle. As Debord put it in 1958, explicitly evoking the past defeat of the revolutionary movements, 'the delay in the passage from decomposition to new constructions is linked to the delay in the revolutionary liquidation of capitalism'.[257]

The SI wrote of '*détournement*' that it was the closest that came to a 'signature style' for the group.[258] If *détournement* marked the early years of the SI, 'recuperation' [*récupération*] emerged as an important concept after 1960.[259] The Situationist sense of the word was applied

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[257] I.S., 'Définitions,' p. 14.

[258] I.S., 'Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude,' p. 11.

[259] For the purposes of this thesis, I have bracketed an examination of the influence that the Situationists exerted on so-called '*pensée 68*' (68 thought), and even the recuperation of their work by some of its more well-known representatives, such as Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In the case of the latter two, I want to briefly note the similarity between '*détournement*/recuperation' and Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical pair 'deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation'. It is hard to discount the

to those pro-capitalist practices that recovered critical ideas and practices in the interest of capitalism. The most obvious need for such a concept was the rapid development of precisely *recuperative practices* aimed at the artistic avant-garde in the 1950s and 60s. Indeed, the SI was on the receiving end of such; their conception of 'the construction of situations' and practice of 'unitary urbanism' were becoming increasingly discussed in more mainstream architectural and artistic settings.[260] However, the idea and practice of recuperation was perhaps even more keenly felt within the SI itself. In this sense, we can understand the fragmentation and effective cessation of experimental unitary urbanism after 1960, and the attempt to problematize the 'repetitive' artistic practices of some Situationists as 'anti-situationist'— i.e. as the use of the label 'Situationist' as merely a distinguishing mark for works that bore little relationship to the Situationist hypothesis, apart from the name.

In chapter five we will see that, despite the turn to a more explicit engagement with revolutionary politics, the turn away from the retreat of those artist-Situationists into what was, in essence, repetitive decomposition, was made by 'revaloriz[ing] the artist past of the SI'.[261] Such a 'revalorisation' was deemed necessary by Debord, Vaneigem and others precisely

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SI's influence on Deleuze and Guattari. This is particularly striking if we consider Raoul Vaneigem's elaboration of '*détournement*/recuperation' as 'de-sacralisation/re-sacralisation' in 1962: 'Myth […] is the place of the sacred, the extra-human zone from which the movement of private appropriation, among so many other revelations, is carefully banished. Nietzsche saw this well when he wrote, "All becoming is a shameful emancipation with regard to eternal being, which must be paid for by death" [*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*]. When the bourgeoisie claimed to substitute the pure Being of feudalism with Becoming, it in fact limited itself to de-sacralising Being in order to re-sacralise Becoming to its own profit. It thus elevated its own Becoming to [the status of] Being, no longer an absolute property but rather that of relative appropriation — a petty democratic and mechanical Becoming, with its notions of progress, merit and causal succession.' — Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (I),' p. 37 (thesis 9).There was no love lost between Deleuze and Guattari and the SI. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari never admitted such an influence, and the almost *complete absence* of reference to the SI, apart from a belated reference to 'situationism' in Deleuze's 1986 book on *Foucault*. Here, Deleuze reduced the SI to one of the 'rehearsals' carried out before 1968, that gave way to a historical praxis in 'which the present explains the past' and gives birth to the 'production of a new subjectivity'. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand, London: The Athlone Press, [1986] 1988, p. 115, fn. 45, p. 150. Of course, some would argue that Deleuze had cause for giving the silent treatment to the SI. In their ninth issue, August 1964, 'Gilles Deuleuze' (sic.) was listed as a 'collaborator' of the journal *Arguments*, and thus by way of both the boycott enforced on *Arguments* from 1 January 1961, and the more recent circular against Lefebvre (*Aux poubelles de l'histoire*, February 1963), Deleuze was strictly *verboten*. Cf. Internationale Situationniste, 'Les mois les plus longs,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 9 (Août 1964), p. 30; Internationale Situationniste, 'Renseignements situationniste [5],' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 5 (Décembre 1960), p. 13.

[260] Consider the Situationist, Constant Nieuwenhuys' article on unitary urbanism 'Contribution to Forum special issue on Fusion of the Arts and "Integration?... of What?" [1959],' in *The Situationists and the City*, ed. Tom McDonough, London: Verso, 2009.
[261] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.

because of what they found was shared by those in the political and artistic avant-gardes, i.e. an inability to pose 'a new type of free activity' beyond older visions of 'militant' political or artistic practice. I believe, that those critics who have described the 1962 'break' in the SI in terms of breaking from art to politics, have not sufficiently understood the Situationist hypothesis as already posing the 'realisation' and 'supersession of art'. Additionally, they have underestimated, or more often ignored the significance of the 'supersession of art' for the SI's critique of political alienation. Therefore, in the next two chapters I will examine the tensions that existed in the early SI, particularly as expressed in the debates and arguments over the role of artistic practices in the elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis and unitary urbanism. On the basis of this I will turn, in chapter five, to show that nonetheless, 'poetry, in the Situationist sense of the term' came to figure prominently in the development of this criticism, simultaneously as an attempt to draw upon the most radical principle of the Situationist hypothesis, and recover — i.e. *détourn* — Marx's conception of 'revolutionary practice' from the orthodox abyss of the politics of labour.

Chapter three: In search of a coherent revolutionary project

Without coherence [...] the SI today should be considered as without interest

— Guy Debord, 1963[262]

The internal debates of the SI, with a focus on their early practice under the term of 'unitary urbanism', are essential to understanding the transformation of the SI's project from one focusing on the critique of culture into one caught up with the reconstitution of a general, revolutionary movement of contestation. In the first three issues of the SI's journal — June 1958, December 1958 and December 1959 — unitary urbanism emerged as the central concern of the group, i.e. as the experimental practice by which the Situationist hypothesis would be elaborated. However, it would be the preponderance of unitary urbanism that would result in the first major crisis in the group, resulting in one of its chief advocates and experimenters — Constant Nieuwenhuys — resigning in June 1960.

In September 1958, Constant Nieuwenhuys (hereafter, Constant) initiated a debate regarding the 'means and ends' of situationist activity. Constant believed that the collaborative elaboration of unitary urbanism should be the sole focus of the group's experimental work. As such, he rejected fellow Situationist Asger Jorn's formulation of the 'free artist' as a reactionary holdover of bourgeois conceptions of the role of the artist and the individual. Constant believed that Jorn's 'free artist' gave too much importance to the individual, and in effect found a place for the practice of the 'traditional arts' in the Situationist project. Further, Constant emphasised the positive role for machinery and industrialisation in the elaboration of unitary urbanism over what he perceived as Jorn's more artisanal and thus 'reactionary' approach.

Constant's argument set off an ongoing debate over the role of the artist in the group that would not be fully resolved until the 'break' with the artists in early 1962. The initial response of the editorial committee, which included Debord and Jorn, attempted to resolve what Constant saw in terms of an opposition, arguing that Jorn's idea of a 'free artist' was an attempt to anticipate

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[262] Guy Debord, 'Note sur la cohérence [1963],' in *Guy Debord : Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006, p. 635.

the possibilities offered to subjective creation and expression beyond either art, or the restricted sense of bourgeois individualism. The debate quickly resulted in the draft 'Amsterdam Declaration', written by Debord and Constant, which was accepted by the group the following year. The Declaration attempted to find a resolution to the argument by clearly eschewing, on the one hand, the practice of the 'traditional arts' while on the other hand defending Jorn's conception of the 'free artist', insofar as unitary urbanism would 'entail the authentic accomplishment[s] of the creative individual' (Amsterdam Declaration).

The debate, however, was not resolved with the adoption of the Amsterdam Declaration at the Third Conference of the SI in March 1959. In fact, the debate between Debord and Constant polarised more and more. In these debates, between 1959 and 1960, Constant argued that unitary urbanism should be the sole focus of the group. He believed, further, the Situationist hypothesis was of little or no practical value. Debord continued to insist that the Situationist hypothesis was an absolute necessity. Not only did it contain the Situationist critique of art, but it also pointed beyond the merely artistic or architectural elaboration of unitary urbanism. However, Debord's point can be better understand as his opposition to Constant's reduction of the hypothesis to one of the *means* of elaborating the hypothesis — in this case, Constant's primarily architectural elaboration of unitary urbanism. One of the most interesting aspects of Debord's defence of Jorn's perspective, was that he considered the use of any means — artistic or otherwise — as potentially important components of the elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis. In this way, Debord's critique of art was not made in order to simply eschew artistic technique, but rather to eschew the role of art, its place in contemporary society, and the inability of art to problematise the 'crisis of representation' in anything other than artistic terms. In this sense, it was not a question of choosing one set of techniques over another, as Constant suggested, but rather to what use these techniques — and, indeed, any techniques — could be put in the interest of unitary urbanist experimentation, and the elaboration of the hypothesis.

Coherence

In late 1971, shortly before the SI was dissolved, Guy Debord wrote,

one cannot speak of "coherence" in the first years of the SI. If this idea can be expressed

in such a context, it refers to the period begun in 1962 and in large part as a project that

was more or less *verified* later on.[263]

Debord's retrospective wager was that the SI only became a coherent group by virtue of the so-

called 'break' with the artists in 1962. Debord believed that the role played by Situationist ideas

in the occupations movement of May 1968 and the consequent success they enjoyed amongst

considerably wider layers of people was the effective verification of his claim and perhaps even

the ultimate justification for the split.[264] However in 1962 the split was justified on the basis of

the Spur group's flaunting of the organisational discipline of the SI, their 'systematic

misunderstanding of situationist theses', and their attempt to hide from the rest of the group

their 'participation in the Biennale de Paris, [and] collusion with diverse traffickers of modern

art'.[265] It is my belief that in order to fully understand the split we need to contextualise it with

regard to the disputes over the role of art vis-à-vis the attempt to outline and practice a

distinctive Situationist practice between 1957 and 1962. In particular, we also need to consider

Debord's attempt, from the outset, to cohere a distinctive Situationist project and practice, most

clearly indicated by his role as the editor in chief of the Situationist journal. If we consider the

split as the culminating point and resolution of a period of organisational malaise and inertia in

1960 and 1961, then the proximal justification for the split proffered by Debord's circle

becomes easier to understand.

Debord is the significant individual in the SI group through which we can chart its developing

coherence. The major theoretical statements were either written by him or were initiated or

coordinated by him. As the editor of the entire 12 issue run of the journal he was responsible for

much of the editorial commentary and criticism, not to mention the work of literally cohering

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[263] Guy Debord, 'Letter to Juvenal Quillet, 11 November 1971', trans. by Not Bored! http://www.notbored.org/debord-11November1971.html.
[264] In the same letter quoted above Debord wrote that he helped 'break' the SI in 1962 and thus cannot 'be ranked among the admirers of the SI' (ibid.).
[265] Situationist International, 'NICHT HINAUSLEHNEN! [the Exclusion of the Spurists - 1962],' in *Cosmonauts of the Future*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, Copenhagen: Nebula, 2015, p. 69; G. Debord et al., 'Résolution adoptée par le 4e session du Conseil Central de l'I.S. (Paris 10-11 février 1962),' in *Guy Debord Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006, p. 591. The SPUR group of artists, based in Munich, was in effect the German section of the SI between 1959 and 1962.

the group around its journal.[266] However, and despite the many and varied criticisms of Debord (up to and including megalomania) he cared little for either the notion of individual genius or proprietary rights over work in which he collaborated.[267] Indeed, his commitment to the collaborative work of the SI group is marked from the outset, and his penchant for such collaboration can already been detected in the drift of drunken days, friendships and theory in the Letterist International (hereafter LI).

However, we can also see that Debord's initial commitment to the SI group involved in a sense a type of compromise in order to get the group going. In the work 'One Step Back' published shortly before the founding of the SI, we find that his acknowledgment of the need to reach out to other currents and individuals in order to develop a specifically Situationist project is conceived as literally 'one step back' from the extreme position of the LI.[268] Certainly he did not compromise his criticism of either the art world or capitalism more generally in this work (or others of the period); but the human task of building a collaborative project was foremost. We can see this in the first few years in the way Debord attempted to mediate the argument that began between Asger Jorn and Constant Nieuwenhuys over the role that the traditional arts would play (if any) in the Situationist project. However, just as Debord initially identified the need for a broader, more collaborative base for the founding and early period of the SI's existence, so too he came to move on from the perspective of 'one step back' when such collaborations became derailed.

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[266] Debord's position as editor of the SI journal from the outset put him in a unique positon with regard to the published representations of the Situationist project and activity. Indeed, this positon appeared to be directly related to the search for coherence, something apparently acknowledged early on by the group, as the following letter to the Situationist Piet de Groof in 1958 indicates: 'Of course, you are perfectly free to publish whatever you want under your own name if my critique seems unfounded to you. I could not publish it in our "official organ," the ideological coherence of which was made my responsibility.' Debord, 'Letter to Piet de Groof (aka Walter Korun), 16 June 1958,' p. 125.

[267] For instance, when the ex-Situationist, André Frankin, published an article in *Arguments*, in which he used the ideas of the SI, including an almost direct plagiarism of Debord's address to Lefebvre's research group on everyday life, what aggrieved Debord was not the plagiarism so much as Frankin appending his name, and thus proprietary rights, to *Situationist* ideas: 'the pretension to a "property of ideas," […] always seems ridiculous to claim, even when one is entitled', Debord, 'Lettre à André Frankin, 8 septembre 1961.' Also, cf. G.-E. Debord, 'Perspectives de modification conscientes dans la vie quotidienne,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 6 (Août 1961); André Frankin, 'Le parti, le quotidien,' *Arguments*, no. 25-26 (1er et 2e trimestres 1962); Internationale Situationniste, 'L'I.S. vous l'avait bien dit !,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (Janvier 1963).

[268] Cf. Debord, 'Un pas en arrière [1957].'

Debord's chief concern in the first five years of the group was the establishment of a coherent Situationist project. Before 1962 there were attempts at coherence, and even evanescent moments of such coherence. But ultimately such attempts failed before the artistic inertia of many of the group's members. Debord's initial program for achieving coherence was fleshed out along the following lines: (1) he argued for the immediate use of present day culture — artistic, industrial or otherwise — integrated into an experimental 'unitary urbanism'; and (2) that such experimental practices would be both a means of developing and a 'means of approaching' the aim of the SI, the Situationist hypothesis.[269]

Indeed, for Debord the Situationist hypothesis was the crux of any present use of culture. Without it the Situationist project became meaningless and indeed ran the risk of simply being absorbed by capitalist society. Thus, it served to orient the present use of elements of cultural production and the rejection of capitalist culture considered as a totality. However, the means for the present practice of the SI was to use whatever was available — that is to say to engage in the *détournement* of cultural and technical means — to the end of developing the Situationist hypothesis and demonstrate the immediate possibilities for new forms of human behaviour enabled by experimental urban 'ambiances' (thus unitary urbanism).[270]

So, it is probably not too strange that the main disputes in the early SI were over the use of art and its relationship to Situationist practice. Indeed, here is where attempts to cohere the group played out. They have often been represented as the dispute between a more 'artistic' (Constant, Jorn, the Spur artists) and a more 'political' (Debord, Bernstein, Vaneigem, Kotányi, etc.) conception of the Situationist project, but such typification is unsatisfactory.[271] For instance, as we will see in the initial dispute in which Debord and Constant Nieuwenhuys were the significant parties, Debord insistently maintained that Situationists must use any means 'even

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[269] Constant [Nieuwenhuys] & [Guy] Debord, 'La déclaration d'Amsterdam,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 2 (Décembre 1958), p. 32.

[270] Or as Constant remarked, 'even if we must reject [present culture] in its entirety, it is necessary to strictly distinguish between the true and the false, between what is usable for the moment, and what is compromising.'
Internationale Situationniste, 'Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 2 (Décembre 1958), p. 26.

[271] Varied commentators have taken this position, for instance Peter Wollen (1989), Stewart Home (1991) and McKenzie Wark (2011) — to name a few.

artistic ones', while Constant maintained a determined opposition to the 'traditional arts' and painters and painting in particular. The question was not one so much of art versus politics as that between the uses to which 'alienated' and 'separated' art (and later politics) could be put.

As we saw in chapter two, a better way to understand Debord's perspective is by way of his conception of the Situationist project as being built upon both the successes and failure of the earlier 'anti-art' artistic avant-gardes. The Situationist hypothesis was not just a suggestion for a future world of playful creation beyond work and alienation, it was offered as a solution to the impasse of Dadaist 'anti-art' and the ambivalent Surrealist 'solution' to the latter. Dada had more than sufficiently shown the problems inherent in contemporary art, detonating its pretensions and undermining its claims to ultimate aesthetic significance. Yet Dada's negative project ultimately consumed it, which is to say having declared the death of art it was unable to successfully outline a project beyond it.[272] The early Surrealists posed their project as the positive solution to Dadaist negativity. However, despite their declarations to be the personification of the positive move beyond the Dadaist demolition job, the Surrealists ended by formulating in effect a new aesthetic style and movement, one which would later be accepted into the pantheon of art.

Debord's Situationist hypothesis (aka 'the hypothesis of the construction of situations') was an attempt to outline a positive project founded on the foregoing. It was 'anti-art' to the extent that it based itself on the Dadaist rejection of aesthetics and the Surrealist division between art and everyday life. However, Debord drew its positive aspects from the failure of either the Dadaists or Surrealists to actually move beyond an artistic elaboration of 'anti-art'. Indeed, Debord believed that Dadaist negativity in itself was the most positive aspect of Dada. Its failure then was the extent to which its productions were understood as the foundation of an anti-artistic aesthetic.

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[272] It is interesting that the ex-Parisian Dadaist, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, outlined, though negatively, the alternative that the SI decided to explore, in his 1930 reminiscences of Dada. Ribemont-Dessaignes believed that '[t]o repeat similar experiments [in what Ribemont-Dessaignes called the 'revolution of the mind'] Dada would have had to risk turning to propaganda and consequently becoming codified'. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, 'History of Dada (1930),' in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell, 1981, p. 110.

Thus, Debord was particularly keen to differentiate the Situationist hypothesis from contemporaries engaged in 'neo-Dada' artistic production (or for that matter any artist production). What was most egregious about 'neo-Dada', and other self-professed artistic avant-gardes, was that their positive interpretation of the exhaustion of Dadaist negativity remained at the artistic level. Indeed, a chief lesson of Dada was that there could no longer be artistic 'progress'. Through such moves as 'found objects' and 'ready-mades', the Dadaists had demonstrated through a delirious inflation that anything could be considered art. The necessary flip side of such a gesture was the destruction of the authoritative aesthetic designation. If anything could be considered art, then what point art? For Debord any move to aestheticize Dadaist anti-art was a retrograde one. The point now was not to develop art — in any case such a 'development' was impossible. The point was now to cash out the promise of an artistic beyond 'by any means, even artistic ones'.[273]

It is strange then to consider that the dispute over the use of artistic means in the SI is usually described as a dispute between those that adhered to a more 'cultural' or 'artistic' interpretation and those that adhered to a 'political' interpretation of the Situationist project.[274] As already noted, in the dispute between Constant and Debord during 1959 Debord continued to defend the use of 'artistic means' in unitary urbanist experimentation against Constant's belief that the 'traditional arts' had no place in such experiments. Indeed, Debord would continue to defend the use of artistic and *any* means in Situationist experiments and practice — even after the 1962 split. The crucial difference between him and the so-called artist members was not over whether or not to use artistic means, but rather over the question of accommodating or reducing such Situationist experiments to the practice of art as it then existed under conditions of capitalist alienation. For Debord, art, politics, philosophy or any other practice or discipline under

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[273] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 322.

[274] The typification of the SI from 1962 as 'political' in opposition to its earlier 'artistic' focus finds its origin in Jacqueline de Jong's description of Debord's circle as acting in a 'completely political and absolutist' fashion when expelling the Spur artists. Such a description has been taken over, largely uncritically, by supporters of de Jong, Jørgen Nash and other artists expelled from the SI. Cf. Jacqueline de Jong, 'Critique of the Political Practice of Détournement [1962],' in *Cosmonauts of the Future*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Ramussen & Jakob Jakobsen, Copehangen: Nebula, 2015; Jacqueline de Jong, Jørgen Nash, and et al., 'The Struggle of the Situcratic Society: A Situationist Manifesto [1962],' in *Cosmonauts of the Future*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Ramussen & Jakob Jakobsen, Copenhagen: Nebula, 2015.

conditions of capitalist alienation and the divisions of labour, was necessarily compromised. Nonetheless they were the cultural 'raw materials' which Situationist must seize hold of. Thus, the Situationist use of such means, in order to be Situationist, must simultaneously draw attention to the 'compromised' nature of their existence in capitalism. Here, then, is the core of Debord's dispute with those Situationists who also pursued careers in art — a dispute that would also be extended to the criticism of a specialised, 'separated' politics. As he would mordantly point out after the split,

> on the artistic side, all the hypocrites feign to treat us as politicians, and on the political side reassure themselves by reproaching us for being artists and dreamers. Their common point is that they speak in the name of artistic or political specialisation, the one as dead as the other.[275]

I believe a better representation of the division within the group before 1962 is between those that had a primarily 'artistic' interpretation and those that had a primarily 'anti-artistic' interpretation. The advantage of such a schema is that it does not absolutely exclude a certain 'porosity' between the perspectives. For instance, those like Debord who opposed an artistic interpretation of the Situationist project were not above the use of artistic technique — albeit within an overarching 'anti-art' perspective (i.e. within the perspective of the Situationist hypothesis). Thus, he conceived of his films as artistic propaganda to the end of a Situationist project, rather than 'Situationist' per se (cf. chapters one, five and seven). Similarly, Situationists like Asger Jorn, Constant and Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio continued to practice and exhibit as artists, and even use Situationist ideas in their public art practice. However, they too attempted to place this artistic 'bias' within a Situationist perspective. The advantage of emphasising the 'anti-artistic' perspective of some Situationists also helps to connect Debord's Situationist hypothesis to its stated purpose of resolving the impasse of the earlier (anti) art avant-gardes, and distinguish the SI from the 'neo-Dada' artists of the 1950s and 60s whose interest was certainly more aesthetic (or aestheticizing) than it was anti-art.

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[275] I.S., 'Sur l'exclusion d'Attila Kotànyi [1963],' pp. 666-67.

Before 1962 there was an internal struggle in the SI regarding the nature of a coherent Situationist practice. In the argument between Constant and Debord (1958-60) the focus was on the role of the 'traditional arts' and whether or not they could be used in an experimental Situationist practice. In the dispute between Debord and the loose faction of Jacqueline de Jong, Jørgen Nash and the Spur artists, the focus was on the freedom to interpret what was classed as 'Situationist' practice (for instance, for the latter Situationists the programs that had been agreed upon at the founding conference, and again at the Munich conference in 1959, were considered more as guidelines than programs to act upon or put into practice).[276] For those around Debord (primarily the Belgian and French sections), the programs were the distillations of the arguments and experience of the SI, but perhaps more importantly they were the 'common' programs and principles agreed upon. To treat them as mere guidelines or worse dismissively or even ignored (as Debord and others accused Spur of doing), is to effectively renounce them, by putting the individual or sections before the collective practice of the SI.

Let us now turn to a more detailed examination of the SI between 1957 and 1960 in order to flesh out the argument regarding coherence and the disputes over the role of art.

The Situationist hypothesis

We saw in chapter two that Debord's criticism of Surrealism was extended to their successors, in particular the post-war avant-gardes, which drew precisely on the artistic successes of Surrealism at the expense of its practical non-conformism and original commitment to 'change life' and 'transform the world.'[277] Debord positioned the Situationist International as the inheritor of the Surrealist project at its most radical — the Surrealism of 1924 rather than 1958, as it was put in the first issue of the SI's journal.[278] And because Surrealism still existed as an organised tendency in the late 1950s, mired in all that Debord criticised (e.g. the artistic practices, the evocation of mysticism and the power of the unconscious), the Situationist project

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[276] In some cases, de Jong et al. even *imagined* a 'Situationist programme' that appear to be non-existent — for instance her and Nash's assertion that the SI held to a 'programme of anti-organisation', Jong et al., 'The Struggle of the Situcratic Society: A Situationist Manifesto [1962],' p. 91.
[277] '"Transform the world," Marx said; "Change life," Rimbaud said. These two watchwords are one for us.' Cf. Breton, 'Speech to the Congress of Writers (1935),' p. 241.
[278] Cf. I.S., 'Le bruit et la fureur,' p. 5.

was necessarily a break not a continuation. Indeed, the Situationist International derived its name from what was to be the central idea of the early SI: the hypothesis of the construction of situations.

In the founding document of the SI, the *Report on the Construction of Situations*, Debord hypothesised the possibility and desirability of constructing situations in opposition to the 'fortuitous situations' of the everyday life of capitalist societies.[279] To the apparent sameness and repetitive nature of these situations, rendered largely 'drab' and 'undistinguished' to the extent that alienated, capitalist imperatives had come to dominate everyday life, Debord posed the possibility and indeed the necessity of Constructing Situations.[280]

The Situationist hypothesis of the construction of situations was offered simultaneously as a totalising synthesis of the results of the experimental practice of the Letterist International (e.g. urban '*dérives*', psychogeography) and as the solution to the impasse reached by the avant-garde artistic experiments of the previous half century.

'Our central idea' Debord wrote 'is the construction of situations, that is to say, the concrete construction of momentary ambiences of life and their transformation into a superior passionate quality.'[281] As originally envisaged the Situationist hypothesis proposed 'an organised intervention [in everyday life] based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual

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[279] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 325.
[280] Ibid. Debord's conception of 'situation' bears a passing resemblance to Jean-Paul Sartre's — insofar as he contrasts the limited, poor 'situations' of present capitalist society with the possibility of free, created situations. However, it is a mistake to make too much of such a passing 'family' resemblance. In fact, we can consider the Situationist theory of the 'constructed situation' as a critique of and an inversion of Sartre's idea of the situation. Considering Sartre's antipathy toward the Surrealists, the SI's 'constructed situation' is a recovery and *détournement* of the revolutionary and 'constructivist' impulse of the Surrealists who proclaimed change and the transformation of life a desirable principle of everyday mores. In contrast, the Sartrean 'situations' of everyday capitalist life were endured rather than created; the 'constructed situation' was implicitly a critique of the ontological fatalism of the existentialists and explicitly a theory of the free construction of everyday life. Sartre's sense of the 'freedom', 'in situation', resembled more Hegel's philosophical reconciliation — i.e. a purely philosophical and thus ideal reconciliation with the reality of capitalist everyday life (even through Sartre's was presented through a superfluous Heideggerean filter of the necessity of the alienation 'in situation'). For more on Sartre, also cf. fn. 114, chapter one (above), and fn. 530, chapter 5, below.
[281] Ibid., p. 322.

interaction: [1] the material décor of life; [2] the behaviours which this material décor brings about and which [in turn] transforms it'.[282]

The 'Constructed Situation' was contrasted with the 'objectified' results of previous artistic avant-gardes: painting, poetry, prose, sculpture, cinema, etc. — indeed the production of any object that could potentially be isolated and fetishized as a commodity for sale. This was not to say that the Situationists were opposed to the production of artistic objects at such. Rather they saw the very artistic techniques as necessarily being appropriated by the Constructors of Situations, reappropriating such diverse practices and others in order that they would be combined in new totalities, new 'ambiances' for living rather than as objects solely for spectatorship or sale. Nonetheless Debord clearly distinguished their project from the 'traditional goal of aesthetics'.[283]

This brings us to a central if often misrepresented aspect of the idea of the 'Constructed Situation.' Most often the 'Constructed Situation' is presented as a type of artistic 'happening' or, to use a term favoured by art criticism, a type of '*Gesamtkunstwerk*' or 'total work of art'.[284] But in fact 'the construction of situations' was presented in the founding document of the SI as a hypothesis; i.e. a theoretical proposal for the construction of environmental and behavioural ambiences in a post-capitalist society.[285] Certainly the SI drew inspiration from such critical artistic practices as Kurt Schwitter's Merzbau and elements of the experimental and artistically inclined Bauhaus. But to reduce their pointed criticism of the artistic limits of the previous avant-garde experiments is to misunderstand the nature of the hypothesis they proposed:

> The situation is conceived as the contrary of the work of art, which is an attempt at absolute valorisation and preservation of the present moment. […] Every situation, as consciously constructed as it can be, contains its [own] negation and moves inevitably

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[282] Ibid. Note the way Marx's conception of 'revolutionary practice' being '[t]he coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change', is already an influence at this point. Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 4 (thesis 3).

[283] Debord, 'Thèses sur la révolution culturelle,' p. 20.

[284] Cf. chapter one above, in particular under the heading 'From 'pre-situationist' activity to art as 'anti-situationist'.

[285] 'Everything leads us to believe that it is around the hypothesis of the construction of situations that the essentials of our research will be decided.' Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 325.

toward its own reversal. In the conduct of individual life, a situationist action is not founded on the abstract idea of rationalist progress (which, according to Descartes, "renders us masters and possessors of nature"), but on the practice of arranging the milieu that conditions us. The Constructor of Situations, to take over a few words from Marx, "by acting through his own movements on external nature and transforming it… transforms at the same time his own nature".[286]

The Situationist hypothesis & unitary urbanism

The Situationist hypothesis was not merely an aspirational goal but intimately entwined with the means proposed for its realisation. Thus, Debord argued that the SI would nevertheless, 'try to construct situations'.[287] Given the poor reality of contemporary 'situations', such an attempt would characterise much of the early SI.

> We see that it is necessary to multiply poetic subjects and objects […] and organise the play of these poetic subjects among these poetic objects. *This is our entire program*, which is essentially transitory. Our situations will have no future; will be places of passage. The immutable character of art or of anything, does not enter into our considerations — which are serious.[288]

The plans for experimenting with the hypothesis were distinguished from the possibility of realising the hypothesis in the future; in particular distinguished on the basis of the poverty of means at the disposal of contemporary Situationists, and the relative marginal and isolated basis of contemporary Situationist experiments. In order to both signify the present constraints of such Situationist attempts at constructing situations, as well as identify the key critical object which they faced, Debord proposed the possibility of immediate experimentation under the rubric of 'unitary urbanism':

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[286] I.S., 'Le sens du dépérissement de l'art,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (Décembre 1959), p. 7. Note that the Marx quote is from *Capital*, specifically chapter 7, 'The Labour Process and the Valorisation Process', p. 284.

[287] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 325.

[288] Ibid., p. 326. My emphasis.

Unitary urbanism is defined first of all as the use of all arts and techniques as means contributing to the integral composition of a milieu. […] Secondly, unitary urbanism is dynamic, which is to say in close relation to styles of behaviour. The smallest unit of unitary urbanism is not the house, but the architectural complex […] Architecture must advance by taking as its material emotionally moving situations, rather than emotionally moving forms. And the experiments conducted with such material will lead to [as yet] unknown forms [*des formes inconnues*]. [289]

Unitary urbanism was, perforce, contrasted with the fragmented 'urbanism' of contemporary capitalism. It was initially conceptualised and presented as an experimental platform for the investigation of possible urban configurations to the end of encouraging the free expression and realisation of human needs and desires. It would be 'unitary' to the extent that the capitalist city was 'fragmented' and overwhelmingly determined by the false universalism of market 'needs'.

It is necessary to envisage this ensemble as infinitely more expansive than the old empire of architecture over the traditional arts, or the present occasional application to anarchic urbanism of specialized technology, or of scientific investigations such as ecology. Unitary urbanism must, for example, dominate the sonic milieu as well as the distribution of different varieties of food and drink. It must embrace the creation of new forms and the *détournement* of the already known forms of architecture and urbanism — as well as the *détournement* of poetry and old films.[290]

It can seem that the theory of unitary urbanism and the Situationist hypothesis are identical. However, as I have argued above the Situationist hypothesis was proposed as the apotheosis of the fragmented, individual arts, as opposed to a type of artistic practice or art work. It was hypothetical to the extent that it proposed a mode of living (a *use* of life) on a radically difference social-productive basis than contemporary capitalism. Unitary urbanism, on the other hand, proposed simultaneously, the criticism of contemporary 'urbanism' and the uses of the present (capitalist) city; and on the other, practical experimentation to the end of exploring the

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[289] Ibid., pp. 322, 323.
[290] Ibid., pp. 322-23.

immediate possibilities for unifying the urban terrain. Moreover, its experimental techniques would draw upon contemporary artistic and scientific techniques in order to suggest an 'integral' use for these techniques — itself a form of practical criticism of the present fragmented use of technique by capital (and in the interests of capital).[291]

As we will discover, despite distinguishing between the Situationist hypothesis and unitary urbanism, confusion remained within the group regarding their relationship and importance. Indeed, the most serious dispute in the group prior to those that ended with the expulsion of the Spur artists in 1962, revolved precisely around the role of unitary urbanism in the group and its potential for supplanting the Situationist hypothesis as the guiding practice and theory of the SI.

One step back

In 1963, almost a year after the final break with the artists, the SI typified those artists who used the 'Situationist' label to distinguish themselves in the art market as 'Nashists', after Jørgen Nash, the ex-Situationist and exemplar of such a practice. Reflecting on the first years of the SI the group wrote:

> It seems to us that Nashism expresses an objective tendency, a result of the ambiguous and adventurous politics which the SI had risked by accepting to act *within* culture, [while] being against all of the current organisation of this culture and even against all culture as a separate sphere[.][292]

What is perhaps most interesting about this attempt to understand the risk the Situationist project took in its first years, was the extent to which it confirmed concerns Debord outlined two months *before* the founding of the SI:

> It is certain that the decision to exploit, from the economic as from the constructive viewpoint, backward fragments of modern aesthetics entails the grave danger of decomposition. To cite a specific case, friends worry about a sudden numerical

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[291] Note that the early use of the term 'integral' by the SI, in the sense of drawing a link between unitary urbanism and an 'integral art', would later be given up to the extent that they encountered problems distinguishing the Situationist project more generally from artistic practices. This was directly related to the term 'integral art' enjoying a wider use among sections of the then contemporary artistic scene.
[292] I.S., 'L'Operation Contre-Situationniste Dans Divers Pays,' p. 24.

predominance of painters, whose work they judge necessarily insignificant and

indissolubly tied to the artistic trade. […] Any use of the current framework of

intellectual commerce yields ground to ideological confusionism — and this includes

us. But on the other hand we can do nothing without taking into account from the outset

this fleeting framework.[293]

Debord's attitude between his assessment of the dangers of 'ideological confusionism' in 1957

and 'Nashism' in 1963 remained consistent. What we find is that Debord did not abstractly

argue against art and artistic practices, as say his fellow Situationist Constant Nieuwenhuys did,

but rather against the practice of the 'traditional arts' insofar as such practices were

accommodated by capitalist society. From the outset of the Situationist project, Debord was

interested in the alternative uses to which artistic techniques, and indeed *any* techniques could

be put to in the service of the Situationist project. Certainly, this was in the broader context of

the criticism of art and the impasse reached by the artistic avant-gardes; however, Debord's

prime concern was the turn toward the alternative use of already existing techniques in order to

experiment with the transformation of everyday life. Thus conceived, it was not so much artistic

technique that was the problem but rather the merely artistic uses to which such techniques were

more often than not deployed.

In the text cited above from 1957, Debord conceived of the coming formation of the SI as 'one

step back'; that is a step back from the utter rejection of the contemporary artistic milieus as

pursued by the Letterist International (LI), in order to enter into a 'new international

organisation' the better to 'seize hold of modern culture in order to use it for our own ends'.[294]

However this was also a 'step back' from what was conceived as the abstractly correct

assessment of the LI, i.e. their negative attitude toward the production of art in capitalist

societies. It was the increasingly isolated position of the LI that necessitated such a step, in

order to break out of their relative isolation and fully explore the possibilities of a Situationist

project. But perhaps more importantly, it was the acceptance that the abstract opposition of the

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[293] Debord, 'Un pas en arrière [1957],' pp. 294, 295.
[294] Ibid., p. 295.

LI was itself an impasse without a practice aimed at the realisation of the Situationist hypothesis — a hypothesis moreover which had emerged from the LI's practice of urban *dérives* and psychogeographical criticism of the capitalist city. And so Debord championed the perspective in the SI that combined the negative assessment of the arts in capitalist society with a program for their immediate use in unitary urbanist experimentation — summarised by Debord as 'within and against' culture.[295]

The best way to consider Debord's conception of 'within and against' is with an eye to what was the exemplary Situationist activity in the first years of the group: the elaboration of unitary urbanism. As we have seen unitary urbanism was presented as the key method of developing the Situationist hypothesis. Not only was it an attempt to turn to a 'work' beyond the confines of the art-object, but it proposed to use any means — even artistic ones. Debord described this attitude in 1957 as being '*within* and *against*' cultural decomposition in order to distinguish it from contemporary attempts to 'renovate' or chisel away at the formal innovations of previous avant-gardes.[296] Certainly there are paradoxes in his perspective, but they were acknowledged as inevitable (and even embraced after a fashion). 'We wish to transform these times (in which all that we love, beginning with our manner of research, *also belongs*)'.[297]

Debord described the Situationist project as the creation of 'a new cultural *theatre of operations*'. The project was conceived not as a new art form or contribution to present cultural production, but rather the outline for a new culture entailing a clear break with the present. Debord's choice of terms was apt. For the Situationist hypothesis to be realised, a war was to be waged via a 'theatre of operations' destined to disappear with the victory *or* defeat of the

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[295] The turn from the LI to the SI was conducted under the broad conception of 'with and against', insofar as Debord proposed to use artists and artistic techniques in the experimental elaboration of unitary urbanism and the Situationist hypothesis. Unfortunately, this is still misunderstood by some commentators. For instance, McKenzie Wark has erroneously invoked Debord to justify his own conception of 'with' (as opposed to Debord's conception of 'with *and* against'): 'Just as Debord, with the founding of the Situationist International, accepted the tactic of positioning the movement within rather than against the art world, perhaps today one might take up a defensive position within higher education rather than against it.' Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, p. 158.
[296] Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes : L'I.S. dans et contre la décomposition [1957].'
[297] Ibid., p. 350.

project.[298] One would lay hold of presently available techniques in order to flesh out this culture 'placed hypothetically at the level of the eventual general construction of ambiances'.[299] But such experimentation, necessarily restricted by their marginal nature and poor command of material resources, was merely a sketch within present culture of a possible future:

> we must anticipate and experiment beyond the present atomisation of the worn-out traditional arts, not in order to *take up again* some coherent [architectural] ensemble (e.g. a cathedral), but rather to open the way to a future coherent ensemble corresponding to a new state of the world whose most important statement will be the urbanism and everyday life of a society in [the process of] formation. We clearly see that the development of this task assumes a revolution which has not yet happened, and that all research is [thus] limited by the contradictions of the present.[300]

What is remarkable about the first years of the SI is the extent to which Debord, and those who agreed with his perspective, accommodated the 'ideological confusionism' of operating within and against art. Debord's early misgivings about 'the grave danger of decomposition' were mitigated by his belief that the SI must use 'any means, even artistic [ones]' in order to develop the Situationist project.[301] Indeed this was the entire point of the foundation of the SI, to step back from the nihilism and abstentionism of the LI in order to engage in a broader project — albeit with the emphasis on the revolutionary use of the arts and other techniques. Nonetheless, the 'grave danger' persisted throughout the first phase of the SI, and eventually, under the threatened dissolution of the Situationist project over 1960 and 1961, turned Debord and other Situationists against such an accommodation.

Debord's perspective is more fully revealed when examining the debate over the role of art and artists in the early SI. It is to this argument we must now turn.

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[298] Ibid., p. 345. The militaristic sense of 'theatre' here is deliberate and a recurring image in Debord's representations. The SI is engaged in a war, deep behind enemy lines and liable to be picked off one by one.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid., pp. 345-46.
[301] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 322.

Episodes from the dispute over art — Constant and the elaboration of unitary urbanism

In September 1958, Constant, member of the Dutch section of the SI, initiated a debate in the group. The proximate cause was his opposition to the 'traditional arts' and in particular painting as a component of unitary urbanist experimentation. It is almost certain that the publication of Asger Jorn's book *Pour la forme* under the name of the SI in the same month as Constant initiated the debate contributed to the emergence of the latter.[302] Jorn and Constant had been members of a group that the SI considered one of its immediate precursors: the Cobra group which existed between 1948 and 1951.[303] In the wake of Cobra, both Jorn and Constant became engaged with more architectural concerns; concerns which would bring them into contact with Debord's Letterist International group and ultimately the foundation of the SI in 1957. However, unlike Jorn, Constant had foresworn painting around 1952 as a result of his experiences in Cobra.[304]

The crux of the debate was this: Constant believed that Situationists like Jorn continued to emphasise traditional artistic practices like painting — for instance Jorn's painterly 'modifications' by which he painted over cheap paintings he found in local flea markets. According to Constant, such techniques, based upon an individualist and backward looking 'artisanal' notion of the 'free artist', were an impediment rather than a boon to the necessarily collaborative and industrially based experimentation required for unitary urbanist experimentation.[305] Constant proposed instead that the 'task of the artists' in the SI was to

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[302] Constant initiated the debate before the publication of *Pour la forme*, however his disagreement with Jorn was made on the basis of re-reading some of Jorn's articles, including one's that were republished in the book.

[303] Cobra: an acronym derived from the originating cities of its initial participants: *Co*penhagen, *Br*ussels, *A*msterdam. From 1949 it was more formally known as the International of Experimental Artists (*Internationale des Artistes Expérimentaux*).

[304] 'I drew the conclusion there six years ago by abandoning painting and launching myself into a more effective experimentation [...] in relation to the idea of a unitary habitat.' I.S.,'Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives,' p. 24.

[305] It is arguable if Jorn's artistic practice was simply 'artisanal'. It is true that his work often involved small scale collaboration – for instance at his artistic 'laboratory' in Albisola, Italy. However, it is hard to lumber Jorn with either the practice of, or longing for the old style artisanal structure based upon a 'master craftsman' guiding and working alongside his 'companions'. See footnote 306 below.

'invent new techniques' that would allow the 'integration of the arts in the construction of the human habitat'.[306]

The 'real contradiction' for Debord was not between painting and traditional arts on the one hand and 'cold' industrial and architectural techniques on the other, but rather that between the 'outmoded [notion of] artisanal freedom' and the possibility of proposing 'a free art […] that masters and uses all the techniques of [social and behavioural] conditioning'.[307] Indeed, from the foregoing we can see that Debord distinguished between the anachronistic notion of an artisanal art and Jorn's conception of 'free art'.[308] He thus rejected Constant's representation of Jorn's perspective, pointing out that Jorn had already rejected this 'reactionary aspect of the Bauhaus'.[309]

The question for Debord was not one of favouring artistic techniques against architectural or industrial ones, but rather emphasising the present unitary urbanist uses to which they could be put; and, with an eye on the Situationist hypothesis, the necessary transformation that all technique would undergo under the solvent process of social revolution. Certainly, Debord agreed that industry and industrialism, unlike painting, was already redolent with unitary urbanist potential.[310] However the difference between technical potential and actual social transformation was crucial. Industrial techniques may be immediately more suited to unitary urbanist experimentation, but such *Situationist* experimentation was made with the Situationist

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[306] I.S., 'Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives,' p. 24.

[307] Ibid.; Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 25 September 1958,' p. 159. Note that the response of the editorial board of the *Internationale Situationniste* to Constant in the second part of 'Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives' was originally sent by Debord in his letter to Constant of 25 September 1958.

[308] I.S., 'Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives,' p. 24. Jorn's conception of 'free art' or the 'free arts' can be hard to pin down, but in essence it appears to be one with the statement made against Constant's attack on it: 'A free art of the future is an art that would master and use all the new conditioning techniques' (ibid.). For Jorn, under the impact of industrial, machine production, the movement of avant-garde art tended to pose the freedom to create and construct architectural 'ambiances' as opposed to art-works as such.

[309] Ibid., p. 24. Jorn had argued at the first meeting organised toward the formation of the SI in 1956, that '[t]he error of the old Bauhaus was included in the slogan of its first *Staatlichen Bauhauses Weimar* manifesto: ARCHITECTS, SCULPTORS, PAINTERS, WE MUST ALL RETURN TO CRAFT PRODUCTION. This slogan perhaps had a certain pertinence at the time, but today craft production has become a small and insignificant domain in comparison with the domains of industry and of free art' (Asger Jorn, 'Against Functionalism [1957],' in *Fraternité Avant Tout: Asger Jorn's writings on art and architecture, 1938-1958*, ed. Ruth Baumeister, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2011, p. 277).

[310] '[T]he material development of the era that has created the general crisis of culture and the possibility of its overthrow in a unitary construction of practical life.' I.S., 'Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives,' p. 24.

hypothesis in mind: 'The construction of ambiances is not solely the application to everyday existence of an artistic standard permitted by technical progress. It is also a qualitative modification of life, likely to result in a permanent conversion of technical means'.[311]

Debord would conclude this initial debate with Constant by arguing that 'the culminating point in our discussion seems to me to be situated in the uses that we propose for present culture.'[312] However such an argument — one that Debord would return to repeatedly in his discussions with Constant over the following year — was crucially oriented by the critical nature of the Situationist hypothesis. Debord was uninterested in reducing the Situationist project to mere art criticism; instead he wanted to put the fruits of present cultural production to use in Situationist experimentation. Thus he wrote '[l]et us leave to the official gravediggers the sad task of burying the corpses of pictorial and literary expression'.[313] For the Situationists, on the other hand, the task was to distinguish between the 'true and the false [in present culture], between what is usable for the moment, and what is compromising.'[314]

As a direct result of the argument, Debord and Constant wrote the 'Amsterdam Declaration' in November 1958. This draft, written for the upcoming Third Conference of the SI planned for Munich in April 1959, was an attempt to synthesise the results of the argument. For instance, the two key topics under dispute appeared to be settled: firstly, in the declaration that in the present '[a]ll means are utilisable, provided that they serve in unitary action';[315] and secondly, in the repudiation of the 'renovation' of the 'individual arts' being in any way commensurate with such unitary action. [316] The Declaration ended with two statements regarding both the mutual

[311] Ibid., pp. 24-5.
[312] Ibid., p. 25.
[313] Ibid., p. 26.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Constant & Debord, 'La déclaration d'Amsterdam,' p. 32.
[316] Constant & Debord, ibid., p. 31. Indeed of all the points in the Declaration this point was strengthened at the April 1959 conference, being changed to a clear repudiation of the practice of the traditional, 'individual arts'. The original third point read: 'The possibility of unitary and collective creation is already announced by the decomposition of the individual arts. The SI cannot include any attempt at renovating these arts' (ibid., p. 31). At the 3rd Conference of the SI in April 1959 the Amsterdam Declaration was adopted by the SI with some amendments. Apropos the above: 'In the third point replace "The SI cannot include any attempt at renovating these arts" (i.e. the individual arts) with "*The SI cannot include any attempt to repeat these arts.*" And add the following: "*Unitary creation will lead to the real accomplishment of the individual creator.*" Internationale Situationniste, 'Corrections pour l'adoption des onze points d'Amsterdam,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (Décembre 1959), p. 28.

entailment of the Situationist hypothesis and unitary urbanism, and their distinction. On the one hand, the 'construction of a situation' was conceived as both less durable than the 'general ambiance' of a unitary urbanist construction; on the other hand, unitary urbanism was conceived as 'the indispensable basis for the development of the construction of situations'.[317] However it appears that there is a subtle distinction here between the construction of particular situations and the Situationist hypothesis regarding the general construction of situations. Thus, the Declaration also spoke of 'a constructed situation' as 'a means of approach' [*un moyen d'approche*] for unitary urbanism'.[318]

However, it was an argument shortly before the Third Conference regarding a draft 'appeal to revolutionary artists and intellectuals' that would prove most prescient for the following year and more of the SI. The argument was mainly between Debord and Constant, though on Constant's side it was initially made under the rubric of the recently established Bureau for Research into Unitary Urbanism (in effect the Dutch section of the SI consisting of Constant, the painter Armando and the architects Anton Alberts and Har Oudejans).

The argument revolved around the question of the centrality of unitary urbanism and the agents who would realise it. The draft had presented unitary urbanism as one aspect of the Situationist critique of culture. Further the draft outlined the 'revolutionary transcendence of existing conditions' as the necessary condition for the success of the Situationist project (and thus of the Situationist hypothesis).[319] The Dutch Situationists insisted that unitary urbanism was the central 'point of departure' for the Situationist group.[320] Further they rejected the idea of the 'revolutionary overthrow of contemporary society' as the condition of this practice.[321] They argued that such a transformation had been undermined by the 'evolution' of the working class

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[317] Constant & Debord, 'La déclaration d'Amsterdam,' p. 32.
[318] Ibid. What we will find is that the distinction between a particular 'constructed situation' and the Situationist hypothesis will become lost, particularly in Constant's interpretation. Thus, Constant disregarded the hypothesis in favour of 'constructed situations' as a component of unitary urbanism. This would became the chief issue under dispute between Debord and Constant.
[319] I.S., 'Discussion sur un appel aux intellectuels et artistes révolutionnaires,' p. 22.
[320] Ibid., p. 23.
[321] Ibid.

away from the material poverty of the pre-war period.[322] As such the SI must rely upon 'intellectuals who rebel against cultural poverty' as the agents of a Situationist project.[323]

Debord responded that despite the profound alteration of the 'classical schemas' of working class immiseration, capitalist exploitation as such had not been eliminated.[324] Thus it was premature to rule out a social revolution as 'utopian'.[325] Additionally Debord believed the perspective of the Dutch Situationists was parochial, reflecting too much both the peculiar position of Holland in the Western European and North American post-war 'affluence', and disregarding the global conditions of such 'affluence'.[326] However Debord was most opposed to the idea that unitary urbanism must be the central practice and concern of the SI to the exclusion of all else. Drawing upon the distinction between the Situationist hypothesis and the attempt to develop a unitary urbanist practice, Debord reiterated his perspective and that of the shared Amsterdam Declaration, that 'unitary urbanism is not a conception of the totality, nor must it become one. It is an instrument'.[327] Both of these questions would not be definitively resolved until the break with the artists in 1962. Indeed, the draft appeal was shelved and the discussion was put aside as the Third Conference rapidly approached.[328]

Constant was Debord's chief correspondent throughout 1959. Despite their differences their perspectives on the prosecution of a distinctly Situationist project with unitary urbanism as a key component were close. However, the differences would prove crucial. Throughout 1959

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[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid. I will briefly deal with the question of 'immiseration' and 'poverty' in relation to the SI's conception of the 'new poverty', in chapter six.
[325] Ibid.
[326] 'What you say about the "abolition, for the working class, of grim material poverty," has actually occurred over the last fifty years in some Western European countries and in America. It has been paid for by the colonial slavery of the rest of humanity, and the atrocities of two world wars. "The slow development in the economic sphere" that you foresee overlooks the Chinese revolution, the revolutionary movements in all the underdeveloped countries, the harsh economic and political results of Stalinist collectivism and the central phenomenon of the "cold war," and the success of the monopolistic and catholic-military reaction in Europe. The perspective of social revolution has *changed* profoundly to its classical [Marxist] schemas. But it is real.' Debord, 'Response to Alberts, Armando, Constant, Oudejans [4 April 1959],' p. 233.
[327] I.S., 'Discussion sur un appel aux intellectuels et artistes révolutionnaires,' p. 24.
[328] After the expulsion of the architects Alberts and Oudejans in March 1960 and Constant's resignation in June 1960, the question of the centrality of unitary urbanism was momentarily settled. But what Debord described as the 'purely reformist' perspective of the Dutch vis-à-vis the possibility of proletarian social revolution would be taken up on almost identical lines by the Spur artists within the SI in 1960 and 1961.

Debord's chief concern appeared to be directed at finding a means to integrate and transform those Situationists who were still wedded to the traditional arts (not to mention serve as a pole of attraction for other artists and technicians moving in a Situationist direction, or open to such). Constant, though appeased by the arguments around and resulting from the drafting of the Amsterdam Declaration, appeared to be unable to completely throw off his distrust of painters in general and Jorn in particular.

Shortly after the Third Conference, Debord replied to a letter from Constant regarding the 'Situationist minority' in the group.[329] Constant's letter to Debord was almost certainly motivated by the recent mass membership of the Spur group of painters. [330] The thrust of Debord's response was to reassure Constant that a self-conscious Situationist minority was in a good position to influence and guide the debates in the group among the more 'modernist-nihilist' majority.[331] The most interesting comment though is Debord's warning that 'we […] cannot rely on the abstract accuracy of our ideas'.[332] Instead he suggested that it was the experimental use of the artistic means that were then most readily available to the SI that were the surest way of 'spread[ing] our problems, and our outlines for solutions'.[333]

Nonetheless, Constant's concern about the painters continued to simmer, propelled somewhat by the ambiguous results of Pinot-Gallizio's exhibition in May 1959.[334] His concerns in this regard were piqued particularly by the turn to organising an exhibition on unitary urbanism at

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[329] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 26 April 1959,' p. 242.

[330] The Third Conference witnessed the adhesion of the Spur group of artists from Germany to the SI ('*Spur*' — meaning the 'Way' or 'Trail'). Spur would prove to be a nettlesome presence in the SI and indeed at the centre of the 1962 split. We will deal with the role of the Spur group in the next chapter.

[331] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 26 April 1959.'

[332] Ibid., p. 243.

[333] Ibid. Debord went on to outline the 'importance of dialectical materialism' in this regard in the same letter. The question was not for him one of rejecting 'pragmatism' or 'idealism' or any other contested doctrine, body of ideas or practice, but rather to what uses such doctrines or practices could be put — indeed such a *Situationist* use would encompass a criticism of the merely doctrinal or pragmatic perspective. Thus 'the *supremacy of practice*, the notion of *praxis* that *contains and supersedes* theoretical reflection, and which is itself always inseparable from a praxis' proved more important that the mere 'scholarly' rejection of different ideological perspectives (ibid., p. 243-44). Perhaps what is most striking about the foregoing, is that Debord was already taking up, more obviously, Marx's 'ideology criticism', which would become centrally important to the SI from around 1960 and 1961. See chapter seven for more on this.

