

Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of
Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency

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REVOLUTION AND COUNTERREVOLUTION IN MODERN CULTURE

First, we believe that the world must be changed. We desire the most liberatory possible change of the society and the life in which we find ourselves confined. We know that such change is possible by means of pertinent actions.

Our concern is precisely the use of certain means of action, along with the discovery of new ones that may more easily be recognized in the sphere of culture and manners but that will be implemented with a view to interaction with global revolutionary change.

In a given society, what is termed culture is the reflection, but also the foreshadowing, of possibilities for life's planning. Our era is at heart characterized by the great distance at which revolutionary political action lags behind the development of the modern potentialities of production, which demands a superior organization of the world.

We are living through a fundamental historical crisis, in which the problem of the rational control of new productive forces, as well as the formulation of a civilization on a global scale, are each year expressed more clearly. Yet the action of the international workers' movement, on which depends the initial defeat of the exploitative economic infrastructure, has only achieved scattered

half-successes. Capitalism is devising new forms of struggle (state intervention in the market, growth in the distribution sector, fascist governments); it is relying on the deterioration in workers' leadership; it is masking the nature of class oppositions by means of various reformist tactics. In this way, it has up to the present been able to preserve familiar social relations in the great majority of highly industrialized countries, thus depriving a socialist society of its essential material foundation. On the other hand, underdeveloped or colonized countries, which have been engaged en masse over the past decade in a more comprehensive battle against imperialism, are about to achieve a very important victory. Their successes are worsening the contradictions of the capitalist economy and, primarily in the case of the Chinese revolution, are furthering a revival of the entire revolutionary movement. This revival cannot be content with reforms in the capitalist or anticapitalist countries, but, on the contrary, must everywhere amplify conflicts that lead to the questioning of power.

The disintegration of modern culture is the result, on the level of ideological struggle, of the confused paroxysm of these conflicts. The new desires in the course of delineation are conceived in an awkward position: while the era's resources permit their realization, the obsolete economic structure is incapable of exploiting those resources. At the same time, the ruling class's ideology has lost all consistency thanks to the bankrupting of its successive conceptions of the world, a situation that inclines it to historical uncertainty; thanks as well to the coexistence of reactionary thoughts that have developed over time and that are, in principle, opposed to one another, like Christianity and social democracy; likewise, thanks to the fusion of contributions from several civilizations that are foreign to the contemporary West and whose value has only recently been recognized. The main goal of the ideology of the ruling class is thus to sow confusion.

In culture—and in using this word we are continually leaving aside its scientific or pedagogical aspects, even if ideological confusion makes them felt at the level of grand scientific theories or broad notions of education; culture for us refers rather to a compound of aesthetics, feelings, and manners, that is, to a period's reaction to everyday life—confusionist counterrevolutionary processes consist of, simultaneously, the partial annexation of new values and a deliberately

anticultural production utilizing the means of large-scale industry (novels, cinema), the natural result of the mindlessness of youth trapped in schools and families. The ruling ideology arranges the trivialization of subversive discoveries, and widely circulates them after sterilization. It even succeeds in making use of subversive individuals: when dead, by doctoring their works; when alive, thanks to the general ideological confusion, by drugging them with one of the blind mystical beliefs in which it deals.

It so happens that one of the contradictions of the bourgeoisie in its stage of elimination is its respect for intellectual and artistic creation in principle, while at first opposing its creations and then making use of them. It needs to preserve the sense of critique and research among a minority, but only with the condition that this activity be directed toward strictly separated utilitarian disciplines, dismissing all comprehensive critique and research. In the cultural sphere, the bourgeoisie strives to divert the taste for the new, which has become dangerous for it, toward certain debased forms of novelty that are harmless and muddled. Through the commercial mechanisms that control cultural activity, avant-garde tendencies are cut off from the constituencies that might support them, constituencies that are already limited by the entirety of social conditions. People from these tendencies who have been noticed are generally admitted on an individual basis, at the price of a vital repudiation; the fundamental point of debate is always the renunciation of comprehensive demands and the acceptance of a fragmented work, open to multiple readings. This is what makes the very term *avant-garde*, which when all is said and done is wielded by the bourgeoisie, somewhat suspicious and ridiculous.

The very notion of a collective avant-garde, with the militant aspect that it entails, is a recent product of historical conditions that are leading simultaneously to the need for a consistent revolutionary cultural program, and to the need to struggle against the forces that are preventing the development of this program. Such groups are led to transpose a few of the organizational methods created by revolutionary politics into their sphere of activity, and in the future their actions will no longer be able to be conceived without a link to political critique. In this respect, there is a noticeable advance from futurism, dadaism, and

surrealism to the movements formed after 1945. All the same, however, one discovers at each stage the same universal will for change, and the same quick break-up when the incapacity to change the real world profoundly enough leads to a defensive withdrawal into the very doctrinal positions whose inadequacy had just been revealed.

