THE NETWORK AS ARTWORK:

ASGER JORN AND THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL

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ABSTRACT

The Network as Artwork: Asger Jorn and the Situationist International

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From 1957 to 1961, the Situationist International (SI) connected artists and theorists in a network that stretched from Bavaria to the Benelux, Algeria to Scandinavia. Its attempt to politicize the practice of non-signifying art even engaged associated chapters as far afield as Tel Aviv and Montreal. While SI is one of the most studied postwar avant-garde groups, little attention has been paid to this international extension; the scholarly gaze has been predominantly trained on its proponents in Paris. The international's project has been interpreted through the final position of SI's French members at the end of the 1960s.

Adopting a trans-national approach, this dissertation homes in on why such an expansive international emerged and its project evolved, arguing that we need to situate SI in its original historical moment and relate its project to its international extension. The ideological repercussions of Soviet's invasion of Hungary in 1956 opened a space across western Europe for oppositional projects outside of the communist institutional structures. SI was one of the few groups who wanted to capitalize on this possibility

aesthetically. But by drawing on primary sources in Swedish, Danish, French, English and German, I show that its constituent members envisioned doing so differently.

While originally Parisian, the venture to construct a 'situation', which gave the international its qualifying adjective 'situation-ist', was adapted to the needs of the various contexts to which it was exported. Informed by the local legacies of the interwar avant-garde and the status of leftwing parties, the SI members put forward diverging opinions of how aesthetics intersected with politics. And such modifications affected the originally Parisian designs. For, as I show, by instituting a conversation on what constituted postwar avant-garde praxis, SI's organizational practice became integral to, indeed inseparable from, its overarching aesthetico-political project. The international was the situation.

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Table of Contents

Introduction and Literature Review 1

First Part: The Rise of the Situationist International

1. The Creation of an International 1954-1957 46

I. The Need for Unity 47

II. The Division within the Groups 72

A. LI and Architecture 73
B. Jorn and Architecture 88

III. Path to Unity 105

IV. The Situation and the International: Paris and the continental compromise .. 125

2. The Modernity of the International 1957-1958..... 135

I. The Cultural Revolution and Cultural Capital: *the* Avant-garde and Paris 136

The Counter-Institution: The Original Intentions of the Avant-garde 136

The Avant-Garde and Postwar Modernization 143

Poetry and Engagement 152

Aesthetics and a new Left 165

The Modernity of the Participatory Avant-Garde 173

The Modern Situation and the Alienating Experience of Paris 187

II. Direction without Participation: the Administration of the International 206

3. The Participatory International: Situationist Practice 1958-1959 221

Dérives in Urban Paris ……. 222

Détournements in the Paris Art world …….. 230

Revolution in Italy …… 242

Utopia in Amsterdam …… 254

Impudence in the Federal Republic …… 267

The Situation in Munich ……. 277

Second Part: The Fall of the Situationist International

4. The Displacement of the Situation 1959-1960 …….. 293

French Algeria in Paris ……. 294

The International in Amsterdam …….. 306

5. Intellectual Openings in Paris 1959 …….. 319

Totality ..……. 320

Reification…… 331

Alienation …… 339

6. The Theorization of the Situation 1960…….. 351

The Constructed Game…..…… 352

The Game of the Avant-Garde …….. 358

The Endgame of the Manifesto..…… 383

7. The Dissolution of the International 1960-1962 ……..…… 394

Theory without Participation …… 396

A New Resistance in Paris……. 406

The Ecumenical Front rather than the International Network …… 413

The Colonization of Metropolitan France…… 425

The End of the International and of Paris internationality……. 435

Epilogue. The International and the Dialogue: Jorn and Debord 1962-1967…… 446

The Council and the Spectacle …….. 448

Ting og Polis …….. 455

Bibliography …… …… 476

Introduction

"*C'est qu'il n'existe pas, qu'il ne doit pas exister de* situationnisme*, au sens de corps de doctrine. Il existe une attitude expérimentale* situationniste *définie* organisationnellement *(précisément sous forme d'une Association internationale).*" (Guy Debord, 1957, his stresses)[1]

The Situationist International (SI) connected artists and philosophers in a network that for a brief moment in postwar European history stretched across the western half of the continent, and beyond. From 1957 to 1961 it had branches in Italy and Scandinavia, the Low Countries and Bavaria; members came to its main office in Paris from both France's northern and southern Mediterranean shores, Algeria as well as the Côte D'Azur. SI attempted to appeal to all radical discontents working in the cultural field. And it attracted associated projects from Tel Aviv to Montreal. "*Nous devons*," it was said in what has often been seen as SI's founding statement, "*présenter* partout *une alternative révolutionnaire à la culture dominante;* coordonner *toutes les recherches qui se font en ce moment sans perspective d'ensemble, amener, par la critique et la propagande, les plus avancés des artistes et des intellectuels à prendre contact avec nous en vue d'action commune*."[2]

The international scope of SI is one of its most fascinating and historically significant aspects. What did it take to organize this revolutionary alternative *partout*? How was it possible to *coordonner* it across so many different countries and in so many differ

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1 Guy Debord to Simondo, 22 Aug 1957

[2] Guy Debord,'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale', in *Textes et documents situationnistes 1957-1960,* (ed) Gérard Berréby (Paris, Éditions Allia, 2004), 22, my emphasis.

ent languages? To date, however, most analysis has focused not on the noun in the name—the international—but on the adjective—situationist.[3] Such emphasis is understandable for it promises to lead directly to the central themes of SI's project: its "*alternative révolutionnaire à la culture dominante*." But, as I will show, this approach tends to overlook another important factor in SI's development. SI was a collective, and to understand its birth, development, and decline, we need to study, as Debord himself understood, how it was organized.

In this dissertation, I will focus on SI's functioning as a network. To do so, this dissertation will explore the contributions from all of SI's national branches up until 1961 but especially emphasize those by the Danish artist and thinker Asger Jorn. It might sound contradictory to foreground an individual when examining the network, but, as we shall see, Jorn sat at its core. His work provides a privileged perspective on what held the network together, as well as what would pull it apart.

The *Situationist* International

"*Ce que nous allons inventer, c'est l'activité situationniste elle-même. Et aussi sa définition.*" (Asger Jorn, 1960)[4]

The Situationists saw themselves involved in an aesthetic project with far-reaching political implications. Prior art, SI thought, had mistakenly tried to eternalize moments by fixing them on a canvas, in a text, or through notation. Embracing the tran-

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[3] I will give examples of this tendency in the literature review where I will also elaborate on the possible reasons for why that is.

[4] Asger Jorn, 'La Création ouverte et ses enemies', *L'Internationale situationniste* (IS) 5, December 1960, Paris, p. 37

sience of modern life, the international rather wanted to produce 'new moments' in various participatory aesthetic experiments. One was a counter-cartographic practice called a *dérive* in which the participants let themselves be guided, or diverted as it were, by the affective ecology of an urban space. Another was a ludic intervention on prior artworks, called *détournement*, that deconstructed and then reconstructed artworks in a way that produced new patterns of meaning.

The aim of SI's cultural revolutionary action was to rearrange the taxonomy which upheld the social order but devalued the experience of everyday life.[5] "*Une action révolutionnaire dans la culture*," the members agreed, "*ne saurait avoir pour but de traduire ou d'expliquer la vie, mais de l'élargir.*"[6] As a project situationist construction originated in an aesthetic problematic, and would still depend partly on aesthetic, especially architectural, forms. But it was pertinent to contexts outside of the normal boundaries of art. "*La création*," the international believed, "*n'est pas l'arrangement des objets et des formes, c'est l'invention de nouvelles lois sur cet arrangement*."[7] Most importantly, SI hoped that the constructed situation would force postwar Europe to rethink the parameters for what constituted progress.

SI's project questioned the central role that quantitative increases in the output of industrial production and in the standard of living had for the political thinking of its time. A quantitative methodology had come to dominate the social science departments

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[5] To avoid any confusion, it should be noted that the concept of a 'cultural revolution' had at this point no Maoist connotation.

[6] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations', 14.

[7] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations', 15.

in western Europe after the war.[8] Once its proponents had control over the levers of the State, such a focus directed the explosive economic growth and technological advancements that marked the era. A technocratic ideology, SI believed, was dominant across the political spectrum, from the postwar right to the traditional left, be it reformist or revolutionary.[9] Carving out a space on the latter end, SI emphasized that "*La révolution n'est pas toute dans la question de savoir à quel niveau de production parvient l'industrie lourde, et qui en sera maître.*"[10]

In this SI was a part of larger drive to detach radical politics from the universe of institutionalized communism. After the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, many intellectuals across the western half of the continent rethought the agents and the site of the revolution without rejecting the idea of revolution itself.[11] SI stands out amongst this group, because it was one of the few that cast the avant-garde as the central agent, and culture as the privileged site of revolution. It argued that *"une nouvelle avance de la révolution est liée à la constitution d'une passionnante solution de remplacement dans*

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[8] Victoria de Grazia, *The Irresistible Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006)*;* Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

[9] In this SI was very influenced by texts such as *La Technique: l'enjeu de siècle* (1954) by Jacques Ellul. As we will see, the need to 'construct situations' was in no small part a response to the technological advancement depicted in such texts.

[10] Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations', 14.

[11] For the tendency to do so in France, see William Lewis, *Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism,* (Lexington Books, 2005).

[12] 'Documents. Discussion sur un appel aux intellectuels et artistes révolutionnaires', *L'Internationale situationniste* (IS) 3, December 1959, Paris, p. 23.

l'usage immédiat de la vie."[12] Such an affective replacement would emerge from artistic experimentation.

For SI their historical moment presented an opportune time to begin this cultural revolutionary project. Postwar growth offered the real prospect of a different framework to quotidian life. But such growth had so far occurred within one-size-fits-all models totally insensitive to the local frame in which the everyday took place. For this SI blamed what they saw as postwar modernism's inability to transcend the interwar practice of destroying all artistic forms. The aesthetic experimentation in the various tendencies gathered under the umbrella of "modernism" had emerged as a dynamic new force challenging the previously dominant paradigms of aestheticism and neo-classical academic art during the preceding half century.[13] But rather than experimenting with new aesthetic forms, its artistic practices were still focused on chipping away at previous aesthetic regimes. This negative focus had led these practices down a path to the dead end of total abstraction where, SI thought, its modes of painting could be commodified by the market and its dominant trend in architecture co-opted by the state. To SI the continuing dominance of modernism bore witness to the exhaustion of current aesthetic trends. It evoked, as SI would have it, a 'decomposition of the superstructures'. That is why, they argued, "*il faut entreprendre un vaste travail commun, à partir de la critique désabusée de tout le*

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[13] For the most famous description of the avant-garde rejection of aestheticism, see Peter Bürger *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (originally published in 1973), trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For the way in which the rejection of academicism provided a unifying rallying cry, which partly enabled the emergence of modernism, see Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and the Revolution', *New Left Review* I/144, March-April 1984.

champ d'action où est enfermée la culture traditionnelle à la fin de son auto-destruction; et à partir de la conscience de l'unité profonde de toutes les tâches révolutionnaires."[14]

In order to harness the newly abundant resources produced by postwar growth and technological advancements, SI broke with modernism by re-conceptualizing art as a game set in quotidian life. The postwar era needed new games, its members thought, not merely the destruction of old forms. Preventing new technologies from causing a wide-spread alienation in fact demanded ludic experimentations. "*Une nouvelle force humaine, que le cadre existant ne pourra pas dompter*," SI stated, *"s'accroit de jour en jour avec l'irrésistible développement technique, et l'insatisfaction de ses emplois possibles dans notre vie social privée de sens*."[15] SI would employ the new resources differently. SI's new games, which they subsumed under the conceptual umbrella of 'situations', would offer a performance of a different but economically feasible evaluative architecture to everyday life. Without dead moments, prescribed roles, or assigned tasks, it would be a quotidian defined by dialogue and interaction. So, SI's manifesto proclaimed, "*Les joueurs révolutionnaires de tous les pays peuvent s'unir dans l.I.S. pour commencer à sortir de la préhistoire de la vie quotidienne*."[16]

If this all sounds evocative but still rather abstract, it is because it is—and indeed was, even to SI's members. For one of the major questions facing SI concerned the means through which its project could be realized. Because the legacy of the interwar

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[14] 'Documents. Discussion sur un appel aux intellectuels et artistes révolutionnaires', IS 3, 23.

[15] 'Manifeste', IS 4, June 1960, Paris, p. 36.

[16] 'Manifeste', IS 4, 36.

avant-garde, and the loss of faith in Soviet communism after Budapest in 1956 was experienced differently in the various national contexts in which SI had branches, there was no consensus with regard to how the various artistic experimentations coalesced into one overarching project. The shape and import of 'situationist' praxis was subject to constant revisions. And this discussion on aesthetic theory did not produce the praxis that they had envisioned. The ludic artwork that would transcend the boundaries of art was never realized; within the international (1957-1961) it remained an artwork manqué, as it were.[17] The problem of building an account of SI as a network around the situation is that *sensu stricto* the 'situation' never got off the planning board.

The Situationist *International*

While the 'situation' remained to some extent a phantom throughout these years, that phantom nonetheless haunted SI's co-operation; it was because the situation was never fully realized that the international could come into being. For the fractious debates over the 'situation' did end up generating an 'international'. A malaise with the postwar dominance of a quantitative perspective brought west European artists together. They shared a sense that the dominant aesthetic theories, even if rejecting such a perspective, actually furthered an instrumental logic by denying non-signifying art any value. So as a response the construction of a ludic 'situation' was an appealing project. The 'situation' conjured up a mirror image to the dominant powers of postwar Europe in which

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[17] As I will touch in on the survey on the existing scholarship below, the 'situation' has been very influential for politically informed performance art since then. But to determine whether a situation was constructed after 1961 is not the purpose of my dissertation.

their cultural and socio-economic priorities were rearranged. This resonated in artist communities and on the fringes of the public sphere across the continent. The progressive *Kulturkritik* of the 'situation' provided that around which a postwar avant-garde organization could rally. It unified artist groups from around the continent. As a prospect it also governed their co-operation. During half a decade, the contested and never completed project of creating a 'situation' allowed the creation and continuous regeneration of an international network.

Methodology

"*Il est bien entendu que nous n'avons pas de* doctrine *à faire approuver et partager. L'expérience que nous voulons mener, si nous sommes capables de la mener réellement, suppose une discussion ouverte, qui peut aller jusqu'à la polémique, entre tous ceux qui s'accordent sur cette ligne générale de recherche*." (Debord 1958)[18]

Since there already are many excellent studies on SI theory, in this dissertation I do not attempt to add another definition of the situationist project. I rather focus on the way the international actually cohered. And the glue that kept the international together was the ongoing disagreements about the main thrust of its project. Construing SI as a network, I will argue that the central cohesive device of its network was precisely the variances in how the 'situation' was imagined. If the constructed situation never happened as originally envisioned, the anticipatory planning of the situation created and upheld the association that was SI; in short, situationist practice was organizational.

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[18] Debord to Constant, 8 Aug 1958

This does not mean that SI's practice was not aesthetic. In *Esthétiques relationnelle,* Nicolas Bourriaud conceptualizes art practices that are concerned less with constructing utopian realities and producing formal novelties than with reconfiguring ways of living within the existing fabric of social relations. He thinks that the aim of such art is to create "*un état de rencontre*."[19] And, "*si elle est réussie, une oeuvre d'art ... s'ouvre au dialogue, à la discussion, à cette forme de négociation interhumaine*."[20] In fact, he goes on, "*ce sont des relations entre les gens et le monde, à travers des objets esthétiques, qu[e l'art] produit en premier lieu*."[21] The dialogue that the prospect of constructing a situation engendered could, in such light, be seen as in itself a crucial part of SI's work, of the situation, even if the latter was not constructed and thus SI's project somehow incomplete.

