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# THE SOCIETY OF SITUATIONISM

## & NOTES TOWARDS A SITUATIONIST MANIFESTO

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# THE SOCIETY OF SITUATIONISM

"Even if a *constituted* situationist theory had never existed as a possible source of inspiration, the system of commodity consumption implicitly contains its own *situationism*."

—Daniel Denevert, *Theory of Misery, Misery of Theory*

1

The second proletarian assault on class society has entered its *second phase*.

2

The first phase — beginning diffusely in the 1950s and culminating in the open struggles of the late sixties — found its most advanced theoretical expression in the Situationist International. *Situationism* is the direct or implicit ideologization of situationist theory, within the revolutionary movement and in the society as a whole.

3

The S.I. articulated the whole of the global movement at the same time that it participated as part of it in the sector where it found itself, taking up "the violence of the delinquents on the plane of ideas" and giving immediate practical follow-through to its theoretical positions. It thus presented a model to the revolutionary movement not only in the form of its conclusions but also in exemplifying the ongoing negating *method*; which method was the reason that its conclusions were almost always right.

4

In generating among many of its partisans the same exigencies that it practiced itself, and in forcing even the most unautonomous to become at least autonomous from it, the S.I. showed that it knew how to *educate revolutionarily*. In the space of a few years we have seen a *democratization of theoretical activity* that was not attained — if it was even sought — in the old movement in a century. Marx and Engels were not able to incite rivals; none of the strands of Marxism maintained Marx's unitary perspective. Lenin's observation in 1914 that "none of the Marxists for the past half century have understood Marx" is really a critique of Marx's theory, not because it was too difficult but because it did not recognize and calculate its own relation with the totality.

5

The very nature of the situationists' mistakes — exposed and criticized by them with pitiless thoroughness — is a *confirmation of their methods*. Their failures as well as their successes serve to focus, elucidate and polarize. No other radical

current in history has known such a degree of intentional public theoretical debate. In the old proletarian movement consequential theoretical polarization was always the exception, the explosion that came out contrary to the intentions of the theorists themselves and only as a last resort when the very continuation of a factitious unity was visibly no longer possible. Marx and Engels failed to dissociate themselves publicly from the Gotha Program because "the asinine bourgeois papers took this program quite seriously, read into it what it does not contain and interpreted it communistically; and the workers seem to be doing the same" (Engels to Bebel, 12 October 1875). Thus, in defending by silence a program against its enemies, they defended it equally against its friends. When in the same letter Engels said that "if the bourgeois press possessed a single person of critical mind, he would have taken this program apart phrase by phrase, investigated the real content of each phrase, demonstrated its nonsense with the utmost clarity, revealed its contradictions and economic howlers . . . and made our whole Party look frightfully ridiculous," he described as a deficiency of the bourgeois press what rather was precisely a deficiency of the revolutionary movement of his time.

6

The concentrated expression of present historical subversion has itself become *decentralized*. The monolithic myth of the S.I. has exploded forever. During the first phase this myth had a certain objective basis: on the level on which it was operating, the S.I. had no serious rivals. Now we see a public and international confrontation of autonomous situationist theories and ideologies which no tendency comes close to monopolizing. Any situationist orthodoxy has lost its central referent. From this point on, every situationist or would-be situationist must follow his own path.

7

The first critiques of situationism remained fundamentally ahistorical. They measured the theoretical poverties of the pro-situ up against the theory of the first phase. They saw the subjective poverties and internal inconsistencies of this milieu, but not its position as related to the sum of theoretical and practical vectors at a certain moment; they failed to grasp this "first non-dialectical application" as the qualitative weakness of the *ensemble*, as a necessary "moment of the true." Even *Theses on the S.I. and Its Time* — in so many respects the summation of the first phase at its point of transition into the second — scarcely broaches the properly historical aspect of situationism.

