

## The Situationists and the New Forms of Action against Politics and Art

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Up to this point we have chiefly endeavored to accomplish our subversion through the use of forms or categories inherited from revolutionary struggles that for the most part derive from the previous century. I suggest that we supplement these expressions of our protest with means that dispense with any reference to the past. This is not to say that we should give up the forms through which we have fought on the traditional terrain of the supersession of philosophy and the fulfillment of art, as well as of the abolition of politics; rather it is a matter of perfecting the work of this journal wherever it has not yet become effective.

Many proletarians have realized that they have no power to determine the use made of their lives, but do not express this insight in the language of socialism and of earlier revolutions.

So let us spit as we pass by those students-turned-grassroots-militants, with their “groupuscules” that intend to become mass parties, who on occasion have dared to claim that workers find the *IS* unreadable, that its paper is too glossy for their lunch bags, and that it is too expensive for those making only minimum wage. The most logically consistent of them thus spend their time distributing the cheaply mimeographed image they hold of the consciousness of a class among which they feverishly search for their Ouvrier Albert. They are forgetting, among other things, that workers have sometimes had to pay quite a high price for reading revolutionary writing, a price comparatively higher than that of a seat at the

TNP [National Popular Theater], and that, when seized by the desire, they will not balk at spending two or three times what it costs to buy *Planète*. But what these critics of our typography fail to grasp above all is that the few individuals who deign to take one of their bulletins are precisely those who possess the few references that would allow them to immediately understand us, and that what they write is utterly unreadable for all the others. Some of them, who cannot even appreciate the complexity of thought in bathroom graffiti (particularly that found in cafés), have almost convinced themselves that, thanks to a parody of elementary-school-level writing printed on sheets that they paste to drainpipes like advertisements for apartment rentals, they can get the signifier and the signified of their slogans to coincide. Here is precisely the measure of what is not to be done.

For us it is a question of linking the theoretical critique of modern society with its critique in acts. By appropriating the very suggestions of the spectacle, we may at once provide the reasons for present and future rebellions.

I propose that we should endeavor:

1. *to experiment with the détournement of photo love stories* and so-called pornographic photographs, and that we should deliver their truth in plain language by restoring true dialogue to them. This operation will make the subversive speech *bubbles*, which spontaneously if largely unconsciously form among those who look at them only to be immediately dissolved, burst to the surface. In the same spirit, it is equally possible to appropriate *all* advertising posters—especially those in the corridors of the Métro, which form such striking sequences—by pasting on new speech bubbles.
2. *to promote guerilla warfare in the mass media*, an important form of protest not only at the stage of urban guerilla warfare but even beforehand. The way has been pioneered by those Argentinians who will besiege the headquarters of some reputable newspaper and in this way use it to issue their own orders and slogans. We still have some time to take advantage of the fact that radio and television stations are not yet guarded by the army. On a more modest level, we know that any radio ham can inexpensively transmit to the neighborhood, and that the small size of the necessary equip-

ment allows for a high level of mobility and thus for evading attempts at tracing the broadcast location. A few years ago a band of Danish dissidents from the CP was able to set up its own pirate radio station. False editions of a given periodical can work to increase the enemy's confusion. For obvious reasons this list of examples is vague and limited.

The illegality of such acts precludes any organization that has not gone underground from following such a program, for it requires the formation in its very heart of a *specific organization*; such an organization cannot be conceived (or be effective) without compartmentalization and hence hierarchy, etc.—in a word, without leading back down the slippery slope to terrorism. So it is preferable instead to refer to the idea of propaganda of the deed, which is a very different method. Everyone shares our ideas—it is a well-known fact—and any group with no necessary ties to us, just a few individuals who get together on the occasion, can improvise on and improve the formulas tested out elsewhere by others. This type of uncoordinated action cannot suppose as its aim any definitive upheaval, but it may usefully punctuate the dawning consciousness of the time. But in any case it is not a matter of obsessing over the word *illegality*. The majority of actions in this domain have no need to break existing laws. The fear of such crimes, however, will lead the directors of newspapers to distrust their typographers, the heads of radio stations to distrust their technicians, and so forth, until the specific repressive laws are finalized.