Futurism, whose influence was propagated from Italy in the period preceding the First World War, adopted a disruptive attitude toward literature and the arts, an attitude that did not fail to provide a large number of formal novelties but that was founded only on an exceedingly oversimplified use of the idea of technological progress. The childishness of the futurists' technological optimism evaporated along with the period of bourgeois euphoria that sustained it. Italian futurism plummeted from nationalism to fascism without ever achieving a more complete theoretical vision of its time.

Dadaism, contrived in Zurich and New York by refugees and deserters of the First World War, wished to be the refusal of all the values of bourgeois society, whose bankruptcy had just become so glaringly evident. Its drastic expressions in postwar France and Germany focused mainly on the destruction of art and writing and, to a lesser extent, on certain forms of behavior (intentionally idiotic shows, speeches, walks). Its historical role was to have dealt a mortal blow to the traditional conception of culture. The almost immediate breakup of dadaism was necessitated by its wholly negative definition. However, it is certain that the dadaist spirit has determined a part of all the movements succeeding it; and that an aspect of negation, historically associated with dadaism, must end up in every subsequent constructive position as long as those positions manage to resist being swept up by the force of social conditions that would impose the mere repetition of crumbling superstructures, whose intellectual verdict has long since been declared.

The creators of surrealism, who had participated in the dada movement in France, did their best to define the grounds for a constructive action starting from dada's emphasis on moral revolt and the extreme erosion of traditional means of communication. Arising from a poetic application of Freudian psychology, surrealism extended the methods it had discovered to painting, to film, and to some

aspects of everyday life—and then, in a diffuse form, it extended them much further. Indeed, for an enterprise of this nature, it is not a question of being absolutely or relatively right, but of succeeding in catalyzing for a certain time the desires of an era. Surrealism's period of progress, marked by the liquidation of idealism and a momentary rallying to dialectical materialism, ceased soon after 1930, but its decay only became manifest at the end of the Second World War. Since that time, surrealism had spread to a rather large number of countries. It had, moreover, inaugurated a discipline whose severity must not be overestimated, moderated as it often was by commercial considerations, but which nevertheless remained an effective means of struggle against the confusionist mechanisms of the bourgeoisie.

The surrealist program, asserting the sovereignty of desire and surprise, offering a new practice of life, is much richer in constructive possibilities than is generally thought. Certainly, the lack of material means of realization seriously limited the scope of surrealism. But the spiritualistic outcome of its first agitators, and above all the mediocrity of its epigones, oblige us to search for the negation of the development of surrealist theory in its very origin.

The error that is at the root of surrealism is the idea of the infinite wealth of the unconscious imagination. The reason for the ideological failure of surrealism was its having wagered that the unconscious was the long-sought chief power of life. It was its having consequently revised the history of ideas, and its having stopped there. We now know that the unconscious imagination is poor, that automatic writing is monotonous, and that the whole genre of the "unusual," which the changeless surrealist trend ostentatiously parades, is extremely unsurprising. Strict fidelity to this style of imagination ends by reducing itself to the very opposite of the modern conditions of the imaginary, that is, to traditional occultism. The extent to which surrealism has remained dependent upon its hypothesis regarding the unconscious can be measured in the work of theoretical investigation attempted by the second-generation surrealists: Calas and Mabile link everything to the two successive viewpoints of the surrealist experience of the unconscious—the first to psychoanalysis, the second to cosmic influences. As a matter of fact, the discovery of the role of the unconscious had been

a surprise, an innovation, and not the law of future surprises and innovations. Freud had also ended by discovering this as well when he wrote, "Everything conscious wears out. What is unconscious remains unvarying. But once it is set loose, does it not fall into ruins in its turn?"

Resisting an apparently irrational society in which the rupture between reality and still loudly proclaimed values was carried to ridiculous lengths, surrealism made use of the irrational to destroy that society's superficially logical values. The very success of surrealism played a big part in the fact that the former's ideology, in its most modern aspect, has renounced a strict hierarchy of artificial values, but makes open use, in its turn, of the irrational and of surrealist survivals at the same opportunity. The bourgeoisie must above all avert a new departure of revolutionary thought. It was conscious of the threatening nature of surrealism. It enjoys certifying, now that it has been able to disperse it into standard aesthetic commerce, that surrealism reached the furthest point of disorder. It thus cultivates a manner of nostalgia for surrealism, at the same time that it disparages all new enquiry by automatically reducing it to surrealist *déjà-vu*, i.e., to a failure that for it can no longer be questioned by anyone. Rejection of the alienation of the society of Christian morality led a few men to a respect for the fully irrational alienation of primitive societies; that's all. It is necessary to go further and rationalize the world more, the first condition for making it exciting.