8

At each stage of the struggle the partial realization of the critique generates its own new equilibrium point with the ruling society. As the theory escapes its formulators, it tends through its autonomous ideological momentum to be run through all possible permutations and combinations, though principally those reflecting the new developments and illusions of the moment. Caught in the transition of the first phase to the second, the pro-situationists in the post-1968 "ebbing of May" period were the embodiments of the *inertia* of a confirmed theory. This ideological lag — in which the partisans of situationist theory failed to confront the new developments in their own practice, that of the proletariat and that of the society as a whole — measured the weakness of the situationist

movement; while the unprecedented quickness with which it engendered its own internal negation — effectively *sabotaging itself* in order to affirm the explosion that had already escaped it and clear the ground for the new phase — marks its fundamental vindication.

9

The pro-situationists saw the issues of the second phase in terms of those of the first. In treating the new, widespread and relatively conscious worker struggles as if they were isolated nihilist acts of an earlier period, which therefore lacked first of all the proverbial "consciousness of what they had already done," the pro-situs only showed that they lacked the consciousness of what others were already doing and of all that was still lacking. In every single struggle they saw the same simple, total conclusion and identified the progress of the revolution with the appropriation of this conclusion by the proletariat. In thus *abstractly concentrating* the intelligence of human practice above the complex process of the development of class struggle, the activist pro-situs were the would-be bolsheviks of a fantasized *coup of class consciousness*, hoping by this shortcut to bring about their councilist program whose implications they overstepped out of incomprehension or impatience.

10

The S.I. did not apply its theory to the very activity of the formulation of that theory, although the very nature of that theory implied its eventual democratization and thus put this question on the order of the day. In the aftermath of May neither the S.I. nor the new generation of insurgents it had inspired had really examined the *process* of theoretical production, either in its methods or its subjective ramifications, beyond a few vague, empirical rules of the thumb. The backlash of the partial realization of situationist theory flung them unprepared from megalomaniac delirium, to incoherence, to chain-reactions of contentless breaks, to impotence and finally to the massive psychological repression of the whole experience, without their ever having asked themselves what was happening to them.

11

Even if the S.I. attracted many poorly prepared partisans, the very fact that such a mass of people with no *particular* experience in or aptitude or taste for revolutionary politics thought to find in situationist activity a terrain where they could engage themselves autonomously and consequentially confirms the radicality of both the theory and the epoch. If the situationist milieu has manifested so many pretensions and illusions, this was merely the natural side-effect of the first victory of a critique that burst so many pretensions of and illusions about the ruling society.

12

To the extent that the ideologies of the first phase suppressed anything to do with the situationists — including therefore the concepts most explicitly associated with them — the eventual discovery of the situationist critique had the contrary exaggerated effect of giving the situationists an apparent *monopoly* of radical comprehension of modern society and its opposition. Hence the adherence to

the situationist critique had the abrupt, fanatical character of a sudden religious *conversion* (often with a corresponding ulterior rejection of it *in toto*). In contrast, the young revolutionary who now adheres to situationist positions tends to be less subject to this fanatical excess precisely because *diverse* nuances of situationist struggle and of its recuperation are a *familiar aspect of his world*.

13

In the second phase, revolution has moved from being an apparently marginal phenomenon to a visibly central one. The underdeveloped countries have lost their apparent monopoly of *contestation*; but the revolutions there haven't stopped, they have simply become *modern* and are resembling more and more the struggles in the advanced countries. The society that proclaimed its well-being is now *officially* in crisis. The formerly isolated gestures of revolt against apparently only isolated misery now know themselves to be *general* and proliferate and overwhelm all accounting. 1968 was the moment where the revolutionary movements began to see themselves in *international company*, and it was this global visibility that definitively shattered the ideologies that saw revolution everywhere but in the proletariat. 1968 was also the last time major revolts could seem to be *student revolts*.

14

The proletariat has begun to act *by itself* but as yet scarcely *for itself*. Revolts continue to be, as they have been over the last century, largely defensive reactions: the taking over of factories abandoned by their owners or of struggles abandoned by their leaders (particularly in the aftermath of wars). If sectors of the proletariat have begun to speak for themselves, they have yet to elaborate an openly internationalist revolutionary program and effectively express their goals and tendencies internationally. If they serve as examples for proletarians of other countries, it is still through the *de facto* mediation of radical groups and spectacular reportage.