Though Bourriaud produced his category of relational aesthetics based on artistic practices in the 1990s, the desire to exhibit works that remained unfinished predated that decade.[22] Mid-century aesthetic experimentation shunned the finished artwork. As Hal Foster writes, "with the arrival of the avant-garde, [a] finish[ed artwork] was associated first with bourgeois taste and then with commodity kitsch; the unfinished was taken to

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[19] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétiques relationnelle* (Paris, Les Presses du réel, 1998), 18.

[20] Bourriaud, 43.

[21] Bourriaud, 45.

[22] It should be noted that his theory has a clear situationist inflection: "*L'oeuvre qui forme un 'monde relationnel', un interstice social actualise le situationnisme et la réconcile, autant que faire se peut, avec le monde de l'art*" (Bourriaud, 89). In this project, he tries to open a space for the construction of a 'situation' outside of the 'spectacle', or perhaps rather: in its interstices. My dissertation historicizes their relation instead: it shows how Debord believed in the possibility to construct a situation until he properly theorized the spectacle, starting in 1961.

resist such fetishistic effects." So "by the mid-20th century[,] process became a thing to expose."[23] In the case of SI, with the construction of a situation outstanding, the process that SI exhibited was the dialogue on the 'situation'.

A reader of *L'Internationale Situationniste* (IS), SI's glossy journal, is not provided with a unified 'party' line. During the international's first five years (1957-1961), when it was published regularly, IS presents SI less as an organization propounding a doctrine than as a group of contributors sharing a problematic. IS ran articles which demonstrate that the members in the international had agreed on a general sense of what they found wanting in contemporary Europe but that they had not settled on a response. As an association of artists from across Europe practicing in different media, with some in the new medium of concepts, the international appears to have been far from a consensually driven post-national formation. Its evocative but vague project invited contributions about the project's outline from all branches. It was a work in progress.

The incompleteness of SI's project does not present an epistemological problem. On the contrary, it furnishes the student of SI with a wealth of sources to draw on: controversies leave more traces than agreements. Such sources provide the building blocks for retrospective reconstruction. And yet the lack of agreement does beg the question: if the international was so marred by conflicts and riven by division, how can one think of it as *one* organization?

In *Reassembling the Social* (2007), Bruno Latour offers me a vocabulary for conceptualizing the way in which SI was less a *set* formation than the *ongoing* formation of

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[23] Hal Foster, 'At the Met Breuer', *London Review of Books*, 31 March 2016

an international. What needs to be explained, he argues, is not primarily the conflicts marring co-operations. It is the rather the longevity of organizations. He suggests that a "grouping … is not a building in need of restoration but a movement in need of continuation."[24] He distinguishes between two ways of describing the means by which stability is achieved but momentum maintained within groups. One can do so by focusing on the intermediaries of an association. He likens these to vehicles transporting something without transforming it. One can also construe that which allows associations to persist as mediators. Mediators transform what is transported throughout the journey and translate it according to the different contexts in which it arrives. Any entity can be either a mediator or an intermediary, and the same entity can shift from one to the other.[25] But Latour privileges mediators over intermediaries. He argues that only a focus on the former allows for an appreciation of an organization's momentum, because such momentum is propelled by the continuous contextual retranslations of a given entity. He calls the ability to discern this activity a 'network'.[26] Lacking a solid foundation, a network needs to be continuously per-formed;[27] it only exists in its performance (of itself).[28]

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[24] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37.

[25] Latour, 35-9.

[26] Insofar as it "designate[s] flows of translations" (Latour, 132), a network "is a tool to help describe something" (Latour, 131). It is "what readies the text to take the relay of actors [or actants, that is, non-human actors] as mediators" (Latour, 131).

[27] Latour, 227.

[28] "Social aggregates are not the object of ostensive definition", Latour argues, "… but only a performative definition" (Latour, 34).

Though Latour helps me conceptualize how the international could counter-intuitively be seen to coalesce through conflict, I do not intend to follow all the implications of Latour's performative definition of social assemblies. While allowing me to trace how similar positions were translated differently in varying contexts, his privileging of mediators can, if applied to SI, easily lead one to overlook the fact that SI's branches were not equally important for the formation of the international's project. At the time of SI's emergence, the various national art scenes and intellectual debates in which SI branches participated were vertically integrated in postwar Europe. Based on a theory from cultural sociology, I will trace what reproduced the time-honored geographical hierarchies of the aesthetic field in which SI's network was performed.

In *The World Republic of Letters* (2007), Pascale Casanova scrutinizes why certain cities are more aesthetically influential with the help of an economic metaphor. Though her focus is mostly on literature, it is applicable to other artistic media too, and especially to SI as her only non-literary example is the Cobra movement, an SI precursor with an overlap of certain crucial members, such as Jorn. To explain why the judgments passed by the artistic scenes in certain cities wield an influence far beyond those cities' ring roads, Casanova likens the case to the way a select number of central banks function as centers of credit for the financial system. "The cities where literary resources are concentrated, where they accumulate," she argues, "become places where belief is incarnat-

ed." They become "centers of credit." Therefore, she suggests that "they may be thought of as central banks."[29]

Like certain central banks, some metropoles have accumulated artistic capital over many years. This, Casanova suggests through a few examples, underwrote the currency of what happened in the present moment of such cities, for at least in the nineteenth century age signified wealth artistically. The acknowledged longevity of a national canon, for instance, bolstered the belief in its value. The aesthetic capital of a city can also take other forms. In fact it "exists in various forms - literary institutions, academies, juries, critics, reviews, schools of literature." What they share is that their "legitimacy is measured according to the age and authority of the recognition that they decree."[30] When such accumulated wealth is reinvested in the present day, it heightens the prestige of the artistic scene of the city.[31]

Casanova suggests that the currency of a city's aesthetic consecrations depends upon its accumulated artistic capital without implying that a city can merely live off the resulting interest. A city's cultural capital or aesthetic prestige is neither given once and for all, nor automatically granted. It has to be reinvested and reinvented. If a city wants its currency to 'remain legal tender' in the commerce of aesthetic exchange, as it were, it

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[29] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters,* trans. Malcom DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 23.

[30] Casanova, 15.

[31] "The [aesthetic] capital [of the city in question] is", Casanova continues, "… embodied by all those who transmit it, gain possession of it, transform it, and update it" (15). It needs a cultivated public, a specialized press, respected judges of new talent, etc. The most crucial group in ensuring the returns on the accumulated capital, Casanova implies, are critics and intellectuals. They are the ones who can "contribute to the growth of the literary heritage of nations that enjoy the power of consecration". "Critical recognition", she contends, is a weapon "in the struggle by and for literary capital" (23).

cannot settle with being a rentier, especially not in the twentieth century. For "the existence, at once concrete and abstract, of this literary capital … is … possible only by virtue of the very belief that sustains it and of the real and tangible effects of this belief, which supports the functioning of the entire literary world."[32] And the emergence of modernism demanded the capital behind such belief be shrewdly reinvested.

The artistic consecration of the twentieth century differed from earlier ones. But far from unseating the major metropoles, modern consecration, Casanova argues, merely redefined the basis of such cities' influence. Their judgements were not followed across the continent because they were universal in the sense of eternally valid, as had been previously argued. They were now followed because they outlined what was most fashionable. "Because the modern by definition is always new, and therefore open to challenge," Casanova argues, "the only way … to be truly modern is to contest the present as outmoded - to appeal to a still more present present, as yet unknown, which thus becomes the newest certified present."[33] And newcomers' ability to contest this "depend[s] to some extent on their familiarity with the most recent innovations in form and technique."[34] So though inherently unstable, modernism (or that which strives to be most 'modern') is in this sense bound by the tradition that it ceaselessly tries to overcome, and thus tends to reproduce its topography.

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[32] Casanova, 17.

[33] Casanova, 91.

[34] Casanova, 91.

The modernism of the twentieth century was both dependent upon certain cities and reinforced the belief in the modernity of these cities' judgements. In the late 1950s Paris was still, if increasingly disputed, the "universal bank of foreign exchange and commerce in literature."[35] And as the French capital was the nexus of the cultural and intellectual networks of postwar western Europe, it attracted aspiring artists from elsewhere who wanted to leave an imprint. The city's centrality lent credibility to their intentions. For when artists came to Paris to intervene in its debates and trends, the modernity of such contributions were, if recognized in the French capital, as a consequence of the city's 'accumulated aesthetic capital' also widely acknowledged elsewhere.[36] But such immigration in turn worked to prove the modernity of Paris' modernism. According to Casanova, it furthered the city's credit. It reinforced the city's claim to be at the forefront of aesthetic and intellectual developments.[37] In other words, it substantiated the belief that the city's trends were ahead of those in its intellectual hinterland.

Such temporal stratification of space, as it were, was integral to the normative project of modernity. For aesthetic modernism, Casanova lets us suggests, shares the 'historicist' time structure of political modernization. In *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Dipesh Chakrabarty lays bare the logic of political modernization. He scrutinizes how, what he, with an implicit reference to Walter Benjamin calls, 'historicism' enabled Europe to dominate the world. According to this view, historical time is integral; it is not

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[35] Casanova, 24.

[36] Casanova, 26.

[37] Casanova, 30.

out of joint with itself. As a concept 'historicism' told the rest of the world that contemporary Europe was its future. And as a mode of thought influencing domains far outside academia, it became deeply entangled in the formation of political modernity. Its abstract universals, be they 'capital' or 'History', presented a geographically normative perception of what was modern; that is, from the perspective of the non-European, of what was to come.[38] Casanova's argument suggests that this is not only applicable to the way certain European powers dominated large swaths of the globe but also to how Paris projected its influence on Europe. The logic of 'historicism' can be exported from the realm of political modernity to aesthetic modernism. Here it expresses a timeframe in which things first occurred not only in Europe, and then the rest of the world; aesthetic trends first appeared in Paris, and then elsewhere on the continent. She implies that one should add 'modern' as an abstract universal next to 'capital' and 'History'.

What is needed then is a form of network theory that foregrounds the multiple nodes of any network, and yet also provides a way of recognizing the priority of some nodes over others. In her recent work, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015), Caroline Levine provides a vocabulary for the lop-sided reciprocity between the metropole(s) and peripheries.[39] Like Latour, Levine stresses the way in which networks are perpetually emerging because they feature infinite ways to interconnect; they exist and proliferate in the relations that they create and recreate. But, like Casanova, she

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38 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Though and Historical Difference* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 6.

39 Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015).

gives more attention to the stratification of the infrastructure within a network. She distinguishes between the points at which a network interconnects through the concepts of nodes, hubs, and hinge nodes.

Levine's distinctions allow us to conceptualize the relations between SI's branches, and to measure the relative weight of their contributions to SI's overarching project. Most commonly, Levine suggests, points of interconnection are nodes. If applied to SI, we could suggest that a node is where a cluster of participants resided or worked. But not all nodes, she goes on, are hubs. The latter project their influence through the network over a host of nodes. A network can also include hinge nodes, she contends. These are those nodes through which all others interconnect.[40]

Though this dissertation will spend the majority of the time discussing Paris, it is Paris as a hub for European intellectual and aesthetic trends—spreading its ideas across the Rhine, the Alps, and the Channel—and as a hinge for such networks—facilitating continental communication—that occupies the center of attention. I will suggest that the French capital holds the crucial answer to how the internationality (or that which was internationally relevant) in the international was produced, namely that which was articulated through the 'situation'. But this was not because Paris was the largest city of continental Europe and hence by default internationally influential; or that the art from here somehow transcended the local frame. In fact, SI strongly resisted this definition of 'international', both aesthetically, as in the international style of the 1950s, which they abhorred, and politically, as in the predominant focus on production of the one-size fits all

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[40] Levine, 113-4.

models driving postwar modernizations. The 'situation' did not seek a non-lieu, as a famous work of anthropology of 'hyper-modernity' has it.[41]

The dissertation will rather spend most time in Paris because internationality resides in those locales which have dense connections to other locales. As Latour suggests, that which is international does not constitute something anti-local. It is always "local sites that manufacture global structures." This means that "Macro … [does not describe] a *wider* or a larger site in which the micro is embedded … but another local, equally micro place, which is *connected* to many others through some medium transporting specific types of traces." The reason why certain places can be thought of as larger or more global is because they are the hinges of networks. "No place can be said to be bigger than any other place," he contends, "but some can be said to benefit from far safer connections with *more* places than others."[42]

In this sense my dissertation attempts, with the help of Levine's concepts, to dialectically relate Casanova's and Latour's perspective. SI's case reinforces the suggestion that it was Paris as a hinge of networks that enabled a local production of internationally relevant aesthetics. On a logistic level, the city provided the opportune space for an international association due to the density of its connections to other places. But, given the focus on networks, such centrality did not mean that the intellectual hinterland of the French capital was merely on the receiving end of trends. The density of Parisian

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[41] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to Hyper Modernity* (London, Verso, 2009).

[42] Latour, 176.

channels of communication to elsewhere on the continent offered ample opportunity for a two-way traffic.

The Situation and the Inter-National

"*Die Situationisten sollen aus der jeweiligen Bodenständigkeit (sagt Jorn) gebildet werden und nicht eine vage kosmopolitische Angelegenheit sein. Debord greift auch die kosmopolitische Attitude der Internationalen snobs an. Jorn sieht sich sehr im dänischen verurzelt, Debord ist echter Pariser, Pinot echter Italiener (nein, es geht weiter, echter Piemonteser), Wyckaert typischer Flame, Constant echter Holländer usw. und trotzdem oder gerade deshalb international.*" (Helmut Sturm)[43]

Though the 'situation' was not realized but the international was, the former has attracted more attention than the latter.[44] The international nature of SI's project has been mostly overlooked, which makes it hard to understand why it emerged, evolved, and eventually dissolved. This dissertation will try to address these questions by putting SI's project in direct relation to the organization itself. It will explore the tension between the way in which the 'situation' was conceived and the way in which the collective was organized. It will show that, while the theory of the 'situation' promoted participation, the international rarely practiced it.

Part of the difficulty arose because, though SI theorized the ability and urgency to perform aesthetic games without reference to any specific context, its project was marked by the context of postwar Paris. This reflected the aesthetic and intellectual hierarchies of

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[43] Helmut Sturm letter to Peter Zimmer, quoted by Roberto Ohrt, *Phantom Avant-Garde: Eine Geschichte der Situationistischen Internationale und der modernen Kunst* (München, Galerie van de Loo, 1990), 200.

[44] I will outline this in the survey of the existing secondary literature below.

western Europe at this moment. The international inscribed the centrality of Paris in such hierarchies in its conceptual superstructure, as per the 'situation'. That SI did so, in spite of decrying the obsolescence of modernism, suggests that it retained modernism's topography and ideas of historicist development. It was even arguably what could be called the geopolitics of modernism that allowed the Paris situation to travel so easily across the borders of postwar western Europe.

Being anchored in Paris discussions facilitated SI's international diffusion. Paris was the main hub for the continent's networks of intellectual exchange. Here local Parisian concerns were elevated, through conceptual sublimation, to become the defining issues for a transnational generation. Once abstracted from the Parisian context, concepts were imported into other contexts, and there used to reframe local questions. And, though it is a commonplace concept, the 'situation' is no exception. SI's 'situation' was one of many projects opposing modernist aesthetics and it counts among the myriad challenges to the dominant form of postwar modernization. What is unique about the 'situation' is that it combined the two: the international believed that only by substituting the reproduction of the modernist paradigm in art for the creation of new games would the dominant mode of postwar modernization be transcended.

