POINT-BLANK!
Point-Blank! — contributions towards a situationist revolution.

October 1972

CONTENTS:

The Show Is Over ............... Theses on the end of the Cold War p. 3

The Changing of the Guard ........ new developments in the spectacle p. 15

The Storms of Youth ............... critique of the New Left p. 30

(Wo)men and Equipment Working .... on the activity of the American proletariat p. 42

Beyond the Point of No Return .... a critical history of the Situationist International p. 53

A Consumer's Guide to Ideology ... who's who of recuperation. p.64

Of Sexual Poverty ................. sexuality as commodity p.66

Self-Management and the Spanish Revolution .................. the greatest practical experience of workers' councils p.71

The Work of Ideology .......... on workers' control and councilism p.81

The Power of the Councils ........ problems posed by self-management p.87

The Practice of Theory ............ an assessment of our past year's practice p.90

All of the above written and produced by:

Point-Blank!
P.O. Box 2233, Station A
Berkeley, Calif. 94702
"Class rule is no longer able to disguise itself in a national form; the national governments are as one against the proletariat."
—Karl Marx. *The Civil War in France.*

That banal melodrama, the Cold War, has ended its record run on the stage of history, taking only the naive by surprise. Even before the curtain has finally closed, the protagonists have regrouped their forces; enemies embrace and nations shed their masks to reveal to the world that everybody looks the same. What formerly presented itself as high tragedy now appears as farce; Nixon visits Peking, China supports the quasi-Trotskyist government of Ceylon against a Maoist-style insurrection, the “arch-renegade” Tito is awarded the Lenin prize. Old foes have become reconciled: China and Japan, North and South Korea.
Even characters that once appeared rebellious are now as respectable as the rest; Regis Debray is a public-relations man for Allende — the heroic guerrilla has become a social-democrat. While analysts Left and Right seem dazed by the sudden turn of events, it should be noted that this script had been determined *long in advance*; behind the ecumenical festivities, we recognize that experienced director, the commodity economy. Though the masters of state power toast each other with celestial platitudes in the banquet halls of the world, a more mundane force has been issuing the invitations. If the Chinese have learned to play the U.S. national anthem, it is because American businessmen have learned how to speak Chinese.

The global peace proclaimed by capitalism today is merely another victory in the perpetual *war* of the commodity — a war which has imposed itself everywhere, above and below the surface of political reality. Only a journalist would think that China and the U.S. merely intend to exchange *ambassadors*. The resolution of former political antagonisms is only the reflection of a convergence of economic interests; this similarity was always implicitly present, but the need for an expansion of advanced capitalism’s markets, coinciding with the primitive development of modern industry (lack of consumer goods, etc.) in the bureaucratic states necessitates that such an affinity be openly expressed. The Cold War was an ideological ruse whereby the competing variants of capitalism could present each other as the *absolute enemy*; in the pseudo-socialist countries this accomplished a social unification in the face of the “enemy,” which concealed the class divisions existing in these societies. In the West the specter of totalitarianism was flung in the face of the proletariat as the meaning of “communism,” effectively intimidating much of the working class. But this charade has long since served its purpose, and the prospect of economic gain has consigned it to an irrevocable past.

The decline of the spectacular pseudo-conflict between “Eastern” and “Western” forms of capitalism has come as an especially hard blow to all the leftist ideologues who had built a career out of it. The movement of history has put an end to all their feeble hopes of a “revolution from the Third World.” The “anti-imperialist” ideology, which sought to transpose the concept of “class-struggle” onto a global context where the Third World would represent the “proletariat” has proved bankrupt as the Third World “socialist” bloc disintegrates into an infinity of local nationalisms. Unlike their vicarious imitators in the West, the *real* Maoists in Peking have had sufficient intelligence to know who their
friends are and who their enemies are. The new-found friendship between the U.S. and China, which became a military reality during the India-Pakistan war, may have upset the well-laid plans of all the idiotic leftist sects, but those who have arranged the romance know what they have in common. The imperialism which lies at the heart of commodity production is not the exclusive domain of the Western powers; Russia and China have proved themselves adept at mastering this technique. Capitalism reigns everywhere.

The various local pseudo-socialisms in China, Cuba, etc. which once "opposed" capitalism have not escaped the fate of their Bolshevik forebears. These peculiar forms of state-capitalism have emerged in countries which had no indigenous bourgeois class capable of maintaining an effective social hegemony, and the bureaucracies have only taken the place of the bourgeoisie in effecting a transition from feudal to capitalist modes of production. This "revolution," which sought to export itself everywhere in the Third World, has now shown its true nature. China now demands full partnership in the capitalist community of nations; Cuba is only an impotent colony of the Soviet Union. Castroism, which once trained its guerrillas for an armed conquest of Latin America, now finds its task much easier; besides recognizing itself in Allende's Chile, it openly flirts with the military regime of Peru. Maoism, having sustained numerous defeats in Africa, Indonesia, and India, has abandoned People's War (Lin Piao) for People's Diplomacy (Chou Enlai); its latest converts to the new line include Greece and Iran. Bureaucratic power makes strange bedfellows.

"The ethical realm remains in this way permanently a world without blot or stain, a world untainted by any internal dissension. So, too, its process is an untroubled transition from one of its powers to the other, in such a way that each preserves and produces the other. We see it no doubt divided into two ultimate elements and their realization; but their opposition is rather the confirmation and substantiation of one through the other; and where they directly come in contact and affect each other as actual factors, their mediating common element straightway permeates and suffuses the one with the other."

—G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit.*
FRIENDS OF THE SHAH. "Empress Farah of Iran, who was greeted warmly by Chinese Premier Chou En-lai at Peking airport Monday, said she hopes her visit would enhance peace throughout the world as well as better relations between her country and China." San Francisco Chronicle, September 20, 1972.

"It is true that the old world belongs to the Philistine. But we must not treat him like a terror from which one flees in fear. Rather, we must face up to him bluntly. To study this master of the world is rewarding...he is master of the world only by filling it with his company, as worms fill a corpse."

—Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, 1843.

The commodity has indeed succeeded in levelling all the walls of China. But this fact is only a superficial manifestation of a global realignment of power which is presently taking place; the Peking and Moscow summits, if nothing else, have established the necessary formalities. The various partners have recognized each other for what they are, masters of state and economy who have a vested interest in maintaining this power. This recognition is only the prelude to the formation of an international counter-revolutionary alliance which has already made itself felt in Ceylon, Poland, and Bangladesh, and which will be heard from again whenever the actions of the world proletariat threaten its continued existence. However, concerted action is only possible if traditional areas of conflict have been neutralized; such a reduction in tension has begun, in the Middle East and Indochina. The Stalinist bureaucracy of North Vietnam and the hyper-national Arab states find themselves isolated even among their "socialist" comrades; like their counterparts in the Western camp (South Vietnam, Israel),
these countries have only been the pawns of an international chess-game in which the players sit in Washington, Peking, and Moscow. The deals made there will bring an end to the Vietnam War and at least continue the stalemate in the Mideast. Formerly troublesome elements such as the Palestinian guerrillas have been rendered virtually harmless within the Mideast; the Palestinian movement, which never advanced beyond a militantly primitive nationalism and hardly posed a revolutionary alternative to the institutionalized nationalism of the Arab states, has been reduced to a state of absolute impotence (reflected in terrorism) in the wake of the destruction of its forces in Jordan, 1970. The lesson of nationalism which the West taught all the other areas of the world returned to haunt it in the form of wars of “national liberation.” But as the more advanced countries move into an era of internationalism, the nationalist rites of other countries will necessarily be cut short.

The global unification of capitalism has proceeded with less pageantry elsewhere in the world. Previous formal power groupings are dissolving: NATO and the Warsaw Pact now only exist in the minds of the two major powers that created them. The European countries may well pride themselves on having met the “American challenge” and turning it into a challenge to American economic predominance. Independent power groupings are emerging in Europe and Japan which can negotiate on an equal economic basis with the U.S. While unable to agree on the exact method of exchanging their currency, the European countries have succeeded in putting their Markets truly in Common. But while the European bloc proclaims its “independence” from the U.S., it acts as proxy for it in foreign affairs. The conciliatory German, Willy Brandt, has managed to demolish the rusting Iron Curtain. Behind the Ostpolitik for which Brandt was awarded the Nobel Prize lies the Realpolitik of the commodity. The eventual demolition of the Berlin Wall will only be a physical complement to the destruction of trade barriers that is currently in progress. Brandt is not merely undertaking these policies in order to be a “statesman” — the trump card that he holds is the stability of the German Mark. The new economic order in Europe, which began with the EEC and is now being extended, allows each country to compensate for its individual economic deficiencies; nations that are heavily industrialized (like West Germany) can draw upon other countries’ excess labor in order to maintain their position and to compete with the more advanced powers. The Marshall Plan has paid off its dividend in the form of a blitzkrieg of Volkswagens and Toyotas.
The developments in the bureaucratic sphere of Eastern Europe under the hegemony of the Soviet Union have been of an entirely different nature. Economic development in the individual countries has been hindered by the permanent political crisis confronted by the ruling bureaucracies. The events of 1968 (Czechoslovakia) and 1970 (Poland) gave the bureaucrats of the Soviet bloc a bad scare. Since the Czech uprising, the U.S.S.R. has been forced to grant a certain degree of parochial "autonomy" to its satellite countries; these regimes are permitted room to experiment with their own "individual roads to socialism," within certain defined limits. The hard-line Stalinists, like Moczar in Poland and Ulbricht in East Germany, are disappearing in favor of more "flexible" technocrats. In the realm of international politics, such mavericks as Ceaucescu can be easily tolerated — the Rumanian Premier, after all, beat everybody else to the punch two years ago by inviting Nixon to pay a diplomatic visit. But the essential relationship of these countries to the U.S.S.R. must be maintained: the Czechoslovak rebellion, precisely because it took place in the most industrially advanced Eastern European country, posed a serious threat to the economic interests of the Soviet Union, and the Kremlin cannot allow a similar situation to occur again. The same considerations are at work in Poland. In 1970, the Polish bureaucrats were faced with the specter of their annihilation in Gdansk when the workers spontaneously revolted against Party rule; widespread looting occurred, and in Szczecin, the CP headquarters was destroyed. The workers answered the oppressive "socialism" of the Communist bureaucracy by maintaining their strike despite State repression and setting fire to several of the tanks that were sent in to crush the insurrection. The danger of a repetition of these events has led the ex-coal-miner Gierek to remodel the government from top to bottom.
II

"The proletariat can thus only exist world-historically, just as communism, its activity, can only have a world-historical existence. World-historical existence of individuals means, existence of individuals which is directly linked up with world history."

— Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

1

The answer to the riddle of history, which Marx discovered so long ago in the economy, now reveals itself openly. But at the same time the present masters of the economy — the bourgeoisie and its bureaucratic counterpart — wish to put an end to history by presenting the current state of affairs as the only possible order. Despite their schemes, however, history has already exploded on the scene: the historical forces of the negation of capitalism announced themselves in the May-June 1968 events in France. The revolt of May heralded the physical reappearance of the class struggle; the myth of the "immunity" of advanced capitalism to revolutionary developments was conclusively shattered. The movement of occupations that extended itself throughout the country was not confined to one sector of production alone — professionals, office workers, and high school students as well as industrial workers occupied the vital terrain of society. That such a crisis could even have occurred at all sent the ideologues scurrying for various convenient ways of explaining it away; the struggle was presented as essentially a student revolt that had gotten out of hand or a general demand for long-needed reforms in the outmoded Gaullist system. But the initial panic of the authorities was succeeded by calculations on how they could maintain themselves; the call for self-management that emerged (often unconsciously) from the occupations was adopted by many of the trade-union leaders and used as a weapon to get the workers to return to their jobs. In one sense, the May movement formed the basis of an orgy of reform whereby capitalism could perpetuate itself. Despite its recuperation, however, the real implications of this movement cannot be suppressed, and they will continue to manifest themselves in France and elsewhere. The radical history made by the proletariat has already disturbed the calm of the sleep that capitalism imposes throughout its world.

2

No sooner had the old world regained its balance than new proletarian movements emerged in the wake of May. Perhaps the most important of these arose in Italy, where workers and students took to the streets, defying both the cops and the Italian CP. What began as a
"I've been in this factory for twenty years now, and I've seen people make so many mistakes. All the time fighting for handfuls of rice, you know. And it's never done us a scrap of good. But now they are starting to understand that it's no good fighting for scraps, that the struggle now is to have *everything*. In the factory either you have everything or you have nothing. There can't be any half measures." — Italian FIAT worker, quoted in *Italy, '69—'70*. Big Flame, Clarendon Road, Wallasey, Cheshire, England.

A series of strikes for higher wages soon developed into a movement of wildcat strikes and fighting in the factories which left the trade unions behind. New forms of struggle grew out of this activity — in factories, spontaneous work stoppages which mobilized entire shop floors would occur, often resulting in managers being roughed up and machines smashed. In the Southern town of Battipaglia, the workers took over the local administration and elected a committee of delegates to run municipal affairs. But the "hot autumn" of 1969 had its initial source in the specific character of the Italian economy, which because of its concentration in the Northern industrial area has forced many workers from the underdeveloped South to seek employment in major centers such as Turin and Milan. It is these workers who are among the most militant in factory struggles. Furthermore, the government in Italy has been traditionally unstable since the end of World War II, with the constantly changing assortment of center-left and center-right coalitions producing an extremely fluid situation conducive to a variety of movements — including neo-fascism. And if the Italian workers have gone beyond the labor unions, they still remain vulnerable to the leftist groups (Potere Operaio, Lotta Continua, Il Manifesto) that prepare the
basis for a new bureaucratic structure while proclaiming their support for the most extremist actions taken by the workers: the Base Committees that appeared in many plants in 1969 were often infiltrated and taken over by these manipulators. But the mere fact that all the powers of the Italian State have been marshalled to prevent another “hot autumn” demonstrates that the struggle of the Italian proletariat has gone beyond the stage where it can be easily defused — it continues unabated despite overt police repression. When the proletariat discovers that the true source of revolution lies only in themselves and in their own autonomous action, the “issues” that initially appeared to direct their struggle are swept away: the essential demand of the proletariat transcends all particular demands.

The proletariat has also announced itself elsewhere, but in a less coherent form than in Italy. Behind the “religious” civil-war in Northern Ireland lies the class struggle which is at its origin. But here the ideologists (IRA, People’s Democracy) have been at work for a long time to ensure the maintenance of the false divisions in the Irish proletariat. The immediate issues — discrimination in job opportunities and in housing — still play a major role in determining the direction of the struggle, which has remained confined to the Catholic enclaves and has yet to extend itself to the factories and other areas of production. The twin factions of the IRA, with their archaic nationalist ideology, have attempted through such spectacular actions as bombing and terrorism to recuperate the struggle into a purely military conflict. At present, the situation in Ireland remains tenuous; the initial conquests of the proletariat have been virtually eradicated by the British troops, and the growth of reactionary Protestant militantism has strengthened the hand of the IRA by raising the possibility of sectarian war. The true depth of the class struggle in Ireland will be measured by the Irish workers’ response to the attempted subversion of their actions. But visible class conflict in Great Britain has not been confined to Ireland. In the “home” country of England, there have been several instances of factory occupations to protest Heath’s “redundancy” cutbacks; however backward their principal slogan, “the right to work,” may be, these actions are in themselves quite radical and concretely pose the question of the occupation of the means of production. The recent unofficial activity of British dock-workers demonstrates that the struggle has already begun to go beyond the unions; the workers organized the wildcat strike on a nationwide level, electing delegates to coordinate strike activity. Battles with police occurred, and when the union leaders attempted to gain control over the strike, the workers disobeyed their orders and on one occasion physically attacked the head unionist after a strike settlement meeting. Radical incidents have taken place in other countries: during the recent general strike in Quebec, workers seized several radio stations, and mines have been occupied in Australia. But in each case the trade unions have remained in control.
The struggle against capitalism is not necessarily confined to its “advanced” sector. The advance of bureaucratic state-capitalism in the Third World does not preclude the possibilities of genuinely revolutionary activity occurring in “underdeveloped” countries; it only means that no one can entertain any illusions as to the exact nature of a revolution which opposes every imperialism and ruling class. The experience, however brief, of the struggle for self-management in Algeria has already outlined the possibilities for such a revolution. The revolution in the Third World must begin where this struggle left off, guarding against the emergence of future Ben Bellas and consciously posing (both practically and theoretically) the question of workers’ councils and self-management. The radical movements that have recently occurred in the Third World have been dominated by all sorts of mystifications. The expropriations of large estates by Chilean peasants have mostly been accomplished under the leadership of the Guevarist MIR, and the spontaneous insurrection of Cordoba, Argentina, in 1969, where militias and armed occupations appeared during the fighting, was to return as a caricature in 1971 when Peronists and various guerrilla groups dominated the street actions. In order for the possibilities contained in these revolts to extend themselves, future movements in Latin America and elsewhere in the Third World must take place over the ruins of these long-discredited ideologies.
Despite the situation in Italy and elsewhere, revolutionary possibilities have not emerged everywhere. In most areas absolute tranquility reigns; the more advanced welfare states (Sweden, Netherlands) have perfected their pacification programs — here, the recuperators have realized the Bolshevik dream of remaining one step ahead of the masses. The once-promising revolts of youth and minorities have in many cases proved to be ephemeral; their demands have been easily integrated into the system. Capitalism has succeeded in rivalling the leftists in an ability to reform society. But despite this reform, capitalism has yet to find a solution to the social crisis which is latently present, even in the most advanced societies. While revolution is by no means inevitable, it is equally true that radical activity exists on a potentially international level.

The two facts which dominate history today, the end of the Cold War and the reappearance of the proletariat as a radical force, only confirm the critique of modern society presented by the Situationist International ten years ago. But this confirmation will be of purely academic interest unless the situationist critique is executed in practice, and no one can delude himself about the nature of the practical task which remains to be accomplished. It would be empty voluntarism to talk of any present "world-wide revolt" or the workers' councils of the future without delimiting precisely the specific nature of the struggles now taking place. Another May '68 will not simply "happen," any practical advance towards self-management will not occur until the critique enters as a decisive force in history. Those who talk about the "unity of theory and practice" without attempting to pursue an immediate radical practice are mere spectators of revolution. Rather than adopt a contemplative attitude, which admires at a distance past theoretical and practical achievements, the task of any revolutionary organization is to go beyond what has already been done, elaborating a theory and practice which is commensurate with contemporary conditions. The situationist revolution has yet to be made; the world is still the terrain of capitalism — the point remains to change it.

The International of capitalism has yet to be answered by an effective International of revolution. This does not mean, however, that the formation of such an International can be conceived in a purely formal sense; since objective conditions differ in each country, the application of revolutionary theory to a given practical situation cannot adhere to a mechanical "universal" pattern. Interventions in potentially radical
struggles must analyze the specific characteristics of these situations as well as place them within a global context; although they are part of the same general struggle, a wildcat strike in America and a factory occupation in Italy pose different tactical requirements. In the past few years the most radical proletarian struggles have been isolated — in order to generalize these struggles, an exchange of experiences between revolutionaries is needed. In the same way, the potential for self-management contained in each situation must be concretely brought out from the events, rather than imposed from outside. It is not enough merely to invoke a past tradition of workers’ councils (Russia 1905, Kronstadt 1921, Spain 1936, Hungary 1956) — unless the present possibilities for self-management are examined, such reliance on the past degenerates into ideology.

Self-management is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call self-management the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.
The history of modern society is a bag of tricks that the dead have played on the living. The forms and structures which are today prevalent everywhere did not simply appear by virtue of some fortuitous technological development; they have their origins in a social and historical fact — the seizure of the means of production by the revolutionary bourgeois class. The privative appropriation by this class of the labor of the proletariat was concomitant with an appropriation of society in its entirety. What initially appeared as a purely economic conquest soon extended itself to a colonization of all aspects of life and the occupation of the terrain of society as the terrain of capitalism. The bourgeoisie came to power in a physical environment that was only partially the result of its own design and ever since its social victory it has consciously striven to obliterate any trace of a past in which it did not dominate.