15

The ideology of the first phase that stressed the concrete realization of radical change without grasping the negative or the totality has found its realization in the proliferation of the so-called *alternative institutions*. The alternative institution differs from classic reformism in being chiefly an immediate, *self-managed reformism*, one that *does not wait for the State*. It recuperates the initiative and energy of the mildly dissatisfied and is a sensitive indicator of defects in the system and of their possible resolutions. Alternative production — whose development on the margins of the economy recapitulates the historical development of commodity production — functions as a *free-enterprise* corrective to the bureaucratized economy. But the democratization and "autogestionization" of social structures, though productive of illusions, is also a favorable factor for the development of the revolutionary critique. It leaves behind the superficial focuses of struggle while providing a safer and easier terrain from and on which to contest the *essentials*. The contradictions in participatory production and alternative distribution facilitate the detournement of their goods and facilities, going up to the point of quasi-legal "Strasbourgs of the factories."

1. Spontaneous Combustion footnote: See 'The Poverty of Student Life' for the original Strasbourg.

The hip notion *trip* expresses the fact that as commodities become more abundant, adaptable and disposable, the individual commodity is devalued in favor of the ensemble. The trip offers not a single commodity or idea but an organizing principle for selecting from among all commodities and ideas. In contrast with the block of time where "everything's included," which is still sold as a distinct commodity, the commodity character of the indefinitely extended trip (art, craft, pursuit, fad, lifestyle, subcult, social project, religion) — carrying with it a more flexible complex of commodities and stars — is obscured behind the quasi-autonomous activity whereby the subject seems to dominate. The trip is the moment where the spectacle has become so overdeveloped that it becomes *participatory*. It recovers the subjective activity lacking in the spectacle, but runs into the limits of the world the spectacle has made — limits absent in the spectacle precisely because it is separate from daily life.<sup>1</sup>

The diminution of the exclusive sway of work and the fragmentation of the consequently expanded leisure give rise to the widespread *dilittantism* of modern society. The spectacle presents the super-agent who can tell to a degree the correct temperature at which *saké* should be served and initiates the masses into exotic techniques of living and to connoisseur enjoyments previously reserved for the upper classes. But the heralded "new Renaissance Man" is no closer to mastering his own life. When the spectacle becomes overdeveloped and wants to cast off the poverty and unilateralness at its origin, it reveals itself as simply a *poor relative of the revolutionary project*. It may multiply amusements and make them more participatory, but their commodity basis ineluctably forces them back into the matrix of consumption. Isolated individuals may, in a caricature of Fourier, come together around ever more precise nuances of common spectacular tastes, but these nexuses are all the more separated from each other and from the social totality and the sought-for passionate activity founders on its triviality. The new cosmopolitan remains *historically provincial*.

The spectacle responds to the increasing dissatisfaction with its tendency toward lowest-common-denominator uniformity by *diversifying* itself. Struggles are channeled into struggles over the spectacle, leading to the semi-autonomous development of separate spectacles tailor-made for specific social groupings.<sup>2</sup> But the singular power of a spectacle comes from its having been placed for a moment at the center of social life. Thus the increase of spectacular choice at the same time reduces the spectacular power that depends on the very magnitude and undivided enthrallment of the pseudo-community the spectacle draws together.<sup>3</sup> The spectacle must contradictorily be all things to all men individually while continually reasserting itself as their single, exclusive unifying principle.

The spectacle revives the dead, imports the foreign and *reinterprets* the existing. The time span required for things to acquire the proper quaint banality to become "camp" continually decreases; the original is marketed simultaneously with its spoof, from which it is often scarcely distinguishable; aesthetic discussions

**1.S.C. note:** The Kung Fu scene is one example of such a trip. But its' real-life practice is somewhat different from its' spectacular 'practice' in a Bruce Lee movie, for example.