[334] As Debord commented to Constant, 'Pinot's show was manifestly a reactionary farce […] The most serious shortcoming was that Pinot, in his practical attitude towards the Parisian painting public, more or less consciously accepted the role of a very ordinary artist recognized by his peers' Guy Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 20 May 1959,' in *Correspondence: The foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e, 2009, p. 250.

the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, to be run by the Situationists. On the back of a successful showing of some of Constant's models of New Babylon (his imaginary unitary urbanist city) at the Stedelijk in May 1959, the curator Willem Sandberg agreed to host 'a large exhibition from the Situationist movement' in May and June of the following year.[335]

Photograph of the original model of the East sector of New Babylon

Constant was concerned about the participation of the painters in the exhibition, though mostly with regard to them exhibiting as 'painters' rather than participants in a collective elaboration of unitary urbanism. Debord shared his concern but attempted to mollify Constant. 'Naturally […] no one will participate other than as a disciplined collaborator (and you are in charge — and therefore at ease).'[336] However Debord was mostly concerned with Constant's return to his abstract denunciation of the painters. Debord posed that the question was not one of continuing to engage in an art criticism that would take them away from the tasks at hand ('I don't want to be an art critic, that would be a waste of time for them and me') but rather 'can we do something new?'[337] Could the SI put forward a new activity, moreover a critical activity like

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[335] Debord, 'Letter to Asger Jorn, 7 June 1959,' p. 256.
[336] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 7 September 1959,' p. 279.
[337] Ibid., p. 278.

unitary urbanism, which could include artists, draw upon their various skills, but refuse to use such techniques in an artistic fashion? [338]

Debord, against Constant's hostility, refused to act in an arbitrary or authoritarian fashion:

> I don't have the right — and do not have the least desire — to try to impose directives and values on painters (for instance) *except in the name of a real movement that is more advanced than their work*, a movement in which they can choose to participate.[339]

Indeed, it would be the later effective refusal of some members, mostly the practicing artists, to participate as collaborators in the elaboration of a Situationist project that would motivate their expulsion. But at this point his prime concern, despite his shared misgivings regarding the painters, was to put forward a reasonable Situationist practice in the present — perforce a critical one which rejected the 'renovation' of the arts, but one that would nonetheless draw upon the artists involved in the group.

Debord had earlier cautioned Constant about fetishizing other disciplines, in this case architecture and urbanism, over the 'traditional arts' he so loathed. Debord argued that even unitary urbanism, deprived of its critical orientation, could end up as problematic as any doctrine or practice incorporated into capitalist society. He wrote that even if unitary urbanism could be presented as 'infinitely larger and more interesting than painting', as a doctrine it would be 'just as isolated as painting by those who have determined its theories and practical construction'.[340] Such an argument was redolent of the Situationist opposition to the conception of 'situationism'. Indeed, implicit in Debord's argument is the fear that Constant's focus on unitary urbanism as the goal and 'art of a new type' was precisely the preliminary to such a transformation. But it also foresaw what Debord would soon see as Constant's transformation into a 'technician' of unitary urbanism.

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[338] 'I remain in favour of the formula from my *Report*: "By all means, even artistic ones." But only insofar as they are real means. [Thus] [w]ithin the [projected] ambiance we don't need to do a show of works — even so-called "industrial" ones, because if even these were to benefit from a certain scandalous value, they couldn't be presented as a scandal in this specific structure' — ibid., p. 279.
[339] Ibid., p. 278.
[340] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 21 August 1959,' p. 269.

In August 1959 Constant published an article in the architectural journal *Forum*, outlining and defending unitary urbanism. In the article, he embraced the perspective of the Amsterdam Declaration which called for both the critical rejection of the 'traditional arts' and their *détournement* in present unitary urbanist experimentation.[341] However for some reason Constant decided to use 'two snapshots of a mock-up of a *church* by Har [Oudejans] and [Anton] Alberts' to illustrate the article.[342] Needless to say, Debord was not amused. 'I imagine that one might think it is a parody', Debord wrote.[343] Nonetheless, he considered the appearance of the pictures as 'very ambiguous and suspect' even if 'the comic character [of the pictures] probably saves Har and Alberts. But they need to declare it themselves clearly'.[344] Though he was clear that he did not hold Constant responsible for the church design, Debord argued that Oudejans' and Alberts' apparent 'indifference' to its use for illustrating the critical theory of unitary urbanism ran the risk of 'a reversion to a kind of art for art school of free formalism'.[345]

In the December 1959 issue of the *Internationale Situationniste* journal such question were addressed directly — particularly with regard to the possibility of a retrogressive doctrinal development of unitary urbanism. In the article 'Unitary urbanism at the end of the 1950s' published in that issue the Situationists[346] wrote,

> unitary urbanism is not a doctrine of urbanism but a critique of urbanism. In the same
> way [as] our presence in experimental art is a critique of art, sociological research must

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[341] '[T]he Situationists believe that individual arts, because of their historical function, are unable to be integrated into everyday life as it appears today. The revolutionary destruction of these arts that has been taking place for a few decades is a direct consequence of this fact. The Situationists oppose to this the idea of unitary urbanism that, as a collective creation merging all aspects of life, can recapture the social and psychological role of the dying arts. In the present phase, the production of artworks can only be of value as preparation for unitary urbanism; outside this perspective, any attempt at integration or synthesis is doomed to fail in advance.' Constant, 'Contribution to Forum special issue on Fusion of the Arts and "Integration?... of What?" [1959],' p. 110.
[342] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 8 October 1959,' p. 290.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid., pp. 290, 291.
[345] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 16 October 1959,' p. 292.
[346] The article appeared under in the 'Editorial Notes' section of the journal. The editors of the third issue were Debord, Constant, Asger Jorn, Helmut Sturm (Spur) and Maurice Wyckaert. Perhaps significantly, apart from Debord all of these Situationists were painters, though at the time Constant deliberately chose not to practice painting in favour of the elaboration of unitary urbanism.

be a critique of sociology. No separated discipline can be accepted in itself; we are

moving toward a global creation of existence.[347]

Here Debord's argument against the possible transformation of unitary urbanism into a doctrine

or 'separated' practice akin to painting and other 'traditional arts' was foregrounded. However

the obvious relation this bore to Debord's discussions with Constant was underlined by a less

obvious side swipe at the architects Oudejans and Alberts. In a fashion reminiscent of Debord's

insistent rejection of abstract art criticism and the need to use 'any means, even artistic ones',

the author(s) proposed that unitary urbanism was 'not a reaction to [the architecture of]

functionalism, but rather a move past it'.[348] The problem of functionalism in architecture was

conceived as its 'narrow application' and its practitioners thoughtless accommodation with 'the

most conservative and fixed doctrines'.[349] Presumably like the traditional arts, functionalist

architecture could be used, or *détourned* in unitary urbanist ensembles. However, such a use

would involve both a criticism of the present role of architectural functionalism and its

accommodation with capitalist urbanism.

By way of illustrating the problems of accommodation with the dominant social order, the

Situationist article singled out a peculiar example of functionalist abstraction:

> The question of the construction of churches provides a particularly conspicuous
>
> criteria. Functionalist architects have a tendency of accepting to build churches,
>
> thinking — if they are not deist idiots — that the church, [an] edifice without function
>
> in a functional urbanism, can be treated as a free exercise in plastic form. Their error is
>
> to neglect the psycho-functional reality of the church.[350]

Now this reference is odd unless you are aware of the dispute that had arisen over the use of the

pictures of a church in Constant's article in *Forum*. Debord was no stranger to the criticism of

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[347] Internationale Situationniste, 'L'urbanisme unitaire à la fin des années 50,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (Décembre 1959), p. 12.
[348] For instance, 'the adaptation to practical functions, technical innovation, comfort, the banishment of superfluous ornament' (ibid.). In this case architectural functionalism refers to the unadorned 'modern' architectural styles that were associated with the triumph of the 'international style' in the post-war period.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid.

churches and their architects; the Letterist International had attacked Le Corbusier in 1954 for his ecumenical eclecticism and his effective submission to the design of a futuristic city of compartments and total surveillance (i.e. our present).[351] The architects Oudejans and Alberts are diplomatically not mentioned in the article, but the intent is clear: an admonishment of their 'ambiguous and suspect' behaviour. Debord had argued with Constant that '[i]t is impossible to build a church from the barely coherent perspective of modern urbanism', which is to say that the church as emblematic of the communion of the sacred and the profane is effectively rendered null and void by secular modernism — all that remains is pastiche and reactionary ideology.[352]

Unfortunately, Oudejans and Alberts did not clear things up, eventually entering into an agreement to build a church in Volendam, Holland.[353] They were expelled in March 1960, Constant approving — though one would imagine that this was a blow to his plans for New Babylon and the role of the architects in the Bureau for Research into Unitary Urbanism set up the previous year in Holland. In the same month as the architects were expelled, the SI withdrew from the planned exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum due to interference in their plans for the exhibition.[354] The confluence of these events, the effective gutting of the Bureau and the end of the collaborative project that was then the prime focus for integrating the artists in unitary urbanist experiments, left Constant and the group at a loss. Debord moved quickly to suggest

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[351] Debord, 'Les gratte-ciel par la racine (Potlatch no 5, 20 juillet 1954).'; Letterist International, 'Skyscrapers by the roots (POTLATCH no. 5, 20 July 1954),' in *Theory of the Derive and other situationist writings on the city*, ed. Libero Andreotti; Xavier Costa, Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, ACTAR Barcelona, 1996.
[352] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 8 October 1959,' p. 290.
[353] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 11 March 1960,' p. 338; Internationale Situationniste, 'Renseignements situationniste [4],' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (Juin 1960), p. 13. Debord had mockingly prophesised this 'betrayal' the previous year, foreshadowing the necessity for a break: 'Where would we be if the decomposed forces of the Church, in its modernist tendency, take them at their word and propose they build a real church? […] Do what's best about this, but don't forget that it is an issue that might, as it develops, necessitate a complete break.' Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 8 October 1959,' p. 291.
[354] '[I]t is impossible for us to consider any kind of restriction on the projected show' wrote Constant, Debord, and Jorn, 'Letter to Willem Sandberg, 7 March 1960,' in *Correspondence: The foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 338. '[I]n March, we presented [Willem] Sandberg with a plan that he accepted. But he was unable to guarantee the full amount of material means we were asking for (we had to write directly to certain organisations outside the Stedelijk Museum, each of which would have had the power to remove something from our experiment). Under these conditions, we wrote to Sandberg that we could not accept to involve the whole of our movement on such inadequate terms, and that the scheduled dates were cancelled.' Debord, 'Letter to Zimmer, Prem, Sturm, Fischer, 17 May 1960,' p. 353.

methods for recovering from this 'setback', including a plan for the possible relocation of the exhibition.[355]

Debord had thought highly of the Dutch architects. He saw their participation as important to the development of the SI, particularly with regard to developing the resources the group could draw upon for the elaboration of its experimental practice (not to mention as a move in challenging the predominance of the painters).[356] In his letter of 2 June 1960, when asking Constant to reconsider his resignation, he recalled Kotányi relaying Oudejans' 'excellent' formula of 'architects of a new type'.[357] But as Debord wrote to the obviously troubled Constant, the 'Dutch architects have not been "placed outside the SI" by us. *They put themselves there*, manifestly' when they agreed to build the church.[358]

Constant was never able to overcome his abstract opposition to the painters of the group, nor his belief that unitary urbanism should be the prime focus of any possible Situationist action in the present. As he would comment some years later, 'I quit [in June 1960] because there were actually too many painters in this Situationist movement. […] I always opposed it. How can you work on urbanism when you are surrounded only by painters?'[359] Certainly this sounds right, but in fact Constant did not explicitly cite 'too many painters' as a reason for his resignation at the time. Indeed, at the time he cited the earlier expulsion of two painters as contributing to his desire to leave the group. The account that the SI gave of his resignation in late 1960 is most consistent with this:

> [Giuseppe] Pinot-Gallizio and G[iors] Melanotte were excluded from the SI in June [1960]. […] Constant […] who had rightly denounced their conduct, was not happy

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[355] There was a possibility floated of relocating the exhibition to Van de Loo's gallery in Essen, Germany, though without the crucial 'derive' component which Debord considered 'rather negative' dilution of the Amsterdam plan. London, the site of the upcoming Fourth Conference in September 1960 was also mooted, though without consequence for rescheduling the exhibition. Cf. Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 11 March 1960,' p. 339; Debord, 'Letter to Maurice Wyckaert, 14 March 1960,' pp. 341-2.

[356] For instance he wholeheartedly agreed with Constant's plans to appeal to architects to collaborate in the elaboration of unitary urbanism: 'I am in complete agreement about an appeal to architects.' Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 16 September 1959,' p. 280. 'I am still in favour — before even the Stedelijk Museum show — of preparing a call to architects and urbanists.' Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 4 November 1959,' p. 296.

[357] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 2 June 1960,' p. 355.

[358] Ibid.

[359] Constant cited in Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide*, p. 78.

with this break. He deplored, moreover, that we had to resort to the same measure some months before against the architects of the Dutch section [Anton Alberts and Har Oudejans], who had had no fear of undertaking the construction of a church. […] [T]he simple equality of treatment, regarding the minimum required conduct toward each other, appeared to him already disproportionate and severe. Thus, Constant declared, in the same month of June, that because he disagreed with the discipline of the SI, he wanted to regain his freedom in this regard, for a period that the course of the events would determine.[360]

Debord responded to Constant's letter of resignation with an impassioned defence of the expulsions and a plea for Constant to reconsider his resignation.[361] But the break was final and Constant never reconciled himself with the group. However, as the SI wrote, his reasons were 'more profound' than mere opposition to the expulsions: 'other Situationists had to recall that at the present stage of the project it was necessary to put the accent on its content (play, free creation of everyday life)'.[362] The SI's charge that Constant had become 'primarily concerned, almost exclusively, with structural questions […] of unitary urbanism' is hard to dispute.[363] His focus in his last year in the group was, on the one hand the elaboration of the designs of 'New Babylon' and on the other the forceful advocacy for the elaboration of such unitary urbanist designs and experiments as the central concern for the SI. 'Thus, Constant's theses valorised the technicians of architectural forms compared to any research [toward] a global culture.'[364] Indeed Constant would spend the following decade refining his New Babylon project before largely abandoning it altogether by 1970.[365]

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[360] I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [5],' p. 10.
[361] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 2 June 1960.'
[362] I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [5],' p. 10.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Looking back on New Babylon from the perspective of 1980 Constant could now agree that 'the plan [for New Babylon was] conditional on a revolutionary change in society'. However, he did not point out how he was initially opposed to such an apparently 'utopian' schema, instead saying that '[f]rom the outset' the New Babylon had been projected on such a basis. Cf. Constant Nieuwenhuys, 'New Babylon - Ten Years On' http://www.notbored.org/ten-years-on.html. Of course the main change between 1960 and 1980 was that the possibility of revolutionary change had been reignited in 1968 and the following decade.
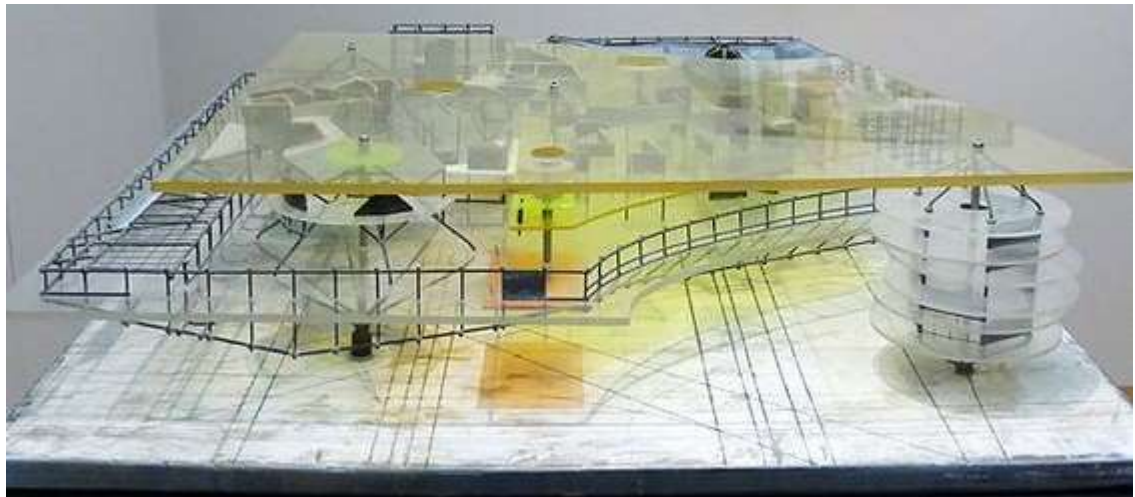
Photograph of the original model of the Yellow Sector

Conclusion

Debord once described the painter Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio as being on the 'right wing' of the SI.[366] McKenzie Wark has attempted to extend this description by describing Constant as the 'left wing'.[367] However Debord's shorthand explanation is perhaps not the best basis for such a schema. Worse it casts Debord in the strange position of being the 'centre' not to mention eliding the similarities between Constant and the right wing — particularly Constant's belief that in the absence of a potentially revolutionary proletariat the elaboration of unitary urbanism must be the work of 'intellectuals who rebel against cultural poverty'.[368]

A better schema for understanding Constant and the other artists of the group is via a formula Debord would soon draw upon: Marx's criticism of the Young Hegelians. To *détourn* Marx to this end, we can say that Constant wanted to abolish art without realising it; Jorn and the Spur painters wanted to realise art without abolishing it. The critical position elaborated by the SI showed that the abolition and the realisation of art are inseparable aspects of a single surpassing or "transcendence" of art.

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[366] 'I advised [Heinz] Höfl to work more directly with us. He asked me about the various tendencies within the SI. I said that [Pinot] Gallizio, in my opinion, represents our "right wing" with more virtuosity than Spur.' Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 26 November 1959,' p. 299.
[367] Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, pp. 67-8.
[368] I.S., 'Discussion sur un appel aux intellectuels et artistes révolutionnaires.'

Without doubt Constant was closer to Debord's conception of the Situationist hypothesis than Pinot-Gallizio and many of the painters of the group, and his belief in the redemptive value of Dadaist negativity can be contrasted with Asger Jorn's more Surrealist inspired 'positivity' when it comes to the role of the traditional arts in a revolutionary project. However it was this closeness that also ultimately made his 'technocratic concept of a situationist profession' a bigger threat to the Situationist project.[369] As the SI would later write Constant's perspective was 'immeasurably more dangerous that the old artistic conception' because it 'was more modern'.[370] In the same article the group argued that 'all really modern research', particularly its 'non-revolutionary' variants like Constant's unitary urbanism, must be 'treated as our number one enemy' precisely because of the apparent similarity to the Situationist perspective.[371] Here was a lever with which elements of the Situationist critique could be 'integrated' into capitalist culture, a threat moreover that was never really posed by the so-called 'right wing' of the SI.

The debate between Debord and Constant clarified the differing perspectives within the group over the efficacy of the Situationist hypothesis. In Constant's reckoning, its use was largely made redundant by his focus on unitary urbanism as a technical problem, whereas Debord argued for it as the theoretical orientation necessary for a truly Situationist appropriation of technique. Debord would continue to make this argument after the departure of Constant, particular in the face of the SPUR artists almost complete indifference to the elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis. As Constant resigned, Debord and his circle began turning to the question of the possibility of the Situationist project being redirected toward the reconstitution of the absent revolutionary movement. Faced with the real problems of the Situationist appropriation of techniques, Debord began to ponder elements of the political avant-garde, and, in particular, the possibility of relaunching the revolutionary movement beyond the impasse of orthodox Marxism. I will turn to this question over the next four chapters.

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[369] I.S., 'L'Operation Contre-Situationniste Dans Divers Pays,' p. 29.
[370] Internationale Situationniste, 'Maintenant, L'I.S.,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 9 (Août 1964), p. 3.
[371] Ibid., p. 4. 'Our project was formed at the *same time* as the modern tendencies of integration. There is thus a direct opposition as well as an air of resemblance, in that we are really contemporaneous.' (ibid., p. 3).

Chapter four: Surpassing the first phase of the SI, 1959 to 1962

Whatever is not superseded rots, and whatever is rotten cries out to be superseded.

— Raoul Vaneigem[372]

The debate between Debord and Constant was without doubt key to the final 'resolution' of the problem of art in the SI. Certainly, it was not resolved at this point, in 1961. Nonetheless, those that attempted to continue this debate, in particular the Spur artists in the German section of the SI — and, at a later point in concert with Spur, Jacqueline de Jong and Jorgen Nash — did not in any real sense substantively add to the arguments already raised between 1958 and 1960. In this chapter and the following, I demonstrate that the argument with Spur et al., was conceptually less important that that between Debord and Constant. However, the argument with Spur has often been singled out, and given more importance because of the way it ended — i.e. the expulsion of the bulk of Spur in February 1962 and the so-called 'break' with art. Indeed, it is precisely the singularity that has been attributed to the Spur artists, associated with their expulsion from the SI, that I seek to refute in chapters three and four. My close reading of these events demonstrates that: (1) that their expulsion was the end result of a long process, rather than an example of a purported political demagoguery on the part of Debord, Vaneigem, et al; and (2) that the practice of art was not forbidden to Situationists, rather it was problematised with regard to the elaboration of a strictly Situationist project (and thus rendered secondary in this sense, rather than outlawed).

Between Constant's resignation in June 1960 and the expulsion of the Spur artists in February 1962 there was both a heightening of tensions between the artists and Situationists around Debord and a diminution in the coherence of artistic experimentation which contributed to the tensions. Most obviously, this diminution was the result of the effective impasse reached with unitary urbanist experimentation with the resignation of Constant. Nonetheless this impasse was also the departure point for the developing coherence of Debord's circle. Certainly, this makes sense retrospectively. Such coherence was never gained nor claimed by the artists who left the

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[372] Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, p. 137.

group; in fact, those that did put forward criticisms of Debord's circle, like Jacqueline de Jong, maintained a more amorphous conception of the situationist project. Howard Slater, drawing upon Asger Jorn, has described this outlook as 'unity in diversity'.[373] However what Slater fails to take into consideration is the distinctive nature of the Situationist project from the outset, and those forces which threatened it — particular from the close proximity of membership of the SI. As Debord would write in 1963, '[w]ithout coherence […] the SI of today must be considered to be *without interest*'.[374] Indeed, if Slater's conception of 'unity in diversity' had been triumphant in the SI then at worse it would have been the dissolution of a distinctive Situationist project and at best its reduction to one project among many.[375] The latter thus would surely have also been the dissolution of a Situationist project and cause for a split. As we will see it is this latter conception, of incompatible interpretations of what constituted being a Situationist, which led to the break in 1962.

Issue number 6 of *Internationale Situationniste* was significant in this regard. It appeared in August 1961 on the cusp of the important Fifth Conference and shortly after the Spur group had republished many of the most important earlier articles on unitary urbanism in their 5th journal

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[373] Howard Slater, 'Divided We Stand - An Outline of Scandinavian Situationism' http://scansitu.antipool.org/2001.html.

[374] Debord, 'Note sur la cohérence [1963],' p. 635.

[375] Slater's source for Jorn on 'unity in diversity' is Jorn's article 'Open Creation and its Enemies' — Asger Jorn, 'La création ouverte et ses ennemis,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 5 (Décembre 1960). However his use of this vis-à-vis the dispute in the SI is questionable. In the article Jorn outlines the idea of a 'situology' as the study of 'the unique identical form' and 'the transformative morphology of the unique' (ibid., p. 39, 40). This was Jorn's attempt to elaborate Debord's idea of the constructed situation as an object of investigation, i.e. as both a 'unique [self] identical form' and its transformation over time (ibid., p. 39). Thus Jorn insisted on the need for a 'unitary homeomorphism' that would be able to comprehend both the unique self-identity of the Situation and its transformation (ibid., p. 45). Within the context of the 'situological field of experience' Jorn identified 'two opposed tendencies, the ludic tendency and the analytical tendency' (ibid.). Slater's reading of Jorn's theory attempts to read these 'tendencies' *analogically* as those between the artists and the theoreticians in the SI — perhaps with some justification. Jorn's focus in the article is on the Situationist hypothesis, i.e. the hypothesis of the constructed situation. Thus, his argument that '[t]he creation of variables within a unity, and the search for unity amongst the variations' is premised on the constructed situation being the form of this unity (ibid.). However, Slater's abstract use of 'unity in diversity' is purely analogical, making no reference to the specificity of Jorn's account. Indeed, he does not make it clear that his use of Jorn in this instance is in effect an analogical adaptation. Rather Slater poses the 'unity' of the SI as subordinate to the 'diversity' of its members, simply because he does not account for the nature of such a unity. Additionally, at the Fifth conference in August 1961, Jorn, under the pseudonym 'George Keller', called for the unification of the various publications of the SI — for instance the journals *Internationale Situationniste* and *SPUR*. The Spur group in fact resisted this call whereas Vaneigem and Kotányi supported it. Jorn's conception of unity was, perforce, made with an eye to the elaboration of the Situationist project not its dissolution into a 'unity' which tolerated members who did not participate in the collaborative elaboration of a Situationist practice. Cf. I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 30.

in June. The issue was a harbinger of the post-1962 SI, particularly its lead editorial article 'Instructions for taking up arms'. However, unitary urbanism as the practical criticism of capitalist urbanism was the explicit content of three articles as well as important aspects of two more.

Two relatively new Situationists — Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem — marked this renewed attempt to cohere the SI in the wake of Constant. Kotányi, refugee from the Hungary Revolution of 1956 and trained architect, had joined in Belgium before Constant's resignation. In contrast to the Dutch architects he celebrated his 'ability to go ten years without building anything' in front of Debord and Constant, on the eve of the latter's resignation.[376] In his first article for the journal, 'Gangland and philosophy', Kotányi depicted the socialisation of the subject in modern capitalist societies as akin to the gangsterism of the US mafia in the 1920s and 30s. The divisions of urban space and the 'ganglands' of the neighbourhoods and suburbs functioned to intimidate their denizens into not accepting the apparently obvious: the Situationist use of space.[377] The organisation of the modern city acted like Wilhelm Reich's description of character armouring, with capitalist urban space embodying the pathological reinforcement of the habitual at the cost of the spontaneously creative use of time and everyday life. Kotányi was soon invited to 'occupy the place left vacant by the resignation of Constant' on the new Central Council of the SI at the 4th Conference in September 1960.[378]

Raoul Vaneigem joined the SI in early 1961. He would prove to be as important as Debord to the shape of the group throughout the 1960s. At the time, he joined his was working as a high school teacher in Nivelles in Belgium. When he wrote to Debord in January 1961 the General

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[376] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 2 June 1960,' p. 355.

[377] Attila Kotányi, 'Gangland et philosophie,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (Juin 1960). Kotányi's advice to organise a glossary of *détourned* words would produce one of the more memorable Situationist inspired leaflets of 1968 by the 'Vandalist Committee of Public Safety' in Bordeaux: 'So don't say: society […] Say instead: racket [etc.]'. René Viénet and others, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May '68*, trans. Loren Goldner and Paul Sieveking, New York: Autonomedia, [1968] 1992, pp. 127-28. Similarly Jacques Camatte would riff on the theme of gangsterism and rackets and modern capitalism in the 1970s (cf. his essay 'The wandering of humanity' in *This World We Must Leave, and other essays*, Brooklyn, N.Y: Autonomedia, 1995.

[378] Internationale Situationniste, 'La quatrième conférence de l'I.S. a Londrès,' *International Situationniste*, no. 5 (Décembre 1960), p. 22. The article notes that the new Central Council, inaugurated at the 4th conference, was in effect the 'transformed' editorial committee of the Situationist journal, on which Constant had participated in the 3rd and 4th numbers of the journal.

Strike that had beset Belgium over the summer had just come to an end. Debord himself had only recently travelled to Belgium with a group of comrades from *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The strike took place as parts of Europe began the long pivot of 'de-industrialisation', in this case mixed up with the results of Belgian's "loss" of its Congolese colony. The centre of the strike was in the 'Borinage', a heavily industrialised area in the Hainaut province in southern Belgium (i.e. 'Wallonia') in which coal mines had figured prominently in the lives of the working class since the 18th century. The Hainaut was where Vaneigem had grown up, the son of a socialist, working class family.[379]

In his first article for the Situationist journal, 'Comments against Urbanism', Vaneigem fruitfully *détourned* the criticisms of capitalist modernity by Marx and Nietzsche. Urbanism is presented as an 'abstract and non-existent' force that has the best claim to the position 'left vacant by the death of God'.[380] Drawing on Lefebvre's 1947 observation that 'the concentration camp is the most extreme and paroxysmal form of the modern housing estate' Vaneigem argued that the new capitalist cities were machines that manifest capitalist ideology.[381] '[U]rbanism renders alienation tactile'.[382] The modern proletariat's reward for the past struggles against hunger and poverty was the 'blind misery of things' whose guarantee was an even more radical proletarianisation of the world.[383] Here was an answer to the sceptical Germans of the SI, a world more thoroughly submitted to capital and the proletariat, whose alienation was even more forcefully inscribed in the world of things that many mistook for the alleviation of the proletarian condition. Such a world was more not less ripe for the insurrection precisely because the conditions of alienation were more insidiously prevalent.

Vaneigem has recently said of this time in the SI that '[t]he artistic mindset could no longer be integrated into a revolutionary perspective.'[384] If we look at the trajectory of the Spur artists,

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[379] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.
[380] Raoul Vaneigem, 'Commentaires contre l'urbanisme,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 6 (Août 1961), pp. 35-6.
[381] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I*, trans. John Moore, London: Verso, [1947] 1991, p. 245.
[382] Vaneigem, 'Commentaires contre l'urbanisme,' p. 36.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.

their association with Asger Jorn's rising star in the art markets, not to mention Jorn's brother Jørgen Nash and the 'Situationist Bauhaus' at Drakabygget in Sweden, then we see a process that Debord and Vaneigem ably described.

> [Vaneigem:] something in the artistic project seemed dreary [*sinistre*] to us. Without going as far as questioning their honesty, we thought that these artists were following a direction that was no longer ours because it consisted, above all, in making their paintings, their art, become successful… For them, what was justification was, for us, incompatible with our revolutionary aspirations.[385]

The main problem the group face in the period of Spur's membership of the SI — April 1959 to February 1962 — was the singular inability to integrate Spur into the Situationist activity of the group. Certainly, the collapse of unitary urbanist experimentation on the back of Constant's resignation contributed to this. However, the Spur artists also demonstrated no real interest in developing the critical theory of the group. Even those initially closest to the more obviously Situationist concerns of the French and Belgian sections — Heinz Höfl and Hans-Peter Zimmer — admitted the incapacity of their group in this regard.[386] More obvious was the apparent lack of interest in Situationist collaboration (beyond artistic collaboration) amongst key members of Spur, notably Heimrad Prem, Helmut Sturm and Lothar Fischer whose attitude sometimes bordered on hostility (though in Fischer's case it was largely indifference to the Situationist project). For instance, at the Fifth conference of the SI in august 1961 Prem infamously

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[385] Ibid. Perhaps most interestingly Vaneigem has said of the later SI, particularly after 1968, that it began to suffer from a type of 'aestheticisation' of its own practice: 'We'd excluded the artists because we'd situated ourselves in an art of living that surpassed art. This didn't prevent us from falling into aesthetics. To caricature it, our art of living became an art for art's sake without us realizing it. […] Perhaps we underestimated the aesthetic dimension. You [the interviewer] brought it up by mentioning Debord's artistic side, which we all shared to some degree. Not having had an artistic past, I completely adhered to the surpassing of art by an art of living. But this art of living itself became an aesthetic, with its ambiguities, because it can also mean living like a *bon vivant* – which isn't at all an art of living, as one quickly understands by experimenting with it. Hedonism has a disastrous [*sinistre*] background. […] From the moment that the project was completed in order to better collapse upon itself, aestheticism triumphed.' (ibid.).

[386] 'The two are in agreement on admitting the theoretical and practical incapability of the Spur group to edit a journal in German.' Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 26 November 1959,' p. 299.

admitted to finding Situationist theory 'hardly comprehensible' after being a member of the group for almost two and a half years.[387]

Vaneigem and Kotányi would prove crucial in the break with the artists. Indeed, both of them spearheaded the criticism of the artists at the 5th conference in August 1961, as well as participating in the drunken composition of the 'Hamburg Theses' shortly after. However as mentioned above they were both deeply involved in the attempt to recover the Situationist project after the withdrawal of Constant and the effective end of unitary urbanist experimentation along such lines.

The sixth issue of *Internationale Situationniste*, released earlier in the month of the 5th conference — i.e. August 1961 — marks the beginning of 'official' break with the artists. However, we do well to remember what Debord would say about the 'Hamburg Theses' composed a month later — i.e. that this 'did not imply the forthcoming break with the artistic "right" of the SI […] but rendered it extremely probable.'[388] In the lead editorial article, 'Instructions for taking up arms', a new direction was outlined for the group, grounded in their previous work but more obviously pointing toward the transformation of the Situationist project. First the group declared that the only current of the old revolutionary movement worth defending was 'that gathered around the watchword of workers councils.'[389] Compressed in this declaration was both the rejection of the hierarchical models of revolutionary transformation (e.g. the various Leninist, Trotskyist and Stalinist variants) and even the rejection of the model offered by such heretics as the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group.[390] However it is the expression of disdain for politics and art in the article that is of most interest to our argument.

> The different moments of Situationist activity up until now can only be understood in the perspective of a new spectre [*apparition*] of revolution, not solely cultural but social, and whose field of application must be immediately more far-reaching than all

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[387] Prem cited in I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 29.
[388] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.
[389] Internationale Situationniste, 'Instructions pour une prise d'armes,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 6 (Août 1961), p. 3.
[390] We will return to this question in the chapter seven.

previous attempts. The SI thus does not have to recruit disciples or partisans, but [rather] bring together people capable of applying themselves to this task in the years that follow, by [using] all means and without worrying about labels. Which is to say, in passing, that we must refuse the relics of specialised politics as much as the relics of specialised artistic behaviour[.][391]

The tensions of the Situationist project are here writ clear. All means are to be used, labels are superfluous. But, and to conjure a slogan yet to appear among the group, the struggle against alienation cannot be made via alienated means. It is one thing to use artistic means; it is quite another to imagine that the elaboration of art as it exists in capitalism is coincident with the needs or aspirations of the SI.

As we have seen, Debord never hid his suspicions or disdain for the traditional arts. However, he neither believed nor practiced exclusion as an expression of personal authority.[392] In a letter to Asger Jorn in 1962 he addressed the problem in the wake of the recent break with the artists: '[t]he practice of exclusion appears to me absolutely contrary to the use of people'.[393] This is not to say that Debord advocated the instrumental use of people. Rather his primary concern was the elaboration of a collaborative Situationist practice which would, in broad outline, anticipate the social relations advocated in the Situationist hypothesis. In the same letter to Jorn, Debord argued that what was most troubling about the artists was not that they were artists, but rather that by maintaining their 'freedom' — especially their freedom *from* the elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis — they effectively refused to engage in a collaborative project.[394]

Around the time the SI broke with Henri Lefebvre Debord wrote in an internal document that 'coherence finds its sole measure in communal praxis'.[395] As we have seen in Debord's debates

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[391] I.S., 'Instructions pour une prise d'armes,' p. 4-5.
[392] Despite those that would represent Debord as a Machiavellian operator within the SI — such as Stewart Home and McKenzie Wark — Debord's strategizing was always directed toward undermining the spectacular society with which he was 'engaged'.
[393] Debord, 'Lettre à Asger Jorn, 23 août 1962,' p. 156.
[394] 'From [Piero] Simondo to the Spurists, all the Situationist factions have appealed to freedom, but in reality, it is clearly their position which is a restrictive choice, excluding *the mass of our possible research*. Thus the position that I have defended does not exclude even their position, but only [that of] *people becoming specialists of a single goal*' (ibid., p. 157).
[395] Debord, 'Note sur la cohérence [1963],' p. 635.

with Constant, establishing a communal or collaborative practice was of preeminent importance. The document, written around the time the group publically broke with the philosopher Henri Lefebvre (February 1963) placed a premium on such 'communal', collaborative practice — particularly for the development of a Situationist project. In the case of Lefebvre what was seen as most egregious and 'serious' was not his plagiarism of some Situationist theses, but rather his 'retreat [...] from a communal action (true dialogue) with us.'[396] Indeed such a retreat or refusal was the only measure of inclusion or exclusion from the project of the SI. So, for instance when some critics — beginning with the ex-Situationist Jacqueline de Jong — emphasise the purported freedom of the artists *to be artists* in the group as being the reason for their expulsion, they are at best confused.

The break in 1962 was precisely over the retreat of the Spur group from such a 'communal praxis', not their continued practice of the 'traditional arts'. Without doubt Spur's prioritisation of such practices at the expense of participating in the collaborative elaboration of a Situationist project was key. But it was the practical results of this prioritisation that led to their expulsion. Those critics, like McKenzie Wark, who identify the 'official' declaration of the 'anti-situationist' nature of the traditional arts at the Fifth conference of the SI, not only misunderstand the reasons for the expulsion of the Spur artists.[397] They also cannot, and in fact do not attempt to make sense of the continued membership of practicing artists in the group — notably J.V. Martin who remained until the end in 1972.[398] Indeed being a practicing artist was never an obstacle to joining the SI. However, prioritising one's career in the arts over participation in the Situationist project certainly was.[399]

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[396] Ibid., p. 637.

[397] Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, p. 113.

[398] Martin was not the exception that proved the rule in this case. There were other Situationists who were also practicing artists after the so-called 'break' with the artists in February 1962. The point here is to emphasise that it was not the practice of art that led to one's exclusion from the SI.

[399] Consider Asger Jorn. His artistic career began to "take off" after he helped found the SI in 1957. Jorn realised that this would prove troublesome for his participation in the SI so he decided to resign while maintaining his financial support for the group until its demise in 1972.

From the foundation of Spur origins to the 4th conference of the SI

'Spur' ('path' or 'way' in German) was a group of artistic collaborators formed by the German painters Heimrad Prem, Helmut Sturm and Hans-Peter Zimmer and the sculptor Lothar Fischer in 1957. During their brief time of existence, 1957 to 1965, they incurred the wrath of the German state for artistic non-conformism. In late 1958 Asger Jorn met the group and co-wrote a manifesto with them broadly sympathetic to the new Situationist International. At the Third conference in April 1959 they joined the SI, effectively becoming the German section.[400] The Spur members in attendance were Erwin Eisch, Heinz Höfl, Heimrad Prem, Gretel Stadler, Helmut Sturm and Hans-Peter Zimmer. Spur's eponymous journal became the organ of the SI in West Germany in 1960 and 1961, though only the fifth number of the journal can be considered fully Situationist in content. Threats of censorship and seizure finally manifested in the Bavarian state government's seizure of all six issues of the journal in November 1961 and their initiation of legal proceedings against members of the group in 1962.

It is significant that Debord never completely gave up on the possibility of integrating the Spur group into Situationist activity until the expulsions of February 1962. Some critics, notably Stewart Home, have cast him in the role of scheming manipulator who 'chose to bide his time' in the face of the dastardly Spur artists and Dutch architects.[401] However Home is completely wrong about the relationship between Constant and Spur, falsely believing that they had 'much in common' particularly regarding the 'production of art'.[402] He further believes that it was Debord and not Constant that was opposed to Spur from the outset. However, there is no evidence — despite Debord's growing belief that Spur's membership was harmful to the SI — that he plotted their expulsion from the outset.[403] Additionally there is no acknowledgement on the part of Home that Debord, despite this distrust, struggled to accommodate Spur in the SI. Home's criticism would be laughable if it was not inexplicably influential. More recently McKenzie Wark has given an account of the same period with some "Homean" touches, writing that Debord was forced to 'gather […] forces that would help him dispense with [the artist's]

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[400] Hans Platscheck, the previous 'German section,' had been excluded in February 1959.
[401] Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, p. 35.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 16 October 1959,' p. 293.

nettlesome presence.'[404] Wark bases this claim on his belief that the artists had 'tilted the Situationist International to their particular concerns.'[405] But when examining the period of Spur's attachment one is struck more by their disengagement rather than their purported influence on the group. Debord and others, particularly Kotányi and Vaneigem from 1960 and 1961, continued on with their explorations, notably the engagement with the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group and the General Strike in Belgium over the winter of 1960-61.

As we have seen, Debord and Constant were suspicious of the efficacy of the recruitment of the Spur group to the SI from the outset. Indeed, their imminent membership reignited the argument between Constant and Debord on the role of artists in the group. In a letter to Constant in the month before the Third conference and the adhesion of Spur, Debord defended the group to Constant. However, his defence was both more measured and more critical than Constant's straightforward opposition to the painters. Debord agreed with Constant that the SI should try and 'obstruct and prevent the conversion of new painters into Situationists', and instead attempt to 'attract sociologists, architects, etc.'[406] However he argued that such a change in the balance of the SI's composition would not in itself be the answer: 'we will *also* have difficulties with sociologists, architects, etc., because they will generally start off as prisoners of their divided practical activity.'[407] In the case of the Spur artists Debord believed that their incorporation into a Situationist project was a question of the extent to which 'they are not already comfortably installed' in the art world.[408] Such an opinion would prove prophetic.

In November of 1959 Debord wrote Constant about the state of the Spur group. He represented the group as 'very divided', split by members closer to the Situationist project (e.g. Höfl and Zimmer) and those still prioritising 'strictly pictorial and plastic activity'.[409] Significantly his comments on the 'Sturm-Zimmer-Prem show' in Munich were exceedingly brief — 'pitiful' —

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[404] Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Streets: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, p. 111.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 3 March 1959,' pp. 220, 219.
[407] Ibid., p. 219.
[408] Ibid., p. 220.
[409] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 26 November 1959,' p. 299. In particular he singled out Heimrad Prem as a 'careerist artist'.

consistent with his repeated statements regarding his disinterest in art criticism. Of more significance to Debord was the appearance of 'a very long text' alongside the Spur exhibition.[410] Despite being unable to read the German (he asked Constant to translate the text) he saw 'the arrival of the brave "Spurists" on theoretical terrain' as a chance to gauge their development and thus their relationship to the Situationist project.[411]

Despite his many reservations regarding the recruitment of artists Debord believed that the most likely source of new Situationists in the near future would be from this milieu, insofar as such artists were still open to the Situationist critique of the traditional arts.[412] What would prove ultimately the most troubling in this regard was not the artistic background of Situationists, nor their continued practice of the 'traditional arts', but rather the extent to which they refused to collaborate with a distinctive Situationist project. Such a refusal was foreshadowed at the Third conference of the SI when Heimrad Prem of Spur raised concerns about the 'the subordination of individual investigations to the discipline of the movement'.[413] Certainly Debord grew to be frustrated by the 'open door tactic' practiced by Jorn and Pinot-Gallizio which had resulted in painters predominating in the group.[414] However it was not painters per se that were the problem. Rather it was a question of finding people capable of collaborating on the nascent Situationist project. The Spur group were certainly enthused to become members of the SI, but it appears that they were little prepared for the peculiarities of the Situationist hypothesis. Despite his reservations about some of the group (notably Heimrad Prem and Helmut Sturm) Debord would write after the Third conference that '[a]ll of them [are] capable of a very favourable evolution.'[415]

The collapse of the unitary urbanist exhibition and derive around Amsterdam in 1960 was definitely a blow to Debord's idea of incorporating the Spur artists into an activity that could at

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[410] Ibid., p. 300.
[411] Ibid.
[412] 'It seems to me that in our era the future creators of new activities [will] *naturally* come from the decomposed individualist arts — provided that they be young and that they are not already comfortably installed therein'. Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 3 March 1959,' p. 220. Translation modified.
[413] Internationale Situationniste, 'La troisième conférence de l'I.S. à Munich,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (Décembre 1959), p. 19.
[414] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 16 October 1959,' p. 293.
[415] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 24 April 1959,' p. 241.

once take advantage of the Spur's artistic preoccupations, while demonstrating the insufficiency of the merely artistic.[416] In the year between Constant's resignation and the heated debates at the Fifth conference in August 1961, Debord and the French and Belgium sections of the SI became more engaged with the French ultra-left group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the Belgian General Strike over the Winter of 1960-61. Indeed, the latter was taken as a confirmation of both the ongoing revolutionary capacity of the proletariat, and the reality of the ongoing problem of the recuperation of working class organisations such as trade unions and social democratic parties into the State managed policing of the working classes. However, such recuperation was measured against the continued capacities of workers to revolt outside and against such institutions — as the recent events in Belgium so ably demonstrated.

Debord believed that the existence of a separate Bureau of Research for Unitary Urbanism within the SI had contributed to the internal opposition of the architects to the revolutionary goal of the SI. In the wake of their expulsion Debord wanted to move to the elimination of all the internal 'Bureaus' and groups. In a letter to Maurice Wyckaert he wrote, '[w]e lack the means […] to promote more than *one movement* […] We need to recognise, in each country, only one Situationist group.' [417] In a pointed stab at the Spurists he continued, 'invasion by elements that are both irresponsible and autonomous does us major harm.'[418] However at this point such 'invasions' were seen by Debord as problematic insofar as groups like Spur or the Bureau in Holland remained organisationally independent. What was required was a 'liquidation' of these groups, as opposed to the expulsion of their members, in favour of the cohesion of a single Situationist group.[419]

During 1960 and 1961 Debord spoke more frequently of the need to either dissolve the group as an independent entity within the SI, or, failing this, expulsion. In a letter to Jorn in July 1960

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[416] Briefly, in early 1961, it appeared that the SI would be engaged in a more ambitious exhibition of unitary urbanism. Called 'Utopolis', the project envisioned the construction of an experimental city somewhere in Italy, funded by Paolo Marinotti (an Italian millionaire and collector of Asger Jorn paintings). However this project, like the one in Amsterdam the year before, foundered once again on the question of the Situationists being given unfettered control over their creations. Cf. Debord, 'Lettre à Maurice Wyckaert, 4 février 1961,' pp. 70-71; Internationale Situationniste, 'Renseignements situationniste [6],' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 6 (Août 1961), p. 40.
[417] Debord, 'Letter to Maurice Wyckaert, 14 March 1960,' p. 341.
[418] Ibid.
[419] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 30 March 1960,' p. 344.

Debord responded, '[a]greed on the one-year reprieve for the "Spur" faction. Let's try to raise the level during this time.'[420] It's not clear what this 'reprieve' is, whether or not it is a reprieve on the dissolution of Spur within the SI or the expulsion of some or all of its members. Debord was most probably reassured with Spur's recent agreement to publish the Situationist Manifesto from May in the first issue of their *SPUR* journal. Additionally, he was almost certainly glad to avoid another fight for the time being, particularly in the wake of Constant's resignation and the collapse of the Dutch section.

Debord first raised the possibility of expulsion of the Spur group with Constant in October 1959, because they had not 'made any progress' since the Third conference in April.[421] However Debord did not pursue a campaign of expulsion directed at Spur. Indeed just one month later, on the back of his visit to the 'pitiful' Spur exhibition in Munich, Debord was keen to examine evidence of possible progress in the Spur document which accompanied their exhibition.[422] Certainly Debord spoke of the possible use of expulsion as a way of dealing with Spur's distance from the Situationist project, but such instances seemed to be connected to his frustration with the group rather than being moments in an ongoing campaign to garner support for their exclusion. More importantly Debord distinguished between Spur members who were more or less sympathetic with the Situationist project. Thus, it was never a question of Debord versus the artists, or the non-artist members Situationists versus the artist members — a dubious distinction considering the artistic activity that all Situationists engaged in professionally or otherwise. What Debord wanted more than anything was the development of a Situationist presence in Germany. To the extent that Spur could provide that he was keen to continue in the belief that they could be developed — at least some of them.

As we have seen, Debord was cognisant of divisions within Spur vis-à-vis their relationship to the SI. Indeed, he identified 'wings' of the group similar to his occasional references to the wings of the SI (though in a similar fashion to his references to a 'right wing' of the SI, he only noted a 'right' wing of Spur — never a 'left'). Of the core of the Spur group — Lothar Fischer,

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[420] Debord, 'Letter to Asger Jorn, 6 July 1960,' p. 368.
[421] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 16 October 1959,' p. 293.
[422] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 26 November 1959,' p. 300.

Heimrad Prem, Helmet Sturm and Hans-Peter Zimmer — Zimmer appeared to be closest to the SI in Debord's reckoning.[423] Of the more obviously pro-Situationist Spurists, most of them came from 'non-core' members, notably Heinz Höfl (who resigned in May 1960), Dieter Kunzelmann (who was excluded with the other Spur artists in February 1962) and Uwe Lausen (who remained with the SI after the exclusion of his Spur comrades until his own exclusion in March 1965). In all cases the proximity or distance of these individuals was in relation to their willingness to collaborate with the SI. As we will see, Lausen sided with the Central Council of the SI against Spur in February 1962. However, Lausen was expelled in March 1965 when he informed the SI of 'his intention to organise a "happening" in Munich'.[424]

Debord reserved particular animus for Heimrad Prem, who he considered a 'perfect zero' who engaged in 'perilous ravings'.[425] As we have seen, Prem was the Spurist most keen to maintain the organisational independence of the group. He was almost certainly the most conservative member of the group vis-à-vis the Situationist critique of artistic activity. For instance Lauren Graber has recently noted how Prem put a premium on gallery shows and art sales as the prime concern of the Spur group, an attitude distinctly at odds with the elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis.[426] At the SI's Fourth conference in London in September 1960 Prem presented the German section's response to a questionnaire put by Debord to the SI regarding what forces the SI could rely upon in society.[427] Prem delivered a 'very long' response in which he 'attack[ed] the tendency in support of a revolutionary proletariat.'[428] Prem pictured a working class incapable of going against the trade union and political bureaucracies which dominated them. As a result, 'the SI must prepare itself to realise alone its entire program, by mobilising the

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[423] Ibid., p. 299.

[424] IS 10, p. 83. Note that this expulsion came after the changed conditions in the SI after the 1962 'break' with the artists. In the period between the break and his expulsion in 1965 Lausen continued to practice as an artist and continue his membership with the SI. However, his decision in 1965 to organise a "happening" must be considered in light of those he proposed to organise the happening with — i.e. members of Spur. In the months previous to his exclusion Lausen had been withdrawing from active participation in Situationist activity. Additionally the SI had criticised the "happening" as a poor derivative of their own Situationist hypothesis — cf. I.S. [Debord], 'L'avant-garde de la présence.'

[425] Debord, 'Letter to Constant, 15 December 1959,' p. 303; Debord, 'Letter to Maurice Wyckaert, 14 March 1960,' p. 341.

[426] Lauren A. Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968' (University of Michigan, 2012), p. 109.

[427] Internationale Situationniste, 'La quatrième conférence de l'I.S. à Londres,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 5 (Décembre 1960), p. 20.

[428] Ibid.

avant-garde artists' in order to 'themselves seize the weapons of conditioning'.[429] The majority of the conference rejected Prem and the Spur position. Kotányi pointed out the reality of increasing numbers of 'wildcat' strikes in France, Britain and even the US, further arguing that Prem's parochial focus also underestimated the capacities of German workers.[430] The group referred to Prem's conception as the reappearance of the 'the hypothesis of the satisfied worker', last seen presented by Constant and the Dutch section at the Third conference in April 1959.[431]

[At the Fourth conference of the SI…] "While the conference is happening."

"Hello 3-12, report… Hello 3-12" "Hey! Do you understand!"[432]

Here one of the highpoints in the dispute between the German section and the rest of the SI reached a first climax. It would be repeated in slightly altered guise and less amicably at the Fifth conference the following year. At the Fourth conference, Spur agreed to retract Prem's declaration and declare their complete agreement with the SI and its activity in the past, present and 'foreseeable future'.[433] In any case Spur declared that it was a secondary matter. Debord and Kotányi, presciently perhaps, had their opposition to this latter statement noted. If there is

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[429] Ibid.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid., pp. 20-21. Perhaps it is this echo of Constant that led Stewart Home to mistakenly pose a fidelity between Constant and Spur?
[432] *Détourned* cartoon accompanying the report on the Fourth conference in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 5. Ibid., p. 21.
[433] Ibid.

anywhere we can mark the 'beginning of the end' for Spur it is here, at the Fourth conference and their decidedly anti-situationist stance, hastily retracted when encountering a majority of descent and argument. If we also recall Prem's future incomprehension regarding Situationist theory at the Fifth conference, one is struck that perhaps the retraction at the Fourth was made in order to preserve Spur rather than develop the German section of the SI.

However, this 'beginning of the end' was also nothing of the sort at the time — except, perhaps, retrospectively. If we examine the relations between the German artists and the rest of the SI in the year that followed there is no real indication of a worsening of relations until the Fifth conference in August 1961. Additionally, if we consider that Debord has already considered Spur's lack of progress vis-à-vis the development of the Situationist hypothesis problematic in October 1959, then one is struck by two things. On the one hand, there appears to be little development on the part of Spur in the intervening year, insofar as there is no real evidence of their contribution to the Situationist project apart from their signature on Manifestoes written by others and their dutiful attendance of Situationist conferences. On the other hand, Debord had remained at the point he had reached with his discussion with Constant. He is none too happy with the conduct of the Spur artists in the SI. However, it was not their artistry as such that was the problem, rather it was their lack of contribution to the Situationist project.

Between the September 1960 conference and the eruption of the 'Van de Loo affair' in February and March 1961 there is little development in the Spur/SI relationship. The Spur group is tardy in publishing the circular against Alexander Trocchi's imprisonment for heroin possession, but this is perhaps a minor infraction in a group dedicated to indolence (when possible) and drifting. However, the SI is very active during this period, particularly the French and Belgian sections and for good reason. Not only did the aforementioned General Strike break out in Belgium over the winter, the opposition to the Algerian war grew in France. Debord and Michele Bernstein signed the 'Declaration on the Right to Insubordination in the War in Algeria' (aka The Manifesto of the 121).[434] Debord became active in *Pouvoir Ouvrier* and *Socialisme ou Barbarie*,

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[434] Debord, 'Lettre à Patrick Straram, 10 octobre 1960.'

and as a member demonstrated with the group against the Algerian war.[435] Added to this Debord

worked on shooting his short film *Critique de la Separation* in September and October 1960,

not to mention preparing the 5th issue of the *Internationale Situationniste* for publication in

December.