DECOMPOSITION, THE ULTIMATE STAGE OF BOURGEOIS THOUGHT

Allegedly modern culture has its two chief centers in Paris and Moscow. Trends from Paris, which for the most part are not developed by the French themselves, influence Europe, America, and other advanced countries in the capitalist zone like Japan. Trends bureaucratically imposed by Moscow influence all the workers' states and, to a lesser extent, have an effect on Paris and its European zone of influence. Moscow's influence has a directly political origin, but in order to explain Paris's traditional influence, which it still maintains, we must take into account an established lead in the concentration of cultural professionals.

Bourgeois thought, lost in systematic confusion; Marxist thought, profoundly deformed in the workers' states—conservatism prevails in the East and the West, and above all in the sphere of culture and manners. It flaunts itself in Moscow by reviving the typical attitudes of the nineteenth-century petite bourgeoisie, while in Paris it disguises itself as anarchism, cynicism, or humor. Although the two dominant cultures would be fundamentally unfit to synthesize the genuine issues of our time, we might say that the experiment has been pushed further in the West, and that in this productive order Moscow's zone looks like an underdeveloped region.

In the bourgeois zone, where, by and large, an appearance of intellectual freedom has been tolerated, knowledge of the evolution of ideas or a muddled view of the numerous transformations of the environment encourage awareness of the upheaval under way, whose impulses are uncontrollable. The reigning sensibility tries to adapt while preventing new changes that are, in the final analysis, inevitably harmful to it. At the same time, the solutions put forward by reactionary trends ultimately boil down to three attitudes: a continuation of forms produced by the crisis of dadaism and surrealism (which is merely the developed cultural expression of a state of mind that spontaneously arises everywhere when past ways of life, the reasons for living accepted until then, collapse), a settling into the mental ruins, and finally the long look back.

As for tenacious forms, a diluted sort of surrealism is found everywhere. It has all the tastes of the surrealist era and none of its ideas. Its aesthetic is one of repetition. The remains of the orthodox surrealist movement at this senile-occultist stage are as incapable of having an ideological position as of thinking up anything at all: they support ever more vulgar charlatanisms and demand such support from others.

Settling into uselessness is the cultural solution that has most forcefully made itself known in the years following the Second World War. It leaves a choice between two possibilities, of which there have been abundant examples: dissembling nothingness by means of a suitable vocabulary, or its offhand affirmation.

The first option has been made famous, above all, by existentialist literature, which copies—under the shelter of a borrowed philosophy—the most

mediocre aspects of the past thirty years of cultural development; this literature sustains its interest, whose origins lie in commercial promotion, through counterfeits of Marxism or psychoanalysis, or even through groping in the dark toward recurrent political commitments and resignations. This behavior has had a large number of followers, some of whom were swaggering, others sly. The continuing swarm of abstract painting, and of the theories explaining it, is a fact of the same nature and of comparable extent.

The joyous affirmation of a perfect mental nullity characterizes the phenomenon that in recent neoliterature is called "the cynicism of young novelists of the right." It extends far beyond people of the right, novelists, or their semi-youth.

Among the trends that call for a return to the past, the doctrine of socialist realism is proving to be the boldest, given that its claims of reliance upon the findings of a revolutionary movement allow it to support an indefensible position in the sphere of cultural creation. At the conference of Soviet musicians, in 1948, Andrei Zhdanov revealed the stakes of his theoretical repression: "Did we do the right thing in preserving the treasures of classical painting and in putting to rout the liquidators of painting? Would not the survival of such 'schools' mean the liquidation of painting?" In the presence of that liquidation of painting (and of many other liquidations) the enlightened Western bourgeoisie, taking note of the collapse of all its value systems, prepared total ideological decomposition by means of desperate reaction and political opportunism. On the other hand, Zhdanov—with the characteristic taste of an upstart—recognized himself in the petit bourgeois who is against the decomposition of the last century's cultural values and makes sure that nothing is attempted other than an authoritarian restoration of those values. It is unrealistic enough to believe that transient and localized political circumstances provide the power to evade the general problems of a period, never mind if one is required once again to take up superseded problems, after having dismissed a priori all the lessons that history has drawn from those problems in their time.

The traditional propaganda of religious organizations, and especially of Catholicism, is close in form and in several aspects of content to this socialist realism. Through an unvarying propaganda, Catholicism defends an overall

ideological structure that it alone, of all the forces of the past, still possesses. However, in order to recapture the ever more numerous sectors that escape its influence, the Catholic church is attempting, parallel to its traditional propaganda, to incorporate modern cultural forms, chiefly among those that fall within the domain of torturous theoretical uselessness—so-called *informel* painting, for example.