**2.S.C.:** E.g. a thousand and one growth groups.

**3.S.C.:** E.g. the Bay City Rollers fan club

increasingly center around the simple question as to whether something is a parody or not. This expresses the increasing contempt felt for the cultural spectacle on the part of its producers and consumers. Society produces a more and more rapid turnover of styles and ideologies, going up to the point of a delirium that escapes no one. As all the permutations and combinations are run through, the individual poverties and contradictions make themselves known and the common *form* that lies behind the diverse contents begins to be discerned; "to change illusions at an accelerating pace gradually dissolves the illusion of change." With the global unification exerted by the spectacle, it becomes increasingly difficult to idealize a system because it is in a different part of the world, and the global circulation of commodities and therefore of people brings ever closer the historic *encounter of the Eastern and Western proletariats*. The recycling of culture sucks dry and breaks up all the old traditions, leaving only the spectacular "tradition of the new." But the new ceases to be novel and the impatience for novelty generated by the spectacle may transform itself into an impatience to realize and destroy the spectacle, the only idea that continually remains really "new and different."

Inasmuch as situationist theory is a critique of all aspects of alienated life, the diverse nuances of situationism reflect in concentrated form the general illusions of the society, and the ideological defenses generated by the situationists prefigure the ideological defenses of the system.

Situationist theory has come full circle when its critique of daily life is drawn on to provide the *sophisticated vocabulary* of a justification of the status quo. Individuals expressing dissatisfaction with self-satisfied pseudo-enjoyments in the situationist milieu, for example, have been characterized as lacking a "capacity for enjoyment," a "sense of play" or even "radical subjectivity," and accused of "voluntarism" or "militantism" for having concretely proposed radical projects or more experimental activities.

*Vaneigemism* is an extreme form of the modern *anti-puritanism* that has to pretend to enjoy what is supposed to be enjoyable. Like the city dweller who affirms his preference for "living in the country" although for some reason he never goes there or if he does soon gets bored and returns to the city, the vaneigemist has to feign pleasure because his activity is by definition "passionate," even when that activity is in fact tedious or nonexistent. In letting everyone know that he "refuses sacrifice" and "demands everything," he differs from the man in the ads who "insists on the best" only in the degree of his pretension and in the often scarcely more than token ideological avowal of the obstacles that remain in the way of his total realization. Dissatisfaction and boredom are forgotten in their boring, ritual denunciation, and at a time when even the most retrograde ideologies are becoming frankly pessimistic and self-critical in their decomposition, the vaneigemist presents an effective *image of present satisfaction*.

Vaneigemist *ideological egoism* holds up as the radical essence of humanity that *most alienated condition of humanity* for which the bourgeoisie was reproached, which "left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest"; differing only accidentally from the *bourgeois* version in envisaging a different means of realization for this collection of isolated egos. This position is contradicted by the actual historical experience of revolutions and often even by the very actions of those who invoke it.

The situationists' criticality and often appropriate calculated "arrogance" and use of insults — once taken out of the context of active struggle to *change things* — find a natural place in a world where everyone is presented with a spectacle of inferiority and encouraged to think that he is "different"; where every tourist seeks to avoid "the tourists" and every consumer prides himself on not believing the ads (an illusion of superiority that is often intentionally programmed into ads in order to facilitate the simultaneous penetration of the essential subliminal message). The pseudo-critical individual affirms his *static superiority* through his contemptuous and consequenceless critiques of others who have cruder or at least different illusions. Situationist *humor* — product of the contradictions between the latent possibilities of the epoch and its absurd reality — once it ceases to be practical, approaches simply the median popular humor of a society where the good spectator has been largely supplanted by the *cynical spectator*.

As *reinvestors* of the cultural riches of the past, the situationists, once the use of those riches is lost, rejoin spectacular society as simple promoters of culture. The process of the modern revolution — communication containing its own critique, continuous domination of the present over the past — *meshes* with that of a society depending on the continuous turnover of commodities, where each new lie criticizes the previous ones. That a work has something to do with the critique of the spectacle — in manifesting an element of "authentic radicality" or in representing some theoretically articulated moment of the decomposition of the spectacle — is hardly disadvantageous for it from the standpoint of the spectacle. While the situationists are right in pointing out the detournable elements in their forebears, in so doing they simultaneously win for those forebears a place in the spectacle, which, because it is so sorely lacking in the qualitative, welcomes the affirmation that there is some to be found among the cultural goods it markets. The detourned fragment is rediscovered as a fragment; when the use goes, the consumption remains; the detourners are detourned.