The project undertaken by the bourgeoisie of remodeling the world after its own image has proved to be one of unlimited duration. The development of productive forces has in fact required a constant renovation, both structural and organizational, of society. The temporary success of the bourgeoisie has been transformed into a seeming permanence only through an economically induced and sustained ephemerality. But this socially planned obsolescence cannot be confused with technological chaos; the autonomy of the bourgeois economy can only be maintained through a continual exertion of power by the dominant class. The image the bourgeoisie has imposed everywhere has been the image of class society; from the factory towns of its infancy to modern suburbia, capitalism has produced a social structure which conforms with the needs of commodity production. This structure has undergone a series of successive transformations; nonetheless, its actual basis in the economy has remained.

The living room of the commodity.

Car placed in home — G.M. ad.
An increased technical capacity (cybernetics, media) on the part of advanced capitalism to control the very conditions of existence has resulted in the society of the spectacle, where life itself becomes a show to be contemplated by an audience which is forced to be passive, the modern proletariat. The spectacle, which is both at the origin and the goal of modern society, is in a perpetual state of modification. The 'consumer society' of the sociologists is actually a society which is consumed as a whole — the ensemble of social relationships and structures is the central product of the commodity economy. Yet the theoretical concept of the spectacle, which was elaborated by the Situationist International, is in need of considerable revision. The forces described in Debord's Society of the Spectacle have come to maturity and in doing so they have prepared the foundations for a further modernization of bourgeois society. While the form of this society only confirms the insights of the S.I., it is necessary to re-elaborate the critique of the spectacle and to delineate the nature of its contemporary development.

Boredom. Descending a Staircase.

II

If the structures of bourgeois society have been determined by an economic reality, it is equally true that the development of society vis-a-vis the economy has been uneven. Today, bourgeois society is faced with a structural crisis which in many ways resembles previous economic crises. This crisis is only superficially a natural, environmental one and it is not surprising that all the 'critical' ideologists have concentrated on this latter blatantness. The decomposition which manifests itself everywhere is only incidentally ecological in nature and has resulted, not from mere technological excess, but from a contradiction between accelerated forces of capitalist production and an outmoded
social framework. The directionless expanse of urban areas characteristic of bourgeois society up until the present is a remnant of the 19th century doctrine of laissez-faire; as advanced capitalism increasingly attempts to rationalize all of its processes, its social structure is necessarily modernized. But this rationalization has by no means proceeded in a uniform, linear progression — capitalism has been forced to reconstruct itself. The urban revolts of the 1960’s and the environmental hazards resulting from the continued growth of industry provided American capitalism with a vision of its annihilation. Now, after this immediate threat has receded through the diligent efforts of its mechanisms of recuperation, capitalism wishes to turn a temporary truce into a permanent victory. This project is designed not only to defend the present system but to perpetuate its existence indefinitely.

"While on the one hand capital must thus seek to pull down every local barrier to commerce, i.e. to exchange, in order to capture the whole world as its market, on the other hand it strives to destroy space by means of time, i.e. to restrict to a minimum the time required for movement from one place to another."

— Karl Marx, Grundrisse.

On a purely physical level, capitalism has sought to resolve the crisis caused by its unlimited quantitative growth. The urban glut spawned by primitive industrial development has proved to be unmanageable and is being replaced by a more ordered structure. The advance of urbanism has not only resulted in the destruction of the traditional city but in the construction of the foundations for a controlled ‘post’ — urban society. The excesses that were the by-products of industrialism are being eliminated in favor of more ‘rational’ alternatives. The obsolete form of automotive transport is being replaced by rapid transit systems which allow for both a greater degree of unity and diversity. Space is becoming unified in a different manner than before; having consumed the city, capitalism must deploy its component parts across the terrain of society at large. Mass-transit allows larger areas to be connected together, creating a vast urban area with no fixed center and
which contains within it many mini-cities. This movement of decen-
tralization and diffusion is at the same time the construction of a
rationalized social territory. Advanced capitalism quantifies space to
the extent that it generalizes uniform, archetypal models of urban
society. In every area, one finds the same kind of design implemented in
the construction of shopping centers, schools, housing, etc. But this
rationalization of the terrain is also its aestheticization — the line of
demarcation between the spheres of culture and the economy has long
since disappeared. Office buildings and shopping centers now disguise
themselves as works of art and museums appear as supermarkets.
Like its predecessors, modern architecture is a social architecture.
With the current need for a reunification of the space of bourgeois
society, stress is being placed on the construction of planned commu-
nities. These ‘model’ communities have so far been realized on a
primitive scale; nonetheless they contain an indication of the future by
Is there any difference between the aim of the city and the aim of the Catholic (universal) Church? They are one and the same. In a very physical way, the city is the Church... —Paolo Soleri.

reproducing the axial relationships of society within a limited area. The planned towns are in most cases clusters of smaller units, each with a central area of day-care centers, schools etc. Within these areas an attempt has been made to replace isolation with a sense of community; one town even constructed a common driveway so that residents would be forced to have contact with each other. These beginnings are only rudimentary, however, when compared with designs for the future. Perhaps the most avant-garde tendency of urban design is represented by Soleri; his ‘arcologies’ would contract the present city into compact, highly dense urban areas. Industrial and residential areas would be separated and constructed in such a way that a ‘personal’ feeling of community would be retained. Soleri’s cities “in the image of man” represent only the next logical step in the perfection of the controls already inherent in the present spectacle; the cities would only be a concentration of the contemporary image of bourgeois society.
All the current changes in the spectacular organization of appearances, however, are only part of a change in the appearance of organization. The contemporary reconstruction of bourgeois society involves not only its form but its content. The reform of the environment is simultaneously a reform of power which exhibits itself on many levels. Structurally, the hierarchical matrix of power which was physically embodied in the traditional city now reproduces itself on an infinite and local level. The advanced spectacle has dispensed with a physical center of command in favor of a poly-centered system of authority. The ‘Invisible City’ dreamed of by Mumford as a ‘radical’ alternative to modern society is fast becoming a reality. As the locus of power shifts from rigidly defined structures to a multi-faceted nexus of relationships, new organizational forms are emerging which will bind the individual more closely to his social environment. The decentralization of authority is not to be confused with its destruction, it merely represents its further extension.

The basic concept of Columbia’s plan is shown in this diagram of a part of one of the villages surrounding the core city. Each neighborhood, with a ring road, has its own elementary school, day-care center and convenience store. Corridors of greenery connect neighborhoods to the village center (bottom of drawing), which has a high school, library, recreational and shopping center.

III

The alienation which is at the root of the modern spectacle became visible during the last decade. This visibility was expressed in a recognition by its inhabitants that the programmed survival of bourgeois society was no longer tolerable. The various soporifics produced by the spectacle: mass-culture, commodities, etc., proved to be inefficient in
ensuring the continued functioning of the system. The discontent which smoldered at the surface threatened to disrupt the entire fabric of capitalist society — the residents of the bourgeois necropolis had awakened from their sleep. The threat of this awakening turning into open revolt forced the guardians of class-society to develop new weapons in their arsenal of social control if they were to maintain their position. This development has taken the guise of an accelerated structural reform; everywhere capitalism modifies itself, utilizing new technical, cultural and ideological means to re-establish its authority over an unruly populace. In doing so, it has proved capable of recuperating even that which seemed to pose a radical threat to its existence.

The vital process of socialization — the mechanism of integrating individuals into society — broke down when people began to question the roles allotted them. The sterile vapidity of reified existence was all too easily seen through and large sectors of the population attempted to define themselves in opposition to spectacular life. But since this opposition expressed itself almost entirely in a cultural form, it was easily reintegrated into dominant society as just another cultural fragment. Bourgeois society was able to resist the challenge to itself by creating new roles and cultural forms within an expanded framework. While the spectacle previously sought to impose a contemplative attitude everywhere, it now endeavors to generalize an active alienation. This “active alienation, the alienation of activity and the activity of alienation”, which Marx perceived in the act of commodity production, now extends itself to all aspects of life. This extension results not only in a quantitative increase in alienation but in a qualitatively different kind of alienation.

Not content with mere spectators, the spectacle now seeks to engage the proletariat as an active participant in its reified world. The present expansion of alienation is a demand for its reciprocity, resulting in a reciprocal alienation in which the distinction between spectator and show, between signified and signifier, becomes blurred. In place of mere passive reception emerges a reified subjectivity in which the individual is able to choose among a number of possible responses — he is given the illusory freedom of a greater role in the construction of the world of his own alienation.
The advance of such an active alienation has had a direct relationship with developments within the sphere of capitalism's star commodity, culture. 'Avant-gardist' experiments in 'participatory' theatre are now being applied to mass-media as a whole. As usual, capitalism has proved to be one step ahead of its professional critics; McLuhan's voyeuristic fantasies of 'participation' via the media, for instance, are being realized on a far more complex level than the vicarious tribal rites which he imagined for the 'global village' of the commodity. The strictly unilateral communication which McLuhan celebrated gives way before a kind of bilateral monologue in which the spectator's response serves as a stimulus for further transmission. The spectacle's house futurist, Buckminster Fuller has envisioned a world which would be governed by a 'telepathic' interaction between the masses and their rulers. With the development of Cable TV, which allows for greater specialization and cultural diversification, and two-way receiver-transmitters, media has advanced beyond a simple reproduction of images for a passive audience — the entire sphere of consumption has acquired an added dimension.

Besides this advance in technics, bourgeois society has enlarged the domain of its economy. Where the marketplace dominates life it is not surprising that life-styles should become integral parts of the marketplace. Even such supposedly 'rebellious' ways of living, such as the bohemian milieu, have become packaged as commodities for cultural consumption. The spectacle now affords everyone the luxury of a reified existential self-determination; the individual can select a mode of 'life', including a particular time and milieu, from among several alternatives. The administrators of the commodity economy have even gone so far as
to inculcate a nostalgic yearning for the past; in a society where the present has been reduced to a moment of an already determined future, various atavistic life-styles (Renaissance, '20's, '50's, etc.) have flourished. The meaning of consumption has also changed; the mere possession of things (and extravagant displays of commodity indulgence) has been supplemented by a possession of experiences. The spectacle has been able to turn the contempt for "materialistic" values to its own advantage — it now offers the non-material for sale. The transition from simple accumulation to acculturation has been accompanied by an expansion of 'leisure' industries whose purpose is to ensure that all areas of time, including that not spent in work, are occupied by the spectacle. The reduction of the working-day has only resulted in increased possibilities and incentives for consumption.

IV

The present reform of bourgeois society is predicated upon an admission of the sins of its past. Behind this confession, which exhibits itself in the form of ritualized denunciations of pollution, waste, poverty, etc., lies the preparation for a continuation of class society and the ersatz nature which capitalism imposes throughout its world. While acknowledging the excesses of its previous development, capitalism in no way wishes to relinquish its control over society. Rather, it proclaims itself capable of constructing a hygienic environment of exploitation to replace the present decrepit order. The accumulation of misery, which manifests itself everywhere — both physically and socially — has brought the spectacle into a showdown with the forces of its own decomposition. But by a spectacular sleight-of-hand, bourgeois society has only to admit that it is decomposed and it gains a new lease on life. By reshuffling the deck of hierarchical power, it prepares to deal out yet another hand. If all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty-Dumpty back together again, his bourgeois descendants think they can by merely changing the guard.

With their customary stupidity, the various ideologists of 'social criticism' are playing their part in reassembling the pieces. One of the most useful auxiliaries to this process has been the "ecology movement". The favorite vision of these lifeguards is that of an independent technology which is rushing madly towards an environmental 'gotterdammerung'. This ideological charade transposes the responsibility for such a crisis upon an imagined collectivity, humanity as a whole, which supposedly exists 'independently' of any class relationships. Ignoring the realities of class society, these critics (Ehrlich, Fuller, Mumford) have little difficulty in imagining a 'transformation' of society which has nothing to do with classes. This ruse is
In the keenly competitive auto business, where advertising hyperbole often spouts like steam from a cracked radiator, the latest Datsun promotion offers a soothing change. It is a coolly understated print and broadcast campaign aimed at improving the environment and showing critics that automakers do care about ecology, as well as boosting sales. In one television commercial, Nature Photographer Ansel Adams strolls through a woodland scene, stresses the need to save the nation's forests and asks viewers to “Drive a Datsun, plant a tree.”

save the forests

convenient for those who do know something about class power; the administrators of the spectacle are able to use the spectre of environmental holocaust to achieve a greater unity — it enlists the support of a duped citizenry to aid in cleaning the environment of their alienation.

The ecological ‘revolution’ is only a call for a further quantitative modification of the technics of bourgeois society; it consciously aims for a reform of the pseudo-nature produced by capitalism. This kind of reformism reaches its most absurd (and logical) limit in the demand for a ‘pure’ consumerism. While seeking a ‘total’ change in the form of society, the environmentalists actually project the basis of bourgeois society ad infinitum. The synergistic ‘utopia’ proposed by these ideologists as a solution to the ecological crisis is merely a sterile and technologically rationalized version of the present spectacle. Those who want to gain the controls of ‘space-ship earth’ wish to replace the traditional elite with a more professional one. In their future society, which would be nothing more than a perfected technocracy, the proletariat will not have assumed control over the means of production, it will merely have a greater choice in the direction of technological development. By seeking to make the spectacle less destructive, the ecologists only want to save capitalism from itself. In their reformed spectacle exploitation will be made more ‘democratic’ and its more advanced model will be extended everywhere.
The role of intellectual accessory to capitalism has not been confined to the environmentalists, however. Even those critics who had fancied themselves to be 'radical' with their sociological analyses of the isolated 'ills' of capitalism have been caught with their ideological pants down. That which once passed itself off as a radical critique of modern society now reveals itself as a mere modernist complement to this society. The criticism of the 'wasteland' of mass-society is now expressed as a self-criticism of the ruling class — city planners and governmental bureaucrats now talk about the 'quality of life'. Since their critique never went beyond the form of bourgeois society, all the leftist ideologues could never realize that the content of this society could continue despite changes in its outward appearances. These changes have resulted, not in an Orwellian totalitarianism (the wet-dream of an impotent Left), but in an advanced welfare-state which has been able to incorporate many of the 'radical' solutions of the Left in order to perfect its functioning.

Marx’s perception that the act of commodity production is at the same time an act of social reproduction has been verified by the subsequent development of capitalism. The modern spectacle, moreover, has attempted to extend the scope of this social reproduction beyond the labor process. The proletarians "who daily remake their lives" are now required not only to reproduce the conditions of their survival but to participate in its organization — the colonization of daily life achieves near-perfection when the colonized themselves begin to create and
operate the machinery of their own oppression. The possibility that such a state of affairs could come about had been predicted by the S.I. ten years ago when it formulated a critique of the 'Cybernetic Welfare State'. But if this description is not to become a facile one it must be re-examined. Cybernation cannot be understood in the limited sense of a programmed rationalization in which men assume the characteristics of machines. While the spectacle seeks to pacify all of existence, it also attempts to create mechanisms whereby it can regenerate itself.

Having perfected the most extreme disassociation of society, capitalism now strives to maintain its coherence in the face of open social disintegration. Concomitantly, the abstract separation characteristic of recent society is being replaced by an imposed collectivity — a communal isolation. This communalization of alienation, reflected in the ‘community control’ of services, schools, local governments — even police, is an attempt to counteract potentially destructive tendencies by placing more of the responsibility for operating society with various constituencies (neighborhood and ethnic groups, minorities). Today, the archaic hierarchy of the past is being supplanted by its modernist replacement, an accumulation of mini-hierarchies. From the universities to the poverty agencies, from the factories to the office buildings, various ideologies of ‘participation’ assist in the construction of a humanist alienation which brings the individual and society closer together.

Besides creating structures which are more ‘responsive’ to the inhabitants of bourgeois society, modern capitalism has refined the psychological dimension of alienation. This refinement has not been accomplished by enlisting the doctrines of crude behaviorism (Skinner, etc.) but through the use of the most modern and ‘radical’ tendencies of psychiatry. This school (Laing, Erikson, Perls), which formulated itself in opposition to traditional Freudianism, has only perpetuated the basically repressive function of psychiatry. Through the techniques of gestalt, encounter groups etc., the adjustment of the masses to reality is carried one step further. Here, alienation is viewed as essentially an internal matter; once anxieties are released through group therapy sessions, individuals are supposedly better able to ‘cope’ with their existence. While formerly such innovations were the privilege of the intelligentsia, capitalism is making wide use of these methods in the factories and the schools in order to reduce social tensions. As workers are made to join encounter groups to vent their hostility to their bosses, the role of the psychiatric police force becomes increasingly important.

With such resources at its disposal, advanced capitalism has sought to correct many of the deficiencies inherent in its earlier forms. Having located the areas of decomposition, the social technicians of the spectacle are attempting to reverse this process and turn it into one of reconstruction. While formerly relying on overt repression to maintain itself, bourgeois society now devises a thousand more subtle methods of control. In promoting a social pacifism, capitalism attempts to conceal the social violence at its base. Like the good salesman it is, the spectacle knows how to change its image and to do so without missing a step. But
by transforming itself in such a manner, bourgeois society has left itself open to possible attack by those it seeks to pacify. The machinations of hierarchical power have been rendered even less mysterious by its decentralization. This loss of mystique puts the dominant elite’s privileged possession of society into question; when the specialists of power are forced to publicly admit that they are no longer capable of running society by themselves, there is little that physically stands in the way of the proletariat bringing the show to an end.

The present modification of capitalism is nothing else but capitalism’s modification of its world. As a fragment establishing itself as a whole, the commodity economy has requisitioned all of society for its purpose. The augmented survival proliferated by the contemporary spectacle in no way alters this fact and if bourgeois society has succeeded in regenerating itself through a conscientious policy of reform, it has not obliterated the possibility of its overthrow. The spectacle remains confronted by the permanent crisis of its possible destruction. While attempting to integrate the masses more fully into its operations, advanced capitalism can only offer them the ability to ‘choose between several varieties of alienated existence. The modernization of the system can only temporarily alleviate its tendency to create the most extreme dissatisfaction on the part of the proletariat — the vast majority of society who have no power over the conditions in which they are forced to survive. While having weathered the storms of the last decade, the spectacle has by no means had the last word. The society of the spectacle seeks continually to overcome the barriers to its continued existence, but it overcomes them only by means which again pose these barriers in its way and on a more formidable scale. The real barrier of spectacular reproduction is the spectacle itself.

---

**Suzuki conquers boredom.**

Boredom is something we live with all our lives.

It sneaks up on us in little, commonplace ways—in habit and routine.
And we only conquer it by trying new things.

Like riding a Suzuki motorcycle—out in the open, seeing the land, smelling the green trees, feeling the wind rushing past your face.

It's a great, spontaneous feeling of freedom.
VI

The greatest revolutionary idea concerning urbanism is neither urbanistic, technological, or aesthetic. It is the decision to rebuild the entire territory according to the needs of the power of the workers' councils, of the anti-state dictatorship of the proletariat, of executory dialogue.

Guy Debord. Society of the Spectacle, Thesis No. 179

The terrain of society remains that of the enemy and as such it must become the terrain of revolution. The transition from the old world to the new is not simply a change in the administration of society but in its use and this recognition is what separates revolutionaries from those who would merely rival capitalism in an ability to reform society. If the situationists have had the merit of describing modern bourgeois society in its totality, it is equally true that they have conceived of its total negation. Unlike the senile leftists of all varieties, the situationists have been concerned not with the quantitative amelioration of this society but with its qualitative supersession. From the beginning, the S.I. considered its task to be the practical realization of a revolution of everyday life. With its early experiments in 'psycho-geography' and the systematic exploration of cities, the S.I. attempted to define the possibilities for a revolutionary transformation of society. Even if these initial experiments now appear as somewhat naive, the radical character of the attempt to expose the terrain of society for its practical subversion remains. In attempting to create situations which put the whole of life into question, the S.I. revealed the fundamentally social character of the present revolutionary project.