The van de Loo affair

In February 1961, the SI learnt that Otto van de Loo, an art dealer and gallery owner, planned to

set up a 'Laboratory of study of unitary urbanism' in his Essen gallery.[436] It appears that the ex-

Situationist Constant had some role to play in this.[437] The SI quickly moved to repudiate van de

Loo's move, directing him to issue a retraction. The development of unitary urbanism was

strictly an affair of the SI, and not a question of art — particularly not for one whose *business*

was art. Jorn and Debord insisted van de Loo issue a retraction, which he reluctantly did on 21

February. However on 23 March van de Loo attempted to bring pressure to bear on the Spur

group, insisting that they choose between their pecuniary relationship with him or their

membership in the SI.[438] Debord wrote to Spur, reminding them that even if he and the SI's

Central Council also demanded the retraction, 'it was, above all, Jorn' who did.[439] More

importantly Debord pointed out that no one, particularly no local bourgeois and art dealer had

the right to bring pressure to bear on Situationists regarding the work of the SI. Thus, they must

clearly choose between van de Loo and the SI. This Spur did, cutting their ties with van de Loo

and treating his attempts at influence as a form of extortion. At least initially they did.

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[435] Letter, 31 October 1960.

[436] Debord, 'Lettre à Maurice Wyckaert, 4 février 1961,' p. 71. In his letter to Wyckaert Debord initially belied that the 'Laboratory' was to be set up at the Van de Loo gallery in Munich. However Van de Loo's and his gallery director Christoph Caspari's plan was to establish the Laboratory during the month in which the Essen gallery was being wound up and closed, i.e. February 1961.

[437] Constant, while a member of the SI, had exhibited his New Babylon models at van de Loo's Essen gallery in January 1960. Debord believed that Constant was involved in van de Loo's move to set up a Laboratory of unitary urbanism outside of the SI, and such a belief seems reasonable considering Constant's continued work on New Babylon throughout the 1960s. Debord ironically pointed out 'the speed and candour with which Constant has brought "his" unitary urbanism to the art dealers' despite his professed loathing for painters, the traditional arts and all those involved with them. Ibid.

[438] Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 152.

[439] Jorn was perhaps the most important of van de Loo's "stable" of artists. Indeed in the late 1950s and 60s the most important of van de Loo's "stable" was a who's who of present and former Situationists.

For a whole week, Spur resisted the siren song of van de Loo before privately agreeing to resume their relationship with him.[440] One must eat after all. However, what is most striking is that Spur hid this arrangement from the rest of the SI. Indeed what would make it worse in their eyes and cruelly ironic for Spur is that van de Loo himself cockily confirmed the truth of this secret agreement five months after it was made — on the last day of the heated debates of the SI's Fifth conference in Göteborg.[441] On 30 August 1961 van de Loo would publish *Offene Erklarung zu einem Artikel der Internationale Situationniste* (Open Declaration on an article of the Situationist International), his response to the SI's account of the affair published in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 6 (August 1961).[442] In the declaration van de Loo apparently boasted of his influence upon the SI, and 'made much of the cordial personal relations he kept with a few Situationists to this day.'[443] Even though it appears that Debord only definitively knew about it later in September, already at the Fifth conference such 'rumours' flew among the violent arguments.[444]

Lauren Graber has written that the quickly re-established relationship between Spur and van de Loo was known within the SI.[445] But Graber's source for this confirms that there was a lengthy lapse before the relationship was reaffirmed and it was publically acknowledged — i.e. when van de Loo published his account, *Offene Erklarung zu einem Artikel der Internationale Situationniste*, on 30 August 1961, the last day of the Fifth conference.[446]

Spur had been associated with van de Loo and his gallery since the year they formed. Indeed it was due to Asger Jorn's association with van de Loo that Spur had first made contact with the

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[440] Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 154; Internationale Situationniste, 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (Avril 1962), p. 53.

[441] Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 154, fn. 161; I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' p. 53.

[442] The SI's account of the Van de Loo affair is in August, 1961: I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [6],' pp. 40-41. Their later account of his response and revelation is in April, 1962: I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' p. 53.

[443] I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' p. 53.

[444] I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 29. Debord would coolly write to Kunzelmann a month after Van de Loo's revelation that it was 'very amusing'. Debord, 'Lettre à Dieter Kunzelmann, 27 septembre 1961,' p. 109.

[445] Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 154.

[446] Ibid., p. 154, fn. 161.

SI.[447] Van de Loo was vitally important to the Spur group, organising exhibitions and perhaps most importantly financially supporting Spur 'through commissions of art works, payments for the *SPUR* magazine and catalogue printing, as well as monthly stipends and atelier rentals.'[448] Thus, we can understand and perhaps even sympathise with Spur's desire or even need to re-establish their relationship with van de Loo. But the clandestine fashion in which they went about it, combined with their turn to the use of the Situationist label to sell their art later in the year were clearly contributing to the rapidly developing tensions within the SI.

The 'Van de Loo affair' which initially begun as a dispute over the SI's control of the development of unitary urbanism, and in particular the necessarily non-artistic nature of this development (in the sense described above), quickly developed into a dispute over the meddling of forces outside the SI with the internal operations of the group. Van de Loo moved from his attempt to set up a 'Laboratory' to his attempt to drive a wedge between Spur and the rest of the SI in the space of a month. Indeed van de Loo almost certainly conceived of his relationship with Spur as more important than theirs with the SI. As the SI would comment in 1962, 'we are not declaring our opposition to a specific art dealer — which would mean that we could investigate alliances with others — but that we are protecting the SI from outside pressures with the most definite measures'.[449] Such is the real beginning of the end for the artists in the SI, made of the stuff of secrecy and rumours, opportunistic art dealers and half-baked plans to carve a Situationist niche in the art market.

The *SPUR* journal, nos. 5 and 6

Apart from the 'Van de Loo affair' and its shady denouement, it was the events known as 'Spur in exile' later in 1961 that was also a contributor to the later accusation of their artistic '*arrivisme*' and use of their SI membership as a fillip to their artistic careers.

In June 1961, the Spur group prepared to publish the 5th issue of the *SPUR* journal, this time a 'special number on unitary urbanism'. The entire issue was markedly different from earlier

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[447] Ibid., p. 63.
[448] Ibid., p. 150.
[449] I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' p. 53.

issues of the journal. Rather than the usual omnipresent reproduction of Spur paintings this issue saw the almost exclusive reproduction of Situationist and Letterist International texts on unitary urbanism and its origins.[450] Debord was particularly keen to see the appearance of this journal, considering it a major step forward in the ongoing integration of Spur into the SI, and perhaps most importantly for the presence of the SI in Germany. However the publication was held up by the publishers on the grounds of the content of the journal — 'because of its "social revolutionary texts" and two instances of "pornographic content"'.[451] Debord and Jorn wrote to the group suggesting that they immediately retain a lawyer, in order to expedite the situation.[452] The refusal of the publishing company did not result in either seizure of the issue or criminal proceedings and the Spur group were able to finally distribute the issue (including a second print run published under the 'Spur-verlag' name). However, in the aftermath of this process the bulk of Spur chose to take up an offer from Jørgen Nash and Asger Jorn to come visit and collaborate at Nash's farm called 'Drakabygget' (Dragon's Lair) in Sweden. Indeed, one of the prime results of this trip was the next issue of the *SPUR* journal with the subtitle 'Spur in exile'.

SPUR no. 6, 'Spur in exile', was fashioned to conjure the belief that Spur was on the run from the Bavarian authorities for *SPUR* no. 5, and indeed would face prosecution on their return to West Germany. However, what is remarkable about these claims is the extent to which they were, at that point, speculative. Indeed Debord and Vaneigem counselled caution on the part of Spur, not because they thought the prospect of a trial would result in defeat but rather because 'it surpasses our present capacities'.[453] As Graber has pointed out, Spur 'used their "exile" and

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[450] The marked exception was the reproduction of Gunter Feuerstein's long article 'Theses on Accidental Architecture', which was critically engaged in the forthcoming issue of the *International Situationniste* (no. 6). Additionally, there was a brief introduction to the issue and H. P. Zimmer's brief (and, considering Spur's major concerns, inevitable…) article, 'Painting and unitary urbanism'. Cf. Gruppe Spur, *SPUR 5: Spezialnummer über den unitären Urbanismus*, (Juni 1961).

[451] Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 156.

[452] Guy Debord and George Keller, 'Lettre au groupe Spur, 18 juin 1961,' in *Correspondance volume II septembre 1960 - décembre 1964*, ed. Patrick Mosconi, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001, p. 96. Note that 'George Keller' was the pseudonym Asger Jorn adopted after he 'officially' resigned from the SI in April 1961.

[453] Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, 'Lettre au groupe Spur, 20 juillet 1961,' in *Correspondance volume II septembre 1960 - décembre 1964*, ed. Patrick Mosconi, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001, p. 103.

prospects of future "persecution" to market their artworks and advance their artistic careers.'[454]

On the back of their fruitful trip to Drakabygget the group organised exhibitions at the

Kunstsalon in Halmstadt, Sweden (August) and the Galerie Birch in Copenhagen, Denmark

(September, October).[455] At the latter, the imaginary persecution of Spur by the Bavarian state

government was an important selling point — a point, moreover which exploited the relatively

recent reality of Nazi occupation.[456] Of course Spur would be persecuted by the Bavarian state

government, but this still lay in the near future, and would be the result of a complaint made

over the distribution of *SPUR* no. 6.

The Fifth conference of the SI at Göteborg

August 1961 would prove to be the pivotal month in Spur's relationship with the SI. In August

SPUR no. 6 ("Spur in exile") was published, so too was the sixth issue of *Internationale*

Situationniste. And to top it off the Fifth conference of the SI was held late in the month. This

was the conference that has, more often than not been presented as the preamble to the break

with the artists, a conference full of recriminations and insults thrown between the so-called

'theorists' and 'artists'. However less spoken of is the confluence of events at the Fifth

conference which brought not only the simmering debate over the role of art to the surface yet

again, but also revealed the way Spur and Jørgen Nash seemed more interested in using the

Situationist label as a brand with which to distinguish their artistic activity. Indeed, it is the later

that significantly contributed to the expulsion of the Spur group the following February, insofar

as Spur continued to cultivate a distinctly non-Situationist practice in the wake of the

conference.

In the first session of the conference Heimrad Prem proposed that national sections of the SI

should not only have the right to decide by themselves who became a Situationist in their

section, but even the ability to judge 'the circumstances and duration of the participation of

[454] Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 170.

[455] Ibid., pp. 170-71.

[456] Ibid., p. 171. '[Jørgen] Nash remarked retrospectively that although not many people went to the Copenhagen exhibit, all the artworks were purchased after three days. This confirmation of Gruppe SPUR's artistic success was discussed for many years to come in the Copenhagen art scene' (ibid., pp. 171-2).

those already in the SI'.[457] Of course the rest of the conference — which is to say the majority of the SI — rejected such a ridiculous demand. As the conference noted the proposal amounted to a call to 'exclude from the German section those opponents who supported within it the politics of the SI'.[458] Why Prem made this demand is less clear. Certainly, if such a proposal had been in place over the previous year the German section could have rejected both the move on the Central Council's part against Van de Loo and the push to make *SPUR* no. 5 reflect Situationist theses rather than just the artistic activity of Spur. In the conference notes the SI made the case for Prem's proposal being related to the ongoing divergence of the German section from the Situationist majority and their desire to maintain such *de facto* independence. i.e. that the German section minority position vis-à-vis the group remain in a majority position within the German section (for instance 'the hypothesis of the satisfied worker' associated with their belief in the domination of workers' by the bureaucratised trade unions and social-democratic parties).[459]

[The Fifth conference] … on a base installed on asteroid G.X. lost in space…[460]

Prem's move at the Fifth conference resonated with his question at the Third conference in April 1959 regarding 'the subordination of individual investigations to the discipline of the

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[457] I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 25.
[458] Ibid., pp. 25-6.
[459] The conference notes that this was based on the German section's minority position vis-à-vis the SI majority remained, nonetheless, the majority position within the German section — and thus their general hostility to the SI majority For instance the German section had defended 'the hypothesis of the satisfied worker' at the Fourth conference, and had withdrawn it to avoid further argument rather than as a sign of their agreement with the majority opinion against this hypothesis. Cf. I.S., 'La quatrième conférence de l'I.S. à Londres,' pp. 20-21; I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 25. See above for more details, in particular for its resonance with Constant's and the Dutch sections perspective in 1959.
[460] *Détourned* cartoon accompanying the report on the Fifth conference in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 7. I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 28.

movement'.[461] However it would be a mistake to think this was just the repetition of the earlier position. In 1959 the Spur group had barely been exposed to the work of the SI. Over two years later the Spurists, considered as both Situationists and as practicing artists, had developed — though mostly in the sense of the incompatibility of their artistic careers with the elaboration of the Situationist project. Prem's move at the Fifth conference was directly related to this question, for instance the problems that Spur had recently faced with regard to Otto van de Loo.

Spur's failed move to render themselves autonomous within the SI, and thus have the best of both worlds (i.e. the 'Situationist' label without any of the responsibilities which flowed from a unified conception of 'Situationist') surely confirmed rather than assuaged the doubts of the rest of the SI — particularly Debord, Vaneigem, Kotányi and the majority of the French and Belgian sections. For instance, at this point the Scandinavian section was solidly on the side of the SI majority, and moreover had rejected Spur 'hypothesis of the satisfied worker' at the Fourth conference. However later in the conference the argument over what constituted 'anti-situationist' activity would test some of the artists of the Scandinavian section — notably Jørgen Nash. Indeed, we cannot discount the recent collaboration of Spur at Nash's Drakabygget farm-commune as a deepening of the ties between many of the two sections, particularly when it comes to considering their perspectives on the relationship between artistic activity and Situationist activity.

However, if we take into consideration that Spur's relationship with van de Loo had continued after the public break in March 1961, then Prem's move to secure autonomy for the German section takes on sinister overtones. Indeed, and as mentioned above, Van de Loo himself revealed the truth of this arrangement in a public document published on the last day of the Fifth conference. In the conference notes published in *Internationale Situationniste* the following April, attention is drawn to the acrimonious and 'violent' arguments amidst 'rumours' in which the Third session of the Fifth conference ended.[462] Indeed the conference notes at this point appear to confirm that the rumour of Spur's continued relationship with van de Loo was the

[461] I.S., 'La troisième conférence de l'I.S. à Munich,' p. 19.
[462] I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 29.

subject of the insults: 'one hears shouts from one side: *"Your theory is going to slap you in the mouth*!"*, and from the other side: *"Cultural pimps!"*.'[463]

Between Prem's ill-played move to gain autonomy for the German section and the violent arguments at the end of the Third session, the argument over the 'anti-situationist' nature of art had been thrashed out.[464] In the first session after Prem proposal, Vaneigem had reminded the assembled Situationists that '[o]nce and for all', '[t]here is no *situationism*, no situationist work of art — even more so, no spectacular situationist.'[465] In the second session, on the back of Nash's perhaps naïve question regarding what constituted Situationist art, Attila Kotányi delivered his infamous definition of all current artistic practice as being 'anti-situationist'.[466] However, as outlined in chapter one, this appellation was not suggested in order to ban or exclude artistic practice from the life of Situationists, but rather to clarify the already acknowledged anti-artistic nature of the Situationist project. Indeed from 1957 'pre-situationist' had been the term suggested to indicate the transitional nature of Situationist practice in the capitalist present (i.e. anti-artistic, but since partially founded in present artistic techniques, not fully 'Situationist' in the sense of the Situationist hypothesis). That Vaneigem had placed such importance on the reaffirmation of the anti-artistic nature of the Situationist project and Kotányi suggested 'anti-situationist' in order to clarify this, is testament to the need for clarity brought on by Spur and now Nash's confusion of art with the elaboration of a Situationist project.

The idea that art was 'anti-situationist' had a longer history in the SI, as we have seen with regard to the argument between Constant and Debord, not to mention the development of Spur's relationship with the group. Indeed, the SI had definitively reached the perspective of art being 'anti-situationist' in the Amsterdam Declaration written by Constant and Debord in late 1958, and ratified by the Third conference of the SI in April 1959. What is significant about the perspective raised at the Fifth conference, particularly in the contributions of Vaneigem and Kotányi, is not the novelty but rather the context. Spur's recent activity, and the ongoing trouble

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[463] Ibid.
[464] The following account of the argument over the term 'anti-situationist' is covered in more depth in chapter one, above.
[465] I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' pp. 27, 26-7.
[466] Ibid., p. 27.

that the SI encountered in its relations with the art world — the 'Van de Loo affair' being an exemplar of such — demonstrated that the issue had not been signed off as a result of "legislative" fiat.[467] Rather the perspective, technically subscribed to by the majority of the SI, was practically fought out in the arguments and attempts at collaborative activity between 1959 and 1961. In this context Prem's attempt to wrest more autonomy for the German section could only be seen as a backward step by the SI *in toto*, and an attempt to retreat from the development of the ideas and practice already agreed upon by the Situationist majority. Perhaps more stunning in Prem's case was the lack of any reasoning for such autonomy, based for instance in a perceived failure of previous developments, or evidence that the SI position against the artistic spectacle was wrong. It is my belief that Prem and Spur's ploy was precisely motivated by the secretive arrangement with van de Loo, and the artistically "successful" results of their brief collaboration at Drakabygget.

In this context, the declaration of art as 'anti-situationist' was not a declaration against the practice of art, merely a clarification of what did and did not count as strict 'Situationist' activity. That this declaration has been so singularly misunderstood by commentators ever since it was made is perplexing. The widespread belief that Kotányi's and Vaneigem's arguments at the conference was in effect an attempt to ban art or rule it out as activity appropriate for members of the SI is, in truth, on a par with Prem's admitted 'incomprehension' in the face of Situationist theory — and thus a marker of the wilful ignorance of such a belief.[468] If the declaration at the Fifth conference was truly directed against Situationists practicing art then we

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[467] For instance as to be found in the Amsterdam Declaration, ratified at the April 1959 conference by the SI, including the then newly minted German section consisting of Spur.

[468] In Prem's response to Kotányi's suggestion of using the term 'anti-situationist' to describe the artworks of Situationists, Prem responded along two lines. First he assuaged the SI majority by formally agreeing with this typification. But secondly he made the case for the SI concentrating its 'power' through artistic interventions. How one would reconcile the 'real power' of the Situationists with what Prem admitted was 'anti-situationist' activity was never resolved by him. Indeed in an obvious slight against Debord, Kotányi, Vaneigem and other so-called 'theorists' he argued that 'theoretical power these days is sterile, without the capacity to change things practically'. Despite this "criticism" of 'theoretical power' Prem proceeded to admit to finding Situationist theory 'incomprehensible' — but presumably not so incomprehensible that he felt capable of rejecting it! 'Several comrades asked him why he was here [at the conference]. Debord recalled a story [Vladimir] Mayakovsky recounted: "No-one calls himself intelligent for the sole reason that they don't understand mathematics or French; but anyone can confirm their intelligence by the proof that they understand nothing of futurism." Where we are in advance is that Mayakovsky's story referred to the bourgeois spectator, whereas here the SI is the first avant-garde which has among its participants one who admits to not understand its theory, which he had agreed with for more than two years.' I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 29.

would do well to ponder why practicing artists remained members of the SI after the so-called

break with the artists (most obviously the painters J.V. Martin and Uwe Lausen, and for a time

the poet Peter Laugesen). Indeed, the painters Jacqueline de Jong and Jørgen Nash, and the

ceramicist Ansgar Elde were not expelled in February 1962 but only later excluded when they

declared themselves in solidarity with those members of Spur who were expelled.

That the practice of art became a measure of the 1962 break is testament only to

misunderstanding the nature of the break. Proximally it was due to the Spur group's

contravention of an agreement made at the Fifth conference. More generally it was with regards

to the priorities Situationists attributed: to Situationist activity on the one hand and artistic

activity on the other. In Spur's case the latter ruled the former. What had been demanded of the

group at the Fifth conference was the reverse — not the cessation nor the renunciation of artistic

activity.

Expulsion

Over the weekend of the 10th and 11th of February, 1962 Central Council of the SI met. Present

at the meeting were the Central Council members accepted at the Fifth conference — namely

Guy Debord, Attila Kotányi, Dieter Kunzelmann, Uwe Lausen, Jørgen Nash and Raoul

Vaneigem (Ansgar Elde was noted as sending apologies for his absence). Hardy Strid,

Jacqueline de Jong, Lothar Fischer, Heimrad Prem, Helmut Sturm and Hans Peter Zimmer were

also present, but as a non-voting members.[469] The other members of Spur (Prem, Sturm,

Zimmer and Fischer) had been called on to attend the meeting considering that it would deal

with the question of the contested publication of *SPUR* no. 7 and attendant breaches in group

discipline. At the council meeting Debord, Kotányi, Lausen and Vaneigem put the motion for

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[469] De Jong would later claim that she was the official Council representative for the Dutch section, which at that time consisted of herself alone (Jong, 'Critique of the Political Practice of Détournement [1962],' pp. 81-2). However neither the report from the Fifth conference nor the official account of the Central Council meeting confirm that she was a member of the Council ('La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg.'; 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' *Internationale Situationniste* no. 7). After her expulsion de Jong claimed that the Spurists who were expelled and Ansgar Elde affirmed her positon as a member of the Central Council (Jong, 'Critique of the Political Practice of Détournement [1962],' p. 81). However, apart from the fact that by this time all of these people including de Jong had been expelled from the SI, we are still faced with the fact that the majority of the Central Council rejected her belief in being a member. No doubt she was at the Central Council meeting but her vote was neither accepted nor recorded at the meeting (even if it had been given).

the expulsion of a majority of the Spur group from the German section — namely Kunzelmann, Prem, Sturm and Zimmer.

> [Jørgen] Nash, blaming the schemes of those responsible for *Spur*, supported the publication of a retraction, but stopped short of [demanding] an exclusion. However, after a debate on this subject, Nash rallied to the decision to exclude, which was thus achieved with 5 votes to 1.[470] Kunzelmann himself approved of all the criticisms of the C[entral] C[ouncil], and affirmed that he was not personally responsible for any of the incriminating facts. But, left free to effectively break with the others he could not resolve himself to do this, and was therefore left among the excluded. This exclusion was immediately made public in the tract *Nicht hinauslehnen!* [Do not lean out!] The only person present, and not implicated, who then expressed that they shared the positon of the excluded, was Lothar Fischer. He was thus necessarily counted with them.[471]

The 'schemes' which the Spurists were accused of and cited as grounds for expulsion were 'the content of issue 7 of the journal *SPUR*; the distrust or hostility of this group toward the comrades applying the directive of the SI in Germany and outside Germany; as well as its now undeniable collusion with some of the ruling class of European culture'.[472] The 'undeniable collusion' was without doubt a reference to Spur's ongoing association with the Van de Loo, Munich bourgeois and incontestably a member of the 'ruling class of European culture'.[473]

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[470] Lauren Graber has written, citing de Jong, that Debord, Kotányi, Lausen and Vaneigem 'precluded any discussion or dissent on the expulsion'. But this appears to be contradicted by the official Situationist account which details Nash's initial opposition, and the single vote, Kunzelmann's, against the expulsion order (I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' p. 49). Additionally Graber has written that 'Debord demanded that only those Situationists who agreed with SPUR's expulsion could return to the evening meeting of the Council', however without citing a source for this claim (Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 206). Certainly de Jong has detailed that Debord et al. presented the expulsion as a *fait acompli*. However she also confusing adds that nonetheless 'THE BIG FIGHT HAD STARTED' (Jong, 'Critique of the Political Practice of Détournement [1962],' p. 79).
[471] I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' p. 49.
[472] Ibid.
[473] 'This group [Kunzelmann, Prem, Sturm and Zimmer] committed numerous acts of artistic arrivism *which they hid from the SI* at the time of the Göteborg Conference and since then (participation in the Biennale de Paris, collusion with diverse traffickers of modern art enemies of several Situationists, or of all)'. Debord et al., 'Résolution adoptée par le 4e session du Conseil Central de l'I.S. (Paris 10-11 février

However it was also a reference to a more recent association, with the 'industrialist and art patron, Paolo Marinotti', mediated via the composition and publication of *SPUR* no. 7 in January 1962.[474]

At the Fifth conference the previous August, Asger Jorn (under the pseudonym George Keller) had suggested in absentia that the different publications of the SI, primarily *Internationale Situationniste* and *SPUR*, be unified in order to order to address and overcome the obvious 'divergences' in the organisation. In the discussion that followed the Belgian section (in effect Kotányi and Vaneigem) supported Jorn's suggestion. Spur, while 'accepting the project in principle', believed that the project of unification should be postponed until the future.[475] As a result further discussion of such a unification was put off. However, Spur did request that that Attila Kotányi and Jacqueline de Jong be added to the editorial board of the *SPUR* journal in order to aid in the development of such unification (additional to their commitment to reapply themselves 'as soon as possible to the diffusion and elaboration of Situationist theory, as they had [already] begun to in issues 5 and 6 of *SPUR*').[476]

Despite this request made by Spur, the group went ahead and worked on the 7th issue of *SPUR* without either informing or attempting to involve Kotányi and de Jong. However, as Kunzelmann stated at the Central Council meeting in February this did not involve him. Rather, Prem, Sturm, and Zimmer travelled from Sweden to Venice in late September or early October 1961 'to visit with Paolo Marinotti and Lothar Fischer, who was there completing a study grant for sculpture.'[477] Paolo Marinotti was an Italian industrialist and collector who also bankrolled the 7th issue and payed each of the Spur members a stipend as well.[478] Considering the recent 'Van de Loo affair' and its final revelation in later August, Spur's engagement with another

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1962),' p. 591. Cf. also Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', pp. 205-06, fn. 363 p. 205.

[474] Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 177.

[475] I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 31.

[476] Ibid.

[477] Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 203.

[478] Marinotti had also attempted to set up the 'Utopolis' project with the SI through the mediation of Asger Jorn. However when he could not guarantee the SI complete creative control, the group withdrew from the project. See above.

bourgeois art dealer and collector was sure to only further inflame their relationship with the rest of the SI. Such was Spur's flouting of the SI's discipline — a discipline, moreover, they had themselves requested. Jacqueline de Jong would inform the Central Council of these facts in January 1962 when the 7th issue was finally published.[479]

From the perspective of the Central Council, and in particular the core group of Debord, Kotányi and Vaneigem, the composition and publication of *SPUR* no. 7 only confirmed what they considered as the continued backward movement of the Spur group. Not only had the group continued to engage in its questionable relation with van de Loo, but it extended the cultivation of such relations with the addition of Marinotti to their list of patrons. Additionally, the content of *SPUR* no. 7 was a marked backward step from no. 5 (and even no. 6). Not only was there no theoretical work that could reasonably pass as 'Situationist', but the text that did exist was simply inane and almost certainly designed to irritate Debord et al.: 'Debord likes us but not van de Loo… Pinot (Gallizio) likes us but not Debord… Kotányi likes Debord but not Constant…'.[480] However, a final breaking point seemed to be reached when the Spur group responded to a request made by the Central Council of the SI regarding the German translation of works written by other Situationists (notably members of the Central Council), by 'withhold[ing] [the] German translations', and contesting the right of the Central Council 'to fair use or even examination of the translations by arguing that the translator *had been paid for*

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[479] According to the SI, *SPUR* no.7 was published in January 1962 — cf. Jean-Jacques Raspaud and Jean-Pierre Voyer, *L'internationale situationniste : chronologie, bibliographie, protagonistes (avec un index des noms insultés)*, Paris: Éditions Champ libre, 1972, p. 113. However Lauren Graber has written that the 7th issue of SPUR was both composed in October and published in October, 1961 (Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 177). It is possible that the SI were wrong, or that they judged that SPUR no. 7 was published in January 1962 because this was when de Jong notified the Central Council of its existence. However there is internal evidence in Graber's account that suggests otherwise. Graber details that after the purported publication of *SPUR* no. 7 in October the Spurists returned to Munich from Venice and 'began to sell *SPUR* #6 in several Munich bookstores and cafes, and hawked it to people on the street for the price of one to five Deutschmarks'. One would imagine that they would have been keen to sell the latest issue. Graber then outlines that the beginning of the criminal investigation into Spur in late October and early November 1961 began as a result of a sold copy of the 6th issue. Indeed the criminal investigation into Spur began with seizure of all of the issues of the SPUR journal in early November 1961 (ibid., p. 178). Additionally in Graber's account of the state harassment and investigation of the group, *SPUR* no. 6 holds a prominent positon, and the putative 7th issue is never mentioned in relation to the criminal investigation.
[480] Cited in Graber, 'Gruppe SPUR and Gruppe GEFLECHT: Art and dissent in West Germany, 1957 – 1968', p. 204.

by them [i.e. Spur]'.[481] Needless to say, this recourse to disputing the proprietary rights of works in translation — works, moreover, that were not originally written by the Spur members — was justifiably interpreted as negatively by the Central Council and the rest of the group.

Aftermath

Jørgen Nash's role in the promotion of Spur as *Situationist* artists was crucial in their backward movement from the publication of *SPUR* no. 5 in June 1961. Indeed, Nash was described as entering into an 'uncontrollable rage' on the back of art being deemed 'anti-situationist' activity by a majority vote at the Fifth conference. Nash's dependence on the reputation of both his older brother Asger Jorn, and his own designation of Situationist appeared to be a crucial part of his niche marketing — something he had decided to extend to his Spur comrades. As the SI wrote a year after the expulsions 'the German Situationists [i.e. Spur] who were excluded at the beginning of 1962 expressed with more frankness and more artistic capability an opposition comparable to that of the Nashists.'[482] Nash, and his followers on the other hand, 'have only pushed bad faith and the profound indifference to any theory (and even conventional artistic action) much further, and in favour of the crudest commercial publicity.'[483]

The animus which developed between the SI and Nash was not only restricted to his showman-like efforts in the second half of 1961. It is perhaps best demonstrated by Nash's behaviour, in concert with Jacqueline de Jong and Ansgar Elde, a month after the expulsions. On 15 March 1962, they issued a declaration against the expulsions, but then perversely backdated it to 13 February. Presumably they acted thus in order to show that they quickly disagreed with the majority decision of the council. But as we know (though not from their declaration) Nash not only voted with the majority of the council, Ansgar Elde was absent from the meeting and Jacqueline de Jong was present as a non-voting member — which is to say she was not a member of the council (despite the false claim of the declaration and her later protestations).[484]

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[481] Debord et al., 'Résolution adoptée par le 4e session du Conseil Central de l'I.S. (Paris 10-11 février 1962).'
[482] I.S., 'L'Operation Contre-Situationniste Dans Divers Pays.'
[483] Ibid.
[484] I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [7],' p. 49; Jong, 'Critique of the Political Practice of Détournement [1962].'

The backdating then was either a gesture of contempt directed at the Central Council or at the very least a misplaced wager on their ability to pull off a bald faced lie.

This last-ditch attempt to protest the Spur exclusions ended with the signers of the declaration also being expelled from the SI. The SI's Central Council declared their move as a 'conspiracy' which,

> did not shy from resorting to the most outrageous lies, going so far as to give the impression that on 10 February, at the SI's last Central Council — in session under some sort of alleged pressure from the streets! — the minority were intimidated by cunning use of the atmosphere of civil war that has apparently been prevalent in Paris for the last two years (*alas!*).[485]

Further they quickly moved to make the painter J.V. Martin 'the supreme authority to represent the Situationist International in the area covered by the former Scandinavian section (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden)'.[486] So ended the so-called break with the artists.

"Sabotage! Make contact with headquarters by space radio!"

Originally subtitled in *IS 7*: **After the Nash putsch J.V. Martin organised the resistance of loyal elements.**[487]

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[485] I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [7].'
[486] Ibid., p. 54.

Conclusion

Amidst the recriminations, rumours and confused accounts and misunderstandings, the so-called 'break' with the artists did, nonetheless, usher in a new period for the SI. As Debord would remark years later, it was this period of the SI's story which 'fixed the departure point for the operation that led to the movement of May 1968, and what followed.'[488] Whereas the initial SI project had drawn most clearly from the anti-artistic practices of Dada and Surrealism, the SI from around 1961 began to apply itself to the rediscovery of the anti-philosophical and anti-political practices of Marx and dissident 'Marxists' and left communists from the 1910s, 20s and 30s. Now 'the realisation and abolition' of art, politics, philosophy, everyday life, became the watchword of the SI.

If I was to summarise the difference between Debord et al. and the artists, whether the 'technician' Constant or the Spur painters and sculptors, it would be this: Debord saw the Situationist project itself as the 'work' of the SI, whereas the artists were never able to progress beyond their attachment to discrete 'works' of art and architecture. I realise this runs the risk of distorting the thrust and counter thrust of the discussions and disputes which animated the SI between 1957 and 1962. However, it was the peculiar notion of the avant-garde being its own project (and further its own disappearance) that distinguished Debord conception from both the Situationists expelled and those contemporaries who claimed the 'avant-garde' mantle more from habit than conviction. Indeed, such a conception flew in the face of the sclerotic political 'avant-gardes' of Stalinism and its pretenders, testament to the brutal extermination of the revolutionary aspirations of past generations. The avant-garde experiments of the 1910s and 20s had failed. Where they failed was precisely at the boundary between the present reality of capitalism and the dream of a free future.

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[487] *Détourned* cartoon accompanying the account of Nash, de Jong and Elde's 'sabotage' of the Scandanvian 'sabotage' of the Central Council's decision in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 5. I.S., ibid.
[488] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.

In a letter to Robert Estivals in 1963, Debord wrote that the 'term "avant-garde" implies the affirmation of a novelty.'[489] What counted as an 'avant-garde movement' existed on the frontier between its 'arbitrary' claims about the future, and a more widespread 'general' acceptance in the present.[490] Nonetheless the avant-garde's field of operation is in the present, even as 'it describes and *begins* a possible present'.[491]
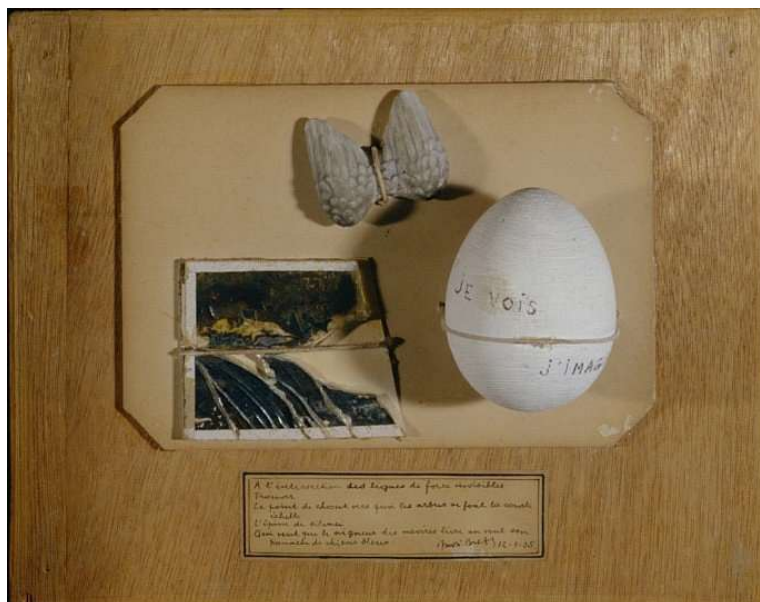
'Poème Objet' — André Breton, 1935

Debord's description of 'avant-garde' resonated with the historical avant-gardes — for instance Futurism, Dada and Surrealism. In each of these cases the work of the avant-garde was the avant-garde itself, whereas the 'works' of the avant-garde were subordinate to the movement — at best expressions of the movement's existence on the frontier of the present and desire for a different future.[492] However this had changed with the rise of critical and practical 'aesthetics' which signified the defeat of these movements by 'the weight of the past and the inauthentic

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[489] Debord, 'L'avant-garde en 1963 et après,' p. 638 (thesis 1).
[490] Ibid.
[491] Ibid.
[492] Ibid., pp. 638, 639 (theses 1, 3). At best, André Breton's 'poem-objects' could almost seem to be artefacts communicated from a future yet to be. At worse they became merely art-objects for spectatorship and sale in the present.

present'.[493] To use a Situationist term, the movements had been recuperated to the extent that they were reduced to their works, as opposed to the 'work' of the avant-garde itself.

Recalling the arguments at the Fifth conference in 1961, Debord continued to Estivals,

> today, the first *realisation* of an avant-garde *is the avant-garde itself.* It is also the most difficult of its realisations; and the fact that it is, from now on, a prerequistie explains the absence of authentic avant-gardes for long periods [of time]. What are usually called "realisations" are first of all concessions to the banalities of the old cultural world. In this regard, what is notable today is the tendency of all fake avant-gardism to put the accent on "works" that are not very new (ideological mystification tends to valorise the very small number of distinct nuances in these works as richness and originality); on the contrary, a movement like the SI tends to conceal (to deliberately disparage), not only partial projects, but above all completed realisations [*les réalisations effectuées*] — designated "anti-situationist" — despite the fact that the numerous sub-products of the SI's central activity of the self-formation of the avant-garde contain more effective novelties than all other artistic-philosophical productions of the last few years. It is by not believing in currently permitted works that an avant-garde also makes "the best" of currently permitted works.[494]

It is important to note here that even though Debord puts primary emphasis on the realisation of the avant-garde itself rather than any works of the avant-garde, he does not therefore argue against the production of such 'works'. They are 'disparaged' when others proclaim their repetitive works "new", and 'concealed' insofar as such works made by members of the SI are not exhibited as remarkable achievements (for instance, the collages Debord continued to make in the 1960s). The ultimate "truth" of opposing the production of art-objects, as claimed against Debord, would in fact be an argument against objectification *tout court*. The problem, then, was one of 'not believing in the currently *permitted* works', as opposed to what the official had ruled *impermissible*: the destruction and overthrow of capitalist social relations.

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[493] Ibid., p. 638 (thesis 1).
[494] Ibid., p. 639 (thesis 3).

The objectified intellectual labours of the SI, most obviously contained in the journal *Internationale Situationniste*, are no less prone to the fate of the art-objects produced by the Spurists, Constant, Jorn, de Jong, Nash, etc. Alas, in the present year, original copies of the *Internationale Situationniste* have befallen the fate of all objects torn out of context and fetishized as historical curios — they sell as "collectable" *objets d'art*, for prices markedly inflated in comparison to their original cost (not to mention at odds with their original intent). In the face of such fetishes, the question we face is still one of disinterring the ideas from these objects and using them again (or not) under our changed circumstances. Indeed, it is even the case of running the risk of creating new objects at the frontier of the present and the future.

However, unlike most of the painterly and "artistic" work of Situationists — 'designated anti-situationist' — the Situationist *critique* was an attempt to make the case for '*realization* of an avant-garde today'. Which is to say they were consciously fashioned to not only gesture at the self-dissolution of the avant-garde (the 'work' of the avant-garde in the Situationist sense), but were also attempts at the communication of such. Debord, Kotányi, Vaneigem, et al. did not push for, nor could they, an absolute end to Situationists producing paintings, films, poetry, novels — or, indeed, for the end of the results of any practice. However, they did push for the clear distinction of what reasonably could be classified as a moment of the elaboration of the Situationist project; and what could not. For instance, Debord did not believe his film work was 'Situationist' in the sense of realising the Situationist hypothesis, even though he fashioned his films as passing arguments for such.

Indeed, as Debord constantly stressed, due to the poverty of material means at the disposable of the SI, necessarily all means must be seized upon for the fashioning of the Situationist project. By 1961 the primary avenue for this project was identified by Debord et al. as lying in the need to fashion a criticism of actually existing capitalism — the commodity-spectacle as it would be called. To the extent that the 'works' of Situationists could become impediments to the 'work of the SI', necessitated the designation of 'anti-situationist'. But even in the realisation of the Situationist hypothesis, the realisation and abolition of a Situationist avant-garde, 'anti-situationist' production would have its part to play.

Chapter five: Emissaries of the new poetry

There are not two kinds of poetry; there is only one. [...] It is a majestic and fertile river.

— Isidore Ducasse[495]

Poetry must be understood as immediate communication in reality and the real modification

of this reality.

— Guy Debord[496]

The 'Hamburg Theses' were an attempt to 'manifest' the apparently un-manifestable Situationist work. Thus, a conception of such a work immanent to its practice was central to the Situationist hypothesis, yet has proved perhaps the most difficult aspect of the project outlined by the SI to understand. Nonetheless, this sense of a work immanent to its practice was based on what Debord identified as the impasse reached by the radical artistic avant-gardes during their period of flourish (c. 1910-30). In the last two chapters I showed the real tensions that arose regarding the attempt to cohere Situationist activity around the Situationist hypothesis, and, in particular, unitary urbanism as the experimental practice to this end. What was perhaps most notable was the confusion regarding what constituted practice for the SI. Against Constant's focus on the elaboration of unitary urbanism as primarily a design problem, Debord attempted to foreground the anticipatory nature of the Situationist hypothesis, and thus the import of focusing upon the present necessity of a critical practice, in particular the criticism of 'urbanism' as an increasingly important ideology of capitalist control and integration. Nonetheless, the question of the practice anticipated by the Situationist hypothesis remained an open question. Was it more or less artistic? And, increasingly, to what extent could it be conceived in political terms?

In this chapter, I will examine more fully the idea of 'poetry' in the Situationists sense of the term. By the use of the term 'poetry', the Situationists, particularly those around Debord, Vaneigem and Kotányi in 1961 and 1962, intended chiefly two things: on the one hand, a

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[495] Ducasse, 'Poésies [1870],' p. 223.
[496] I.S. [Debord], 'All the King's Men,' p. 31.

recovery of Marx's conception of 'revolutionary practice' and 'free, productive activity' as the critical 'beyond' of the negation of capitalist, alienated labour; on the other hand, by virtue of the term 'poetry', they wanted to recover that positive aspect of the artistic avant-gardes, who, in contrast to orthodox Marxism, had intuited a perspective closer to Marx than Marxism by virtue of posing 'poetry' — in a general sense — as a free activity not reducible to labour. Indeed, this sense of 'poetry' as free activity beyond instrumental labour was already encompassed by the Situationist hypothesis; thus, by posing 'poetry' at this point Debord et al., brought the Situationist critique of art into a fruitful engagement with the recovery of Marx beyond Marxism. As we will see, Marx, in posing 'revolutionary practice' and 'free, productive activity' beyond labour, criticised and overcame the conceptual Aristotelian division of '*poiesis*' and '*praxis*'. However, Marxist orthodoxy, by positively valorising productive labour as it exists under conditions of capitalism (i.e. as the possibility of the democratisation of alienated labour) tended to decompose Marx's criticism, and jettison his negative critique of labour and production (of activity reduced to '*poiesis*', i.e. instrumental production). In particular, orthodox Marxism lost Marx's sense of human activity as itself an object of productive and playful transformation. However, the critical target for the SI in this case was the less than orthodox Marxism of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and Cornelius Castoriadis in particular, who, despite elaborating a far-reaching critique of modern, 'bureaucratic state capitalism' in its Western and Eastern variants, still tended to hold to an orthodox conception of 'labour' as a neutral term for purposeful human activity, and thus liable to 'liberation' and 'self-management' (rather than *supersession*). The importance of the SI asserting 'poetry, in the Situationist sense', was key to distinguishing their conception of a revolutionary project from the impasse it had reached in both the orthodox and heterodox quarters of Marxism, whose shared valorisation of the labours of the 'political militant', tended to reproduce the hierarchies of direction and execution within the heart of even the most explicitly 'revolutionary' organisation. By virtue of posing 'poetry', the SI argued that the free practice to which they worked must be anticipate in the present practice of (anti) political agitation, otherwise any purported critique of capital would only tend to reproduce the hierarchies and divisions of labour that permeated all of social

life. Additionally, they were able to address the artistic impasse of the SI, insofar as 'poetry' was a reassertion of the Situationist hypothesis, and the argument regarding the critical appropriation and supersession of art.

In order to avoid any terminological confusion, 'poetry, in the Situationist sense of the term' is not reducible to '*poiesis*', in the sense of being equivalent to 'production' or more exactly instrumental production. Rather, the Situationist sense bears comparison to Marx's idea of 'revolutionary practice' or 'free, productive activity', which he contrasted with both instrumental and alienated labours. In this sense, Situationist 'poetry' is similar to Marx's critical reconciliation of '*poiesis*' and '*praxis*', i.e. the *praxis* which itself is produced and transformed over time. As Marx phrased it in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, '[t]he coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*'.[497] For Marx, *praxis* is an object of *poiesis* (production), and thus cannot be functionally opposed to *poiesis*; rather they are reconciled as revolutionary practice (i.e. as the conscious appropriation of the self-transformation and production of practice).

This conception of practice already figured, to an extent, in the early SI. Debord conceived of the activity of the constructors of situations as self-transformative, in Marx's sense, whose object was not merely the external environment, but especially the 'behaviour' of the Situationists themselves.[498] Additionally, the Situationists had early on conceived of this hypothetical activity, as 'replacing and *completing* […] poetry'.[499] Thus, we can say that the idea of human practice as both practice and product(ion), was a part of the Situationist hypothesis (see chapters one and three, in this regard). However, the context in which this 'revalorisation' and assertion of the Situationist sense of poetry also helps us to understand the more deeply Marxian dimensions of this revalorisation around 1961. In his encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* over 1960 and 1961, Debord found not only the 'political alienation'

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[497] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 4 (thesis 3).
[498] Cf. Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957].'; Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes : L'I.S. dans et contre la décomposition [1957].'
[499] I.S., 'Problèmes préliminaires à la construction d'une situation,' p. 12.

that he criticised (a subject I will turn to more fully in chapter seven), but the related problem of the positivistic conception of human practice as 'labour' redolent of Marxist orthodoxy. 'Poetry', then, was offered as a corrective of sorts, and attempt to *détourn* Marx beyond his positivistic Marxist avatars, and correct the sense of 'free, productive activity' beyond the socialist imaginary of a freer labour.

We can best understand the import of this 'revalorisation' if we contrast Cornelius Castoriadis' critique of Marx alongside a reading of what Marx actually argued, which I will turn to shortly. Indeed, this allows us to also understand the explicit association of 'poetry' with the SI's attempt to recover Marx beyond his mutilation at the hands of Marxism (a question I will also deal with in chapter seven below). At the heart of Castoriadis' argument regarding the 'self-management' of labour and production was the idea that workers already implicitly self-managed production; all that was necessary was to make it explicit. Thus, apart from the more egregious examples of superfluous, harmful or pointless production, by Castoriadis' lights labour as it existed was already in anticipation, the productive activity which would continue after capitalism. To say that this was in contrast with the idea of free, playful activity embodied in the Situationists hypothesis is perhaps an understatement. Therefore, by way of proposing 'poetry', albeit in the 'Situationist sense of the term', the SI wanted to not only 'revalorise' their artistic past, but also recover Marx's more general sense of 'free, productive activity' that Marx also theorised under the term 'revolutionary practice': i.e., '[t]he coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change'.[500] In contrast with Castoriadis, who conceived of such activity only in the register of the 'democratic', 'self-management' of labour as it presently existed, the SI argued that a 'new type of free activity' must be posed in its stead, one that is based on the real resistance and rebellion of workers rather than their 'labour' for capital as such.[501] In this way, they associated the 'insubordinate' poetry of the past — particularly the poetry of Dada and Surrealism — with the insubordination of workers against work (and their reduction to labour). Importantly in this regard, the SI's conception of a 'new

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[500] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 4 (thesis 3).
[501] Internationale Situationniste [Raoul Vaneigem], 'Domination de la nature, idéologies et classes,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (Janvier 1963).

type of activity' was not simply restricted to activity *apart from* labour, but rather the end of labour wholly *determined* in the alienated mode, i.e. as a 'blind power' (Marx). Thus, the pithy graffito of Debord's from 1952, '*ne travaillez jamais*' ('never work' or 'never labour'), can be seen as a part of the (anti) artistic 'revalorisation' around this time, retrospectively recast as the 'preliminary program of the Situationist movement'.[502]

Poetry, in the Situationist sense of the term

As we have seen, in the early work of the SI (particular before 1962 and 1963), the terms used to describe Situationist activity stressed the way they surpassed present 'traditional arts'. Nonetheless from the outset Debord evoked the 'poetic' qualities of the Situationist project, stressing a sense that would later be evoked by the 'Hamburg Theses'. When describing what would be necessary in order to constitute a constructed situation Debord wrote that 'we must multiply poetic objects and subjects […] and organise games for these poetic subjects amongst these poetic objects. This is our entire program, which is essentially transitory'.[503] At the same time Debord noted that the 'poetic' appropriation of ideas and practices to the end of impassioning the world, had already been outlined by the Surrealists in the 1920s.[504] Such an expansive conception of the 'poetic' was redolent of the more extreme conceptions of Romanticism — for instance those of Hölderlin, Rimbaud and Lautréamont — in which new sensibilities and new ways of living would not only be conjured, but everyday life itself would become the poetic medium for its collective elaboration and self-transformation.

The Surrealists positioned themselves as the inheritors and systematisers of past 'extreme' poetic projects (among others). The lineage that Surrealism identified in the Romanticism of Hölderlin and the 'Bousignots' bohemians in the 1830s and 1840s, and Lautréamont in the 1860s, was taken over by the Situationists in its entirety.[505] Debord was most interested in these examples of artistic rebellion as transitory models and attempts at a free subjectivity. In this

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[502] Internationale Situationniste, 'Programme préalable au mouvement situationniste,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (Janvier 1963).

[503] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 326.

[504] Ibid., pp. 312-13.

[505] For instance, as outlined by Guy Debord in 'Le Surréalisme : une révolution de l'irrationnel.' For more details on the influence of Hölderlin and the Bousignots on the SI, cf. Martos, *Histoire de l'internationale situationniste*, pp. 84-88.

regard their biggest impediments were their material poverty and marginality; indeed, it was these latter traits that allowed them to be both defeated and recuperated (in the Situationist sense).

We can measure the drift of the Situationist sense of 'poetry' from that of the Surrealist sense through their debates with the remaining Surrealist faithful in the late 1950s. Initially, Debord concentrated his criticism of the Surrealists upon their obsession with the unconscious and irrationality, and their tendency toward mysticism.[506] But soon his criticism would be more obviously focused on the largely artistic and literary orientation of the Surrealists, no doubt influenced by the widespread influence of Surrealism on not only the SI's literary and artistic contemporaries, but members of the group as well. As Debord said of the original Surrealists, their 'limited scope […] was in large part due to the lack of material means for fulfilling its aims', notably that of impassioning everyday life more generally.[507] The chief expression of this lack of material means was precisely the poetry and art produced by the surrealists, insofar as the transformation of the word or the canvas was closer at hand than the social-revolutionary implications of the Surrealist 'revolution'. As Debord would later say,

> whereas surrealism in the heyday of its assault against the oppressive order of culture and daily life could appropriately define its arsenal as "poetry without poems if necessary," for the SI it is now a matter of a poetry *necessarily* without poems.[508]

In 1958 the Situationist tone was more *surrealist*, but the argument was the same: 'We do not want to renew [artistic] expression in itself, […] we want to impassion [*passionner*] everyday life. Poetry can no longer be less than this'.[509] Poetry, in the Situationist sense of the term, was precisely the transformation of everyday life embodied in the Situationist hypothesis and experimentally elaborated through unitary urbanism. As we have seen in chapters one and three, such a conception did not preclude the production of art by members of the SI, but rather

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[506] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957].'
[507] Ibid.
[508] I.S. [Debord], 'All the King's Men.'
[509] Internationale Situationniste, 'Les souvenirs au-dessous de tout,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 2 (Décembre 1958), p. 3.

clarified the non-artistic nature of the Situationist project. Whether or not Situationists were also

artists was not the chief concern; rather the question was one of how the group could take hold

of elements of past cultural production in order to elaborate and develop the idea of the poetic

elaboration and appropriation of everyday life.[510] As we have seen, the way the Situationist

sense of poetry was evoked and objectified became *the* point of contention within the group.

But it is this sense of the poetic, as at once anticipative of a Situationist future and the measure

of current 'pre-situationist' activity, that proved most durable across the phases and breaks of

the SI. By emphasising the process of production across time over fetishizing the results of such

production, Debord and his circle gestured at a sense of poetry that was both *poiesis* and *praxis*

(in the senses outlined by Aristotle). In doing so they evoked Marx's sense of revolutionary

praxis by way of recovering the anti-artistic thrust of the most extreme experiments in artistic

decomposition of the past century and more.

The Situationist argument regarding the 'poetic' versus the reified results of poetic activity (e.g.

the poem, or any other art work for that matter) resembles, in the negative, Aristotle's argument

regarding the difference between 'making' (*poiesis*) and 'acting' (*praxis*). For instance,

Aristotle cautioned against conflating *poiesis* and *praxis*, arguing that the former is an activity

that is distinguished from its results (i.e. the production of things), whereas the latter is activity

(i.e. acting, doing) as an end in itself.[511] The SI's perspective constitutes a critique of Aristotle,

insofar as they implicitly argued for such a conflation against the received wisdom of

distinguishing the act from the result (or one type of practice — *poiesis* — from practice —

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[510] By way of illustration it is useful to compare some of the artistic productions of the SI. If we look at the year 1961 there are two examples that help us to understand the growing tensions within the group regarding the role of art. In February 1961, Jørgen Nash published a collection of poetry, *Hanegal, gallisk poesiealbum*, with illustrations by fellow Situationist JV Martin. The book was published under the 'Édition Internationale situationniste' imprint. Without doubt the book bore little if any Situationist content, and proved controversial within the group. If we look at another example drawn from that year, Michèle Bernstein' novel *La nuit*, we find that no attempt was made to pass this novel off as a Situationist artwork. Indeed, such an omission was deliberate, in the same way that Debord never described his contemporaneous film work as 'Situationist'. As we will discover in chapters three and four below, such a distinction was deliberately made in order to prevent the use of 'Situationist' as a placeholder for describing so-called 'extreme' or avant-garde art.

[511] Aristotle, 'Nicomachean Ethics,' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 1799-1800 (VI. 4, 1140a 1-23, VI. 5, 1140b 5-7). Also cf. Aristotle, 'Magna Moralia,' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 1893-1894 (I. 34, 1197a 3-13).

praxis — as such).[512] In doing so the SI followed Marx's conception of '*praxis*' and in particular his idea of 'revolutionary practice'.