But this does not mean that the Paris branch within SI imposed its project onto the other branches of the international. It was rather filtered through their local preoccupations. For even if the Cold War had brought about a bipolar division of the world, national differences were still crucially important within Europe's western camp. The political

and cultural agendas in Munich were different from those in Turin and Milan, and those in Amsterdam and Copenhagen from those in Paris.

The peripheral branches mobilized the trans-contextual claims of the 'situation' to mold it to the local requirements of their national contexts. For like its time-period, SI's network was far from post-national: it was arranged by national branches that, because of varying national priorities, put forward different suggestions of how to create a ludic praxis that broke with the hegemonic instrumental paradigm. Even if the 'situation' originated in Paris, all branches offered their input and interpretation of SI's project.

The resultant cacophony of opinions blurred the exact outlines of SI's project. This furthered the international's status as a platform for a continental discussion on avant-garde art and radical politics. For a less exhaustive definition of the 'situation' demanded collaboration within the international. Unlike so many previous and contemporaneous avant-garde groups, SI did not propagate one message until self-destruction. Nor did it, as similar formations centered on Paris, ensure its coherence *primarily* through expulsions.[45] It rather did so through disagreements.

In the first half of this dissertation, we will see how such disputes over the aesthetic theory gradually led to a participatory organizational praxis. Approaching the ideal of its theory, this praxis even modified SI's project. As the peripheries wrote back, the originally metropolitan 'situation' came to be envisioned as a participatory artwork that would open a space for dialogue. Even if the 'situation' itself remained to be constructed,

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[45] It was Surrealism that introduced orthodox party lines, and purges of heterodox factions, into artistic organizations (Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord* (Arles, Editions Denoël, 2001), 90). Doing so, as we will see, it was much more hierarchical than SI. It was not a dialogue to the same extent as SI.

the disputes about the outline and centrality of the 'situation' provided this dialogue. For a brief moment around the turn of the decade, the 'situation' became a way to articulate both an artistic project and an organizational praxis.[46] The members of the international united around a purpose through a diversity of means. The prospective, if morphing, 'situation' had produced an international of mediators. SI bridged the divide that had initially separated the Parisian internationality of the 'situation' from the nationality of the branches constituting the international.

A study of how such a division was overcome allows us to home in on the conditions for a Pan-European co-operation at this time. It could in this sense serve as, what one historian has called, "a microperspective … [which] may … allow new macroperspectives."[47] For it both follows and inverts parts of the received narrative on the impulses behind what eventually became the European Union, which, lest we forget, was, like SI, also formed in 1957. No other architects of policy threw themselves as much into technocratic reform as the French. Many historians have linked this French modernization to European political integration. The Fourth and early Fifth Republics, so this argument goes, modernized so as to escape the strictures of 'Yalta'. Early postwar France

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[46] For this reason, the similarity between SI and certain precursors, notably Dada, should not be overemphasized. It has been observed that "Dada fashioned itself as a network, a web of connections linking actors and local groupings, which served as a conduit of ideas and images" (Leah Dickerman, 'Introduction', in (ed) Leah Dickerman, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC : National Gallery of Art in association with D.A.P./ Distributed Art Publishers, 2005) p. 1). Dada's network stretched across Europe and even over the Atlantic. Yet there are crucial differences between it and SI. As Leah Dickerman argues, "the loss of community … haunts Dada". Part of what is inscribed in "Dada artworks" is "the failure of new collective forms" (Dickerman, 14). Unlike the 'situation', Dada is not to be constructed. It marks a deconstruction, if a melancholic one. Dada was an association, as Tristan Tzara recalled, "without aim or design, without organization" (Tzara quoted in Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London, Routledge, 1992), 41).

[47] Andreas Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xviii.

wanted to integrate primarily West Germany but also the rest of western Europe into a geo-political architecture of its own making.[48] Like such French diplomatic efforts, SI's was a project imagined in Paris but applied to the continent. Though multilingual and thus constantly dependent on translation, SI's means of communication was French—and its hinge for such communication was the French capital. But SI was less EEC's cultural double than its distorted reflection. Organized by national branches and communicating through an official organ, the praxis of this avant-garde 'international' parodied that of international bureaucracies.[49] It positioned SI against that which drove (west) European political integration: a shared opposition to the dominant mode of modernization brought the pan-European coalition of artists together. Though conceptualized in Paris and articulated in French, west European 'aesthetic' integration was a response to rather than product of French technocratic rejuvenation.

As SI in its first rendition eventually fragmented, a study of the international can also show under what conditions national divisions become insurmountable for a transnational co-operation. The way in which SI's branches joined forces reflected the intellectual structures of their historical moment. Both within the international and in West European society at large, Paris' concepts framed the intellectual discussions on the con-

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[48] To name but a few of those who have pursued different takes on this argument, see Perry Anderson, *The New Old World* (London, Verso, 2011); Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name* (London, Vintage, 1994), John Hellman, *The Communitarian Third Way* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2002); Tony Judt, *Postwar* (London, Penguin, 2005); Eugen Weber, *Hollow Years* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co, 1996).

[49] Such praxis, one interlocutor has claimed, constituted "*ein Narrenspiegel großartiger Institutionen und Bürokratien*" (Roberto Ohrt, *Phantom Avant-Garde: Eine Geschichte der Situationistischen Internationale und der modernen Kunst* (München, Galerie van de Loo, 1990), 78.

sequences of an instrumental postwar modernization. But due to its participatory theory, in the international the interlocutors of this discussion forced Paris' concepts to morph: SI unity went from being merely announced in the Parisian theory of the situation to being practiced by a diverse international. In the second half of this dissertation, we will, however, see that the unity within SI's diversity was precarious. As a consequence of all the input on its project, its shape grew vaguer. Just before the turn of the decade only a minimal definition remained of the 'situation'. SI's overarching project had become under-theorized. And as such it was vulnerable to external shocks. These would soon come through the ramifications of France's protracted decolonization.

Unlike the case for the EEC, the French war in Algeria profoundly shook the recently acquired equilibrium within SI between a minimally defined Parisian situation and a participatory international organization, because it forced SI to re-arrange its implicit division of roles and bolster its theory. As the war led to the suspension of certain civil liberties in Paris, SI had to displace the situation. The international tried constructing it in Amsterdam. Due to being guided by the Dutch branch, whose take on SI's project did not apply beyond their local conditions, this performance failed to unify SI's diverse branches in one decisive praxis. In response to the shifting sands of history, the Paris-based members attempted to shore up the international's project intellectually. The situation, they believed, needed to be more extensively theorized. They ensured that SI in 1960, three years after its emergence, finally published a manifesto in which the international was cast as champions of participatory art, indeed the agents of a dialogic culture. But this was a Pyrrhic victory. They had over-reached.

In retrospect the manifesto reads like an obituary. The message of unity in SI's theory was bought at the price of its international diversity and participation. Outlining SI's project, the manifesto closed the space for the internal contestation on it. It abolished the need for the branches to continuously discuss the social role and purpose of SI. There was a trade-off between the level of theorization of the situation and its ability to organize an institution that reflected situationist values. A sharply defined situation, which promoted dialogue, shut dialogue down in practice because it was sharply defined.

Even if a manifesto is supposed to bring unity, with its publication SI ironically started to fragment. The manifesto reinforced the SI project's ties to Paris. As it also fixed the definition of the project, the peripheral branches could not mold it to their needs. So the praxis of the organization changed. Shortly after the manifesto's publication, the international ceased being a network in a permanent state of emergence. It instead got a hierarchical structure. Some original members left of their own volition.

The unity in theory paved the way for a Parisian leadership in practice. This soon threatened the cohesion of the international, for the priorities in the French capital were rapidly diverging from those in other European capitals. In Paris the Algerian war for independence led to a discursive shift. While intellectuals and artists in other European countries were still occupied by the reconceptualization of the revolution, in Paris they had started theorizing the revolutionary implications of *le tiers monde.* Within SI this cut Paris loose from its continental network. Adopting the concepts of the new discourse, the Paris branch wanted to restructure SI in order to combat the rejuvenated colonizing efforts of the French State, which, after its loss of overseas colonies, allegedly had the

metropole's quotidian life in its sight.[50] While the definition of this perceived colonization was in certain respects a radicalization of, rather than a break from, SI's take on postwar modernization, it did mark a departure from the perception that western Europe faced the same problems. The new kind of modernization did not have a continental extension. So unlike the 'situation's earlier opposition to modernism and modernization, the new project in Paris did not resonate beyond the hexagon. Substituting the *Kulturkritik* of the 'situation' for an anti-imperial stance, it rather put Paris at odds with the rest of SI's network.

In 1961 the tenets upholding the 'situation' imploded, and by 1962 most of SI's original members had quit the international. Those who still either claimed to be situationists or engage in situationist practices at this point can be divided into two camps: one centered on Paris and another that traced an arc across northern Europe, from West Germany via Scandinavia to the Netherlands and Britain. A situationist in the latter camp published a journal from Amsterdam that ran many pieces by previously excluded SI members from around the continent. Some of the North Europeans even produced a manifesto for an alternative, less structured kind of Situationist practice, printed in this journal. But, as this manifesto made explicit, such practice no longer aimed to form an organization. While remaining a multilingual international, they were a network only in the loosest possible sense of the word. What remained of SI in the French capital had meanwhile ceased being both the hinge of multilingual international and a network. Until

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[50] For the colonization of the metropolitan everyday, see Debord, 'Perspectives de modifications conscientes dans la vie quotidienne', IS 6, and for the restructuring of the international, see IS 7.

the late 1960s, SI there turned from being a pan-European international into a Franco-Belgian *cellule.*[51]

Asger Jorn

While including the perspectives and practices of many SI members from various branches, this dissertation will take Asger Jorn, the only original Scandinavian member, as the main guide for its investigation of SI's paradoxes. He is well placed to assume this role. Jorn was one of the three dominant personalities in early SI, along with the French *ciné-provocateur* and philosopher of urban everyday life Guy Debord and the Dutch multimedia artist and architect Constant Nieuwenhuys (known simply as Constant). But unlike the latter two, Jorn's relationship to SI has rarely been placed in the foreground in scholarly studies.[52] This is partly because, like Constant, he left the international in the early 1960s. And yet, like Debord, who stayed to reorganize the Paris part of the international, he continued reworking its themes after the original organization's implosion.

When he first participated in the international, Jorn was already a seasoned member of the avant-garde. Born as Asger Jørgensen in Jutland, Denmark in 1913, Jorn had first gone to Paris in the late 1930s. When setting out for the Continent, he had intended to join the original Bauhaus, but he arrived in Germany too late: the Nazi regime had already closed the school. So he ended up in Paris, where he worked at the studio of the

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[51] For the way Paris based SI shrank throughout the early and mid 1960s, see Ohrt, 266.

[52] As we will see in the literature review, the vast majority of works on SI has cast Debord as its main protagonist; Simon Sadler's *The Situationist City* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998) fronts Constant.

painter Fernand Léger, one of the founders of cubism, and collaborated with the Swiss architect Le Corbusier, one of the most visionary proponents of modernist architecture. The outbreak of World War II forced Jorn back to Copenhagen. During the German occupation of Denmark, he contributed to the resistance publication *Land og Folk.* Together with a group of Danish artists, he also started publishing the art journal *Helhesten*, which intended to provoke the German occupier by juxtaposing the Scandinavian folk art fêted by the Nazis with African art, jazz, and surrealism. Around this time he first formulated the thesis that would become the foundation for his critique of architecture. Architecture, Jorn argued, acquiesced to the needs of the (current) state to the point of becoming its built expression. Doing so it renounced its ability to construct ambiences in which the imagination could grow and new desires proliferate.[53] Germany's surrender would not change the main outlines of this argument. Upon the conclusion of the war, Jorn set out to proclaim in various international associations that experimental art should shoulder architecture's role. From then on he not only collaborated in multiple continental formations, such as with artists associated with Revolutionary Surrealism and Nuclear Art, but co-founded some, like Cobra (Copenhagen-Brussels-Amsterdam) and the International Movement for an Imaginiste Bauhaus (IMIB).

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[53] Jorn, 'Om arkitekturens kunstneriske muligheder' (*A5. Meningsblad for unge arkitekter* (København juli-aug 1943, årg. 2, nr. 3) 17-25.

Jorn's role in SI has led some to claim that he was its 'instigator', others even that he was the '*homme-situationniste*'.[54] But for our purposes he is better seen as the '*homme-internationaliste*'. For as a Dane living in Paris, Jorn belongs at once to the metropole and the peripheries of the movement. More than any other member, he attracted new national branches to SI's network and tried to ensure that they cohered into an international. He strived to close the gap between the international's participatory theory and its organizational praxis.

Jorn believed that the construction of a ludic situation could reunite the practices of the avant-garde with the forces of the revolution. Uncovering a topology of resistance, it could link the means of art with the aims of politics. This was a connection that, he thought, had been lost since the 1930s but that could now be revived. The postwar prosperity experienced across western Europe had opened unforeseen possibilities to rethink hierarchies of values and employ of technologies that had so far remained untapped. Artistic experimentation with acquired usages could question received ideas and tacit assumptions. And if such practice spread across national borders as an international with a clear purpose, he believed that it could destabilize the very political structures of modern Europe. To effect this change, Jorn thought, one had to concentrate one's energies on Paris, due to its unique central position in continental networks. Only here, he originally believed, could non-signifying art disrupt the reproduction of

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[54] Michèle Bernstein, Debord's wife and important member of SI's Paris branch, suggested that Jorn was the instigator of SI in an interview with Laurent Gervereau (Laurent Gervereau, *Critique de l'image quotidienne. Asger Jorn* (Paris, Cercle d'art, 2001), 158). Gervereau cast Jorn as 'l'homme-situationniste' (Gervereau, *Critique de l'image quotidienne. Asger Jorn,*133).

signifying systems. This position motivated his SI participation.

However, without explaining why, Jorn had decided by the early 1960s to engage again in aesthetic projects that were not centered on the French capital. Around that time he composed four dense and idiosyncratic theoretical works on the divisions of Europe, political economy, and aesthetics in quick succession. Since he occupied a privileged vantage point within the international, I will suggest that these relatively neglected texts constitute crucial sources for understanding the way in which SI constructed its cross-continental network, and how SI depended in its project on a specific historical moment, between Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in 1956 and the intensification of France's war in Algeria in the first years of the 1960s. They will guide my reading of SI.[55]

These texts also provide an important but largely forgotten foil to the most lasting monument to SI, Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). After SI ceased being an international network, Debord continued theorizing the colonization of the metropole. In *The Society of the Spectacle,* this colonization is described as more or less complete. The spectacle now reigns supreme through the proliferation of images. But, curiously, that also meant that a 'situation' could no longer be constructed. The only possible response was a council in which to conduct armed conversations. What is usually seen as the pinnacle of SI—Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*—stands as a witness to the fact that its original project had been discarded. In his post-SI texts, Jorn also worried about the impact a metropolitan colonization had on the construction of situations. But, unlike De-

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[55] These texts are *Vaerdi og økonomi,* (Copenhagen, Borgen, 1962), *Naturens ordning* (Copenhagen, Borgen, 1962), and *Ting og Polis* (Copenhagen, Borgen, 1963), as well as *Held og hasard* (Copenhagen, Borgen, 1963), which had originally been published in 1952.

bord for whom the spectacle's reign extended beyond unnamed borders, Jorn interpreted it in national categories. He thought that De Gaulle's bid for power, which initially affected Paris, would have repercussions across (western) Europe: it was articulated through the new institutional landscape centered on Brussels. Jorn opposed the peripheries, where contestatory aesthetic practices could take place, to the center where such practices would be recuperated. And yet, while such practices would emerge from the former, they, he thought, had to ultimately aim to create a space of alterity in Paris, which was still in his mind the true site of History. So after 1961 he used the revenue from the sales of his paintings to fund both post-1961 situationist camps.