The politics which emerged from the city (polis) has now made the entire world its city. Politics, inherently an alien objectification of man, has in turn objectified a world of alienation — bourgeois political economy has carried this process to its most extreme materialization. For the proletariat, then, which exists at the level of the most extreme alienation, the annihilation of class society is at the same time an annihilation of the political realm. Proletarian revolution is the affirmation of an unmediated practical dialogue with the world in which all the means of society are at the disposal of the proletariat. The transformation, through the labor process, of personal powers (relationships) into their alien and material objectification can only be eliminated by the action of individuals in again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing the commodity spectacle. This revolutionary project is not possible except through the collective action of the proletariat in transforming society so that it conforms, not with the dictates of the commodity economy, but with the desires of its inhabitants. The struggle for self-management is not only a struggle for the means of production but for society as a whole.

Proletarian revolution requires nothing less than the construction of a society in which the individual finds his confirmation rather than his objectified denial. In place of the imposed collectivity of the spectacle, it establishes an authentic community and "in the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association." (Marx) All the various bureaucratic pseudo-socialisms have only


TO GO BEYOND THE POINT WHERE WE CAN ONLY TALK ABOUT THE WORLD TO THE STAGE WHERE WE CAN TALK TO EACH OTHER IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW WORLD IT IS NECESSARY TO ENGAGE IN THE MOST RADICAL PRACTICE POSSIBLE — THE CRITIQUE OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY MUST BECOME A CRITIQUE EXECUTED IN ACTS. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH A PRACTICE ENTAILS AN ACTIVE INTERVENTION BY REVOLUTIONARIES IN ALL ASPECTS OF SOCIETY; UP UNTIL NOW THE CONCEPT OF INTERVENTION HAS BEEN LIMITED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY TO VARIOUS POINTS OF PRODUCTION (FACTORIES, SCHOOLS, ETC.). IN ADDITION TO THIS, IT IS NOW NECESSARY TO EXTEND THE TACTICS OF SUBVERSION TO CONFRONT THE PRESENT MODIFICATION OF THE SPECTACLE DIRECTLY. RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEMS, SHOPPING CENTERS, MUSEUMS, ETC., AS WELL AS THE VARIOUS NEW FORMS OF CULTURE AND MEDIA MUST BE CONSIDERED AS AREAS FOR SCANDALOUS ACTIVITY. IT IS THE COMMONPLACE, THE BANAL, WHICH SEEMS TO BE SECURE FROM ATTACK AND YET WHICH IS THE EASIEST TO SUBVERT. IT IS ON THE TERRAIN OF DAILY LIFE THAT THE SPECTACLE IS MOST VULNERABLE.
Nothing has preoccupied American capitalism so much in the last ten years as its youth. Faced with the apparent refusal of a younger generation to participate in its structures, capitalism has expended much effort in analyzing the sources of this revolt; sociologists, psychologists, and other ideologues have been called into service to explain the reasons for youth discontent. Initially, their forecasts were optimistic; the alienation of youth was treated as another symptom of the eternal "rebellion of the generations" which would supposedly end once youth acceded to the "responsibilities" of adulthood. As the crisis developed, however, the ideologists proclaimed the "generation gap" to be a permanent division, attributable either to a mysterious, socially manifested Oedipal conflict or as a result of "permissive upbringing" — the operatives of American society feared that no solution was possible and that a real threat had been posed. But suddenly all these grim predictions have disappeared; the bourgeoisie and their analysts have breathed a sigh of relief — they now talk of the youth vote instead of the youth revolt. This new situation has not been the result of some social coup in which capitalism has only now retrieved its errant children — the "youth revolt" has collapsed of its own dynamic.

The suddenness with which this crisis has dissipated casts suspicion on its origin; curiously, the "enemy" once singled out by capitalism, the New Left, now appears as harmless. The Yippies, who in their heyday scorned all political parties and the electoral process in general, have become campaign workers for McGovern; the Black Panthers, who once openly armed themselves against the police, field slates of anti-poverty workers and distribute bags of groceries at "survival conferences." All of these changes have not been merely tactical; the New Left is not simply regrouping its forces for a fresh assault — it is, in fact, in a state of decomposition, and a post-mortem is already underway among those ideologists who pretend to speak for what is left of the Movement. In their examinations, they have attempted to locate an exact time at which the New Left began its decline. Some have chosen the SDS convention in 1969 as a convenient date, attributing the adoption of a "Marxist-Leninist" platform there as a sign that the Movement had betrayed its initial vision; others have derided the New Left's "sexism" or the "terrorism" of certain factions as being the cause of its downfall. But the real cause of the death of the New Left will always escape these morticians.

The decline of the Movement stands in direct relation to its development; the New Left was a product of the American spectacle and as such was defined as much by capitalism as by itself. The history of the New Left bears witness to the ability of modern capitalism to package rebellion as a commodity, as a socially necessary safety valve for the rejuvenation of the system. Purely spectacular revolt has taken its place in capitalism's show; it is presented as an image to be consumed
or contemplated so that people will forget how to rebel. Despite the radical impulses which generated its appearance, the New Left remained on this spectacular terrain throughout its existence.

* 

The New Left began at a time when American capitalism seemed secure from any kind of serious challenge; through a combination of overt repression and ideological control, it had succeeded in unifying itself on a basis rarely attained in the past. But this unification was more apparent than real, and the sterile uniformity of life in bourgeois society was to engender the first stirrings of youth revolt, expressed in the bohemian "beat movement" of the Fifties. This revolt was initially confined to a cultural rejection of bourgeois values, but it eventually merged with the more profound social movement which had begun among those who were systematically excluded from participation in the system, notably the blacks. Although the early civil-rights movement was generally reformist in that it only sought to correct certain defects within bourgeois society by demanding that blacks be treated as equals, it did open up serious contradictions in the American system. It tapped a source of radical discontent not only among the so-called "outcasts" of society but among all those powerless over the use of their lives. Students joined the Southern blacks in attempting a total rejection of the roles allotted them in society; in their naive enthusiasm, the early Freedom Riders recognized the truth of many aspects of the American system, however much they may have seen themselves as a mere auxiliary of the black movement. When this nascent revolt spread to the universities, it was initially centered around the issue of civil
rights, but its implications went far beyond any particular issue: the American university had long since ceased to be the training ground of the elite — it had become a mass institution, designed to fill the needs of an expanding modern economy which required millions of educated specialists and functionaries. The call for "free speech" that issued from the revolt of Berkeley students in 1964 rapidly developed into a critique of the "multiversity's" role in maintaining society — unlike much of what followed, the FSM's analysis of student life focussed on the immediate conditions of alienation confronted daily by everyone in bourgeois society.

But while these positive tendencies could have provided a basis for a radical critique of American capitalism as a whole, the Movement in 1964 contained the seeds of the destruction of its own radicalism. Any critique of the university became lost in the ideology of student power and academic reform: this movement chose its name well — they were little more than Students for a Democratic Society. The guilt impulses that motivated many of the activists in the civil-rights movement gradually dominated and defined the later trends in the New Left. The sacrificial militantism and the spirit of renunciation present in the beginning were to form the basis of later Movement ideology. The New Left did not assume a definitive form until the mid-60's, however. The end of the civil-rights movement provoked an adolescent existential crisis within the Movement — with the rise of Black Power, the white movement was temporarily deprived of a Cause, and correspondingly, an effective base to organize. As the black movement began to develop its own recuperators, the white students, who had always regarded the struggle of the blacks as an external force, were increasingly relegated to a marginal position. When they were ousted from SNCC, the militants of the white New Left took refuge in proclaiming their support for the new black activist hierarchy. Having been leaders themselves, the white Movement maintained that the blacks deserved the manipulators who sought to impose the ideologies of "black power" and separatism upon them: Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown succeeded Martin Luther King and Bob Moses in their esteem. The New Left was at a complete loss to understand the spontaneous and radical violence of Watts, Newark, and Detroit — these revolts did not fit into the reformist schemes of Movement organizers.

The escalation of the Vietnam War resolved the crisis of the early New Left and at the same time accentuated its tendencies towards sacrifice and hierarchy. In Vietnam, the Movement found another cause to serve: organizing anti-war demonstrations succeeded the registration of black voters, and the Freedom Riders became peace marchers. Vietnam provided the New Left with an issue ("ending the war") which could easily be endorsed by large numbers of people, and it became the central focus of action and discussion, in university "teach-ins" as well as in petitions and marches. The anti-war movement was a new moral crusade in which the New Left could present itself as the "conscience of America"; its reformism was made explicit in its call for a "redress of grievances." Henceforth, the direction that the Movement was to take had been determined — everything that it accomplished was to be carried out on the system's terms.
The positive content of the New Left was rapidly lost in its subsequent development. Although it had arrived at a partial critique of some aspects of society, it was never able to extend these insights into a coherent explanation of bourgeois domination as a whole — the New Left’s opposition to capitalism was always fragmentary. Arising from a visceral response to the admitted “excesses” of American society (Vietnam, racism, pollution), the Movement consumed the image of oppression presented by capitalism. The revolt of the New Left remained a spectacular revolt precisely because it was engendered by the stimuli of the spectacle. The Movement was an authentic product of a society where critical attention is everywhere diverted from looking at oneself — it was inherently reactionary. Whatever traces of the subjective revolt against the conditions of bourgeois society became lost as the Movement developed according to the objective “demands” presented by capitalism. The New Left admitted this dependence on capitalism for its survival; its leaders boasted that “the system is our best organizer.” As a result, the New Left was only “revolutionary” in a sense defined by bourgeois society; in identifying with capitalism’s “enemies” (NLF, China, Cuba), it only sought to replace one form of domination with another. The naive “anti-imperialist” ideology put forth by the Movement was restricted to support of the Stalinist bureaucracies of the Third World. While profoundly disillusioned with American society, the Left accepted the counter-revolutionary Leninist “vanguard party” as an organizational paradigm.
Internally, the Movement developed its own hierarchy of cadre and “base,” and a manipulative practice supposedly “serving the interests of the people.” This process of Bolshevization was only one extension of earlier attempts at community organizing; in both cases, the Movement conceived of itself as the representative of various abstract constituencies on whose behalf the militants would carry out the struggle. Whenever the possibilities for organizing one set of constituents had been exhausted, the New Leftists would attempt to find another group to manipulate — whether it was voter registration, building the anti-war movement, or “going to the workers,” the basic motive was the same. If any struggle arose which threatened to go beyond partial issues, the Movement leadership, in almost every instance, would attempt to divert it into the channels of conventional “protest.” Radical acts like the seizure of land at People’s Park became lost in the issues of “police brutality”; disruptions carried on by left-wing elements (Motherfuckers, Yippies) were subsumed in the Movement as a whole — despite their pretensions to an authentic radicalism, these “leftists” were nothing more than a quasi-anarchist sideshow to the New Left in general. The spontaneous violence that accompanied many street actions was easily recuperated by the Movement; riots were viewed as an acceptable complement to the New Left’s spectacle of protest. All marches became carefully orchestrated performances, produced as much for the TV cameras as for the participants. The Movement consciously evoked a theatrical atmosphere in its panoply of slogans and banners; its leaders were aware of their role as performers and played this part in the courtroom as well as on the podium.

* 

The New Left’s histrionics, however, were only part of a larger show staged by capitalism. The Movement, which emerged as a revolt against a spectacular image of oppression, was in turn presented as an image of revolt by capitalism. For a time neither could do without the other and both were conscious of this symbiotic relationship — their ideologies were mutually contingent. The New Left served as a convenient “threat” to bourgeois society, which attempted to use the specter of a “generation of freaks” as a means of unifying the “silent majority.” But while denouncing a revolt which it had itself packaged, capitalism incorporated many of the Movement’s demands into its own structure, reforming itself with the Movement’s unwitting assistance. This reform was in no way a result of some mysterious “co-optation” of the New Left — although it proclaimed itself to be a “revolutionary” alternative, the Movement’s practice demonstrated that the transition from the reform of the early 60’s to a “revolutionary” posture was purely a change in semantics. The “contradictions” within the system which the New Left saw as definitive could easily be resolved by capitalism; blacks and other minorities could be allowed to participate in society, the war could be phased out, the problems of the environment could be alleviated — all without altering the basic structures of modern capitalism. Once the Movement had revealed the “faults” of the system, it was rendered irrelevant — the spectacle proved far better able to implement reform than the New Left, which began to fade as soon as it was deprived of an effective basis for its activity.
Since it drew its initiative from capitalism's actions, the New Left could only sustain itself as long as the system appeared openly repressive — its zenith was reached during the spring of 1970, with the invasion of Cambodia, raids on Black Panthers, the shootings at Kent State, etc. But by this time, the decline of the Movement had already set in; a once physically unified New Left had degenerated into sectarian disputes between different bureaucratic factions, and with the advent of terrorism it was to leave the scene in a display of ideological and tactical pyrotechnics. The rise of groups such as Weatherman, however, cannot be considered as an aberrancy attributable to the "excesses" of a decomposing New Left — rather, the truth of the Movement was revealed in these tendencies. These organizations represent the ultimate consequence of the weaknesses inherent in the early New Left; the Weathermen and their ilk took their New Leftism seriously.

The Weathermen were Movement veterans who had been through the civil-rights and student movements. The initial motivations of guilt and sacrifice that brought them into the New Left were taken to their logical conclusion in Weathermen, whose history demonstrates not only the futility of terrorism but that of the New Left in general. Rather than
simply acting on behalf of the blacks, the Vietnamese, etc. the Weathermen actually attempted to become part of the Third World themselves — they desired to join themselves physically to the “anti-imperialist” forces of the world. The new “Americong” terrorists intended to act as a “fifth column” for the exterior “proletariat” in the underdeveloped countries, and as such they attempted to translate the latent guerrilla fantasies of the New Left in general into reality.

The triumph of guilt in Weatherman was accompanied by a triumph of ritual. Its actions had a dual aspect — while ostensibly “fighting imperialism,” Weatherman was more importantly negating the “bourgeois” attributes of its background, as shown in a Weatherman statement, “We began to feel the Vietnamese in ourselves.” With its avowed goal of “smashing” its “honky” origins, Weatherman could present itself as the most moral group of militants. For Weatherman, every aspect of the struggle became a quasi-spiritual test, an act of faith in which the militant purified himself and his ideology. This ritual cleansing could only be accomplished in the cathartic act of violence, where the individual “put his body on the line” for the cause. The violence of the Weathermen, exhibited in such acts as the “Days of Rage” in Chicago, was designed not only to “bring the war home” but to establish a line of demarcation for the Movement as a whole. Those who did not come to Chicago would be “punking out”; if Weatherman was prepared to die for the Vietnamese, anything less would be “counter-revolutionary.”
Weatherman's extremism lies only in that it played the role demanded of it by capitalism to an *extreme*. Weatherman took its mythic status literally, to the point of consuming the image of itself presented by the bourgeois media. It revelled in its own notoriety, progressively enhancing its mystique of violence and bravado as if to suit the public's taste for titillation. Weatherman was the most spectacular faction of the New Left in that myth became its only rationale; politics became secondary — from violent Maoists, they became satanic harbingers of apocalypse. By the time Weatherman convened the Flint "War Council," its "solidarity" embraced Ho Chi Minh and Charlie Manson — its actions became black rites of exorcism in which the Weathermen would expiate the sins of their "privileged" past. This masochism led inevitably to self-destruction; while the Black Panthers only talked of revolutionary suicide, Weatherman was prepared to put it into practice.

*By having no family,*
*I have inherited the family of humanity.*
*By having no possessions,*
*I have possessed all.*
*By rejecting the love of one,*
*I have received the love of all.*
*By surrendering my life to the revolution,*
*I found eternal life — Revolutionary Suicide. ~ H. Newton*

Weeks later, an East Indian friend read the passage and with surprise noted its close similarity to the writings of Hindu swami Vivekananda, an Indian militant turned religionist who died in 1902 after travelling the world promoting a universal religion based on the Hindu Vendanta. — *Rolling Stone*
The decline of Weatherman was a prelude to the decline of the Movement as a whole; ideologically, Weatherman had been the heir to all the New Left's mystifications. It accepted the false divisions promoted by the spectacle between young and old, "hip" and "straight," and proclaimed youth as the only revolutionary force in American society. The later Weatherman carried these divisions one step further; the Third World became the true agent of revolution — all those who reaped the "privileges" of the "mother country" were by definition "honkies," and "white-skin privilege" became the sole criterion for Weatherman's conception of the "bourgeoisie." This ideology was to be Weatherman's undoing: once it had been deprived of its ephemeral base, Weatherman turned in on itself, exerting an internal terror against its own members, who were accused of "bourgeois" or "racist" traits. A Stalinism of everyday life was practiced in Weatherman collectives — these communes, which were supposed to produce the "new men and women of the revolution," only succeeded in creating a pitiful breed of obedient android. The truth of militantism was revealed in the burnt-out shells of these activists: the "revolution" of the New Left disappeared as rapidly as it had developed.

The revolt of youth cannot be discussed solely in terms of the New Left, however — it was not a purely "political" phenomenon. The personal transformation which was attempted on a political level by groups like Weatherman was mirrored culturally by the proliferation of Bohemian life-styles among the young. In a sense, this "counter-culture" was more radical than the New Left ever was, because from the beginning it attempted to define itself in opposition to politics and sought to create an alternative to a society based on power. The appeal of the counter-culture lay in its apparent rejection of the attributes of bourgeois society; those who dropped out did so with the intention of creating something out of their lives. Yet, like the New Left, the counter-culture did not pose an authentic opposition to capitalism — far from signalling a radical transformation of all values, it remained
subservient to the existing values, being merely a hip parody of the dominant spectacle. In its rituals and its “alternate” institutions, the counter-culture reproduced the hierarchy and the commodity relations of bourgeois society. Its festivals and rock concerts were nothing more than mass displays of passivity; its businesses were only modern rivals to conventional firms.

In the end, the counter-culture was easily absorbed as another cultural fragment within the spectacle. The Youth Culture only challenged the form of modern society; the trappings which it developed to distinguish itself from the rest of society were largely superficial differences in music, clothing, chemicals, etc. The experiments in new social relations that were attempted in the communes resulted in most cases in a simple reproduction of the family unit. The “isolation” of the counter-culture from the rest of society was always a myth — since it conceived of revolt in cultural instead of social terms, its “rejection” of bourgeois society was easily recuperated. The counter-culture soon became another market for capitalism, which developed new commodities to pander to the tastes of youth. The successful integration of the new culture within the ruling order has disproved all the hopes of the bourgeois ideologists (Marcuse, etc) who entertained various illusions about a “radical” life-style. The decomposition of the counter-culture — reflected in the growth of mysticism and religion, the sordid misery of the “drug scene,” and the “riots” at rock concerts — revealed it to be simply one alienation among many in spectacular society.

Despite the decay of the “radical” political and cultural movements of the past decade, many of their characteristics and illusions linger on. The collapse of the New Left has engendered various partial critiques of its practice, all designed to save the Movement from itself. Women’s liberation criticized the hierarchy and manipulation prevalent in New Left sects and attempted to analyze the inter-personal relationships of the Movement, but in the process evolved into merely another separatist movement with a fundamentally reformist ideology. The male New Left redeemed itself through “men’s groups,” where the participants would flagellate themselves for their “male chauvinism.” Other groups have attempted to overcome the New Left by fusing both political and cultural tendencies; their criticisms of the Movement (especially Anti-Mass) deride its forms of protest (mass movements, etc.) and pose the ideal of the collective or “affinity group” as constituting the nucleus of the future revolutionary society, which will somehow emerge with the proliferation of these collectives. But far from presenting a radical alternative, this idealization of the collective erects a banality — a particular living arrangement — as the major focus of the revolutionary process; in place of the New Left, groups like Anti-Mass can only offer communalized misery. Further to the left are the assorted anarchist denunciations of the Movement; while occasionally perceptive, the anarchists have also been unable to see any way beyond the New Left other than to resurrect the faded anarcho-syndicalist ideology of the IWW or to embrace the modernist confusionism of Bookchin. None of these reformist critiques have ever aimed at the supersession of the Movement — all of the New Left’s saviors are incapable of seeing that it is already dead.
In the wake of the New Left’s demise, it has become fashionable to discuss the general mood of “apoliticism” among youth — the sociologists have attributed this to a sudden upsurge of “introspection,” while the last remnants of the Movement decry it as “apathetic.” The fact that many have become disillusioned with the manipulative practice of the Left, however, does not mean that American capitalism has achieved any kind of final victory. While the relics of the New Left are reduced to applauding prison rebellions from the sidelines, the real discontent which resulted in the revolt of American youth remains. The New Left was a false start in the process of genuine revolution; if the rise and fall of the Movement has shown that a true opposition to capitalism cannot be partial or limited in scope, the commodity spectacle, which invades the whole of life, can only be answered by total revolt.