The present outcome of this crisis of modern culture is ideological decomposition. Nothing new can be built any longer on these ruins, and the simple exercise of critical thought is becoming impossible, for any judgment comes up against others, and each makes reference to scraps of disused comprehensive systems or to personal, sentimental imperatives.

Decomposition has reached everything. We no longer see the massive use of commercial advertising to exert ever greater influence over judgments of cultural creation; this was an old process. Instead, we are reaching a point of ideological absence in which only the advertising acts, to the exclusion of all previous critical judgments—but not without dragging along a conditioned reflex of such judgment. The complex play of sales techniques is reduced to the automatic creation of pseudosubjects for cultural discussion, much to the surprise of the professionals. This is the sociological importance of the Sagan-Drouet phenomenon, an experience witnessed these last three years in France whose effect, prompting interest in the workers' states, has even surpassed the limits of the cultural zone centered on Paris. The professional judges of culture, in the presence of the Sagan-Drouet phenomenon, sense the unforeseeable result of mechanisms that elude them, and they generally explain it in terms of the methods of circus advertisement. But, owing to their occupation, they find themselves forced to contend, through critiques in name only, with the subject of these works in name only (a work whose significance is inexplicable constitutes, moreover, the richest subject for bourgeois confusionist criticism). They inevitably remain unaware of the fact that the intellectual mechanisms of criticism have eluded them long before external mechanisms came to exploit this vacuum. They refrain from recognizing in Sagan-Drouet the absurd reverse of the transformation of means of expression into means of action upon everyday life. This process of supersession

has made the author's life more and more important in relation to his work. Then, the period of significant expressions having reached its ultimate reduction, the only remaining possibility of importance is the personage of the author who, rightly, could no longer have anything noteworthy other than his age, a fashionable vice, or an old, picturesque occupation.

The opposition that must now be united against ideological decomposition should not, furthermore, endeavor to critique the antics produced among doomed forms like poetry or the novel. Only activities important for the future, those that we need to use, must be critiqued. A most serious sign of today's ideological decomposition is functionalist architectural theory's basis in the most reactionary notions of society and ethics, i.e., that an excessively retrograde notion of life and its scope is smuggled into the imperfect yet temporarily beneficial contributions of the first Bauhaus or the school of Le Corbusier.

However, everything since 1956 indicates that we are entering into a new phase of struggle, and that an eruption of revolutionary forces, which on all fronts will come up against the most appalling obstacles, is beginning to change the conditions of the previous period. At the same time we can see socialist realism beginning to lose ground in the countries of the anticapitalist camp, along with the Stalinist reaction that had produced it; the culture of Sagan-Drouet most likely marking an impassable stage of bourgeois decadence; and finally a relative awareness, in the West, of the exhaustion of cultural expedients that have been of service since the end of the Second World War. The avant-garde minority can recover its positive import.

THE FUNCTION OF MINORITY TRENDS IN THE PERIOD OF REFLUX

The ebbing of the worldwide revolutionary movement, which became obvious a few years after 1920 and became ever more marked until the approach of 1950, was followed within five or six years by an ebbing of the movements that had tried to advance a liberatory new attitude in culture and everyday life. The ideological and material significance of such movements decreased continuously until they reached a point of complete social isolation. Their actions, which

under more favorable conditions might have brought about an abrupt renewal of the affective climate, weakened until conservative trends managed to forbid them any direct access to the rigged game of official culture. These movements, dismissed from their role in the production of new values, would henceforth form a reserve army of intellectual labor from which the bourgeoisie could draw individuals who might add novel touches to its propaganda.

At this stage of decay, the experimental avant-garde's social significance is apparently inferior to that of pseudomodernist trends that in no way take the trouble to display a desire for change, but that represent—through drastic measures—the accepted face of modern culture. However, all those who have a place in the true production of modern culture and who discover their interests as producers of this culture (all the more keenly so as they are reduced to a negative position) are developing a consciousness based in these facts that is inevitably lacking among the modernist shams of a washed-up society. The poverty of recognized culture and its monopoly over the means of cultural production lead to a proportional poverty of the avant-garde's theory and expressions. But it is only within this avant-garde that a new revolutionary conception of culture is imperceptibly being formed. This new conception must assert itself at the moment when the ruling culture and the outlines of an oppositional culture reach the furthest point of their separation and their mutual powerlessness.

The history of modern culture during the ebb tide of revolution is thus the history of the theoretical and practical reduction of the movement for renewal, a history that reaches as far as the segregation of minority trends, and as far as the undivided domination of decomposition.