Marx's argument was not aimed at the conceptual distinction *poiesis/praxis*, but rather what was practically implicit in this division.[513] For Aristotle the '*praxis*' of a thing is bound up with its nature. Thus *praxis*, 'doing', is to be found in things themselves; it is not a question of accident or design but one of natural necessity. In contrast, '*poiesis*', 'making', is based upon chance and accident; it is a question of 'what can be otherwise' rather than a question of what must be by necessity.[514] However, Marx rejected the idea of '*praxis*' being commensurate with the nature of a thing, insofar as such a 'nature' was invariant. For instance, in the *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx argued that human nature itself was an object of (self) transformation, and thus posed it as an object of *poiesis* in Aristotle's reckoning. That is, he posed the idea of 'revolutionary praxis' which encompassed the idea that '*praxis*', as Aristotle understood it, was not only liable to transformation and production, i.e. '*poiesis*', but was also a potential object of self-conscious transformation. Against the idea of an invariant nature, Marx posed the 'essence of man' as not merely an abstraction, but rather '[i]n its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations' whose full meaning cannot be revealed without reference to his idea of revolutionary practice: 'The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*'.[515]

Marx and the Situationists' conception of human practice — as 'poetry' or as 'revolutionary practice' — was not a plea for an indeterminate or purely relative human 'nature'. In this sense, they did not make *praxis* derivative of *poiesis*, as Cornelius Castoriadis did in his departure

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[512] For the purposes of this discussion I will limit my discussion to *praxis* and *poiesis*, and will set aside their relation, for instance, to such important Aristotelian categories as *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *theoria* (contemplation).

[513] Cf. Jorge Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1979, pp. 41-2. 'Marx emphasizes […] that practice is not only the transformation of nature but also the transformation of men themselves. Practice should be understood not merely as the production of the physical existence of men, but also as an activity express sing their life. In this sense, Marx surpasses Aristotle's distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*. What men are coincides with their practice. Therefore, practical activity cannot be opposed to other aspects of man. Practice is man's specific way of being. It is not an external determination, a sort of appendage to theory or even the application of theory. Practice determines man in its totality. It is the activity which produces not only material means but also men and their social life'.

[514] Aristotle, 'Nicomachean Ethics,' p. 1800 (VI. 4, 1140a 23).

[515] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 4 (thesis 6 & 3).

from Marxism.[516] Indeed, and as we will see below, the idea of grounding *poiesis* in *praxis* (and

praxis in *poiesis)*, or practically conflating these distinctions in the human animal, allows us to

steer a path between determinacy and indeterminacy. The question, then, for both Marx and the

Situationists was not one of whether the human was essentially determined by *poiesis* (as

Castoriadis wagered against Marx) or whether the human was in essence just *poiesis* (as was

also paradoxically asserted by Castoriadis), but rather to what extent was the human animal

successively a product of its own, self-transformative practice.[517] Lost in Castoriadis' evocation

of *poiesis* is the idea that *praxis* as such is the mediate form of the relationship between the

(human) animal and the rest of nature. Whether or not this relationship itself becomes an object

of *poiesis* is immaterial to the priority of praxis in this sense; thus, in the human case, *praxis*

itself becomes an object of *poiesis*. But, without doubt, *praxis* as the marker of the mediation of

the human with both human and non-human nature is primary. Nonetheless, when Vaneigem

wrote that '*praxis* alone [is] the foundation of the relation between men and nature', like Marx

he drew attention to both the peculiar nature of the human in contrast to the non-human animal,

and the way human activity itself had become the departure for the elaboration and

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[516] 'The Aristotelian division into *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis* is derivative and secondary. History is essentially *poiesis*, not imitative poetry, but creation and ontological genesis in and through individuals' doing and representing/saying. This doing and this representing/saying are also instituted historically, at a given moment, as thoughtful doing or as thought in the making'. Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987 [1975], pp. 3-4.
[517] Castoriadis argued that Marx considered the 'predominant motivation' of human nature as an 'essentially unalterable' economic determinism which entailed that for 'all time, human societies are held to have aimed [...] first and foremost to increase their production and their consumption' (ibid., pp. 29, 25). In apparent opposition to this perspective, Castoriadis argued that '[h]istory is essentially *poiesis* [...] [i.e.] creation and ontological genesis in and through individuals' doing and representing/saying' (ibid., pp. 3-4). However, as the SI argued against Castoriadis, Marx did not propose an 'essentially unalterable' human nature, but rather that 'the whole of history is only the progressive transformation of human nature' (Internationale Situationniste, 'Socialisme ou Planète,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 10 (Mars 1966), p. 79). Indeed, by their lights Marx's perspective was superior to Castoriadis' simply because Marx held onto the idea of nature — albeit one undergoing unconscious and conscious transformation in the case of the human animal. The danger of Castoriadis' perspective is that it opened onto the possibility of a complete relativism insofar as it recognises no 'nature' apart from *poiesis* (a danger, moreover, clearly realised by those poststructuralists influenced by Castoriadis' criticism of Marx — notably Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard). By doing so Castoriadis further exposed himself to paradox, i.e. that amidst his rejection of determinism under any guise, he nonetheless he had recourse to a determinism of the apparently indeterminate. What we will see, below and in chapter seven, is that by 'determinism' Marx and Castoriadis understand different objects. For Marx, such 'determinism' was neither ironclad nor impervious to accident or free action; whereas for Castoriadis 'determinism' simply meant the operations of impersonal forces or laws.

transformations of such *praxis*, i.e. productive activity which entailed the reproduction and transformation of the natural relationship itself.[518]

As we will find below, the different interpretations of what constituted *praxis*, *poiesis*, revolutionary practice and the idea and reality of human productive activity cuts to the heart of not merely the differing interpretations of the SI, Castoriadis and *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, but also to the real differences between Marx and Marxist orthodoxy. Before turning to this in more detail we should consider more clearly the nature of poetry in the Situationist sense. Above I dealt with the Situationists' criticism of conventional and avant-garde poetry, insofar as such convention led to a focus upon the art-work over the process of creation. However, as we have seen via the brief consideration of *praxis* and *poiesis* above, the SI's conception of poetry bore more than a striking resemblance to Marx's conception of revolutionary practice.

For the SI, as opposed to much of Marxist orthodoxy, the question was not one of "freeing" or "liberating" labour, but rather posing free, playful activity in opposition to its reduction to alienated labour — an insight moreover that brought them into line with Marx's early argument regarding the reduction of 'free, conscious life activity' to 'estranged labour'. The Situationist hypothesis thus presented the possibility of constructing situations not as *labour* but rather as *poetry*, i.e. as the conscious and collaborative organisation of 'play' or 'spontaneous creativity'. The concepts of 'play' and 'poetry' embodied both the Situationist critique of the Marxist notion of 'labour', and their attempt to *détourn* Marx beyond his mutilation at the hands of Marxism. 'Play' for the SI was the equivalent of free activity, i.e. activity that was not compelled by immanent needs, whether constituted 'naturally' or 'socially' (even if they accepted such needs as the ground of play). In this sense the opposition 'play-labour', insofar as 'play' is considered as secondary to and attendant upon 'labour' (i.e. as rest and recuperation from labour) was rejected. Here the SI was following the argument of Johan Huizinga, who had rejected functionalist conceptions of play that reduced it to either a 'biological purpose' or

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[518] Raoul Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (II),' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (Janvier 1963), p. 45 (thesis 28).

secondary to labour.[519] Of course this is not to say that that 'play' is not experienced as rest from labour, but rather that in a society in which labour is the condition of survival, the free play of human powers is largely reduced to labour for subsistence, just as play is reduced to rest and recuperation from labour. Thus, the SI distinguished between their sense of 'play' and the 'pseudo-games' on offer as so many compensations for a life of wage slavery.[520]

Vaneigem spoke of 'creativity' in similar terms to Marx's early conception of 'production' as the activity in which humans distinguish themselves from non-human animal production.[521] Thus, Vaneigem spoke of creativity as a quality in which all humans share — and so, after a fashion, something akin to human nature — whereas the capacity for 'spontaneous creativity' was a mode of *individual* creativity he considered a conquest and not a given.[522] Vaneigem distinguished between the general capacity for creativity and its activation; additionally he was able to distinguish between the hierarchical and exploitative harnessing of creativity — as wage labour, as slavery, etc. — and the necessarily critical, 'free', spontaneous mode of creativity required in order to refuse the canalisation of creativity. Here we begin to approach the significance of the Situationist notion of 'poetry'. According to Vaneigem, the incidence of truly free, spontaneous creativity has so far led a shadowy existence, in the face of the hierarchical canalisation of creativity. Nonetheless the canalisation of this capacity, as in Marx's sense of labour power at the disposal of capital, is crucial to the creation of commodities. So far, free creativity in the sense of being autonomous and mostly unrestricted in its individual instances has been restricted to either sections of the ruling classes, or those groups, relatively marginal in non-revolutionary times, who cultivate a critical resistance to the ruling powers (for instance, in bohemian 'micro-societies' like the SI). Vaneigem, following Debord's Situationist hypothesis, gives the name 'poetry' to the cultivation and organisation of such spontaneous creativity. Debord identified 'the poetry of the era' (as opposed to the false poetry of poems)

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[519] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the play element in culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Boston: Beacon Press, [1944] 1955, p. 2.
[520] Cf. I.S., 'L'urbanisme unitaire à la fin des années 50.'
[521] For instance, in the way Vaneigem speaks of the peculiarly human 'natural alienation'. Cf. Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (I)' & 'Banalités de base (II)'.
[522] Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, pp. 167, 170.

with the construction of situations, with the 'dynamic system of an environment and playful behaviour':[523]

> poetry must be understood as direct communication within reality and as real modification of this reality. It is none other than liberated language, language regaining its richness, language breaking its [rigid] significations while simultaneously embracing words, music, cries, gestures, painting, mathematics and events [*les faits*]. Poetry thus depends on the greatest [material] wealth, in a given stage of socio-economic formation in which life can be lived and changed. Needless to say, the relation of poetry to its material base in society is not one of unilateral subordination, but [rather] one of interaction.[524]

Like Vaneigem, 'poetry' for Debord was clearly associated with the Situationist activity that is entailed in the realisation of the Situationist hypothesis. However Debord's phrasing at this point — 1963 — was more *semiotic*, perhaps, emphasising the play of language that not only breaks its rigidity but also embraces 'events' — among other items.[525] '[D]irect communication within reality and as real modification of this reality' is here analogous to Marx's conception of 'free, conscious activity' and 'revolutionary practice', opposed by the 'pseudo-communication' of the commodity-spectacle (exemplified in the largely mono-logical "communication" of information and news).[526] Under the rule of the commodity, words, like proletarians, are forced into work. The free play of language is constrained to the extent they are put to work and transformed into the 'counter-poetry of power' — namely 'information' and 'news'.[527] Thus,

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[523] Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes : L'I.S. dans et contre la décomposition [1957].'

[524] I.S. [Debord], 'All the King's Men,' p. 31.

[525] In doing so he betrays the influence of Henri Lefebvre, and his research group on the everyday day at the CNRS, as much as the heady atmosphere of the contemporaneous blossoming of structural semiotics in France in the 1950s and 60s. Cf. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*.

[526] The Situationists had earlier spoken of 'artistic expression' as 'pseudo-communication', insofar as artists had continued to engage in such 'expression', despite the 'testimony' rendered by the anti-art avant-gardes through their practice of 'destruction in poetry, novels and all the plastic arts'. Cf. I.S., 'Le sens du dépérissement de l'art,' p. 5.

[527] I.S. [Debord], 'All the King's Men,' pp. 30, 31.

the 'problem of language' is 'inseparable from the very terrain of those struggles. We live within language as within polluted air'.[528]

Vaneigem also addressed the problem of language in the same issue as Debord's article. As if by way of establishing the parameters of his and Debord's argument, Vaneigem had earlier remarked in the first part of his long essay 'Basic Banalities', that 'in the language of an era one can follow the unfulfilled but always immanent trace of total revolution'.[529] Later, in the second part, and in language similar to Debord's, he drew attention to the 'distortion and awkwardness in the way we express ourselves […] on the confusing frontier where we engage in the infinitely complex battle [between] language confined by power (conditioning) and free language (poetry)'.[530] Here Vaneigem called the language of power 'conditioning', underlining the purpose of what Debord described as the 'unilateral' "communications" of power.[531] For Vaneigem, poetic activity is always 'irreducible and non-recuperable [*non récupérable*] by power', precisely because once it is laid hold by power it is transformed into a 'stereotype', into 'conditioning' and the 'language of power' — which is to say 'counter-poetry'. Common to both Debord and Vaneigem is the sense that power attempts to isolate and strictly determine the meaning of words, a process akin to the attempt to corral the poetic tendency to play and transform meanings.

The crucial connective between the Situationist sense of the word 'poetry' and Marx's idea of 'revolutionary practice' is contained in the final two sentences quoted above. Here Debord grappled with an idea that Castoriadis came to believe revealed the limits of Marx's conception of production. On the one hand, Debord argued that poetry in the Situationist sense depended upon 'the greatest [material] wealth'; on the other hand the relationship between poetry and its material basis is not one of 'unilateral subordination, but [rather] one of interaction'.[532] Marx and the Situationists argued that the priority of the economic base qua economic base is a function of the capitalist reduction of life to the production and sale of commodities (or the

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[528] Ibid., p. 29.
[529] Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (I),' p. 38 (thesis 10).
[530] Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (II),' p. 38 (thesis 17).
[531] Debord, 'All the King's Men,' p. 30.
[532] Ibid., p. 31.

prioritisation of the production and sale of commodities), and the reproduction of this schema. In his schematisation of 'base and superstructure' Marx's apparent "approval" is actually critical and analytical, following upon his early ideas about the separation of mental and manual labour, and their role in the rise of hierarchical class divisions and the various class based 'modes of production'.

We can perceive Debord's idea of 'the relation of poetry to its material base in society' being 'one of interaction' rather than 'unilateral subordination' in the playful nature claimed for the poetic organisation of spontaneous, 'playful' creativity — free *praxis* and *poiesis* (production) in Marx's sense. As mentioned elsewhere, the Situationists hypothesis is the *détournement* of Sartre's sense of the situation, however drawing its sense from a similar idea of the temporal nature of the situation, the freedom to be other than 'in situation'.[533] There is no "point" here apart from the play of the Situationists themselves, which is to say 'games for these poetic subjects amongst these poetic objects'. And bound up in this 'play' is both the situation as a temporal passage and the playful self-creation of the Situationists themselves. This brings us back to what Debord considered the most important 'results' of the Dada and Surrealist avant-gardes, i.e. not the exoteric artistic results so much as the esoteric behavioural results — possibilities outlined and explored for a '*new type of free activity*' (as Vaneigem would later put

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[533] It has often been remarked that Debord's Situationist hypothesis was influenced by Sartre's idea of the situation; it is less remarked that Debord's hypothesis was a critical inversion of Sartre's conception — a *détournement* in the Situationist vernacular. In this sense Debord's *détournement* is not dissimilar to what Marx did to Hegel's notion of 'supersession' (*dépassement — aufheben*) by way of Feuerbach. Rather than dispensing with Hegel altogether (as Feuerbach had argued was necessary, in a Hegelian fashion…) Marx 'inverted' him, that is to say used the dialectic inversion of subject and predicate against Hegel in order to demonstrate not only that the spiritual world was a simulacra of the "real" one (as Feuerbach argued), but that the so-called "real one" was itself the product of human activity which had largely taken place, so far, under the demonstrably distorted hand of religious hierarchies and "spirituality". Marx's innovation was to argue with and against Feuerbach that even though he agreed religious ideas tended to form a cruel and pale simulacrum of the "material" world, this made them no less "real" insofar as they were embodied in human practices. As Marx would mordantly argue, 'once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and in practice' (*Theses on Feuerbach*, thesis 4). Debord did to Sartre something similar to what Marx did to Hegel's spiritual hierarchy: he turned it on its head. We could get lost in the Heideggarean roots of all of this — but let's not. Heidegger's sense of being is deficient in comparison to Marx's, as we can understand by way of Debord's *détournement* of Sartre. The facticity of being gives too much to the objectivity of situation over its openness to malleability and free construction. Of course, this is not to claim a complete malleability, but rather to pose like Marx that the facticity of natural being is not completely closed to human transformation. This is Marx's contention in posing 'revolutionary practice' in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. We will return to Marx's ideology criticism in chapter seven. For more on Sartre, cf. fns. 114, 278, in chapter one, and three, above.

it[534]). However, considering the caution regarding misapprehending the Situationist hypothesis as merely 'the unitary use of artistic means contributing to an ambience' — which is to say *poiesis* (production) — we should note the way the elaboration of the constructed situation is presented as a practice immanent to Situationists — i.e. as *praxis*.[535] This Situationist *praxis* is itself a *poiesis*, i.e. not only do the 'actions' contained within the constructed situation contribute to the décor of the situation, but they are produced by the décor and produce 'other forms of décors and actions' in turn.[536] In this sense the practice of Situationists, in the anticipative sense, is at once *praxis* and *poiesis*, i.e. it is commensurate with the activity of these Situationists (*praxis*) and the ongoing production of the conditions for this activity (*poiesis*). Here we begin to see the distinct lineaments of 'poetry' in the Situationist sense, and the basis for its later fruitful interchange and criticism of Marx's idea of 'revolutionary practice'.

Marx, production and revolutionary practice

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx presented a conception of human 'productive activity' consonant with what he would soon call 'revolutionary practice'. Here he wrote of the 'species character' of the activity of the human animal as 'free, conscious activity' and 'spontaneous, free activity'.[537] He contrasted such activity with, on the one hand, non-human animal activity and on the other hand with the 'estranged labour' predominating in capitalist societies. Indeed, he drew a comparison between the latter two conceptions, insofar as he conceived of 'estranged labour' as a type of reduction of the species character of the human to a purely animal level. Marx argued that through the imposition of 'estranged labour' as the general type of productive activity in capitalist societies, '[l]ife itself appears only as a *means to life*', insofar as '*life activity*, *productive life* itself, appears to man in the first place merely as a means of satisfying a need — the need to maintain physical existence'.[538] Thus 'free, conscious activity' is contrasted to unfree 'labour', in which the latter is the former reduced to the merely instrumental. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels contrasted 'self-activity' to 'labour' in

[534] I.S. [Vaneigem], 'Domination de la nature, idéologies et classes,' p. 4.
[535] I.S., 'Problèmes préliminaires à la construction d'une situation,' p. 11.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,' pp. 276, 277.
[538] Ibid.

a similar fashion; thus under conditions of constraint, and specifically those of capitalism, the historical conditions for 'self-activity' are reduced to 'labour', which, as the 'negative form of self-activity' has 'lost all semblance of self-activity and only sustains […] life by stunting it'.[539] 'Labour' is here presented as a degraded, alienated form of self-activity, i.e. as the negation of 'life activity, productive life itself', of 'free, conscious activity'. What is clear from the foregoing is that Marx did not simply equate productive activity with labour; indeed, at this point (1844-45) 'labour' was more often associated almost exclusively with the 'estranged labour' of capitalism. But most importantly 'labour', insofar as it was the productive activity geared solely toward the subsistence of the labourer, was considered reductive — both conceptually and practically — of a more expansive sense of free, conscious, productive life.

Marx moved from using 'labour' in mostly a negative sense in his early writing (i.e. as 'estranged labour') to using 'labour' as 'one of his fundamental ahistorical categories' by the time of the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.[540] However, it would be a mistake to consider this as Marx simply conflating 'labour' and 'life activity'. For instance, in *Capital* he examined the 'labour process' in abstraction, strictly in terms of 'productive activity' to the end of the production of 'use-values' — thus he was able to conceive of this process abstracted from both the production of commodities for sale and the separation of 'labour power' from the labour process itself.[541] In his draft of this section from *Capital*, Marx further considered the labour process, in terms of its *particularity* — as 'purposeful activity aimed at the creation of a use value, at the appropriation of natural material in a manner which corresponds to particular needs' — and in terms of its *abstract* quality as a technical process; an abstraction, moreover, which Marx argued follows upon its capitalist character.[542] By doing so he was able to consider the labour process firstly in

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[539] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'The German Ideology [1845],' in *Karl Marx & Frederich Engels Collected Works, Vol.5* New York: International Publishers, 1976, p. 87.
[540] C.J. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 13.
[541] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, pp. 283-84, 290. The distinction between the labour process and 'labour power' was a crucial part of Marx's idea of 'surplus value'.
[542] Karl Marx, 'Economic Manuscript of 1861-63 [1],' in *Marx Engels Collected Works, Vol. 30*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988, p. 55. Also, cf. György Márkus: '[W]ork as labour constitutes only one side or aspect of that unitary and indivisble process which from the other side appears as the process of transformation of the "socio-economic form", i.e. as that of the realisation and change of definite productive relations between the different social actors of economic life. […] The earlier, philosophic-anthropological meaning of work is connected not with the concept of "work" (labour) in [an] economic

terms of the production of use-values and secondly as a restricted instance of the 'metabolic interaction between man and nature' (i.e. restricted in the sense of 'subsistence' production of 'use-values') vis-à-vis its capitalist character.[543] However, by more strictly stipulating the abstract notion 'labour process', Marx was able to continue an argument he carried over from his earlier work, namely that the 'metabolic interaction of man and nature' to the end of the production of subsistence goods (i.e. use-values) would be a component of *any* social form created by humans. The problem, as always, was the extent to which life-activity, productive life, free activity, etc., was simply restricted or reduced to the labour process itself.

Marx's idea of human practice is naturalistic, i.e. it is rooted in our 'nature'. However, because the human, unlike the animal, is not completely 'merged' in its nature, the human makes of nature (both its 'own' and non-human nature) an object of life activity (conceptually and materially). Such 'objectification' opens up the possibility of the transformation of nature, insofar as, (i) it is an *object of practice*, and (ii) it is *objectified in practice* (such as human activity itself). Marx called 'free, conscious activity' the species-character of the human animal, insofar as the conditions of possibility of such 'free' practice, beyond animal (re)production, was what marked out the human animal from other animals.

Conceptual abstractions play a singularly important role in Marx's estimation. He contrasts human production with that of the spider and the bee.[544] Whereas it is true that the bee and the spider do not perceive or conceive of their 'production' as a human does, in the labour process the human builds 'the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax'. Whether or not she makes the building out of wax or stone, good, bad or indifferent, the human objectifies her practice, conceptually abstracts her project in such a fashion that she can transform the object — both conceptually and materially.

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sense, but with that of "production". […] More precisely, what is expressed in the early philosophic manuscripts of Marx by the category work (or production) is designated in his later economic writings with the help of locutions like "the material life-creating process of men", "the real social life-process", [and] "the productive life-process of society".' György Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology: The concept of "human essence" in the philosophy of Marx*, trans. E. de Laczay and G. Márkus, Sydney: modem-Verlag., [1966/1978] 2014, p. 15, fn. 12.

[543] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, pp. 283, 290.

[544] Ibid., p. 284.

Castoriadis vs. Marx vs. Castoriadis

Recently Raoul Vaneigem has spoken of the need 'to revalorize the artist past of the SI […] in the name of poetry' around 1962-63.[545] Such a 'revalorisation', of what Breton called the 'poetic adventure' in the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, was made in the face of their encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.[546] At the time of the SI's encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (most 'amicably' between 1960 and 1963) Marx's notion of 'production' and 'revolutionary activity' were being contested by Cornelius Castoriadis. Thus, perhaps the best way, at least an often misunderstood or ignored way, is to approach the relationship between the Situationist sense of 'poetry' and Marx's sense of 'revolutionary activity' by way of their implicit and explicit criticism by the chief theorist of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* — i.e., Castoriadis. This way, moreover, is hinted at in a recent interview with Vaneigem:

> *Socialisme ou Barbarie* retained an anti-bureaucratic radicality without managing to accomplish anything else […] The SI had no reason to be opposed to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. We agreed with their analysis of the bureaucratization of the workers' movement. They lacked what we had: poetry, that is to say, self-management, which was the poetry of the proletariat rediscovering its everyday life, rediscovering the veritable substance of class struggle: the self-management of everyday life[.][547]

The group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (hereafter 'SB') famously argued for working class 'self-management' (*autogestion*) of industrial production and society throughout the 1950s.[548]

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[545] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.
[546] Ibid.
[547] Ibid.
[548] It is not exactly clear when the term 'self-management' ('*autogestion*') began to be used in Socialisme ou Barbarie. Castoriadis wrote in 1976 that 'the wide diffusion of the idea of self-management over the last two decades is to be linked to the exemplary demands of the Hungarian workers' councils' Cornelius Castoriadis, 'The Hungarian Source [1976],' in *Cornelius Castoriadis Political and Social Writings Volume 3, 1961-1979*, ed. David Ames Curtis, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 251. Indeed, the word does not appear to be used by Castoriadis before 1957 — for instance before his article, 'On the Content of Socialism, II'. Of course, this is not to argue that Castoriadis and other Social Barbarians did not speak of the workers management of production — which they did, at length, from the outset of the group — but rather to note that the term '*autogestion*' does not enter into their lexicon until after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Castoriadis' main translator in English, David Ames Curtis, has confused things slightly by choosing to translate a term Castoriadis did use prior to the Hungarian Revolution, namely '*gestionnaire*' (i.e. 'manager' or 'administrator') as 'self-managerial'. Cf. Cornelius Castoriadis, *Cornelius Castoriadis Political and Social Writings Volume 1, 1946-1955*, trans. David Ames Curtis, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988, p. 335 (Appendix I).

Vaneigem's point was not to claim 'self-management' for the SI, particularly in the same breath in which he acknowledges the debt of the SI to SB. Rather, he argued that their notion of self-management was more limited than the SI's: '[t]hey lacked what we had: poetry'. By Vaneigem's reckoning, and by extension the SI's, the question of self-management should not, nor could it be limited to the question of the organisation of production as it stood in capitalist societies. Rather, it was a question of the 'self-management' of everyday life itself, beyond the momentary production and reproduction of the means of existence in order to encompass the transformation of these means and — crucially — the ongoing self-transformation of human nature. In this sense Vaneigem's argument was directed against the reduction of the revolutionary idea of 'self-management' to a question of the management of production alone, rather than against SB as such. Nonetheless, and as we will see below, the idea of the 'self-management of everyday life' implied a critical rejection of SB's notion of 'self-management'.[549]

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[549] For the SI, the idea of the 'everyday' was derived from Henri Lefebvre's work. In contrast to those arguments that placed the 'economic' or the 'political' as the determining instant of the everyday, Lefebvre argued that elevation of any 'instant' or 'moment' above or in opposition to the everyday was 'alienating' or 'ideological' in Marx's sense of the terms. However, in the face of the practical separations and specialised activity proliferating across the social space-time of capitalism, the 'everyday' is relegated to cracks in the façade — classed as mundane and unimportant. Thus the 'everyday' is often associated with 'private life', 'family life', 'leisure-time' or life otherwise not directly engaged with what passes for productive activity in capitalist societies. Lefebvre, like Marx, held to both a *negative* and *positive* conception of the everyday. The negative conception, already outlined above, corresponded with the idea that the everyday was the 'very scanty residue' left over when one 'removes' the 'highly specialized occupations' from it. The positive conception, on the other hand, was both anticipative and a 'recovery': anticipative in the sense of posing the possibility of an everyday life in which no 'part' was elevated at the expense of another; but also, a 'recovery' in the sense that aspects of the 'everyday' present were testament to the incomplete nature of capitalist domination. Nonetheless, Lefebvre described this 'everyday' as 'lagging behind what is possible' insofar as it was marginalised, as the 'residue' or space-time yet to be fully invested by capitalism. Marx in effect operated with a concept of the everyday; however, he was less interested in an elaboration of a theory of the everyday than he was in posing the possibility of overcoming the practical separations 'within' it (to use an overworked spatial image). For instance, in his early work 'On the Jewish Question', Marx argued that only when the fragmented individual (fragmented across 'economic' and 'political' space-time) has become a self-conscious social being, in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognised and organised his "own powers" as social forces, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of political power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished. In a criticism and *détournement* of the idea of a 'lag' in everyday life, Debord would speak of 'colonisation' of everyday life, deliberately evoking the extension of the commodity-spectacle and its divisions of the world in the post-war world (the first, second and neo-colonial third worlds). Cf. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I*, pp. 8-10, 86, 148-50, 230 (See in particular the first chapter in which he outlines a criticism of the artistic and literary denigration of everyday life coming from such erstwhile critics of the everyday as the Surrealist group around André Breton); Debord, 'Perspectives de modification conscientes dans la vie quotidienne.'

Castoriadis believed that Marx was inconsistent across his earlier and later work; however, the real inconsistency lay in Castoriadis' interpretation of Marx.[550] For instance, Castoriadis came to believe that Marx had, in his later years (the so-called 'second element' of Marx in Castoriadis' vernacular), come to envisage 'productive activity' as determined utterly by 'natural necessity' and that free activity only began at the limits of such activity. On such a basis Castoriadis claimed that Marx saw 'only alienation' in the production process, no matter if it was subordinated to the ends of capital or the ends of the self-management of the producers.[551] Whereas it is true that Marx contrasted the realms of freedom and necessity, he did not oppose them. Contrary to Castoriadis' belief that such a conception constituted a retreat from his earlier work, Marx had already outlined an identical perspective in his earlier writing when he argued that, in contrast to the non-human animal, which 'produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, […] man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom'.[552]

The main problems with Castoriadis' criticism of Marx are as follows. First, he appeared to misapprehend Marx's early critique of the reduction of 'life activity' to 'labour' or 'estranged labour', arguing instead that Marx initially conceived of 'labour becom[ing] free activity'.[553] Secondly, he confused Marx's later conception of the 'realm of freedom' and the 'realm of necessity' as an opposition, further believing (mistakenly) that such a conception was absent from his earlier work. Finally, and on the basis of the foregoing, he argued that by rejecting his earlier conception of labour becoming free, and moving on to conceive of labour in a strictly determinist fashion, Marx posed that 'technique' insofar as it is equivalent to the production

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[550] Castoriadis would later consider Marx inconsistent within not only a single work, but a single chapter (in this case of *Capital*): 'He implies that, in one and the same chapter of *Capital,* Marx holds the very quasi-natural, nonhistorical position he analyzes critically in his discussion of the fetish.' Moishe Postone, *Time, labor, and social domination: a reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 171, fn. 110. Also, Cornelius Castoriadis, 'From Marx to Aristotle, from Aristotle to Us,' *Social Research* Vol. 45, no. 4 (Winter 1978).
[551] Cornelius Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' in *Cornelius Castoriadis Political and Social Writings: Volume 2, 1955-1960*, ed. David Ames Curtis, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 106.
[552] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,' p. 276.
[553] Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' p. 107.

process, 'follows an autonomous development, before which one can only bow down'.[554] Indeed this last point proved crucial to Castoriadis' later critical rejection of Marx.[555]

I have already shown above that Marx did not conceive of 'labour becom[ing] free activity', but rather contrasted the reduction of human activity to labour with the possibility (and reality) of 'free, conscious activity'. Indeed, Marx's later theorisation of the 'labour process' in abstraction was made in order to draw out an idea he carried over from his earlier work, namely that insofar as 'the metabolic interaction between man and nature' required the production of use-values for subsistence, human productive activity would be ultimately determined by such an 'interaction'.[556] Further, and contrary to Castoriadis' assertion, Marx also contrasted the "realms" of freedom and necessity in his earlier work, albeit not under these terms. Thus, he argued that whereas the animal 'produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, […] man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom'.[557]

Castoriadis' argument against Marx first clearly crystallised in an article written in 1957, under the influence of the Hungarian Revolution (among other things). In this article, 'On the Content of Socialism, II', Castoriadis put forward the argument that in the struggle of workers, and in particular in the 'modern' struggle between 'directors' and 'executants', the worker-executants posed a positive notion of labour and production, insofar as self-management was implicit, and sometimes explicitly posed, in their struggles against the capitalist management of work. Castoriadis noted that not only had Marxism missed this positive content, but Marx himself had seen '*only* alienation' in the capitalist labour process.[558] Castoriadis noted that this had not always been the case, and that Marx had moved from an earlier perspective in which he

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[554] Ibid.

[555] I will return to the question of Castoriadis and his relation to the SI in chapter six. I hope to return, in more detail, to the question of Castoriadis' critique of Marxism in a latter article.

[556] Marx did not use the term 'use-value(s)' in his early work, rather speaking of production conditioned by 'needs', of which the production of 'new needs' was a primary consequence. Cf. Marx & Engels, 'The German Ideology [1845].'

[557] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,' p. 276.

[558] Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' p. 106.

conceived of labour as (potentially) 'free activity' to one in which — by the time of *Capital* —
he saw,

> in modern production only the fact that the producer is mutilated and reduced to a
> "fragment of a man" […] and, what is more serious, to link this aspect to modern
> production and finally to *production as such*, instead of linking it to *capitalist*
> *technology*.[559]

Castoriadis' contention was that instead of identifying the problem as the capitalist domination
of the production process (and more exactly, such domination being exercised by the peculiarly
capitalist nature of industrial technology), Marx presented the production process itself as
always — and thus necessarily — dominating of human practice. However, there are real flaws
in Castoriadis' assessment. For instance, Marx saw the technological determination of the
production process only to the extent that such technology was itself an expression of the
capitalist 'labour process', it's artificial and 'natural' division, and the strange paradox of the
commodity labour power.[560] In the same article, Castoriadis pointed to a late work of Marx's in
order to substantiate his claim that Marx only saw alienation in the labour process. In what
would become the third volume of *Capital*, Marx posed two 'realms' as invariant moments of
any human community: the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity. Castoriadis'
assessment of this passage is damning. First, he accused Marx of now posing that 'freedom […]
could only be found outside of *labour*', unlike in his earlier work.[561] Secondly, and given
Marx's apparent rejection of the possibility of free labour, he argued that his conception of time
'freed' from labour was simply '*empty* time' which avoided the 'problem' at hand: 'to make all
time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to embody itself in creative activity'.[562]
Finally, and perhaps most damning, considering Castoriadis' later trajectory, he concluded:

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[559] Ibid.
[560] 'The sole point to be kept in view here is the specificity of labour where it appears as a real process. It
will be seen below that this indifference towards the specific content of labour is not only an abstraction
made by us; it is also made by capital, and it belongs to its essential character. Just as the investigation of
the *use values* of commodities as such belongs in *commercial knowledge,* so the investigation of the
labour process in its reality belongs in *technology*.' Marx, 'Economic Manuscript of 1861-63 [1],' p. 55.
[561] Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' p. 107.
[562] Ibid.

Underlying the idea that freedom is to be found "outside the sphere of actual material production" there lies a double error: first, that the very nature of technique and of modern production renders inevitable the domination of the productive process over the producer, in the course of his work; second, that technique and in particular modern technique follows an autonomous development, before which one can only bow down. Modern technique would moreover possess the double attribute of, on the one hand, constantly reducing the human role in production and, on the other hand, of constantly increasing the productivity of labour. From these two inexplicably combined attributes would result a miraculous dialectic of technical progress: More and more a slave *in the course of* work, man would be in a position to reduce enormously the *length* of work, if only he could succeed in organizing society rationally.[563]

However, if we more closely consider the section from *Capital* volume 3 that Castoriadis indicts, we find a conception of necessity and freedom that is actually consistent with the earlier Marx (i.e. the Marx favoured by Castoriadis). For instance, Marx did not argue that 'freedom […] could only be found outside of *labour*', as Castoriadis maintained, but rather that 'freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends'.[564] Such a perspective was consistent with his earlier belief that 'man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom'.[565] Marx did not oppose labour to free activity (or productive activity to free activity), but rather argued that productive activity that was truly free from subsistence production was also firmly and inescapably based upon such production. Thus, we do well to remember his belief that such free productive activity could and did emerge on such a basis. Indeed, it is strange that Castoriadis passed over so quickly and with little comment Marx's point that the 'realm of necessity' was not inoculated to freedom, but rather that,

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[563] Ibid.
[564] Ibid., p. 107; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 3*, trans. David Fernbach, London: Penguin Books, [1894] 1991, pp. 958-59.
[565] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,' p. 276.

> [f]reedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power[.][566]

Castoriadis' confusion may lie in the fact that Marx later stipulated in *Capital* that productive activity, insofar as it concerned the production of use-values for subsistence, could be considered abstractly as the 'labour process'. However, apart from this, Marx did not cease to speak of productive activity (and at times of 'labour' activity) which encompassed both the 'labour process' so delimited and productive activity that moved beyond this, but was nonetheless necessarily based upon the 'labour process'.

The real source of Castoriadis' error lies in what appears to be his adoption of the younger Georg Lukács' schema regarding 'labour' and 'production'. For instance, in his criticism of Lukács, Castoriadis rightly condemns the Hegelian 'sleight-of-hand trick' whereby the proletarian's consciousness of its revolutionary immanence is brought to it from without.[567] However, in making this criticism, Castoriadis does not challenge Lukács belief in the essential identity of the proletarian with its alienated objectification (mediated only in its alienation) but only that 'self-knowledge' of this relation can come from without. Additionally, Castoriadis mistook Lukács conception of capitalism as simply the alienated object of proletarian subjectivity as Marx's. On this basis, Castoriadis retained Lukács' *subjectivism* ('proletarian consciousness is nothing outside of proletarian action; simply put, it *is* action') while rejecting what he considered was Marx's *objectivism*.[568]

In *History and Class Consciousness*, the younger Lukács posed that the proletariat was in effect alienated as the world of commodities which paraded before it as, in truth, the alienated objectification of its activity. Such a conception is not missing from Marx or Debord's work; however, in emphasising the alienated objectification of the proletariat, Lukács underestimated — and this instance, ignored — objectification as the positive expression of human subjectivity

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[566] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 3*, p. 959.
[567] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 262. Debord takes up this criticism in *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 112.
[568] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 262.

beyond its alienated objectification. Entirely absent from Lukács conception of 'labour' or 'productive activity' is Marx's augment regarding the productive mediation of the 'metabolism between man and nature'; thus 'labour' as the activity which, on the one hand transforms the 'object', and on the other hand is the 'objectifying' activity of the subject was lost. By posing an immediate, albeit alienated relationship under conditions of capitalism, Lukács lost sight of the necessarily antagonistic and conflictual nature of objectification under conditions of capitalist labour and production. As he would later write, critical of his earlier self, '[i]t […] means the disappearance of the ontological objectivity of nature upon which the process of change is based'.[569] This is to say, under Lukács earlier vision capitalism is understood as simply alienation or estrangement rather than the contested development of labour as the 'ontologically fundamental' mediating activity.[570]

The question has been raised to what extent Debord was influenced by Lukács' earlier conception of the proletariat as the 'identical subject-object of history'.[571] The French translation of Lukács' 1967 Preface did not appear until 1974. However, Debord would certainly have known of Lukács criticisms of his earlier text, even if from the brief 'declaration' published in French in 1960.[572] However more importantly Debord, unlike the younger Lukács, had access to Marx's early *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, a work moreover that criticised Hegel for holding to precisely the conflation of alienation and objectification that Lukács later admitted to. In the *Manuscripts* Marx pointed out that the transcendence of 'alienated objectification' for Hegel meant 'also or primarily the transcendence of *objectivity* since the objective character of the object for self-consciousness […] is the scandal of alienation.'[573] Such a conception flowed from Hegel's belief in a 'spirit' and its successive

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[569] Georg Lukács, 'Preface to the New Edition (1967),' in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, London: Merlin Press, 1983, p. xvii.
[570] For more on labour as 'ontologically fundamental', cf. István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, Fourth ed., London: Merlin Press, 1975.
[571] Cf. the works of Tom Bunyard: 'A Genealogy and Critique of Guy Debord's Theory of the Spectacle'; '"History is the Spectre Haunting Modern Society": Temporality and Praxis in Guy Debord's Hegelian Marxism,' *Parrhesia* no. 20 (2014).
[572] Lukács & Axelos, 'Une déclaration de G. Lukács,' *Arguments*, no. 20 (4th quarter, 1960).
[573] Karl Marx, 'Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy in General [1844],' in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. Loyd D. Easton & Kurt H. Guddat, New York: Anchor Books, 1967, p. 327.

alienated objectifications (as nature, but primarily as self-conscious "man"). In his schema 'objectification' was synonymous with the self-alienation of spirit, short of its philosophic reconciliation. In Lukács' early schema the objectification of the proletariat — i.e. its self-alienation as labour-power and its objective alienation as capital, as the means of production and surplus value extracted — simply was alienation. As Debord pointed out,

> The *reversal* carried out by Marx […] does not trivially consist of putting the materialist development of productive forces in the place of the journey of the Hegelian Spirit towards its encounter with itself in time, its objectification being identical to its alienation, and its historical wounds leaving no scars. […] Marx demolished Hegel's position of *separation* from what happens — the *contemplation* of a supreme external agent, whatever it may be.[574]

In contrast to Marx, Castoriadis, much like the younger Lukács, emphasised human production (alienated or not) at the expense of conceiving of productive activity as the mediation of our relationship with our nature (conceived as both first, 'ontologically fundamental', and second, 'social' nature). History simply is *poiesis*, and Castoriadis disregarded the possibility of any natural relation (or 'necessity' as he condemns it via his reading of the later Marx) apart from the one established as "nature" through *poiesis*:

> There exists no place, no point of view outside of history and society, or 'logically prior' to them, where one could be placed in order to construct the theory of them […] Every thought of society and of history itself belongs to society and to history. Every thought, whatever it may be and whatever may be its 'object', is but a mode and a form of social-historical doing. It may be unaware of itself as such — and this is most often the case, by a necessity which is, so to speak, internal to it.[575]

Castoriadis rightly criticised the idea that theory can somehow stand outside of history or society. But to note that theory is a social product is not to deny the ability of humans to make

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[574] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 80.
[575] Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, pp. 3-4 (December 1974 Preface).

of society, history or even the 'totality' of being an object of theory. By reducing everything to the inescapable artifice of the social bond, Castoriadis, like the younger Lukács, tended to eliminate the non-social dimensions of sociality, i.e. of the social as an emergent property of human nature. Castoriadis was half right; but by being so he is largely wrong about the nature of alienation and production — not to mention his erroneous belief that the younger Marx shared his view in a series of 'stunning intuitions'. For instance, Castoriadis' conception of alienation is similar to Lukács early idea of it being largely misrecognition, i.e. that the proletariat misrecognises that its alienated object, capitalism, is simply its objectified "self" under alienation. Again, this is sort of half-right, but as the latter Lukács (and Debord) recognised, such a notion effectively erased the unity of the early and later Marx's belief in the 'natural necessity' that was contained in the social bond.[576]

In contrast to Marx, it is easy to see that Castoriadis held to a positive conception of labour.[577] However, this did not mean that Marx only conceived of 'productive activity' in a negative sense; rather he criticised the capitalist reduction of productive activity to mere labour for subsistence as the negation of the 'free, conscious life activity' of the human. Because Castoriadis misunderstood the unity of Marx's perspective across his earlier and later works, he formed the mistaken belief that Marx moved from a more subjectivist to a more objectivist and 'determinist' conception of productive activity in general in his later work. That is to say, Castoriadis argued that Marx, having posed labour as 'free, conscious activity' in his early work, turned to 'see in modern production only the fact that the producer is mutilated and

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[576] Castoriadis' interpretation and use of the young Lukács was taken up by other writers after him. For instance, Jean Baudrillard's conception of what counts as Marx on labour comes almost entire from Castoriadis (though not clearly attributed). Like Castoriadis, for Baudrillard the social relation is everything. However unlike Castoriadis, who reduces alienation to the alienation of the workers from control of the means of production (dispensing with Marx's other senses), Baudrillard's sees in alienation only a chimaera, a product of the alienation of human activity as labour power itself (cf. *The Mirror of Production*). However, Baudrillard like Castoriadis did not seem to understand that labour power was for Marx both a category derived from a critique of political economy and the reality of the alienating reduction of 'free, conscious' human activity *to* labour power for sale. The 'young-Lukácsian Marx' is one of the bugbears of poststructuralism, but in fact it is a production of Marxism and some of Marx's interpreters (even if we acknowledge the use of Marx today is always a production).

[577] 'Castoriadis implicitly reads Marx's negative critique [of labour] as a positive science and then criticizes it on this basis; he does not consider the relation between Marx's categorial analysis and his notion of the commodity fetish, and imputes an implausible degree of inconsistency to Marx. He implies that, in one and the same chapter of *Capital,* Marx holds the very quasi-natural, nonhistorical position he analyzes critically in his discussion of the fetish'. Postone, *Time, labor, and social domination: a reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory*, p. 171, fn. 110.

reduced to a "fragment of a man".'[578] Contrary to Castoriadis' belief that the worker

experienced their role in the labour process as 'only alienation', Marx emphasised the alienation

experienced as the condition of the workers *rebellion* against their reduction to labour power for

capital (and thus the basis for posing what the Situationist called a 'new type of activity', i.e.

poetry in the Situationist sense). Against the alienation of labour power, Marx thus conceived of

the positive movement of the workers in terms of their rebellion against the capitalist labour

process, 'stand[ing] from the outset in a relation of rebellion towards it and perceive[ing] it as a

process of enslavement.[579] Thus, whereas it is perhaps true Marx only saw alienation in the

capitalist labour process, the 'relation of rebellion' is itself 'free, conscious activity' emerging

in the midst of its alienation as labour. This was recognised by the Situationists through the

emphasis they laid upon the refusal of labour, as opposed to its self-management.

In a more Hegelian-Marxian register embraced by the SI around the early 1960s, we can argue

that Castoriadis and SB wanted to realise production without abolishing it in its present form;

i.e. in their conception, self-managed labour as embodied in industrial production, would not be

surpassed but rather democratically self-managed by the workers.[580] Work, as such, would

remain organised as an independent 'realm' within and apart for everyday life, and according to

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[578] Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' p. 106.

[579] Karl Marx, 'Chapter Six. Results of the Direct Production Process [1863-4],' in *Marx Engles Collected Works, Vol. 34*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994, p. 399.

[580] The question of 'self-management' (*autogestion*) has taken on more controversial shades which are related to the SI's use of this term *détourned* from Socialisme ou Barbarie. For instance, the criticism of the 'workerist' and 'productivist' limits of the idea of the self-management of production have been extended to the Situationist notion of 'generalised self-management' which Vaneigem, among others, advocated. Recently
Gilles Dauvé has restated an argument he first made in the 1970s, i.e. that the Situationist notion of generalised self-management does not escape the capitalist imaginary of production and 'self-managed' industrial production. That is to say that 'self-management' is too redolent of the alienated labour it purports to supplant and surpass, despite the addition of 'generalised' — i.e. generalised self-management. Indeed, a case could be made that Vaneigem's notion of 'generalised self-management' tends to naturalise not only diverse capitalist forms of labour, but also reduces human activity to labour. However, this is not necessarily problematic as long as we pay attention to Marx's early distinction of 'life activity' and 'labour', and his later delimitation of the labour process' in relation to what he would call the 'realm of necessity' (we will turn to these questions below in this chapter and to a limited extent in chapter seven). Dauvé does not simply oppose the idea or practice of 'self-management' (or of 'self-organisation' with which it is often confused and conflated); rather he argues for the need to understand the capitalist dimensions of 'self-management' in order to avoid the reduction of the revolutionary supersession of alienated labour to the mere self-management of alienated labour. Cf. Gilles Dauvé, 'The Bitter Victory of Councilism,' in *Eclipse & Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement*, PM Press, 2015.

Castoriadis' 1957 formulation would even form the basis for non-work 'socialisation'.[581]

Needless to say such a conception of 'work' or 'labour' was rejected by the SI. Indeed, in the same issue of *Internationale Situationniste* in which both Debord and Vaneigem argued for the idea of poetry in the Situationist sense of the term, Vaneigem specifically targeted the conception of work embraced in SB's idea of 'self-management'. There he argued that Castoriadis and SB, though 'rightly opposing the increasingly perfected reification of human labour […] end up maintaining, more or less unconsciously, a sort of nostalgia for older forms of work'.[582] Thus they failed to adequately conceptualise the 'erasure [*effacement*] of work in favour of a *new type of free activity*'.[583]

Conclusion

In the intervening years since the onset of Marxism, 'revolutionary practice' had become narrowly associated with the practice of adherents of various Marxist parties, and 'labour' and 'production' narrowly associated with industrial production. In a way, Marxism *détourned* Marx, but rather than making it more precise, or correcting it, it had stripped it of all of its radical vision and ossified it as doctrine and dogma. In a word, Marxism *narrowed* Marx's sense of 'revolutionary practice' and 'labour'. Indeed, it is better to conceive of Marxism — as a State philosophy, and as the ossification of revolutionary praxis — as the recuperation of not only Marx's work, but the revolutionary events in which he produced (and was produced by).[584] For instance, in his early elaboration of 'revolutionary practice' Marx was keen to include the subject within the 'objective powers' which constituted material causation. Therefore, the individual subject was not just an effect of social-material forces, but was a potentially active participant in such 'objective' causation. Marx thus distinguished his sense of materialism from those mechanical materialists who tended to eliminate the subjective side of material

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[581] 'Workers' management is only possible, within the framework of new organizational forms embodying the direct democracy of the producers (as represented by the *councils*). Workers' management can be consolidated and enlarged only insofar as it attacks the deepest roots of alienation in all fields and primarily in the realm of *work*'. Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' p. 149.
[582] I.S. [Vaneigem], 'Domination de la nature, idéologies et classes,' p. 4.
[583] Ibid.
[584] In this regard see, in particular, chapter four of *La Société du Spectacle*.

transformations (notably Feuerbach in this case).[585] Indeed Marx was most concerned to conceive of the human social order as primarily a result of subjective human powers individually and collectively 'objectified', and most importantly liable to further transformations. Unfortunately, since the foundation of Marxism, Feuerbach's non-dialectical conception of materialist determination has become the dominant materialism of Marxist orthodoxy, albeit lumbered with the adjectival 'dialectic'.

For the SI, art was alienated objectification, in Marx's sense of the term, even if such alienation itself could point beyond its alienated nature. Thus, what most excited the SI regarding the Dadas and Surrealists was precisely the practices of these groups and individuals that attempted to sketch an objectifying 'productive' practice beyond the restrictions of alienated practice. 'Poetry' came to be equated with 'revolutionary practice' — as the critical practice which brings about the surpassing of capitalism, and as the general 'free activity' which will be manifest in the construction of situations (among other activities). The emphasis here is on 'revolutionary practice', but only insofar as such an activity can be considered as on a continuum with its destination, i.e. the unity of means and ends which presents the practical criticism of capitalist alienation as already the practice of the future social order in anticipation.

If we recall that Marx considered 'alienation' as primarily the experience of human powers and objectifying practices as an 'alien force' (in the sense of appearing separate to or beyond the control of the human agents who objectify so), then implicit in the Situationist criticism, like Marx, is the possibility of non-alienated practice and production in the present (apart from 'natural alienation', the term the SI use to speak of the 'ontologically fundamental' activity by which the human mediates her relation with nature, and other humans). The SI's wager at the end of the 1950s was that the state of present social and technical development immediately revealed uses, in the negative, that were in effect denied or obscured by the capitalist imaginary of work, the nuclear family, conventional morality, etc. At best, such practices were considered merely 'play' (for instance the *dérive*). Against Castoriadis, the SI believed that Marx's conception of activity (under the rubric of 'labour' and 'modes of production') and the material

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[585] Cf. Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845].'

transformations of this activity (as subjective 'self-change' and 'objectifying' activity) bears only a passing resemblance to the one-sidedly 'objectivist' conceptions of Marxism which, at the very moment the SI turned to the use of 'poetry', were being further ossified under the notion of 'structuralist Marxism'. 'Poetry', then, played a dual role for the Situationists: the assertion of a radically subjectivist interpretation of Marx's notion of 'revolutionary practice' against its 'objectivist' mutilation (and thus not merely subjectivist); and the 'revaloriz[ation] of the artist past' of the SI.[586] I will return to the criticism of Castoriadis in chapter seven below.

Debord and Vaneigem's notion of poetry is not naturalistic, in the sense that 'poetry' is a description of a natural state or activity which is merely oppressed and obscured by its exploitation. 'Poetry […] depends on the greatest [material] wealth, in a given stage of socio-economic formation in which life can be lived *and changed*.'[587] Like Marx, Debord connects poetry to both the possibility and sometime past reality of a freer human activity, but within the context of the human transformation of human activity, and thus the transformation of what constitutes human activity. Nonetheless this human activity is commensurate with a freely determined and determining activity, i.e. consciously self-transformative. Thus, Debord is clear that such 'poetry' is not reducible to just 'poems'. Rather it is more resonant with the ancient sense of '*poiesis*' — a point later drawn out more clearly by Vaneigem. Debord explicitly equates it with the Situationist hypothesis, while implicitly equating it with what Marx called 'revolutionary practice'. 'The programme of realised poetry is nothing less than the simultaneous creation of events and their language — inseparably.'[588] The idea of 'realised poetry' is commensurate with its surpassing, i.e. the realisation and abolition of poetry. Such a program of 'realisation' is here playing the role of the 'revalorisation' of the artistic past of the SI which Vaneigem recently spoke of, i.e. the need to emphasis the moment of realisation in its abolition and 'supersession' (i.e. *dépassement*, *aufheben*). And so, we must turn to these ideas in the next chapter, surpassing them in turn…

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[586] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.
[587] [Debord] I.S., 'All the King's Men,' p. 31.
[588] Ibid.

Chapter six: The realisation and abolition of art & philosophy

The root of the reigning lack of imagination *cannot be understood if one does not accede to the* imagination of [what is] lacking*; which is to say, to conceive of what is absent, forbidden and hidden, and yet possible in modern life. — Situationist International, 1962*[589]

The identification of Marx's project of surpassing capitalism and the self-destruction of the proletariat with the Situationist project of surpassing art became for the SI not a mere correlation but rather the basis for the *modern* revolutionary project. Indeed, the terms in which the Situationists cast their project of surpassing resembled nothing so much as Marx's attempt to move beyond the radical milieu from which he emerged: the Young Hegelians of the 1840s. However, where they differed marks the real changes between the insurgent capitalism of the 19th century and the established, spectacular capitalism of the 1960s.