A desire to change everything in this world is what separates us from the feeble reformers of the Left. It is the subjective experience of alienation, and not any external force or issue, which forms the basis of a truly revolutionary opposition to capitalism. The refusal of the constraints imposed by the spectacle does not stem from a need to right any particular wrong, but from a recognition of the absolute impoverishment of life in bourgeois society. Any practical rejection of sacrifice and hierarchy must necessarily be made over the ruins of the New Left. Our critique of the New Left is a critique of all spectacular revolt and constitutes the premise for the formation of an authentic revolutionary movement in the United States. While the death of the Movement has revealed the true nature of false opposition, it is still necessary to show how its errors can be avoided, since any movement which proclaims itself to be “radical” but speaks in the language of Power only stands in the way of the development of a true radicalism.
In our theory and practice, we present ourselves as a group which has opposed the reactionary New Left. An identical opposition has been implicit in the general contempt for the Movement which exists among its former constituents. The alternative to the New Left, however, does not lie in aimless nihilism or in a simple rejection of revolt in favor of passivity. While rejecting quantitative change, we do not mean to "wait" for radical activity to occur: the development of a revolutionary situation in the U.S. requires a practice equal to our theoretical critique. The society that the New Left set out to change is still in power, but capitalism has not succeeded in destroying all opposition to it — the spectacle continues to produce the forces of its possible negation and from now on, no one can have any illusions as to the meaning of real change — revolution begins when people speak for themselves and seize control over everything affecting their lives. If anything, the "youth revolt" has shown that no one is really young in this society; there are only varying degrees of age. The destruction of the old world and the reaffirmation of youth begins when people challenge everything openly; instead of allowing itself to be defined by capitalism's rules, the revolutionary movement must define itself as the complete negation of existing society through the positive construction of a qualitatively new social order.

The individual, lost in the alienation of society and the counter-alienation of the New Left, must form the starting point for real socialism. Throughout its brief existence, the Movement offered nothing more than a vision of sacrifice on behalf of an external cause — its fate proved once again that revolution is not a duty — it is pleasurable or it is nothing. Revolt always begins with the individual, whenever he refuses to submit to the mindless routine to which he is subjected daily, and he must take himself and his desires seriously if this revolt is to be extended. Individual subjectivity is the means and the end towards the development of collective revolutionary activity. The "individualism" that capitalism prides itself on having achieved is merely the alienated subjection of the individual; self-management implies the creation of a collectivity where individuals find the possibility for their self-realization in the freedom of others, where they affirm themselves as subjects in a world which they have made their own.

"The storms of youth precede brilliant days." — Lautreamont, Poesies
The question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat at the moment, considers as its aim. The question is what the proletariat is, and what, consequent on that being, it will be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is irrevocably and obviously demonstrated in its own life situation as well as in the whole organization of bourgeois society today."

— Karl Marx. The Holy Family

The recent upsurge in radical activity in which workers have begun to fight for themselves has conclusively destroyed American capitalism’s idyllic picture of workers who are satisfied with their position and whose interests are fundamentally linked to the system. But it has also confronted American capitalism with a qualitatively new kind of crisis, whose origins cannot be classified as purely “economic” or “political.” Across the country, workers in all industries are openly rebelling, not against isolated grievances, but against the most concrete aspect of their daily lives, the act of work itself. Everybody has recognized the monotony of his job, and while this recognition has in most cases been restricted to a very basic level, many of the forms in which it has expressed itself have posed a direct threat to the system’s existence. The most creative and far-reaching aspects of the new revolt (sabotage and wildcat strikes) have actually foreshadowed the end of commodity production, and this essential demand, precisely because it calls everything into question, cannot be easily defused into conventional reformist channels.
Its spectacular coverage in the press should not obscure the fact that the revolt of GM workers at Lordstown, Ohio, in 1971 opens up many subversive possibilities for future action, as well as the new trends in recuperation that have been developed to contain its extension. Ostensibly, the sabotage of new-model Vega cars at Lordstown was a response to the "rationalization" of factory work implemented by General Motors, which geared all operations towards maximum efficiency through the use of highly automated techniques. This streamlining of the productive process (which is occurring in other branches of production as well), while lessening the strain on the individual worker, correspondingly increases the mindlessness of his task. His job may have become "easier," but everything about it is aimed at turning him into a mindless accessory to the machines — his faculties increasingly become the alienated property of the object of labor. By engaging in sabotage, the worker not only asserts his superiority over the object that enslaves him to a fixed repetition of specific gestures, he turns his over-specialized skills into subversive weapons and reaffirms his individuality in circumstances that are expressly designed to suppress it. Thus, he presents a critique in acts of alienated production, and for this reason sabotage cannot be "solved" by higher wages (the auto workers at Lordstown, for example, are among the highest-paid in their profession); these expressions of revolt, on the assembly line as elsewhere, destroy all the well-laid plans of management and the unions to maintain a lasting peace.
Faced with an open threat to their roles, the UAW local and the bosses used their respective positions to pacify the struggle; management offered “material incentives” to the workers, and the union assumed a militant posture in order to maneuver the situation into a conventional strike. Predictably, the strike was settled in a short time, but several hundred workers defied the local’s order to return to work and stayed off the job. The “militancy” of the union had been unsuccessful — the UAW had been defeated at its own game. However, more sophisticated methods of control had already been devised: the company instituted “sensitivity sessions” among workers and management representatives to discover what the “real grievances” were, and the union, not to be outdone, called for elimination of the assembly-line in favor of a more collective approach to work, where work-teams would follow a car down the line until its completion. The entire process would supposedly restore “creativity” to the act of work; in a situation where the workers are expressing a desire for the abolition of wage-labor, the old issues are replaced by demands which concern themselves with concretely ameliorating the productive process.

If the revolt at Lordstown were only an isolated phenomenon, an exception to the general rule of tranquility, the forces of capitalism would not have attempted such an overhauling of the labor process. But the fact that the new movement of the proletariat has extended beyond the traditional domain of industrial workers and into the service and white-collar sectors has compelled capitalism to reorient its priorities. The wild-cats by (among others) teamsters, taxicab drivers, telephone workers, and post-office employees that have taken place in the last three years demonstrate the depth of what bureaucrats and businessmen have termed the “Lordstown syndrome”; formerly “privileged” sectors such as white-collar workers have also displayed signs of dissatisfaction, although in many cases this has been centered around a drive for unionization. Whether such movements become openly revolutionary or not is a question that remains to be resolved, but their
existence at least shows that revolution in America is no longer an improbable fantasy. Every wildcat strike that occurs demonstrates the impoverishment of those who once proclaimed the "integration" or the "disappearance" of the proletariat; capitalism, which aims every new reform at putting an end to the conflict, now has to openly acknowledge its presence. But despite this reform, the lines of demarcation can no longer be concealed; the false divisions in the proletariat are being superseded to the extent that future activity will not be able to be restricted according to skill or pay-bracket. What were once regarded as "privileges" are now considered unimportant; whatever their jobs, workers are united by a common feeling of boredom. Class divisions are not determined by differences in salary; the proletariat is composed of all those who do not control the means of production and who are thus rendered powerless to control their lives. The fallacy about the "middle-class majority" is being practically refuted day by day.

ALIENATION AND ITS GESTURES
It is no accident that the renewal of the class struggle in America has defined itself in opposition to the unions on many occasions; since wildcat strikes are spontaneous, unmediated actions, they necessarily go beyond the unions and all organizations that have a vested interest in maintaining the system. The unions have been left behind and exposed as the bourgeois institutions that they are. Those who accuse the unions of "selling out" the struggle ignore the fact that the unions have already sold out a long time ago; if the current revolt has remained in a relative state of practical unconsciousness, it is because the unions were able to establish their power and destroy the revolutionary movement in America at a comparatively early stage. In turn, these circumstances have actually contributed to the profundity of the revolt, since the illusions about unionism cannot be easily sustained. From the very beginning of the American "labor" movement, the American Federation of Labor, which had entered the scene at a volatile period, had attempted to manipulate the workers' actions for their own ends, assuming a "radical" position only when the militancy of the workers threatened to go beyond its grasp. The sole organization that offered a revolutionary alternative to the AFL, the anarchosyndicalist IWW (responsible for many of the most radical strikes and activity in the pre-World War I period) was rapidly crushed both by the government and the large unions, which often sent in scabs to break IWW strikes. Future struggles, despite their moments (notably in the sit-down strikes of the 1930's) were usually directed towards unionizing industries, and by the time the AFL had merged with the "maverick" CIO, unionism had carved out a permanent niche for itself in the system. Each new bargain struck with capital was invoked as a tribute to the unions' ability to "deliver the goods." The role of the unions as mediators between the rank-and-file and the bosses, as bureaucratic structures which helped integrate workers into the capitalist framework, was crucial in maintaining general harmony.

But while the unions are integral to the functioning of capitalist society, they have continued to promote an image of "opposition," and the need to reinforce this image becomes even more pressing when revolts occur which threaten their position. When workers actually take over a union meeting during a strike and throw out the bureaucrats (which happened several times during the nationwide phone strike in 1971), the unions are confronted with an immediate crisis which they can only resolve by modernizing their antiquated structure. Initially, this process of reform has taken place on the local level, with the unions attempting to pass themselves off as a "militant" alternative to the fossilized national leadership, whether by calling strikes independently of national directives or by denouncing the Meanys and the Beirnes. For the locals, the crisis can be explained away as a "crisis in confidence," a sign that the unions have somehow "lost touch" with their membership.

The fact that management itself has been the first to offer more advanced solutions to the problem of rank-and-file insurgency has also been a determining factor in the modernization of the unions. The bosses, once recalcitrant to any union attempts at reform, have reversed the old relationship: now, it is the unions who are behind the times. They find themselves required to up the ante on management, belatedly competing to invent new palliatives for the workers. This
explains the attention accorded to “qualitative” demands, notably the concept of “workers’ control,” which has up until now gained very little acceptance or headway in America, but which is already beginning to be implemented locally. UAW reports have already sketched the essential goals of these demands, and newly-formed unions among white-collar workers and professionals have also based their programs on achieving decentralization and partial control over the job.

The various leftist workerist groups (IS, NAM, PL, Spartacist League, Workers’ League, etc.) which have entrenched themselves in some unskilled and professional areas, have assisted the unions in effecting these changes, since they pretend to speak “for the workers.” These proto-bureaucrats have been in the forefront of demands for more “participation,” and for “democratizing” the union hierarchy. In a few locals, they have set up caucuses which act as “revolutionary” pressure groups on the union leadership; during wildcat strikes, they attempt to use their position as an “alternative” to divert the events into the boredom of picket lines. This manipulative practice is further reflected in their efforts to impose a reified “consciousness” on the workers from outside; in this scheme, the workers are treated as constituencies (blacks, women, gays), each with its own set of particular “needs.” But the workerists are easily seen through; their ideologies are all thirty years out of date, as a glance at any of their boring papers or leaflets will testify, and they have made very few inroads into the majority of the working class. An exception could perhaps be made for the women’s movement, which, however, has contributed to the confusion — its partial critique of the social role of women under capitalism has been vitiated by its demand for greater female participation in the job market (a process which is already under way) and by basing its opposition on a vague caste solidarity (“all women are our comrades”). The women’s movement pretends to have gone beyond the conventional left, but in reality it only reproduces the poverty of the workerists on a different level.
However, there is a new type of workerism, centering around tendencies in Socialist Revolution, Radical America, and Liberation, which is beginning to gain some influence. Less anachronistic than their miserable cohorts, these modernists have *rediscovered* the proletariat in the wake of the New Left's collapse; along with the sociologists, they have recognized the obvious changes in the composition of the work force, the increase of the service sector at the expense of the industrial proletariat. They profess to have a critique of the union bureaucracy, supporting wildcats and sabotage against the traditional strike, and call for new forms of working-class organization. But their rigid economism leads them to consider radical activity as a response to an external series of events (the wage-price freeze or job cutbacks). They resurrect the long-discredited cliches about "periodic economic crises," imagining that the present period of economic readjustment has its source in one of these "crises," as if capitalism had not already planned to reorganize its priorities away from strictly "wasteful" industries (armaments production, etc) and towards new markets predicated on reforming the excesses of the past (anti-pollution and leisure industries). While it is true that this transition has left the system temporarily vulnerable to open attack, it can hardly be considered as a serious economic disaster. These advanced recuperators will always be incapable of understanding that revolution will not occur as a simple *reaction* to a particular circumstance — it will happen when people recognize the impossibility of their daily lives.

The forces which are practically superseded in any radical action — unions, bosses, and leftists — have been put on the defensive by recent struggles, but this does not imply that these struggles have completely escaped their grasp; in fact, to the extent that the workers fail to realize that *any* form of representation is counter-revolutionary no matter how "democratic" it may purport to be, they can easily succumb to the pressures for reform or to the blandishments of the more advanced workerists. The American proletariat has begun to speak for itself — it is now a question of *extending* what it has already accomplished.

If such a radical extension is to be successfully carried out, the workers must begin by making their isolated acts of discontent *collective*. They are already *organized*, but against themselves and in the service of capitalist production; the subversive possibilities that are encountered daily (and which generally are allowed to pass unnoticed) must be recognized and put into practice if the tables are to be turned. The slightest act of defiance immediately poses a basis for calling everything into question, since most of these subjective acts are in direct response to the enforced tedium of work (even the most rudimentary methods of wasting time at least serve to break the routine). Certain groups of workers have gone much further in developing new *counter*-organizational forms in practice, and on a highly sophisticated level. In these instances (notably in Detroit auto plants), isolated sabotage has been superseded by subversion and counter-planning, to the point where factory operations have become systematically disrupted. The complexities involved in coordinating this activity throughout the plant were easily solved, independent of all external control other than the workers' own spontaneous action. However rarely such incidents might occur, they show that the first important
step in a struggle is the destruction of the *isolation* imposed by capitalist social relations — once this has been done, the rest becomes a matter of *generalizing* these experiences. Individual acts of sabotage, while effective in hindering the progress of the assembly-line, will remain mere *phenomena* unless the positive aspects implicit in these negative acts are realized. For the proletariat, the critique of work must become the precondition for all other critiques, in the factories, office buildings, and schools.

The organization of sabotage in Detroit factories has demonstrated that in areas where rank-and-file discontent has manifested itself practically, the crucial question of *occupying terrain* has become less "difficult" to carry out. Where large-scale revolt exists, the act of seizing the means of production grows to be less utopian than it might seem — in the auto plants, at least, the workers have already asserted a *de facto* control over everything that occurs on the shop floor, and the bosses are powerless to intervene at the risk of their own safety. And where the *threat* of such revolt has forced capitalism to decentralize itself and allow workers some degree of control over their jobs and the disposition of their labor time in the name of "productive efficiency," the apparently complex mechanisms of power are more easily seen through. Certain sectors will offer more strategic possibilities once they are occupied, but every workplace has a part to play in the functioning of the system, and as such those who are involved in them confront an identical subversive task. The expropriation of the expropriators begins when the vital machinery of society is seized by those who are caught up in it. The experiences of France in 1968 show how an occupation of one factory or building can spread across a large area in a relatively short time, and with the sophisticated communications system in America, it would be possible to diffuse news of an occupation with even greater speed around the country.

The appearance of such a situation, although still in the future, is nonetheless implicit whenever the proletariat moves to take control of its own affairs; wildcat strikes always indicate the beginnings of the power of the councils, precisely because they reveal that the source of true class consciousness resides in the action of the workers *themselves*, beyond the constraints of any self-imposed leadership. Self-management is not only the *goal* of the present movement, it is also to be found at this movement's *origin* — and thus, the importance of the stirrings in the American proletariat cannot be minimized. Revolutionary change may not be inevitable, but it is certainly quite possible, and the continued reform of capitalism will not exacerbate the contradictions now in existence.

The creation of a "Strasbourg of the factories," (and beyond that, the workers councils) in America, however, will not come about through a spontaneous act of collective will. The possibilities that exist have to be openly expressed and communicated before they can be realized, especially in circumstances where no continuous current of revolutionary activity is in progress, and where the events that *do* occur are often confused and unclear. As a revolutionary organization, we consider our major task to be *intervention* in any ongoing struggles, with the purpose of clarifying and contributing to the subversive potential
Can Americans survive a four-day work week?

There's one major problem with the 4-day work week—the 3-day weekend. Too many of us throw away our leisure time, simply because we're not aware of all the things we could be doing. We spend more time than we'd like flat on our backs, watching TV, or collapsed on a hammock in the back yard.

So, if the 4-day week comes, Americans will have to look hard for a way to fill what could be a debilitating 3-day vacuum. And American industry will have a chance to satisfy an enormously expanded leisure-time market.

At Olin, we've begun to work on this in two ways. One, by educating the public to the opportunities for fulfilling non-work. Two, by providing products and services to meet leisure-time needs.

In short, we're off to a good start in a burgeoning field.

So if the 4-day work week ever comes, the 3-day vacuum won't.

that exists in these moments. Intervention has nothing to do with the patronizing leftist dream of "going to the workers"; in carrying out agitations, we act on the terrain of daily life, attempting to speak directly and radically to the proletariat, to be transparent about who we are, as well as about the nature of the struggle. The fundamental basis for our activity is the recognition of our own subjectivity in the spontaneous actions of the workers, when they express the same disgust with the existing world and an identical desire to change it. While we are not in a position to directly interfere with the process of production (as are most workers), we always act as proletarians fighting for ourselves, insofar as we recognize that we are powerless to control our own lives in this world. We share this powerlessness with everyone who is forced to work. In communicating our perspectives, we speak as part of the proletariat — we do not seek to speak in its behalf or in its name. Neither do we intend our agitations to be limited to one area — their implications extend beyond any particular situation to the general social problem that capitalism's growth has engendered.

Since the proletarian movement in the United States has up until now only expressed itself in isolated instances, it is obvious that the task of making the unconscious tendencies of this movement conscious must
begin with a precise analysis of the terrain of intervention. To indulge in vague generalizations about the “worker milieu” leads nowhere unless this “milieu” is considered in terms of what it actually is — the comparatively “new” sectors that are emerging with the decline of strictly industrial labor must be taken into account. The service areas of production (especially the telephone and postal workers) have already engaged in radical action, and the first signs of discontent among white-collar employees have only recently begun to display themselves. New techniques of agitation must be used accordingly in exploiting the scandalous possibilities inherent in any autonomous revolt — comic strips, subverted advertisements, fake publications, etc. We have begun to explore some of these techniques in our interventions and if we have not had much success in actually opening a dialogue with workers so far, it only underscores the need for us to develop contacts and to initiate something inside the factory, installation, etc. Tactically, a fake internal communication or memo can have a far more wide-ranging effect than a leaflet distributed from the outside.

In intervening, self-management must be recognized for what it is — a distinct possibility — and not as an abstract goal to be achieved at some distant point in the future. Precisely because it is a practical question which is present in every workers’ struggle, self-management must be considered in connection with the internal dynamic of the proletariat. The development of a revolutionary situation in the United States is directly linked to the development of the class consciousness of the American proletariat, which must become conscious of itself as a
class before it can act collectively to transform society. The new currents of radical activity among American workers are important because they are taking place in areas that are vital to capitalism, but until this movement is generalized to all areas of society, it will be defeated in isolation as were the spontaneous insurrections of the 1960's (Watts, Detroit, Newark). At present, large-scale revolts have not manifested themselves; however, the important first steps have been taken — American workers have begun to react to the impoverished conditions of life under modern capitalism.

The task of the proletariat today is identical with the task that faces all revolutionaries; at this point, the struggle has largely been carried out on the system's terms, and the proletariat must now begin to invent its own rules for its game. For our part, we intend to challenge capitalism on even its most commonplace and overlooked levels, taking advantage of every opening as it presents itself. If every radical action of the proletariat forms another point of departure for our game, our success will be measured to the extent that our practice coincides with the rest of the proletariat, when both games become one in the project of the abolition of work and the construction of a new world.