Between 1930 and the Second World War, we witnessed the continual decline of surrealism as a revolutionary force, at the same time as its influence extended far beyond its control. The postwar period brought about the quick liquidation of surrealism by the two elements that exhausted its development around 1930: first, the lack of possibilities for theoretical renewal, and the ebb of revolution, which found expression in the political and cultural reaction of the workers' movement. This second element is directly determinant, for example, in the disappearance of Romania's surrealist group. On the other hand, it was,

above all, the first of these elements that sentenced the revolutionary-surrealist movement in France and Belgium to a quick breakup. Except in Belgium, where a group issuing from surrealism continued a valid experimental position, all the surrealist tendencies scattered around the world have rejoined the side of mystical idealism.

Assembling a part of the revolutionary-surrealism movement, an "International of Experimental Artists"—which published the journal *Cobra* (Copenhagen-Brussels-Amsterdam)—was set up between 1949 and 1951 in Denmark, Holland, and Belgium, and then extended to Germany. The merit of these groups was to have understood that such an organization is required by the complexity and extent of current problems. But the lack of ideological rigor, the limitation of their investigations chiefly to the plastic arts, and, above all, the absence of a general theory of the conditions and perspectives of their experiment provoked their breakup.

In France, lettrism had started from a complete opposition to all known aesthetic movements, whose continual decay it precisely analyzed. Intending the uninterrupted creation of new forms in all spheres, the lettrist group maintained a salutary agitation between 1946 and 1952. But, having generally accepted the idealist fallacy that aesthetic disciplines should take a new departure within a general framework similar to the former one, its productions were restricted to a few laughable experiments. In 1952 the lettrist left wing organized itself into a "Lettrist International" and expelled the backward group. In the Lettrist International, the search for new processes of intervention in everyday life was pursued, amid sharp struggles among different tendencies.

In Italy, with the exception of the antifunctionalist experimental group that in 1955 formed the soundest section of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, the attempts at forming avant-gardes linked with old artistic viewpoints have not even succeeded in a theoretical expression.

In the meantime, the follow-the-leader attitude of Western culture has held sway from the United States to Japan, with all its triviality and popularizations (the avant-garde of the United States, which is in the habit of gathering in Paris's American colony, is there isolated from the ideological, social, and even

topographical standpoints in the dullest conformism). The productions of peoples who are subject to cultural colonialism—often brought about by political oppression—play a reactionary role in advanced cultural centers, even if they are progressive in their country. Indeed, critics who have tied their entire careers to out-of-date references to the old systems of creation affect to find novelties after their own hearts in Greek cinema or the Guatemalan novel. Thus do they appeal to an exoticism that happens to be anti-exotic, since it is a question of the late reappearance in other nations of formerly employed approaches, but which certainly has the chief function of exoticism: the flight away from real conditions of life and creation.

In the worker's states, only the experiment led by Brecht in Berlin, in its questioning of the classical idea of theater, is close to the constructions that matter for us today. Only Brecht has succeeded in holding out against the stupidity of the reigning socialist realism.

Now that socialist realism is falling to pieces, we can expect everything from the revolutionary irruption of the intellectuals of the workers' states into the true problems of modern culture. If Zhdanovism has been the purest expression not merely of the cultural deterioration of the labor movement but also of the conservative cultural position of the bourgeois world, then those who are rising up against Zhdanovism at this moment in the East cannot be doing so, whatever their subjective intentions, in the name of a greater cultural freedom that is nothing more than that of, for example, Cocteau. It must truthfully be seen that the objective meaning of the negation of Zhdanovism lies in the negation of the Zhdanovist negation of "liquidation." The only possible supersession of Zhdanovism will be the practice of a genuine freedom, which is consciousness of present necessity.

Here, similarly, the years that have just passed have merely been, at the very most, a period of confused resistance to the confused reign of retrograde foolishness. We did not partake in this confusion. However, we must not linger over the tastes or the little discoveries of that era. The problems of cultural creation can no longer be resolved other than in relation to new progress in worldwide revolution.

PLATFORM OF A PROVISIONAL OPPOSITION

A revolutionary action within culture cannot have as its aim to be the expression or analysis of life, but its expansion. Misery must be pushed back everywhere. Revolution does not only lie in the question of knowing what level of production heavy industry is attaining and who will be its master. Along with the exploitation of man, the passions, compensations, and habits that were its products must also wither away. Now, we must define desires appropriate to today's potentialities. Even at the height of struggle between present-day society and the forces that will destroy it, we must already find the initial components of a higher construction of the environment and of new conditions of behavior—the latter through experimentation and propaganda. All the rest belongs to the past and is its servant.

We must undertake an organized collective labor that will strive for a common usage of all the means of transforming everyday life. That is to say, we must first recognize the interdependence of those means from the viewpoint of a greater domination of nature, a greater freedom. We must build new settings that will be both the product and the instrument of new behaviors. To do this, at the outset, requires that we empirically use everyday approaches and cultural forms that presently exist, while questioning their value. The very criterion of novelty, of formal invention, has lost its meaning within the traditional limits of an art, i.e., within the limits of an inadequate, fragmentary medium whose partial renewals are already outdated, and hence unworkable.