Such a vital concept as *situationist* necessarily knows simultaneously the truest and the most false uses, with a multitude of intermediate confusions.

As with other pivotal theoretical concepts, one cannot suppress the interested confusionism engendered by the concept *situationist* by suppressing its label.

**I.S.G.: E.g. In France many new editions of past culture - Surrealism, Hieronymous Bosch etc. - quote the S.I.s' positive references to them in order to boost sales.**

The ambiguities of the term "situationist" reflect the ambiguities of the situationist critique itself, at once separate from and part of the society it combats, at once separate party and its negation. The existence of a distinct "situationist milieu" — at once social concentration of advanced revolutionary consciousness and social embodiment of concentrated situationism — expresses the contradictions of the uneven development of conscious struggle in this period; since while to be explicitly situationist is hardly a guarantee of intelligent practice, not to be so is virtually a guarantee of aims of falsification or of an ignorance increasingly difficult to maintain involuntarily. The "spectacle" will be considered as a specifically situationist concept as long as it is considered as merely one more peripheral element of the society. But in simultaneously repressing its central aspects and the theory that has most radically articulated them and then thinking to kill two birds with one stone by lumping these uncategorizable entities together, the society confirms their real unity; as when for example a bibliography contains a section: "Daily Life, Consumer Society, and Situationist Themes."

For the S.I., the situationist label served to draw a line between the prevalent incoherence and a new exigency. The importance of the term withers away to the extent that the new exigences are widely known and practiced, to the extent that the proletarian movement becomes itself situationist. Such a label also facilitates a spectacular categorization of what it represents. But this very categorization at the same time exposes the society to the very *coherence* of the diverse situationist positions that makes possible a single label, the power of this exposure depending on the net total of significances carried by the term at a given moment. It is the *trenchancy* of the term which is at issue in the diverse struggles over whether someone or something is situationist, and it is a notable measure of this trenchancy that the term "pro-situationist" has been rendered universally recognized as pejorative. Although association with the label serves as no defense for acts, the actions of situationists do in a sense defend the word, in contributing toward rendering it as concentrated and dangerous a bomb as possible for the society to play with. The society that with little difficulty presents sectors of itself as "communist," "Marxist" or "libertarian" finds it as yet impossible or inadvisable to present any aspect of itself as "situationist," although it certainly would have done so by now if for example a "Nashist" (opportunistic neo-artistic) sense of the term had prevailed.

At its beginnings, as long as no one else is very close, the situationist critique seems so intrinsically anti-ideological that its proponents can scarcely imagine any situationism other than as a mere gross lie or misunderstanding. "There is no situationism," such a term is "meaningless," declares I.S. 1. A simple differentiation suffices to defend the term from misuse: the 5th Conference of the S.I. decides that all artistic works produced by its members must be explicitly labeled "anti-situationist." But the critique that opposes itself by definition to its ideologization cannot definitively or absolutely separate itself from it. The S.I. discovers a tendency "infinitely more dangerous than the old artistic conception we have fought so much. It is more modern and thus less clear. . . . Our project takes shape at the *same time* as the modern tendencies of integration. There is

thus an air of resemblance as well as a direct opposition, in that we are really contemporary. . . . We are necessarily on the same path as our enemies — more often preceding them" (I.S. 9).

30

It is notorious that the modern intelligentsia has often utilized elements of situationist theory, formerly without acknowledgment, more recently — when such a plagiarization has become more difficult and when at the same time spectacular association with the situationists adds more to one's prestige than knowledge of dependence on them detracts from it — more often with acknowledgment. But even more significant are the numerous theoretical and ideological manifestations that, in spite of no direct influence or even knowledge of the situationists, are ineluctably drawn to the same issues and the same formulations because these are nothing other than the intrinsic pivotal points of modern society and its contradictions.