From Out of Order, distributed by Point-Blank! to wildcat telephone strikers, summer 1971.
The history of the Situationist International cannot be separated from the history of the modern proletariat — the two are necessarily interconnected. The reappearance of a revolutionary opposition to modern capitalism — an opposition which became so visible by May 1968 that no one could ignore it — had been theoretically formulated by the S.I. well in advance of its practical manifestation. If today bourgeois observers and their leftist counterparts have come to talk of the “influence” of the S.I., it is not on account of some attempt to be “objective” but because the recent radical actions of the world’s proletariat have forced them to. Increasing numbers of people have recognized themselves in the project begun by the S.I. and have appropriated its theory as their own. Thus, in acknowledging the existence of the S.I., all the ideologists have done their best to dissimulate the nature of its ideas; they have even invented the ideology of “situationism” and called the situationists “anarchists” or “Dadaists” in order to make their radical ideas more “intelligible” to the general public. The more advanced ideologists now use these ideas for their own ends. But even those revolutionaries sympathetic to the S.I. have entertained various illusions about it; in almost every account, the S.I.’s existence as an organization has receded before its mythic reputation as a “set of ideas”. At this point, when the S.I. has achieved greater notoriety and hence greater respectability, it is necessary to establish its authentic radical nature as well as its shortcomings against those who would view the S.I. either uncritically or as a mere footnote to the past. In doing so, we proceed not from the perspective of the historians but from those who want to make history.

*  

The S.I. began at a time (1957) when it was necessary to completely re-invent the nature of the revolutionary project of the proletariat. The sleep of dialectical reason which engendered the twin monsters of advanced capitalism and the “socialist” bureaucracy was a sleep in which all the previous assumptions about proletarian revolution became obsolete. The defeat of the traditional proletarian movement, which had begun during the time of Marx and Bakunin, at the combined hands of the bourgeoisie and Bolshevism was not merely a temporary setback; it marked the beginning of a prolonged counter-offensive against the proletariat in which the force of ideology played as great a role as the force of arms. Not only were the organizations (unions, parties) which supposedly acted “on behalf” of the proletariat revealed to be counter-revolutionary, world capitalism proved capable of appropriating the most radical ideas and returning them against the proletariat in the form of ideologies. Under such impoverished conditions any organization which desired to create a revolutionary opposition to the modern forms of capitalism was necessarily forced to
develop a new theoretical critique of bourgeois society, as well as elaborate the possibilities for modern revolutionary activity. In short, it had to begin again through a long process of theoretical and practical experimentation in order to arrive at a coherent revolutionary position.

That the S.I. was able to accomplish such a beginning was in large part due to the fact that, in its early form, it was not a revolutionary organization in the traditional sense. Rather, the situationists initially conceived of themselves as a sort of experimental group within the sphere of culture; as artists, the members of the S.I. had experienced the decomposition of the ‘avant-garde’ and were concerned with directing their talents in a new and radical direction. In the late 1950’s, the S.I.’s program was that of a ‘cultural revolution’; "an international association of situationists can be considered as a union of workers in an advanced sector of culture, as a union of all those who demand the right to a labor now hindered by social conditions..." (Debord. Theses on the Cultural Revolution, S.I. No. 1). At this stage, the S.I. remained an avant-garde cultural organization; its radical activity was confined to an aesthetic level. Yet the distance between this artistic grouping and that of an actual revolutionary organization was not that great. In elaborating the concepts of unitary urbanism and the construction of situations, the S.I. had begun to develop a critique of everyday life in modern society. It was on this theoretical terrain that the S.I. advanced the most radical positions of its time.

THE TERRAIN OF PLAY
Situationist design for a city, IS No. 4.

The contribution of the early S.I. to the development of the modern revolutionary project lies largely in its formulation of the positive, anti-political dimension of revolution. While the fact that most of its members came from a cultural background was not without its limitations, it enabled the S.I. to bring a qualitatively new perspective to the question of socialism. Against all the lies of leftist ideologists, the
S.I. demonstrated that revolution did not involve sacrifice, hierarchy, or a mere transfer of power from one ruling elite to another. While the politicians of the left attempted to enlist recruits for various causes, the S.I. perceived that the only issue facing the modern proletariat was the way that it lived. In restoring a truly radical meaning to revolution, the S.I. placed the class-struggle within the context of everyday life. For the S.I. radical activity was an immediate possibility and it translated its radicalism in an immediate practical way. From its inception, the S.I. attempted to intervene decisively in society; while initially these interventions were limited almost exclusively to the realm of culture, they contained the basis for an actual revolutionary praxis.

The early S.I. affirmed the possibility of a total transformation of the world at a time when capitalism (both East and West) had seemed to have achieved a final victory over the proletariat. The radical nature of the S.I.'s critique of modern society stems from the fact that it was able to go beyond the fetishized appearances of bourgeois society to discover the actual historical processes present within it. Despite this, however, the S.I. in the '50's had not developed the theoretical and practical capabilities to link it concretely to the social struggle against capitalism. The essential weakness of the early S.I. was its almost exclusive concern with the supersession of art. While committed to a revolutionary practice, the S.I. remained entrapped within the cultural avant-garde; many of the situationists at this time chose to remain artists and as such hindered the development of the S.I. into a revolutionary organization. The faded aestheticism of the situationist artists prevented them from realizing the possibilities for a social revolution — while deriding the proletariat's capacity for revolutionary activity, these dilettantes found refuge in the decomposed glitter of avant-gardist happenings, etc. With the exclusion of the factions of this regressive tendency, (SPUR, Nashists), the S.I. was able to effect a break with the avant-garde and Art in general.

Moving rapidly beyond a cultural framework, the S.I. sought to situate itself within the revolutionary tradition of the past century of class-struggle. In doing so, the S.I. identified itself with the most radical aspects of this history, with those ideas and events which had gone the farthest towards the construction of a qualitatively new world. But the theoretical positions advanced by the S.I. at this time did not result from a simple eclectic fusion of marxist theory, anarchist practice and the poetic radicalism of Lautreamont, Rimbaud, etc; instead, it represented the supersession of these individual traditions. The S.I. was in the process of attempting to develop a coherent theory commensurate with the drastically altered conditions of modern capitalism. In this attempt the S.I. was not alone and many of the ideas it was to utilize were appropriated from elsewhere. The concepts of spectacle and daily life were derived from Lefebvre; the tradition of workers' councils had been analysed first by Pannekoek and then by groups such as Socialisme ou Barbarie. But what was new and what made the S.I. profoundly radical was the manner in which these concepts were used to elaborate a total critique of bourgeois society and the attempt of the S.I. to put this critique into practice.

Unlike the modernist sociologist Lefebvre and the impotent
Socialisme ou Barbarie, the S.I. took its radicalism seriously. As an organization, the S.I. did not merely interpret the world, it attempted to change it. The S.I. was first of all an organization of revolutionaries and not a mere association of critics; what enabled the S.I. to progress further theoretically than others was its ability to understand contemporary reality not in a sociological manner, but in its implications for revolutionary activity. The S.I.'s ideas were not developed in abstracto: the wildcat strikes and youth riots of the early '60's, as well as the struggle for self-management in Algeria after independence, provided the S.I. with a positive opening with which to develop a new theory of revolution. The situationists at this time were prepared to draw the most radical conclusions possible and their theoretical explorations were to be confirmed by further actions of the proletariat. The S.I.'s approach to the class struggle was a measure of its own radicalism. While the various Trotskyist and Stalinist parties could only repeat the reformist and bureaucratic lies of a half-century of counter-revolution and even those who had gone beyond Leninism (the anarchists, etc.) were unable to see a way out of the stasis of modern society, the S.I. offered a radically different point of departure for the modern proletariat. While the ideologists were assembling their evidence that the proletariat had been integrated into the system or at best was only capable of reformist politics, the S.I. demonstrated the illusory nature of the social peace proclaimed by everyone else. Where the ideologues found 'co-optation', the S.I. found the radical discontent which existed below the surface: "as reification and bureaucratization cut deeper and deeper into life, the exhaustion of the spectacle and of everyday life become increasingly evident to everyone." (Banalités de Base, S.I. No. 8). This discontent was not limited to any one sector of society; for the S.I., the modern proletariat constituted all those who had no power over the conditions of their existence. It was from the poverty of everyday life that the S.I. expected the radical poetry of the future and its expectations were to be confirmed at an ever increasing rate during the 1960's:
During this period the S.I. had redefined its role from being an international grouping of artists to becoming a revolutionary International — a modern successor to the International Workingman’s Association. That the similarity between the First International and the S.I. was more than just in name became evident as the situationists sought to extend their project everywhere. The S.I. recognized itself in the most radical acts of the proletariat (e.g. Watts 1965) and as a consequence was able to elaborate the most radical theory possible. The rapid theoretical development of the S.I. was matched by the actions of the proletariat — the situationists’ critique of the commodity spectacle found its practical complement. If, at this point, the S.I. declared itself to be at the center of the new revolutionary movement it was not because of some attempt to direct it in any fashion but because of the S.I.’s absolute refusal to compromise with the ideologies and organizational forms of the old world. In opposing the ruling ideas of the day, the S.I. opposed the ruling classes of the world and their accomplices. The S.I.’s denunciation of the false opposition to capitalism presented by the various leftist sects was a prerequisite towards establishing a radical theoretical base for the new revolutionary current.

The theoretical development of the S.I. reached maturity by 1966 when both Vaneigem and Debord’s books were written. By this time the S.I.’s theory had gone beyond the experimental stage; having delimited the nature of the contemporary development of capitalism (the critique of the commodity spectacle) as well as the possibilities for its negation, the S.I. was prepared to make its theory become a social force. The subversive game begun by the S.I. involved the systematic exploration of the terrain of the spectacle for its scandalous possibilities; the S.I. experimented with many forms of communicating its theory including the subversion of bourgeois media (subverting comics, advertisements, etc.). More important than these technical experiments, however, were the attempts to intervene in radical situations with the aim of accelerating a revolutionary opposition to capitalism. Among these interventions were the Address to Algerian Workers and several agitations in Spain, but the greatest practical success at this time was achieved in the by-now infamous “Strasbourg Scandal” at Strasbourg University in 1966.

The details of the capture of the Strasbourg student union by the S.I. and its collaborators and the subsequent printing (with student funds) of the text “On the Poverty of Student Life” are well-known; what is important is the relationship of this scandal to the events of May ’68. At a time when the struggle at the universities was confined to reformist demands for restructuring education or protests concerning external issues such as Vietnam, the S.I. produced a critique not only of student life but of spectacular life in its entirety. Besides destroying mystifications concerning the university and the nature of an authentic radicalism, this pamphlet made clear that “the problem of revolution is once again a concrete issue.” How concrete this issue was to become was evident less than two years later and Strasbourg accordingly must be viewed as a very real prelude to the revolutionary period of May. In 1966, the situationists had demonstrated how the struggle of students was directly joined to and part of the movement of the proletariat.

In 1968 the modern revolutionary movement, which the S.I. had been talking of for so long, became a social force and not a mere theoretical conjecture. It is not surprising, then, if the S.I. was the only group which was not taken unawares by the rapid development and extension of this movement beyond its student origins. The theoretical agitation which the S.I. had conducted for 10 years had found its most complete practical manifestation and the S.I. and its comrades were part of the game in May from the beginning. The Enragés, a group which adhered to the theses of the S.I., had been active in several French universities in the year preceding May — several of them were disciplined by university authorities along with other radicals and this action precipitated the immediate crisis at the university level. As this crisis developed, the S.I. and the Enragés took an active part in it; the joint committee of S.I. & Enragés played a major role in the occupation of the Sorbonne. As members of the Sorbonne occupation committee they were the first to communicate the call for self-management and the creation of workers' councils after the first factories were occupied by French workers.

When the Sorbonne assembly became dominated by the intrigues of various bureaucratic leftist sects, the S.I. and the Enragés left it and formed (along with other comrades) the Council for the Maintenance of the Occupations (CMDO) which produced a number of texts and leaflets which were distributed among the workers of France. The CMDO recognized that what had initially been a student revolt now contained,
because of the occupations of factories, the possibilities for a social revolution. As such, the CMDO attempted to show what prevented the movement of May from becoming a revolutionary movement; in its interventions the CMDO denounced the recuperators (those who sought to direct the movement towards reforms or towards the bureaucratic ends of their parties) of the Stalinist unions, parties and the confusion of the groupuscules (trotskyists, maoists and anarchists who formed 'action committees' of militants united only on the most immediate particulars — the banal demands of 'reform the university' and 'end police repression') who sought to impose their 'non' — leadership on the movement. But more importantly, the CMDO posed the issue of self-management concretely as an immediate possibility; revolution was the only demand to be made by the French proletariat.

The defeat of the revolutionary movement in June by a united front of counter-revolution (the government, the Stalinists, etc.) in no way negated its radical content — after May, advanced capitalist society could never be the same. Revolution was a possibility everywhere. The May-June events represented a confirmation of the theory and practice of the S.I. — its ideas were generalized as never before. The CMDO dissolved itself when the occupations ended in June and the S.I. was regrouped with increased numbers. But while enjoying success, the situationists were faced with immense difficulties. The notoriety the S.I. had acquired was accompanied by the rise of pro-situationism — a contemplative, ideological attitude towards revolutionary practice on the part of those who merely admired the S.I. and in their admiration remained passive, letting the S.I. act on their "behalf". This tendency was to reproduce itself even within the S.I. and as a result posed a serious obstacle to the continued progress of the S.I.

Throughout its existence, the S.I. had set itself a task of attaining not only theoretical but organizational coherence. The S.I. organized itself on the most democratic basis possible and attempted to ensure the full participation of its membership. This egalitarian participation could not be realized, obviously, in an absolute sense — nonetheless it remained a practical goal. Over the years, the S.I. was forced to exclude many of its members who prevented it from going further; this practice was not the result of some megalomaniacal impulse (as some bourgeois
observers have put it) but was necessary to ensure the democratic basis of the organization (i.e. that the S.I. would be composed of equals capable of realizing a collective project). After May, the S.I. seemed prepared to accept the challenges of the "new epoch" it proclaimed in its review (S.I. No. 12, June 1969), namely developing the practical forms capable of exploiting the radical possibilities opened up by the occupation movement. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case — the period after 1969 witnessed not the radical extension of the situationist project but a prolonged internal crisis within the S.I. itself.

Even before May the problems which were to confront the S.I. had been recognized; in April 1968, Debord had drafted a piece ("The Question of Organization for the S.I." printed in S.I. No. 12) which elucidated the difficulties faced by the S.I. These obstacles centered around extending the radicalism of the S.I. beyond its immediate membership (during its entire existence the S.I. had 70 members); in bringing attention to itself and to its individual members the S.I. had developed a certain radical 'aura' — many people thought of the S.I. as being somehow 'beyond' the problems of the proletariat as a whole. New organizational forms and practical undertakings were necessary if the S.I. was to supersede the status of a small group of theoreticians. Debord was aware of this in his piece: "The S.I. must prove its efficiency in a subsequent stage of revolutionary activity or else disappear." While the S.I. was able to prove its 'efficiency' in the May–June events, it was unable to sustain this capacity; many of the problems which became apparent before May reappeared despite the indications that they had been resolved during May.

The tactical debate that went on within the S.I. during 1969 proved to be largely superfluous as few of the ideas were to be applied in practice. From then on, the S.I.'s critical energy turned in upon itself; while situationist ideas gained a wider currency than ever before, the S.I. itself was preoccupied with internal organizational matters. The problem of equal participation became more acute; various members (Vaneigem included) were content to rest on the laurels of a supposed theoretical 'coherence' and took little part in the debate on the future direction of the S.I. In addition to this, the S.I. was faced with structural difficulties; the national sections (France, Italy, U.S. etc), which were supposed to be developing autonomously, relied on the initiative and seeming guidance of the French section. As a result very little was accomplished by the individual sections; the American section, for example, published one review (Situationist International No. 1) in 1969 and then became involved in serious organizational difficulties resulting in the exclusion of half its members. Following this, the American section was unable to take the necessary steps towards organizing a practice on the American terrain — it dissolved in 1971.

The years since 1969 have marked little theoretical or practical advance within the S.I. During this period it became preoccupied with the individual life-styles of its members and various exclusions took place, often on the most trivial matters. The contemplative tendency within the S.I. further compounded the crisis and mitigated against its resolution. With the exception of several agitations in Italy, nothing was
produced by the S.I. — in fact, it began to dissolve as an effective international revolutionary organization. Exclusions and resignations (notably Vaneigem and Vienet) reduced its membership to two (Debord, Sanguinetti) by 1972. But it has never been possible to judge the S.I. on the quantitative criteria of the number of its members; the S.I.'s failures were not merely reflected in a numerical decline — they had their theoretical consequences.

In 1972, Debord and Sanguinetti published the "The Real Break in the International" — the first extended theoretical piece produced by the S.I. in three years. The "Real Break" enumerates the details surrounding the breakup of the S.I. and attempts to define a situationist perspective for the future in "61 theses on the S.I. and its time." In doing so, Debord and Sanguinetti are unable to resolve the contradictions which faced the S.I. as a whole after 1969. While elaborating the essential failures and weaknesses of the S.I., the book fails to explain any possible organizational supersession of these faults, leaving their resolution for an undetermined and anonymous future. For the present, Debord and Sanguinetti are content to state that situationist ideas have gained acceptance "from California to Calabria" and to quote extensively from the bourgeois press in order to demonstrate the "importance" of the S.I. Despite the widespread generalization of the situationist critique, however, it has yet to enter as a decisive practical force in the historical movement of the proletariat after May '68. In this respect, Debord and Sanguinetti are curiously silent concerning the crucial issues of practical intervention and the relationship of revolutionary organizations to the contemporary struggles of the proletariat and with this silence lapse into a kind of situationist determinism.

When Debord and Sanguinetti, in speaking of the period after May, say that "at this moment a generation began to be situationist on an international level" (thesis No. 7) they lose all sense of precision. It is one thing to state that "the new age is profoundly revolutionary and knows it" and to say that it contains profoundly revolutionary possibilities. For us, a situationist revolution is not somehow inevitable; the contemporary currents of revolt against the spectacle are in most cases specific in nature — immense practical obstacles remain to be overcome before the S.I.'s "knowing" will truly "become a power". Debord and Sanguinetti, however, see the decomposition of the spectacle and the appearance of the revolutionary proletariat everywhere. This misplaced enthusiasm leads them to make several theoretical errors. They impute a revolutionary consciousness to even openly reformist movements; when they say that "youth, workers, homosexuals, women and children dare to want everything that had been forbidden them" (thesis No. 12) they fail to see how movements which only question isolated aspects of bourgeois society are easily recuperated. The opposition to "a hundred individual alienations" cannot be confused with a revolutionary opposition to alienated labor. In doing so, the S.I. completely misreads the situation in the U.S. and makes the most naive assertions concerning the "drug army" in Vietnam which will come home to fight the spectacle. Other equally tenuous conclusions are drawn about the 'temporary' role of trade unions in strikes. Determinism is merely the other side of voluntarism.
Besides these over-optimistic predictions, the S.I. mistakes the present "environmental crisis" for being a decisive one. When they say that "Pollution and the proletariat are today the two concrete aspects of the critique of political economy" (thesis No. 17) they underestimate capitalism's ability to reform the pseudo-environment it imposes everywhere. To think that the workers will revolt because it is necessary to "assure their very existence" (thesis No. 14) is simply being dramatic and almost reintroduces the concept of 'species-being' and its alienation to the theoretical critique of capitalism. It is simply not true, at least in the U.S., to say that "already the remedies for the totality of the sicknesses are too expensive for it (capitalism) at this stage of commodity richness. The relations between production and productive forces have finally reached a point of radical incompatibility..." (thesis No. 17). The "vital demand of the exploited" for a hygienic environment is a demand that can be satisfied by capitalism and the present reform of the spectacle is based around precisely such a task.