Literature Review

SI has had a wide reception. Its influence on the last five decades of art practice can hardly be overstated.[56] Nor can its recent imprint on city planning.[57] According to some estimates, its redefinition of the role of art and purpose of cities has made it the most studied of all postwar avant-garde formations, attracting the attention of academic

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[56] This is not the place to trace how SI informed later performance art and institutional critiques, but it could be noted that its presence can still be felt widely. In autumn 2016, the celebrated Anglo-German artist Tino Sehgal almost literally re-staged SI's situations at Palais de Tokyo in Paris. In his largest show to date 'Carte blanche', Sehgal, who works at the intersection of experimental dance and performance, emptied the gallery of objects. Though he still insisted that his exhibition was one based in visual arts, he employed some 300 people of varying ages to fill its 13 000 square meters. They were, as he called them, interpreters. Based on Sehgal's instructions on how to move and what to say, they engaged the spectators by asking them questions such as 'what does progress mean for you'. Together the interpreters and spectators, he claimed, constructed situations! (For Sehgal's explanation, see Emmanuelle Lequex, 'Tino Sehgal, créateur d'échappées', *Le Monde*, Mardi 11 Octobre 2016, p. 18.)

[57] The recent concern for the identity and unique affectivity of cities and neighborhoods have SI's imprint written all over it. But there is an even more direct link. The Dutch SI branch would influence the Amsterdam 'Provos' who in the late 1960s propagated for, among other things, free city bikes. This initiative has since been taken up by most major Western cities - but without the bikes being free, neither of charge nor of corporate advertisements.

disciplines from art history to urban and cultural studies.[58] Such studies, which make use of SI in order to think through issues relating to aesthetics, the cultural industry, urbanism, and everyday life, are not my main concern here.[59] Below I will focus on works whose main focus is SI in its own right.

As late as the 1990s, Debord remained the unquestioned center of SI in the secondary literature in English. In what in many ways was the groundbreaking work in the anglophone SI scholarship, *Lipstick Traces* (1989), the music critic Greil Marcus traces, often cheekily so, situationist practice back to the middle ages.[60] And yet, as a foundational work influential for much of later secondary literature, its legacy has been the inverse historical focus. Marcus' approach arguably informed a reading according to which the early SI texts are understood not in their own right but as leading up to, if not indirectly engendering, later historical events. For, besides foraging for esoteric mediaeval roots to SI practice, he discerns SI's imprint everywhere in his own field of expertise: Anglo-Saxon punk music. While discerningly positioning SI within more

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[58] Raymond Spiteri, 'From Unitary Urbanism to the Society of the Spectacle', *Aesthetic Revolutions* (ed) Ales Erjavec, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2015), 208.

[59] I should nonetheless acknowledge that some of these works have influenced my understanding of SI's concerns, such as its critique of modernity. This is especially the case with the recent works on SI and everyday life: Michael Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction* (London: Routledge 2000), Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge 2001); John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Practice and the Fate of Cultural Theory* (London: Pluto Press 2006), and Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009). These works all focus on the way in which methodological concerns with quotidian life traveled west, crossing the Rhine after the Second World War. But with a diachronic concentration on the long lines of such theoretical development, which for some started in the USSR and for others in the German-speaking academia of *Mitteleuropa*, they overlook the postwar contexts of the growth of the theories of which I am primarily concerned.

[60] Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1989).

rarified domains, such as the so-called Western Marxism or 'French Theory', Peter Wollen (1989), Sadie Plant (1992), and Martin Jay (1993) all follow this model.[61]

The importance of the international that existed from 1957 to 1961 was, according to such a view, posthumous. There is in fact an even earlier instance of this tendency in the American scholarship on SI. In possibly the first academic essay on SI in English, 'The Great Sideshow of the Situationist International' (1987), Edward Ball frames the elusive essence of SI praxis around the increased currency of their concepts and slogans during the events in Paris 1968.[62] From the example set by Bell and Marcus onwards there has tended to be a reciprocal confirmation between a focus on 1968 and one on SI's French members in SI's reception.

When works foreground 1968, France and the French members often end up the unquestioned center of SI. Marcus confines his time and effort to artists in the French capital. He rarely if ever leaves the Hexagon when drawing the twentieth century intellectual lineage of the Situationists (though not, it should be acknowledged, when divining whose output they influenced post-68, or when branching back to the middle ages). Due to such geographical restrictions, Marcus' presentation unequivocally suggests that the germ of the international was to be found in the Parisian Lettrists, and

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[61] Peter Wollen, 'The Situationist International', *New Left Review* I/174, March-April 1989; Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London, Routledge, 1992); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993).

[62] Edward Ball, 'The Great Sideshow of the Situationist International', *Yale French Studies,* No. 73, 1987, 21-37. For the sake of clarity, it should perhaps be pointed out that this was by no means the first instance of contributions by SI members being acknowledged outside of their own circles. Many artists had already been widely studied and Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* was upon its original publication in French in 1967 reviewed in many publications, for example in *The Times Literary Supplement.*

more particularly in the work of Guy Debord. And he is not alone. Since the publication of *Lipstick Traces*, this geographical bias has continued in works by scholars in other countries. In otherwise judicious works with many keen insights upon which I will draw in this dissertation, the British scholar Andrew Hussey, in his *Game of War* (2001), the German-Italian Anselm Jappe, in *Guy Debord* (1992), the Swiss French Vincent Kaufmann, in *Guy Debord* (2001), and the American Tom McDonough, in *The Beautiful Language of My Century* (2007), all more or less construe Debord's and SI's project as one.[63] Kaufmann even argues that the international years of SI—1957-1961, the years I focus on in this dissertation—mark a momentary deviation from Debord's otherwise straight artistic trajectory.[64]

There has been dissenting voices, such as Stewart Home. In his well-documented but dismissive *The Assault on Culture* (2001), Home argues that there is a geo-political reason for the fact that the 'Specto-Situationist' international, that is the post-1961 Paris-

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[63] Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London, Pimlico, 2002); Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord,* (Arles, Editions Denoël, 2001); Vincent Kaufmann, *Guy Debord : la révolution au service de la poésie* (Paris, Fayard, 2001); Tom McDonough *The Beautiful Language of My Century: Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945-1968* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2007)). As should be obvious from the title, McDonough's work is slightly different: it is not a study of SI per se, but rather one that traces the growth of a counter-discourse in postwar France that "construct[ed] a language of negation out of fragments of the dominant discourse, out of the very depths of reification" (McDonough, 8). But in this story, whose telos is 1968, first LI and then SI play a dominant role.

[64] As SI was Parisian and European, the presence of such a position within the Francophone scholarship is perhaps more remarkable than in the Anglo-American literature. Though Danish, Jorn for instance lived much of his adult life in the French capital. And while he has in English-speaking countries been recognized as an influential Parisian artist, even the most important of the 1950s according to some (TJ Clark), in France it has been suggested that even Jorn's paintings were until recently largely forgotten. (Laurent Gervereau, *Critique de l'image quotidienne. Asger Jorn* (Paris, Éditions Cercle d'art, 2001), 12. Since Gervereau wrote this, there has been major exhibitions of his art in France, such as the 2009 'L'évènement Asger Jorn' at Centre Pompidou.) Jorn's temporary fall into oblivion furthermore occurred at the same time as the French State declared Debord a *trésor national,* which allows it to reject any offers of buying his estate. (For the way this ability played into the decision, see http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2009/02/16/debord-un-tresor_310380.)

centred group, has gained a disproportionally wider notoriety (especially in the UK, North America and France) than its precursor, the early SI, and its more international counter-part, which he calls the Second Situationist International. He suggests that "not only has Europe traditionally seen itself as the centre of the world, but Britain, France and Germany, tend to view themselves as the hub of this centre. Thus, when the SI split in two, from a French or Anglo-American perspective, the specto-situationists based in Paris were seen as the real SI, while the 2nd International centered on Scandinavia could be dismissed as foreign to the S.I."[65]

The first English-language anthologies of SI's texts confirmed Home's suspicions. Neither British nor American editors seemed to have cared much for the texts by the non-French members. In the British *Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International,* translated and edited by Christopher Gray (1974), none of Jorn's or Constant's texts are included, even though the anthology focuses on work from the early SI.[66] In the American *Situationist International Anthology* (edited and translated by Ken Knabb, with assistance from Nadine Bloch and Joêl Cornuauly), texts from all IS issues are featured.[67] But none of Constant's contributions to SI make the cut, and only one of Jorn's SI texts does. And yet the British and American editions to some extent complemented each other: Gray focused on early SI, Knabb on later.

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[65] Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture* (London, AK Press, 2001), 41.

[66] Christopher Gray (Ed. & Trans), *Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International,* (London: Free Fall Publ., 1974).

[67] Ken Knabb (Ed. & Trans., with assistance from Nadine Bloch and Joêl Cornuauly), *Situationist International Anthology,* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981)

Before all SI texts were easily available online—as they are now, in (uneven) English translations—such editorial choices had a noticeable impact on SI's Anglo-American reception. In a new edition of the British anthology, published in 1998, Richard Parry defends the editorial choices of the first edition from this perspective: it is, he points out, thanks to *Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International* that the anglophone reader gained access to situationist thought at all.[68] But it is also for precisely this reason that the editorial choices proved so influential. For Gray's choice of excluding crucial texts from the peripheral branches still influences scholars.[69] When October Books published a selection of SI texts in translation with an emphasis on early SI, edited by Tom McDonough in 2002, their choices reproduced those of Gray's.[70] Of the republished texts that were signed and written during SI's first phase, four out of seven are by Debord; the others are by his then wife Michèle Bernstein, a crucial mover in the Paris branch, and by Constant, none are by Jorn nor any of the Italians or Germans. And of the texts published before the emergence of SI, only Debord's are included.

In *Downcast Eyes* (1993), Martin Jay provides the perhaps clearest example in the American scholarship on the SI of how an entrenched perception of history has informed

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[68] Richard Parry, 'Introduction', in Christopher Gray (Ed. & Trans), *Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International* (London, Rebel Press, 1998)

[69] Gray's choices are partly informed by the fact that he had come to know SI as an English member of the international in the mid to late 1960s (Sam Cooper, *The Situationist International in Britain,* (London, Routledge, 2017), p. 103). And at that point, SI was a Parisian project.

[70] Tom McDonough (Ed.), *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

a lopsided interpretation of SI's various phases and branches. In spite of the fact that the SI consisted of members from all over Europe at the outset and produced a journal with a signally cosmopolitan outlook, he contends that "the international in its title [Situationist *International*] gained added meaning [after 1968] as offshoots appeared in other countries."[71] Following the earlier American reception, he neglects, in an otherwise rich and careful book, SI's early phase with its multiple national branches.

The tendency to overlook the contributions of SI's peripheral branches in the 1980s and 1990s probably has to do with the way in which the power structures Home identified enabled the secondary literature to treat the non-French branches as merely intermediaries, and not mediators, in SI's network, to borrow Latour's concepts. But, when it comes to Constant and Jorn, it was indisputably entrenched by the boundaries imposed by language. Their marginalization within this scholarship is hardly unrelated to the fact that few in the first generation of Franco- and Anglophone SI scholars read Danish or Dutch.[72] These scholars were thus unable to explore what motivated Jorn and

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[71] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1994), 430.

[72] Such an opinion is bolstered by the one work that does cast Jorn as the exemplary proponent of SI: Richard Gombin's *The Radical Tradition: a study in Revolutionary Thought,* trans. Rupert Swyer (London, Methuen Books, 1978). In itself a product of 1968, at least insofar as it follows Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in focusing on the 'losing' leftwing tradition, Gombin's work explores the currents that were not corrupted by power. Gombin gives SI in general and Jorn in particular a prominent role in his narrative on the overlooked tradition of anti-authoritarian socialism that he thought the postwar avant-garde carried on. When doing so, he draws on Jorn's small output in French: his contributions to IS and his *Critique de l'économie politique* (1960). But Gombin's slim volume, which pays no concern for SI's overall trajectory, remains very much an exception.

Constant in the work they produced in their own tongues.[73]

Over the last two decades, however, there has been a growing interest in Jorn and Constant as theorists in their own right in English and French, and this is emblematic of a broader trend to extend our scholarly scopes beyond France. Around the turn of the millennium, an anthology and two monographs that trace Constant's theoretical trajectory, in and out of SI, were published,[74] and two collections of Asger Jorn's writings on art and architecture were reissued in French;[75] they have since appeared in two different English translations.[76] In his second piece on SI (2001), Peter Wollen now argued that Jorn's "ideas had a big effect on Situationist thought."[77] Jorn's critique of Le Corbusier in particular influenced Debord's thinking with regard to the supersession of the division between subject and object. In his preface to *Le jardin d'Albisola* (1974), Debord, in Wollen's words, "recollects how Jorn, *as is often forgotten*, was one of the very first to

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[73] While communicating with each other and the Parisians in French throughout their time in the international, both Jorn and Constant wrote less in French after quitting SI. Jorn for instance elaborated on the ideas he presented in the SI journal in Danish in four of his five central works. By swapping languages, from French (and to some extent Italian) to Danish, he consciously restricted his audience (see Asger Jorn, *Held og hasard,* (København, Borgens forlag, 1963, originally published 1952), new preface to 1963 edition, i). He did so in spite of continuing to live in Paris (he, for example, wrote the new preface there). In doing so he could be seen as making a deliberate political point about the relation between the center and the periphery. They were asymmetrically related. This is an asymmetry that the scholarship on SI has arguably unconsciously reproduced.

[74] Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1999); Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon : the hyper-architecture of desire* (Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 1999); Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zegher (Ed), *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

[75] Asger Jorn, *Discours aux pingouins et autres écrites* (Paris, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2001); Asger Jorn, *Pour la forme* (Paris, Editions Allia, 2001).

[76] Asger Jorn, *Concerning Form: An Outline a Methodology of the Art,* trans. Peter Shield (Silkeborg, Museum Jorn, 2012); Asger Jorn, *Fraternité Avant Tout. Asger Jorn's writings on art and architecture,* (ed) Ruth Baumeister, trans. Paul Larkin (Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 2011).

[77] Peter Wollen, 'Situationists and Architecture', *New Left Review* 8, March-April 2001, 124.

develop 'a modern critique of the most recent forms of repressive architecture'."[78] Around the same time in Paris, Laurent Gervereau called Jorn the "*homme-situationniste*" and Constant's work the most situationist of all.[79]

Such synthesizing attempts remain rare. Following upon the publication in English of Jorn's essays on art and architectures, the journal *October* devoted a special issue to Jorn in summer of 2012.[80] The articles in this issue address Jorn's relation to Cobra, views on gender, and attempts to carve out a space for artists in society. In one of two articles elaborating on the latter topic, Nicola Pezolet stresses that Jorn was interested in "the roles that artists and the postwar public ought to play in democratic education and in the reconstruction of society."[81] But he states that there are still only two exegetical texts devoted to Jorn's writings on art and architecture, his own MA-thesis and Ruth Baumeister's dissertation, both of which remain unpublished.[82] The editor of *October,* Hal Foster, urges the reader that "much work remains to be done."[83]

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[78] Wollen, 138, my emphasis.