31

To the extent that the situationist critique extends and deepens itself, modern society — merely to minimally understand its own functioning and opposition, or to present the spectacle reflecting what is most generally desired — must recuperate more and more elements of that critique, or in repressing it become the victim of its own correspondingly increasing blind spots.

32

Everything the S.I. has said about art, the proletariat, urbanism, the spectacle, is broadcast everywhere — minus the essential. While in the anarchy of the ideological market individual ideologies incorporate elements of situationist theory separated from their concrete totality, as an ensemble they effectively reunite the fragments as an abstract totality. All of modernist ideology taken as a block is situationism.

33

Situationism is the stealing of the *initiative* from the revolutionary movement, the critique of daily life undertaken by power itself. The spectacle presents itself as the originator or at least the necessary forum of discussion of the ideas of its destruction. Revolutionary theses don't appear as the ideas of revolutionaries, that is as linked to a precise experience and project, but rather as an unexpected outburst of lucidity on the part of the rulers, stars and vendors of illusions. Revolution becomes a moment of situationism.

34

The society of situationism does not know that it is; that would be giving it too much credit. Only the proletariat can grasp its totality in the process of destroying it. It is principally the revolutionary camp that generates the diverse illusions and ideological nuances that can shore up the system and justify a restored status quo. The very successes of revolts having arrived at an ambiguous point of equilibrium with the system serve in part to advertise the greatness of a system that could generate and accommodate such radical successes.

35

By its very nature situationism cannot be immediately or fully realized. It is not supposed to be taken literally, but followed at just a few steps distance; if it were not for this albeit tiny distance, the mystification would become apparent.

36

In producing its situationism, the society shatters the cohesion of other ideologies, sweeps aside the archaic and accidental falsifications and draws the fragments capable of reinvestment to itself. But in thus concentrating the social false consciousness, society prepares the way for the expropriation of this expropriated consciousness. The sophistication of recuperation forcibly dis-abuses revolutionaries, its unity pushes the conflict to a higher level, and elements of situationism diffused globally provoke their own supercession in regions where they had not yet developed from an indigenous theoretical base.

37

The S.I. was exemplary not only for what it said, but above all for *all that it did not say*. Diffuseness dilutes critical power. Discussion of things that don't make any difference obscures the things that do. Entering onto the platform of ruling pseudo-dialogue turns truth into a moment of the lie. Revolutionaries must know how to be silent.

KEN KNABB

(FROM BUREAU OF PUBLIC SECRETS #1 JAN. 1976)

## NOTES TOWARD A SITUATIONIST MANIFESTO

A qualitative leap has been made in the period since the S.I. ceased its experimentation around 1968.

The assault of the proletariat, rediscovering little by little the necessity of a revolution and defining in its struggles the conditions and stakes of a "new epoch," has been qualitatively confirmed and precised. The nature of this assault now allows the elimination or modification of certain premature hypotheses and slogans of the old theory and also reveals certain *limits*, the overcoming of which would create the conditions of a qualitatively different epoch.

In obvious connection with the return of the social revolution, we are witnessing a development, *without precedent* in the modern epoch, of partial-reformist contestation drawing its inspiration from *modern* themes taken from revolutionary struggles as it progressively abandons its traditional themes. This phenomenon joins with the new orientation taken by the spheres that run the present society; faced with the assault of the *negative*, they have decided to obtain, at any cost, people's *active* participation in their own alienation; they are exploring and establishing the futuristic conditions of this participation, on a program of the modification of daily life, of mores, of the social utilization of space and time, of proletarians' role in production and of this production itself. Hence all the liberalizing experiments, questionings of the assumptions, the goals and the power of the economy itself, declarations, studies and programs promising the transformation of existence, which are accompanied, by an irony of the logic of statist power, by a sector-by-sector reinforcement of the *means of control* over social life. This is one of the contradictions which is going to dominate all social life in the next few years: the power of the economy and the State can't confront the present collapse and consider liberalizing the society without reinforcing its bureaucratic control, and it can't reinforce its bureaucratic control without substantially liberalizing the anachronistic social structures whose negative and negating consequences have become uncontrollable.