A large part of "61 theses..." is concerned with a critique of the prositus and there is little to dispute about it. The ending theses, however, do little to indicate how the S.I.'s critique will become a practical force beyond repeating certain conventions such as "When the revolution is far off, the difficult task of the revolutionary organizations is the practice of theory. When the revolution begins, its difficult task is more and more the theory of practice." (thesis No. 47). If nothing else, though, "61 theses" makes clear that the S.I. should not be viewed as any kind of absolute model for revolutionary activity. In criticizing the prositus, those who have only been able to contemplate the S.I., Debord and Sanguinetti criticize various mystifications concerning the S.I. and its project. "Henceforth, the situationists are everywhere and their task is everywhere. All those who think they are situationists have simply to prove the 'truth, in other words, reality and power, what is material' of their thought before the ensemble of the revolutionary proletarian movement, wherever it begins to create its International, and no longer before the S.I. alone." (thesis No. 53).

* 

The current silence of many so-called situationists concerning the history of the S.I. after 1968 only reveals that they have never been able to see the S.I. for what it was, namely "a moment of historical activity". The supposed perfection of the S.I. only exists in the imaginations of those admirers of revolutionary organization; in their uncritical adhesion to situationist ideas these voyeurs have refused to admit the possibility of a weakness on the part of the S.I. For these impotent bystanders, the S.I. remains an almost mythic ideal: for us, as revolutionaries, the history of the S.I. must be subjected to the same critical examination as all other radical history. While the immense practical and theoretical contributions of the S.I. to the revolutionary movement cannot be minimized, neither can its very real failures be overlooked. If we call ourselves situationists, it is not because of some imagined claim
to the tradition of the S.I., but because we have recognized our own radicalism in that of the S.I. And in criticizing the S.I. we do not reproach it for not realizing a goal which it never set itself. The S.I. is not (and never was) everything; its weaknesses are a part of the weaknesses of the present revolutionary movement and the progress of this movement will be measured by its advance upon what has already been accomplished.

In going beyond the S.I. it is not a question of beginning again but of continuing the project outlined by the S.I. and, in doing so, we face the same difficulties that it confronted. The requirements of the present age are not simply practical and those groups who have based themselves around an abstract conception of practice (the GRCA in France, for example) have succumbed to a militantism which is only a mirror-image of the practical inertia of those groups which merely translate the texts of the S.I. For any revolutionary organization the only assurance against militantism or 'pro-situism' is the development of autonomous theoretical and practical capability. From now on, the center of the revolutionary movement is everywhere. The S.I. has played an important role in clarifying the nature of this movement, but it is the world proletariat and not any one organization which will make a situationist revolution.
American Surrealist Group: Group of imbeciles headed by one Franklin Rosemont, a corpse who has convinced himself that he is the incarnation of Andre Breton and Leon Trotsky, and stinks of both. His Arsenal consists of a pop-gun.

Murray Bookchin: Ecology special, runs on solar energy and wind turbines. House anarchist for Ramparts and Liberation. Has recently recycled his ideology — instead of affinity groups and decentralization, he now talks of the proletariat and dialectics. Biodegradable — don't forget to flush.


Liberation: Eclectic assortment of modernists, activists, and gaga pacifists. Girl Scouts whose “good deed for the day” is to give artificial respiration to the New Left. Readers of Lefebvre and situationist texts. Pretend to reject Leninism while supporting the NLF.

Herbert Marcuse: Import model. Aging professor and defender of the university. Famous for his conceptual suppression of the proletariat. Acknowledges that Angela Davis was his best student. One-dimensional.

Shulamith Firestone: Lacks either sexuality or dialectics. Head of Simone de Beauvoir Fan Club. “Improves” Marx by substituting sexual conflict for class-struggle.
The contemporary struggles of the proletariat against capitalism have not been confined to the arena of production and contempt for existing conditions has long ceased to be expressed in purely economic or political terms. The signs of revolt which are apparent today are as much social in character as anything else, and as a consequence, the theoretical critique of daily life in bourgeois society, which began with Marx's analysis of alienated labor, must be expanded to incorporate the new forms of its practical expression. Covert opposition to spectacular life has become visible, not only at the point of production, but throughout every facet of quotidian reality. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this rebellion has been the widespread rejection of the most basic structures of bourgeois society, the family, marriage, morality, etc.; the collapse of these particular forms has been part of a general revolt against conventional definitions of 'acceptable' sexuality. In a larger sense, this devaluation of bourgeois society is implicitly a refusal of the conditions of survival it enforces. At the same time, however, this opposition — because of its limited nature — does not pose an immediate threat to class-society.

Sometime scholar and full-time radical, Gloria Root is an archetypal child of the rock age: always on the move, always ready to challenge authority—and always eager to have a good time. As one means of fulfilling these needs, Gloria showers and dresses, then heads for a massive demonstration against the war.

A socially imposed norm of permissible sexual behavior has long been at the cornerstone of hierarchical society. Traditionally, the repressive character of bourgeois society has been measured, not only by its use of force against the proletariat, but in its suppression of overt sexuality. For centuries, the most successful capitalist countries have utilized variants of ascetic morality as an effective mechanism of social regulation; more recently, the bureaucratic states of Russia, China etc., have employed similar moral ideologies to the same effect. Today, however, the most advanced forms of spectacular society have aban-
French watch ad: Time passes

donned such blatant methods of control over their inhabitants. In these cases, the spectacle has even gone so far as to actively promote the decomposition of its former defenses — morality and the family are now discarded as antiquated social features. The sexuality once confined to the periphery of bourgeois society is now tolerated — that which was openly and defiantly expressed only by those "on the outside", blacks, bohemians, etc., has become part of spectacular culture as a whole.

The former taboos of bourgeois society have disappeared in the face of new standards of moral conduct. Past behavioral paragons (chastity, monogamy, etc.), which were always little more than myth, have been replaced with the modern 'adventures' of infidelity and sexual intrigue. From the office buildings to the suburbs, an 'openness' has been proclaimed in sexual affairs; the demands which were radical 30 years ago (sex education, birth control, etc.) are now accepted services of public schools and institutions. Even the radical libertinism of Sade now returns as a farce in the contemporary rituals of "sexual freedom" — that which proved so scandalous in the past is now nothing more than a stimulant to enliven routine existence. The current explicitness has even reached the conventional media; American housewives can now 'participate' in radio "talk shows" where sexual activity, adultery, etc., form the sole topics of conversation.

Behind the much-discussed era of "sexual freedom", however, lies an extension of sexual domination. In making sexuality public, the spectacle only conceals its real absence. Capitalism continues to generalize an image of sexuality which, however removed from puritanism, remains only that — an image, a surrogate for real experience. The "new" sexuality, like the old, has become a weapon in the class-struggle, not only in relations between bosses and employees, but throughout the relations of everyday life. The spectacle's pornographic use of sexuality is only incidentally revealed in the cheap "sex" films, magazines, etc., and the suggestive advertising in which alluring men and women serve as an enticement to the world of the consumer. The
banalization of life accomplished by capitalism has reached the point where sexuality itself has become a quantifiable article. The reality principle imposed by capitalism upon sexual pleasure is that of commodity reality; the marketplace of sexuality has been added to the modern economy, not merely as a commodity, but as one which sells others. The voyeurism present in every aspect of the spectacle now finds its fulfilment in sexual consumption.

The spectacular accumulation of sexuality is only an accumulation of misery and the reification of erotic experience has produced its complement in the form of a rampant sexual nihilism. Here, all pleasure is absent — the freedom which modern capitalism affords everyone is the freedom to meet, fuck, and remain as an object. This situation, however, does not constitute some mysterious “repressive desublimation” (Marcuse) in which alienation is made tolerable through sexual release. Spectacular sexuality in no way compensates for the poverty of spectacular life — sexual alienation is another moment of a total alienation and a recognition of sexual oppression has already become apparent among large sectors of the proletariat.
A critique of both the old and “new” sexuality of bourgeois society has been developed by the Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation movements. In refusing the sexual roles demanded by capitalism, these movements have uncovered the truth of reified sexuality — in bourgeois society, personal relationships are determined by social relationships. But while exposing the hierarchy and social dimensions of present sexual relations, these movements have failed to develop a critique of spectacular domination as a whole. Even in terms of sexuality, their critique is limited and does not take into account the roles demanded of others (men, ‘straights’); more important, however, are the various mystifications concerning the ‘essential’ social contradiction posed by sexual differences. From this false division, Women’s Liberation and the like construct separatist ideologies in which the partial critique of daily life generated by these movements becomes subsumed under the ultimately reformist aims of “sexual equality”.

“If one compares the immensity of our desires with our limited means of satisfying them, it seems that God has acted unwisely in endowing us with passions so eager for pleasure, passions that seem created to torment us by exciting a thousand desires, nine-tenths of which we cannot satisfy so long as the civilized order lasts.” — Charles Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, 1808.

Where Women’s Liberation and others leave off is precisely the starting point for a radical critique of the social implications of sexual behavior. It is alienation in its totality, and not in its purely sexual aspects, that must be abolished by the proletariat; the refusal of a particular constraint (marriage, housework) has meaning only if it is part of a refusal of all constraints. A century before the earliest critiques of bourgeois sexuality, Fourier demonstrated that a qualitative change in sexual relations could only take place in a radically different social context. All ‘radical’ experiments in living which take place in abstracto are condemned to failure; the communes of the New Left and the “counter-culture” are witness to the illusory nature of such a revolt. Here, spectacular sexuality is merely reproduced on a ‘hip’
level: from the cheap voyeurism of hippie comic books to the ‘families’ of Stalinist sects, all the old values are reinforced. These archaisms are also reflected in the various ‘radical’ ideologies of sexuality; the New Leftist Reimut Reiche seeks to reestablish ‘genital primacy’ and the family, while the interpretations of ‘polymorphous perversity’ by the mystic professor, Norman O. Brown, represent a conscious atavism in which myth and ritual will supplant reification.

Against both the spectacle and counter-spectacle of sexuality, it is necessary to assert the free will of the individual — a radical power which does not yet exist and which cannot, in fact, exist separately from collective revolutionary action. To oppose the desires of the individual against the prisons of daily life in bourgeois society is not simply to oppose radical sexuality to that of the spectacle, however — the ideology of “sexual freedom” has proved easily recuperable (see the Sexual Freedom League for example). There can be no talk of sexual freedom except within the framework of a larger social freedom. The perception that these two issues are inseparably joined is that of Reich, whose theories, despite their shortcomings, remain more radical than those of the ‘modern’ ideologues. However naive its assumptions may have been (confusion on Lenin, etc), Reich’s Sex-Pol movement in the 1920’s represents one of the first attempts to develop a radical opposition to bourgeois society that would be based on the terrain of everyday life. Unlike either the clinical or ‘radical’ psychologists of today, Reich was not concerned with either analysis or sexuality in themselves; Reich’s analysis led him to concretely link rebellion against bourgeois sexuality with the class-struggle as a whole.

Reich’s vision of a ‘Sexual Revolution’ is today only part of the revolutionary project which faces the proletariat. Sexual affirmation is one aspect of a total affirmation. The search for authentic life and communication which, however mystified, lies at the root of all sexual experience will only be satisfied through the transformation of all social relations. Revolutionary passion embraces all other desires — the cells in which we are all trapped will only be destroyed in the abolition of the spectacle in its entirety.
self-management
and the spanish revolution 1936-7

I

"For the first time since the attempts to establish socialism in Russia, Hungary and Germany following the First World War, the revolutionary struggle of the Spanish workers demonstrates a new type of transformation from capitalist to collective modes of production, which despite its incomplete nature was carried out on an impressive scale."

Karl Korsch — 1939

Thirty-six years after its first victories, the Spanish Revolution remains the most significant of the various practical experiments in self-management which have taken place in this century. The experience of the Spanish workers' councils forms an important point of departure for the modern proletariat, both in terms of its accomplishments and its failures. The widespread dissimulation of this aspect of history made by the proletariat only reinforces its fundamentally radical character. Suppressed by bourgeois historians and Leninists alike, and distorted into an unrecognizable myth by those anarchists who treasure it as one of their "golden moments", the revolutionary movement in Spain continues to be a source of embarrassment for ideology. The activities of the "uncontrollable elements" of the Spanish
proletariat proved to be a scandal to all parties. The revolution was eliminated long before the victory of the fascists by a combined force of Stalinists, liberals and ‘libertarian’ bureaucrats of the very anarchist movement in whose name the most radical members of the working class had acted. The Spanish ‘Civil War’ only began after the defeat of the Revolution.

* 

The revolution in Spain represents the last stand of the traditional proletarian movement and within its history are contained all the positive aspects of this movement as well as the counter-revolutionary forces and ideologies which were to oppose it. The struggle which had developed between Leninism and the councils in Russia was to be repeated in Spain on a larger and more profound scale. By rediscovering the councilist form in its own practice, the Spanish proletariat were the heirs of Kronstadt and the councils in Germany and Italy; with the Spanish councils the revolutionary movement which had been defeated by Social-Democracy and Bolshevism reappeared. The Spanish Revolution was an international struggle, not only in the sense that its combatants came from many countries, but because its existence stood in opposition to all the ruling powers of the world. As the Italian anarchist Berneri observed: “Today we are fighting against Burgos, but tomorrow we will have to fight against Moscow in order to defend our freedom.” This war against hierarchy; moreover, was to become a struggle against ideology in general.

* 

In understanding the Spanish Revolution, it is not a question of merely rendering its “unconscious tendencies conscious” but in explaining the actions of a highly class-conscious proletariat — actions which were veiled in ideology, yet transcended it. The appearance of the councils in 1936 was the product of 50 years of revolutionary activity, most of it under the aegis of the Spanish anarchist movement. Yet the actual revolution marked the tactical failure of the anarchists; the expropriations of July were in response to a fascist putsch and not an anarchist insurrection. The anarchists’ faith in the apocalyptic powers of a general strike had largely proved to be chimerical; the CNT—FAI had failed, in rising after rising, to be capable of extending the locus of revolution beyond the parochial confines of a few cities or regions. By 1936, the ideology of anarcho-syndicalism had been shown to be obsolete; the spontaneous development of workers’ councils during the course of the 1933 Aragon insurrection and the Asturian miners’ revolt represented a practical advance upon the anarcho-syndicalist program of building a revolutionary society based on unions. The revolutionary committees of Aragon and Asturias, which had established themselves as a social and economic power in addition to their military capacities, were to reappear all over Republican Spain in July 1936 and their existence threatened the leadership of the CNT—FAI as much as the Republican government.
Before the revolution, the CNT had attempted to integrate the councils within its ideological schema; the document produced by the CNT Congress at Saragossa (June 1936) was essentially a councilist program and recognized the councils as the basic organ of revolution. While advancing a revolutionary theory of workers' councils, however, the CNT itself was not a councilist organization — the principle of direct democracy under which the councils were to operate was not reflected in the structure of the anarchist organization. While the lessons of the Bolshevik counter-revolution were not lost on the Spanish anarchists, their refusal of a 'revolutionary' representation — a party holding power in the name of the proletariat — was purely formal. The matter of democratic organization was to become anarchism's undoing. Although its explicit call for a social revolution — one in which the proletariat would assume management over the means of production without the mediation of the state — remains one of anarchism's merits, the actual practical task of making such a revolution was beyond it.

From its inception, the Anarchist movement in Spain had retained an implicitly hierarchical structure which embodied a dualistic separation of political and economic sectors. While the anarchist union, the CNT, was to organize the working-class in preparation for social revolution, the recently-formed FAI was to constitute a “conscious minority” of anarchist militants. The CNT—FAI was patterned upon an elitist conception of organization much like Bakunin's Alliance for Social Democracy which he had defined as being composed of “federations of workers, forming..free pacts with one another, with a small secret revolutionary body that permeated and controlled them.” The clandestine FAI saw itself as a “motor producing the quantity of fabulous energy needed to move the syndicates in the direction which most conforms to the longings of Humanity for renovation and emancipation.” In practice, this organization was to act as a quasi-Leninist vanguard party and the latent hierarchical divisions of the CNT—FAI as a whole were to become a social reality after July 1936. The immense revolutionary activity of the anarchist masses was to be reversed in a struggle in which the official CNT—FAI was to take the side of the bourgeois Republican state and its new-found ally, the Communist party. What was accomplished by the factory councils, agrarian collectives and workers' militias in the year 1936-7 was in spite of the policies and actions of the official anarchist organization. Nonetheless, despite the obstacles erected in its path, the movement for self-management in the Spanish Revolution provides the clearest historical example of a genuine socialism.
"The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their actions" (Benjamin)

The historical explosion that was the Spanish Revolution cannot be explained under the convenient rubric of a 'Civil War'; it represented the unfolding of an acute class-struggle in which the Spanish proletariat participated as much for itself as against Franco. The fascist rising was answered, not by the impotent Republican government, but by a popular insurrection which involved men, women and youth and destroyed, in less than a month, the entire matrix of Spanish society. The armed proletariat of July accomplished a de facto abolition of Church and State and replaced capitalist modes of production with economic and social forms of its own. In the subsequent year, the councils established by the working-class were to become a third force fighting against both the fascists and the attempts of the Republican government to re-establish its authority. The success of the workers' and peasants' militias cannot be measured in purely military terms. While checking the fascist advance, these militias more importantly implemented a revolutionary program of expropriation and collectivization. The slogan "war and revolution at the same time" formed the basis of the militias' actions. Wherever possible throughout Republican Spain, workers seized the factories, peasants collectivized their land and a revolutionary force was organized to generalize and defend the revolution: "we carry a new world in our hearts, a world that is growing at this very moment." (Durruti)
The period of revolutionary occupation which began during July demonstrated the viability of the councilist form. The Spanish councils (unlike those previously in Russia, Germany and Italy) were able to pose the question of self-management practically, proceeding beyond the necessary arming of the workers to the organization of production. In the industrialized areas of Catalonia, an anarchist stronghold, the proletariat proved capable of administering and improving a modern urban economy, increasing productivity while maintaining necessary services for the population — revolutionary Barcelona is witness to the success of self-management in Spain. Similar results were achieved in the rural areas of Aragon and Valencia, where modern agricultural techniques were introduced in the process of collectivization. The most radical aspect of this movement, however, was not the simple rationalization of the Spanish economy but the attempt made to practically realize a critique of political economy. From the beginning of the occupations, the Spanish proletariat proclaimed a communismo libertario in which money and commodity labor were abolished. In spite of admittedly primitive economic conditions, the Spanish councils and collectives were able to devise a system of distribution and exchange which represented a qualitative supersession of the relations of capitalist production. The dilemma of 'economic' or 'moral' incentives, a problem for the bureaucratic classes of pseudo-socialist countries, was not encountered in revolutionary Spain. The radical translation of the dictum “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” into reality was incentive enough for the proletariat to meet and in fact excel the demands imposed by war.

The spontaneous capacity for organization demonstrated by the Spanish proletariat during the revolutionary period disproved, once and for all, the Leninist falsehoods about the need for “correct leadership”. The assumption of direct power over the means of production was accompanied by the establishment of a direct democracy of the proletariat in which the basic organs of power were the councils — “revolutionary committees created by the people in order to make the revolution”. (CNT, December 20, 1936). Despite differences in their individual characteristics, the councils and collectives operated on essentially the same basis: delegates were elected to perform specific tasks and co-ordinate production — these delegates had limited powers and were subject to recall by the general assemblies of workers and peasants, in which all important decisions were made. Besides establishing an internal democracy, the councils sought to extend their power by co-ordinating activities with each other; unity was created between the factory councils and agrarian collectives, not only in the militias where workers and peasants fought side by side, but in the actual federation of movements and the exchange of delegates. While bourgeois sociologists and historians have attempted to portray the revolutionary activity of the anarchist peasants as a ‘primitive religious movement’, one must only examine the Program of the Federation of the Aragon Collectives to perceive the advanced consciousness of the rural proletariat: “We propose the abolition of the local boundaries of
the property we cultivate...unoccupied work-teams will be used to reinforce the collectives that are lacking labor power.” The Spanish movement for self-management was not a demand for simple regional autonomy — councilist federation was designed to supplant traditional authority in its entirety.

“Everywhere the column advances, they collectivize... Feudalism is substituted by free communism...In former times one used to say army and people, or even the army against the people. Today, there are only a fighting and working proletariat.” —Carl Einstein, November 21, 1936.