We must not reject modern culture, but seize it in order to repudiate it. An intellectual cannot be revolutionary if he does not acknowledge the cultural revolution before us. A creative intellectual cannot be revolutionary simply by supporting the politics of a given party, even if he does so by original means, but must rather work, outside of parties, for the necessary change of all cultural superstructures. Similarly, the quality of a bourgeois intellectual is ultimately determined not by his social origin, nor by his cultural knowledge (the common starting point of criticism and of creation), but by his role in the production of historically bourgeois forms. Authors with revolutionary political opinions,

when congratulated by bourgeois literary criticism, need to search for what mistakes they have made.

The union of several experimental trends into a revolutionary front within culture, begun at the conference held at Alba, Italy, at the close of 1956, assumes that we will not neglect three factors.

First of all, we require a complete agreement of persons and groups participating in this united action, and such an agreement must not be facilitated by allowing participants to close their eyes to certain consequences. We must distance ourselves from practical jokers or careerists whose lack of conviction leads them to wish to succeed by such a route.

Next, we need to remember that if every truly experimental attitude is useful, nevertheless the excessive use of this word has very often served as justification for an artistic act within a current structure, i.e., one discovered previously by others. The only valid experimental approach is one based on the uncompromising critique of existing conditions and their conscious supersession. Once and for all, it must be stated that we will not dignify with the term creation what is merely personal expression within the limits of means set up by others. Creation is not the arrangement of objects and forms, but the invention of new laws for such an arrangement.

Finally, we must eliminate sectarianism among ourselves, for it will stand in the way of acting toward defined ends in unity with potential allies, and it will prevent the infiltration of similar organizations. Between 1952 and 1955, the Lettrist International, after some necessary purges, moved continually toward a kind of uncompromising discipline that led to an equally uncompromising isolation and ineffectiveness, and that in the end favored a certain opposition to change, a decay of the spirit of critique and discovery. We must supersede such sectarian behavior once and for all in favor of genuine actions. On this lone criterion we must join or abandon our comrades. Of course, this does not mean that we have to renounce expulsions, as everyone invites us to do. On the contrary, we believe that we must go even further in banishing certain habits and people.

We must collectively define our program and carry it out in a disciplined manner, through all means—even artistic ones.

TOWARD A SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL

Our central purpose is the construction of situations, that is, the concrete construction of temporary settings of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate nature. We must develop an intervention directed by the complicated factors of two great components in perpetual interaction: the material setting of life and the behaviors that it incites and that overturn it.

Our prospects for action on the environment lead, in their latest development, to the idea of a unitary urbanism. Unitary urbanism first becomes clear in the use of the whole of arts and techniques as means cooperating in an integral composition of the environment. This whole must be considered infinitely more extensive than the old influence of architecture on the traditional arts, or the current occasional application to anarchic urbanism of specialized techniques or of scientific investigations such as ecology. Unitary urbanism must control, for example, the acoustic environment as well as the distribution of different varieties of drink or food. It must take up the creation of new forms and the *détournement* of known forms of architecture and urbanism—as well as the *détournement* of the old poetry and cinema. Integral art, about which so much has been said, can only materialize at the level of urbanism. But it can no longer correspond with any traditional definitions of the aesthetic. In each of its experimental cities, unitary urbanism will work through a certain number of force fields, which we can temporarily designate by the standard expression *district*. Each district will be able to lead to a precise harmony, broken off from neighboring harmonies; or rather will be able to play on a maximum breaking up of internal harmony.

Secondly, unitary urbanism is dynamic, i.e., in close touch with styles of behavior. The most reduced element of unitary urbanism is not the house but the architectural complex, which is the union of all the factors conditioning an environment, or a sequence of environments colliding at the scale of the constructed situation. Spatial development must take the affective realities that the experimental city will determine into account. One of our comrades has promoted a theory of states-of-mind districts, according to which each quarter of a city would tend to induce a single emotion, to which the subject will consciously

expose herself or himself. It seems that such a project draws timely conclusions from an increasing depreciation of accidental primary emotions, and that its realization could contribute to accelerating this change. Comrades who call for a new architecture, a free architecture, must understand that this new architecture will not play at first on free, poetic lines and forms—in the sense that today’s “lyrical abstract” painting uses these words—but rather on the atmospheric effects of rooms, corridors, streets, atmospheres linked to the behaviors they contain. Architecture must advance by taking as its subject emotionally moving situations, more than emotionally moving forms, as the material it works with. And the experiments drawn from this subject will lead to unknown forms. Psychogeographical research, “study of the exact laws and precise effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, acting directly on the affective deportment of individuals,” thus takes on its double meaning of active observation of today’s urban areas and the establishment of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city. Psychogeography’s progress depends to a great extent on the statistical extension of its methods of observation, but principally on experimentation through concrete interventions in urbanism. Until this stage, the objective truth of even the first psychogeographical data cannot be ensured. But even if these data should turn out to be false, they would certainly be false solutions to a genuine problem.