When Debord wrote that the only thing that remained of the 'Hamburg Theses' was their conclusion — 'Now, the SI must realise philosophy' — it is almost as if he had recalled them in the form of a pre-Socratic fragment, so full of implied meaning and yet frustratingly slight in its keyhole apprehension of a conversation long gone. [590] The source of the *détournement* was Marx's 'celebrated formula', from his 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right — Introduction'.[591] In this work Marx took aim at his Young Hegelian confreres, arguing that the two wings of their group variously attempted to *realise* philosophy without abolishing it as a separate practice, or *abolish* philosophy without realising its radical project of comprehending and transforming the world. Common to both, according to Marx, was the inability to locate an agent of transformation, one which could by turns realise *and* abolish philosophy. Marx located such an agent in the burgeoning proletariat of wage workers, who he

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[589] Internationale Situationniste, 'Géopolitique de l'hibernation,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (Avril 1962), p. 10.

[590] Interestingly Debord had described Ivan Chtcheglov's 'proto-Situationist' *Formulary for a New Urbanism* (1953) as 'a very condensed, quasi-Heraclitean document'. Cf. Debord, 'Lettre à Ivan Chtcheglov, début avril, 1963,' p. 207.

[591] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989].'; Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44].'

conceived of as the 'negative' *being* of bourgeois society, thoroughly dehumanised and excluded from its wealth and yet at the same time the sole source of this wealth which they had not effective control over. And so he famously argued that this class could only free itself from its exploitation by realising and abolishing at once its human potential and the negation of this potentiality.[592] For the composers of the 'Hamburg Theses' such a conception resonated with the SI's project to surpass art, which is to say the desire to realise the creative promise of radical, avant-garde art while abolishing it as a separate, specialised and progressively exploited realm of human activity.[593] Perhaps even more so it resonated with their then new belief that the Situationist project itself was the truth hidden amidst the new, spectacular alienation and the fitful struggles against it.

In order to better understand what Debord would later describe as the 'formal innovation' of the 'Theses', in this chapter I will turn to their resonance with Marx's criticism of philosophy. Indeed, this relationship was more than simply an accidental resonance. The Situationists would come to believe that Marx's lacunae with regard to art and its supersession was twofold. On the one hand, he tended to take over largely intact Hegel's schema with regard to the criticism of aesthetics (albeit 'inverted' after a fashion). On the other hand, the tendency for art to pose its own supersession in artistic terms was still under development in the 19th century, and would not clearly flower until the dazzling confrontations posed by the Dadas and Surrealists in the 1910s and 20s. Nonetheless it was in Marx's criticism of philosophy that the SI found a general theory for the criticism of the alienated practices of capitalist society, one that held for art as much as philosophy to the extent that art and philosophy were the separated domains of critique and reflection vis-à-vis everyday life.

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[592] Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' p. 185.
[593] Without doubt, there is more buried away in this phrase, particularly the debt owed to Hegel's conception of 'aufheben' (i.e. the abolition and preservation of past ideas in their dialectical 'transcendence'). Debord's historical account of the origins of 'independent' artistic practices in the late feudal/early Modern period of capitalism's rise to global dominance is crucial in this regard, pointing to the movements in artistic practice as themselves a form of dialectical movement. Cf. Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, - in particular, chapter 8, 'La négation et la consommation dans la culture' [Negation and consumption in culture].

In chapter one we saw how the 'Hamburg Theses' was an exemplary instance of Situationist practice — possibly *the* exemplary instance short of a revolutionary situation. Faced with the paradox of promoting a practice without works, Debord, Vaneigem and Kotányi set out to bring to bear precisely such a work. By conjuring their thesis regarding the abolition and realisation of art in the (absent) form of the 'Hamburg Theses', these Situationists hoped to practically demonstrate the significance of their perspective. Thus, the 'Hamburg Theses' became a pivot for the group, obviously in terms of the turn away from the interminable debates over the role of art, but even more so toward an explicitly general, revolutionary conception of the surpassing of art. At once the 'Hamburg Theses' attempted to synthesis the SI's criticism of art, and the discovery of the correlation with Marx's project of the proletarian supersession of philosophy. Indeed, as the SI would also argue, the surpassing of art was the missing dimension of Marx's critique, the lacunae in his almost exclusive turn to the criticism of political economy.[594]

As we have seen, by eschewing the typical form of avant-garde manifestoes and theses, the SI attempted to draw attention to what exactly constituted the surpassing of art and politics under conditions of capitalist reification. Similar to Marx's differentiation of 'free activity' and capitalist labour, the SI argued that unless the general form of activity were to change (i.e. the predominance of alienated, wage-labour in the present case), posing their 'realisation' would merely result in the valorisation of the existing forms of production and consumption — i.e. wage labour, its results, and the consumption of both. Thus, the only way to *surpass* art as it presently existed would be to both *realise* and *abolish* it as a 'separated', 'alienated' practice. In order to better understand this, it will be necessary to turn to an examination of the congruence between the SI's notion of the surpassing of art and Marx's notion of the supersession of philosophy (a 'supersession, moreover, that lay at the heart of his conception of the self-overcoming of labour and capital).

Not only did the Situationists use Marx to better understand the critical impasse of art and politics — in the limited, alienated sense — but, we can use Marx to better understand the SI, particularly with regard to the idea of pushing the critique already embodied in the Situationist

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[594] Cf. Martos, *Histoire de l'internationale situationniste*.

hypothesis toward the later idea of the 'supersession of art'. What the SI proposed, in short, was the recovery of Marx beyond its 'ideologization' as Marxism. Indeed, this 'recovery' was made against the more orthodox conception of MArx(ism) that he SI subscribed to up until 1961. As Debord would later argue, Marx was partly responsible for the 'ideologization' that led to Marxism, insofar as he finished off his critique of political economy in the absence of a revolutionary movement, 'in the separation of scholarly work [*du travail savant*]'.[595] In this sense, the separation of the elaboration of his theoretical critique from a living revolutionary movement had greater import than merely being the result of circumstances; instead, it established the orthodox precedent of opposing theory and theoretical elaboration to the practice of the revolutionary movement. Nonetheless, there is no indication that Marx gave up on his early notion of 'realisation and abolition', nor the idea of 'revolutionary practice', as enunciated in the 1840s amidst the radical circles working toward what became the revolutionary movement of 1848-1849. Rather, Debord's wager — *détourned* to an extent from 'Hegelian-Marxists' like Henri Lefebvre and Georg Lukács — was that the early Marx enabled one to critically surpass Marxist orthodoxy, considering that the conceptions of labour and ideology held by the latter in many respects reproduced the schema of Feuerbach which the young Marx had criticised and rejected (I will return to this question in the following chapter). The misfortune of Marx, to some extent, is that his scholarly sequestration throughout the 1850s and some of the 1860s — an isolation he bitterly resented rather than sought out — became a model for the real separation of the thought and practice of the future socialist workers' movement.

In this chapter I will begin by examining the appearance of Marx's early problematic of 'realisation and abolition' and 'supersession' in the work of the SI, around 1959. At this point, the SI framed their appropriation via the critique of two Hegelian-Marxists, who raised the idea of 'supersession' in terms of the supersession of art — namely Lucien Goldmann and Henri Lefebvre. However, the SI argued that both Lefebvre and Goldmann demonstrated the insufficiency of their turn to Marx; in the case of the former, by virtue of suggesting a return to the Surrealist practice of poetry already comprehensively criticised by the SI; in the case of the

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[595] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 85.

latter, by virtue of his inability to grasp the weakness of Marx's conception of art, insofar as Marx himself neither observed nor accepted that artistic practice could be the site of the emergence of a similar problematic to the one he identified and criticised in philosophy. Nonetheless, in his critique of the radical philosophical movement that he was involved in the 1840s, the Young Hegelians, Marx presented a critical framework that enabled the clarification of the Situationist critique art and the impasse of cultural decomposition (outlined in chapter two, and the debates over art in chapter three and four). Before moving on to a detailed examination of Marx's conception of the 'realisation and abolition of philosophy', I will briefly look at the idea of the 'new proletariat', the figure posed by the SI as the agent which would realise art in a similar fashion to the proletarian 'body' Marx proposed as realisation and abolition of philosophy. Finally, I will turn to a brief examination of how the SI's recovery of Marx strengthened their criticism of Marxist orthodoxy, rather than reaffirming such orthodoxy, as has been argued by Jean Baudrillard, among others. By distinguishing the SI and Marx from Marxism, I will the then turn, in chapter seven, to a detailed account of Debord's reckoning with just such an orthodoxy, in the figure of 'political militancy' in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Perhaps more importantly, I will also show how this reckoning entailed the rapid development of Debord's concept of spectacle, though not as the mere extension an orthodox conception of 'ideological superstructure', as he has been falsely represented, but rather as the critique of the *becoming ideological* of ideas and culture. This will complete my argument against the reduction of the SI being either the return to or last gasp of Marxist orthodoxy.

The twilight of philosophy, art and other idols

Debord drew an analogy between the artistic and political avant-gardes in his *Report on the Construction of Situations* in June 1957. However, in making this analogy he merely reiterated a common idea, an idea moreover that was explicitly proclaimed by the avant-gardists in their manifestoes throughout the 1910s, 20s and 30s.[596] Nonetheless in the same work Debord had already discovered a homology between Marx's criticism of alienated labour and the

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[596] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 311. As Debord noted in the *Hamburg Theses*, the artistic avant-gardes had been 'avid to explain themselves'. Cf. Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 704.

Situationist critique of art. In the key section of the piece in which he outlined both the Situationist hypothesis and associated methods and criticism, Debord noted that the hypothesis itself was based on a 'non-continuous conception of life':

> The notion of unity must be displaced from the perspective of the whole of life (in which it is a reactionary mystification founded on the belief in an immortal soul, and, in the last analysis, on the division of labour) toward the perspective of isolated moments [*instants isolés*] of life, and of the construction of any moment [*instant*] by a unitary employment of Situationist means. One can say that in a classless society there will no longer be painters but [rather] Situationists who, among other things, will [also] paint.[597]

In *The German Ideology*, Marx had written (as a Situationist *avant la lettre* perhaps) that '[i]n a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities.'[598] Marx's target in this case was one of his Young Hegelian confreres, specifically Max Stirner. His broader point against Stirner was with regard to the social conditions of creativity, i.e. that the apparently 'unique' creative individual is *also* a product of the social relations which bind and constitute her. 'The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of [the] division of labour.'[599] In a society in which such divisions no longer prevailed, the basis for a creative flowering, both cooperatively and "individually", would move beyond the reduction of the individual to any of the activities to which they turned themselves.[600]

Toward the end of 1959, Debord and the SI drew a direct parallel between Marx's belief that philosophy, in order to be realised, must be *abolished* as a "realm" of practice separate to and "superior" to the rest of everyday life. Marx's perspective had been very influential on Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), which had in turn greatly influenced the early

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[597] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' pp. 326-27.
[598] Marx & Engels, 'The German Ideology [1845],' p. 394.
[599] Ibid.
[600] Theodor Adorno spoke of society as 'the objective determinant of the mind' in which the (social) individual is epitomised and 'negated'. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 10.

Situationists.[601] In Marx's early work, the solution to the suspension of the philosophical and political "realms" from everyday life was formulated in the conjoined ideas of philosophy's 'realisation and abolition', and a proletarian subject *become* revolutionary in order to destroy capital, and thus *abolish* itself. Marx had presented humanity reduced to the proletariat in a similar fashion to philosophy's degraded state in the early 19th century; i.e. the paradox of being both the source of wealth (or critical ideas in the case of philosophy) but excluded from any real control over the potential *realisations* of this wealth (or, for instance, the practical realisation of the philosophical 'good life').

Around 1959, at the height of the elaboration of 'unitary urbanism' and Constant's experiments in architectural form cohering around his ideal city of 'New Babylon', we find that Debord was engaged in the further elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis. Of particular interest in this regard, was an article published in Internationale Situationniste no. 3, under the title '*Le sens du dépérissement de l'art*' ('The meaning of the decline of art'). In the article, the anonymous Situationist author(s) discuss how even though the sense of the 'decline' or 'decomposition' of art was widespread at the time, most of the discussion revolved around either attempts to dismiss it in a reactionary fashion, or attempts to defend it as a 'new' type of artistic expression (albeit dominated by existential dread and negativity). Two critics were singled out for addressing the problem of decomposition as one of 'alienation' and the possibility of the supersession of art and culture in its present decline — namely Henri Lefebvre and Lucien Goldmann. However, despite approving of Lefebvre and Goldmann directly confronting both the question and even the necessity of 'surpassing' art, the SI nonetheless found both of their criticisms lacking. For instance, the SI rejected Lefebvre's belief that the expressive qualities of surrealist art were adequate to the problem at hand, arguing that he misapprehended the real impasse of surrealism. Similarly, they criticised Goldmann's typification of the destruction of expression as evidence of alienation in the most extreme forms of avant-garde art, instead

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[601] Lefebvre criticised Surrealism, and its literary progenitors (Baudelaire, the Romantics, etc.), with the effective elevation of the 'marvellous' at the expense of everyday life (despite the Surrealists professing the materialism of their *marvellous*). This bears comparison to Marx's criticism of his Young Hegelian confreres. Cf. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I*, pp. 105-17.

arguing that 'the progressive aspect of this destruction' must be understood as 'being at the same time the testimony of a whole epoch on the insufficiency of artistic expression'.[602]

In the article, the SI drew an explicit relation between the decline of Marxism into an ideology and the original "Marxists" (i.e. Marx and Engels) inability to fashion an equally revolutionary criticism of capitalist culture (equal that is to their criticism of philosophy and political economy).[603] In the 'classics of Marxism' no 'real critique' of art had been developed.[604] 'Moreover, in the era in which Marxist thought was constituted, the formal movement of dissolution in art was not yet apparent.'[605] As such most Marxist critics continued to work under the schema Marx inherited from Hegel: that of the 'Classical/Romantic' dichotomy in which the latter was the art-form most historically and "materially" appropriate to the capitalist era.

The SI noted that despite Lucien Goldmann 'correctly' arguing that art, like other separated and apparently 'autonomous […] domains' of everyday life would disappear in a classless society, he was unable to shake off the Marxist schema.[606] Thus he saw in Romanticism and post-romanticism (i.e. the entirety of modern art) only 'reification', remaining unable to see, like the Situationists, that in addition to the reifying tendencies immanent to all production under capitalist conditions, modern art had also born a critical, self-destructive movement akin to that identified by Marx in German Idealism and its epigones. Thus, the dissolution of art which Goldmann considered a necessity in communist society had already been 'verified' by the movement of modern art itself.[607]

In the same article the SI turned to consider a more recent book and article by Henri Lefebvre dealing with the same question. In the wake of his split from Stalinism in 1958 Henri Lefebvre had returned to an early love: Marx on alienation and estrangement.[608] For instance the SI

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[602] I.S., 'Le sens du dépérissement de l'art,' p. 5.
[603] Note that at this point — 1959 — the SI had yet to develop their critical rejection of 'Marxism' as ideology.
[604] I.S., 'Le sens du dépérissement de l'art,' p. 4.
[605] Ibid.
[606] Ibid., pp. 4-5. '[L]ike the law, the economy or religion, art as an autonomous phenomenon separated from other domains of social life, will be lead to disappear in a classless society'.
[607] Ibid., p. 5.
[608] Lefebvre, alongside Norbert Guterman, was a pioneering translator and commentor on Marx's early work in French in the 1930s. Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *Key Writings*, New York: Continuum, 2003.

happily discovered the resonance between their Situationist hypothesis and Lefebvre's 'theory of moments' formulated in his reckoning with his Stalinist past in *La Somme et le reste* (1959) — a resonance which would lead to a fruitful exchange between Lefebvre and the group between 1960 and 1962. Also in 1959 Lefebvre published an article in the journal *Arguments*, ruminating on the meaning of Nietzsche's 'death of God'.[609] An early, if often forgotten exponent of a type of 'Nietzcshean-Marxism', Lefebvre wrote about the "schizoid" nature of the modern, alienated subject of capitalism.[610] In the same article Lefebvre spoke of religion in a similar fashion to Marx's criticism of philosophy and religion in 1843 and 1844. For Marx — in a register that Nietzsche would take up against the religious nature of secular modernity — the criticism of religion was the foundation of all criticism, '*in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears* of which the *halo* is religion.'[611] For Marx, religion was the exemplar of a 'separated' practice, posing an impossibly ideal world in opposition to the 'vale of tears' which was, in fact, its real condition of existence. However, rather than accepting, like many of his liberal contemporaries, that religious ideology had been dissolved in the glare of the revolutionary enlightenment, Marx put forward the thesis that the 'inverted world' of religion had merely been

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[609] Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, [1887] 1974, thesis 125, 'The madman'. Nietzsche tells the story of a Diogenes the Cynic like character, wielding a lantern, who leaps about in the market place calling out 'I seek god! I seek God!' To the crowd which gathers he cries 'Whither is god? […] I will tell you. *We have killed him* — you and I.' Then the madman asks the crowd 'how did we do this?' The vertiginous abyss opens before us and we are barely aware of the noise of the shovels as the gravediggers bury the corpse. 'Is not the greatness of the deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?' (ibid., p. 181). But then the madman realises he has come too early. In a register redolent of Marx and in advance of the Situationists, he says '[t]his deed is more distant from them than the most distant stars — *and yet they have done it themselves*' (ibid., p. 182). Modern 'man' is alienated from his very creation. Summoning Marx's style, the Situationists proclaim themselves the bridge between the alienated forms of "secularised" Christianity and the future new 'men', constructors of situations.

[610] Lefebvre was influenced by his fellow *Argumentiste*, Joseph Gabel, who wrote about the alienated and reified subject of capital in such terms. Gabel 1962 work, *False Consciousness*, would influence Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.

[611] Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' p. 176. Translation modified. The Situationists drew on Marx and Nietzsche — the latter, in particular, after Raoul Vaneigem joined the group in early 1961. Their theory of the 'spectacle' bore both Marx and Nietzsche's influence (though undoubtedly more of the former than the latter). They compared the spectacle to Marx's depiction of religious dualism, itself repeated after a fashion in Nietzsche's history of an error. Like the critique of religion, the critique of the spectacle was the contemporary foundation of all criticism. The spectacle was religion "secularised", the inverted world transformed into its material integument of the commodity-spectacle, in which appearance ruled over the hitherto displaced rules of having and being.

taken over in a bourgeois world which pitted the ideal state against the profane world of 'civil society' (I will return to the question of the ideological 'inversion' in chapter seven).[612]

In a tone redolent of Marx, Lefebvre spoke of Nietzsche's 'death of God' as itself a result of the 'completion' of the "realm" of religion, and thus a marker of its self-destruction. 'Only a finished totality can reveal that it is not a totality.'[613] For Nietzsche not only was God dead, but the blood was on everyone's hands — in more Nietzcshean terms, everyone was the unwitting modern Oedipus slaughtering one authoritarian father after another.[614] In Lefebvre's reckoning all of the incomplete domains of social life must be added to Nietzsche's discovery that, 'man must traverse the death of God (the sacred and accursed, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, etc.).'[615] By Lefebvre's lights, and in terms redolent of the Situationist criticism, Art 'defined man in dazzling flashes and the human through exceptional moments [*instants exceptionnel*], alienating in their striving toward deliverance' — which is to say that they were 'incomplete totalities'.[616] The Situationists agreed with Lefebvre, arguing that it correlated with their criticism of the 'decomposition of culture':

> This scheme [of Lefebvre's], which applies rather to philosophy after Hegel, perfectly
> defines the crisis of modern art, as can be easily verified by examining an extreme
> trend: for example, poetry from Mallarmé to Surrealism.[617]

Here, on the back of their criticism of the 'classics of Marxism' and Goldmann, the Situationists once again drew out the argument which would distinguish them from other 'heretical Marxists'. Indeed, Lefebvre himself would explicitly take up the Situationist argument in his work *Introduction to Modernity* three years later.[618] The movement of 'self-dissolution', posed

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[612] Cf. Marx, 'On the Jewish Question [1844].'
[613] Henri Lefebvre, 'Justice et vérité,' *Arguments*, no. 15 (3e trimestre 1959), p. 16.
[614] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, thesis 125, pp. 181-82. Of course one is Nietzcshean in the same way one is Christian, according to Nietzsche — which is to say not Nietzsche. Thus the post-Freudian "Nietzsches" promulgated by such as Lefebvre, Deleuze, Foucault, etc.
[615] Lefebvre, 'Justice et vérité,' p. 15. Lefebvre's additionally lists, 'the cosmic, the divine, the maternal, […] philosophy, […] economics and its history, […] politics and the State, […] Art' (ibid., pp. 15-16).
[616] Ibid., p. 16.
[617] I.S., 'Le sens du dépérissement de l'art,' p. 5.
[618] 'Here are a few more lines from the same [Situationist] text: "The fundamental characteristic of modern spectacle is that it stages its own ruin." Art does not die an ontological or a metaphysical death, as Hegel thought, and Nietzsche after him. It dies like a human being, killed by being externalized. Its death

by Marx as emergent in the radical philosophy of the early 19th century had reappeared in the movements of art throughout the 19th and into the 20th century. The most extreme experiments in artistic form, 'from Mallarmé to Surrealism', had encountered the apparent impasse of the dissolution of artistic expression itself.

In their critique of Lefebvre and Goldmann, we can see the SI moving toward problematising the Situationist hypothesis in terms that more clearly engaged with the idea of 'realisation and abolition'. Indeed, and to a limited extent, we can conceive of Lefebvre and Goldmann's perspectives as recapitulating the perspectives that Marx criticised among his Young Hegelian confreres in the 1840s. Thus, Goldmann wanted to abolish artistic alienation, while misunderstanding the need to realise its destruction (i.e. he misrecognised the positive moment of the destruction of expression); whereas Lefebvre wanted to realise artistic expression (in its Surrealist guise) without understanding that such 'expression' was the real impediment to the realisation of the more radical aspects of the Surrealist project.

The SI at this point still phrased their criticism in terms of the current absence of a revolutionary proletarian movement (such as existed before the late 1930s), and considered the reappearance of such as the real solution to the impasse of cultural decomposition. Indeed, unlike the approach outlined in the 'Hamburg Theses', the SI in 1959 still conceived of themselves in cultural terms, albeit negative ones, 'encamped at the gates of culture', but 'not want[ing] to establish themselves inside'.[619] In this sense, their cultural critique was still conceived as the accompaniment — in the 'realm' of cultural criticism — to a revolutionary movement not yet in existence. The critique of Lefebvre and Goldmann, in this instance, was an opening to a project that would soon eschew the early sense of the Situationist project being the specialised critique of culture in the context of the broader reconstitution of a revolutionary movement, and their turn toward an attempt to reconstitute such a movement itself.

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is a social one. […] [N]ow that art has become pure spectacle, pure separation, there is just one thing left for it to do: disappear. It has already done so, in aestheticism.' Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes September 1959-May 1961*, trans. John Moore, London: Verso, [1962] 1995, pp. 353-53. The lines quoted from the SI are from: Internationale Situationniste, 'Le cinema après Alain Resnais,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (Décembre 1959).
[619] I.S., 'Le sens du dépérissement de l'art,' p. 7.

The New Proletariat

It was precisely the 'proletariat' that is missing from the SI's assessment of Lefebvre and Goldmann in 1959. Indeed, the proletariat is conceived here as an absent subject, insofar as there is a modern proletariat but no revolutionary proletarian movement. As noted, the SI still demarcated themselves into the realm of cultural criticism, albeit as a negative force whose positivity was the elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis. However, in their criticism of Goldmann, and his inability to recognise the positive moment of present artistic negativity as the pivot of the overcoming of artistic alienation, we can recognise an opening to the SI's turn away from the further elaboration of the Situationist hypothesis as it then existed (or at least that element of the hypothesis focused on the criticism of cultural decomposition).

In 1962 and 1963 the SI began to speak of a 'new proletariat [which] tends to encompass almost everybody'.[620] In contrast to those then contemporaneous theories which pointed to an eclipse of the proletarian condition in the midst of commodity abundance, the SI argued that in fact the proletarian condition was being extended and intensified. Thus the growing commodity abundance was in itself deceptive, being rather a marker of a 'new poverty' which included the apparent amelioration of the old, material poverty.[621] The SI saw the lineaments of the 'new poverty' at the point where the manufactured 'needs' of the new commodity abundance met the extension of the proletarian condition; which is to say that condition which finds all 'the people who have no possibility of modifying the social space-time that society allots to them to consume'.[622] The *desires* of proletarians did not match the *needs* manufactured for them, not because they were false needs as such but rather because they were falsified to the extent the proletarians had no real control over their determination. Indeed, the falsification of needs in this sense was founded on what capitalism proclaimed as the primary "unquestioned" need —

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[620] I.S., 'Les mauvais jours finiront,' p. 13.
[621] Ibid., p. 16. It is worth noting that the SI did not believe that material poverty had been done away with by modern bureaucratic capitalism. Instead they argued against the orthodox Marxism which still placed the struggle against material poverty at the centre of their programme, even in situations like France in the 1950s and 60s which witnessed a substantial amelioration of the material poverty hitherto experienced by large sections of the working class. Moreover, the SI wanted to focus on the patent possibilities for a different life which was hidden or sublimated in the burgeoning commodity-spectacle of the advanced industrial nations in the post-war world.
[622] I.S. [Vaneigem], 'Domination de la nature, idéologies et classes,' p. 13.

the apparent need to labour for a wage in order to continue to secure the material bounty on offer.

The 'new poverty' the SI proposed as the complement to, and expression of the alienation of the 'new proletariat' constituted a type of 'immiseration' theory; however, unlike the orthodox Marxist conception of poverty or immiseration, the 'new poverty' of the contemporary proletariat referred clearly to the domination of the commodity-object rather than material poverty in the vulgar sense. Indeed, such 'new poverty' for the SI, constituted both a critique of Marxist orthodoxy and, amongst their general recovery of Marx's radical critique, a recovery of the more general sense of poverty in his alienation theory. No doubt Marx emphasised material impoverishment in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. Labour produces 'wonderful things for the rich', such as 'palaces' and 'beauty'; whereas for the worker it produces the 'privation' of 'hovels' and 'deformity'.[623] But in his argument Marx emphasised the objective nature of this impoverishment, i.e. that the 'the worker is related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien* object.'[624] More than the material impoverishment of the worker, it is precisely the *alienated* objectivity of the product of labour, and crucially of the labour process itself, that is the cause of such impoverishment. In this sense, the material privation of the worker is a dependent variable; its inverse relation to the material wealth of capitalism is a 'fact [which] expresses merely […] labour's product […] as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer.'[625] Thus it is the form which productive activity is reduced to, the reduction of the worker herself to the status of a commodity-object, and the results of this formal reduction — the object-world of commodities — which determine the nature of the privation. However, despite the attention that Marx pays to the reality of material privation in the lives of workers in Western Europe in the 1840s he did not conceive of such impoverishment either necessarily or exclusively material. The impoverishment is of the whole person, as much material as it is spiritual: 'the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and

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[623] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,' p. 273.
[624] Ibid., p. 272.
[625] Ibid.

against himself, the poorer he himself — *his inner world* — becomes'.[626] Certainly the poverty of 'his inner world' is related to the poverty of her outer world; but Marx's broader point was that under conditions which reduce productive activity to labour for capital, and the products of labour to commodities alienated from their producers, the 'inner world' is necessarily impoverished in a world in which labour produces an 'alien world of objects'. It is '[t]he *devaluation* of the world of men' and thus of the possibilities of *generic humanity* that is enacted 'in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things.'[627]

I cite Marx in detail, to demonstrate that the Situationists sense of the 'new poverty' is of a piece with Debord's critique of Marxism by recovery of Marx. Nonetheless, the poverty of the 'new proletariat' was 'new' precisely because the poverty of their everyday life was posited on the basis of implied accessibility to the new commodity abundance of contemporary capitalism — implied, that is, in the spectacle of commodity abundance. At the same time that the SI were outlining this criticism, Cornelius Castoriadis was continuing his argument against Marxism by asserting that the material immiseration that what an essential moment of Marx's theory was another reason to reject not only Marxism, but Marx as well. Needless to say, the SI rejected this perspective; and even Castoriadis would come to admit, in part, that he had fudged his Marx scholarship in this regard (I will return to Castoriadis in the next chapter).

Perhaps the most interesting if often overlooked aspects of their theorisation of this 'new proletariat', was with regard to the development of what the SI called a 'revolutionary intelligentsia'.[628] The concomitant of the development of a 'new proletariat', the 'revolutionary intelligentsia' was also the result of the proletarianisation of the intellectual in contemporary capitalist society. Here we begin to approach the real difference between Marx's milieu of the 1840s and the milieu of the SI in the early 1960s. For the SI one of the clear markers of the 'new proletariat' was what they saw as the progressive 'proletarianisation' of previously non-proletarian sectors of production and consumption. They argued that intellectuals as a social layer were being subjected to such a proletarianisation. Indeed, this process was leading to an

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[626] Ibid. My emphasis.
[627] Iibid.
[628] I.S. [Vaneigem], 'Domination de la nature, idéologies et classes,' p. 9.

internal differentiation brought on by the process of proletarianisation, one which divided intellectuals progressively into those submissive to their new role and those broadly in opposition to it. They spoke of 'specialised intellectuals' and 'the growing mass of "intellectual workers" whose conditions of work and life' were becoming largely indistinguishable from other wage labourers.[629] For the SI what marked out the latter from the former was the extent to which they rejected their allotted role as a specialised intellectual for the commodity-spectacle. They compared them to the 'delinquents' and '*lumpens*' among the working classes actively refusing their role as wage labourers for capital.[630] Perhaps most importantly the SI argued that among those intellectuals who recognised the 'new', proletarian conditions of their intellectual labour emerged 'critics and saboteurs […] of consumer capitalism' who clearly 'refuse the conditions of individual competition, and thus of servility'.[631]

The SI saw the potential for a 'revolutionary intelligentsia' to emerge from this proletarianisation and internal differentiation. They were at pains to argue that such a 'layer' did not constitute an 'intellectual party' apart, but rather a moment of the development of a revolutionary proletarian class itself.[632] In words redolent of the early Marx they wrote of this radicalising layer as a moment of a general mass 'which look for their theory'.[633] The search for a theory adequate to the criticism of modern capitalism was, at the same time, the refusal to labour for capital — or at least the movement toward an active resistance to wage labour and the

[629] Ibid.

[630] Ibid. Note that the SI used the term 'lumpen' to characterise those consciously refusing wage labour, most likely derived from its pejorative English use. However the term 'lumpenproletariat' was used by Marx and Engels to typify '[t]he "dangerous class", the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society may' who they believed might join the revolutionary movement but were more likely to be 'a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue' — Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology [1845],' p. 494. The SI's use of 'lumpen' was a *détournement* of this pejorative sense, indeed a pointed rejection of its pejorative sense and a valorisation of the abolition of wage labour as the foundation of a revolutionary perspective.

[631] I.S. [Vaneigem], 'Domination de la nature, idéologies et classes,' p. 9. Indeed the SI recognised the milieu from which they originated as an exemplar of this emergent critical practice, in which 'the movement of modern art can be considered as a permanent *deskilling* [*déqualification*] of the intellectual labour power of the creators'— ibid.

[632] The SI made the practical criticism of the role of the specialised intellectual the *sine qua non* of a potential revolutionary intelligentsia. Thus, they sometimes spoke of such an 'authorised intelligentsia' as effectively constituting a party *apart* on terms set by capitalism, 'in the final analyse satisfied [with their positon], or even satisfied with mediocre literary expression of their dissatisfaction'. To the extent that some of these 'authorised' ones kept the expression of their dissatisfaction strictly within the realm of 'literature' was the extent to which they constituted the 'social sector most spontaneously anti-situationist' — ibid., p. 10.

[633] Ibid.

proselytization of such a revolutionary perspective. The SI of course eschewed the orthodox view of liberation from wage labour being fought through the eye of the needle of wage labour itself—i.e. as the largely mysterious and even mystical relationship posed by many orthodox Marxists between the struggle over the wage and the rate of exploitation, and the possibility of the 'abolition of the wages system' altogether.[634] The real contradiction in 'the new world we must comprehend' was that between 'those material powers which are multiplied without [being] used, and those spontaneous acts of contestation lived by people without a [revolutionary] perspective'.[635]

However, what marked this perspective out as distinctive, particularly when we set it against the SI's *détournement* of Marx and his notion of 'realisation and abolition' of philosophy and the proletariat, was precisely the idea of the proletarianisation of the intelligentsia. In Marx's early conception the intelligentsia were firmly outside of the emergent proletariat. Marx conceived of himself and other radical intellectuals as the potential 'head' of a process of which a revolutionary proletariat constituted the 'heart'.[636] For Marx the practical surpassing of philosophy would be made possible by a revolutionary self-abolition of the proletariat, the impasse of the purely theoretical surpassing of the former project announcing the necessity of its transformation into the latter. From the perspective of the Situationists and France in the early 1960s, the intelligentsia had been largely subsumed by the proletarian condition, a "victim" of the voracious appetite of the commodity-form and the needs of capital. Whereas Marx and Engels had spoken of 'a portion of the bourgeois ideologists' going over to the proletariat (in effect declaring their own "treason"), in a world more thoroughly submitted to commodity production the privileged position of the intellectual was increasingly subject to its corrosive effects.[637]

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[634] Karl Marx, 'Value, Price and Profit [1865],' in *Marx Engels Collected Works Vol. 20*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985, p. 149.

[635] I.S. [Vaneigem],'Domination de la nature, idéologies et classes,' p. 9.

[636] 'The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy,* its *heart* is the *proletariat*.' Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' p. 187.

[637] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party [1848],' in *Karl Marx & Frederich Engels Collected Works, Vol.6*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976, p. 494.

Thus, for the SI, the movement of the 'surpassing of art', of the 'realisation and abolition' of art, is not the mere parallel of Marx's criticism of philosophy or accidentally associated with the project of proletarian self-abolition. Rather it was the result of a functionally identical process. In the case of philosophy Lefebvre had argued that its 'surpassing' was posed by Marx insofar as philosophy itself was posed as a 'completed totality' in the wake of German idealism, and thus necessarily a false totality.[638] More pointedly Marx also saw this as the result of the alienated development of philosophy, which had reached a paroxysm of development in the Hegelian philosophy which recognised the self-transformations of history in a merely speculative fashion.[639] For the SI the emergence of the perspective of self-destruction in the arts was to be found in the history the arts shared with philosophy and the emergence of the proletarian movements from the French Revolution and its aftermath.[640] To the extent that philosophy and the incipient proletarian movement posed their surpassing in the first half of the 19th century was proof only of their relative advancement over the arts.[641] Nonetheless on the basis of the large scale recuperation of the intelligentsia, both in terms of its submission to the rule of the commodity-form and the recuperation of the explicitly posed surpassing and self-destruction of its most advanced expressions (of philosophy and of the arts) the SI proposed the reappearance of a revolutionary movement from the ruins of modern art.

> It is thus that starting out from modern art — from poetry — from its supersession [*dépassement*], from what modern art looked for and *promised*, starting out from the clean sweep of the values and rules of everyday behaviour that it has already made, we will now see reappear the revolutionary theory which emerged in the first half of the

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[638] Lefebvre, 'Justice et vérité,' p. 16.

[639] One can see here that the proposition of classical political economy, namely Adam Smith's and David Ricardo's recognition of 'labour' as the ultimate source of wealth, as akin to the false 'completed totality' of which Lefebvre spoke.

[640] The best description of this is to be found in Martos, *Histoire de l'internationale situationniste*, pp. 83-100.

[641] Though the J.-F. Martos has noted that Hölderlin already posed something akin to the SI's *dépassement de l'art* in his work *Hyperion* (1797/99), not to mention Hegel's own dabbling with such notions when a student alongside of Hölderlin. Nonetheless such imagined projects were isolated in regards to the more generalised appearance of self-destruction as an explicit theme of the artistic avant-gardes in the early 20th century. Cf. Ibid., pp. 85-88.

19th century from philosophy (from the critical reflection upon philosophy and from the crisis and death of philosophy).[642]

The negative dimension of such a project was, perforce, inimical to the idea of a positively constituted 'intellectual party', or even a class of 'professional revolutionary' intellectuals, beloved of Marxist orthodoxy. Indeed, for the SI it was precisely the tendency to abandon or obscure the self-destructive nature of the revolutionary project that had led to the defeat or recuperation of the revolutionary contestation of 1917-37 (particularly in the form of the 'Bolshevisation' of the international revolutionary labour movement at this time). Indeed, the reappearance of conscious self-destruction in the artistic avant-gardes contemporaneous with the revolutionary era of 1917-37 was for the SI both the necessary corrective for the failings of the positive constitution of the labour movement, and the basis upon which the negative criticism of the early Marx could be rediscovered in the present. It is to the latter that I will now turn.

In order to better understand the transformation of the Situationist hypothesis from a critique 'encamped at the gates of culture', to one in which it was posed as the end immanent to a revolutionary movement that was already in formation, we need to examine Marx's critical appropriation of philosophy, and his turn to identifying the 'proletariat' as the subject capable of 'realising and abolishing philosophy'. Indeed, such an examination is not made in order to merely contrast Marx and the SI, but rather draw attention to what Debord, Vaneigem and others saw as the functional equivalence of the problems faced by the SI and Marx. In the case of the SI, we can say that the struggle over the 'realisation and abolition of art' was perhaps the key thread of the argument over art, and the debate between Debord and Constant. In this sense, Constant pitted his conception of the abolition of art against Asger Jorn's notion of art's realisation, in the figure of the 'free artist'. Debord, via this debate, and his later engagement with Marx, came to embody a perspective similar to the latter's: i.e. for the supersession of art through its realisation and abolition. Let us now turn to an examination of Marx's argument apropos this subject.

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[642] I.S. [Vaneigem], 'Domination de la nature, idéologies et classes,' p. 11.

Marx and Hegel's political philosophy

If the publication of the *1844 Introduction* and *On the Jewish Question* in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* can be considered the departure point for Marx's development of a distinctive body of ideas sometimes known as 'Marxism', it was his experiences in the year before that provided the context and content for these works.

At the beginning of 1843 Marx was the editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a journal of avowedly democratic mien, and one of the mouthpieces of the philosophical radicalism of 'Young Hegelianism'. Over the previous two years this milieu of mostly young philosophers had turned their attention to political questions.[643] In opposition to their avowed master the Young Hegelians rejected the idea that the Prussian state was the perfect embodiment of the spirit of history and thus the perfect resolution of the contending interests in society. In a Europe in which the French Revolution of 1789 cast a long shadow alongside of the stunning transformations signalled by the English and the Scots through industrialisation, the Young Hegelians saw their 'nation' as hopelessly backward, mired in the muck of an absolutist autocracy.[644] Nonetheless their image of the ideal state was decidedly *Hegelian*, which is to say that the state was the perceived solution to the conflicts of social particularities.

Hounded out of the state university system because of their atheistic philosophical radicalism the Young Hegelians turned to journalism in order to espouse their ideas. Established in early 1842, the *Rheinische Zeitung* had an uneasy relationship to the Prussian state and even the local Rheinish bourgeois who effectively funded it. By October 1842 Marx had become editor and under his editorship the journal's popularity grew. However, Marx's writing in particular fell afoul of the Prussian censor and in March 1843 the *Rheinische Zeitung* was forcibly closed. In a

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[643] David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, London: Macmillan & co. Ltd., 1969, p. 25. Much of the particular historical detail of the following is taken from this work, as well as McLellan's *Marx Before Marxism*, London: Macmillan & co. Ltd., 1970.

[644] Note that the German nation-state did not come into existence until 1871. The largest single state of the German states in the 1840s was the Kingdom of Prussian. A German state was a demand of all political liberals, after the model of the French Revolution.

letter to his friend Arnold Ruge Marx wryly quipped '[t]he Government have given back my liberty.'[645]

Under the impact of such censorship, and the patently worsening attitude of the Prussian state to criticism, Marx re-thought his relationship to the philosophy of the state the Young Hegelians had inherited. Over the summer of 1843 Marx used his liberty to finally marry Jenny von Westphalen and develop a critique of Hegel's philosophy of the state. Years later he wrote '[m]y inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind'.[646]

In Hegel's schema, the liberal state represented the universal mediation of particular and individual interests. Above the 'civil society' of public and private interests there arose a state, the 'realm' of universal 'political' life. For Hegel, such a 'liberal state' was the goal of world history in which the particular interests of individuals can finally be resolved and sublimated; which is to say at the level of the universal state the particularities are 'abolished'. However, for Hegel such 'abolition' is ideal; the particularities of civil society remain, conserved, 'realised' and mediated by their resolution at the level of the universal state.

In contrast Marx rejected the idea of the state as the outcome of the movement of the soul or 'Spirit' of world history. He believed that the universal perspective was simply the work of history as opposed to the work of the Spirit's journey through successive phases of self-alienation, 'moving towards a meeting with itself in time'.[647] To *détourn* Hegel's language, the possibility of universal 'Spirit' is produced through social conflict and the particular 'resolutions' which result. It is not their presupposition, nor the unwitting result of the ruse of history. Rather the modern political states which emerged from the anti-Feudal struggles led by the rising capitalist class instantiated bourgeois particularism as their image of political universality. Thus, the claims of their defenders — Hegel included — that such states stand

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[645] Karl Marx, 'Letter to Arnold Ruge, 25 January 1843,' in *Marx Engels Collected Works Volume 1*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, p. 397.
[646] Marx, 'Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859],' p. 262.
[647] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 80.

above the conflicts and private interests of 'civil society' are simply false. For Marx, such states are clearly bourgeois states, in which the bourgeois worldview was projected into the political firmament.

For Marx, the political state was the resolution of neither the particularities of civil society, nor the solution to the 'politicisation' of the religious Feudal states but rather the practical separation of political and civil life (and indeed is founded on such a separation). 'Political emancipation was at the same time the emancipation of civil society from politics, from even the appearance of a *universal* content.'[648] In the bourgeois state, political life is sundered from civil life; it is set outside and against it, extruded as it were, leaving 'unpolitical' civil life as the apparent 'natural' core of human life and practice. And so, the peculiar myth of the bourgeois epoch takes on the trappings of a universal truth. The social individual is reduced to 'egotistical man' — the calculating, selfish individual of civil society whose only alleviation comes through the mediation of the political state, completely 'exterior' to the purported nature of 'man'.[649] And yet as Marx points out in his examination of the 'rights of man and citizen' in the French Revolution, it is precisely the idealised 'egotistical man' which is the truth of the universal citizen. The universal 'rights' of liberty, equality and security are the rights of an idealised bourgeois, whose freedom 'is the right of man to private property', whose equality is to be considered 'a self-sufficient monad', and whose security is 'the concept of police'.[650] Marx thus derided the illusory universality of the bourgeois political state, in which society only appears as an exterior constraint upon the 'naturally' self-interested monad, and in which 'political life

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[648] Marx, 'On the Jewish Question [1844],' p. 233. Riffing on Marx's arguments Raoul Vaneigem argued out that the 'pulverisation' of the feudal pyramid left 'the shadow of the divine hierarchy' in the bourgeois conception of the ideal 'man' in which a 'myriad of diminutive beings each, each seemingly absolute: little "citizens" set in motion by the process of social atomisation'. Cf. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, p. 74.

[649] Strictly speaking this accords more fully with political-economic assertions regarding the nature of 'man' than that of Hegel, who conceived of the particular interests finding reconciliation in the rational universalism of the state, itself the product of the self-development of 'mind'. Nonetheless Hegel's conception of civil society was at one with the emergence of political-economic accounts in the 18th century.

[650] Marx, 'On the Jewish Question [1844],' pp. 229, 230.

declares itself to be a mere means whose goal is the life' of this apparently selfish 'civil society.'[651]

Looking back on his early work almost thirty years later Marx wrote that his dialectical method was 'not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it.'[652] However he argued that despite Hegel's idealistic failings he openly avowed himself 'the pupil of that mighty thinker'.[653] Indeed the main problem with Hegel's dialectic was that it was mystified by such ideas as the 'world spirit' and thus needed only to be 'inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.'[654] In contradistinction, in its 'rational form', in which its idealism was not merely stripped but negated through a critical inversion, the dialectic 'was a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction.'[655] It was a scandal simply because it called into question the bourgeois conception of 'egotistical man' as the revealed truth of human nature. Thus, Marx presented something much more radical than Hegel's ideal sublimation of the particular in the supposed universal political state; he argued that the realisation of the universal claims of the bourgeoisie could only be carried out through the negation of bourgeois particularity — in both its 'political' and 'civil' forms. For the young Marx of 1843 the main failing of his Young Hegelian comrades was precisely in following Hegel's mystical dialectic.

Even when they criticised Hegel's belief that the Prussian state was the manifestation of his ideal state, what they found lacking was not Hegel's idea but rather the reality of the Prussian state. Behind the veil of state universality lay the particular interests of the Prussian monarchy and aristocracy. Marx agreed. However, Hegel's idea of a universal state was a phantasm; it did not exist and it could never be brought into existence. In Marx's view, the Prussian state, or any state for that matter, was the vehicle through which a particular class imposed its perspective as the universal perspective — its *weltanschauung* passed off as human nature.

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[651] Ibid., p. 231.
[652] Marx, 'Postface to the Second Edition [1873],' p. 102.
[653] Ibid., p. 103.
[654] Ibid.
[655] Ibid.

The Young Hegelian desire to finally bring into being the true universal state theorised by Hegel was empty. For Marx, the future of the Prussian state could already be made out in the present of France and Britain; here he saw the particularity of the bourgeois worldview transformed into the alleged 'universality' of the bourgeois state. Here was the real limit of Young Hegelian radicalism; in effect their call for a truly liberal state was merely the call for the elevation of the bourgeois worldview to the level of state 'universality'. The question now for Marx was how to do away with the separation of political and civil life grounded in the particularities of class.

The realisation and suppression of philosophy

In the *1844 Introduction* Marx presented his Young Hegelian milieu as the avant-garde of German society. However, there was a great deal of irony in his presentation. In a German society that was backward in its civil and political life, the 'dream history' of philosophy was its only advanced element.[656] And such an advanced element was in reality only theoretically at a level already practically achieved by the bourgeoisies of France and Britain — i.e. the elevation of their particularity to the 'universality' of the state. Thus, Marx goes on to examine the partial critique of the two 'sides' of the Young Hegelians, what he calls respectively the 'practical' and 'theoretical' parties. Of the former he argued that they tried to *abolish* philosophy without realising it; of the latter, he argued that they tried to *realise* philosophy without suppressing it. By 1844 the point for Marx was to realise philosophy *and* abolish it; abolish it, that is, as an activity apart from other activities of everyday life; as an activity that merely reflects upon the state of the world rather than engages in its practical creation and transformation. As he would later put it, perhaps more pithily and famously: '[t]he philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.'[657]

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[656] '*German philosophy of law and state* is the only *German history* which is *al pari* [on par] with the *official* modern reality. The German nation must therefore take into account not only its present conditions but also its dream-history, and subject to criticism not only these existing conditions but at the same time their abstract continuation.' Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' p. 180. For more on Marx and 'dream history' cf. David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 26-34.
[657] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 5.

Of the 'practical party', most often associated with Ludwig Feuerbach, Marx argued that its demand for 'the negation of philosophy' did not go far enough. Correctly understanding that the Hegelian political philosophy was merely the ideal projection of a 'solution' on the basis of the real conflicts and divisions of earthly reality, Feuerbach et al. misconceived speculative philosophy as mere illusion rather than as a practice itself mired in the sensuous conflicts of everyday life. Indeed the "practical" component of their demand — 'turning its back on philosophy and with averted face muttering a few trite and angry phrases about it' — tended to be as abstract as its charge against speculative philosophy.[658]

> You demand that *real living germs* be made the starting point but you forget that the
> real living germ of the German nation has grown so far only inside its *cranium*. In a
> word – *You cannot supersede philosophy without making it a reality*.[659]

For Marx, speculative claims about the German nation nonetheless 'existed' as moments and expressions of actual social conflicts — even and especially such a thing as the 'German nation' did not exist at that point in history. To ignore them, or pretend that they were illusory was not to embrace a practical position but rather to resile from the real conflicts fitfully expressed in such ideal formulas.

Of the 'theoretical party', most often associated with Bruno Bauer's circle, Marx wrote that it had achieved a similar perspective to the practical party, 'but with the factors *reversed*'.[660] The theoretical party pictured the present struggle against Prussian absolutism as an exclusively philosophical one:

> These Berliners [Bauer's '*Die Freien*' circle] do not regard themselves as *men* who
> *criticise,* but as *critics* who, *incidentally,* have the misfortune of being men. They
> therefore acknowledge only one *real* need, the need of *theoretical* criticism. People like
> Proudhon are therefore accused of having made some *"practical" "need"* their point of
> departure. […] This criticism thus regards itself as the only *active* element in history. It

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[658] Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' p. 180.
[659] Ibid., pp. 180-81.
[660] Ibid., p. 181.

is confronted by the whole of humanity as a *mass,* an inert mass, which has value only as the antithesis of intellect.[661]

In contrast to the idealisation of sensuous reality contra abstraction on the part of the practical party, the theoretical party emphasised abstraction at the cost of sensuality. Nonetheless it shared the mistake of the practical party, effectively bracketing philosophy itself as a part of the world, and thus equally in need of criticism. Indeed, Marx's point is precisely the one that I surveyed above, that the disparity between the actual Prussian state and the ideal state of the theoretical wing of Young Hegelianism were both grounded in the real particularities and conflicts of German society; the ideal state was inevitably the state of particular class, whether 'ancient' (i.e. the monarchy) or 'future' (the bourgeoisie). Perhaps worse for both sides of Young Hegelianism was the fact that the 'dream history' of Germany had been surpassed, fitfully realised 'beyond the Rhine' in France and Britain. Indeed, in this fitful reality the truth of Hegel's universalism was revealed in all of its stark reality: the rise to political supremacy of the bourgeoisie.

Practice and the proletariat

Crucial to Marx's argument against the so-called 'practical' and 'theoretical' wings of Young Hegelianism, was the symmetry of their apparent opposition. He demonstrates this by showing their shared belief regarding the *exceptional nature* of philosophy; the former to deny its significance, the latter to hail its singular importance. Both in effect made of philosophy something otherworldly and beyond criticism, either to be embraced as an absolute value or utterly rejected as pointless. In contrast to these perspectives, and as the attempted dialectical synthesis of their partial perspectives, Marx's argument was that philosophical critique can be made practical to the extent that it is at once the criticism of the world and a part of the world so criticised. Thus, Marx posed the practical criticism of the world as also the sublimation of

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[661] Karl Marx, 'Letter to Ludwig Feuerbach, 11 August 1844,' in *Marx Engels Collected Works Volume 3*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, p. 356. Marx would make a related criticism against Feuerbach, charging him with elaborating a contemplative, 'objective' materialism. Cf. Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845].'

philosophical critique as practical criticism; philosophy is at once realised as a crucial moment of practical criticism and abolished as ideal criticism.

It is important to recall this in opposition to those Marxists that believe Marx suggested philosophy was outdated or to be replaced by a positivistic science.[662] They do well to remember that even when Marx contrasted his 'practical critical activity' with philosophers who only 'interpret the world' instead of changing it, philosophy nonetheless *remains* as a transformed moment of 'practical critical activity.'[663] Indeed Marx posed his critique of the two parties of Young Hegelianism as providing the grounds for the solution to the quandary of philosophy's role: 'the criticism of speculative philosophy of right [i.e. Hegel's political philosophy] strays, not into itself, but into *problems* which there is only one means of solving — *practice*.'[664] Marx proceeds along two lines from this point. First, he considers what it means to pose the realisation and suppression of philosophy as a practical question. Secondly, he looks around contemporary German society for an agent of such practice, eventually finding the 'proletariat'.

Marx's critique of the two wings of Young Hegelianism locates their solution in practice; this solution is drawn from the insufficiency of the two wings themselves. The 'practical' wing locates practice as something outside or beyond philosophy's grasp; the 'theoretical' wing locates philosophy itself as the preeminent practice which reality must be adjusted to. Both views mistake the potential role of philosophical thought as a moment of critical practice, at once *reflective of* and *shaping* reality:

> The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material
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> force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as
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> soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it

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[662] Indeed, we can compare the 'orthodox' Marxist hostility to philosophy to the 'practical party' of Young Hegelianism whose mistake is to ignore philosophy or pretend that it is merely an 'ideal' activity with no real-world import.

[663] 'Practical critical activity' is the term Marx uses to describe precisely his notion of the 'realisation and suppression of philosophy' contra Feuerbach's 'passive' materialist philosophy in Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' pp. 3-5.

[664] Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' p. 181.

demonstrates *ad hominem* [to the person], and it demonstrates *ad hominem* [to the person] as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But, for man, the root is man himself.[665]

Marx poses the idea of a 'radical revolution' to 'the partial, the *merely* political revolution'.[666] To be radical, 'to grasp the root of the matter' is opposed to what I considered earlier as the particularity of the bourgeois world view and its aspirations to universality. However, if the philosophy is neither to be abolished by disenchanted philosophers, nor realised by philosophers *par excellence*, how exactly will it be 'realised and abolished'?

> […] [R]evolutions require a *passive* element, a *material* basis. Theory can be realised in a people only insofar as it is the realisation of the needs of that people. […] Will the theoretical needs be immediate practical needs? It is not enough for thought to strive for realisation, reality must itself strive towards thought.[667]

We do well to remember that Marx is talking about Germany in the mid-1840s. We should remind ourselves of this when we consider the specificity of the dispute within the largely German Young Hegelian movement; as too we should remember the specifically German problems Marx wrestles with in regard to the possibility and desirability of revolution in the German states.

Nonetheless, Marx is always at pains to contextualise German problems, particular with regard to the then present reality of Britain and France. In particular, he compares the German bourgeoisie unfavourably to the revolutionary bourgeoisies of France and Britain. And it is precisely the shortcomings of the German bourgeoisie that propels Marx to consider the possibility of a 'radical revolution' as opposed to a narrow, particularistic, bourgeois political revolution as the solution to the problems that assail German society both theoretical and

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[665] Ibid., p. 182.
[666] Ibid., pp. 183, 184.
[667] Ibid., p. 183. Note that Marx's use of 'passive' here is not an attribution of 'passivity' to the material base, but rather an analogical description of materiality in the sense of the 'material basis' allowing philosophy to be realised. Thus, he continued '[t]heory can be realised in a people only insofar as it is the realisation of the needs of that people.'

practical.[668] Indeed, the nub of his argument — the role of philosophy in such a 'radical revolution' — is not only important for its time and place, but perhaps even more so for the reconfiguration of the Situationist project and 'modern' revolution.

