

Toward a Situationist International

Our central idea is the construction of situations, that is to say, the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality. We must develop a systematic intervention based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the behaviors which that environment gives rise to and which radically transform it.

Our perspectives of action on the environment ultimately lead us to the notion of unitary urbanism. Unitary urbanism is defined first of all as the use of all arts and techniques as means contributing to the composition of a unified milieu. Such an interrelated ensemble must be envisaged as incomparably more far-reaching than the old domination of architecture over the traditional arts, or than the present sporadic application to anarchic urbanism of specialized technology or of scientific investigations such as ecology. Unitary urbanism must, for example, determine the acoustic environment as well as the distribution of different varieties of food and drink. It must include both the creation of new forms and the *détournement* of previous forms of architecture, urbanism, poetry and cinema. Integral art, which has been talked about so much, can be realized only at the level of urbanism. But it can no longer correspond to any of the traditional aesthetic categories. In each of its experimental cities unitary urbanism will act by way of a certain number of force fields, which we can temporarily designate by the classic term “district.” Each district will tend toward a specific harmony distinct from neighboring harmonies; or else will play on a maximum breaking up of internal harmony.

Secondly, unitary urbanism is dynamic, in that it is directly related to styles of behavior. The most elementary unit of unitary urbanism is not the house, but the architectural complex, which combines all the factors conditioning an ambiance, or a series of clashing ambiances, on the scale of the constructed situation. Spatial development must take into account the emotional effects that the experimental city is intended to produce. One of our comrades has advanced a theory of “states-of-mind” districts, according to which each district of a city would be designed to provoke a specific basic sentiment to which people would knowingly expose themselves. It seems that such a project draws appropriate conclusions from the current tendency to depreciate randomly encountered primary sentiments, and that its realization could contribute to accelerating that depreciation. The comrades who call for a new, free architecture must understand that this new architecture will primarily be based not on free, poetic lines and forms — in the sense that today’s “lyrical abstract” painting uses those terms — but rather on the atmospheric effects of rooms, hallways, streets — atmospheres linked to the activities they contain. Architecture must advance by taking emotionally moving situations, rather than emotionally moving forms, as the material it works with. And the experiments conducted with this material will lead to new, as yet unknown forms.

Psychogeographical research, “the study of the exact laws and specific effects of geographical environments, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals,” thus takes on a double meaning: active observation of present-

day urban agglomerations and development of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city. The progress of psychogeography depends to a great extent on the statistical extension of its methods of observation, but above all on experimentation by means of concrete interventions in urbanism. Before this stage is attained we cannot be certain of the objective truth of our initial psychogeographical findings. But even if those findings should turn out to be false, they would still be false solutions to what is nevertheless a real problem.

Our action on behavior, linked with other desirable aspects of a revolution in mores, can be briefly defined as the invention of games of an essentially new type. The most general goal must be to expand the nonmediocre part of life, to reduce the empty moments of life as much as possible. One could thus speak of our enterprise as a project of quantitatively increasing human life, an enterprise more serious than the biological methods currently being investigated, and one that automatically implies a qualitative increase whose developments are unpredictable. The situationist game is distinguished from the classic notion of games by its radical negation of the element of competition and of separation from everyday life. On the other hand, it is not distinct from a moral choice, since it implies taking a stand in favor of what will bring about the future reign of freedom and play.

This perspective is obviously linked to the continual and rapid increase of leisure time resulting from the level of productive forces our era has attained. It is also linked to the recognition of the fact that a battle of leisure is taking place before our eyes, a battle whose importance in the class struggle has not been sufficiently analyzed. So far, the ruling class has succeeded in using the leisure the revolutionary proletariat wrested from it by developing a vast industrial sector of leisure activities that is an incomparable instrument for stupefying the proletariat with by-products of mystifying ideology and bourgeois tastes. The abundance of televised imbecilities is probably one of the reasons for the American working class's inability to develop any political consciousness. 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 extends its power of struggle, it also extends the terrain of the struggle. New forms of this struggle then arise alongside directly economic and political conflicts. It can be said that up till now revolutionary propaganda has been constantly overcome within these new forms of struggle in all the countries where advanced industrial development has introduced them. That the necessary changing of the infrastructure can be delayed by errors and weaknesses at the level of superstructures has unfortunately been demonstrated by several experiences of the twentieth century. It is necessary to throw new forces into the battle of leisure. We will take our position there.

A rough experimentation toward a new mode of behavior has already been made with what we have termed the *dérive*: the practice of a passional journey out of the ordinary through a rapid changing of ambiances, as well as a means of psychogeographical study and of situationist psychology. But the application of this striving for playful creativity must be extended to all known forms of human relationships, so as to influence, for example, the historical evolution of sentiments like friendship and love. Everything leads

us to believe that the essential elements of our research lie in our hypothesis of the construction of situations.