Power cannot know how far it will be swept along by this course. This is why it so willingly leaves it to the diverse shades of contemporary critical thought to explore its possible stages, including the worst envisageable ones; this is why it encourages experimentation with solutions aimed at transforming populations into credulous and cooperative actors of a renovated alienation. Its major concern, since it has already given up getting out of the present period in one piece, is to keep the damage to a minimum and avoid generating situations of irreversible disequilibrium. It is this process, taken up on a global political scale as well as internally in the various states and modified or postponed according to local necessities, in which is inscribed the considerable development — if one takes for comparison the pre-1968 epoch of the triumphant and euphoric economy — of a *spectacle of contestation and social transformation*.

To be sure, contestation has always had its place in the spectacular universe, but as a peripheral and negligible sector; now it shares the center of the stage, openly competing with satisfied submission's eulogy of existing conditions. In place of the capitalism-stalinism opposition which was at the base of the spectacle of the preceding period, is now substituted the familiar imagery of existing society grappling with the forces and processes announcing its *internal negation*.

In the spheres of high politics one now sees everywhere the still-groping rise of a *neo-reformism*, supported by the *foil* of a certain revival of rightist or semi-fascist manifestations.

The ensemble of the present tentatives from which Western capitalism is developing its own reexamination and preparing its necessary restructuring is indicative of the pivotal and even *profoundly historical* character of this epoch. As the signs and risks of a *total negation* develop, a terrain of experimentation constitutes itself in reaction, from which the *ideology* is being elaborated that will prop up the reorganization of the faltering system in the next few years. It is a matter here of a *stalinization* of Western capitalism, in the sense that the necessary restructuring conceived to safeguard state domination must be conducted in the most centralized and controllable manner possible, no longer in the name of the natural needs of the workings of the economy but to save the *economic order itself*, in the name of an ideology imposing a *global conception of existence* and preparing the favorable conditions for cybernetic society. But in order to conduct this operation, power finds itself constrained in the short run to descend to the favored terrain of revolutionaries, of which it has a horror: that of *adventure*. If its goals are clear, it nonetheless does not have the process it finds itself engaged in *under control*. This is a central point for the historical understanding of the present period and of the manner in which the alternative of revolutionary adventure articulates itself there. None of the rulers can say any longer what the consequences of the reformist measures that they are forced to take today will be; they all see their time running out and the last-ditch palliatives they urgently need to develop or generalize, but they hesitate before these correctives whose process and results are uncertain. This paralyzing uncertainty leads them rather to give a clumsy and inadequate priority to the only one of their instruments that remains without surprises and that they know well — *their police*.

Revolutionary theses are being taken up everywhere, inspiring the thinkers underwritten by the State and the future technicians of the control of populations; they are used with the greatest cynicism to praise modern merchandise as well as to justify the possible necessity of a bureaucratically planned privation of this merchandise. In a way, they have never been so known and popular; but only on rare occasions are they understood, used and developed on their own terrains. The spectacle effect obliterates their origin and their meaning. They don't appear as the ideas of revolutionaries, that is to say linked to a precise experience and project, but rather as an outburst of lucidity on the part of the rulers, stars and vendors of illusions.

This popularity of our anesthetized theses defines a primary difficulty for the realization of a situationist manifesto. It will have to be conceived so that the point of view which it develops cannot appear as the "extreme left" of the existing currents of contestation. It must convey as unambiguously as possible

the critique and supercession of them. That is, it must shatter the "in" status that situationist theory holds today. It is this very rupture which principally defines the content of and need for a manifesto.