[79] Laurent Gervereau, *Critique de l'image quotidienne. Asger Jorn* (Paris, Cercle d'art, 2001)

[80] But, as if to indicate how the interest in the SI has progressed, this issue was published a decade and a half after the same journal put out one on Debord and the SI, in which Jorn only merited mention as a painter.

[81] Nicola Pezolet, 'Bauhaus Ideas: Jorn, Max Bill, and Reconstruction Culture', *October,* 141 summer 2012, p. 110. In the other article doing so, Steven Harris focuses on Jorn's anti-structuralist intervention together with Arnaud. (Steven Harris, 'How Language Looks: On Asger Jorn and Noël Arnaud's *La Langue verte*', *October* 141, summer 2012, 111-132.)

[82] Pezolet, 88.

[83] Hal Foster, 'Introduction', *October,* 141 – Summer 2012, 3.

While extensive, the scholarship on the non-French branches of SI have often focused on one group within the international rather than studying the organization as a whole. In meticulously well-documented works, Troels Andersen, Guy Atkins, Peter Shield, and Graham Birtwistle have for instance all greatly expanded our knowledge of Jorn.[84] Among these Jorn scholars, only Shield and Birtwistle are primarily concerned with Jorn's texts rather than his paintings. Shield's and Birtwistle's monographs identify what inspired Jorn and excavates the underlying logic of such inspirations. Based on impressive amounts of primary research and guided by a genuine synthetic élan, their works account for all of Jorn's thought within their respective frameworks: Jorn's anthropology in Birtwistle's, Jorn's thought in the 1960s in Shield's. But for possibly this reason they do not construe Jorn's thought as a part of larger conversation. Neither one focuses on him as a Situationist.

Even if only inadvertently, such choices could be claimed to bolster the perception of the centrality of SI's post-1961 French section. For, if read together, the scholarship on Jorn with its lack of contextualization and that on SI with its focus on late 1960s Paris mutually reinforce a conception of Jorn's irrelevance for SI. He can thus be cast as an author and painter who briefly participated in the international without being a 'mediator' of it. As he was the crucial non-French member, the same case could then be made for

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[84] Troels Andersen, *Asger Jorn. En biografi* (Copenhagen, Borgen, 1997); Guy Atkins, *Jorn in Scandinavia 1930-1953* (London, Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, 1968); Guy Atkins, *Asger Jorn 1954-64: The Crucial Years,* (London, Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, 1977); Graham Birtwhistle, *Living Art: Asger Jorn's Comprehensive Theory of Art Between Helhesten and Cobra* (Utrecht, Reflex, 1986); Peter Shield, *Comparative Vandalism: Asger Jorn and the Artistic Attitude to Life* (London, Ashgate, 1998).

the Italians, Germans, and Brits, et al., which it has.[85]

When interpreting the international's project in concert with its continental extension, my dissertation reorients the analysis from the traditional *telos* of Paris 1968 to the *arche* of Hungary 1956. This enables me to draw on both parts of the scholarship, the scholarly works on SI's metropolitan branch as well as those on SI's peripheral members. For by focusing on the way SI's members first worked out their project together rather than being guided by its most complete expression, it forces Debord and Bernstein to share the stage with other SI participants, such as Constant, the Italian member Pinot Gallizio, the German Gruppe SPUR, and of course Jorn. In doing so, I participate in a growing trend.

Recent work show that things are changing. In *The Art and Politics of Asger Jorn* (2014), Karen Kurczynski foregrounds Jorn's position in the central networks of postwar art.[86] By drawing on his thought and his art, she persuasively shows how Jorn's practice reacted to and commented upon the intellectual trends of western Europe. Though her main interest is Jorn's thought and art rather than the actual organization of SI, she stresses that his role in the international has been unfairly marginalized in the scholarship.

Such recognition of Jorn's importance, as initiator of and negotiator in the international, has taken place at the same time as a more plural understanding of SI. In *The Situationist International in Britain* (2017), Sam Cooper unearths the practices and

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[85] There is an exception. As remarked above, one of the recent work on Constant explicitly deals with SI as a whole and fronts the Dutch: Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1999).

[86] Karen Kurczynski, *The Art and Politics of Asger Jorn: the avant-garde won't give up* (London, Ashgate, 2014)

theories that were particular to SI's British members. Instead of fencing these off from a 'correct' SI line in Paris, he argues that one has to see them as equally situationist. One needs to speak of 'Situationisms' in order to account "for the multiple negotiations and adaptations of the project across different contexts."[87] Adopting a similar perspective, Mikkel Bolt Rasmusen and Jakob Jakobsen have recently edited a collection on what Home calls 'the 2nd International'.[88] Like this dissertation, these works attempt to move the focus on SI from its Parisian core.

Few of these works have so far sought to 'inter-nationalize' pre-1961 SI. One of the few that treats this earlier period of the international (1957-1961) and that features SI members beyond the usual suspects, Debord and Vaneigem, is McKenzie Wark's recent *The Beach Beneath the Street* (2011).[89] In this pioneering work, Wark includes chapters on many of the most prominent protagonists in SI's non-Francophone cast. "The early years of the Situationist International are the ones in which it may develop itself, elaborate itself, ornament itself - in many different directions," he writes. "The movement exercises a lasting fascination on art historians for this reason. All the major figures of the early years have their favourites, who excise them from the game [that was the movement] and hoist them up as their champions. What is perhaps more interesting is

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[87] Sam Cooper, *The Situationist International in Britain* (London, Routledge, 2017), 9.

[88] Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (ed), *Expect Anything, Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen, Nebula, 2011)

[89] McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (London, Verso, 2011).

to keep these figures in play, to view what passes between them as what matters."[90] By presenting concise readings of the artworks and theories by Jorn, Constant, Pinot Gallizio, and Bernstein, et al. , he draws attention to those who have often been left out of SI's story because he wants to recuperate theoretical strategies from before the ascendence of what he calls 'High Theory'—ie Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, et al., and their American interlocutors—for use today.[91]

Inspired by the way Wark brings the SI branches into conversation with each other, my dissertation investigates the concrete ways in which that conversation was historically organized. Trying to understand what brought them and kept them together, I home in on the infrastructure of the international. My aim is to identify what historically conditioned SI's continental network.[92] Though interested in the theoretical connections between the SI members, and such connections' impact on the structure of the organization, rather than in their theories themselves, my study should thereby not be seen as closer in aim to the other exception to the rule of French dominated SI accounts: Roberto Ohrt's *Phantom Avant-Garde: Eine Geschichte der Situationistischen Internationale und der modernen Kunst* (1990). Based on primary sources from across

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[90] Wark, 73.

[91] In doing so, his work shares certain ambitions with *Clean Bodies, Fast Cars* (1995) by Kristin Ross. Though the latter does not explicitly reference early SI, many of its insights are applicable, and will be applied, to this dissertation.

[92] As Wark points out, I am not the first to thus focus on the early SI: "this is the moment [1957-1960], like the opening scene in a film or a novel, where circumstances are fluid, where many things are possible. One discovers in the first three years of the Situationist International many possible versions of it besides the ones of legend or even historical record. This is perhaps why so many keep returning to them, and to these early years in particular, as the scene of a moment in still-living movement, a situation" (Wark, 62-3).

Europe, Ohrt narrates how this international association of artists came about in 1957 and how there were no longer any artists left by 1962. He explains SI's trajectory by stressing the impact of certain contextual factors on the international, chief of which was the still marginal position of avant-garde aesthetics and emancipatory politics in the 1950s.[93] He starts his narrative at Christmas in 1942, at the height of Fascist rule, when 'degenerate' art was no longer exhibited and leftwing positions silenced across the continent. He then tracks their return.[94] But when thus relating the rediscovery of interwar avant-garde art by then insignificant groups in Paris to the grand schemes of twentieth century political history, he overlooks how SI dealt with certain more immediate concerns, such as the fall out of 1956, the nascent EEC and decolonization. Though finely attuned to differences among the national branches, he also rarely, if ever, relates the disputes on aesthetic theory within SI to its organizational practice.

When emphasizing how the different SI branches interacted, I will *not,* however, propose to have found the key to unlocking the meaning of how SI's theory relates to, or indeed produces, its praxis, that is, its organization. As I have outlined in the methodology section above, I rather build this account based on the inverse assumption. I want to show how SI was an international organization of artists, architects and 'theorists' that was continuously looking for a way to anchor its conceptual superstructure

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[93] Roberto Ohrt, *Phantom Avant-Garde: Eine Geschichte der Situationistischen Internationale und der modernen Kunst* (München, Galerie van de Loo, 1990), 7-13.

[94] Though he gives an even-handed account of all tributaries flowing into SI, he shows how Jorn especially directed it. Not only did the Dane expressly want to reforge the links between an unorthodox Marxist tradition and the avant-garde. He implicitly did so against the recent historical background of the two being eclipsed: his most famous painting, which he worked on intensely from 1957 to 1960, was called 'Stalingrad, ou le rire fou de courage' (Ohrt, 117).

through praxis in a quotidian base at this particular historical conjuncture. Drawing on the primary sources and existing scholarship, I will look into why Jorn offered one take, Debord another, and the Dutch, led by Jorn's former Cobra peer Constant, a third in order to account for how they somehow co-operated.

For our understanding of the paradoxical attraction and precarious coherence of the international network, I will nonetheless argue that Jorn's texts and practice offer a privileged vantage point. Not only did he physically straddle the divide between SI's Parisian center and Scandinavian and Mediterranean peripheries; he put forward an aesthetic theory that incorporated the various conflicts of interests within the international into its practice. Through a recourse to the organization, his texts tried to bridge the distance separating SI's means, artistic practice, from its aim, political theory. They can help us reconstruct the personal connections and theoretical infrastructure that brought the members together, if we simultaneously remember that he was merely a co-producer, if a crucial one, of SI's network.

First Part: The Rise of the Situationist International

1. The Creation of an International 1954-1957

This chapter shows how SI emerged as a hinged network in mid to late 1950s western Europe. A 1956 meeting of multiple artist groups manifested a concern for a shared problem. In a time of large scale technological advancements, artists felt alienated and powerless. Jorn argued that they needed to politicize non-signifying art. But, as no one could show how to do so, the groups did not amalgamate. The political horizon remained closed and the groups divided.

A few months later the inhabitants of Budapest unexpectedly rose up against their Soviet-installed overlords. Exposing the emancipatory claim of State socialism to be bankrupt, it freed the imagination for articulating new, alternative political visions. At the follow-up meeting of artists a year later, Debord gave a suggestion of how to politicize non-mimetic art based on the discursive openings to which Soviet's re-imposition of its power in Hungary in 1956-7 had led in Paris. He wanted to create ludic situations. Like, as he imagined, the councils of Budapest, they would dodge the instrumentalism inherent in both camps of the postwar geo-political architecture.

Speaking to the shared concern of the artist groups, this suggestion precipitated the organization of an international with Paris, Debord's home, its hinge node. But rather than a centralized post-national organization, it became an inter-national one. For it was not merely guided by the project of the Parisian hinge node, the peripheral nodes also pushed back. The formation of SI thus led it to become a hinged network.

I. The Need for Unity

"*Le congrès d'Alba marquera sans doute une des difficiles étapes, dans le secteur de la lutte pour une nouvelle sensibilité et pour une nouvelle culture, de ce renouveau révolutionnaire général qui caractérise l'année 1956*."[95]

In summer of 1956 Le Corbusier, the doyen of modernist architecture, organized le Festival de l'art avant-garde at his 'Cité Radieuse' in Marseille together with the young theater director Jacques Polieri.[96] It counted Picasso, Chaplin, and Piscator as its patrons. Many of the leading lights of 1950s arts from both sides of the Channel, the Rhine and the Alps either participated or their works were performed/exhibited: Ionesco, Becket, Tinguely, Klein, Dufrêne, Béjart, Boulez, Stockhausen, to name but a few. The festival united innovative and critically acclaimed artists working in various media.

The same summer, another meeting took place at Alba, a hilltop in the Piedmontese mountains. It also brought together innovative artists working in various media, though these ones were less critically praised. Possibly because of this, the role of critics became a central point of discussion at Alba. Organized by the artists Asger Jorn and Pinot Gallizio, who together fronted the artists co-operating under the umbrella of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB),[97] artist associations from eight countries came to this small town in northern Italy. Among those present at the confer-

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[95] Unsigned, 'La Plate-forme d'Alba', Potlatch, no 27, 1956

[96] Ohrt, 154.

[97] Michèle Bernstein suggested that Jorn was the instigator of SI according to Laurent Gervereau, *Critique de l'image quotidienne. Asger Jorn* (Paris, Cercle d'art, 2001)..

ence were both eventually prominent SI members such as Constant, previously of Cobra but currently unaffiliated, and representatives of prominent members, such as Debord of the Parisian Lettrist International (LI).[98] Not well established enough to be invited to le Festival de l'art avant-garde in Marseille,[99] they turned this lack of recognition into a virtue. Jorn called their meeting 'the First World Congress of *Free* Artists'.

Jorn gave the opening address. In his 'Discours du premier congrès mondial des artistes libres', Jorn claimed "*l'évolution mondiale dans le domaine de l'art et de la technique est arrivée à une telle confusion formelle que l'établissement d'un INSTITUT D'EXPÉRIENCES ET THÉORISATIONS ARTISTIQUES, au niveau des Instituts scientifiques, au-dessus des problèmes scolaires professionnels artistiques ou industriels, s'impose avec une force éclatante*." Speaking for himself and Pinot Gallizio, he declared to the assembled artists that "*l'établissement de cet Institut est notre but précis et direct*."[100]

By creating an institute, the congregated artists would, Jorn argued, be able to provide a narrative for experimental art contesting those advanced by art critics and cultural theorists. He was unhappy that the privilege to define art was given to others than the artists themselves. For more often than not, he thought, critics especially were misguided. "*La raison pour laquelle l'artiste est aujourd'hui obligé de prendre la parole*," he

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[98] Debord, the most prominent among the LI members, was represented at Alba by Gil J Wolman (Ohrt, 151).

[99] 'La Plate-forme d'Alba' (Potlatch 27). Artists came to Alba from Algeria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the UK; the members of a Czech group were not granted exit visas in time to participate (Ohrt, 151).

[100] Asger Jorn, *Pour la forme. Ébauche d'une méthodologie des arts* (Paris, Editions Alia, 2001), 30-1.

thought, "*n'est pas que le public demande une explication* littéraire *de n'importe quelle création artistique*." It is rather "*qu'il en reçoit toujours de fausses*."[101] Such explanations were misguided because they were blind to how they implicitly favored certain media.

Jorn wanted the artists to resist the imperialism of prose. "*Les critiques d'art qui prétendent que la peinture ne peut pas s'expliquer en terms musicaux ne se gênent pas pour expliquer la musique comme la peinture en termes* littéraires," he argued. "*L'existence même d'une critique semble avoir établi ses raisons d'être*."[102] In their explanations, he thought, prose literature furnished the implicit benchmark. Literature was more often than not the master medium. It provided the metric by which all other artistic media could be understood.

The emphasis on literature was, according to Jorn, misguided, because it was the least experimental of all art forms. This, Jorn thought, had not only led critics to neglect experiments in other media. Jorn believed that any aesthetic formation buoyed by a focus on literature tended to overlook experimentation.[103] Through a narrative of its own, an organization of artists could, he hoped, establish the importance of experimental processes in art without such a literary bias.

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[101] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 30, my emphasis.

[102] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 30, my emphasis.