A person's life is a succession of fortuitous situations, and even if none of them is exactly the same as another the immense majority of them are so undifferentiated and so dull that they give a definite impression of sameness. As a result, the rare intensely engaging situations found in life only serve to strictly confine and limit that life. We must try to construct situations, that is to say, collective ambiances, 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, it would be desirable, while taking into account the knowledge and material means we have at our disposal, to study what organization of the place, what selection of participants and what provocation of events are suitable for producing the desired ambience. The powers of a situation will certainly expand considerably in both time and space with the realizations of unitary urbanism or the education of a situationist generation.

The construction of situations begins beyond the ruins of the modern spectacle. It is easy to see how much the very principle of the spectacle — nonintervention — is linked to the alienation of the old world. Conversely, the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity by provoking their capacities to revolutionize their own lives. The situation is thus designed to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing "public" must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, "livers," must steadily increase.

We have to multiply poetic subjects and objects — which are now unfortunately so rare that the slightest ones take on an exaggerated emotional importance — and we have to organize games for these poetic subjects to play with these poetic objects. This is our entire program, which is essentially transitory. Our situations will be ephemeral, without a future. Passageways. Our only concern is real life; we care nothing about the permanence of art or of anything else. Eternity is the grossest idea a person can conceive of in connection with his acts.

Situationist techniques have yet to be invented. But we know that a task presents itself only when the material conditions necessary to its realization already exist, or at least are in the process of formation. We have to begin with a phase of small-scale experimentation. It will probably be necessary to prepare plans or scenarios for the creation of situations, despite their inevitable inadequacy at the beginning. To this end we must develop a system of notations, which will become more precise as we learn more from the experiences of construction. We will also need to discover or verify certain laws, such as that according to which situationist emotions depend on extreme concentration or extreme dispersal of actions (classical tragedy giving a rough idea of the former, dérives of the latter). In addition to the direct means that will be used for specific ends, the positive phase of the construction of situations will require a new application of reproductive technologies. One can envisage, for example, televised images of certain

aspects of one situation being communicated live to people taking part in another situation somewhere else, thereby producing various modifications and interferences between the two. More simply, a new style of documentary film could be devoted to “current events” that really are current and eventful by preserving (in situationist archives) the most significant moments of a situation before the evolution of its elements has led to a different situation. Since the systematic construction of situations will give rise to previously unknown sentiments, film will find its greatest educational role in the dissemination of these new passions.

Situationist theory resolutely supports a noncontinuous conception of life. The notion of unity must cease to be seen as applying to the whole of one’s life (where it serves as a reactionary mystification based on the belief in an immortal soul and, in the final analysis, on the division of labor); instead, it should apply to the construction of each particular moment of life through the unitary use of situationist methods. In a classless society there will no longer be “painters,” but only situationists who, among other things, sometimes paint.

The main emotional drama of life, aside from the perpetual conflict between desire and reality hostile to desire, seems to be the sensation of the passage of time. In contrast to the aesthetic modes that strive to fix and eternalize some emotion, the situationist attitude consists in going with the flow of time. In so doing, in pushing ever further the game of creating new, emotionally provocative situations, the situationists are gambling that change will usually be for the better. In the short term the odds are obviously against that bet. But even if we have to lose it a thousand times, we see no other choice for a progressive attitude.

The situationist minority first emerged as a tendency in the Lettrist left wing, then in the Lettrist International which it ended up controlling. The same objective movement has led several recent avant-garde groups to similar conclusions. Together we must eliminate all the relics of the recent past. We now believe that an accord for a united action of the revolutionary avant-garde in culture must be carried out on the basis of such a program. We have neither guaranteed recipes nor definitive results. We only propose an experimental research to be collectively led in a few directions that we are presently defining and toward others that have yet to be defined. The very difficulty of succeeding in the first situationist projects is a proof of the newness of the domain we are penetrating. Something that changes our way of seeing the streets is more important than something that changes our way of seeing paintings. Our working hypotheses will be reexamined at each future upheaval, wherever it comes from.

Various people (particularly among the revolutionary artists and intellectuals who have resigned themselves to a certain impotence) will respond that this “situationism” seems rather disagreeable; that we have not created any beautiful works; that we would do better to talk about André Gide; and that no one will see any clear reasons to be interested in us. They will evade facing the issues we have raised by reproaching us for using scandalous tactics in order to call attention to ourselves, and will express their indignation at the procedures we have sometimes felt obliged to adopt in order to dissociate ourselves from

certain people. We answer: It's not a matter of knowing whether this interests you, but whether you yourselves are capable of doing anything interesting in the context of the new conditions of cultural creation. Your role, revolutionary artists and intellectuals, is not to complain that freedom is insulted when we refuse to march alongside the enemies of freedom. Your role is not to imitate the bourgeois aesthetes who try to restrict people to what has already been done because what has already been done doesn't bother them. You know that creation is never pure. Your role is to find out what the international avant-garde is doing, to take part in the critical development of its program, and to call for its support.