In presenting his film, for example, Guy Debord, renouncing the continuation of an offensive position, has actively contributed to placing situationist theory in the inextricable situation of the contemporary contestatory spectacle. Not, obviously, because film is necessarily more "spectacular" than writing (though this is a question of a domain that revolutionaries are nowhere near being able to dominate in the current context), but because seven years after the appearance of his book — well into a radically new period — he has made a film which is no more than that book and which is thus only a self-admiring glorification of an act of the past. But even if there is an inordinate proportion of flaunted self-satisfaction in this film, it isn't our intention to deny Debord the indisputable talent that remains to him and which can even still manifest itself in certain partially revolutionary and efficacious ways. The problem is not there. It is that Debord, in the activity of situationist theory where he holds a deserved authority, devotes himself less to the theory of negation than to maintaining a personal glory through the *art* of the negative, which society today integrates as a peripheral and entertaining art. This is an example of the path that a good manifesto and its authors must not follow.

As a preliminary to the drafting of a manifesto, there is a profound retardation to make up for in revolutionary theory. Notably in the mastery of phenomena particular, in their dimension or their novelty, to the "new epoch"; in the heretofore neglected interpretation of what is rising there. And in taking this route it is possible that we will discover new notions decisive for the struggles of the next few years.

A good manifesto, for example, ought not to talk to the revolutionary movement in the fashion of that frantic optimism which some feel obliged to adopt whenever they talk about revolution, insisting principally on the radical aspects, even inventing them for the occasion, and on the ineluctability of the final issue. This doctrinaire point of view only betrays the doubts of those who adopt it.

The manifesto will have to consider the *real* revolutionary movement; that is to say certainly the admirable element of what has already been accomplished, which justifies the very notion of a *revolutionary movement*, but solely in the sense that what has already been done is going to be superceded. It will also consider all the regrettable defects which compromise revolutionary development, its complicity with existing conditions. The correct analysis of a single step of the real movement is worth more than a hundred discourses on the timeless certainties of the final issue. The epoch when the mere arrogant declaration of those certainties had its efficacy is now over.

The manifesto will take *precise and trenchant* positions on the reality and the becoming of the revolutionary movement. It will have to locate and *name* this proletarian movement's really situationist tendencies, those which can in now way be considered such, and those which may become so and under what conditions. It will avoid that habit of contemporary revolutionary prose which sees an unadulterated confirmation of its theses in more or less everything that's happening. It will be necessary to *clarify* what has already been done and the

**I.S.C. Note: The film will be arriving in England within the next year.**

present activity of consequential revolutionaries, in showing what the revolutionary proletariat is *necessarily* going to be led to do in the next few years. That is to say what questions struggles are necessarily going to depend upon, what forms they are necessarily going to take, before what *precise alternatives* the revolutionaries on one side and the dominant society on the other are going to be placed. Revolutionary theory can no longer content itself with presenting the final stage as the foreseeable negative of what exists; it is now necessary for it to conceive, in an ever-more *practical* manner, all the eventualities of the intermediary periods and to advance diverse debated hypotheses on these periods.

We ought to put ourselves in a position to announce with certainty some foreseeable developments, to exclude others; to show what function catastrophism fills for power and for the contesters. Which are the catastrophes that one can reasonably show to be avoidable, which on the other hand are those that won't be avoided. We ought to foresee the principal socio-historic developments coming from all the aspects of the present breakdown of social functioning, that is to say to foresee the immediate context in which the proletariat is going to have to develop its struggles.

The project of a manifesto responds more to the necessity of presenting a series of simple positions on problems hitherto left in abeyance than to that of a more rational and striking presentation of points acquired from already existing theory. It will be a sort of guidebook for the revolutionary adventure of the next twenty years. Not an idyllic travel agency prospectus but a practical document mentioning the dangers and obstacles which have already begun to manifest themselves, and the *scientifically evaluated and situated* chances of success.

What will differentiate us from the pseudo-revolutionaries who today monopolize attention, in the manifesto and in the activity that we are going to continue to develop, is that we are going to talk about revolution as a *concrete and global* enterprise for the last quarter of this century and that we are going to say precisely under what conditions it can succeed as *total revolution*. From the conditions in which we conduct our activity, and because this activity is not directed by anyone, no one can say who will be the authors of the situationist manifesto or manifestos. One thing, however, is sure: our epoch really needs theoretical works, and it itself is going to create the forces necessary for the satisfaction of that need.

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