[103] The clearest example of this belief is when he expressed that the fertile experimental ground of Surrealism had dried up because it was dominated by writers rather than painters (Jorn, 'Nya tendenser i Pariskonsten''. *Ny Tid* (Göteborg 8 aug. 1947))

At the time of Jorn's opening address, Jean-Paul Sartre had produced the most influential argument for preferring literature over other artistic media. In his *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947-8), written shortly after the end of World War II with the intention of influencing the direction of postwar art practices and translated as *What is Literature?* (WIL), Sartre had not only put artistic experimentation under political suspicion. He had also explained its significance according to the parameters of prose literature. In the first section of WIL, Sartre distinguished between on the one hand poetry, painting, and music, and on the other, prose. Only the latter, he claimed, signifies: "*L'écrivain peut vous guider et s'il vous décrit un taudis, y faire voir le symbole des injustices sociales, provoquer votre indignation. Le peintre est muet: il vous présente* un *taudis, c'est tout; libre à vous d'y voir ce que vous voulez*." He claimed that "*on ne peint pas les significations, on ne les met pas en musique*".[104]

Jorn questioned the underlying focus of Sartre dichotomy: signification. He found it inapplicable to the questions facing his day. "*Je trouve*," he wrote with reference to Sartre, *"une distinction entre l'essencielle [sic] et l'insignifiante inutile*."[105] And no wonder: such a distinction served to marginalize experimentation.

By distinguishing between signifying and non-signifying art, Sartre wanted to show that only prose can be politically committed. It alone can 'engage'. Wanting postwar art to be engaged, he saved his most damning assessment for poets. Though using a medium able to signify, they failed to take advantage of it: "*Les poètes sont des hommes*

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[104] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations II* (Paris, Gallimard, 1948), 16-7, his emphasis.

[105] Jorn in a letter to Debord, 1954

qui refusent d'utiliser *le langage … En fait, le poète s'est retiré d'un seul coup du langage-instrument; il a choisi une fois pour toutes l'attitude poétique qui considère les mots comme des choses et non comme des* signes."[106] In this "*la poésie est du côté de la peinture, de la sculpture, de la musique*,"[107] and not on the side of "*la prose*", which Sartre claimed, "*est utilitaire par essence*."[108]

Based on the metric of prose, Sartre disqualified the political claims of the other artistic media. This was because they, and poets especially, considered the world from the outside. They saw it as strange and wild. "*L'homme qui parle* [in prose] *est au-déla des mots, près de l'objet; le poète est en deçà. Pour le premier, ils sont domestiques; pour le second, ils restent à l'etat sauvage*."[109] Still wanting to be political, poets had as consequence, he claimed, ended up in misguided positions with downright disastrous consequences.

Sartre associated aesthetic experimentation with scandals. And he identified the propensity to create scandals with a specifically bourgeois desire to rebel against one's class. "*Ces jeunes bourgeois turbulents veulent ruiner la culture parce qu'on les a cultivés*," he claimed. But in this, he argued derisively, "*leur ennemi principal demeure ... leur papa*."[110] In the first issue of *Les Temps modernes* (TM), Sartre noted that all young,

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[106] Sartre, 18-9, his emphasis.

[107] Sartre, 17-8.

[108] Sartre, 25.

[109] Sartre, 19.

[110] Sartre, 182-3.

middle-class *littérateurs* had sensed this itch. "*Tous les écrivains d'origine bourgeois*," he wrote, *"ont connu la tentation de l'irresponsabilité: depuis un siècle, elle est de tradition dans la carrière des lettres*."[111]

But the desire to *épater la bourgeoisie* was juvenile at best. At worst, as in the case of André Breton's Surrealism,[112] it harbored dreams of killing rampages that were implicitly anti-Semitic. Sartre thought that Surrealism belonged to "*les traditions destructrices*."[113] For, quoting Breton, he stressed that "*L'acte surréaliste le plus simple ... consiste, revolver au poing, à descendre dans la rue et à tirer au hasard, tant qu'on peut, dans la foule*".[114] Although expressed as the novelty of scandal, surrealist artistic praxis was, Sartre thought, a mere continuation, indeed only the most recent illustration, of unsavoury tendencies with deep roots in the soil in European history. When Sartre, in *Anti-semite and Jew,* which was written shortly after the liberation of Paris but published after the end of the war*,* observed that there were no participants of Jewish origin among the

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[111] Sartre, 'Présentation des Temps modernes', *Les Temps Modernes,* no. 1, l'automne 1945. Reprinted in *Situations II* (Paris, Gallimard, 1948), 9. It is not included in the English edition.

[112] In fact the title of his essays can be read as a taunt of the certainty of literature's essence hiding behind the pompous name of Surrealism's literary journal, *Littérature* (!). The surrealist journal had taken its name, Andrew Hussey notes, from a line by Verlaine, "*tout le reste est littérature*" (Andrew Hussey, *Paris: The Secret History,* (London, Penguin, 2006) 333). If so Sartre, in actuality, asked what all the rest is and how an author relates to and writes of it.

[113] Sartre, 182.

[114] Sartre, 138.

[115] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate,* trans. George J. Becker (New York, Schocken, 1995) 97.

Surrealists, it was far from gratuitous.[115] To him, it pointed to what he saw as the latent politics of their art.[116]

Sartre's suggestions would shape an influential strand of postwar art theory. As one historian discerns, "the cultural shock produced by the war was [so] immense … [that] in future, it seemed, the artist would have to live in, with, and for his era, assuming fully his responsibilities before History."[117] As an indicator of how largely Sartre loomed for the time-period, Jorn felt the need in 1954 to apologize for his inability to find guidance in Sartre.[118]

But by the time Jorn organized the meeting at Alba, he found that Sartre's focus on signification and responsibility had become part of the problem. Artists, he thought, had to refuse the imperative to be useful according to the parameters of the day. And if doing so within the framework of an association, we would be "*obligé*," he told his listeners, "*de reconnaître que* notre mouvement *est arrivé à un stade où seul le nom de mouvement d'avant-garde peut lui être appliqué*."[119]

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[116] He had been gesturing towards the existence of such a connection even before the war ended. In his short-story collection, *Le Mur,* published 1939, Sartre depicted characters whose traits fit those type-cast as surrealist in *WIL.* That is, they were people who succumbed to the temptation of irresponsibly provoking the class of their origin. In one of the short stories, 'The Childhood of a Leader', the protagonist, fitting the surrealist bill, ends up killing a Jewish man reading the PCF's journal, *L'Humanité.*

[117] Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958,* trans. Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), 430.

[118] *Je m'excuse*", he wrote in the letter to Debord, "*de ne pas être existensialiste [sic] dans le sens que je trouve une distinction entre l'essencielle [sic] et l'insignifiante inutile*".

[119] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 31, my emphasis.

In this it would differ from those artists already working under the label of the avant-garde, who were gathering in Marseille. As an avant-garde movement, Jorn argued, they could not have any nostalgic attachment to the present order: "*Il faut qu'il [le mouvement] se trouve isolé et sans appui direct des forces établies*."[120]

Such a movement did not only have to question vested interest. In response to Sartre, they also had to re-think received ideas. As a group it had to create in the name of a "*la société humaine* et *l'évolution artistique*."[121] The two were not, as Sartre claimed, in opposition. Indeed, the exploration of what was not directly signifying was not irresponsible. For Jorn, it could rather re-kindle the desire for what was different, for that which had no 'significance' right now.

Jorn wanted to reconnect aesthetic experimentation with political outcomes. He argued that "*la position gagnée par cette avant-garde soit plus tard confirmée par une évolution générale*." For, he went on, "*c'est seulement dans le future que nous pourrons trouver une justification précise de cette dernière condition. Cela reste encore dans le domaine de l'espoir et de la croyance*."[122]

The link between avant-garde practice and revolutionary theory had, he thought, been severed in the 1930s.[123] And today, he implied, a reconnection between aesthetics and politics was blocked by critics' limited understanding of art's function in society.

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[120] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 31..

[121] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 31, my emphasis.

[122] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 31.

[123] Unsigned, 'Le Sens du déperissement de l'art', IS 3.

Only aesthetic experimentation could, he believed, re-conceptualize what was politically possible. And Sartre's aesthetic theory spoiled this possibility. Rather than nourishing the desire for other political configurations, it worked within what Jorn saw as the dominant logic of current society. In favoring art's utilitarian aspect, it furthered the instrumental rationality of the time period.

According to Jorn, technological advancements had during the ten years that had passed since Sartre published his aesthetic guidelines increasingly come to dominate European society. He feared their political consequences. In 'Image et Forme' (1954), Jorn defined technology, even though rapidly developing, as ultimately a force of stasis. It not only advanced through but entrenched set forms. Though blind to this consequence, the techno-optimists of the time-period were the authors of this development. They, Jorn thought, "*se sont imaginé que l'on pouvait arriver aux formes définitives, idéales, des differents objects intéressant l'homme.*" In reality, however, "*leurs idées*" favored "… *standardisation*."[124]

In contrast to humans, technology was not auto-transformative. "*Toute technique humaine*," Jorn argued, "*est inspirée par le besoin et par le désir de l'homme, elle est l'expression immédiate de l'intérêt humain*."[125] Where postwar techniques went wrong was in believing that all needs could be fulfilled and all desires satisfied. To Jorn this suggested that they entertained a fixed perception of life. But humans, who Jorn defined by their desires and wishes for a transcendence of the present conditions, are constantly

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[124] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 15.

[125] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 14.

transforming.[126] "*On doit arriver à une conception dynamique de la forme*," Jorn argued in response. Only then can we "*regarder en face cette vérité que toute forme humaine se trouve en état de transformation continuelle*."[127]

But while it was not auto-transformative, technology was self-augmenting. It had become so prominent that by the mid-1950s its static forms had, Jorn thought, turned into an architecture. Now he noted not only that "*avant tout l'architecture est une technique humaine*," but also that "*on peut considérer toute technique humaine comme une architecture*."[128] Though a practice, it was now a framing architecture, by which he meant that its static forms suppressed the dynamism of life.

Jorn was not alone in believing that the proliferation of technology had by the 1950s become an autonomous social force with which to be reckoned. 1954 had seen the publication of some major works on such postwar developments. One of these was Jacques Ellul's *La Technique: l'enjeu du siècle.*[129] It is hard to know if Jorn read Ellul since what is left of his private library are the books he acquired from the 1960s on. But

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[126] That Jorn thought that humans developed was, as we will see, illustrated both in that he found the imagination to be their privileged intellectual faculty and in that his failed dissertation cast shifting interests as part of the essence of culture.

[127] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 15.

[128] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 14.

[129] Another was Martin Heidegger's 'Die Frage nach der Technik'.

it is not unlikely. He generally kept up to date with the intellectual developments.[130] And during these years, his critique of contemporary society became increasingly concerned with technology.[131] As we will see, his thinking on technology closely relates to Ellul's conceptualization of it.

Ellul, a French sociologist, wanted to wake postwar society up from the convenient misconception that technological developments only affected industrial production. What he called 'technique' infiltrated all of social life. Its logic was first visible in machines but no longer ended there. In fact the ideology of technique "creates the kind of world the machines needs". It not only "clarifies, arranges, and rationalizes", but "it is efficient and brings efficiency to everything."[132]

Ellul went so far as to proclaim that 'technique' rather than capitalism had created the modern world.[133] Its impact had been more decisive. "When technique enters into every area of life, including the human, it ceases to be external to man and becomes his

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[130] "Cobra" whose three driving forces were Jorn, Constant and Christian Dotremont "can be seen as an artistic intervention in the debate about humanism after the war," Hal Foster writes in 'Creaturely Cobra'. It was "one", he goes on. "that engaged the preeminent philosophers of the time, above all Sartre, who insisted that his existentialism was a humanism, and Heidegger, who dismissed both concepts as metaphysical" (Hal Foster, 'Creaturely Cobra' (*October* summer 2012) 7). At Museum Jorn in Silkeborg, Denmark where the remains of Jorn's private library are held, there are titles both by Heidegger and by scholars writing on Heidegger's aesthetics.

[131] In the mid-1950s, Jorn changed focus somewhat, from one on 'architecture' (of which we will here more in the second section of this chapter), to one on technology.

[132] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* trans. John Wilkinson (New York, Vintage, 1967)*,* 5.

[133] Ibid. 5.

very substance," he argued. "It is no longer face to face with man but is integrated with him, and it progressively absorbs him."[134]

As a concept 'technique' is near all-encompassing. It designates that which Ellul identified as the main strand of historical development since the dawn of western modernity. But precisely because it is so comprehensive a concept, it also suffers from a slight loss of focus. As Robert Merton notes in the preface to the English translation, its exact nature remains elusive.[135] But what is nonetheless clear is that it is not merely technology. It rather traces the ascent to dominance and sketches the impact of some sort of instrumental, or better instrumentalizing, rationality from a holistic perspective. Its comprehensive point of view is somewhat akin to what around this time in the US became known as cybernetics. It has also been suggested that Ellul's technique relates to *techné*.[136] When theorized by ancient philosophers, the latter denoted a kind of know-how or skill. It was associated at the same time to the making and the knowing of something. It suggested a knowledge acquired through practice. For Plato it was also a knowledge of harmony and measure. Once the concept entered the modern age this changed. "From Ellul's view, [techné was then] reduced to the process of measuring," according to David Lovekin, an interlocutor of Ellul's. Technique suggests an epoch in which *techné* as "measuring no longer implies a standard of measure beyond what is con-

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[134] Ibid. 6.

[135] See Robert Merton, 'Introduction', *The Technological Society,* trans. John Wilkinson (New York, Vintage, 1967), i-viii.

[136] David Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Lehigh University Press, 1991), 70

tingently determined";[137] it denotes a mentality no longer concerned with the harmony of the true and good, only with the measuring.[138]

As the allegedly dominant postwar ideology, technique was restructuring society. "Technique," Ellul claimed, "is nothing more than means and the ensemble of means."[139] In the modern society that he depicted, the emphasis on means subordinated any consideration of ends. Technique was the way in which this subordination of ends to means was articulated. It, he argued, translated into action "man's concern to master things by means of reason, to account for what is subconscious, make quantitative what is qualitative, make clear and precise the outlines of nature, take hold of chaos and put order into it".[140] Indeed, even "organization is a technique".[141]

'Technique' described the future Jorn feared. His mid-1950s texts suggest that he was especially concerned by the tendency in postwar society that Ellul had diagnosed. The sociologist defined technique as a practice, but a practice that, when applied, "undergoes no modifications in the movement which is its being and essence". In fact "it is the only locus where form and being are identical. It is only a form, but everything conforms to it … [it] modifies whatever it touches."[142] Technique's practices were creating a world

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[137] Lovekin, 70.

[138] Lovekin, 65.

[139] Ellul, 19.

[140] Ellul, 43.

[141] Ellul, 12.

[142] Ellul, 94.

in its own image, in which the tension between the current state and the hopes for something different had disappeared, where form and being were identical, where the human faculty of the imagination had been subdued. Through technique, it has been argued, "a transcendent reality beyond the contingently present is denied".[143] It entrenched the architecture of set forms.

Recently a qualitative jump had, according to Ellul, occurred in technique's progressive expansion in the West: "at the present time technique has arrived at such a point in its evolution that it is being transformed and is progressing almost without decisive interventions by man."[144] It "has become autonomous."[145] Detaching itself from input or control, it was erasing the distinction between a reality full of contradictory wishes and demands and what was currently the case, the here and now, on its own.

Though Ellul claimed to have written his work with strictly scientific ambitions in mind and did not want to moralize, it is clear that his reader did not have to interpret his text that way. Evoking a Faustian development, he offered him/her much cause for concern. Ellul's work could easily be interpreted as a call to action, a demand that the reader do something before it was too late. Right now, Ellul observed,"some decisive conquests remain to made—man, among others—and it is hard to see what is to prevent technique from making them."[146]

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[143] Lovekin, 65.