3. *to perfect situationist comics*. Comic strips are the only genuinely popular literature of our century. Idiots who have been indelibly marked by their years in high school may not be able to stop discussing them, but reading and collecting ours will annoy them. Doubtless they will buy them only in order to burn them. Who cannot immediately sense how easy it would be, in our task of “making shame more shameful still,” to change *13, rue de l'Espoir* into *1, bd du Désespoir* by integrating into the background a few additional elements, or simply by changing the speech balloons? This method, as you can see, is the exact opposite of pop art, which breaks comics into pieces. This, on the contrary, aims at restoring to the comics their greatness and meaning.

4. *to produce situationist films.* Cinema, which is the newest and without doubt most useful means of expression of our epoch, has made no progress for close to three-quarters of a century. To summarize, let us say that it has effectively become the “seventh art” so dear to film buffs, film societies, and parents’ associations. For our purposes let us note that the cycle (Ince, Stroheim, the unique *Âge d’Or*, *Citizen Kane* and *Mr. Arkadin*, lettrist films) has ended, even if some masterpiece (of, however, a classic and narrative construction) still remains to be discovered among foreign distributors or in the film archives. Let us appropriate the stammerings of this new form of writing; let us, above all, appropriate its most accomplished and modern examples, those that have escaped the ideology of art to an even greater extent than American B-movies: I mean, of course, newsreels, trailers, and most of all filmed advertisements.

Made in the service of the commodity and the spectacle, indeed, but when freed from that support, filmed advertisements can lay the foundations for what Eisenstein foresaw when he spoke of filming *The Critique of Political Economy* or *The German Ideology*.

I am quite sure that I could film “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy”<sup>1</sup> in a way that would be immediately understandable to the proletarians of Watts, even though they are not aware of the concerns implied in that title. And this translation into a new form will, without any doubt, reciprocally contribute to the deepening and exacerbating of the “written” expression of the same issues; we could confirm this, for example, by shooting the film *Incitement to Murder and Debauchery* before writing its equivalent in the journal, “Correctives to the Consciousness of a Class Which Will Be the Last.” Among other possibilities, cinema lends itself particularly well to studying the present as a historical problem, to dismantling processes of reification. Historical reality can, of course, be apprehended, known, and filmed only in the course of a complicated process of mediations that allow consciousness to recognize one moment immanent within another, to recognize its aim and its action in its destiny, its destiny in its aim and action, and its own essence in this necessity. This mediation

would be difficult if the empirical existence of facts themselves was not already a mediated existence, which only takes on an appearance of immediateness because and to the extent that, on the one hand, consciousness of the mediation is lacking and, on the other hand, the facts have been uprooted from the network of their determinations, placed in an artificial isolation, and poorly linked together again by the montage of classical cinema. It is precisely this mediation that has been lacking, and inevitably so, in pre-situationist cinema, which has limited itself to so-called objective forms or re-presenting politico-moral concepts, whenever it has not been a merely academic type of narrative with all its hypocrisies. All this explanation is more torturous to read than to see filmed, as all commonplaces are. But Godard, the most famous of pro-Chinese Swiss, could never understand it. He may well harness what has been done before, as is his wont—that is, from all that has been done before he may pick up a word or an idea, like that of appropriating advertising films—but he could never do anything but brandish such little novelties that he took from elsewhere, images or keywords of the time that definitely have a resonance, but one that he cannot grasp (Bonnot, worker, Marx, Made in USA, Pierrot le Fou, Debord, poetry, etc.). He is in fact nothing more than the child of Mao and Coca-Cola.

Anything can be expressed in the cinema that can be expressed in an article, a book, a pamphlet, or a poster. This is why from now on we must require that each situationist be as able to shoot a film as write an article (cf. “Anti-Public Relations,” no. 8, p. 59).<sup>2</sup> Nothing is too beautiful for the negroes of Watts.

## NOTES

*Internationale situationniste* 11 (October 1967), 32–36.

1. [See “Le déclin et la chute de l’économie spectaculaire-marchande,” *Internationale situationniste* 10 (March 1966), 3–11. Ed.]

2. [“Situationist International: Anti-public relations service/Internationale situationniste: service des anti-public-relations,” *Internationale situationniste* 8 (January 1963), 59. Ed.]