Our action on deportment, in connection with other desirable aspects of a revolution in customs, can be defined summarily as the invention of a new species of games. The most general aim must be to broaden the nonmediocre portion of life, to reduce its empty moments as much as possible. It may thus be spoken of as an enterprise of human life’s quantitative increase, more serious than the biological processes currently being studied. Even there, it implies a qualitative increase whose developments are unforeseeable. The situationist game stands out from the standard conception of the game by the radical negation of the ludic features of competition and of its separation from the stream of life. In contrast, the situationist game does not appear distinct from a moral choice, deciding what ensures the future reign of freedom and play. This is obviously linked to the certainty of the continual and rapid increase of leisure, at a level corresponding

to that of our era’s productive forces. It is equally linked to the recognition of the fact that a battle over leisure is taking place before our eyes whose importance in the class struggle has not been sufficiently analyzed. To this day, the ruling class is succeeding in making use of the leisure that the revolutionary proletariat extracted from it by developing a vast industrial sector of leisure that is an unrivaled instrument for bestializing the proletariat through by-products of mystifying ideology and bourgeois tastes. One of the reasons for the American working class’s incapacity to become politicized should likely be sought amidst this abundance of televised baseness. By obtaining through collective pressure a slight rise in the price of its labor above the minimum necessary for the production of that labor, the proletariat not only enlarges its power of struggle but also widens the terrain of the struggle. New forms of this struggle then occur parallel with directly economic and political conflicts. Revolutionary propaganda can be said until now to have been constantly dominated in these forms of struggle in all countries where advanced industrial development has introduced them. That the necessary transformation of the base could be delayed by errors and weaknesses at the level of superstructures has unfortunately been proven by some of the twentieth century’s experiences. New forces must be hurled into the battle over leisure, and we will take up our position there.

A first attempt at a new manner of deportment has already been achieved with what we have designated the *dérive*, which is the practice of a passionate uprooting through the hurried change of environments, as well as a means of studying psychogeography and situationist psychology. But the application of this will to ludic creation must be extended to all known forms of human relationships, and must, for example, influence the historical evolution of emotions like friendship and love. Everything leads to the belief that the main insight of our research lies in the hypothesis of constructions of situations.

A man’s life is a sequence of chance situations, and if none of them is exactly similar to another, at the least these situations are, in their immense majority, so undifferentiated and so dull that they perfectly present the impression of similitude. The corollary of this state of affairs is that the singular, enchanting situations experienced in life strictly restrain and limit this life. We must try to con-

struct situations, i.e., collective environments, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of a moment. If we take the simple example of a gathering of a group of individuals for a given time, and taking into account acquaintances and material means at our disposal, we must study which arrangement of the site, which selection of participants, and which incitement of events suit the desired environment. Surely the powers of a situation will broaden considerably in time and in space with the realizations of unitary urbanism or the education of a situationist generation. The construction of situations begins on the other side of the modern collapse of the idea of the theater. It is easy to see to what extent the very principle of the theater—nonintervention—is attached to the alienation of the old world. Inversely, we see how the most valid of revolutionary cultural explorations have sought to break the spectator's psychological identification with the hero, so as to incite this spectator into activity by provoking his capacities to revolutionize his own life. The situation is thus made to be lived by its constructors. The role of the "public," if not passive at least a walk-on, must ever diminish, while the share of those who cannot be called actors but, in a new meaning of the term, "livers,"¹ will increase.

Let us say that we have to multiply poetic objects and subjects (unfortunately so rare at present that the most trifling of them assumes an exaggerated emotional importance) and that we have to organize games of these poetic subjects among these poetic objects. There is our entire program, which is essentially ephemeral. Our situations will be without a future; they will be places where people are constantly coming and going. The unchanging nature of art, or of anything else, does not enter into our considerations, which are in earnest. The idea of eternity is the basest one a man could conceive of regarding his acts.

Situationist techniques have yet to be invented, but we know that a task presents itself only where the material conditions necessary for its realization already exist, or are at least in the process of formation. We must begin with a small-scale, experimental phase. Undoubtedly we must draw up blueprints for situations, like scripts, despite their unavoidable inadequacy at the beginning. Therefore, we will have to introduce a system of notation whose accuracy will increase as experiments in construction teach us more. We will have to find or

confirm laws, like those that make situationist emotion dependent upon an extreme concentration or an extreme dispersion of acts (classical tragedy providing an approximate image of the first case, and the *dérive* of the second). Besides the direct means that will be used toward precise ends, the construction of situations will require, in its affirmative phase, a new implementation of reproductive technologies. We could imagine, for example, live televisual projections of some aspects of one situation into another, bringing about modifications and interferences. But, more simply, cinematic "news"-reels might finally deserve their name if we establish a new documentary school dedicated to fixing the most meaningful moments of a situation for our archives, before the development of these elements has led to a different situation. The systematic construction of situations having to generate previously nonexistent feelings, the cinema will discover its greatest pedagogical role in the diffusion of these new passions.