* The form in which the councils appeared was directly related to the organization of the workers’ militias where the principles of direct democracy had first been developed. In July, the armed columns of the Spanish proletariat were, in fact, the Revolution. Their function was as much social as military; the liquidation of bourgeois elements by the militias was not carried out ‘in defense of the Republic’ but as an initial step in the radical transformation of Spanish society. The militias themselves never intended to be part of a regular army; in itself, the militia structure represented a radical break with conventional modes of warfare, simply because it was organized along revolutionary democratic lines. Like the insurgent armies of the Russian and German Revolutions, the Spanish militias represented the military arm of councilist power; the soldiers’ councils, like the factory assemblies and collectives, elected revocable, mandated delegates. The non-hierarchical character of these militia columns is evidenced in the fact that differences in rank and pay were non-existent. The history of the Spanish militias remains an example of armed proletarian power; the revolutionary columns resisted any attempt at ‘militarization’, designed to turn them into regular army units, to the end. Defiantly, their slogan became: “militiamen, yes! soldiers, never!”
III

"We must carry out a total revolution. Expropriation must also be total. This is not the time for sleeping, but for building...If the Spanish worker does not carve out his liberty, the state will return and will reconstruct the authority of the government, destroying little by little the conquest made at the cost of a thousand acts of heroism."

—Solidaridad Obrera, Aug. 26, 1936

*  

Despite the rapid advance of the workers' militias in Republican Spain, the social revolution which began in July failed to establish the absolute authority of councilist power. While the Republican government had been severely weakened, it did not, of course, abdicate in favor of the proletariat; after July, dual power existed in 'Anti-Fascist' Spain between the forces of a new revolutionary order and the remnants of the bourgeois Republic. The councils of July had made the government virtually irrelevant and had practically superseded the syndicalist structure of the CNT—FAI; they were defeated to the extent that they failed to see the necessity of consolidating their power — a consolidation that would inevitably mean the abandonment of all traditional organizations. Although the slogan of Asturias, UHP (unite, proletarian brothers!), reappeared during July and united various factions of the proletariat around a common program of revolutionary activity, ideological divisions soon manifested themselves again and prevented a lasting unity. The proletariat split along party lines, the anarchist rank-and-file and POUM (a small Marxist party) being the only ones to support the Revolution. Despite this, the revolutionary proletariat were in a majority — unfortunately, however, they did not take advantage of their position. A misplaced trust in the leadership of the CNT—FAI led to a situation where the anarchist masses were to acquiesce to the gradual abolition of their power. Invoking the Stalinist slogans of "Unity" and "Discipline", the CNT—FAI sought to persuade the proletariat that the elimination of the councils and militias was a necessity imposed by the exigencies of Civil War.

*  

While the anarchist proletariat undertook the reconstruction of society along the lines of self-management, the official CNT—FAI was preparing to accede to its compromise. The collaborationist policy of the anarcho-bureaucrats became clear when they put aside their 'anti'-statist ideology and actually joined the government. Playing into the hands of the Stalinists, who were rapidly organizing the Republican petit-bourgeoisie into a counter-revolutionary movement, the CNT ministers consented to governmental action against the councils. Government-inspired municipal councils, which included extra-proportional representation for the UGT and Communist party, were created.
in an effort to replace the councils of the proletariat. Additionally, the CNT leadership helped draft the Decree of Collectivization of October 24, 1936, which would limit the councils’ power; in place of self-management they proposed to establish a form of ‘workers’ control’ in which the workers’ committees served a purely advisory role.

* 

The failure of the Spanish Revolution lies in its inability to extend itself to a point where the councils and militias would assume total control over the revolutionary movement and, as a consequence, over Republican Spain as a whole. While immensely successful in organizing military and economic affairs, the Spanish councils failed to give positive practical and theoretical expression to their own existence. Unable to define themselves in relation to the CNT—FAI, they were everywhere outmaneuvered. Every attempt at action against the enemies of the Revolution in the Republican camp was thwarted; the Stalinists and liberals were able to reconstruct the machinery of government virtually unhindered. Successive Republican ministries sabotaged the attempts at self-management, denying credit to factories, etc., without serious retaliation — the anarchist militias who were denied arms did not disarm those who were preparing their demise. The destruction of the Spanish Revolution did not, of course, proceed without opposition, but the recognition by the proletariat of its betrayal did not come until well after the initial moves against the councils and militias. Berneri was one of the first to openly pose the crucial question facing the revolution — in an open letter to the ‘anarchist’ politician Montseny he wrote: “The dilemma, war or revolution, no longer has any meaning. The only dilemma is this: either victory over Franco through revolutionary war or defeat. The problem for you and the other comrades is to choose between the Versailles of Thiers and the Paris of the Commune, before Thiers and Bismarck make their holy union.” Unfortunately, the forces of the Spanish Thiers had already acted; the left-wing anarchist masses, who co-operated with militants of POUM, did not offer significant opposition until early 1937. The left-anarchist group, the Friends of Durruti, conducted a widespread agitation among the workers’ militias for a defense of the Revolution, but by this time the initiative had passed from the proletariat to the forces of its enemies.

* 

The campaign of the bourgeois Republican forces (the government, the Communist and Socialist parties) against the workers’ councils became overtly violent in May, 1937 when the Stalinists and Catalan Nationalists moved on the self-managed Barcelona Telephone Exchange. Following this action, the working-class of the city rose spontaneously to defend their Revolution; barricades were erected, the police disarmed and armed workers were in control of the city. At this point, the counter-revolution could have been reversed, at least in Catalonia. The anarchist militias at the Aragon front were prepared to
"On the one side stood the huge compact proletariat of Barcelona with its long revolutionary tradition, and on the other the white-collar workers and petite bourgeoisie of the city, organized and armed by the Communist party against it." — Gerald Brenan, The Spanish Labyrinth.

March to Barcelona — victory was far from assured for the government and the Stalinists. The Barcelona workers, however, remained in purely defensive positions and hesitated to move beyond their own districts. This stalemate worked to the advantage of those who sought to pacify the situation and, as before, the central leadership of the CNT—FAI was to offer its services of ‘conciliation’ — from the beginning of the insurrection, these recuperators urged the workers to dismantle their barricades and return to work. The casa CNT was resisted in its pacification program by the Friends of Durruti and others who called for the defense of the councils and a victorious conclusion to the fighting. Despite this resistance, the CNT continued in its efforts to ‘mediate’ the dispute and prevented anarchist militiamen from entering the city. Thus isolated from external support, the insurgents of Barcelona were easily surrounded; while the CNT called for a ‘return to normality,’ Stalinist agents began to implement their by-now standard methods of repression, assassinating select groups of the most radical elements and disarming the workers, thereby establishing ‘unity’. In the months after May, these tactics were employed throughout Republican Spain: Lister’s troops eliminated the agrarian collectives, the militias were dissolved, POUM was suppressed and the CNT, now expendable, was evicted from the government. The councils were defeated within a year after their appearance; the “thousand acts of heroism” of the Spanish proletariat were not enough to prevent the victory of the counter-revolution.
AN ANSWER TO
"WHAT IS TO BE DONE?"

Destruction of
Leninist texts,
Hungary 1956.

IV

What was so difficult to accomplish in Spain 1936, today becomes the absolute minimum for any proletarian revolution. The experience of the Spanish workers’ councils provides an example of only the beginnings of councilist power; the technical resources of contemporary capitalist society will enable the modern proletariat to accomplish in a few days what the Spanish revolutionaries were never able to complete — the self-management of the means of production. The possibilities for the radical transformation of society are that much greater now because the ‘economic question’ can and must become a banality. Whereas in Spain “full employment” was a revolutionary goal, the success of any future councils will be measured by their concrete efforts to eliminate work as much as possible. Because of the extreme conditions of emergency in which it took place, the Spanish Revolution was never a festival, even to the extent the Commune was. The pleasure denied the Spanish proletariat awaits the revolutionaries of today.

*  

Beyond the economic and technical developments which separate the modern proletariat from the tradition of the Spanish councils, there remains an essential link — many of the problems encountered in 1936 will continue to confront any revolutionary movement. In its defeat, the Spanish Revolution demonstrates the role played by enemies within the ranks of the proletariat — recuperators who are not as easily recognized as the clowns of the various Leninist parties. As Spain shows, councilist power does not always succumb to an external ‘villain’ conveniently played by the Noskes and Trotskys of the world; the councils can defeat themselves if they fail to take the offensive and establish their authority everywhere. The modern proletariat will avoid the fate which befell revolutionary Kronstadt or Barcelona only through an awareness of the immensity of the task which awaits it. The exemplary actions of the Spanish councils and militias could not compensate for the failure of the Spanish proletariat to perceive the obstacles which still remained in its path. The radical history of the future will be conscious or it will be nothing.
THE WORK OF IDEOLOGY

The mundane and at the same time mysterious fact of life, work, has forced its way back into the spotlight of public attention. Capitalism, which for so long has attempted to conceal what goes on in the act of commodity labor, now puts the relationship between the worker and the means of production up for display. Its accomplices, the unions and the sociologists, have joined in the examination. But all the current interest in this subject has nothing to do with mere curiosity; it is a direct result of the acute social crisis faced by world capitalism — workers everywhere have expressed a desire to put an end to work. The actions of the proletariat have forced capitalism to reveal what it had previously kept secret — no one believes in work any more. This revelation has been accompanied by an attempt to restore order to the labor process; everywhere the world’s bosses are implementing new techniques of labor management. “The reform of labor and not its abolition” is the watchword for the ruling classes of all countries.

Pehr Gyllenhammar, president of Sweden's Volvo, measuring morale on the assembly line.
While formerly capitalism reduced the worker to a mere appendage of the machine, today it is required to "humanize" the work process. Already, new programs designed to restore "vitality" to the act of work are being initiated by capitalism from Sweden to the United States. The traditional assembly line (and its ideology, Taylorism) is being replaced by work-situations in which workers are allowed to participate in the planning and execution of production; capitalism has also tried to restore "meaning" to the worker's job by diversifying the tasks he must perform. In many areas, these "job enrichment" programs have swept the initiative for reform away from the unions and other self-proclaimed representatives of the proletariat.

The trade unions, permanent and necessary partners with management in the maintenance of commodity production, have been carried along in the reformist tide and have come to accept the idea of "workers' control" as a stop-gap to the militant actions of their constituencies. In this movement, the U.S. trade unions lag behind their bureaucratic counterparts elsewhere; the more advanced trade unions (the Canadian CNTU, the French CFDT) have made "workers' control" an important part of their programs — the ex-priests of the CFDT have even endorsed the concept of "self-management." All of this parvenu "radicalism" is only meant to strengthen the position of the unions; they have become militant only to keep some measure of control over their members. Any kind of "workers' control" implemented by the unions will be carried out under their tutelage; this will be the reward offered by management if they are able to involve the workers in their schemes once again.

In the wake of all this, the various left-overs of Leninism have been put in the position of trying to catch up with a fast-changing reality. They too have begun to modernize, appending a call for workers' control to their ideologies. Gramsci's modernist Jacobinism (vanguard party cum "factory councils") has been dusted off and declared serviceable in order to give the Leninist party an appearance of "democracy." Abandoning the archaic models of Russian or Chinese state-capitalism, the more sophisticated Leninists have taken their cue from more flexible systems of bureaucracy such as Yugoslavia, where the Party has institutionalized sham "workers' councils" that organize the particulars of commodity production. Certain Trotskyist groups, especially in England, have been in the forefront of this new trend, basing their entire conception of "revolution" around workers' control and advocating "self-management" between their predictable calls for "correct leadership" to guide the struggle.

As can be seen, the reform of work has also been the work of ideology. Even the most radical slogans, once stripped of their content, have entered the service of counter-revolution. Of these, workers' control has probably drawn the most overtime from capitalism; in cloaking simple reformism under a radical guise it has been in the forefront of the recuperation of current struggles. The ideologists of workers' control have
attempted to define the terrain of struggle in advance; workers will assume 'control' over the means of production by including demands for increased worker participation in decision-making capacities along with the usual demands for higher wages, etc. Through a quantitative accumulation of "qualitative victories," the gradual "withering away" of the bosses' power, the workers will learn to run production as it is. This "radical" step is nothing more than a more sophisticated version of the present work relationship; once the more oppressive features of the system have been eliminated, commodity production, under the administration of workers' control, will function more smoothly.

In attempting to impose themselves as the adjutants to the movement of the proletariat, the ideologists of workers' control have revealed themselves for what they are — the future masters of a more advanced alienation. The workers' controllers are just that; their idea of proletarian 'democracy' is nothing more than a further step in the control of the proletariat. Even the most advanced ideologists of workers' control (Gorz, Mallet) admit this; the idiot Gorz talks of workers' councils, "revolutionary" reform, and "cultural revolution" all in one breath. By integrating workers more fully into the production process, workers' control affords the proletariat the ability to participate in the construction of their own alienation. "Participation" cannot be confused with self-management; the mere occupation of the existing order of production without its transformation can be nothing more than a substitution of bosses. From the old robber-baron capitalist to the joint union-management committees, the principle of authority is the same.

While workers' control has begun a revitalization of the unions, both bringing them back into focus as a center of "working class activity" and providing a suitably "democratic" environment for their long-needed restructuring, certain groups (Solidarity, ICO, Root & Branch) have already advanced to a critique of unionism and its attendant, open reformism. These groups have sufficient intelligence to recognize the real movement of the proletariat in such autonomous acts as wildcat strikes and sabotage. Yet while they correctly see the form in which the class struggle is actually taking place, the true implications of this activity remain beyond them. Like the workers' controlists they can comprehend the proletarian revolt currently developing throughout the world only as a rebellion against the particular forms of the political and economic organization of capitalist society. Failing to understand the proletariat as the negation of the total production of life in bourgeois society, these "councilists" center their aims around the rearrangement of productive life. Because they recognize the need for a revolution to achieve their aims, they have successfully placed themselves beyond workers' control; because they only aim to have immediately what the workers' controlists want to develop into a long bureaucratic march, they are only one step beyond.
These “councilists” have not moved forward one inch from the perspective elaborated in Anton Pannekoek’s *Workers’ Councils*, which attempted in 1940 to assess the experience of workers’ councils as revolutionary forms. Pannekoek’s radical method of deriving the new organization of the new world from “the real conditions and needs of present work and present workers” allowed him to go far beyond the rigid perspective of “Marxism,” and to elaborate the first coherent theory of councils and councilist organization. But Pannekoek’s radicalism is totally lost to his self-proclaimed “councilist” inheritors. Lacking a critique of modern society, they have only been able to develop a pale imitation of what Pannekoek had already done. In short, they have succeeded in building an ideology out of Pannekoek’s theoretical contribution: detached from the movement of the proletariat as it is unfolding, the concept of workers’ councils is erected as an *ideal* to which reality is supposed to conform.

This idealization of the council form is reflected in the organization of the various “councilist” groups. Unable to understand the ongoing revolutionary processes at work in society, they devote most of their time to documenting details surrounding workers’ movements of the past. Solidarity has effectively made a career out of this, publishing pamphlets on virtually every proletarian revolution since the Commune, with the notable exception of the Spanish Revolution. Here, a closely guarded silence is maintained; the major role played in Spain by anarchists (whose English imitators constitute Solidarity’s chief ideological rivals) necessitates that the whole affair be deleted from Solidarity’s “history” of the proletariat. Other than providing the proletariat with these selected abstract models for revolution, Solidarity exists in an organizational limbo, waiting for the workers to do something so that its isolated groups of militants can be of more concrete service. In the interim, an “ongoing debate” is proclaimed, which in this case can only reveal the eclectic nature of their ideology and serve to justify such “temporary” expedients of working at the unions “from the inside” and forming an alliance with the American followers of Daniel De Leon (whose original contribution to socialism was that it could be achieved by passing a constitutional amendment).

The French group I.C.O. (Workers’ Information Correspondence) has avoided the militantism of other groups by doing *nothing*; their concept of ‘federation’ is nothing more than a federated discussion of “general ideas.” I.C.O.’s non-organization is a measure of its own impotence; it *exists* as a monthly “information bulletin.” Its answer to traditional leftist manipulation is a purely formal democracy of speech, where everything can be said so that nothing has to be decided. The ostensible purpose of I.C.O. being to “explicate situations in which the workers realize more or less rapidly that nothing fundamental has changed,” their worst nightmare is that something might really happen. Incapable of acting themselves, they imagine the proletariat to be in the same miserable state: following May ’68 in France, they published a pamphlet which meticulously explained why a revolutionary situation did not exist.
We've Got to Understand How Things Got This Way In Order to Change Them

Most young Americans today aren't students or street people but workers. And they're having the same tough time that generations of American workers have had before them. That's why the Panthers, the Young Lords, the triumphant Véga strikers and others across the country are studying the real history of massive revolutionary movements in America. And they are organizing.

Did you know that in 1877 working-class Americans paralyzed the nation in an authentic revolutionary movement that nearly overthrew the railroad robber barons and the entire federal government?

That in 1892 hundreds of people were killed and wounded when workers struck Carnegie Steel's Homestead Works, defeating a whole army of Pinkertons hired to crush the insurrection.

Hit parade history. Ad for Brecher's book in Rolling Stone

Root & Branch, the latest addition to the “councilist” camp, has assembled its ideology by taking the 'best' of everyone else’s. I.C.O.'s “mass strike” is combined with Solidarity’s concept of organization, added to a bit of economism, and finally joined together with selected New Left mystifications (emphasis here on the “counter-culture”). Root & Branch has always been part of the “Movement”; despite occasional praises for fellow “councilists,” it actively shares an affinity with avant-garde Movement groups such as Liberation Magazine (with special affection reserved for that dean of labor reform, Staughton Lynd). Thus it is hardly surprising that Root & Branch’s Jeremy Brecher, pop ideologist published by Rolling Stone, attempts in his book on the American proletariat to integrate councils into the framework of the New Left. This custodian of proletarian history renounces all precision, and sees councilist tendencies in struggles everywhere —
in student strikes and wildcat strikes alike. Brecher's analysis is not confined to the United States — he attempts to elaborate an international perspective as well with short synopses of workers' movements in Russia (1917), Italy (1920), and Spain (1936). These "interesting" and "impressive" events are even specially packaged: the apparently dull subject of workers' councils is enhanced with more exciting facts and figures. Where discussion of councils is necessary, they are presented under various euphemisms ("factory committees," "factory councils," "workers' committees," "organs of workers' control," "communes," etc.). But Brecher does not pretend to analyze the function of the councils as the forms of the self-organization of the proletariat — he openly admits his role as historian, and ends his book with a touching plea for intellectual objectivity.

The sociological perspective with which the "councilist" ideologists view the past is employed by them to describe the present as well. Seeing revolutionary activity only as a series of "events" in which the proletariat participates as a "mass," the "councilists" fail to perceive the subjective dynamic of revolution. Although they claim to have gone beyond Leninism, they continue to see revolution as proceeding from an external logic, a response to a "social crisis" of capitalism which will "educate" the workers about the need to revolt. Yet while the "councilists" fail to comprehend the radical content of current proletarian activity, they nonetheless attempt to append themselves to the workers' struggles, in the hope that these struggles will develop into something. They invent a mechanical formula for the future: a quantitative progression of wildcat strikes is envisioned as developing into a "mass strike" and finally into revolution. Consciousness in this "struggle" is dependent solely on the numbers of workers involved; as the ranks of this idyllic movement grow, workers are to understand that they are fighting no longer as isolated individuals but as a class. United around the sterile slogans of "solidarity" and collective "responsibility," the workers will gradually take over the means of production; strike committees will "naturally" tend to become workers councils, which will organize things "rationally" and provide for everyone's needs. The economist nature of this view of councils even leaves it open to a "critique" by advanced Leninists such as the Italian Baldi, who "proves" the need for a vanguard party by maintaining that councils only reproduce the form of capitalist society by occupying the means of production that have been organized by the bourgeoisie.

What brings on the downfall of the "councilists" forms only the starting point for any authentic revolutionary movement. Just as political economy has succeeded in dominating all aspects of life, it must be answered by a movement which aims to transform all social relations. Workers' councils can reproduce capitalist society, and will in fact do so to the degree that they accept the artificial distinctions of politics, economics, etc. But the solution to the possibility of such social
reproduction begins with what the "councilists" will never understand — the refusal to reproduce the conditions of one's own alienation in the act of commodity labor, a refusal which is already present in the proletarian struggles taking place today. The only justification for the councils will be as the means by which each individual can make his desire to live free from all restrictions a permanent reality.