[144] Ellul, 85.

[145] Ellul, 6.

[146] Ellul, 13.

From the mid-1950s on, Jorn's main focus was to rally artists against automation, that is a self-directed automated technology. He cast these artists as humanist bulwarks. He was especially scathing about those within the artist community who had let themselves be employed by the ideologues of technique. And never was he more so than with regard to those formations who had previously resisted it.

As primary proponent of the fixed forms of a techno-ideology, Jorn singled out Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus School. The legendary Bauhaus school had re-opened in the early 1950s at Ulm, West Germany. As he had narrowly missed out on joining its inter-war precursor, Jorn tried to enroll, in any capacity, for the postwar incarnation of the school. But in contrast to the original institution, postwar Bauhaus neither employed artists, nor educated them. It no longer featured a fine arts programme.[147]

To Jorn, who nourished a somewhat idealized vision of the interwar Bauhaus school, this was a betrayal of Bauhaus's initial project.[148] According to Jorn, its original organizational structure had been a response to the question: "*quelle 'éducation' faut-il à l'artiste pour qu'il puisse occuper sa place dans l'âge machiniste?*"[149] And this, Jorn thought, had been "*à leur époque révolutionnaires*."[150] The choice at postwar Bauhaus to

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[147] For a description of Jorn's his attempt to join its postwar incarnation, see Nicola Pezolet, 'Bauhaus Ideas: Jorn, Max Bill, and Reconstruction Culture', *October,* 141 summer 2012. See also Jorn's 'Image and Form', *Regarding Form,* which quotes the letter correspondence between Jorn and Max Bill, head of Bauhaus.

[148] For a critique of Jorn's idealized vision of the Bauhaus School, see Pezolet, 'Bauhaus Ideas: Jorn, Max Bill, and Reconstruction Culture', *October,* 141 summer 2012.

[149] Asger Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 28.

[150] Asger Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 25.

exclude artists confirmed his sense that in postwar Europe an instrumental logic had even come to invade previous bastions of aesthetic experimentation.

It was in his rejection of (and by) postwar Bauhaus that Jorn had first elaborated on the importance of the free arts, which gave name to the 1956 meeting. Jorn chose the opportune moment to make his disappointment with the postwar Bauhaus widely known. Max Bill, the first principal of postwar Bauhaus, was invited to give the keynote address at the 10th Triennale of Industrial Art in Milan 1954, an international congress of industrial design, gathering visitors in related fields from across Europe and beyond. In his keynote address, Bill had suggested that a free artist is a false artist. That is, s/he is an artist making objects without immediate purpose to or use in society.

At a counter-event in Milan during the Triennale, Jorn responded to Bill's keynote address.[151] In his response, 'Contre le fonctionnalisme', Jorn stressed the importance of free art for society. As a retort to Bill, Jorn introduced an opposition between the free artist on the one hand and the technician and sociologist on the other. Only the former, he claimed, can refuse a technical automatism from dominating postwar society.

In his conception of free artists Jorn unearthed the lost duality of *techné*. With reference to art, he connected the making of something to the knowledge of it through their shared etymological roots in Germanic languages. "*Suivant son utilisation la plus authentique, le mot* art (Kunst) *signifie ce que nous pouvons faire, notre capacité* (können) *dans n'importe quel domaine*," he suggested. "*Ainsi nous sommes tous des artistes,*

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[151] For an account of Jorn's polemical response, see Nicola Pezolet, 'Bauhaus Ideas: Jorn, Max Bill, and Reconstruction Culture', *October,* 141 summer 2012, especially pp 104-8.

et toutes les techniques sont des arts." But Jorn linked art to technology through a twist of his own. Art, he argued, is the skill to make what is unknown. "*Etre un artiste d'un caractère esthétique*, [or what Bill would call] *un faux artiste, un trompeur, un imaginiste*," he argued, "*veut dire qu'on est capable de faire ce que l'on ne peut pas faire, que l'on peut faire l'impossible*."[152] For, "*en esthétique*," he continued, "*l'impossible n'existe pas*." Fusing this imperative in aesthetics with a somewhat metaphysical ideology critique, he continued: "*Le nouveau est toujours impossible, une tromperie, parce que le possible, c'est le connu*."[153]

On this basis Jorn outlined the larger social implication of free art's resistance to what was signifying according to the technological architecture. In the same year he defined the role played by the free artist in society. He repeated that a "*réalité nouvelle se crée toujours dans l'irréel, c.a.d. dans le non-existence, sinon ce n'est pas nouveau*." But he now added that this was because "*quelque chose de nouveau ne peut jamais immédiatement avoir du valeur*." In fact *"l'expérience systématique dans les recherches scientifique ont montré*," he continued, "*que il est extrêmement important que un certain nombre des savants s'occupe de ça, sans s'occuper de l'intérêt que ça peut avoir, sans s'intéresser à* l'utilité." Underlining the social relevance of experimental art, he concluded that "*Je crois que c'est la même chose dans l'art, et ma place est* là."[154]

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[152] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 27.

[153] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 27.

[154] Jorn to Constant, 20 March 1954, his emphases.

Jorn's way of linking the free artists with experimentation was met with approval in Milan and thus helped give birth to a counter-Bauhaus organization. His response became the founding moment of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB). This was a loose association of 'free artists' from around Europe. Many of its 'members' had previously participated in CoBrA. And it had a large overlap with the Italian organization of Nuclear Artists, among whom Jorn is often counted. They shared an experimental laboratory at Alba in northern Italy where the meeting of the international artist groups would take place two years later.[155]

Unlike postwar Bauhaus at Ulm, Jorn's Imaginist Bauhaus would not appease the powers that be, nor further the instrumentalizing logic of their ideology. He rather suggested that "*nous avons aujourd'hui besoin d'une nouvelle base idéologique*."[156] Indeed, he continued, "*la question de base posée par l'artiste [libre] à tous les hommes d'aujourd'hui est celle-ci: comment éviter un automatisme complet, une transformation de notre intelligence en un réflexe instinctif et standardisé?*" Contrary to what most politicians and bien pensant intellectuals believed, he argued that "*ce n'est pas en parlant de la défense d'un libéralisme, d'un individualisme mourant; ce n'est pas en s'opposant à la socialisation que l'on arrive à une solution*."[157] Such critiques had misunderstood the main challenge. And so far aesthetically grounded ideology critiques had also been off the mark.

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[155] Ohrt, 139-141.

[156] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 25.

[157] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 27.

Jorn argued for the need of (his) 'free artists' to experiment directly with modern technology. Here we should bring to mind Jorn's perception that technology, as a society's architecture, responds to social needs. But such responses had fixed forms, among which he now included the new field of industrial design. They could therefore in the long run never satisfy human desire. Because desires by definition evolve, whereas such design did not, "*la technique moderne*" has become "… *la plus grande source … de nouvelles obligations et de nouveaux tabous*."[158] In a postwar society humans had come to serve technology, rather than vice versa. And as per its ideology, those who refused its instrumental rationality were perceived, e.g., by postwar Bauhaus, as failures, even fraudsters. Only free art, Jorn thought, could ensure that technology did not turn humans into automatons and that the perception of the current drift of modern society by sociologists, such as Ellul, did not materialize.

Unlike the collaborators of postwar Bauhaus, the free artists did not care about justifying their own artistic role in a society where the question of applicability loomed large.[159] They wanted to subvert the instrumental rationality of this society. They needed, Jorn argued, to constantly contradict the developments of technology. Ellul had claimed that 'technique' was its use; it was practice. Jorn now wanted to use technologies for applications other than those conforming to the logic of 'technique' in which

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[158] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 25.

[159] "Technique", Ellul wrote, "… brings its own ideology; and every technical realization engenders its own ideological justifications" (323). Indeed, "man creates for himself a new religion of a technical and rational order to justify his work and to be justified in it" (324).

means subordinate ends: "*L'artiste expérimental doit s'emparer de l'industrie, et la soumettre à ses fins non-utilitaires*."[160]

In order to situate his belief that artists could prevent modern technology from turning society into an automated mechanism, Jorn evoked the Danish physicist Niels Bohr and his perception of the existence of multiple perspectives. Artists could introduce and spread a perspective, he thought, that contradicted that of the priests of modern technology, the technicians. Indeed, only the repeated contention of contradictory perspectives could ensure that "*nous pouvons garder ... notre jeunesse, notre intelligence et notre envie tournée vers l'inconnu*."[161]

This became a foundational belief for IMIB. It is, he thought, what the meeting at Albissola in 1954, at which IMIB formally came into existence, demonstrated.[162] In his 'program to IMIB' the special ability of artists to provide a sort of aesthetic ideology critique coincided with postwar society's need of them. Artists had to refuse the fixation of technology's forms, he believed, insofar as it turned humans into automatons by denying their continuous evolution and desire for what was different. Free art had to resist 'technique's' demand for humans to conform to it.

The purpose of IMIB was to provide that which Bauhaus overlooked, and to work against those tendencies which Bauhaus therefore also, if even only unwittingly, championed. IMIB was, Jorn contended, "*la réponse à la question OÙ ET COMMENT trouver*

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[160] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 28-9.

[161] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 27.

[162] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 28-9.

une place justifiée pour l'artiste dans l'âge machiniste."[163] Their place was in opposition to the standardization that the era had seen due to the fact that technological advancements had been made within a instrumentalizing paradigm. The expression of this opposition was not, he thought, to start Bauhaus Ulm's missing fine arts program on their own. "*Nous abandonnons toute tentative d'action pédagogique*," he said, "*pour nous orienter vers l'activité expérimentale*."[164]

Jorn hoped that aesthetic experimentation could disrupt the instrumental logic of postwar technological advances by subverting the imperative of production. The latter had, according to Ellul, caused widespread alienation. "The only thing that matters technically is yield, production," Ellul had claimed. "This yield can only be obtained by total mobilization of human beings, body and soul, and this implies the exploitation of all human psychic forces."[165] It had recreated the human environment, cutting 'man' loose from it.[166]

To explain how 'technique' had alienated humans from their natural habitat, Ellul compared his theory to Marxism. "Man and technique bear the same relationship to each other as the social superstructure bears to the economic infrastructure in the Marxist scheme of things," he argued. "Technicized man literally no longer exists except in rela-

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163 Jorn, *Pour la forme*, 28.

164 Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 29.

165 Ellul, 324.

166 Ellul wrote that "Technique has penetrated the deepest recesses of the human being. The machine tends not only to create a human environment, but also to modify man's very essence. The milieu in which he lives is no longer his" (325)

tion to the technical infrastructure."[167] For the more orthodox Marxism that Ellul arguably evoked here, the superstructure reflected the base as consciousness did material existence. And what defined such existence within a society structured by private property was, according to Marx, alienation. For private property was, Marx claimed through a famous inversion, both the product of alienation and the means by which any labour alienated itself.

Since alienation will turn into an important problematic for SI, I will here lay out the steps of Marx' argument. Marx argued that alienation ensues when a person loses control of his/her own self-production. The loss of such production occurred in a few ways. In his current day, he argued that labour had become an object. It was objectified through industrial production. If appearing to its author, this object would come across as something alien. Furthermore, the actual production produced, Marx also contended, a self-estrangement of the producer. For, while a producer is created in the act of production, in a capitalist economy the producing activity does not belong to him.[168] He does not own the means of production. As he is still producing himself through it, he is not his own author.[169] And the effects of this do not stop in the action of producing alone. For 'man' is, what Marx called, a species being. In contrast to animals, he is a being who is

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[167] Ellul, 397.

[168] I use a gendered pronoun here deliberately. Marx is quite clear about the fact that the worker is a man. He is not, however, essentializing this gendered property; after all, his entire notion of identity revolves around its production.

[169] Here one can clearly spot, as Jürgen Habermas has suggested, that Marx re-appropriated the romantics' perception of essence as self-realization (in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* trans. Fredrick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995), 64). But one can arguably hear romantic echoes in more than one way. For this perception of labor seems to suggest that industrial labor is evaluated against the metric of artisanal activity…

conscious of his own activity and thus of his self-production. He can reflect upon himself through his objectifications. "He duplicates himself," Marx argued, "not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality". Production produces more than *a* produced object and a producing subject; it creates a world. The producer is "therefore," Marx pointed out, able "to contemplate[] himself in a world that he has created."[170] And this is arguably the image that Ellul evoked.

Postwar technological advances had created a society of which (wo)men were no longer the subject, but an object (among many). Such a vision was akin to Marx' description of a world in which people were the plaything of alien forces. But now this was no longer due to private property. "All I have said concerning the technique of human relations is as true of a socialist as of a capitalist society," Ellul contended.[171] "Technique encompasses the totality of present-day society. Man is caught like a fly in a bottle. His attempt at culture, freedom and creative endeavour have become mere entries in technique's filing cabinet."[172]

If a touch hyperbolic, such descriptions still fit the prevailing mood in 1956. In his address to the congregation of the self-proclaimed 'free artists' from eight countries, Jorn linked the wish to topple the critic from his/her pedestal with the need to remain in opposition to the dominant logic of society. Artists who were not reliant on misguided critiques could, he assumed, nourish a desire for other political configurations. In doing

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[170] Karl Marx, 'Estranged Labor', *The Marx-Engels Reader* (ed) Robert C. Tucker, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 76.

[171] Ellul, 356

[172] Ellul, 418.

so, he associated two sources of alienation: the nigh autonomous technological development foreclosing the possibility to make a subjective impact on postwar society and the loss of control to critics over the meaning of artworks, which he cast as the privileged site of subjective expression. If the former described a world that appeared foreign to its makers in a broad sense, the latter evoked a case, more specific to artists themselves, where a professional tastemaker inscribes an artwork with a meaning foreign to its creator—often a meaning, Jorn implied, that belittled the work's significance to boot. By linking the two sources of alienation, he wished that, if they could displace the privileged position of the critic, the new organization would be able to position its practices directly against the instrumentalizing technological logic of society.

But, at the same time as thus implying that Sartre's perception of art was part of the problem, Jorn's texts acknowledged that the legacy of the avant-garde as a whole now appeared to be contested. This was the case around postwar Europe because historical developments had problematized the domain of the avant-garde: the production of the new. "*L'histoire préparait des surprises d'une telle gravité qu'en comparaison le choc surréaliste apparaît comme un jeu d'enfants*," Jorn noted. "*La guerre, encore une fois, les camps de concentration, la bombe atomique*."[173] History had questioned the very hallmark of modernism.

The new historical circumstances meant that the privatized play of the interwar period was no longer sufficient. Jorn's organization of a meeting drove home the urgency of the message to the artists from around the continent gathered at Alba. He articulated

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[173] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 34.

what proved to be a shared concern. The 1956 meeting at Alba led to a co-operation between Italy-based IMIB and Paris-based LI. Jorn joined the committee of LI's journal *Potlatch*, and Gil Wolin that of Erestica, the Italian-language publication of IMIB and Arte Nucleare.

But the congress stopped short of a seeing a formal amalgamation of the various groups that were present. Bringing to light an issue that was continental in reach, Jorn formulated a (social) question that demanded an (aesthetic) answer. His question provided a shared platform. As answer, Jorn had envisioned an artistic movement that would match the times in its scale and power. A new or at least expanded organization was needed to position artistic practices at once against the ideologically biased standardization that followed upon the recent technological advancements and for a recreation of postwar avant-garde experimentations. But, though stressing the importance of artists unifying under a shared umbrella, he did not provide one himself. He did not have the requisite positive theory of art to supplement his *Technologiekritik*.