Situationist theory resolutely asserts a noncontinuous conception of life. The idea of consistency must be transferred from the perspective of the whole of a life—where it is a reactionary mystification founded on the belief in an immortal soul and, in the last analysis, on the division of labor—to the viewpoint of moments isolated from life, and of the construction of each moment by a unitary use of situationist means. In a classless society, it might be said, there will be no more painters, only situationists who, among other things, make paintings.

Life's chief emotional drama, after the never-ending conflict between desire and reality hostile to that desire, certainly appears to be the sensation of time's passage. The situationist attitude consists in counting on time's swift passing, unlike aesthetic processes which aim at the fixing of emotion. The situationist challenge to the passage of emotions and of time will be its wager on always gaining ground on change, on always going further in play and in the multiplication of moving periods. Obviously, it is not easy for us at this time to make such a wager; however, even were we to lose it a thousand times, there is no other progressive attitude to adopt.

The situationist minority was first formed as a trend within the lettrist left wing, then within the Lettrist International, which it eventually controlled. The same objective impulse is leading several contemporary avant-garde groups to

similar conclusions. Together we must discard all the relics of the recent past. We deem that today an agreement on a unified action among the revolutionary cultural avant-garde must implement such a program. We do not have formulas nor final results in mind. We are merely proposing an experimental research that will collectively lead in a few directions that we are in the process of defining, and in others that have yet to be defined. The very difficulty of arriving at the first situationist achievements is proof of the newness of the realm we are entering. What alters the way we see the streets is more important than what alters the way we see painting. Our working hypotheses will be reconsidered at each future upheaval, wherever it may come from.

We will be told, chiefly by revolutionary intellectuals and artists who for reasons of taste put up with a certain powerlessness, that this "situationism" is quite disagreeable, that we have made nothing of beauty, that we would be better off speaking of Gide, and that no one sees any clear reason to be interested in us. People will shy away by reproaching us for repeating a number of viewpoints that have already caused too much scandal, and that express the simple desire to be noticed. They will become indignant about the conduct we have believed necessary to adopt on a few occasions in order to keep or to recover our distances. We reply: it is not a question of knowing whether this interests you, but rather of whether you yourself could become interesting under new conditions of cultural creation. Revolutionary artists and intellectuals, your role is not to shout that freedom is abused when we refuse to march with the enemies of freedom. You do not have to imitate bourgeois aesthetes who try to bring everything back to what has already been done, because the already-done does not make them uncomfortable. You know that creation is never pure. Your role is to search for what will give rise to the international avant-garde, to join in the constructive critique of its program, and to call for its support.

OUR IMMEDIATE TASKS

We must support, alongside the workers' parties or extremist tendencies existing within these parties, the necessity of considering a consistent ideological action

for fighting, on the level of the passions, the influence of the propaganda methods of late capitalism: to concretely contrast, at every opportunity, other desirable ways of life with the reflections of the capitalist way of life; to destroy, by all hyperpolitical means, the bourgeois idea of happiness. At the same time, taking into account the existence among the ruling social class of elements who have always cooperated, through boredom and need of novelty, in that which finally entails the disappearance of these societies, we must urge persons who hold certain of the vast resources that we lack to give us the means to carry out our experiments, through an account analogous to what might be employed in scientific research and might be quite profitable as well.

We must introduce everywhere a revolutionary alternative to the ruling culture; coordinate all the enquiries that are happening at this moment without a general perspective; orchestrate, through criticism and propaganda, the most progressive artists and intellectuals of all countries to make contact with us with a view to a joint action.

We must declare ourselves ready to resume discussion on the basis of this platform with all those who, having taken part in a prior phase of our action, are again capable of rejoining us.

We must advance the keywords of unitary urbanism, of experimental behavior, of hyperpolitical propaganda, and of the construction of environments. The passions have been interpreted enough: the point now is to discover others.

NOTES

Presented by Guy Debord to the founding conference of the Situationist International at Cosio d'Arroschia (July 1957).

1. [In French, *viveurs*, a theatrical pun. Typically, the word means "rake" or "playboy," and was thus commonly linked with the dubious morality of the theatrical world; here, Debord assigns it a new meaning that recalls its roots in *vivre*, to live. Ed.]