The struggle against all hierarchy must recognize itself as the struggle against the hierarchy of ideas employed by the bourgeoisie to maintain its world. Ideology is today the essential defense mechanism of spectacular society — false consciousness, however radical it may appear, is the palace guard of the old world. The destruction of this last barrier of mediation will be crucial for the revolutionary proletariat if it is to establish its authority; ideological as well as physical domination must be abolished by the councils through the direct translation of thought into practice. The opposition between theory and ideology is no mere academic dispute; it is itself part of the class-struggle and can be resolved only by the actions of the proletariat. The autonomy of theory can only be established by an autonomous proletarian power.

If we have shown the ideologists of workers' control and councilism for what they, in fact, are, it is not to offer ourselves and our theory as some sort of idealized replacement. We have merely shown what stands in the way of the proletariat and the radical tasks it must perform before it begins to create a world of its own. We are not mere partisans of workers' councils; what separates us from the "councilist" ideologists is our desire to extend and in fact supersede the past accomplishments of workers' councils. In speaking of a past tradition, we do so not out of some romantic attachment to a bygone era of proletarian revolution, but because the experience of these instances of councilist power form a practical basis for future revolution.

the power of the councils:

If we are radical enough to imagine the reality of a situationist revolution, we can also think of its consequences. Up until now, the situationists have been unique in their willingness to speak of the positive aspects of proletarian revolution, but even in this respect very little has been said about the concrete problems which will arise in any practical attempt in self-management. While we have no desire to create any sort of blueprint for revolution, these questions cannot be dismissed out of hand; if we can talk of the workers' councils of the past, we can also talk of those in the future. Unless self-management is viewed theoretically as a contemporary possibility, it will remain as an easily distorted myth. The facility with which situationist theory can be
turned into an ideology is shown most clearly in the psittaceous repetition of certain phrases and certain traditions in current 'situationist' texts. From now on, we are the enemies, not only of the pro-situs, but of those situationists who are merely pro-councilist.

The absence of sustained practical experience in councilist organization necessitates a far-reaching theoretical debate on the nature of such organization. A similar debate was initiated after the Russian and German Revolutions by Korsch, Pannekoek, Gorter, etc., but the results obtained during this period have long ceased to be directly applicable in practice. Raoul Vaneigem's 'Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Autogestion (Internationale Situationniste No. 12, reprinted in ANARCHY No. 7, 1972) represents one of the few attempts after Pannekoek to theoretically pose the questions faced in any revolutionary situation where councils emerge. Based on the experiences of May '68, Vaneigem's theses are important, but altogether tentative; much of the piece is concerned with a theoretical vindication of Fourier and the analysis of a future councilist power is somewhat facile. Pannekoek's prescient observation that "when the workers seize the factories in order to organize production a number of new and difficult problems arise also" (Workers Councils) has not been invalidated by the technical progress of the bourgeois economy. The development of modern economic forces, while enabling a radical resolution of problems of communication, distribution, etc., has also created a situation not anticipated in previous councilist theory. The rapid decline in the productive sector of the proletariat in advanced capitalist countries has rendered the traditional model of councilist organization, the factory assembly, obsolete.

The shop floor can no longer be considered as the primary base of councilist power. The occupation of the factories will form only one of many initial steps towards the conquest of society by the proletariat — today in most advanced economies, the actual productive sector of the working-class constitutes a minority of the proletariat as a whole. Thus, the task for a councilist revolution, which seeks to establish a total democracy over society, will be to involve, not only the factory workers, but all of the proletariat in its activity. The present economic reality of bourgeois society cannot be radically overcome, however, by a simple quantitative proliferation of the councils throughout all areas of the proletariat. The councilist form itself must be re-examined in view of a contemporary definition of the "means of production".

It is no longer possible to talk only of workers' councils in the strict sense of the term. The conventional image of workers' soviets is as archaic today as the Bolshevik Jacobinism which defeated them was 50 years ago. Since the tasks of any councils which will arise in the future must extend beyond the sphere of production, the councilist form itself must extend beyond the work-place. In any period of revolutionary
occupations, it will be necessary to distinguish between several types of councils — productive, service, neighborhood, etc., — but such a distinction in no way resolves the difficulties posed by total revolution. The councils will inevitably eliminate various ‘parasitical’ sectors of the economy and this elimination will liberate large numbers of the proletariat from work. At the same time, however, it will destroy the councils in these areas and will entail the incorporation of those displaced within other organizational structures. Vaneigem’s proposal to merely “open the factory gates” to those not involved in a vital capacity retains an outmoded conception of the functioning of the councils and is, in fact, elitist. There can be no ‘vanguard’ of the councils, no ‘center’ of self-management; the revolution will be in the hands of a majority or hierarchical divisions will reappear despite the most democratic principles.

The organization of the councils must be such that they embrace all of society. Assemblies will have to be constituted not only in work areas but in other areas as well. The delineation of the various tasks, powers, membership, etc., of these different forms of organization will be one of the first priorities of the assemblies. Following this, perhaps the greatest difficulty for the revolutionary proletariat will be that of avoiding any kind of parliamentarism in the organization of the councils. The concept of revocable, mandated delegates will remain a purely formal principle until it becomes a practical reality. Even such a realization, though, does not ensure the success of direct democracy. Delegated authority, however accountable to a democratic base, always contains the possibility of developing in opposition to a power without mediators. In any revolutionary situation, bureaucratization will remain a very real contingency — one that must be confronted, not only through the rotation of delegates, but through an awareness of the hierarchical tendencies which are likely to develop. Certain forms of organization (co-ordinating committees, etc.) will be delegated with more authority than others and, as a consequence, must be closely supervised by the general assemblies. Only the continued, active participation of these assemblies and, hence, the proletariat as a whole will prevent the possible rise of any councilist bureaucracy.

The ability of the councils to solve the question of their own organization will determine the success of self-management. In any case, the process whereby the operation of society can be reduced to a “simple administration of things” will undoubtedly be long and complex. The power of the councils will have a meaning which can only be supplied by the revolutionary proletariat — the councils are its power and it is there that the problems raised by theory can be answered. At present, we can only dispel the illusions which will face such a power; its real obstacles can only be overcome in practice.
The true measure of a revolutionary organization's effectiveness is not only to be found in its theoretical capacities, but in its ability to transform its insights into practical reality. In this journal, we have attempted to revise and expand upon the situationists' critique of modern society, in order to provide a theoretical basis for our future activity. However, our perspectives have not emerged as a ready-made set of ideas — they have been the product of a year's practical and theoretical work. While we have made it clear in our practice that organization cannot just be conceived in terms of adherence to a "minimum definition," it is also necessary to discuss the "mediation between theory and practice" concretely and not as an abstract slogan. We do not take our simple existence for granted — we can only show who we are by what we do.

If we call ourselves an organization, it is not out of an acknowledgement of the "historical necessity" of establishing such a form, but because organized activity has proved to be the most effective means of communicating radical ideas; whether in our projects or in our internal discussions, we attempt to put our capacities in common and to use these capacities collectively in order to attain our goals. We are not partisans of a pure, spontaneist "practice," nor do we concern ourselves with academically refining our theoretical discoveries — we constantly seek to make our methods as radical as our words. In many cases we have been successful in achieving this, but we have also encountered many problems along the way, both in our attempts to arrive at internal democracy as well as in our organizational practice.
Given our situation, then, we do not pretend to be an exemplary elite of super-revolutionaries; we can hardly say that we exist outside the daily life of society. It would be useless to proclaim that we have already “transformed our lives.” Rather, it is the subjective awareness of the misery of daily life which forms a point of departure for our action and which unites us with other struggles; we do not act through a misplaced need to bring the proletariat up to “our” level of consciousness but out of a desire to contribute to the radicalization of what it has already accomplished. And although we are councilists, our function is not to provide a “dress rehearsal” for the councils — the tasks which we confront in the present pre-revolutionary period are entirely different from those which the councils will face.

In the same way, we do not idealize each individual’s potential for equal participation in the affairs of the group; each of us has differing talents, and the problem consists in placing all these talents at the service of our project. “Equality” is not a fixed point or an absolute — genuine equality can only take place on the level of the possible. All of us share a common desire for the realization of the game we have begun, and since we are aware of our occasional failures in abolishing hierarchy within the group, the supersession of these limitations forms an important part of this game. We cannot wish our problems away — they can only be resolved in the process of practical struggle. Transparency and mutual critical confidence are our best weapons for this.

Our central task in engaging in revolutionary activity is to “generalize communication and coherence” in present struggles. We have intervened in areas where a definite revolt against authority exists — in high schools, universities, and among workers — and in situations where this revolt has manifested itself openly, we have tried to show how far it could go if it were conscious of its implications. We have no desire to lead or guide these struggles; rather, in these moments of the present which are striving to surpass themselves, we find the direction of a future revolutionary praxis. However, the problems involved in carrying on such activity in the U.S., where radical struggles have so far only affirmed themselves in a primitive form, along with the fact that no practical examples for action have been created, have required us to experiment with different agitational techniques. Since we are working on our own and in isolation from the strategic areas in the system, we have had to rely on chance in many instances. But when we have succeeded in exploiting the possibilities of a given situation, it has been primarily because of the use of a subversive technique which we have put to use. It has been shown that agitation in areas where nothing is happening (but where something could happen) can produce positive results — witness our Daily Cal scandal. No matter how radical the situation, though, we have always attempted to pose questions that go beyond the immediate circumstances; by demonstrating the revolutionary potential inherent in what is already taking place, we do not want merely to describe the unfolding of a historical process. Instead, we aim to participate in making our own history and to inform others about their capacities to shape the world according to their desires — we explicitly discourage any contemplative attitudes towards our activity.
Our intention in producing agitations is not simply to accomplish a conventional dissemination of ideas. If we have gained a certain notoriety, it is because our strategic weapons have proved to be as important as our theoretical perspectives; we have constantly sought to endow the content of our pieces with an appropriate form which would enable us to communicate on a direct level. We have endeavored to take advantage of every possible opening for activity to carry this out, but although we have not restricted our attention to a particular area, it is true that much of what we have done has been concentrated in the student milieu and that most of our successful interventions have occurred there. Despite the unquestionable poverty of student life, a definite feeling of discontent has been characteristic of American students in the past ten years; no matter how confused this intuitive revolt has been, most students, at least once, have tried to search for the causes of their dissatisfaction with the academic routine. In attempting to give a coherent form to this rebellion, we have succeeded in making more people aware of their misery and the ways to abolish it. Our failure to achieve a similar success among workers is at once a reflection of a practical weakness on our part and the very real conditions of the American terrain which mitigate against the immediate occurrence of such a success. This does not mean that we should “talk down” to people who aren’t students, or that we are preoccupied with university life; we intend to broaden our strategy to encompass all areas of society.

The projects we have undertaken in the past year have shown a definite development, both technically and in the use of certain concepts; our initial work, The Citadel and Other Sordid Tales (written during the spring of 1971 and distributed at several Bay Area universities), while it attempted to formulate a critique of the university in capitalist society and of the student Left, remained abstract because it did not start from a specific situation. As we began to clarify our perspectives, however, this was gradually superseded in our practice. Perhaps the most effective form which we have employed has been the subversion of conventional publications (newspapers and leaflets) to publicize our ideas and to communicate a scandalous effect. Our agitations at the University of California at Berkeley were particularly successful examples of this: the critiques expressed there were anticipated in the leaflet On Contradiction, designed to expose the charade of the dismissal of Maoist professor H. Bruce Franklin from Stanford University, and which was distributed at Stanford after the verdict was issued.

At first we produced two sets of questionnaires aimed at the disciplines of psychology and sociology (two of the most popular departments at Berkeley), using the university seal and the announcement of non-existent competitions for “authenticity.” These contained a critique of the sociological and psychological perspectives, where both systems of false knowledge were made to pronounce judgement on themselves, and on the society which requires their existence, in their own language. Distribution of the questionnaires formed an integral part of their shock-value; by passing ourselves off as teaching assistants, announcing the end of classes, and insulting the professors on occasion, we managed to disrupt the normal classroom routine.
thoroughly. The fact that many students took the questionnaires seriously at first only demonstrated the stupidity of their roles, which they eventually had to confront when the truth of our activity dawned on them.

Our fake issue of the Berkeley student newspaper, the Daily Californian, represented an attempt at accomplishing a large-scale scandal at the university. The fact that we chose the Daily Cal as a means of communicating our critique of student life, the university, and the New Left is itself unimportant other than that it was a convenient way to assure a wide distribution. We did not aim to scandalize the miserable staff of the newspaper but the university as a whole. It was no surprise that the media focused its attention on the superficially scandalous
A Dadaist-anarchist group called “Point Blank!” apparently stole most of The Daily Californian delivered to campus and substituted its own version of the paper yesterday morning between 7:45 and 8:15 a.m.

Phony Essay
The group may have been responsible for a phony “essay contest” flyer circulated to students in the sociology department. The flyer bore the names of prominent sociology professors, and offered a cash prize to the winner.

Leaders of other anti-war groups have been attacked in some of the organization’s literature, and some are reportedly calling for a crack-down on “nihilistic” elements in the city.

Daily Cal 5-19-72

“The same people,” said Toni Marin, night editor of the regular student newspaper, “have issued a number of weird leaflets during the past few days.”

UC Berkeley students arriving for classes Friday were shocked to find on the front page of the Daily Californian the following notice: “Last issue of the Daily Cal.”

A statement on the back page, signed by the staff, explained that the Daily Cal editors had decided there is “no more news” worth covering and had, therefore, simply quit printing the newspaper.

Fortunately, the statement continued, a group of concerned individuals, calling themselves “Point Blank,” had offered to take over management of the publication.

Students were even more shocked when they found it was a hoax. Or, more precisely, an anarchist plot to overthrow the U.S. government.

“Point Blank,” it turns out, is a small band of honest-to-goodness anarchists, called “situationists,” dedicated to the eventual downfall of capitalism. Instead of throwing bombs like their forerunners, they try to create situations which might lead to anarchy.
aspects of our critique and deliberately suppressed the content (to which we responded appropriately in our comic *He Who Laughs Last*) — what was more important was that our *Daily Cal* had made more people aware of the radicality of our ideas than had any of our previous projects. The leaflet *Riot or Ritual?* written during the spring disturbances over Southeast Asia, had offered a preview of the ideas contained in the *Daily Cal*, and its success was further confirmed by that of the larger work — at a time when our existence had been made known, the fake newspaper served the purpose of a more thorough explanation of our game, as well as a way of assuring our notoriety.

**From *He Who Laughs Last***...
But although our agitations at the university level have generally had positive results, this has not been the case with most of our other pieces — specifically, our interventions directed at workers. The phony issue of a workerist “underground” paper that had circulated among Bay Area phone workers, the AT&T Express, while distributed over a large area, produced no practical results at all, and our leaflet Out of Order, written during the telephone wildcat in the summer of 1971 met with the same lack of response. Each piece analyzed the radical situation existing in the telephone company, drawing possible conclusions for future activity. Out of Order was an intervention during an ongoing struggle, which placed the events within a context of extending what the workers had already accomplished in their spontaneous action (sabotage, disruptions and occupations of union meetings, etc.). The AT&T Express developed many of these points, presenting a more detailed critique of the workerists operating among the rank-and-file,
and situating the struggle of phone workers within the movement of the American proletariat in general: it emphasized the strategic nature of communications networks in the system and indicated what possibilities the workers could take advantage of on the job. If these projects did not have much of an effect, though, it is not because their content was “over the heads” of the workers — they were initially received very favorably when they were distributed — but because we had not communicated clearly enough to our readers. Quite aside from the tactical errors which were committed (the real AT&T Express was not as well known as we had thought, and Out of Order was preoccupied with the question of “play” in areas where more precise analysis was needed), our essential failure consisted in our contrived notions of practice. We were not only unfamiliar with the particular characteristics of the areas in which we were intervening; we also considered these areas as forming a part of an undefined “worker milieu,” and we have only begun to break through the obstacles that confront us here.

What we have learned in the past year, however, will furnish a basis for what is yet to come — in the future, we plan to intervene on a more specific level. The fate of our pamphlet The End of High School (a critique of high school and the modernist proposals to reform it, which showed how the nihilist revolt existing among high school students could be developed further) showed that general conclusions must be drawn out of the particular examples, and not imposed on them, in order for an agitation to have any success. It is therefore important to establish direct contact with people who are inside the school or workplace; once we have some information as to what is going on at a given time and what is involved there, our capacities for scandal can be put to greater advantage. At the present time, it is still necessary for us to
publicize our existence, and the only effective way of accomplishing this is to continue what we have been doing on a larger scale, using different techniques of communication. In general, we aim to experiment as much as possible with new methods of agitation: we have discovered that provoking situations can be as scandalous as intervening in situations that have already been created. Thus, we don’t intend to stand aside until something happens, but to continue to make our presence felt everywhere.

While capitalism has definitely not heard the last from us, our activity will be passed off as a mere novelty until people begin to join us in a common project. We make no pretensions about ourselves — at best we can only point out what everybody already knows, and the problem for people who recognize themselves in our agitations is to translate that knowledge into action. It should be clear that we have no use for disciplines — we do not seek to be guardians of an absolute “coherence” to which only a select few can gain access, but to establish a basis for dialogue with all those who contact us. Since we reject all manipulation, we make definite demands on people who want to participate actively in our projects, and we expect them to be clear on what they want from us: once this minimum has been acknowledged, the game can begin. It is pointless to entertain illusions about “collaboration” or “federation” — these questions can only be resolved mutually and concretely with groups or individuals in the elaboration of a common perspective and terrain of activity.

Our insistence on the importance of developing a revolutionary practice in modern society is what sets us apart from the two other groups in America that call themselves “situationist,” Create Situations and Contradiction. Neither of these groups has produced anything worthy of discussion in the past year, other than reprints or translations of already-written texts. Their “existence” is merely formal — they may delude themselves about their imagined coherence, but they have not bothered to take any practical risks or even think about the question of practice at all. These publishing houses are of no interest to anybody outside of themselves.

If we are the only situationist organization in America that has actively tried to make our radical theory a reality, this does not imply that we have a monopoly to defend. At this point, it is vital for revolutionaries around the country to communicate with each other and generalize their experiences. There is no predetermined point at which a large-scale proletarian insurrection will occur, where revolutionaries will somehow take advantage of the situation to announce their presence. The daily battle against alienation that is now being waged demands an appropriate practice — it requires all those who consider themselves revolutionaries to make their existence a force to be reckoned with. Those who accuse us of being “activists” and who counterpose a metaphysical faith in the inevitability of revolution are simply abdicating any conception of the problems which remain to be dealt with. Since our goal is practical truth, we will continue to confront these problems directly and to communicate our ideas openly, wherever they find their concrete expression in the class struggle. Our real success will occur to the extent that it becomes impossible for anyone to escape its conclusions.
Copies of most of our projects can be obtained from us.

The following situationist texts are available from us:
- *Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity-Economy*. Xerox.
- *Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations.*
- *On the Poverty of Student Life.*
- 61 Theses on the Situationist International and Its Time (from *The Real Break in the International*). Xerox. $1.25
- Raoul Vaneigem: *Notice to the civilized Concerning Generalized Autogestion* (from IS No. 12). Xerox.
- *The Totality for Kids* (from IS No 7—8).
- *Treatise on Living for the Use of the Young Generation*, Parts I and II.

Collected edition of Internationale Situationniste 1—12 available in French from Van Gennep, 128 Nes, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* can be obtained in a defective English translation from Radical America.

NOTICE: Since our purpose is to engage people in a common project of revolutionary action, we openly discourage all those who communicate with us merely in order to obtain texts. If we have revealed who we are through our writings, we expect others at least to do the same in writing to us. A dialogue between us can only begin on a radical basis, in a recognition of what we have in common.

—Point-Blank!
TO CREATE A SITUATION WHERE MAN DOES NOT REPRODUCE HIMSELF IN ANY GIVEN FORM, BUT PRODUCES HIS TOTALITY; WHERE HE DOES NOT SEEK TO REMAIN SOMETHING FORMED BY THE PAST, BUT IS IN THE ABSOLUTE MOVEMENT OF BECOMING!

for a situationist revolution