The negative being of the proletariat

By Marx's lights the German bourgeoisie, unlike their French confreres in 1789, were simply not up to the challenge of posing themselves as the representatives of the universally wronged. The general project of emancipation, whose banner the French bourgeoisie draped themselves in and through which they successfully united the mass of French society behind them, was simply not an option for the German bourgeoisie.

The German bourgeoisie, for Marx, was not the class through which 'reality […] itself strive[s] towards thought'. Unlike the bourgeoisie of France in the late 18th century they were only universal in their narrowness. Marx cast them as 'the general representative of the philistine mediocrity of all the other classes' of German society, buried in their real and imagined disputes with the German state, its bureaucrats and monarchy, and incapable of 'that revolutionary audacity which flings at the adversary the defiant words: *I am nothing and should be everything.*'[669] Meanwhile the modern world has already begun to develop the very *industrial* relations that will supersede the real and imagined particularistic struggles of the German bourgeoisie. And in such a development the lineaments of a new class emerged,

> […] a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no *particular right* because no *particular wrong* but *wrong generally* is perpetuated against it; which can no longer invoke

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[668] Which is not to say there would be no political dimension to such a universal, social revolution, but rather that such a 'dimension' would be liable to change and negation. 'Every revolution dissolves the *old society* and to that extent it is *social.* Every revolution overthrows the *old power* and to that extent it is *political.* […] [W]hereas a *social revolution* with a *political soul* is a paraphrase or nonsense, a *political revolution* with a *social* soul has a rational meaning. Revolution in general — the *overthrow* of the existing power and *dissolution* of the old relationships — is a *political act.* But *socialism* cannot be realised without *revolution.* It needs this *political* act insofar as it needs *destruction* and *dissolution.* But where its *organising activity* begins, where its *proper object,* its *soul,* comes to the fore — there socialism throws off the *political* cloak.' Marx, 'Critical Marginal Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian" [1844],' pp. 205, 206.

[669] Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' p. 185.

a *historical* but only a *human* title; […] a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the *complete loss* of man and hence can win itself only through the *complete re-winning of man*. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*.[670]

Marx speaks of the proletariat as 'the artificially impoverished' result of the development of modern capitalist industry, and thus a marker of the 'dissolution of society' rather than its positive (re)constitution — as, say, the burghers and bourgeoisie were in late Feudal society.[671]

It is this 'negative being' of the proletariat that marks it as the materialisation of the realisation and suppression of philosophy. The 'secret of its own existence' is precisely the proletariat *as* the dissolution of society:

By demanding the *negation of private property,* the proletariat merely raises to the rank of a *principle of society* what society has made the principle of the *proletariat,* what, without its own co-operation, is already incorporated in *it* as the negative result of society.[672]

The proletariat is not merely posed as the revolutionary subject of a 'radical revolution' in the absence of a revolutionary bourgeoisie; rather the proletariat is the solution to the mystery of social development, particularly its own development as the 'negative being' of bourgeois property and industry.

Here we approach an analogous situation to philosophy as posed by Marx; i.e. that the contrary developments of Young Hegelianism as the most advanced thought (and practice) of Germany immanently posed its own solution precisely through its contradictory developments. Thus, philosophy finds its solution in the proletariat as much as the proletariat finds its solution in

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[670] Ibid., p. 186.
[671] Ibid., p. 187.
[672] Ibid.

philosophy: 'As philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy.'[673]

Marx also poses this by way of a bodily metaphor: 'The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy,* its *heart* is the *proletariat*.' However, such an 'alliance' is hardly the stuff of positive constitution; the confluence of Young Hegelianism and the German proletariat is the negation and transcendence of both; it is the realisation and abolition of the proletariat and philosophy. Thus '[p]hilosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality.[674]

The *supersession* of orthodox Marxism

The SI has often been accused of holding to an orthodox conception of the 'base superstructure image'.[675] Jean Baudrillard put forward this criticism in 1973, saying that for the SI behind the apparent falsehood of the commodity-spectacle lay the "real" of the proletariat.[676] Jean-Luc Nancy made a similar albeit more philosophically grounded charge against the Situationists, arguing in the late 1990s that their society of the spectacle was a criticism of a material world absorbed entire by representation — i.e. the appearance of the commodity-form.[677] The tragedy of their criticism, by Nancy's reckoning, is that,

> [t]he denunciation of mere appearance effortlessly moves within mere appearance, because it has no other way of designating what is proper — that is, nonappearance — except as the obscure opposite of the spectacle. Since the spectacle occupies all of space, its opposite can only make itself known as the inappropriable secret of an originary property hidden beneath appearances.[678]

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[673] Ibid.
[674] Ibid.
[675] I use Jorge Larrain's term 'base superstructure image' here to distinguish the critical image of the base superstructure, particularly with regard to fully capitalist societies, from those who consider this image as a real description of invariant human social structures, for instance Althusser's structural variant of Marxist orthodoxy. Cf. Jorge Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983, p. 175.
[676] Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, p. 120.
[677] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 49.
[678] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

Baudrillard and Nancy's claims concerning the SI are widespread, even among people broadly sympathetic to the Situationist project (as both Baudrillard and Nancy have identified themselves).[679] However what is either misunderstood or forgotten in relation to this criticism is that the SI originally held to an orthodox conception of the 'base-superstructure image' of material-economic determinism, but moved away from such a conception progressively and rapidly between 1960 and 1963. By the time of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, written between 1965 and 1966, the conception of base-superstructure dualism is entirely absent. In its place, Marx's early conception of ideology as the *becoming ideological* of ideas (in opposition to practice broadly conceived) has replaced the earlier notion of the ideological 'realm' (a question I will return to in chapter seven). I believe that the SI attempted to differentiate between ideas as instances of social-material reality, and the becoming ideological of ideas, in a similar fashion to Jorge Larrain. Larrain has attempted to recover the original negative sense of ideology from its conflation with a positive sense of 'ideological superstructures', by differentiating between the 'ideational' and the 'ideological'.[680] Such a distinction is in contrast to Marxist orthodoxy, which imagines ideas as necessarily superstructural, emergent from the material "base", and merely reflective and secondary of this material base. Larrain's argument, as too implicitly the SI's, was that Marx did not hold to the orthodox conception of an 'ideological superstructure', insofar as he considered ideas as variously ideological and non-ideological. The criterion for being 'ideological' was precisely the extent to which ideas were presented as either opposed to or elevated above the material conditions of their existence, i.e. as an indivisible part of 'human sensuous practice' as Marx put it. Against the orthodoxy not all ideas are ideological; and perhaps more importantly ideas are considered as moments of a material practice (as opposed to a merely emergent and dependent mode of matter). To the extent that ideas are superstructural (or in Nancy's reckoning merely representational) is the

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[679] A recent example: 'The SI worked within a heavily Hegelian-Lukácsian subgenre of Marxist thought that still relied heavily on a base-superstructure framework. For them, culture was essentially a reflection of the base, an epiphenomenon.' Stevphen Shukaitis, *Imaginal Machines: Autonomy & Self-Organization in the Revolutions of Everyday Life*, London: Minor Compositions, 2009, p. 198.

[680] 'If one wants to uphold both a negative concept of ideology and the idea of an all-encompassing level of consciousness, then the solution is to propose a superstructure of ideas or "ideational superstructure" which contains both non-ideological and ideological forms of consciousness.' Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, p. 172.

extent to which they are ideological, i.e. practically opposed or ideally elevated above the material practices in which they are embedded and are expressions of. However, Debord, or Marx for that matter, did not oppose representation to the "real" of 'non-representation', but rather pointed to the way representational forms emerged from everyday practice and came into an ideal (and thus ideological) opposition to the reality (of which they were a part).

Marx argued that Hegel's account of particular social and historical forms of 'object' alienation and estrangement, 'for instance, wealth, state power, etc.', considered this estrangement only 'in their form as thoughts… They are thought-entities, and therefore merely an estrangement of *pure,* i. e., abstract, philosophical thinking. The whole process therefore ends with absolute knowledge.'[681] In contrast, the main line of Marx's attack was not that Hegel was an idealist and he a materialist, but rather that Hegel, operating on the basis of the priority of thought, only saw in alienation something negative which could only ever be 'resolved' ideally. 'Absolute Knowledge' for Hegel was the ideal resolution of the contradictions of everyday life, not their "real" resolution as such. For Marx, this was a utopia only a philosopher could construct, who take themselves 'as the *criterion* of the estranged world'. [682] For the real estrangements of the world, in which Marx included first and foremost religion and philosophy, Hegel resolved them into the alienation of mind and the object world of its alienations: 'that is to say, it is the opposition between abstract thinking and sensuous reality or real sensuousness within thought itself.'[683] For Hegel,

> [i]t is not the fact that the human being *objectifies himself inhumanly,* in opposition to himself, but the fact that he *objectifies himself* in *distinction* from and in *opposition* to abstract thinking, that constitutes the posited essence of the estrangement and the thing to be superseded.[684]

For Marx, the object world was neither fated to alienation, nor its essence. Rather objectification as praxis and the results of praxis was the *sine qua non* — at least of the human. This 'essence'

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[681] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,' p. 331.
[682] Ibid.
[683] Ibid.
[684] Ibid.

was an emergent and volatile property; it was brought into being, it did not pre-exist its forms of appearance as in Hegel. In this sense, Marx posed that ideas are the real products of real practices; but only insofar as these ideas, even considered in terms of a truth value which exceeds human practice — for example, physical laws — cannot be completely disentangled from the conditions of their sensuous production and consumption by humans. Thus, the essence of the human was the passing truth of a 'complex activity' in which practice mediates a relation between the human natural being and the rest of nature. For Marx, this relation is human insofar as it is *uniquely* human. Of the animals, only the human has a relation with all of nature.[685] In doing so the human comes to understand a pre-existing nature and also fashions this understanding amidst the human transformation of nature and, crucially, the transformation of human nature — i.e. the human comes-to-be *human*. Here again we approach Marx's idea of 'objective activity', or 'practical- critical', 'revolutionary practice' being 'conceived and rationally understood' as the 'coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change'.[686] That is to say, the truth of human practices, beyond the claims of tradition, divinity and the various ideologies that score human history, are their own self-transformation and coming-to-be and passing-away.

As already touched on, above, Marx considered the Hegelian dialectic 'in its essence critical and revolutionary', albeit 'mystified', insofar as Hegel believed that it described the movement of 'spirit', in which the real historical movement and 'objectifications' of human practice across time signified successive alienations of this Spirit's movement. Spirit, thus, was presented by Hegel as both the premise and result of historical movement. Marx believed that Hegel's conception was 'inverted', not merely by virtue of him prioritising Spirit over 'matter' (as Marxist orthodoxy would have it), but rather by misunderstanding the priority of Spirit. For

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[685] 'The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life activity*. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labor reverses the relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his *essential being,* a mere means to his *existence*' ibid., p. 276.
[686] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' thesis 3, p. 4.

Marx, Spirit — insofar as this term signifies conscious practice and the results of such — is dependent in the sense that to consider it in abstraction from its 'embodied' appearance, i.e. as 'sensuous', 'conscious practice', is to engage in an ideological fallacy. That is, it is to maintain that ideas and consciousness can be considered as really autonomous of the sensuous practices in which they are embedded, and are expressions of. Nonetheless, Marx recognised that historical movement could be described dialectically, i.e. that human practice, considered individually and social-historically, can be conceived by way of its negative movement, i.e. by the positing of ideas and practices in social life, by which one 'must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of […] thinking in practice'.[687] In his 1873 Postface to *Capital*, Marx described the demystification of Hegel's dialectic, infamously, as consisting of inverting Hegel's dialectic, 'in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell'.[688] Insofar as Marx rejected Hegel's conception of the priority of Spirit over its material objectifications, the inversion can be considered, for my purposes, as primarily the rejection of the Hegelian notion of objectification as necessarily alienation (i.e. alienation of the spirit as objectivity), based upon Hegel's prioritisation of Spirit, and further his belief in its immanent *telos* (as Absolute Spirit at the end of history). As Debord pointed out,

> [Marx's] *inversion* […] does not trivially consist of putting the materialist development of productive forces in the place of the journey of the Hegelian Spirit moving towards its encounter with itself in time, its objectification being identical to its alienation, and its historical wounds leaving no scars. History become real no longer has an end. Marx ruined Hegel's position as separate from what happens, as well as contemplation by any supreme external agent whatever. From now on, theory has to know only what it does.[689]

Nonetheless, Marx was criticised precisely for what Debord argued he did not do. For instance at the same time Debord was using Marx to formulate the criticism of the commodity-spectacle, Cornelius Castoriadis came to believe that Marx merely recast Hegel's scheme of the successive

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687 Ibid., p. 3, thesis 2.
688 Marx, 'Postface to the Second Edition [1873],' p. 103.
689 Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 80.

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688 Marx, 'Postface to the Second Edition [1873],' p. 103.
689 Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 80.

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'spiritual' alienations as 'historical' alienations, substituting for Hegel's spiritual determinism a material 'economic determinism'.[690] In more philosophical terms Jean-Luc Nancy has argued that the Situationists, drawing upon Marx, fell prey precisely to the 'metaphysical in the Nietzschean sense' by posing an authentic reality ('deep, living, originary') beyond the apparent one, as the basis upon which to contest alienation.[691] Castoriadis and Nancy's criticism coincide insofar as they both pose that Marx and the Situationists attribute a deeper, more authentic level as the determinant level. For Castoriadis this is merely a reductive move, whereas in Nancy's Nietzcshean terms, it denies the apparent in favour of the 'fable of the real world'.[692]

Whereas it is true the Situationists identified a tendency for living to recede into the distance of representation, in particular the representations of the commodity-spectacle, *pace* Nancy they did not reduce representation to the spectacle (or the spectacle to mere representation).[693] In *The Society of the Spectacle* Debord wrote that the spectacle 'is not a collection of images, but a social relation between people mediated (*médiatisé* — also, 'broadcast' or 'publicise') by images.'[694] 'The spectacle simultaneously presents itself as society itself, as a part of society and as an *instrument of unification*.'[695] By Debord's reckoning all of these instances of the spectacle are both really lived *and* ideological; importantly the latter does not exhaust either the ideas or reality of the former. Thus, the spectacle was never just representation, even if it is that part of everyday life in which the 'gaze and consciousness is concentrated'.[696] Rather it was the produced and consumed representations of everyday life on the basis of the capitalist organisation. Like Marx against Hegel, the problem for Debord and the Situationists was not one of representation *per se*, but rather representation posed ideologically, i.e. as separated from its material conditions of existence. Ideology is false to the extent that it is the real representation of a falsehood, for instance of the claims of political economy with regards to 'labour' and its alienation as wage-labour and capital. Nonetheless capitalist society is real,

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[690] Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 35.
[691] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 52.
[692] Ibid. Also, cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols (1889),' in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
[693] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, theses 1, 2, 3.
[694] Ibid., thesis 4.
[695] Ibid., thesis 3.
[696] Ibid.

albeit with an inverted consciousness of its real existence. However, the disjunct between 'ideology' and 'reality' is not absolute. We must recall that under capitalism not all ideas are ideological, however all practices tend to be dominated by ideological, 'inverted' thought (e.g. the "necessity" for human activity to appear as wage-labour, capital, commodity-markets, etc.). If we recall Debord's argument that the spectacle is not a collection of images, but rather those images and representations which mediate (*médiatisé*) the capitalist social relation, then we can understand that the spectacle is not the beyond or just the apparent falsehood of the social relation, but rather a real part of everyday life. Its "secret" then is not beyond the everyday life that the spectacle tends to invade and occupy with its version of the truth, but rather the everyday itself which is so occupied. The spectacle falsifies social reality on the basis of social-natural reality itself. The beyond then, is not to be found literally beyond the spectacle but on the ground that the spectacle falsifies as itself a product of this (social-natural) reality. For instance, the proletariat in Marx and the SI's conception is both ground of alienation and the constitution of a revolutionary agency *against* this ground. 'In a world that is *actually inverted*, the true is a moment of the false'.[697] Or, to rephrase this with an eye to the Baudrillard's charge that the SI could not shake their 'fidelity to the proletariat', the truth of the proletarian condition is the movement of surpassing this condition as ultimately false — i.e. as bound by the ideological claims regarding the reality of the proletarian condition.[698]

The Situationists captured the positive aspect of Marx's notion of supersession in opposition to Hegel's largely negative conception. Marx's conception of alienation, contra Hegel, differentiated between objectification and alienated objectification; thus, "man" objectified her human powers, but alienated "man" posed her powers as alienated objects, i.e. as powers become autonomous of human agency (or even origin, in the case of religious objectifications). For Hegel, by posing 'man as equivalent to self-consciousness', and 'the estranged object (the estranged essential reality of man) [as] nothing but *consciousness*', he further proposed that 'man' could ideally *surpass* his estranged objectification, insofar as his 'objectified' being was

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[697] Ibid., thesis 9.
[698] Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, p. 120.

only alienated to the extent that it was misrecognised.[699] That is to say, the objective forms posed in opposition to 'man', particular as the objectified production of 'man', are in reality merely the objectified consciousness of 'man' in an 'estranged' state (i.e. appearing as things apart from consciousness — even and especially in the case of consciousness as a posited *thought-entity*). Note that Hegel equated objectification with alienation; thus, the surpassing of alienation was also a surpassing of objectification (in the recognition of the essential identity of the subject — self-consciousness — and its object — objectified consciousness). Marx, on the other hand, rejected such an identity, distinguishing between alienated objectification and objectification as such. Of course, this flowed from his materialist re-interpretation of the idea of subjective human activity as objectifying activity. Marx typified Hegel's solution— i.e. the *supersession* as the 'negation of the negation' of objectification — as an 'empty supersession of that empty abstraction'.[700] Marx, instead, proposed the possibility of the *positive supersession* of alienation as the negation of *alienated* objectification (as opposed to Hegel's negation of objectification, as such). In what appears to be a non- or even anti-Marxist register, Marx conceived of communism as the pivot of this supersession and not the goal as such.[701] Communism is the historical movement of the negation of private property that posits the possibility for a truly human social arrangement beyond the alienations of private property. That is to say, communism poses the possibility of truly human objectifications beyond the alienations of private property; and by this movement, 'the first real emergence, the actual realisation for man of man's essence and of his essence as something real.'[702]

Conclusion

In the Situationist hypothesis we can find an argument for the 'realisation and abolition' of art, however without this Hegelian-Marxist terminology. Though critical of the fragmented and repetitive nature of their artistic contemporaries, Debord initially phrased the overcoming of art as it existed in terms of the immediate possibilities on offer: of *realising art*, realising the potentialities of current artistic and non-artistic techniques in an 'integral art' deployed across

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[699] Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,' p. 343.
[700] Ibid.
[701] Ibid., p. 306.
[702] Ibid., p. 342.

cities and everyday life.[703] The anti-artistic nature of this was nonetheless clear; for instance 'artistic means' were seen as one set of methods among others to be used to realise the Situationist hypothesis.[704] However, the idea that this surpassing was at once, the one and the same *abolition* of the present state of affairs was only implicit. Indeed, it is the development of capitalism's ability to not only absorb criticism (artistic and other wise), but flourish on this basis, that set some Situationists on the path of making what was implicit explicit. In the face of such a disarming of criticism — what the SI would come to designate 'recuperation' — art needed to be abolished as it existed in order to be realised. Thus, one way we can typify the changing perspective of the SI throughout the first five years is the movement from the perspective of *realising art* to a perspective of *surpassing art* (which was at once its realisation and its abolition).

Debord would write in *The Society of the Spectacle* (published in 1967), that since the Dada and Surrealist experiments in the abolition and realisation of art, 'the critical position elaborated […] by the Situationists has shown that the abolition and realisation of art are inseparable aspects of a single *surpassing of art* [*dépassement de l'art*]'.[705] The significance of Debord's perspective here is twofold. On the one hand, it demonstrated the ongoing importance of Marx's conception of 'surpassing' and 'realisation and abolition', which Debord and other Situationists derived from their more considered engagement with the work of the young Marx from around 1959 and 1960. On the other hand, implicit in Debord's assessment is the convergence of the Situationist hypothesis with Marx's criticism of the philosophical radicalism from which he emerged in 1843-44. Indeed, this convergence is better understood as an homology, insofar as Debord, Vaneigem, et al., proposed that the negative movement in art not only paralleled that of philosophy, but was ultimately entailed in the general decomposition of bourgeois culture. Thus, we can understand the 'Hamburg Theses', further, as a gesture at encompassing the negative movement of supersession as the critique of art and politics.

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[703] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' passim.
[704] Ibid., p. 322.
[705] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 191.

However, what was perhaps most striking about the homology that the SI posed was the practical consequence they drew from this. Unlike Lefebvre and Goldmann, the SI's recognition of such a homology moved beyond the identification of a theoretical-critical homology to posing an unresolved alienation of culture and cultural production embodied in the figure of a 'new proletariat', much as Marx had posed such a similar figure in the mid-1840s. However, this recovery was not the mere return to Marx's problematic in an abstract, ahistorical fashion. Rather, the figure of the 'new proletariat' embodied the 'new poverty' the SI spoke of, i.e. a poverty of means and methods for the real control and self-transformation of everyday life. At least in its contemporaneous Western European variant, this 'new poverty' was masked by the burgeoning commodity-abundance of consumer society. Hence, the conceptualisation of a 'new poverty' was contrasted with, and functioned as a criticism of the material poverty that Marxist orthodoxy considered the *sine qua non* of proletarian immiseration and alienation. However, and as we will see to an extent in the following chapter, this 'new poverty' was not merely the critical rejection of Marxist orthodoxy in this case. It also functioned as the recovery of Marx's conception of the alienation of the worker as her alienation from the object-world constituted by her labour (including herself *as* labour-power for capital).

Indeed, and bearing in mind the foregoing, what is perhaps most striking regarding the Situationist recovery of Marx was that it constituted as critical rejection of Marxist orthodoxy. This runs counter to those critics, like Baudrillard and Nancy, who see in the SI either a reassertion of orthodoxy (such as the supposed equivalence of the 'separate' and 'ideological superstructures') or as the last gasp of a disintegrating orthodoxy. Debord would turn to a more considered critique of Marxism, dedicating the longest chapter of his *The Society of the Spectacle* to such a task. A consideration of this criticism is beyond the scope of the present work. Nonetheless, I will turn to an elaboration of the Situationist critique of Marxism, a critique, moreover, that I have already sketched in this chapter and the previous one. As we will see in chapter seven, the recovery of Marx's sense of 'ideology critique' became central to both this criticism and the development of the concept of spectacle. Indeed, such a recovery is more often ignored and less often misunderstood, by those critics who seem either incapable or ill-

equipped to understand that the sheer presence of Marxism does not require one to anachronistically read Marx as a Marxist (for instance, as Castoriadis did). Let us now turn to the last piece in this puzzle, the Situationist critique of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and the enrichment of the concept of spectacle by way of the original sense of 'ideology critique'.

Chapter seven: The spectacle of ideology

In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the

Cartographers Guild struck a map of the Empire whose size was that of the

Empire, and which coincided point for point with it.

— *Jorge Luis Borges, 1946*[706]

The worker does not produce himself, he produces an independent power.

[...] The spectacle is the map of this new world, a map which exactly covers

its territory.

— *Guy Debord, 1967*[707]

1961 would prove to be the pivotal year for the SI. We have already seen this in the manifestation of the 'Hamburg Theses'. However, so far, I have only touched on what were to become the most significant developments of the year, developments moreover that were summarised in the 'Hamburg Theses'. In 1961 the concept of the 'spectacle' and the critique of the 'political militant' would move to the centre of the group's concerns, and, indeed, set the stage for its metamorphosis beyond its existence on the edge of artistic and cultural criticism.

The concept of the 'spectacle' had been a part of the Situationist arsenal since Debord had used it in the founding document, associating the 'alienation of the old world' with 'the very principle of the spectacle: non-intervention'.[708] The idea of an engaged practice, in which there were no passive bystanders, or 'spectators', was key to the hypothesis of the constructed situation, as opposed to the more or less passively experienced situations of capitalist everyday life. However, what we see in 1961 is the concept of the 'spectacle' becoming more forcefully asserted, and its use by the Situationists to describe the travails of alienation across the social field, and in particular against the idea of the political alienation they found in groups like

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[706] Jorge Luis Borges, 'On Exactitude in Science (1946),' in *Collected Fictions*, New York: Penguin Putnam, 1998, p. 325.
[707] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 31.
[708] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 325.

Socialisme ou Barbarie. It would be too much to argue that the encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was merely negative in this sense, insofar as this encounter positively influenced the development of the SI in its trajectory beyond the artistic ghetto. As we have seen in previous chapters, and as was definitely the case with the lingering arguments over art in the group between 1960 and 1962, 'the very principle of the spectacle: non-intervention' had become a serious problem for the SI itself. We can thus consider Debord's turn to an engagement with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in the winter of 1960 as an attempt to address the impasse reached in the SI, due to both the stalling of unitary urbanist experimentation, and the relatively passive level of engagement with the Situationist hypothesis on part of most of the artist members of the group.

The marked efflorescence of the concept of the spectacle in the work of the SI in 1961 was closely associated was Debord's critique of the 'political militant', and his discovery of such a figure in his brief passage through *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Debord's membership of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, via its 'political' organisation Pouvoir Ouvrier, was brief but significant. Partially motivated by his collaborative work with the 'Social-Barbarian' Daniel Blanchard in 1960, Debord participated as a rank and file militant in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*/*Pouvoir Ouvrier* between the summer of 1960 and May 1961. However, it was Debord's experience of the life of the young militants in the group, and the largely unavowed hierarchy he found there, that helped solidify his growing belief in the breadth of the 'spectacularisation' of everyday life.[709] Indeed, it was this experience that informed one of the key conclusions of the 'Hamburg Theses': 'that we should no longer pay the least importance to any of the conceptions of revolutionary groups that still survived as heirs of the old social emancipation movement destroyed in the first half of our century'.[710] Debord's chief point here was against the conceptions of what *constitutes* a revolutionary group, rather than the theories elaborated by revolutionary groups as such. In the case of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*/*Pouvoir Ouvrier* (hereafter SB/PO) their critical theory was not

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[709] Phillipe Gottraux conceived of Debord's 'distance' from the older members of the group (such as Cornelius Castoriadis and Albert Masó [aka 'Vega']) as largely a 'generational' division. Cf. Phillipe Gottraux, *«Socialisme ou Barbarie» : Un engagement politique et intellectuel dans la France de l'après-guerre*, Editions Payot Lausanne, 1997, pp. 224-25.

[710] Debord, 'Les thèses de Hambourg en septembre 1961 (Note pour servir à l'histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste) [1989],' p. 703.

in question (at least not at this point); rather it was one of calling into question how their conception of politics and political practice came into conflict with their critical theory. As Debord would remark in his letter of resignation, SB/PO, though 'founded on the contestation of all aspects of current society', was 'not particularly favourable to the contestation of the least of its own habits'.[711] By Debord's reckoning the largely uncriticised internal hierarchy of SB/PO was evidence of alienated, spectacular relations, whose existence could not remain bracketed or ignored if the group wanted to accede to the unquestionably radical nature of its theoretical criticism of capitalist society as a whole. It was this critique, rooted in the SI's criticism of the spectacular passivity of the burgeoning mass market in culture, that would prove crucial to the Situationist conception of the need for a revolutionary organisation of a 'new type'.[712]

One of the most significant aspects of the entailed development of the concept of the 'spectacle' and the critique of the 'political militant', was the (re)discovery of Marx's early conception of 'ideology critique'. The significance of this is sometimes hard to grasp from a post-1970s perspective. For instance, when the SI proposed over the course of 1961 and 1962 that 'it is necessary to recover the Marxian critique of the role of ideologies', their demand was made in opposition to the orthodox Marxist conception of ideology. They underlined the need to differentiate ideology in 'Marx's sense of the term', a sense which they took over and extended in the concept of 'spectacle', from not only the orthodox conception, but from what they came to see as the 'ideologization' of Marx's work *as* Marxism.[713] The apparent paradox of calling themselves Marxists in the same way that Marx was when he said 'I am not a Marxist', was precisely made in order to draw attention to the ideologization of his work, and the ideology of Marxism.

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[711] Debord, 'Aux participants à la conférence nationale de Pouvoir ouvrier (5 mai 1961).'
[712] The argument for a 'new type of revolutionary organisation' appears in the sixth issue of *Internationale Situationniste* (August 1961). However, Debord had broached the idea in his critique of 'Social Barbarian' Sébastien de Diesbach in February 1961, and his presentation to Henri Lefebvre's research group into everyday life in May 1961. Cf. Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art [février 1961].'; I.S., 'Instructions pour une prise d'armes.'; Debord, 'Perspectives de modification conscientes dans la vie quotidienne.'
[713] Internationale Situationniste, 'programme élémentaire du bureau d'urbanisme unitaire,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 6 (Août 1961), p. 16; I.S., 'Du rôle de l'I.S.,' p. 16.

Recently Jan Rehmann has noted that the eclipse of Marx's ideology critique by Marxist orthodoxy's positivistic notion of ideology — what Rehmann calls the 'neutral concept of ideology' — 'helps explain […] the appeal of the postmodernist challenge from the 1970s onwards'.[714] Certainly the association of 'ideology' with the sense of the 'ideological superstructure' being in effect the 'ideational' reflection of the material base has done great damage to Marx's notion of ideology criticism.[715] Marxist orthodoxy largely reduced ideology to a correspondence theory of truth, i.e. that the ideological superstructure simply reflected the material base in a more or less truthful fashion. By its lights, one can pit the more truthful proletarian or socialist ideology against the less truthful bourgeois ideology. However, if we pay close attention to Marx's early and later work, we find that he did not present a general theory of the 'ideological superstructure' (indeed, he never used this term). What we do find is that Marx differentiated between ideas and consciousness, and their ideological deformation under particular conditions. Marx argued that the ideological deformation of ideas was a result of those practices (in particular, specialised, intellectual practices) that understood consciousness and its results autonomously of their material conditions of being — for instance as the 'history ideas' (considered separately to history as such).[716] Certainly, such a conception is at odds with the orthodox conception of ideology, and has only been fitfully recovered over the course of the 20th century.

Even if we concede that the SI held to a relatively orthodox conception of 'ideology' and 'ideological superstructures' before 1961, we nonetheless find ideas in their theoretical toolbox that mitigated such a conception. One of these was the concept of 'spectacle'. Certainly, in its initial elaboration it bore a resemblance to aspects of the orthodox conception of the 'ideological superstructure'. However, even at this point the concept of the spectacle was not presented as the 'ideational' doubling of material reality, as it was in Lenin's conception of ideology, but

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[714] Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, p. 64.

[715] Here I use Jorge Larrain's distinction between the 'ideational' and the 'ideologically', which Larrain coined to formalise Marx's distinction between the materialised ideal (i.e. ideas embedded in material practices) and ideology. Cf. Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*.

[716] 'They [ideas] have no history, no development', apart from the history and development of peoples. Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology [1845],' p. 37.

rather as the material production of 'spectacles' (films and other mass produced images), which, via their circulation as commodity-objects, were presented as so many compensations for the real loss of control over everyday life by a primarily working class audience. It was, however, another Situationist criticism that prepared them for the (re)discovery of Marx's early conception of ideology critique, namely 'situationism'. 'Situationism' was formulated by the group in its first year in order to disabuse onlookers of what the Situationist project *was not*: 'There can be no situationism, which signifies a doctrine of the interpretation of existing facts'.[717] The influence of Marx is palpable. In his *Theses on Feuerbach*, one of the key documents regarding his early critique of ideology, Marx infamously concluded, '[t]he philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it'.[718] To reduce the Situationist hypothesis to merely an interpretation of existing situations, would be to risk its reduction to the passivity the Situationists sought to interpret *and* change. Thus, to reduce the critical practice associated with the Situationist hypothesis to a doctrine of 'situationism' would be merely to return to the philosophical perspective Marx criticised and rejected.[719]

Vaneigem has recently noted that '[f]or me, ideology is thought separated from life'.[720] Pithily he gestured at Marx's belief that religious and philosophical 'ideologies' were grounded in a division of labour that was foundational to class societies: that is, the separation of mental and manual labour that was the concomitant of the division between the rulers and the ruled, and those that direct and think productive activity, and those that execute and follow such thoughtful directions. Thus, at its most elementary, '[t]he spectacle is but the result of thought become autonomous'.[721] This core conceit of Marx's ideology critique, the becoming ideological of ideas in their separation and apparent autonomy from 'conscious existence', was partially

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[717] I.S., 'Définitions,' p. 13.
[718] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 5 (thesis 11).
[719] Debord would later draw a clear parallel between his hypothesis of the constructed situation and Marx's notion of the 'revolutionary practice', by arguing that the constructed situation amounted to '[t]he coincidence of the changing of circumstances and human activity'. Marx, cited in G.-E. Debord, 'A propos de quelques erreurs d'interprétation,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (Juin 1960), p. 31; Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 4 (thesis 3).
[720] Vaneigem, 'Raoul Vaneigem: Self-Portraits and Caricatures of the Situationist International [2014]'.
[721] Ibid.

addressed in the early Situationist conception of 'situationism'. The group argued in the first issue of their journal that 'situationism' was an abuse of the meaning of 'situationist', and thus must surely be senseless: 'there can be no situationism' because it would only 'signify a doctrine of the interpretation of existing facts'.[722] But they came to realise that such doctrines exist, and dominate what passes for intellectual activity, and, indeed, were the very essence of what they would come to understand as the dominant form of *separated* intellectual activity (in Marx's and the SI's sense of ideology as the separation and opposition of intellectual activity from activity as such). Indeed, the travails of becoming ideological were fought first within the SI itself, insofar as the group faced both the problem of art, of the attempt to forge a Situationist aesthetic on the part of some of its members, not to mention the increasing popularity of the idea (as opposed to the practice) of the 'constructed situation' as defined by the SI outside of the group.

Associating the critique of 'situationism' with both the concept of 'spectacle' and the critique of the 'political militant' allows one to fruitfully understand the continuity between the first and second phases of the SI. Debord did not come to SB/PO empty handed. As already noted the concept of spectacle was there, as can be seen in its deployment in the work jointly written with the Social-Barbarian Daniel Blanchard in 1960. However, the critique of 'situationism' is perhaps more pointedly a precursor of the recovery of Marx's ideology critique, insofar as it referred to a process that the SI feared from the outset, namely the ossification of the ephemeral sense of the constructed situation, and the possibility of the aestheticization of a project that was determinedly anti-aesthetic (cf. chapters three and four, above). Nonetheless, the encounter with SB/PO should not be underestimated. Some more recent commentators, notably Bernard Quiriny, have suggested that Debord took this concept from SB/PO, and the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, in particular. However, and as we will see, this claim simply does not hold up. Indeed, Quiriny, in suggesting that Debord 'forged' his concept of the spectacle under the white-hot influence of Castoriadis, not only mangles his sources and dates, he tends to

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[722] I.S., 'Définitions,' p. 13.

undermine the real influence that Castoriadis' theories exerted on Debord.[723] The question then should not be who influenced whom more, as if we are participating in debate with all of the verve of a playground dispute. Rather, I intend to throw a light on the hitherto largely misunderstood, or more simply ignored, rediscovery and 'repurposing' through *détournement*, of Marx's critique of ideology.

Some preliminaries toward defining a unified revolutionary program

The first sustained and constructive encounter between a Situationist and a 'social barbarian' (Fr. '*socio-barbare*') was that between Debord and Daniel Blanchard.[724] Blanchard's first meeting with Debord followed upon his initial encounter with the SI's journal, sometime in late 1959 or early 1960.[725] Their meeting would be crucial, in particular for the SI's move away from its more exclusive concern with the question of avant-garde artistic practice and its critique. However, the consequences of this meeting would not be solely limited to the SI, affecting SB/PO itself in both unforeseen and at the time largely unacknowledged ways.

Over the course of months, 'during long talks in bistros, and endless roaming through the city streets', Debord and Blanchard discussed many of the ideas that would appear in their jointly authored '*Préliminaires pour une définition de l'unité du programme révolutionnaire*' [Preliminaries toward defining the unity of the revolutionary program], published in July 1960.[726] What was most striking about the *Préliminaires...* was the way that Debord and Blanchard brought the central critical categories of their respective groups into relation with each other: 'The relationship between authors and spectators is only a transposition of the fundamental relation between directors and executants.'[727] Blanchard and Debord argued that

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[723] Bernard Quiriny, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie et l'Internationale situationniste : notes sur une « méprise »,' *Archives et documents situationnistes*, no. 3 (2003), p. 49.
[724] Debord had been relatively hostile to the SB group during the attempted coup of May 1958, in particular the tendency around Claude Lefort and Henri Simon which split from the group in September 1958. Cf. Debord, 'Letter to André Frankin, 8 August 1958.'; Debord, 'Lettre à André Frankin, 19 fevrier 1961.'
[725] Daniel Blanchard, 'Debord, in the Resounding Cataract of Time,' (1995). http://www.notbored.org/blanchard.html. In 1961 Debord wrote that his first meeting with Blanchard had taken place in 1960 — cf. Debord, 'Lettre à J.-L. Jollivet, 8 décembre 1961,' p. 113. For more details, cf. 'Whose spectacle?', in Appendix three, below.
[726] Blanchard, 'Debord, in the Resounding Cataract of Time'.
[727] Canjuers and Debord, 'Preliminaires pour une definition de l'unite du programme revolutionnaire [20 juillet 1960],' p. 515 (part I, thesis 7).

the separation of 'direction' and 'execution' was redolent of the more general cultural separation of 'understanding' and 'doing', in which the comprehension of productive activity is functionally reserved for its directors, not its executants.[728] Such a division, perforce must lead to the destruction of meaning of most productive activity, insofar as the 'meaning' of such activity now lies outside of work itself (i.e. working in order to gain access to money, the primary form of social power in capitalist societies). Because of this emptying out of meaning — which we can consider commensurate with the development and spread of 'Fordist', mass production, assembly line techniques — productive activity was largely 'rendered absurd' for the producers.[729] However, in order to both avoid open and hidden rebellions against this absurdity, and to better integrate proletarians into the hierarchy of commodity production, 'capitalism […] strives to place the meaning of life in leisure activities and to reorient productive activity on this basis'.[730] Such leisure activities were considered by the authors to be largely 'artificial' in the sense that they were determined by the capitalist 'need' to better integrate the worker into the capitalist work-place and the increasingly asocial 'terrain of consumption' outside.[731] Such 'compensations' for meaningless labour were called 'spectacles', and 'outside of work, the spectacle is the dominant mode through which men [*les hommes*] are brought into relation with each other'.[732] The production of art was given a preeminent role in the rule of this 'spectacle'. On the one hand art was 'recuperated by capitalism as a means of conditioning the population' via the expansion of cultural production to the end of being consumed as a 'leisure' activity; on the other hand, the role of the artist, insofar as it appeared to embody 'free creative activity', served as 'an alibi for the alienation of all other activities'.[733]

Debord and Blanchard's document remained ambiguous with regard to the relationship between 'culture' and 'productive activity'. For instance, culture was conceived as both 'the ensemble of

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[728] Ibid., p. 511 (part I, thesis 1).
[729] Ibid., p. 512 (part I, thesis 3). Note that such 'techniques' based on the decomposition and division of labouring processes was not limited to solely factory style production, but were being taken up elsewhere. The 'classic' example of such was the development and spread of bureaucratic 'white collar' work in the post-war world.
[730] Ibid., p. 514 (part I, thesis 6).
[731] Ibid.
[732] Ibid., p. 515 (part I, thesis 7).
[733] Ibid., p. 516 (part I, thesis 8).

means [*instruments*] by which a society thinks itself and shows itself to itself', and 'the organisation of everything beyond the immediate necessities of [society's] reproduction'.[734] Such a conception is redolent with the orthodox separation of the 'economic base' and the 'ideological superstructure', a conception moreover that Debord and the SI would clearly eschew in the coming years (cf. chapter six, above).[735] However, such a separation was already problematised by the authors, to the extent that they conceived of the 'spectacle' (and the production of the spectacle) as increasingly determinate of productive activity generally. Thus, the 'spectacle' was conceived as a result of productive activity being 'emptied […] of all meaning for itself', which is to say meaning for the producers as opposed to the capitalist meaning which is the source of this emptying out (i.e. the capitalist meaning derived from the pursuit of profit).[736] However, the 'spectacle' was also conceived of as a source of this process, insofar as the progressive decomposition of productive activity into the 'stable division between directors and executants' was akin to what Georg Lukács described as the domination of the 'contemplative attitude' in commodity production.[737] Work, insofar as it was 'reduced to pure execution' tended to be posed as a spectacular object of contemplation rather than as an activity in which the producer was embedded and 'realised' their own, autonomously determined life projects.[738] Perhaps the lack of clarity over the causal role of the 'spectacle' in their document — i.e. the tendency to make spectacular relations a consequence of the reduction of work to mere execution — was what prompted Debord to latter comment that 'it is a little weak on several points', due to it being 'the exposition of what, it seemed to us, must be accepted by all' (i.e. by both the SI and SB/PO).[739] As we will see, it was Debord's agreement with Lukács and Marx over the reduction of productive activity under capitalism to largely a 'contemplative

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[734] Ibid., p. 511 (part I, thesis 1).

[735] It also bears comparison to Marx's conception of the "realms" of freedom and necessity; though for Marx, these "realms" were not so much practically separated as they were analytically. Cf. chapter five, above, and the section, 'An excursus on ideology', in this chapter, below.

[736] Canjuers and Debord, 'Preliminaires pour une definition de l'unite du programme revolutionnaire [20 juillet 1960],' p. 514 (part I, thesis 6).

[737] Ibid., p. 511 (part I, thesis 1). Cf. Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,' in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, London: The Merlin Press, [1923] 1983.

[738] Canjuers and Debord, 'Preliminaires pour une definition de l'unite du programme revolutionnaire [20 juillet 1960],' p. 512 (part I, thesis 3).

[739] Debord, 'Lettre à J.-L. Jollivet, 8 décembre 1961.'

attitude' (contemplative of the object of labour, and thus also of labour as objective activity itself) that was at the base of the theoretical dispute between the SI and SB/PO — and Castoriadis in particular — in the coming years.

On the basis of this theoretical 'transposition', Blanchard and Debord hoped to spark a fruitful interchange between the groups with an eye to the reconstitution of a revolutionary movement. Thus, the second part of their document focused on what would constitute such a new movement, in particular drawing upon the experimental practices of the artistic avant-gardes in order to reinvigorate the political avant-garde.[740] However, even though it was intended as 'a platform of discussion' between the SI and SB/PO, Blanchard and Debord's document appeared to have little immediate impact within SB/PO.[741] Debord would later say that 'it seems to me that they only began to read it [i.e. the *Préliminaires*…] in P[ouvoir] O[uvrier] only ten months after' its publication — which is to say, around two months after Debord resigned in May 1961.[742] Debord's resignation from SB/PO was almost certainly more important than his participation in their activity between autumn 1960 and May 1961, at least in terms of the effects which resulted from his membership. For instance, a small coterie of younger members of SB/PO formed a faction in broad sympathy with the SI, some of whom even split from SB/PO briefly on this basis.[743] However, this was by far the least interesting and perhaps most

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[740] Canjuers and Debord, 'Preliminaires pour une definition de l'unite du programme revolutionnaire [20 juillet 1960],' p. 518 (part II, thesis 4).

[741] I.S., 'Renseignements situationniste [5],' p. 11; Debord, 'Lettre à J.-L. Jollivet, 8 décembre 1961,' pp. 113-14. As Debord believed at the time, and as Blanchard would later admit, the latter's absence undermined the advocacy and defence of the document within SB/PO. 'Your absence has surely made it harder to have discussions that are essential' — Debord, 'Lettre à Daniel Blanchard, 13 juin 1961.' 'I left quickly after the publication of our common text. […] I know this is one of the grievances that Debord had toward me: I had not sufficiently defended the text in the group. […] It's true that I had not been ardent enough to defend it ...' — Blanchard in Helen Arnold et al., 'Entretien avec quelques anciens membres de Socialisme ou Barbarie ', ed. Frédéric Thomas (*Dissidences : le blog*: http://dissidences.hypotheses.org/5691, Septembre 2014).

[742] Debord, 'Lettre à J.-L. Jollivet, 8 décembre 1961,' p. 113. Blanchard has recently commented that the document 'was read but not necessarily discussed' within the SB/PO group. Blanchard, in Arnold et al., 'Entretien avec quelques anciens membres de Socialisme ou Barbarie '. Blanchard believed that the document was not only important for the SI, but in itself opened onto issues well in advance of their later, more popular consideration in 1968: 'The idea [of the text] was not to the put the cultural thematic at its centre, but of justly showing the articulation of this theme along with the criticism of society, including [that of] work and organisation ... It was not for nothing that it happened at that time, because it opened upon, well before '68, all the questions that we would speak of then: education, the role of women, youth, architecture, urbanism' (ibid.).

[743] Gottraux, *«Socialisme ou Barbarie» : Un engagement politique et intellectuel dans la France de l'après-guerre*, pp. 224-25.

confusing effect, one which is still treated by some critics as a result of Debord's allegedly

destructive passage through SB/PO.[744] Of more interest, for our concerns, is the mutual

influences exerted: of SB/PO upon the SI, and the less acknowledged positive influence of the

SI upon SB/PO. As other critics have pointed out, SB/PO's theory of bureaucratic state

capitalism and their critique of the transformation of work into largely meaningless direction

and execution proved important for the SI's development of the theory of spectacle.[745]

Additionally, SB/PO's championing of workers councils helped the SI throw of the last vestiges

of their loose fidelity to Trotskyism.[746] However, the influence that the SI exerted on SB/PO has

been lost amidst mutual recriminations that flew in the wake of Debord's resignation.

Debord's encounter with SB/PO proved crucial to the development of the theory of the

spectacle. In the year after he co-authored the article with Blanchard the theory was

considerably developed from its rudimentary origins. Nonetheless, Debord encountered

Blanchard and SB/PO *with* the concept of the spectacle, one in which the he was struggling to

understand the role of art played — and in particular, what then passed for the 'avant-garde' in

art — in the development of the new leisure industries increasingly pitched at a working-class

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[744] For instance, one of the chief 'pro-Situationists' in SB/PO, André Girard, believed that he and his faction were 'conned' by Debord. After Debord resigned, Girard and some other members also left, though unlike Debord they each 'sent a very violent post […] to denounce the sterility of the [SB] group', in what they believed to be Situationist style (Girard, cited in Gottraux [1997], p. 225). However, and despite Girard's claims, there is little evidence to indicate that Debord or any of the rest of the SI supported either the method of their gesture against SB, or the constitution of a Situationist inspired oppositional faction within SB. Indeed, there is much evidence to demonstrate that Debord left SB amicably, and did not approve of Girard and his coterie's propaganda of the deed. Cf. Debord, 'Lettre à Daniel Blanchard, 13 juin 1961.'; Debord, 'Lettre à J.-L. Jollivet, 8 décembre 1961.'; and in particular, Debord, 'Lettre à Attila Kotányi, 12 juillet 1961.' Nonetheless, Debord's former collaborator, Daniel Blanchard, has written that '[a]pparently, he [Debord] had attempted to foment a revolt among the younger members, mostly students' (Blanchard, 'Debord, in the Resounding Cataract of Time'.). However, as Blanchard admits, he was not present for this alleged plot, having been absent from France for an extended period (ibid.). Interestingly, a member of SB who was present at the time of Debord's resignation, Pierre Guillaume, has noted that Debord showed no 'aggressivity' [sic.] toward SB when he resigned. Additionally, Guillaume noted that 'a bid by Richard Dabrowsky to create a "situationist trend" in the group, [was] completely disapproved [of] by Debord'. Pierre Guillaume, 'Debord,' *(orig.) La Vieille Taupe No. 1, Spring 1995* (1996). http://www.notbored.org/guillaume.html.
[745] Cf. Not Bored's three articles on the relationship between SB, and, in particular, Cornelius Castoriadis and the SI: 'Workers' Councils, Cornelius Castoriadis and the S.I.' (1996), 'Cornelius Castoriadis, 1922 to 1997' (1998), and 'Strangers in the Night. . .' (1999). Also cf. Stephen Hastings-King, 'L'Internationale Situationniste, Socialisme ou Barbarie, and the Crisis of the Marxist Imaginary,' *SubStance* 28, Number 3, no. 90 (1999).
[746] Martos, *Histoire de l'internationale situationniste*, p. 143.

audience.[747] Thus, we can find in the founding document of the SI (published June 1957) that Debord wrote of the 'a battle of leisure taking place before out eyes' upon the 'modern ruins of the spectacle':

> To this day, the ruling class succeeds in using the leisure [time] the revolutionary proletariat wrested from it, by developing a vast industrial sector of leisure [activities] that is an incomparable instrument for stupefying the proletariat with the by-products of the mystifying ideology and tastes of the bourgeoisie.[748]

Here, the primary association of 'spectacle' was with the burgeoning 'cultural spectacle', by means of which the instrumentalities of capital further insinuated time away from work with the commodity-form. In contrast, the 'artistic spectacle' of the 'neo' avant-gardes, and others, was striking in its poverty of material means; nonetheless, it was still 'spectacular' to the extent that it did not fundamentally challenge the passivity of the 'actor/spectator' relationship, with its array of repetitive, and 'isolated and fragmentary' artistic practices that constituted an increasingly poor attempt to 'directly intervene in the ambience of […] life'.[749] The Situationist hypothesis was presented, thus, as the answer to 'spectacle' — artistic and industrial. Debord from the outset associated these *spectacles* with the 'alienation of the old world', i.e. the alienation of capitalist subject as labour-power for sale. As he wrote in 1957,

> [t]he construction of situations begins beyond the modern ruins of the spectacle. It is easy to see to what extent the principle of the spectacle — non-intervention — is attached to the alienation of the old world. Conversely, we see that the most valuable revolutionary research in culture seeks to break the psychological identification of the spectator with the hero, in order to draw this spectator into activity, by provoking their capacities to overturn their life. The situation is thus made in order to be lived by its constructors. The role of the "public" (if not passive nevertheless only given a walk-on

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[747] We will look at the bizarre counter-claim of Bernard Quiriny regarding Debord's supposed plagiarism of Castoriadis, below (a claim, sadly, sparked by Castoriadis himself in the 1980s).
[748] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 324.
[749] I.S., 'Les souvenirs au-dessous de tout,' p. 3.

part) must always be diminished, while increasing the part of those who should not be called actors, but rather "livers" [*viveurs*], in a new sense of the term.[750]

Representation as materialised idea and ideology

In February 1961 Debord circulated within SB/PO (and presumably the SI) an article entitled '*Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art*' (For a revolutionary judgement of art). His article was a response to a review of Jean-Luc Godard's film *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*), written by SB/PO member Sébastien de Diesbach — under the pseudonym S. Chatel — and published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* no. 31. Debord's central point against Diesbach was that he left his criticism at the level of the explicit 'subject matter' while ignoring the *spectacular role* of the film in a spectacular society. For Diesbach the question appeared to be only one of representation, i.e. that Godard's film was a better representation of the life of working class youth, and even of modern life more generally, amid a veritable filmic ocean of 'more or less grotesque and mystified image[s] of society'.[751] However it was Diesbach's vague conclusion that films such as Godard's could meaningfully play a part in the revolutionary contestation and transformation of present society that Debord found most objectionable. For instance, Diesbach argued that because a 'fraction of the population' could recognise itself in *À bout de souffle*, the possibility was opened for this audience to 'use the images which pass on the screen for its own needs'.[752] Debord, the practitioner of filmic *détournement*, certainly did not dispute the possibility of using films in the abstract. However, he accused Diesbach of both a lack of clarity and naivety.[753] Missing from Diesbach's account is any sense of what 'needs' would be satisfied thus, or that his suggestions were anything more than an 'idyllic vision of people equally free to admire or criticize themselves by recognizing themselves in characters on screen', considering

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[750] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' pp. 325-26.

[751] S. Chatel [Sébastien de Diesbach], '« À bout de souffle » de Jean-Luc Godard,' *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 31 (Décembre 1960 - Février 1961), pp. 104, 106.

[752] Ibid., pp. 106-07; Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art [février 1961],' p. 561 (thesis 6).

[753] 'The essential fact is this: for the first time since films were made in France, a fraction of the population finds itself in a film, and can therefore, thanks to this, look at itself, admire itself, criticize or reject itself, in any case use some images that pass on the screen for its own needs' – Chatel [Diesbach], '« À bout de souffle » de Jean-Luc Godard,' pp. 106-07. Diesbach's claim that *À bout de soufflé* constituted the 'first time' that such recognition was possible was almost certainly hyperbolic.

the reality of film production and consumption.[754] Short of a 'revolutionary modification of the present forms of culture', such 'criticism', as suggested by Diesbach, appeared to be little more than an already ineffectual moment of commodity-consumption encompassed by the existing 'division of labour between uncontrollable specialists who present to the people an image of their life, and the people who have to recognise themselves there more or less clearly'.[755]

For Debord the revolutionary criticism of culture, as opposed to a criticism which does not call into the question the fundamentally spectacular nature of culture and social life more general, 'can be nothing less than the supersession of all aspects of the aesthetic and technological apparatus that constitutes an ensemble of spectacles separated from life'.[756] Here, the idea of 'spectacles separated from life' is the evidence of the emergence of Marx's criticism of ideology. For Debord, like Marx, the question was not one of a true life versus the false spectacle, but rather the spectacular falsification of life to the extent that these images appear suspended above it, or apart from it. The film *as it exists* in capitalist societies, is not only embedded in spectacular relations (of filmic 'heroes' and largely passive 'spectators'), but presupposes such relations, and perforce reinforces such relations. One then does not simply take over capitalist industries as they exist, but rather transforms them on the basis of the transformation of the capitalist social relation itself. Similarly, to *détourn* elements of pre-existing culture is to call into question their previous existence as an apparently coherent, singular work. To criticise any product of capitalist culture while bracketing its conditions of possibility, notably the spectacular relations in which it is embedded and realised, is to forego a criticism that cuts to the root of the matter. Thus,

> [i]t is not in its surface significations that we should look for a spectacle's relation to the problems of the society, but at the most profound level, at the level of *its function as spectacle*.[757]

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[754] Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art [février 1961],' p. 561 (thesis 6).
[755] Ibid.
[756] Ibid., p. 558 (thesis 2).
[757] Ibid.

The idea of the spectacle operating at a more profound level than, for example, the mere appearance of the film-commodity, was enunciated in an early Situationist foray against the contemporary 'cinematic spectacle', in the first issue of *Internationale Situationniste*:

> cinema is the central art of our society, in the sense that its development is sought out through a continuous movement of integrating new mechanical technologies. It is therefore — not only as an anecdotal or formal expression, but also in its material base [*infrastructure*] — the best *representation* of an era of anarchically juxtaposed interventions (not articulated, [but] merely added).[758]

There are two main lines of criticism implicit in the foregoing (both of which are explicitly brought up in the critique of Diesbach and Godard). The first is that we can critically isolate and analyse the *content* and *form* of films; however, the form *qua* an expression of the social and technical relations of capitalism is perhaps a better '*representation* of an era' than its explicit content. As we have seen, Debord argued against such an isolation at the cost of the richness and efficacity of the criticism. Thus, we can also pose that the nature of the content of the film is not simply accidentally related to the more profound analysis of a film's 'function as spectacle'; indeed, we can only begin to understand the success or failure of the content insofar as we pay attention to the film as both a particular film *and* as an instance of film as capitalist technology.[759] In *Préliminaires…*, Debord and Blanchard had argued that the hierarchical relations of director and executant did not end at the factory gate or office entrance, but rather existed as spectacular relations throughout capitalist culture. Thus, to treat Godard's film as Diesbach did, while bracketing its conditions of possibility and its ongoing existence as a spectacle among spectacles, was to run the risk of 'introduc[ing] reformist illusions about the

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[758] Internationale Situationniste, 'Avec et contre le cinéma,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (Juin 1958), p. 8.

[759] In 'Avec et contre le cinéma', the Situationists posed that the cinema had yet to witness the widespread appearance of 'formally destructive works, concurrent with what has been accepted for twenty or thirty years in literature and the plastic arts' (ibid., p. 9). However, they would favourably note a little over a year later that Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour* signalled just such an 'appearance in "commercial" cinema of the self-destruction that dominates all modern art' (I.S., 'Le cinema après Alain Resnais,' p. 9). What excited the Situationists most about *Hiroshima mon amour*, was that like the formal dissolution they identified as the most striking trait of modern art, 'the spectacle is the *mise en scène* of its own ruin' (ibid., p. 10). That is to say, the formal decomposition signalled simultaneously the possibility of the alternative use of cinema, a use necessarily beyond its capitalist form.

spectacle, as if one day it might be ameliorated from within, improved by its own specialists, under the supposed control of a better informed public opinion'.[760]

Debord wagered that the representation of human practices tends, under conditions of the 'commodity-spectacle', to *become ideological* in the fashion that Marx identified, i.e. that they come to be posed in opposition to (and often as superior to) the activities they purport to represent.[761] Of course, the process by which such representations assume this 'ideological' or 'spectacular' mode is not in itself a necessary moment of representations *per se*, but rather are related to the way such acts are submitted to the existing hierarchies and divisions of capitalism. The film as an ideological representation is false to the extent that implicit in the production and consumption of the film is a division of labour that is largely dissimulated in its presentation as a film commodity. Thus, films are false to the extent that they are products caught up in social relations that falsify and dissimulate the truth of the totality of these relations (i.e. relations requiring the alienation and exploitation of labour-power). It is not a question of the supposed falsehood of *mimesis* (i.e. of representation as such). In the case of Godard's *À bout de souffle* (or any similar film in terms of social and historical particulars), its spectacular nature is a function of its appearance as a film-commodity for (largely) passive consumption. However, even here we should be careful to pay attention to the way the film as commodity shapes the production of the film as much as its consumption. Films tend to be considered the work of what are identified as the chief creative agents (e.g. the director, the writer, to a lesser extent the actors insofar as they *realise* the script and direction); and indeed, they are, insofar as these creative agents' command and submit the activity of the working crew (or 'executants' in SB/PO's vernacular) to their direction. Of course, to criticise film production in this fashion is not to make a moral judgement, but rather to draw attention to the spectacular hierarchies which exist across different forms of creative practice submitted to the judgement of the marketplace. It is to foreground the bureaucratic capitalist nature of the film industry — spectacular to its core. Nonetheless, the Situationists raised the possibility of the use of film (or other technical mediums) under conditions markedly different from spectacular ones.

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[760] Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art [février 1961],' pp. 558-59 (thesis 2).
[761] Ibid., p. 558 (thesis 2).

In the month Debord circulated his criticism of Diesbach, his film *Critique de la séparation* was released. Debord did not consider his film non-spectacular; and, as we have seen in chapter one, he thus rejected the appellation 'situationist'. At best, he considered it a film that explicitly drew attention to its *necessarily* spectacular nature (necessary, insofar as its production and consumption was inescapably embedded in the social relation it criticised). In this sense, it was 'pre-situationist'. Indeed, we can consider *Critique de la séparation* as a practical instantiation of precisely the use Debord suggested for film under spectacular conditions, as opposed to Diesbach's search for a *truly* representative film. Early in *Critique de la séparation*, the narrator states:

> The function of the cinema, whether dramatic or documentary, is to present a false and isolated coherence as a substitute for a communication and activity that are absent. In order to demystify documentary cinema, it is necessary to dissolve what is called its "subject matter" [*sujet*].[762]

'Falsehood' for Debord, in this case, is not to be found in representation *per se*, but rather the 'false and isolated coherence' of the film. This important caveat is often lost, and is later emphasised by Situationists against Castoriadis and Godard; i.e. that something is 'false' under present conditions not because it falsifies an irreducibly grounded 'reality', but rather that it is caught up in the false representation of its own truth — for instance, the 'truth' of a film's existence as a commodity-product bound by particular social and technical relations that are effectively effaced in its appearance as a film object. That Diesbach recognised a true representation in Godard's film is undermined precisely by the 'false and isolated' coherence of the film.[763] What is hidden in both his analysis of the film, and the film itself, are the conditions of the film's existence as a film-commodity. Not only the intention of the director, but the social and material conditions of the film only appear to the extent that they are represented *in* the

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[762] Guy Debord, 'Critique de la séparation [1961],' in *Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006, pp. 541-42.

[763] I.e. its existence as a discrete film-commodity, the product of deliberation, planning and cooperative execution to the end of being circulating and even competing with other commodities in national and global markets.

film.[764] For Debord it is this "hidden" social structure that is revealed by the dissolution of the explicit 'subject matter'.[765] What is more, this structure is spectacular. The film exists as spectacle in both its explicit existence as a cinematic spectacle, and as the product of spectacular productive relations.

As we saw in chapter five, Castoriadis' sense of 'productive activity' — of *poiesis* — differed markedly from both Marx and Debord's sense. Indeed, Castoriadis did not recognise Marx's differentiation of 'free productive activity' and 'labour' as such. For Castoriadis, there simply is productive activity, which was more or less free depending upon the struggle over its direction

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[764] For instance, in *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (1959), during a tracking shot along a table the narrator speaks of it as a 'botched tracking shot'. Here the representation is the botched tracking shot itself that is both seen, as the point of view tracks along the table, and not seen insofar as the equipment, camera and director are out of shot. Debord, gesturing at both the artificiality of the film ('botched') and the relative poverty of means ('botched') at his disposal, is by the latter able to incorporate a limited criticism of this film and cinema as such.

[765] As if to mock the 'false and isolated coherence' of films, Debord illustrated the narration at this point in the film with a 'complete circular panoramic of the Plateau Saint-Merri'. 'What real project has been lost?' the narrator asks at the beginning of the 360° circuit of the demolished block ringed by buildings on the Plateau Saint-Merri in the Beaubourg district at the heart of the 4th *arrondissement*. In Debord's film the panoramic sequence posed the use and abuse of this now *demolished* space. It was as if the interior of the *arrondissement* itself had been dissolved, a part of the greater relocation of the Les Halles markets nearby, the emptying out of Paris that Debord and others decried. The camera takes in everything and yet nothing much, a couple getting into their car, a kid on a bike, some kids wandering around, some other people crossing the plateau. A space opened in the midst of the city is used pitifully, mostly as a parking lot. You can imagine some of the kids playfully using the space, but Debord doesn't show this, just an ephemeral, *boring* moment framed by the circular movement of the camera and the cameraman. In the distance a modernist building sits on the Rue de Beaubourg, simultaneously awkward and peacefully absorbed into the warren of streets and shops. As the point of view slowly spins the narrator speaks of 'the rules of the cinematic spectacle', the dissatisfaction with life that is the real wellspring of the 'satisfying products' which constitute the 'false coherence' of films. Accompanying the image and narration are the following subtitles *détourned* from Dante's *Inferno*: 'Midway upon the journey of our life… I found myself within a forest dark… for the straightforward pathway had been lost'. Viewing this sequence from the perspective of the post-1970s, we can only be struck by an extra coat of melancholia layering this recorded moment from 1960 or 1961. Late in *Critique de la séparation* the narrator says, 'Memory must be destroyed in art. To ruin the conventions of its communication. To demoralise its fans. What a work!' — indeed! Here is ground zero of Baudrillard's 'Beaubourg-effect, […] a machine for making emptiness'. The Plateau Saint-Merri upon which Debord filmed would become the sight of the spectacular display of so many products of the historical avant-garde that the SI claimed to both inherit and *surpass*: namely the Pompidou Centre, that 'incinerator absorbing all the cultural energy and devouring it' (Baudrillard). Considering this sequence in Debord's film, the Pompidou Centre would also ironically mark the recuperation of the *architectural style* of the Situationists — or at least a parody of Constant's yellow sector in New Babylon — here used as the *sarcophagial* container and catalogue of art works and books, and so only incidentally a place of play or encounter under the watchful eye of *Gendarmes*. Present-day Beaubourg is an unintended testament to Debord's suspended and incomplete work of the creative destruction of art; or, as Baudrillard can be made to say by extracting the rational, Situationist kernel within: *a monument to total alienation, to spectacle and to the spectacularisation of culture*. (Cf. Debord, 'Critique de la séparation [1961],' pp. 541, 542, 550-51; Jean Baudrillard, 'The Beaubourg Effect: Implosion and Difference,' in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, [1981] 1994, p. 61, 63). For a different interpretation of this sequence cf. Tom McDonough, 'Calling from the Inside: Filmic Topologies of the Everyday,' *Grey Room*, no. 26 (Winter 2007), pp. 18-20.

and execution. Diesbach, in his review of Godard, operated within a similar outlook. He believed that the problem with culture, and filmic culture in particular, was one of direction and execution. Just as Castoriadis could imagine the self-management of productive activity as it presently existed in capitalist societies, even to the extent that he believed that the struggle against capitalist productive activity constituted the positive content of this self-management (rather than an intimation of its negation, as Debord and the SI would have it), so Diesbach imagined the spectacular representation of everyday life — albeit the *more* 'true' version of Godard's — as already, in anticipation, moving beyond its appearance as an alienated product of an alienated reality. However, and as Debord would mordantly note against Diesbach, '[t]he revolution' — and for that matter revolutionary criticism under present conditions — 'is not "showing" life to people, but rather living itself'.[766] Debord's wager was that the truth or falsity of the film *qua* representational content was the least interesting approach for revolutionary criticism. In any case, as Debord noted, 'even if Godard presents people with an image of themselves in which they can undeniably recognise themselves […], he presents them all the same with a false image in which they recognise themselves falsely'.[767] To be clear, the 'false image' is not immanent to the representational form of the image, i.e. a brutal fact of *mimesis*. The image is falsified to the extent that it appears only in its fetishized form, i.e. as *this* image in *this* film, in which the conditions of production and consumption are effectively dissimulated in the commodity-form itself. In order for criticism to be revolutionary, to attain the level of the social totality, one cannot leave the object of criticism at the level of the explicit content while ignoring the spectacular form. Debord argued, thus, that people 'recognise themselves falsely' in 'a false image', insofar as such recognition remains at the level of the representation of life, of which the latter — the representation of life — is more properly understood as being encompassed by living itself. This is the 'secret' of ideology; i.e. that the ideological is the production of ideas, images, etc., as if they were autonomous, as if they could be posed separately to the life and social conditions in which they are embedded and expressions of.

[766] Debord, 'Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art [février 1961],' p. 561 (thesis 7).
[767] Ibid., p. 561 (thesis 6).

Some years later, the SI would respond to Godard's enunciation of precisely the claim that the SI are often lumbered with — i.e. that image is false by virtue of its *mimetic* qualities. In the twelfth issue of *Internationale Situationniste*, in response to Godard's statement in his short film *L'Amour*, that 'the revolution cannot be put into images' because 'the cinema is the art of lying', the Situationists wrote that '[t]he cinema has been no more an "art of lying" than all the rest of art'.[768] That is to say, representational activity is not false by virtue of its form, but rather by virtue of the spectacular use to which such forms are put. Debord took this question up in *The Society of the Spectacle*, in which he would say — in anticipation perhaps of the common misinterpretation of the 'spectacle' as merely the false, representational 'doubling' of life — that the spectacle 'is not a supplement of the real world, an added decoration'.[769] Rather, 'in its totality, [it] is simultaneously the result and project of the existing mode of production'.[770] Thus, it should not be 'understood as an abuse of the world of vision, [or] the product of technics of the mass distribution of images' but rather as a 'part of society', even as it is 'present[ed] simultaneously as society itself, a part of society, and as the *instrument of unification*'.[771] For Debord, what is most egregious regarding the spectacle is not that 'representations' as such are *false*; rather it is a question of *falsification* — i.e. that the spectacle of images in capitalism can be presented as the exhaustive truth of a social relation of which they comprise only a part. In this sense, true and false images can be considered spectacular to the extent that engagement with them is rendered largely passive, i.e. one consumes the image, and has no real control over either its production or mode of presentation. Here is the core insight of the critique of the spectacle, and what links it to the early Situationist critique of 'passivity' and 'non-intervention'. The spectacle falsifies, but not because the spectacular image is merely false.[772]

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[768] Internationale Situationniste, 'Le cinéma et la révolution,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 12 (Septembre 1969), p. 104.
[769] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 6.
[770] Ibid.
[771] Ibid., theses 5, 3.
[772] It is perhaps not too much to suggest that Debord's critique of *spectacular* representation, can be related to the conception of art as 'anti-situationist'. In this sense, it is not a question of rejecting representation, or art, as such, but rather one of how best to use such representations under conditions of commodity-production. In short, how best to critical appropriate them as moments of revolutionary contestation. Cf. chapters one, three and four above.

An excursus on ideology

> *[W]e know that an ideology in power makes all partial truth*
>
> *become an absolute lie...*
>
> — *Guy Debord, 1965*[773]

We must hold onto the idea that the problem for Debord was not representation *per se*, but rather the *use* to which representations are put. Without doubt, the idea that the spectacle is 'false' or 'unreal' was contained within Debord's conception. However, such falsehood or unreality was not considered as an absolute. Insofar as the capitalist spectacle is presented as the exhaustive truth of capitalist society, it is false. For the SI, the important question was one of participation versus the spectacle's principle of 'non-intervention'; the spectacle *falsified* the 'real' only to the extent that it held out the false promise of participating in a decision already taken, i.e. of the capitalist premises and results of consumption and production.

I have already briefly mentioned the way the SI, and the concept of the spectacle, has been illegitimately conflated with the orthodox Marxist conception of 'ideological superstructure', in the work of Jean Baudrillard and Jean-Luc Nancy. A similar argument is made by Jacques Rancière. He even argues that Debord returned to a pre-Marxians problematic, in simply taking over the positon of Feuerbach's criticised by Marx. However, Rancière appears to be confused by Debord's *détournement* of Feuerbach in *The Society of the Spectacle*; i.e. Debord doesn't so much merely cite Feuerbach as improve him, as per Isidore Ducasse's suggestions for progressive plagiarism. Rancière writes that '[t]he "contemplation" denounced by Debord is contemplation of the appearance separated from its truth; it is the spectacle of the suffering produced by that separation'.[774] However, Debord's concept of the spectacle bears a closer family resemblance to Marx's critique Feuerbach, rather than the latter's critique of religion, as Rancière asserts. Debord did not conceive of the spectacle as the 'appearance' separated from its truth; rather he argued that the spectacle was a produced falsehood, a part of social-

[773] Guy Debord, 'Lettre à Branko Vucicovic, 27 novembre 1965,' in *Correspondance volume III janvier 1965 - décembre 1968*, ed. Patrick Mosconi, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003, p. 89; Internationale Situationniste, 'L'idéologie du dialogue,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 10 (Mars 1966), p. 69.
[774] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 7.

productive life that is presented as equivalent to, or in the place of the entirety of social life. Rancière in effect implies that 'appearance' is conflated by Debord with 'representation', and by posing such 'appearance' in separation Debord does not proceed any further than Plato's sense of '*mimesis*'. As we will see below, this is in essence Feuerbach's critique of religion. Debord did not consider 'representation' in this way, as inevitably false simply because it is a *mimetic* illusion. In fact, the question of *mimesis* was of little interest to Debord; he considered the representation of life as a moment of real, "material", social reality. What he tried to problematise was when representations were effectively posed autonomous to, and even superior to the life so represented, as in the commodity-spectacle. In a word, Debord criticsed the becoming ideological of representations, not representation *per se*.

Ideology critique has often been reduced to the idea of 'false consciousness', a reduction, moreover, that emphasises ideology simply as false consciousness in the most vulgar sense. Embedded in this sense of ideology is the orthodox conception of economic 'base' and ideological 'superstructure', in which the latter — the realm of 'consciousness' and 'culture' — is the repository of false consciousness regarding the 'base' (at least, insofar as we are talking about a capitalist superstructure and so-called 'bourgeois ideology'). Consequently, the economic base is posed as the 'truth' obscured by the false 'ideological superstructure' (in the sense of bourgeois consciousness obscuring and falsifying the truth of the centrality of labour). However, as we have seen in chapters five and six, such a conception has serious problems. First, we find that Marx's negative critique of capitalist labour is effaced in favour of posing labour as the positive 'truth' to be recovered beyond its ideological falsification. Similarly, the negative critique of ideology is lost in favour of a positive theory of base and superstructure, that tends to hypostatise these critical categories in a dubious ontology. As has been pointed out, such a 'naively metaphysical' conception poses consciousness, ideas and culture as a 'reflection' of the material base, that tends to reproduce a sort of substance dualism even while laying claim to a monist materialist outlook.[775] Indeed, so widespread was this 'orthodox'

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[775] Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, trans. Fred Halliday, London: New Left Books, [1923/30] 1970, p. 83.

conception, that erstwhile critics of it nonetheless accepted it as irreducibly 'Marxian'. Thus, when Jean Baudrillard came to criticise the SI, he argued that,

> [e]ven the situationists, without doubt the only ones to have attempted to free [*dégager*] the new radicality of political economy in their "society of the spectacle", still refer to the "infrastructural" logic of the commodity — from whence [comes] their fidelity to the proletarian class. [776]

Baudrillard's point here was to argue that the purely representational logic of the commodity, what he considered a signifying logic cut free from a signified 'ground' or given, was only partially captured in the concept of the 'spectacle'. However, and perhaps unwittingly, Baudrillard lumbered the SI with an orthodox, positive conception of base (i.e. 'infrastructure') and superstructure, in which the 'proletariat' played the role of the signified 'truth' — insofar as such a 'truth' is commensurate with the irreducibility of 'labour-power' — 'behind the spectacular organisation' of this labour-power.[777] Baudrillard believed that the 'spectacle' of the Situationists was simply commensurate with the falsehood consequent upon the domination imposed on labour (or labour-power) by commodity production. The concept of the spectacle is reduced to being little more than a false 'reflection' of the truth of the economic 'infrastructure', and thus in its essentials simply a redescription of the orthodox conception of ideology. However, such an assessment does not bear up under scrutiny. First, as discussed in chapter five, the SI from the outset tended to share Marx's negative assessment of labour, vis-à-vis his more general conception of 'free, productive activity' (i.e. that even before their more thoroughgoing engagement with Marx's work on alienation and alienated labour, the SI had reached a similar negative assessment of labour). And secondly, and as already partly demonstrated above, the idea of the 'spectacle' was never simply the falsification of an unalloyed truth. Indeed, and as we will see, Marx never reduced consciousness or ideas to 'ideology'; rather he argued that under the conditions of capitalism (and hierarchical class

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[776] Jean Baudrillard, *Le miroir de la production, ou l'illusion critique du matérialisme historique*, Tournai: Casterman, 1973, pp. 101-2 (Poster 1975 trans. p. 120-1).
[777] Ibid., p. 102.

societies more generally), ideas and consciousness tended to be practically reduced to ideology. As Karl Korsch would phrase it, against Marxist orthodoxy,

> it never occurred to Marx and Engels to describe social consciousness and intellectual life merely as ideology. Ideology is only false consciousness, in particular one that mistakenly attributes an autonomous character to […] partial phenomena of social life.[778]

Here, Korsch captured the essence of ideology critique; not the orthodox sense of the false, or illusory representation of reality, but rather the ideological attribution of 'an autonomous character to […] partial phenomena'. In this sense, such consciousness is 'false' precisely because of its partiality, rather than whether or not its object is illusory.[779] Thus, we can also understand, by the reckoning of the Situationists, that even 'true' ideas and representations can be rendered false insofar as they are *spectacularised*. For instance, Marx believed that ideologies contain true ideas, and even reveal truths. Marx considered the work of classical political economists, such as Smith and Ricardo, to be ideological in the sense of illegitimately universalising a partial understanding of social life (notably an 'economic' understanding), despite the important scientific work they achieved in revealing human activity — under the concept of 'labour' — as the source of capitalist wealth. Let us turn to Marx to gain a better understanding of his concept 'ideology'.[780]

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[778] Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 73.

[779] Note, Korsch, like Debord, used the term 'false consciousness'. However, rather than trivially contrasting it with so-called 'true consciousness' (or implying the latter by its use), Korsch attempted to recover Marx's sense by delimiting the idea of 'false consciousness' to the practice of 'mistakenly attribute[ing] an autonomous character to […] partial phenomena of social life' (ibid.). In this sense, what is false about false consciousness, is the mistaken attribution, rather than consciousness as such.

[780] Korsch would come to play a significant role in the development of the Situationist *détournement* of 'ideology', insofar as he outlined just such a recovery of the original sense of 'ideology criticism' against Marxist orthodoxy, in his 1923/1930 work, *Marxism and Philosophy*. However, prior to 1964 — the year this work appeared in French translation — Korsch's more considered argument appeared to be largely unknown to Debord (apart from passing references to his perspective in two, exceedingly brief translations of Korsch that appeared in 1959 — cf. Karl Korsch, Kostas Axelos, and Maximilien Rubel, 'Les thèses de Karl Korsch,' *Arguments*, no. 16 (4e trimestre 1959). Korsch's work would become crucial to Debord, and, in large part, the fourth chapter of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* constitutes a continuation and elaboration of Korsch's attempt to use Marx's method to criticise Marxism as an ideology. Indeed, Korsch is more often than not overlooked when considering the influences that shaped Debord, being downgraded or ignored in favour of Lefebvre or Lukács. For instance, Korsch barely appears in Jappe's excellent critical biography, *Guy Debord*, something Jappe acknowledged as an unfortunate lacuna in subsequent editions of his work. Korsch's commitment to an anti-Leninist

I have already dealt with Marx's argument regarding the supersession of philosophy. In chapter six, we have seen how Marx, in 1843, hit upon the argument that the 'theoretical' and 'practical' wings of the Young Hegelians, despite their apparent opposition, mirrored each other with regard to their partial perspectives. At this point, Marx argued that the former wanted to realise philosophy without abolishing it, whereas the latter wanted to abolish philosophy without realising it. Marx's point was to draw out what he would soon call the ideological aspect of both of these perspectives. The theorists imagined that the 'inert mass' of humanity 'has value only as the antithesis of the intellect', whereas the practical party forgot that the ideas it charged with being illusory, nonetheless were 'real living germ[s]' which played a part in the practical struggles of political, economic and everyday life more broadly considered.[781] Marx's argument was an important response to the practical instantiation of a sort of substance dualism on the part of the idealistic 'theorists' and the materialist 'practitioners'; i.e. that causal efficacy lay either with ideas or sensuous, 'objective' reality.

Marx took on a related argument, in *On the Jewish Question*, regarding the real manifestation of partial, perspectives in the guise of the universalism associated with the bourgeois conception of politics and the state. In its essence, Marx conceived of such a conception and practice as the illegitimate projection of the bourgeois worldview — replete with its ideas of the individual and private interests — into the political firmament of states and citizenry. His critique of partiality resolved into two main thread: on the one hand, the projection of the bourgeois conception of social reality into a political universalism of property rights and obligations; on the other hand, the decomposition of the unity of everyday life (i.e. in its political, economic and other aspects) into apparently independent 'realms' of political and civil life. By Marx's reckoning such partiality and division was both fictitious in the claims made for them (particularly in the

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interpretation of Marx, a more anarchistic 'left communism', and ultimately the rejection of Marxism entirely, brings him closer to Debord's perspective than either Lefebvre or Lukács — both somewhat ambiguous ex-Stalinists. The full force of Korsch's influence upon Debord et al., lies outside of the period under consideration, so I have unfortunately had to put his considerable work aside for the time being. A more considered investigation of the relationship between Korsch and Debord awaits to be undertaken.

[781] Marx, 'Letter to Ludwig Feuerbach, 11 August 1844,' p. 356; Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' pp. 180, 181. See also chapter five above, under the subheading 'The realisation and suppression of philosophy'.

universalising claims of bourgeois political and civil life) but nonetheless brutally factual, insofar as such claims were the 'real living germs' embedded in practice, and most importantly contested in practice. Indeed, in his critique of the political 'universalism' of the bourgeoisie we can find an exemplar of what Marx would soon criticise as 'ideology'.

It is in the *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology* that Marx's critique of the Young Hegelians reached its conclusion. In this sense, his 'ideology critique' was bound up with an attempt to salvage what he considered the superior moments of both wings of this movement, i.e. his typification of the 'German Ideology' was intertwined with his project of realising and abolishing philosophy. Thus, Marx's materialism should not simply be seen in the vulgar Marxist sense that Marx moved from an idealist to a materialist perspective. Rather, in developing his ideology criticism, Marx attempted to understand intellectual life as a moment of practical, 'sensuous', material life.

In the *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx's main concern was to demonstrate the insufficient nature of Feuerbach's 'objective' materialism. Marx argued that by posing a primarily contemplative materialist perspective, Feuerbach reinforced the idea of an irreconcilable separation of thought and 'sensuous' reality. According to Marx, Feuerbach, in an attempt to disabuse readers of the illusory world of religion, argued that one can only contemplate an object word of 'things, reality, sensuousness'.[782] However, in making this argument he not only bracketed the intellectual contemplator from the object contemplated, but worst still he effectively bracketed human 'sensuous human activity, practice' as such from counting as 'objective activity'.[783] That is, Feuerbach discounted the practical, human aspect of the object world. Such a move was unacceptable to Marx, because it misapprehended the significance of human practice as *self*-transformative, i.e. intertwined not only with the transformation of the object world, but also of human activity itself as an object of transformative practice.

Marx argued that Feuerbach, unintentionally, ended by mimicking the religious perspective he claimed to reject, his 'doctrine' effectively 'divide[ing] society into two parts', of which one

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[782] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 3 (thesis 1).
[783] Ibid.

was implicitly superior to the other: on the one hand the 'sensuous', 'object' world; on the other hand, the 'subjective', "realm" in which the 'theoretical attitude' which opens upon the object world vies with the merely illusory realm of 'chimeras, […] ideas, dogmas [and] imaginary beings'.[784] Feuerbach's division is confusing, because he emphasised the object world at the expense of the subjective world of theory and ideas, and yet he also believed that the 'theoretical attitude' was the 'only genuinely human attitude'.[785] However, Feuerbach's inversion of Hegel only demonstrated the symmetry of his ideas with those which he purported to criticise. Thus, even though Feuerbach denied an independent existence for ideas, he nonetheless identified activity as the province of the intellectual contemplation of the object; i.e. in the case of religious contemplation, false; in the case of scientific contemplation, true. However, in doing so Feuerbach did not resolve the upside-down vision of idealism, rather he merely "materialised" its ideal bifurcation, placing activity on one side of the ledger and the object contemplated on the other. In this way, intellectual activity became responsible for both the illusion of ideas (as religious ideas and other metaphysical fancies) and the correction of these illusions; either way, intellectual activity lay beyond the object world Feuerbach posed as the misrepresented material of reality. By Marx's reckoning, such 'material' in Feuerbach's hands became idealised itself, bearing little relationship to the human and natural reality purportedly contemplated and represented.

If we turn to Marx's critique of Feuerbach's criticism of religious ideology, we can better see how Feuerbach focused on the ideological moment at the expense of the real conditions of the ideological — not unlike what Debord accused Diesbach of with regard to his review of Godard.

For Marx, Feuerbach's starting point of 'religious self-estrangement and the duplication of the world into a religious world and a secular one' ran the risk of misapprehending both the nature of 'religious self-estrangement' and its relationship to the 'secular world' of objects.[786] Marx proposed instead that more was needed than merely 'resolving the religious world into its

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[784] Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology [1845],' p. 23.
[785] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' p. 3 (thesis 1).
[786] Ibid., p. 4 (thesis 4).

secular basis'; rather one needed to understand how the 'secular basis' apparently 'lifts off from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds'.[787] And to do this it was necessary to reckon with 'the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis'.[788] Marx offered thus a decidedly different 'inversion' of Hegel's idealistic system than Feuerbach's, in which ideas were not resolved into mere reflections of a secular basis, or simply dismissed as illusory, but rather understood as themselves moments of the constitution and resolution of 'the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis'.[789] That is to say, that ideas (and, perforce, consciousness) were moments of subjective practice understood objectively, i.e. as objects of practice and reflection. In this way Marx did not dismiss ideas or consciousness as causally efficacious — as some orthodox Marxists imagine — but rather drew attention to the need to explain consciousness with regards to not only its material conditions of being, but consciousness as constitutive moment of such, vis-à-vis subjective, human practice.[790] As he would later phrase this perspective,

> [i]t is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of the misty creations of religion than to do the opposite, i.e. to develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized.[791]

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[787] Ibid.

[788] Ibid.

[789] Ibid.

[790] For instance, in the 1873 afterword of *Capital Vol. 1*, Marx wrote, contra Hegel, that 'the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought'. However, *pace* Lenin's interpretation of Marx's reflective 'materialism', we cannot understand it without reckoning with Marx holding on to the idea of the objectivity of subjective human practice. Thus, a few paragraphs after his declaration regarding ideas, Marx wrote, '[i]n its mystified [Hegelian] form, the dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists. In its rational [Marxian] form it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary'. That Marx associated the 'critical and revolutionary' with human practice goes without saying; to attribute to him a purely *objective* conception of such 'negation' and 'destruction', is surely nothing but 'a scandal and an abomination'. Marx, 'Postface to the Second Edition [1873],' pp. 102, 103.

[791] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, p. 493, fn. 4 (continued). That even at this late date Marx had not completely given up on the critique of ideology, can be gathered not only from this quote, but perhaps even more clearly from the immediately following sentences: 'The latter method is the only materialist, and therefore the only scientific one. The weaknesses of the abstract materialism of natural science, a materialism which excludes the historical process, are immediately evident from *the abstract and ideological conceptions* expressed by its spokesmen whenever they venture beyond the bounds of their own speciality' (ibid., my emphasis).

That Feuerbach had in effect attempted 'to do the opposite', resulted in a positivist affirmation of precisely the 'the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness' that Marx argued was at heart of the ideological practice and projection of 'this secular basis'. Here we find the kernel of Marx's method, in his early work as much as his mature. One explains the abstractions of concrete life by beginning with the latter; however, it is important to note, in this case, that the abstractions of concrete life are a moment of this life itself. That is, they are the ideational forms — true and false. The danger Marx identified in Feuerbach's method, is that it positively valorises the concrete in an abstract fashion, i.e. as the concrete, as opposed to the abstract, without paying attention to either the real transformations of the 'concrete' (crucially, in this regard, via human agency), and thus the role of human agency and human abstractions as constitutive moments of the concrete. Indeed, Feuerbach misapprehended not only the practical nature of these ideological projections (in the sense of being the results of past human practice embedded in present practice) but he was unable to reconcile human practice itself with his vision of an ideologically falsified object world. Marx accused him of holding to an idealised vision of the secular world, one expunged of its historical transformations through human practice.[792] Thus, not only was he unable to recommend the role played by the human transformation of the object world, Feuerbach was also unable to comprehend the real deficiencies of this world, insofar as Marx criticised them as the result of the hierarchical division and exclusionary principles of ruling classes, and the struggles against such divisions. Thus, Feuerbach could 'not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", […] "practical-critical" activity' (i.e. activity that comprehended the world *and* changed it), precisely because he could not conceive of '[t]he coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change […] as *revolutionary practice*'.[793]

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[792] Feuerbach 'posits "Man" instead of "real historical man". […] He does not see that the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed [a product] in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs'. Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology [1845],' p. 39.
[793] Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach [1845],' pp. 3, 4 (theses 1, 3).

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels posed that, '[t]he production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men — the language of real life'.[794] However, with the rise of semi-permanent and then permanent 'divisions of labour', abstract hierarchies based upon practices began to be introduced into everyday life. Not least, the opposition of the 'mental' and the 'manual':

> [The] [d]ivision of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. The first form of ideologists, *priests,* is coincident. From this moment onwards consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of "pure" theory, theology, philosophy, morality, etc.[795]

For Marx, the establishment of a division of labour in which the conscious direction of this labour was largely alienated from its execution (to use SB's vernacular) was the key to not only the establishment and reproduction of hierarchical class societies, but the *becoming ideological* of intellectual activities, as such. It is this sense of consciousness as 'something other than consciousness of existing practice', as '*really* represent[ing] something without representing something real', as 'pure' as opposed to the corruption of the profane, that is essential to Marx's sense of what counts as 'ideology' or an 'ideological reflex'; i.e. that consciousness, intellectual activity or the results of such activity are not simply ideological, but rather *become ideological*, under particular conditions. In a similar sense to the critique of 'representation' posed above, such a conception does not reduce ideas or consciousness to the state of 'ideology' or a component of 'ideological superstructures' (as Marxist orthodoxy does), but rather posed the conditions of the *formal* becoming ideological of intellectual practice.

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[794] Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology [1845],' p. 36.
[795] Ibid., p. 44-5.

Indeed, and as we have seen contra Feuerbach and 'German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth', by Marx's lights one must 'ascend […] from earth to heaven' in order to understand that ideas become ideological insofar as they are presented in opposition to, or divorced from the historical and social conditions of being.[796] This 'ascent' does not, however, discount either the importance of ideas or their role in conscious practice, but rather insists that we begin on the basis of their earthly, rather than otherworldly, presence. If we 'ascend' from the 'real life-process' of individuals, we find that their 'ideas', 'real or illusory', ideological or not, are the 'conscious expression […] of their real relations and activities'.[797] Thus by considering first 'consciousness taken as the living individual', and secondly 'consciousness solely as' the consciousness of these 'real living individuals themselves', the results of such consciousness — i.e. ideas — 'no longer retain the semblance of independence'.[798] Marx infamously used the image of a camera obscura to illustrate the 'upside-down' appearance of all ideology, i.e. those conceptions that descend from the heaven of ideas rather than ascend from 'real living individuals themselves'. Ideology is 'inverted' only in the sense that it takes the ideal as its starting point, rather than the conscious, 'active life-process' broadly conceived. 'Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology […] have no history, no development' of their own apart from that of 'men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, [who] alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking'.[799] In this sense ideas (and consciousness) are both products and premises of such development, irreducibly a moment of the 'material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises'.[800] Thus, when Marx wrote '[i]t is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness', he did not trivially mean that consciousness was the conditioned and life the conditioning, i.e. in the sense which he critically identified in Feuerbach and rejected. Rather, he rejected an independent and

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[796] Ibid., p. 36.
[797] Ibid., p. 36, fn. *.
[798] Ibid., p. 37.
[799] Ibid., pp. 36, 37.
[800] Ibid., p. 36.

autonomous determination of consciousness and ideas. Here, then, is the core of Marx's sense of the 'ideological'.[801]

The rejection of the ideology of the political militant

On the 5th of May 1961 Debord submitted a resignation letter 'to the participants in the national conference of *Pouvoir ouvrier*'.[802] For Debord, what was peculiar about SB/PO was that despite its pioneering theoretical critique of the 'directors and executants' of bureaucratic state capitalism outlined in the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* journal, not to mention its demands for new forms of revolutionary self-organisation, the group had as yet been unable to organise a political

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[801] That Marx never gave up on his early, critical notion of ideology can be demonstrated by the singular notion of the 'commodity-fetish' in *Capital*, albeit a notion largely sidelined by Marxist orthodoxy in the century after. In *Capital*, the 'mystical character' of the commodity, chiefly its possession of a quality that appear to be 'supra-sensible or social' (namely its 'ability' to be exchanged with equivalent values), was explained by reference to 'the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves' (*Capital*, pp. 164-5). Marx asked: 'Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity?' And he answered: 'Clearly, it arises from this form itself' (*Capital*, p. 164). In a telling passage, Marx compared the commodity-fetish to the act of seeing, reminiscent of the passage on ideology as akin to a camera obscura in *The German Ideology*. In the case of the former, 'the impression made by a thing on the optic nerve is perceived not as a subjective excitation of that nerve but as the objective form of a thing outside the eye' (*Capital*, p. 165). That is to say, the subjective dimensions of the object-impression are not only effectively bracketed in the act of seeing, but this act is also reduced — as Feuerbach believed — to the object itself. As William Blake one wrote, 'we are led to believe a lie, when we see with not through the eye' (*Auguries of Innocence*). Or, as the 'young' Marx may have put it, the commodity is only conceived as a 'thing', 'only in the form of the *object, or of contemplation,* but not as *sensuous human activity, practice,* not subjectively' (*Theses on Feuerbach*, thesis 1). However, the older Marx cautioned against considering the commodity-fetish a purely material or physical relation (i.e. considering the commodity as an object *possessing* qualities additional to its physical qualities), unlike that which existed between the perceiving eye, the reflected light and the external object. The commodity is at once a physical object and, mysteriously, a 'supra-sensible' thing, much like a god or other so-called 'objects' of religious practice. However, as Marx said of these objects, they are nonetheless 'real' insofar as they are embedded in real practices, are the 'objects' of real, sensuous practices, that nonetheless make false claims about the objectivity of their ideas. Thus, the mystery of the commodity, and the commodity fetish: 'the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material *[dinglich]* relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities' (*Capital*, p. 165).

[802] 'Debord took part [in the conference] as per normal, breaking little into the debate, but properly when he did. Then, in the end, he announced calmly and firmly to Chaulieu (alias Cardan, alias Castoriadis, which is his real name), then to Lyotard and then to all, his intention to resign. All attempts by Chaulieu to make him reconsider his decision, this evening and the next day, remained in vain. Chaulieu displayed all the treasures of seduction he could; he outlined great perspectives: "if only the group's bureaucratic and retrograde defects were transformed, etc., etc." Debord was listening, without a word. When Chaulieu had finished, he only said, "Yes ... but ... I don't feel I'm up to this task," and also, "It must be very exhausting [to build a revolutionary organisation]." And Debord came to the following meeting at "le Tambour" cafe, gave his official resignation, payed his contribution for the earlier month and the current, and said in a few words that he appreciated that the group existed, but that for himself he had no will to be involved in it! He thanked us for all he had learned. And disappeared.' Guillaume, 'Debord'.

expression adequate to its 'frank self-criticism'.[803] Debord attributed this chiefly to the 'mistrust toward any sort of novelty' in the group's 'external work', singularly manifested in the survival within SB/PO of 'the conception of specialised revolutionary activity, thus of militant specialists' — aka 'political militants'.[804] Despite admirably lacking a permanent bureaucratic apparatus — present in organisations like the large, Stalinist French Communist Party (and even some of the smaller Trotskyist groups) — the group had nonetheless produced on the basis of its adherence to the 'conception of specialised activity, thus of militant specialists', an 'unavowed division' loosely based upon age, but 'even less useful': that 'between teachers and students'.[805] In Debord's account, the younger 'rank and file militants' [*militant de base*] of the group, tended to be the group's 'executants', who carried out the basic tasks of the group, while the thinking and direction of the group was left in the hand of those militants apparently more qualified.[806] And so, in an organisation in which the 'division of society into directors and executants is almost abolished […] it reappears under its corollary aspect of division between "actors" and spectators'.[807]

In a paper presented to Henri Lefebvre's research group into everyday life in May 1961, Debord began by saying that the 'study of everyday life would be a perfectly ridiculous enterprise, first and foremost condemned to never being able to grasp its object, if one did not explicitly propose to study this everyday life with the aim of transforming it'.[808] The broader point Debord went on to make was that despite the perspectives or prejudices of the researchers involved, the study of

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[803] Debord, 'Aux participants à la conférence nationale de Pouvoir ouvrier (5 mai 1961),' p. 82.
[804] Ibid., pp. 82, 83.
[805] Ibid., p. 83.
[806] André Girard recalled of Debord's brief membership that '[h]e began not by being spoken of, but by carrying out the tasks of a rank and file militant, like operating the mimeograph [*la ronéo*]' (Gottraux, *«Socialisme ou Barbarie» : Un engagement politique et intellectuel dans la France de l'après-guerre*, p. 224, fn. 96). We can assume, then, that Debord's critique of the division within SB/PO was based primarily upon his own experience of the division, as well as his observation of its operation throughout the group. Indeed, anyone who has been a member of a militant organisation like SB/PO can speak to such internal divisions, in which younger, 'less experienced' members sell most of the papers, photocopy most of the leaflets and posters, past-up most of the posters, and sit dutifully in meetings while the usually older, 'more experienced' members engage in rhetorical combat in the meetings and pages of the groups' publications. Of course, there is a sort of 'progression' from the base to the commanding heights of the organisation, just so long as one is willing to accept this division without qualification. I will only add, that in the case of criticising the division within politically 'militant' far-left organisations like SB, is made here on the basis of my participation in two Trotskyist inspired organisations, over almost a decade in the last years of the twentieth century.
[807] Debord, 'Aux participants à la conférence nationale de Pouvoir ouvrier (5 mai 1961),' p. 83.
[808] Debord, 'Perspectives de modification conscientes dans la vie quotidienne,' p. 20.

everyday life was necessarily a part of the object of study. Thus, such a study should raise the role of the researcher; and indeed, this role, like everyday life itself, should be an object of study only insofar as it was simultaneously an object of transformation. Here, we can find resonances with Marx's criticism of Feuerbach. The idea that such 'roles' could not, nor should not be isolated from the object under consideration (and potential transformation) resonated with the growing importance of the critique of ideology. Embedded in Debord's critique of the role of the researcher was an argument that he deployed against the theorists and leaders of political groups like SB/PO. Despite the real limitations that such revolutionary groups faced, their marginality and relative material poverty, it was still not enough that the role of the militant-*director* (and its corollary, the militant-*executant*), was not criticised, particularly when such a role patently reinforced an attitude to activity which impeded revolutionary criticism.

Towards the end of his presentation to Lefebvre's research group, Debord raised the question of 'the alienation of revolutionary politics itself'.[809] For Debord, such alienation arose from the specialisation of politics, a specialisation not limited to 'mainstream' bourgeois politics. Perhaps the obvious example was the large, Stalinist French Communist Party; however, Debord considered the explanation for the latter's alienation as 'unfortunately more gross'.[810] Rather, he warned of 'the possibilities of alienation always re-emerging within the very struggle conducted against alienation' (for instance, as we have seen among the artist members of the SI, in chapter three and four, above).[811] To this end he emphasised the need to recognise its emergence at the 'highest level of research' (including Lefebvre's research group as an example of the 'philosophy of alienation in its entirety').[812] However, his target encompassed also those distinctly anti-Stalinist groupings such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and, perforce, his own Situationist International. Thus, Debord dismissed both 'revolutionary part[ies] on the traditional model' and 'avant-garde cultural movements, even [those] having revolutionary

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[809] Ibid., p. 26.
[810] Ibid. For the SI, as for most of the ultra-left, Stalinism was not an example of revolutionary politics, but rather its defeat.
[811] Ibid.
[812] Ibid.

sympathies'.[813] Rather, it must be 'the task of a revolutionary organisation of a new type', namely one which would recognise and accept the need to contest alienation (in Marx's sense of the term) within itself as much as within capitalist culture at large.[814]

The main thrust of Debord's criticism was that the real existence of alienated relations within SB/PO itself was not something to be endured until the day of revolutionary liberation, but rather that it must be as much a target of criticism and projected overcoming as the rest of capitalist society. Thus, Debord dismissed those of the 'wait-and-see attitude' [*attentisme*] within SB/PO, who imagined that if only the group could grow numerically (i.e. *quantitively*) the real problems that it faced with regard to its organisational culture would be magically transformed (i.e. *qualitatively* changed).[815] Instead, Debord counselled the immediate confrontation of this problem, whose day of reckoning could not be forever delayed because 'on this side of the qualitative leap, time does not work for the organization, but against it'.[816] In this sense Debord's demand was neither a call for the (impossible) elimination of these alienating and alienated relations within the group, nor their simple acknowledgment. Rather, his argument was for a new revolutionary organisation that accepted its 'ground' as the problems of everyday life, of the struggle against alienation on the basis of alienation, wheresoever it arose.

… and the recovery of ideology critique

If we accept that the object of Marx's ideology critique was the *false autonomy of ideas*, rather than *false ideas* as such, we can recognise the homology between his critique and Debord's critique of representation outlined above. Indeed, this conception of ideology critique became central to Debord's concept of spectacle. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord would write that,

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[813] Ibid., p. 27.
[814] Ibid.
[815] Debord, 'Aux participants à la conférence nationale de Pouvoir ouvrier (5 mai 1961),' p. 85. The idea of quantitative growth giving way to qualitative transformation, taken from Frederick Engels' schematic explanation of 'dialectical' change, is frequently deployed as a formula, more magical in its invocation than explanatory, among the Marxist far-left.
[816] Ibid. Here Debord returned the notion of 'qualitative change' vis-à-vis capitalist society to its proper meaning, i.e. of revolutionary transformation of the social relation.

in the essential movement of the spectacle […] we recognise our old enemy […] the *commodity*. […] It is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by "sensuous things that are at the same time supra-sensible", that is absolutely realised in the spectacle, in which the sensible world finds itself replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, while at the same time are recognised as the sensible par excellence.[817]

The resonances here with Marx's critique of ideology, and in particular his criticism of Feuerbach's contemplative materialism, are palpable. Debord drew, in essence, a relationship of identity between Marx's early conception of 'ideology', and his later conception of the 'commodity-fetish', by speaking of the spectacle as 'ideology materialised':

In the conflictual course of its history, ideology is the *basis* of the thinking of a class society. Ideological facts have never been simple chimeras, but [rather] the deformed consciousness of realities, and as such real factors exercising in turn real deforming action; especially since the *materialisation* of ideology brought about by the concrete success of autonomised economic production — in the form of the spectacle — practically confuses social reality with an ideology which can tailor all of reality on its model.[818]

By August 1961 the SI were beginning to more clearly incorporate 'ideology critique' into their work. For instance, in the sixth issue Vaneigem and Kotányi would write:

Urbanism does not exist; it is only an "ideology" in Marx's sense [of the word]. Architecture really exists, like Coca-Cola: it is a production coated with ideology, but [nonetheless] real, falsely satisfying a falsified need. Whereas urbanism is comparable to the advertising displayed around Coca-Cola — pure spectacular ideology. Modern Capitalism, which organises the reduction of all social life to spectacle, is incapable of

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[817] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, theses 35, 36. Debord cites here Marx, from the section in *Capital* on the 'commodity-fetish'. Cf. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, p. 165.
[818] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, thesis 212.

presenting another spectacle than that of our own alienation. The dream of urbanism is its masterpiece.[819]

Certainly, the authors grappled here, imperfectly no doubt, with perhaps the most difficult aspect of ideology criticism, i.e. that it is the *false autonomy of ideas*, rather than *false ideas* as such. Nonetheless, the apparent autonomy of ideology from the real conditions of everyday life, *really* falsify such conditions. Bound up with real architectural production, urbanism is presented as the 'pure spectacular advertising' which in effect sells the real alienation embodied in present-day architecture.[820]

In the lead editorial article of the same issue, the SI spoke with their recent encounter with SB/PO. As in Debord's letter of resignation, the critique of the 'militant' and of 'specialised politics' was central. By the SI's reckoning, 'the greatest difficulty encountered by groups seeking to create a new type of revolutionary organisation is the task of establishing new types of human relationships within the organisation itself'.[821] The SI typified the repeated calls made by groups like SB/PO for the 'participation of all' as largely 'abstract and moralistic' considering the real experience of most members being reduced to the role of spectating those 'most qualified' in 'specialised' political activity. Thus, in the heart of a group aspiring to organise a revolutionary contestation, were 'the relations of passivity of the old world reconstituted'.[822] Instead, the SI posed that,

> [t]he creativity and participation of people depends on a collective project which explicitly concerns all aspects of real life [*vécu*]. This is also the only way to "enrage the people", by exposing the enormous contrast between their present poverty and the possible construction of life.[823]

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[819] Attila Kotányi & Raoul Vaneigem, 'Programme élémentaire du bureau d'urbanisme unitaire,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 6 (Août 1961), p. 16.
[820] The SI would later mordantly comment on the 'captive nature' embodied in the landscaped 'reserves […] magnanimously reconstituted by the urbanists' in large working class housing developments like those at Sarcelles, as the false attempt to address the real problem of urban alienation. Internationale Situationniste, 'L'absence et ses habilleurs (suite),' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 9 (Août 1964), p. 11.
[821] I.S., 'Instructions pour une prise d'armes,' p. 3.
[822] Ibid.
[823] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

Failing this, revolutionary organisations risked becoming a sort of therapeutic ghetto as 'conventional and ultimately as passive as those holiday villages that are the specialised terrain of modern leisure'.[824] Instead of drawing their organisational 'poetry from the past' — and, moreover a failed and recuperated past — revolutionaries must rather conceive of their work in the present as already engaged in the construction of a yet to be realised future beyond alienation.[825] Of course such a vision of the revolutionary end informing the present means of revolutionary contestation was based upon the critical appropriation of present alienation; thus the SI's conception of the future in the present was grounded in building a collective project capable by itself of exposing 'the enormous contrast between [people's] present poverty and the possible construction of life'.[826] This returns us to the question of the Situationist hypothesis, i.e. the realisation and supersession of art.

The following year, shortly after the final break with the artists, the group declared that 'we must recover the Marxian critique of the role of ideologies'.[827] Such a recovery was posed clearly in opposition to what the SI considered the ideological impasse groups like SB/PO had reached:

> The rebellious minorities who survived, in obscurity, the crushing of the classical workers' movement […] saved the truth of this movement, but as an abstract truth of the past. […] The formation of new organizations depends on a more profound criticism, translated into action. It is a question of breaking completely with *ideology*, in which the revolutionary groups believe that they possess real qualifications [*des titres positifs*] guaranteeing their function […].[828]

The preservation of the 'the truth of this movement', insofar as it remained the preservation of the theory and 'abstract truth of the past', could not avoid the risk of *becoming ideological*. Indeed, this is the chief lesson we can draw from Marx's ideology critique and Debord and the

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[824] Ibid., p. 4.
[825] Ibid.
[826] Ibid. Suffice to say, such 'poverty' (*misère*) was conceived in the realm of the poor, and irrationally constricted use of life amidst rapidly expanding commodity production.
[827] I.S., 'Les mauvais jours finiront,' p. 16.
[828] Ibid., 14-16.

SI's attempt to update it. Even 'true' ideas become ideological to the extent that they are abstracted from their conditions of possibility, stripped of their 'sensuous' entailment, and reduced to the merely theoretical (as opposed to the *sensuously* theoretical, as Marx may have put it). Certainly, this is the core claim of Karl Korsch against Marxism, i.e. that Marx's critique, to the extent that it was elaborated apart from the revolutionary situation from which it emerged, risked ideologization despite the best efforts of Marx himself.

Before finishing with the question of ideology and the rediscovery of its original, critical thrust by Debord, I want to briefly assay the possibility that this rediscovery was made under the influence of Cornelius Castoriadis and SB/PO. I raise this for two reasons: firstly, because Castoriadis made a similar 'recovery' of the original sense of ideology in his 1964-65 work, 'Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire'; and secondly, because Debord has been accused of plagiarising his concept of spectacle from Castoriadis.[829] Indeed, even Castoriadis infamously accused Debord of such in 1986.[830] The claim is fairly easy to dispute. What is remarkable about both Castoriadis' assertion, and those academics who have repeated and elaborated Castoriadis' claim — notably Bernard Quiriny (2003) — is that not only do they ignore that Debord's first formulation of the concept predated his meeting with the Social Barbarian Daniel Blanchard by more than two years; more pertinently the work of Castoriadis' which he was supposed to have plagiarised was published more than two years after the *Report on the Construction of Situations* (1957), i.e. in October 1959. For more details on this unfortunate episode in "scholarship", see the brief article 'Whose Spectacle' in the appendices, below.

Nonetheless, in his telling aside on Debord's purported "plagiarism", Castoriadis described *his* concept of spectacle in almost an identical fashion to Baudrillard, Nancy and Rancière, i.e. as 'appearance of the simulacrum [*présentation du simulacre*]. The image in place of the truth'.[831] However unlike these critics of Debord, Castoriadis postively affirmed the Platonic sense of his notion of 'mass media […] simulacrum'. However, by phrasing it thus, Castoriadis

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[829] Cf.

[830] Cf. Cornelius Castoriadis, 'Seminar of April 30, 1986 - Questions,' in *On Plato's Statesman*, ed. David Ames Curtis, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002.

[831] Ibid., p.169, 170. Translation modified. Castoriadis cited in Quiriny, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie et l'Internationale situationniste : notes sur une « méprise »,' p. 57.

inadvertently revealed his misapprehension of Debord's concept, and perhaps more pointedly his largely orthodox conception of ideology.

If we consider that Castoriadis posed his 'simulacrum' in explicitly Platonic terms, and the extent to which I have attempted to demonstrate the non-*mimetic* nature of 'spectacle' under the hand of Debord, it is further interesting to note that Castoriadis' understanding of 'ideology critique' *lagged behind* the Situationists. Certainly, Castoriadis came to understand that 'ideology' had a different sense from the positivistic notion of ideology in orthodox Marxism during the 1960s. However, there is no indication in Castoriadis' writing that he differentiated between the orthodox conception of 'ideology' and Marx's sense of 'ideology critique' before he wrote his long farewell to Marxism, '*Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire*' (1964-65). It was in the first part of this article, published in April 1964, that Castoriadis first spoke of 'Marxism […] becom[ing] an *ideology* in the very sense that Marx gave to this term'.[832] However, before this insight, Castoriadis appeared to share the orthodox Marxist perspective on 'ideology'. Thus, he previously conflated ideology and culture in an orthodox fashion, in the sense of conceiving of ideology as commensurate with the so-called 'superstructural' realm of culture.[833] He spoke of Marxism — favourably — as a 'revolutionary ideology' and as 'the ideological expression of the proletariat's activity', in the sense of it being its intellectual expression.[834] When turning to a more thoroughgoing criticism of Marxism, Castoriadis considered the 'ideological degeneration' consequent upon the incorporation of working-class political and economic organisations into the bureaucratic capitalist state, as evidence of the absence of 'any revolutionary ideology or even simply a working-class ideology present on a society-wide scale (i.e., not just cultivated in a few sects)'.[835] Indeed, when Castoriadis began to take up what we would recognise as a perspective redolent of an 'ideology critique' around 1963 — coincident with the call for a 'new orientation' and then split in SB/PO — he still confused 'ideology' with

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[832] Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 11; Paul Cardan [Cornelius Castoriadis], 'Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire [part I],' *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 36 (Avril - Juin 1964), p. 4.
[833] Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' p. 148.
[834] Castoriadis, 'Proletariat and Organisation, I [1959],' p. 213; Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 232.
[835] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 295.

its orthodox sense.[836] Of course, Castoriadis' confusion does not mark him out from most other contemporaries, whether 'orthodox' or 'heterodox'. But what is important regarding the foregoing, is that there is no evidence that Castoriadis considered 'ideology critique' in the way Debord and the SI began to engage and enunciate such from around 1961. Considering the centrality of Marx's ideology critique in the turn from theorising the spectacle as applicable to the cultural spectacle to a theory with a more general important (albeit incorporating the earlier critical sense of 'spectacle'), it is hard see how Castoriadis developed the belief that Debord plagiarised his notion of the 'appearance of simulacrum'. Of course, if we consider the patent advance Debord had on Castoriadis regarding the recovery of ideology criticism, we can ponder the extent to which Castoriadis was possibly the plagiariser of Debord.

Conclusion

In the early 1960s among French Marxists — orthodox and heterodox — 'ideology' was largely understood under the 'neutral concept of ideology'.[837] This meant that 'ideology' was used in a fashion similar to the early 19th century originators of the term (eg. Destutt de Tracy) rather Marx's critical appropriation of it (one might even say *détournement*). In the former sense, 'ideology' is a 'neutral' term insofar as it is a descriptor for 'a system of ideas or way of thinking pertaining to a class or individual'.[838] Thus one could speak of 'bourgeois ideology', 'socialist ideology', 'proletarian ideology', 'feminist ideology', etc. The 'neutral concept of ideology' was perhaps most forcefully put by Lenin, even though he was restating an idea that was already prevalent within Marxist orthodoxy. However, the force of Lenin's conception was precisely the significance attributed to it on the back of the success of the October 1917 revolution and the 'Bolshevisation' of much of the communist workers' movement in its wake. Consequently, Lenin's conception was read as a more or less accurate reading of Marx's conception, which reduced 'ideology' to a descriptor for ideas in opposition to the 'material' economic base, thus leading 'to the identification of ideology and "ideas" and therefore

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[836] Castoriadis, 'For A New Orientation [1962],' pp. 9, 10, 11; Cornelius Castoriadis, 'Recommencing the Revolution [1963],' in *Cornelius Castoriadis Political and Social Writings Volume 3, 1961-1979*, ed. David Ames Curtis, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993, p. 30.
[837] Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*.
[838] *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Volume 1, A-M*, Fifth ed. s.v. "Ideology."

overlooking the materiality […] of the ideological'.[839] As we have seen, this was in marked contrast to Marx's use of the term.

Significantly, the SI helped in the recovery of the original sense of 'ideology criticism', a recovery moreover that has become more readily accessible since their time. And yet such a recovery has become eclipsed by the understandable rejection of Marxism. More often than not, Marx was thrown out with the old Marxist garbage, a fate unfortunately anticipated in the often-illuminating work of Cornelius Castoriadis. Castoriadis' *heterodox* precedent of conflating Marx and Marxism, related to his inability to throw off his orthodoxy in this case, has been unfortunately, and farcically, repeated *ad nauseum* — and with much less nuance or justification.

The Situationist recovery of Marx's concept of ideology became central to Debord's elaboration of the concept of the spectacle. However, such a recovery is largely overlooked or simply ignored, insofar as it is conceived as the reiteration or reassertion of Marxism. The exemplar of this is Jean Baudrillard, whose belief that the spectacle was simply a redescription of the orthodox Marxist conception of the 'ideological superstructure', is remarkably persistent.[840] Unfortunately, Baudrillard's brief, and largely unjustified criticism (at least in terms of a distinct lack of citation) is often repeated without any serious examination of his claim. Certainly, the SI did hold to a largely orthodox exception of 'base/superstructure', as can be seen in their earlier, pre-1961 work. But, as I have demonstrated, even this was problematised with regard to the cultural spectacle which was, by turns, conceived as *both* infra and superstructural. Around 1961, the critique of ideology, in Marx's original sense, began to emerge in the work of the SI. At this point the group was at a crossroads. On the one hand, it was throwing off its residue attachment to artistic practice. On the other hand, Debord's brief membership of the SB/PO group was coming to an end. Indeed, it was the encounter with SB/PO, that proved crucial to

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[839] Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*, p. 9. In this sense Louis Althusser is a good Leninist; his idea of ideology being the 'imaginary relation to real relations' is an unsuccessful attempt to overcome the dualism inherent in Lenin's account, by redescribing 'ideas' (i.e. 'ideology') as an 'imaginary' reflection of the 'real'.

[840] Cf. Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, pp. 120-21; Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London: Sage Publication Ltd, [1976] 2006, chapter 1, passim.

this re-emergence, but not in the sense that some critics have argued (for instance, as the largely one-way influence of SB/PO upon the SI). The theoretical debt the SI owed to SB/PO was significant and clearly identifiable. However, as we have seen, the SI encountered SB/PO with two significant criticisms already under development: the concept of the 'spectacle' and the critique of 'situationism'. Both of these notions would prove important to the (re)discovery and incorporation of Marx's early sense of the critique of ideology into the SI's practice — particularly the concept of 'spectacle'.

Debord's *détournement* of Marx was, firstly, a significant elaboration of the latter's critical conception of ideology, encompassing Marx's latter conception of the commodity-fetish as, essentially, the recasting of his earlier ideology critique in the light of his mature critique of commodity wealth. Secondly, Debord used these theories in his attempt to understand the considerable development of visual representation in modern capitalism as the intensification and even 'materialisation' of ideology. As we have seen above, the concept of the spectacle at the time of his article written with SB/PO member Daniel Blanchard in 1960, was still largely commensurate with the earlier Situationist idea of the 'cultural spectacle', and Castoriadis' notion of the privatisation of working class life outside of work and the capitalist process of production. However, by the time of his critique of Diesbach's review of Godard, Debord was rapidly moving toward the problematisation of representation under the reign of the commodity-form — not as the immanent falsehood of representation (most lamentably enunciated by Godard himself) but rather as the false or falsifying use of representational forms. What was perhaps most significant, at least in terms of the longevity of the relations between the SI and SB/PO, was the way Debord associated this critique ultimately with the use of representational forms within SB/PO itself, in particular the uncriticised split between those political militants who directed and thought the activity of the group, and those political militants who executed these directions and consumed such thinking. As Debord, Vaneigem et al., discovered, Marx's critique of the division of intellectual and manual labour, instantiated in class society more generally considered, but brought to a sort of miserable perfection under the commodity-

spectacle, was the real impasse facing revolutionaries, whether moving toward the idea of supersession from the perspective of the artistic or political avant-gardes.

To return to where I began. The 'Hamburg Theses' can be considered an attempt to embody this perspective, insofar as it was both espoused in the Situationist hypothesis, and transformed under the impact of the progression of the debates on art and the encounters with political militancy. These 'Theses' can be considered as both the objectification of Situationist activity, in the sense of its "composition", and even as the *non-spectacular representation* of this activity, insofar as there was little or no residue left over to be reified as a commodity-representation (or the potential for such). Nonetheless, the 'Hamburg Theses' could and have been falsified, as we have seen in chapter one. However, they have so far resisted the burgeoning market in Situationist collectibles. And, insofar as they stand as an exemplar of a practice that brooks no hierarchical divisions, in terms of direction or execution, they remain a singular exemplar of the type of radical practice that is required in the (re)constitution of a revolutionary movement.

Conclusion: Leaving the nth century…

> *Other horrible spectators will come; they will begin from the horizons where*
>
> *the Situationists succumbed! —* détourned *phrase, c. 2017*

Apart from the work of revolutionary contestation — which is no work at all — the key "work" of the Situationist International was the 'Hamburg Theses'. In being this "work", the 'Hamburg Theses' was a fitting conclusion of sorts to Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918), dissolving the spectator of anti-art in that greater realm of the revolutionary critique of everyday. The 'Hamburg Theses' cannot be recuperated; certainly, the phrase can be bandied around, and made subject to scholarly speculation — as I have done in this thesis. But I would argue that this is not a case of recuperation. There are no 'Hamburg Theses' to copy; the residue left over defeats contemplation as much as mechanical reproduction. At best, we can talk about them in their absence, or better yet emulate them in the only way they should be: as revolutionary practice.

In chapter one I discussed the 'Hamburg Theses', the mysterious document that was not a document. Through an examination of its form and content, and, crucially, the context which produced them, I argued that they remain the exemplary "work" of the SI, lost in the alienations of time and beyond recuperation. The 'Hamburg Theses' were intended as the fulfilment and supersession of the artistic and political avant-gardes, 'the height of avant-gardism' in Debord's reckoning, the inversion of the cult of emptiness that the Situationists mocked among their contemporaries.[841] Here the mysteries of supersession were manifested, placed beyond the reach of commodity-spectacle, hidden in plain sight. The 'Hamburg Theses' were, and remain, prolegomena to the realisation of the Situationist hypothesis; a sketch of a possible practice, and necessarily concealed in perilous times. The better to keep them from travails of quantification in anticipation of the future to come, or not — as the case may be.

To the extent that I have analysed what little remains of the 'Theses', and attempted a partial reconstruction, my intention has been one of clarification rather than merely cataloguing or

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[841] Debord, 'Lettre à Raoul Vaneigem, 15 février, 1962.'

rendering them safe for consumption. What they were not remains their most powerful import: not another manifesto, not an opportunity for mere contemplation or consumption. Understood thus, the 'Hamburg Theses' should figure as an inducement to act, to emulate through supersession. Now, we must realise philosophy.

In chapter two through four, I discussed how the 'Hamburg Theses' emerged from the SI's own emergence from and engagement with the artists and artistic avant-gardes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By looking at the SI's practice from 1957 to 1962 I argue that the 'Hamburg Theses' can be seen as the culmination of active cultural decomposition that Debord criticised. In the Situationist sense, they were the *détournement* of art, philosophy and politics in the service of the poetry of everyday life. They were the answer to the question of coherence which Debord pursued most single-mindedly through the history of the group from the formulation of the Situationist hypothesis. Constant's interpretation of unitary urbanism imagined the framework for a future of play beyond work, but unfortunately bogged down in this imaginary as a technical problem. Dim echoes of his perspective propagate through contemporary culture. For instance, the "singularitarians" treat humanity as a technical problem, but largely bereft of either the poetic sensibility or revolutionary sentiments of Constant. Of the painters, and other self-styled "Situationist" artists of the group, most were only capable of a practice that did not go beyond the contemporary neo-Dadas, neo-realists and pop-artists that the SI decried as exemplars of repetitive decomposition. So many simulacrums of a last hurrah for a truly dead art. In answer to their interminable irresolution and tired jokes passed off as assaults on bourgeois sensibility, the authors of the 'Hamburg Theses' saw off art in the best possible way — as realisation and abolition in everyday life. The 'Hamburg Theses' were lived as critique and contestation — a public secret necessarily available to all.

In chapters five through six I showed how the 'Hamburg Theses', and the practice there embodied, also emerged from the SI's engagement with Marx, with his critical resolution of *praxis* and *poiesis* as 'revolutionary practice'. Key to the Situationist *détournement* of Marx, was what they identified as an homology between their critique of cultural decomposition and his critique of philosophy, and his proposal thus to supersede philosophy through revolutionary

practice — i.e. its realisation and abolition. In his critique of German idealist philosophy, and its radicalised Young Hegelian continuation, Marx proposed not only an inversion of the spiritual dimensions of this idealism, as Feuerbach did, but rather the recognition that the 'imaginary flowers' of religion, philosophy and art could be plucked, 'not so that man shall wear the unadorned, bleak chain but so that he will shake off the chain and pluck the living flower'.[842] For Marx, the ideologies of living were not mere falsehoods, but rather real distortions of this life, the premises and products of the hierarchal divisions of production, and of the rulers and the ruled. 'Poetry, in the Situationist sense', or 'revolutionary practice' as Marx called it, was the solution to these separations; indeed, by his lights and theirs, the objective dimensions of subjectivity are implicit in even the most alienated practice. The question for the SI, then, was not one of merely doing away with the alienated representations of life, dismissing them like so many phantoms or spectres, but rather how one dissipates these really existing illusions by realising all that they actually promise and forbid beyond their alienated objectivity.

In chapter seven, I continued the examination of the importance of Marx, by way of Debord's engagement with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and the *détournement* and recovery of Marx's ideology criticism in the Situationist concept of the spectacle. Without doubt, the Situationists found much that was amenable to their critique of everyday life among the comrades of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*; but they also found the very structures that befuddled their own organisation. The 'serious' theoretical labours of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* bore a family resemblance to the technical problems of Constant and the pratfalls and repetitive slapstick of the artist-Situationists; the 'social-barbarians' also failed to confront the spectacular nature of their practice, essentially leaving intact capitalist divisions and hierarchies of labour, uncriticised and fatally accepted as unavoidable this side of the revolution. Indeed, in this sense the encounter with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was as pivotal as the final confrontation with many of the artists in the SI — perhaps more so. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* proved to be an example of the possibility of developing a critical perspective beyond the bureaucratic conceptions of orthodox Marxism, much like the early SI was an example of the possibility of outlining a

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[842] Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction [1843-44],' p. 176.

perspective beyond the repetitive "avant-gardes" of the 1950s. Where they both failed was related to their incapacity to subject their own practice to the same critical insight reserved for the "external" world of capitalist hierarchy and alienation. Unfortunately, those social-barbarians who agreed with Debord, proved incapable of rising to the challenge of transforming *Socialisme ou Barbarie* into a revolutionary organisation.

All of this shows that the concern for the SI of finding a practice that was, by turns, informed by the artistic and political avant-gardes, was played out from the beginning of the group, and formed an important part of the search for coherence throughout its first and second phases, even if this coherence proved elusive until the pivot of the 'Hamburg Theses', and the break of 1962. Thus, even though we can — and must — take note of, and even sometimes emphasise, the breaks of the SI, we need to pay more attention to the continuity through the Situationist hypothesis and the more developed concept of the spectacle by way of the 'Hamburg Theses'. By understanding this continuity, we come to a better understanding of the concept of spectacle, how it emerged from its more rudimentary form in the early Situationist hypothesis, and moved to a position of being the central critical focus of the SI. Thus, my thesis is an account of the coming to be of the concept of spectacle, insofar as the 'Hamburg Theses' are a misplaced key to the transformation of the Situationist hypothesis from being primarily a critique of the artistic spectacle to a critique of the commodity spectacle.

Understanding the emergence of a more nuanced sense of spectacle from an earlier, more 'orthodox' conception, means that we can avoid the mistakes of those critics, such as Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière, who tend to understand the concept of the spectacle — in the form in which it is presented in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) — as a Feuerbachian gesture, conflating it with the orthodox conception of 'ideological superstructures'. Similarly, we can avoid reducing it to merely a criticism of the cultural spectacle, of the so-called 'ideological superstructure', such as we find in McKenzie Wark, Tom McDonough et al. Indeed, this perspective is similar to those that criticise the SI for its purported Platonism; however, unlike Nancy, Rancière, et al., the art-centric critics positively valorise this purported Platonism, rather than rejecting it. Finally, we can avoid the dead end of

seeing in the spectacle merely a re-write of a Marxist political critique, rather than the critique of political alienation, Marxist or otherwise. Instead, we can draw attention to the way the Situationists, particularly after 1961, understood their project. As realisation and abolition of the political and artistic avant-gardes, as revolutionary contestation and supersession.

In 1963, in the brochure accompanying the Situationist exhibition, *Destruction of RSG-6* (itself clear proof that the production of art did not suddenly end in the SI in 1962), Debord wrote of the Situationist project as constituting the 'supersession of art' (*dépassement de l'art*). Considering the importance that the SI placed on this notion, and the entailed recovery of artistic, political and philosophical 'research', Debord wrote,

> one should understand that when we speak of a unified vision of art and politics, this absolutely does not mean that we are recommending in any way a subordination of art to politics. For us, and for all those who have begun to regard this era in a demystified manner, there is no longer any modern art, in exactly the same way there is no longer a constituted revolutionary politics, anywhere [in the world], since the end of the 1930s. Today, their return can only be their *supersession*, that is to say, the realisation of precisely what had been their most fundamental demands.[843]

The positive negation of art and politics, that is their supersession through the revolutionary transformation of capitalism, remains 'unrealised'. Nonetheless, and in contrast to the world the Situationists confronted before 1968, the world after 1968 has moved to undermine such contestation by conceding many of the demands of the SI, but in a solely spectacular fashion. As Debord would mordantly note in the document that saw the close of the SI, after the eruption of 1968 'the language of power has become wildly reformist'.[844] Thus, the simulation of their critique of everyday life — perhaps we can call it a realised 'situationism' — appeared in the wake of 1968, by way of the recuperation and insinuation of Situationist "inspired" practices, carved-up and sold back to us as a means of "resolving" the 'work-life balance'. But, in truth,

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843 Debord, 'Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action dans la politique ou l'art [1963],' p. 648.
844 Guy Debord & Gianfranco Sanguinetti, 'Thèses sur l'Internationale situationniste et son temps [1972],' in *Guy Debord : Œuvres*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006, p. 1093 (thesis 11).

there is no justice to be found in such an impossible performance; work is not so much balanced as submitted to. Similarly, there is little "self-actualisation" or realisation to be found in today's ghettoes of leisure and hobbies, any more than there were in the less complex, more obviously "plastic" varieties the SI confronted before the late 1960s. To *détourn* an old anti-war slogan from the First World War, there is a worker on either end of a commodity. This is even more so the case today, than in the 1960s, even if these often paltry "weapons" have proliferated and further submitted us to the rule of the commodity-form. Nonetheless, we can still *détourn* them and turn them on the bosses and cops that keep us in our place, even those that reside within us.

<div align="center">*</div>

> *We will not work on the spectacle of the end of the world, but for the end of the world of the spectacle. — Situationist International, 1959*

In Jorge Luis Borges' *The Library of Babel*, every book that ever will be written can be found, no matter how meaningless. Indeed, I would dare say that Dada-like gibberish fills up the bulk of its infinite series, (even if by speaking of the bulk of the infinite I have merely added to this noisy gibber). No doubt the 'Hamburg Theses' would turn up endlessly in its references and catalogues. But on none of its impossible shelves would you find a copy. The 'Hamburg Theses', cannot be encompassed in a Borgesian list. It is not a machine of production, or a conceptual trick like one of Raymond Queneau's poem-engines, grinding out its pointlessness over the centuries. The 'Hamburg Theses' is a lost fable that is truly lost, a singular rumour of its disappearance.

A few days after the expulsion of the bulk of the artists from the SI, Debord wrote to Raoul Vaneigem that, '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.'[845] To the unwary the 'Hamburg Theses' were a sort of trap, at once strangely present and beyond the reach of the most determined of researchers. For the SI, in

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[845] Debord, 'Lettre à Raoul Vaneigem, 15 février, 1962.'

opposition to contemporary artistic and political practice, the *practice* of being a revolutionary was necessarily more important than the *results* of such a practice. Which is to say, to the extent that such practices become objectified as so many 'works', 'manifestoes', 'theses', etc., is the extent to which the apparent results of such activity can be separated from the process of their production and alienated as cultural commodities. In the refusal to set down the 'Hamburg Theses' for all time, the SI took a stand against the increasing complicity — consciously or not — of critical intellectuals in the development and consolidation of the commodity-spectacle.

To shape our evanescent lives, make our ephemeral gestures count for more than so many passing spectacles among the spectacle — this is one of the demands of the 'Hamburg Theses'. The original Situationist project reached its ambiguous conclusion in 1968 and its immediate aftermath. Debord would later compare it to a doomed charge, the Light Brigade of revolutionary contestation.[846] As the ranks were cut down the careening pace carried them on until no one was left on the field. Only the memory of this assault remained. The question today is not one of repeating the Situationists, but rather the supersession of the past to which we must leave them, and from which they desired more than most to escape. The Situationists spoke of leaving the twentieth century behind. They also marked their ground upon the unresolved contradictions of the nineteenth century. Just as Marx said that the coming revolution cannot draw its poetry from the past, but rather from the future, we must continue to make this call as surely as we remain stuck in the problematic inherited from Marx's present — the intensification and extension of industrialism and its alleged 'post-industrial' workhouses. Today, we must leave not just the nineteenth and twentieth, but all the centuries that mark us with the signs of our self-made incarceration throughout time and space.

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[846] Cf. Guy Debord, 'In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni,' (1978).

Appendix one: The Hamburg Theses of September 1961

The Hamburg Theses of September 1961
(Note to serve in the history of the Situationist International)[847]

The "Hamburg Theses" ["*Thèses de Hambourg*"] surely constitutes the most mysterious of all the documents that emanated from the SI; among which many have been widely reproduced, while others have been distributed discretely.

The "Hamburg Theses" were evoked several times in situationist publications, but a single citation was never given. For example, in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 7, pages 20, 31 and 47; plus indirectly in *I.S.* no. 9, page 3 (in the title of the editorial "Now, the SI"); and also in the still unpublished contributions of Attila Kotányi and Michèle Bernstein to the debate concerning A. Kotanyi's programmatic propositions in 1963. The "Theses" are mentioned without commentary in the "table of works cited" (page 99) of Raspaud and Voyer's *L'Internationale situationniste (protagonistes, chronologie, bibliographie)* [1972].

In fact, the "Theses" were some conclusions, voluntarily kept secret, of a theoretical and strategic discussion that concerned the entirety of the conduct of the SI. This discussion took place during two or three days at the beginning of September 1961, in a series of randomly chosen bars in Hamburg, between G. Debord, A. Kotányi and R. Vaneigem, who were travelling thus on the return trip from the Vth Conference of the SI, which took place in Göteborg from the 28th to the 30th of August.[848] Alexander Trocchi, who was not present in Hamburg, would subsequently contribute to the "Theses." Deliberately, with the intention of leaving no trace that could be observed or analysed from outside of the SI, nothing concerning this discussion and what it had concluded was ever written down. It was then agreed that the simplest summary of its rich and complex conclusions could be expressed in a single phrase: "*Now, the SI must realise philosophy*." Even this phrase was not written down. Thus, the conclusions were so well hidden that they have remained secret up until the present.

The "Hamburg Theses" have had a considerable importance, in at least two respects. First, because they mark the most important choice made [*qu'elles datent la principale option*] in the history of the SI. But also as an experimental practice: from the latter point of view, the "Theses" were a striking innovation in the succession of artistic avant-gardes, who hitherto had all given the impression of being eager to explain themselves.

The summarised conclusions evoked a celebrated formula of Marx in 1844 (in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel Philosophy of Right* [— *Introduction*]). At that moment, it meant that we should no longer pay the least importance to any of the conceptions of revolutionary groups that still survived as heirs of the old social emancipation movement destroyed in the first half of our century; and therefore that we should instead count on the SI alone to relaunch as soon as possible a time of contestation, by revitalising all of the starting points which were established in the 1840s.[849] Once established this position did not imply the coming rupture with the artistic

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[847] Translated by Anthony Hayes
[848] [Translator's note]: 'After the closing of the final session, the Conference ended in a much more constructive celebration, for which, unfortunately, there is no record [*procès-verbal*]. This celebration wound down into a drift [*dérive*] departing across the Sound, continuing on to the port of Frederikshavn — and for others extending on to Hamburg.' I.S., 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg,' p. 31.
[849] [Translator's note]: The second clause of the forgoing sentence has been particularly hard to translate accurately in English. Earlier English translations have rendered it the opposite of my translation — i.e.

"right" of the SI (who feebly wanted to continue or only repeat modern art), but rendered it extremely probable. We can thus recognise that the "Theses of Hamburg" marked the end of the first era of the SI — that is research into a truly new artistic terrain (1957-61) — as well as fixing the departure point for the operation that led to the movement of May 1968, and what followed.

On the other hand, considering only the experimental originality (that is to say the absence of any written "Theses" [*rédaction des « Thèses »*]) the subsequent socio-historical application of this formal innovation is equally remarkable — of course only after it had been subjected to a complete reversal. In fact little more than twenty years later you could see that the process had encountered an unusual success in the highest bodies of many States. We now know that truly vital conclusions — [whose authors are] loath to inscribe them on computer networks, tape recordings or telex, and even wary of typewriters and photocopiers — often having been drafted in the form of handwritten notes are simply learned by heart. The draft is immediately destroyed.

This note was written specifically for the Thomas Y. Levin, who so tirelessly raced around the world to find traces of the effaced art of the Situationist International, as well as its various other historic infamies.

Guy Debord

November 1989

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'After the closing of the final session, the Conference ended in a much more constructive celebration, for which, unfortunately, there is no record [*procès-verbal*]. This celebration wound down into a drift [*dérive*] departing across the Sound, continuing on to the port of Frederikshavn — and for others extending on to Hamburg.' — Internationale Situationniste. 'La Cinquième Conférence de l'I.S. à Göteborg.' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (Avril 1962), pp. 25-31.

'therefore that we should instead *no longer* count on the SI alone to relaunch as soon as possible a time of contestation'. I had used such renderings unquestioning (for instance in my article 'Three Situationists walk into a bar: or, the peculiar case of the Hamburg Theses', *Axon: Creative Explorations*, no. 8), and indeed the fault of this use lies only with myself. Thanks to Tom Bunyard, I was alerted to my error. Nonetheless, I have not been able to shake off completely the ambiguity of this sentence. It makes sense that after deciding 'that we should no longer pay the least importance to any of the conceptions of the revolutionary groups that still survived', the SI would 'count on' itself '*alone* to relaunch as soon as possible a time of contestation' [my emphasis]. I believe that my confusion in this regard was produced by the corollary belief that the SI also began to see its project as emerging directly from the lived experience of alienated, everyday life — i.e. that 'Situationist theory is in people like fish are in water' — I.S., 'Du rôle de l'I.S.,' p. 17. Thus I thought it was reasonable that the SI would no longer count on itself alone. However, upon reflection, this conclusion makes no sense; further, the comment of Debord was pointedly aimed at what he perceived as the failure of other ultra-left groups like *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and to a lesser extent the *Arguments* group.

Appendix two: The Next Step

The Next Step (*L'étape suivante*)[850]

Attila Kotányi

(Second version, March 1963)

After intensive discussions which took place between 10 and 18 October 1961 in Hamburg, we came to the general conclusion that:

1. Specialists of thought, logic, language and artistic language of dialectics and philosophy, had basically abandoned or had not inherited the main themes, results, historical ambitions of boldness in the critical, methodical hopes, dreams and wishes of their predecessors;

2. For these reasons, we were forced to adopt the following hypothesis: in every man in industrialized countries, one can discover in one form or another, an obvious desire for an interesting daily life and criticism - formulated by us - its staging, although this aspiration and this criticism is largely suppressed.

We cannot say that before October 1961 we felt isolated, as this may seem normal to other avant-garde groups. We spent those years in good company, at positions away from world experts (see paragraphs 1-7 of the Situationist International magazine), having been neither more nor less that perspective, for example, isolated artist, that is to say, the prospect of one day finding a wider echo. In October 1961, the level of expectation of our outlook rose sharply, as we have known and recognized our "isolation" as a moment contained in all forms of experience. (Moment: crisis meeting or second?)

The next step in the SI is to draw a clear conclusion from this sudden transformation of probability.

The conclusion we have drawn: if so, despite any appearance and any proof to the contrary, our existence is provable, then we must demonstrate it and we attach ourselves to.

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[850] Translated by Anthony Hayes

Appendix three: Whose spectacle?

Infamously, Cornelius Castoriadis accused Debord, in 1986, of stealing the concept of the spectacle:

> As for the mass media, and to remain within the Platonic vocabulary, I would file them under the heading: appearance of the simulacrum [*présentation du simulacre*]. The image in place of the truth. This is now something well established. I myself argued all that as early as 1959, in a text on modern capitalism [i.e. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution] […] [w]hat comrade Debord Frenchified and plagiarised when talking about the "society of the spectacle".[851]

Perhaps what first emerges from the foregoing, considering our discussion of Debord's concept above, is that Castoriadis holds precisely to a concept of *mimetic* falsehood, unlike Debord. However, we will put that aside for the moment in order to consider Castoriadis' claim. Castoriadis dated his conception of the mass media, i.e. the 'appearance of the simulacrum', from 'as early as 1959'. However, if we examine Castoriadis' work, the term 'simulacrum' [*simulacre*] does not appear before 1963. When it did appear, Castoriadis used it in his recapitulation of his conception of the modern 'depoliticization' and 'privatization' of the working class:

> This privatization [*privatisation*] of the working class and even of all other social strata is the combined result of two factors: on the one hand, the bureaucratization of parties and unions distances these organizations from the mass of laboring people; on the other, rising living standards and the massive proliferation of new types of consumer objects and new consumer life-styles provide them with the substitute for and the simulacrum of reasons to live [*le simulacre de raisons de vivre*]. This phase is neither superficial nor accidental. It expresses one possible destiny of present-day society. If the term *barbarism* has a meaning today, it is neither fascism nor poverty nor a return to the Stone Age. It is precisely this "air-conditioned night mare," consumption for the sake of consumption in private life, organization for the sake of organization in collective life, as well as their corollaries: privatization, withdrawal, and apathy as regards matters shared in common, and dehumanization of social relationships.[852]

Castoriadis conceived of the 'privatisation' of the working class as related to their 'de-politicisation', i.e. the 'apathy or indifference to political matters' of the working class was a direct result of the 'the bureaucratization of parties and unions' and 'the massive proliferation of new types of consumer objects and new consumer life-styles'.[853] Castoriadis considered such 'de-politicisation' as 'characteristic of all modern countries for the past fifteen years' (i.e. since the end of the Second World War); a factor, moreover, whose significance held important

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[851] Castoriadis, 'Seminar of April 30, 1986 - Questions,' p.169, 170. Translation modified. Castoriadis cited in Quiriny, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie et l'Internationale situationniste : notes sur une « méprise »,' p. 57.

[852] Castoriadis, 'Recommencing the Revolution [1963],' pp. 46-47. Translation modified; Socialisme ou Barbarie [Cornelius Castoriadis], 'Recommencer la révolution,' *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 35 (Janvier - Mars 1964), pp. 27-28.

[853] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 231; Paul Cardan [Cornelius Castoriadis], 'Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne [part I],' *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 31 (Décembre 1960 - Février 1961), p. 57; Castoriadis, 'Recommencing the Revolution [1963],' p. 46.

ramifications for both political practice and Marxism.[854] We can recognise here a certain resonance with what Debord conceptualised, in the article co-written with the Social-Barbarian Daniel Blanchard, as 'the spectacle' through which the relations between people are dominated 'outside of work'.[855] However, I am not concerned here with whether or not Debord either derived the idea of a spectacle beyond work, or enriched his concept of the spectacle via a reading of Castoriadis. Without doubt, Debord benefited from an engagement with Castoriadis and SB/PO. And, indeed, Castoriadis had been working on his entailed concepts of 'privatisation' and 'de-politicisation' since at least 1959. However, as we have seen above, Debord had begun to conceptualise the spectacle as a crucial aspect of modern society from at least 1957, when he wrote of the ruling classes development of 'a vast industrial sector of leisure [activities] that is an incomparable instrument for stupefying the proletariat with the by-products of the mystifying ideology and tastes of the bourgeoisie'.[856]

The significance of Debord's observation here lay with his early conceptualisation of the 'spectacle [...] of non-intervention', rather than his observations of the development of 'leisure' activities. In the late 1950s more and more leftist thinkers were turning toward the criticism of the patently *new* phenomenon of the mass market in commodities aimed at a working class in their leisure away from work. What differentiated the SI and SB/PO from the majority of such, was their largely negative conceptualisation of this phenomenon; that it constituted a loss of possibility not an enrichment, even as the vast wealth and technical array itself appeared to demonstrate the possibility of its opposite — a world beyond wage-labour and capitalist hierarchy. Thus, and in stark contrast to those critics that only saw the satisfaction of needs, Castoriadis and Debord saw the way modern capitalism *provoked* needs rather than satisfied them. As Debord and Blanchard put it in 1960,

> capitalist consumption imposes a movement of the reduction of desires through the regularity of the satisfaction of artificial needs, which remain needs without ever having been desires — authentic desires being constrained to remain at the stage of their non-realisation (or compensated in the form of spectacles).[857]

To return to Castoriadis' 1986 claim. Apart from a certain symmetry and mutual influence marked by Debord and Blanchard's 1960 article, there is no clear evidence that Castoriadis spoke of 'the simulacrum of reasons to live [*le simulacre de raisons de vivre*]' before 1963. Indeed, this term, deployed as it is with regard to 'the massive proliferation of new types of consumer objects and new consumer life-styles', is striking for its resemblance to the Situationist critique of 'consumer objects and [...] lifestyles'.[858] For instance, during the early months of Debord's membership of SB/PO, the group would write that,

> Abundance, as [a] human future, cannot be an abundance of objects, even of past "cultural" objects or ones created on that model, but [rather] an *abundance of situations* (of life and dimensions of life). Within the current framework of consumerist propaganda, the fundamental mystification of advertising is to associate ideas of happiness with objects (televisions, or garden furniture, or automobiles, etc.),

[854] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' pp. 231-32.
[855] Canjuers and Debord, 'Preliminaires pour une definition de l'unite du programme revolutionnaire [20 juillet 1960],' p. 515 (thesis 7).
[856] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 324.
[857] Canjuers and Debord, 'Preliminaires pour une definition de l'unite du programme revolutionnaire [20 juillet 1960],' p. 514 (part I, thesis 6).
[858] Castoriadis, 'Recommencing the Revolution [1963],' p. 46.

furthermore breaking the natural link these objects can maintain with others, in order to make them, above all, constitute a material environment with "status" [*haut standing*]. […] [W]hen advertising is dealing with a real passion, it is only adverting a *spectacle*.[859]

Here, we can already detect the critique of 'situationism' giving way to the critique of ideology. However, the contrast of an 'abundance of situations' with an 'abundance of [commodity] objects' is striking. Even more is the prescient description of 'a material environment with "status" [*haut standing*]' that is nothing more than an 'imposed image of happiness [that] also constitutes the explicitly terrorist nature of advertising'.[860] In the same month the SI published this, the first part of Castoriadis' 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution' was published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Of course, Castoriadis' article (or at least the first two parts) had been available in an Internal Bulletin published in 1959 and 1960. We can consider Debord, a member of SB/PO from the 'summer of 1960', as having access to this Bulletin's (if not before via Daniel Blanchard). Without doubt, we are struck by the similar concerns of Castoriadis and the SI, but also the difference of expression:

> In its present stage, bureaucratization has extended far beyond the spheres of production, the economy, the State, and politics. […] Consumption has become the object of an ever more refined and intensive practice of manipulation. […] Even leisure is becoming bureaucratized. An increasing degree of bureaucratization in the world of culture is inevitable in the present context. Even if the "production" of culture has not become an organized, collective activity, its promotion and propagation have become so to an immense degree (the press, publishing, radio, cinema, television, etc.).[861]

Castoriadis and the SI were speaking of similar processes.[862] The SI highlight the 'terrorism' of advertising (an idea later taken up by Jean Baudrillard) in its construction of a 'material environment' of 'status' associated with consumption — what the SI identify as a '*spectacle*', in a fashion redolent of Marx's sense of ideology. In Castoriadis it is the idea of 'bureaucratisation' beyond the sphere of production, of leisure, and of culture. However, at this point there is no sense in Castoriadis of its ideologization, of the spectacularisation of life in advertising and culture more widely considered. However, this would come, and I believe under the direct influence of SB/PO's encounter with the SI.

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[859] Internationale Situationniste, 'La frontière situationniste,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 5 (Décembre 1960), pp. 7-8. The SI would reprint this quote under the title 'Consumption and the spectacle of its presentation' (La consommation et sa mise en spectacle). Above the title and the quote, an ad for alcoholic cider was illustrated with the image of young heterosexual couples at a party, dancing, listening to music, talking, all smiling, with the title 'Yes, that's right, they are drinking *Cider Doux*'. Cf. Internationale Situationniste, 'Critique de l'urbanisme,' *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 6 (Août 1961), p. 10.

[860] I.S., 'La frontière situationniste.'

[861] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 272. Paul Cardan [Cornelius Castoriadis], 'Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne (suite) [part II],' *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 32 (Avril-Juin 1961), p. 101.

[862] In the same issue, the SI used a quote from Castoriadis first published, coincidently, the same month the SI was formed (July 1957). Illustrating the quote, was a page from Debord and Asger Jorn's Memoires, a work of painting and *détournement*. The insinuation is that *Memoires* has become, insofar as it is a 'past "cultural" object', another commodity in the commodity-spectacle. However, even the recuperation of the most apparently benign object dissimulates the antagonistic reality of its production: 'Those who look only at the surface of things see only a commodity as a commodity. They don't see in it a crystallized moment of the class struggle. They see faults or defects, instead of seeing in them the resultant of the worker's constant struggle with himself. Faults or defects embody the worker's struggles against exploitation' Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' p. 116.

Echoing Castoriadis' 1986 claim, Bernard Quiriny has more recently argued that Debord 'forged' his concept of the spectacle as a direct result of his encounter with SB/PO and Castoriadis.[863] His prime source is Christophe Bourseiller's gossipy 1999 biography, in which Bourseiller writes that Debord first wrote on the concept of 'spectacle' in an article published in the December 1959 issue of *Internationale Situationniste*.[864] On this basis, and using Daniel Blanchard's 1995 published memories of his meetings with Debord, in which Blanchard said he met Debord in the 'autumn of 1959', i.e. before the December 1959 publication with the article on the concept of 'spectacle', Quiriny argues that Debord 'forged' his concept of 'spectacle' as a direct result of Castoriadis' influence (and, in particular, the publication of the first part of the draft of 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution' in October 1959).[865] Additionally, Quiriny notes that Castoriadis used the term 'spectacle', in a *Debordian* sense, in 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution'. Even though he notes that Castoriadis did not 'explicitly employ' the term in his October 1959 draft, nonetheless 'it is quite probable that it is through contact with S[ocialisme]. ou B[arbarie]. and Castoriadis that Guy Debord "discovered" the concept [of spectacle]', and thus 'to Castoriadis […] he owes the intuition of the concept which was the fortune of his thought — that of the "spectacle".'[866]

First, Bourseiller is wrong about the first appearance of the concept of 'spectacle' in Debord's work. As we have seen, Debord elaborated upon the 'spectacle' in his June 1957 published *Report on the Construction of Situations*.[867] Further, the 'spectacle' in the sense of the 'principle of […] non-intervention' outlined in the 1957 *Report...*, appeared in at least four articles across the first two issues of *Internationale Situationniste* (June and December 1958).[868] Certainly, the concept is developed rapidly in the midst of Debord's contact with SB/PO over 1960 and 1961, in contrast to the articles between 1957 and 1959. Nonetheless, to believe that it was 'discovered' or intuited as a result of contact with Castoriadis after October 1959 is simply false. Secondly, it is hard to say exactly when Blanchard met Debord. In Blanchard's 1995 reminiscences, he wrote that he first came across the third issue of the *Internationale Situationniste* in the 'autumn 1959'.[869] However, there are internal inconsistences with his account. For instance, he confuses the content of the fourth issue of the journal, published in June 1960, with the third published in December 1959.[870] Debord, writing in a letter in 1961, told his correspondent that Blanchard had 'made contact with the SI in Paris […] last year' — i.e. 1960.[871] If we consider that Debord and Blanchard published their collaborative work in July 1960, then it is safe to assume that Blanchard most likely first stumbled upon the third

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[863] 'In fact, it is not improbable that it was the contact with social-barbarian conceptions that Debord "forged" this idea – to reuse a word of Bourseiller.' (Quiriny, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie et l'Internationale situationniste : notes sur une « méprise »,' p. 49.). Quiriny uses '*forgé*' (forged) whereas Bourseiller actually speaks of Debord as a "*forgeron*", i.e. as a "blacksmith" (Bourseiller, *Vie et mort de Guy Debord 1931-1994*, p. 166). No doubt Quiriny was keen to evoke the English associations with 'forged', i.e. that the Debord's elaboration is merely a copy of Castoriadis' work.

[864] Bourseiller, *Vie et mort de Guy Debord 1931-1994*; Quiriny, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie et l'Internationale situationniste : notes sur une « méprise ».'

[865] Blanchard, 'Debord, in the Resounding Cataract of Time'; Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' translator's note, p. 226.

[866] Quiriny, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie et l'Internationale situationniste : notes sur une « méprise »,' pp. 51, 49.

[867] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale [1957],' p. 325.

[868] Cf. I.S., 'Avec et contre le cinéma.'; I.S., 'Problèmes préliminaires à la construction d'une situation.'; I.S., 'Les souvenirs au-dessous de tout.'; I.S.,'Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives.'

[869] Blanchard, 'Debord, in the Resounding Cataract of Time'.

[870] 'looking through this perfectly singular booklet, I discovered […] the illustrated description of a fantastic place called the "Yellow City".' ibid.

[871] Debord, 'Lettre à J.-L. Jollivet, 8 décembre 1961,' p. 113.

issue of Internationale Situationniste over the summer of 1959-60 (no earlier than December 1960). This clearly puts the published discussion of the concept of the 'spectacle' before Debord's meeting with Blanchard.[872]

However, it is Quiriny's third assertion that is most extraordinary. In fact, despite Quiriny believing that is adds to his evidence against Debord and 'his' concept, it reveals rather the extent to which Debord *influenced* Castoriadis. Recall that Quiriny, drawing upon Bourseiller's faulty dating of the first instance of 'spectacle' in Debord's work to December 1959, puts forward the possibility that Debord 'forged' this concept upon a reading of Castoriadis' October 1959 draft of his article 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution'. Here is a part of Castoriadis draft, which Quiriny quotes in defence of his assertion:

> modern capitalist society […] *succeeds in destroying the socialisation of individuals as political socialisation.* A society in which the individuals perceive themselves more and more as private individuals and behave as such; […] A society in which the "public thing" or more exactly the "social thing" is seen not only as strange or hostile, but as escaping our action; which thus throws men back to the "private life" or to a "social life" in which society as such is not put in question. […][873]

Certainly, this passage is of a piece with Castoriadis' conceptions of 'de-politicisation' and his latter notion of 'privatisation' — two conception that were patently influential upon Debord. Quiriny notes that Castoriadis did not use the term 'spectacle' in this draft, however he proceeds to argue that on the basis of Castoriadis' use of the term in a 'considerably augmented' version of the argument found in the draft, one can reasonably believe that the concept of spectacle is not only identical with Castoriadis' notions of 'privatisation' and 'de-politicisation', but that Debord concept of 'spectacle' is little more than a 'forged' plagiarism of Castoriadis'. Here is the quote from the later 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution' that Quiriny quotes in order to underline his thesis:

> The spectacle […] thus becomes the model for contemporary socialisation, in which each person is passive in relation to the community and no longer perceives the other as a possible subject of exchange, communication, and cooperation, but only as inert body limiting his own movements.[874]

If we accept that Quiriny's claim regarding Debord's 'discovery' of the concept of the spectacle in SB/PO and Castoriadis' is false, then what can we make of the foregoing? Perhaps it is a case of Castoriadis' unwitting duplication of the use of 'spectacle' in a context remarkably similar to Debord's use of the term? If we examine a further scholarly error of Quiriny's we come closer to the more likely truth: that Debord exerted an influence on Castoriadis. Quiriny believed that

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[872] In any case, even Blanchard admits a certain hesitancy in his recollection: 'That is what I experienced on the day, in autumn 1959, when I first glanced through an issue - number 3, *I think*'. Blanchard, 'Debord, in the Resounding Cataract of Time'. My emphasis.

[873] Castoriadis cited in Quiriny, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie et l'Internationale situationniste : notes sur une « méprise »,' p. 50.

[874] Castoriadis, cited in ibid. Note the difference in David Ames Curtis translation of this passage: 'The show [*spectacle*], a performance by a specialized individual or group before an impersonal and transitory public, thus becomes the model for contemporary socialization. Each person is passive in relation to the community and no longer perceives the other as a possible subject of exchange, communication, and cooperation, but only as inert body limiting his own movements.' Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 294; Paul Cardan [Cornelius Castoriadis], 'Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne (fin) [part III],' *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 33 (Décembre 1961 - Février 1962), p. 73.

Castoriadis' use of 'spectacle' appeared when 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution' was published in December 1960.[875] However, here too he is wrong. The passage in question appeared in the third part of 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', which was published in December 1961 in issue number 33 of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.[876] The dating in this case is extremely important, and for two reasons. First Debord had come and gone from the official orbit of SB/PO by December 1961, whereas in December 1960 he was still a member. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is the context of the appearance of the term 'spectacle' in the third part of Castoriadis' article. Directly before the quote cited above Castoriadis wrote:

> […] *popular festivals*, a creation of humanity from time immemorial, tend to disappear as a social phenomenon in modern societies. They now survive only as *spectacle*, a physical conglomeration of individuals no longer positively communicating with each other, but merely coexisting through their anonymous and passive, juxtaposed relations. In such events only one pole of people is active nowadays: Its function is to make the event "live" for the others, who are just onlookers.[877]

What is striking about this quote is its Situationist *style*. Indeed, it resembles Debord's 1957 comments on the need for people to become 'livers' rather than merely occupying 'passive', 'walk-on' parts. Considering that it appeared after Debord's brief membership and almost two years after the initiation of closer relations between Debord, other Situationists and SB/PO, not to mention more than a year after Debord and SB/PO member Blanchard published a document outlining just such a theory of the spectacle, one must wonder about the Situationist influence upon Castoriadis and SB/PO. That is to say that there was no doubt a fruitful and productive interchange *between* SB and the SI rather than a merely one way influence in either direction.

Perhaps even more interesting than this is the paragraph immediately afterward, in which Castoriadis wrote,

> It was in no way accidental that observers of the Belgian strikes in Wallonia, in January 1961, were so struck by the genuinely festive appearance of the country and of the people in their conduct, despite being in a state of need and despite the difficult struggle they were in the midsts [sic.] of.[878]

This passage helps to date its composition, i.e. *after* the Belgian General Strike over the Winter of 1960-61, and thus after both the 1959 draft and the appearance of the first part of the article in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* no. 31 in December 1960. However of more immediate interest is the fact that Debord participated directly, alongside of Castoriadis and others in an SB/PO solidarity trip to Belgium during the strike.[879] Additionally, the Situationists André Frankin and Attila Kotànyi were based in Belgium during the strike, and were in contact with, and became members of the SB affiliated group *Pouvoir Ouvrier Belgique*.[880] So it is perhaps not too much

[875] Quiriny, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie et l'Internationale situationniste : notes sur une « méprise »,' p. 51.
[876] Cardan [Castoriadis], 'Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne (fin) [part III],' p. 73.
[877] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 294; Cardan [Castoriadis], 'Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne (fin) [part III],' pp. 72-3.
[878] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' pp. 294-95.
[879] It is also possible that Debord, as a participant of the SB trip to Belgium during the strike, contributed information to the special issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* on the strike, number 32 (April 1961).
[880] Cf. Debord's letters to André Frankin dated 24 January, 4 February, 19 February, 18 March and 30 May, 1961 (Guy Debord, *Correspondance volume II septembre 1960 - décembre 1964*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001.). Debord and the other Situationists came into contact with Robert Dehoux of *Pouvoir Ouvrier Belgique*. Dehoux was also the editor of the journal *Alternative* which had published

to imagine that Castoriadis' references to 'festival', 'spectacle' and the 'festive appearance' of parts of Belgium during the strike was bound up with the participation and indeed influence of Situationists during these events. That the possibility of such a relationship was not investigated by Quiriny is surely more evidence against his idea of Debord's 'discovery' and 'intuition' of the concept of 'spectacle'.

To bring this extended examination of the pitfalls of the scholarship on the SI and SB/PO's relations, let us return to where we began. Castoriadis is on the record saying that Debord's concept of 'spectacle' was merely 'Frenchified and plagiarised' from his patently Platonic concept 'the appearance of the simulacrum [*présentation du simulacre*]'.[881] However, I have found no evidence of this being the case. Certainly, I have found the influence that Castoriadis notion of 'de-politicisation' and 'privatisation' exerted on Debord — or at least the symmetry and similarity between Castoriadis' elaboration of these concepts and Debord's conception of the 'spectacle' of consumption 'outside of work'.[882] Indeed, Castoriadis' turn to speaking of 'the simulacrum of reasons to live [*le simulacre de raisons de vivre*]' in 1963, alongside of what I believe to be the obvious Situationist influence upon his use of the term 'spectacle' in 1961, poses the question of the extent of the Situationist influence upon Castoriadis and SB/PO.[883] Indeed, despite the obvious influence of SB/PO upon the SI, the numerous citations of Castoriadis and other 'Social-Barbarians' in the pages of *Internationale Situationniste*, neither Castoriadis nor the official organs of SB/PO ever acknowledged the existence of the SI, let alone their influence. One wonders what drove Castoriadis to make the preposterous claim that he did in 1986.

If we consider that Castoriadis posed his 'simulacra' in explicitly Platonic terms, and the extent to which I have attempted to demonstrate the non-*mimetic* nature of 'spectacle' under the hand of Debord, it is further interesting to note that Castoriadis' understanding of 'ideology critique' *lagged behind* the Situationists. Certainly, Castoriadis came to understand that 'ideology' had a different sense from the positivistic notion of ideology in orthodox Marxism during the 1960s. However, there is no indication in Castoriadis' writing that he differentiated between the orthodox conception of 'ideology' and Marx's sense of 'ideology critique' before he wrote his long farewell to Marxism, 'Marxism and Revolutionary Theory' (1964-65). Indeed, it was in the first part of this article, published in April 1964, that Castoriadis first spoke of 'Marxism […] becom[ing] an *ideology* in the very sense that Marx gave to this term'.[884] Before this, Castoriadis appeared to share the orthodox perspective of 'ideology'. Thus, he conflated ideology and culture in an orthodox fashion, in the sense of conceiving of ideology as commensurate with the so-called 'superstructural' realm of culture.[885] He spoke of Marxism — favourably — as a 'revolutionary ideology' and as 'the ideological expression of the

Raoul Vaneigem. And it was during the same period, January 1961, that Debord and Vaneigem came into contact shortly thereafter leading to Vaneigem's membership of the SI. Without doubt the SI's involvement with SB during the Belgian strike was close. In a, Debord noted that 'three Situationists are in the Belgian *Pouvoir Ouvrier* group' — presumably Frankin, Kotányi and Vaneigem (Debord, 'Lettre à Daniel Blanchard, 13 juin 1961,'). Later that year in a letter to J. L. Jollivet, he noted that 'the last Situationists have withdrawn from P[ouvoir] O[uvrier] B[elgique] in November [1961]' (Debord, 'Lettre à J.-L. Jollivet, 8 décembre 1961.').

[881] Castoriadis, 'Seminar of April 30, 1986 - Questions,' p. 169.
[882] Canjuers and Debord, 'Preliminaires pour une definition de l'unite du programme revolutionnaire [20 juillet 1960].'
[883] Castoriadis, 'Recommencing the Revolution [1963].'; Socialisme ou Barbarie [Castoriadis], 'Recommencer la révolution,' p. 27.
[884] Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 11; Castoriadis], 'Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire [part I],' p. 4.
[885] Castoriadis, 'On the Content of Socialism, II [1957],' p. 148.

proletariat's activity', in the sense of it being its intellectual expression.[886] When turning to a more thoroughgoing criticism of Marxism, Castoriadis considered the 'ideological degeneration' consequent upon the incorporation of working-class political and economic organisations into the bureaucratic capitalist state, as evidence of the absence of 'any revolutionary ideology or even simply a working-class ideology present on a society-wide scale (i.e., not just cultivated in a few sects)'.[887] Indeed, when Castoriadis began to take up what we would recognise as a perspective redolent of an 'ideology critique' around 1963 — coincident with the call for a 'new orientation' and then split in SB/PO — he still confused 'ideology' with its orthodox sense.[888] Of course, Castoriadis' confusion does not mark him out from most other contemporaries, whether 'orthodox' or 'heterodox'. But what is important regarding the foregoing, is that there is no evidence that Castoriadis considered 'ideology critique' in the way Debord and the SI began to engage and enunciate such from around 1961. Considering the centrality of Marx's ideology critique in the turn from theorising the spectacle as applicable to the cultural spectacle to a theory with a more general important (albeit incorporating the earlier critical sense of 'spectacle'), it is hard see how Castoriadis developed the notion of his proprietary claim; it is even harder to believe this, when we consider that his Platonic notion of 'simulacrum' bears little relation to a core conceit of Debord's concept from 1961 — i.e. Marx's sense of 'ideology critique'.

[886] Castoriadis, 'Proletariat and Organisation, I [1959],' p. 213; Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 232.
[887] Castoriadis, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution [1960-61],' p. 295.
[888] Castoriadis, 'For A New Orientation [1962],' pp. 9, 10, 11; Castoriadis, 'Recommencing the Revolution [1963],' p. 30.

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