In 1956 the artist groups had no full program to unite around. The groups present at the congress merely united around half a dozen tenets.[174] The aesthetic practices that these envisioned revolved around postwar architectural questions. But, as we will see in the next sub-chapter, a shared interest in architecture actually divided them.

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[174] According to Potlatch 27, these were "la « nécessité d'une construction intégrale du cadre de la vie par un urbanisme unitaire qui doit utiliser l'ensemble des arts et des techniques modernes » ; le « caractère périmé d'avance de toute rénovation apportée à un art dans ses limites traditionnelles » ; la « reconnaissance d'une interdépendance essentielle entre l'urbanisme unitaire et un style de vie à venir... » qu'il faut situer « dans la perspective d'une liberté réelle plus grande et d'une plus grande domination de la nature » ; enfin l'« unité d'action entre les signataires sur ce programme... »".

II. The Division within the Groups

An interest in architecture and rejection of Le Corbusier had once put Jorn in touch with LI. In 1954 he discovered that they shared a belief that art had a role to play in society and that it would play out in architecture. Jorn first contacted the editor of *Potlatch*, the journal of LI, André Frank Conord, after having read a few issues of the journal, in 1954. Jorn expressed his happiness in having finally found someone sharing his disappointment with the dominant aesthetic theories of the time-period. He said that he tried but failed to find aid to surpass them from André Breton, with whom he had had an unsuccessful meeting. But nor, he also admitted, did he find much solace in Sartre's theories.[175]

Though Jorn's letter was addressed to Conord, it was Debord who responded: "*La nécessité d'exploiter à des fins passionnelles les immenses pouvoirs de l'architecture est une des proclamations de base de notre mouvement*," he told the Dane.[176] In their further correspondence, Debord and Jorn agreed that while architecture demanded attention, Sartre's theories were inapplicable.

Based on this vaguely outlined common ground, Jorn and Debord established an intellectual connection. Jorn asked if Debord could send him some more issues of *Potlatch.* In return he sent LI a copy of 'Immagine et forma' (Milano, EPI: Editoriale Periodici Italiani, 1954), edited by Enrico Baj, a member of the Italian art group, Arte Nucleare, with which Jorn was loosely affiliated. Once he had read the work, Debord wrote

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[175] Jorn letter to LI, quoted in Debord, Correspondances, Vol 0, p. 43

[176] On 16 Nov 1954

to his LI colleague, André Frankin, that "*Les nucléaires n'ont aucun intérêt. Mais le 'Mouvement pour une architecture imaginiste' d'Asger Jorn, auquel ils adhèrent, défend une position réellement moderne en architecture*."[177]

But they thought that they were closer than was in actuality the case. Jorn and Debord shared the belief that art practice had to work against the repressive aspects of postwar 'architecture'. But their perception of what architecture meant and how central it was differed. Where Jorn searched for ways in which artistic practice could shield the imagination from the standardizing ideological architecture of postwar society, Debord construed aesthetic practice as a game that, though played out within architecture, predominantly counteracted, by capitalizing on, the expansion of leisures in the 1950s. Debord did not link a rejection of Sartre's aesthetics to one of what Ellul called 'technique'.

A. LI and Architecture

LI was a break-away fraction of the Lettrists. The Lettrists were a group of avant-garde provocateurs who first gained fame on the Paris art scene in the late 1940s and early 1950s for defying artistic convention. Inspired by his fellow Rumanian Tristan Tzara, Isidore Isou, a leading Lettrist, wanted to follow in Dada's footsteps.[178] He reduced poetry to its smallest constituent parts, the phonemes. Including hiccups, coughs, and lisps, his poetry revolved around bodily intonations. In it, according to Kaira Cabañas, "the propositional content of language is displaced by the physicality of the

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[177] Debord, Correspondence 0, p 48

[178] Luc Sante, *The Other Paris,* (New York, Farrar Strauss, Giroux, 2015), 266-7.

utterance and the immediacy of aural sensation".[179] For Isou and his fellow Lettrists, art was not tied to a physical medium. It rather existed in its use. It was expressed in and through its practices.[180] And they practiced across artistic media. Some brought their performative pieces into the cinema,[181] and others out onto the streets.

The Lettrists gained a certain notoriety for pulling off daring stunts. One stunt in particular occurred on Easter in 1950, when a few among their numbers dressed up as clergy and entered the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris. They walked up to the altar and read a sermon. But rather than reading from the Gospel, they recited a Lettrist poem that ended in Nietzsche's prophecy on the death of God. Once exposed they were almost lynched by the Swiss Guards.[182] On another occasion, two years later, some Lettrists publicly questioned the value of Charlie Chaplin's acting and directing at a reception being held for him in Paris. Expelled from a McCarthyite US for suspicions of communist sympathies, Chaplin was at this point an almost sacrosanct figure on the Parisian liberal-left.[183] Spread through flyers that ended with "Go home mister Chaplin", these Lettrists' opinion outraged the public. It also alienated the old guard within the organization: Isou and two fellow Lettrists, Lemaître and Pomerand, publicly

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[179] Kaira M. Cabañas, *Off-Screen Cinema: Isidore Isou and the Lettrist Avant-Garde* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014), 12.

[180] Cabañas, 16.

[181] Their films caught the attention of Paris. Not only were they widely, if generally poorly, reviewed at this time; their screening-performances were attended by the likes of Yves Klein and Jean-Luc Godard (Cabañas, 34).

[182] Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London, Pimlico, 2002), 34-5.

[183] Hussey, 65-7.

disassociated themselves from the intervention.[184]

As this schism between the members widened, the younger Lettrists behind the action left the mother organization to create the Lettrist International (LI) in 1954. They congregated at Chez Moineau, a back-street bar in St Germain-de-Prés. The leading figure eventually became Debord (then still known as Guy-Ernest, but soon only as Guy). Debord had moved to the French capital from provincial Cannes a few years prior. He had signed up for classes at the Sorbonne, which throughout the 1950s spared him the military draft for the French war in Algeria, but he was immediately drawn to the fringes of the scandal-ridden art scene. He passed much of the mid-1950s, as memorably depicted by Vincent Kaufmann in his intellectual biography *Guy Debord* as one of the lost children of St Germain-de-Prés.[185] According to his autobiography *Panegyric*, Debord spent most of his time in a narrow triangle on the Left Bank: south of the Seine but north of rue de Vainguard, east of Carrefour de la Croix-Rouge, but west of rue Dauphine. This was at a time before St Germain-de-Prés was taken over by fashionable boutiques and trendy bars. It still featured places of refuge from the arms of the state and the conventions of polite society.[186] It was where 'lost children' intermingled, Patrick Modiano imagined in *In The Café of Lost Youth,* with those who had quietly retired from the public arena so that their wartime record would escape attention. And, as Debord admits in his autobiography, bars played a prominent part of his life:

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[184] Cabañas, 105.

[185] In spite of nominally being an 'international', LI, however, was mostly French (Kaufmann, 63-4).

[186] Eric Hazan, *The Invention of Paris: A History in Footsteps,* trans. David Fernbach (London, Verso, 2011), 19.

> It is no doubt the quickly acquired habit of drinking that has marked my entire life… Two or three other passions … have almost continually taken up a lot of space in this life. But drinking has been the most constant and the most present. Among the small number of things that I have liked and known how to do well, what I have assuredly known how to do best is drink. Even though I have read a lot, I have drunk even more. I have written much less than most people who write; but I have drunk much more than most people who drink.[187]

At the backstreets of the Left Bank and within the LI, Debord re-conceptualized his bohemian everyday life as an art practice.[188] Together with a fellow LI member he proclaimed that "*notre affaire n'était pas* une école littéraire, un renouveau de l'expression, *un modernisme. Il s'agit d'une manière de vivre*."[189] One of its leading mottos was to never work, a maxim to which Debord thanks to a trust-fund could adhere.[190]

Instead Debord and the other members of LI rethought art from the ground up, as it were. They took behavior as their point of departure. Rather than producing a fixed theory or a systematic doctrine, they intended to experiment with the various forms of

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[187] Guy-Ernest Debord, *Panegyric,* trans. James Brook. (London, Verso, 1991) p. 29.

[188] They eventually concentrated their activities to Place de Contrescarpe, in Quartier Latin (Ohrt, *Phantom Avantgarde,* 52-73).

[189] Debord and Wolman, 'Pourquoi le lettrisme?' (Potlatch 22, 1955)

[190] Hussey, 131.

behavior that constituted everyday life.[191]

Doing so they wanted to accomplish what they found wanting in postwar modernism, including in Isou's poetics.[192] Modernism's deconstruction of artistic forms was once, they acknowledged, a useful gesture. It had been historically necessary. But its experiments had stalled there. In 'Le Grand sommeil et ses clients', Debord claimed that "*cette destruction menée à bien, ses promoteurs se trouvent naturellement incapables de réaliser la moindre des ambitions qu'ils annonçaient au-delà des disciplines*."[193] Continuing in the path forged by interwar artistic practice had not allowed contemporary artists to respond to the exigencies of their historical moment. It had rather lead to an increasingly fixed, if deconstructed, formal language.[194]

Postwar modernism's alleged failure of vision had left the field open for LI.[195] Focusing on the experience rather than products of art, LI related artistic practice to the ambiences it elicited within everyday life. "*Toutes les oeuvres valables de cette*

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[191] "*Nous devons apprendre beaucoup, et expérimenter, dans la mesure du possible, des formes d'architecture aussi bien que des règles de conduite",* they thought. *"Rien ne nous presse moins que d'élaborer une doctrine quelconque* : *nous sommes loin de nous être expliqué assez de choses pour soutenir un système cohérent qui s'édifierait intégralement sur les nouveautés qui nous paraissent mériter que l'on s'y passionne",* Debord and Wolman, 'Pourquoi le lettrisme?' (Potlatch 22, 1955).

[192] Cabañas, 114.

[193] Debord, 'Le Grand sommeil et ses clients' (Potlatch 16, 1955). In the same article he noted that "*la phase de destruction de l'art est encore un stade social, historiquement nécessaire*".

[194] "*Le mépris que ces découvreurs vieillissants professent alors pour les valeurs précises dont ils vivent - c'est-à-dire les productions contemporaines au dépérissement de leurs arts - devient",* Debord aruged, *"une attitude assez frelatée, a souffrir la prolongation indéfinie d'une agonie esthétique qui n'est faite que de répétitions formelles, et qui ne rallie plus qu'une fraction attardée de la jeunesse universitaire*" (Debord, 'Le Grand sommeil et ses clients', 65-66).

[195] "*La synthèse des revendications que l'époque moderne a permis de formuler reste à faire et ne saurait se situer qu'au niveau du mode de vie complet",* Debord argued (Debord, 'Le Grand sommeil et ses clients', 66).

génération," Debord thought, "*... conduisent à penser que le prochain bouleversement de la sensibilité ne peut plus se concevoir sur le plan d'une expression inédite de faits connus, mais sur le plan de la construction consciente de nouveaux états affectifs*."[196] So even if the LI members were a part of *les enfants perdus de* St Germain-de-Prés, as Kaufmann suggests, which easily evokes the misery of the heroin-addicted lost children of West Berlin in *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo,* the destructive living of Debord's band of hard-drinking children was endowed with a constructive theoretical superstructure. Inspired by another regular at Chez Moineau, Jean-Paul Clébert, whose novel *Paris insolite* (1952) lyrically depicted this milieu, they turned their everyday into the site of a new kind of artistic practice.[197] They had a positive theory of art.

What LI primarily wanted was to produce games. They yearned for ludic experiences. And playing constructs new ambiences. In 1956 LI even admitted that "*Nous n'avons guère en commun que le goût du jeu, mais il nous mène loin*."[198] Such a concern for playing, they thought, was not trivial. For speaking of their time, LI stated that "*La vie est à gagner au-delà,*" that is, in playing.[199]

LI thought that games would offer a route out of the unsatisfactory ideological paradigm in the western world. LI construed play in contradistinction to the political paradigm of the time-period. They argued that "*Il ne faut pas demander que l'on assure*

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[196] Debord, 'Le Grand sommeil et ses clients', 66.

[197] Luc Sante, *The Other Paris,* 264-8.

[198] Unsigned, 'Contradictions de l'activité lettriste internationaliste', Potlatch 25-6, 1956

[199] Bernstein, Conord, Dahou, Debord, Fillon, Wolman, 'Le Minimum de la Vie', Potlatch 4, 1954

ou que l'on élève le « minimum vital », mais que l'on renonce à maintenir les foules au minimum de la vie." In other words, "*Ce n'est pas la question des augmentations de salaires qu'il faut poser, mais celles de la condition faite au peuple en Occident.*" What this means in practice is that "*Il ne faut pas demander seulement du pain, mais des jeux*."[200] Through play LI would offer that which the time-period as whole did not, and had not.

Besides being a perennial romantic theme, which inspired artists long after the Romantic period ended, such as Mallarmé in France, ludicity had at this point recently been addressed by Mikhail Bakhtin across the iron curtain and Roger Caillois in the Hexagon. It is unlikely that any of LI's members drew on Caillois. For not only was the latter politically suspect at this time–-having left his Collège de sociologie days behind, he now wrote for the journal of the Gaullist movement, edited by the Catholic author François Mauriac–-he had, according to Boris Groys, a tragic perception of play.[201] The only one who did not, Groys goes on with a slightly hasty generalization, was Bakhtin, whose theories were still unknown in Paris.[202]

Creating new games would, LI believed, produce new behaviors, not only

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[200] Bernstein, Conord, Dahou, Debord, Fillon, Wolman, 'Le Minimum de la Vie', Potlatch 4, 1954

[201] Regarding his political trajectory, Rioux 156-7; and his perception of play, Boris Groys, *Introduction to Anti-Philosophy,* (London, Verso, 2012), 210.

[202] As the historian Richard Wolin points out, the Russian's texts were unknown in Paris until Julia Kristeva's arrival on the scene from Bulgaria (in *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, The Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010)). In terms of SI's reluctance to draw on him, it should be noted that Kristeva, who brought his texts, participated in a rivalling group claiming avant-garde status, the Tel-Quelians, about whom SI had surprisingly little to say, partly, one would assume, due to its shifting priorities, from the 'situation' to the 'spectacle', before the other group's emergence in the early 1960s. For a description of the Tel Quel group as the last avant-garde, see Niilo Kauppi, *Radicalism in French Culture: A Sociology of French Theory in the 1960s* (London, Routledge, 2010).

constitute a temporary reversal of roles (as per a tragic perception of play). At their historic moment "*Les chances de nouveaux comportements*," LI thought, "*sont en jeu*."[203] And this would have a larger social impact. To substantiate the claim of why a marginal group on the fringes of the Parisian art scene, and a group producing very little art in a conventional sense to boot, would stamp its imprint on the time period, LI invoked the Dutch cultural historian Johann Huizinga, who Groys overlooked.[204]

Huizinga allowed LI to suggest that their ludic experiences would have a wider social impact. In *Homo Ludens,* which was originally published in Dutch in 1938 but had just appeared in French translation, the Dutch historian narrated the changes of and within civilizations over the last two millennia.[205] He framed such changes as expressing a ludic impulse and as materializing through playing. He did not conceptualize such changes as due to material factors or existential struggles between ethnic groups; in fact the perceptions of history advanced by, on the one hand, a Soviet Marxist economism and, on the other, the Nazi 'crown jurist' Carl Schmitt's friend-enemy principle, are what he rejected.[206] Play, not work or war, moved history.

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[203] Unsigned, 'Soft Drugs', Potlatch 6, 1954

[204] LI did so at multiple occasions. Debord for one referenced Huizinga in 'L'Architecture et le jeu' (Potlatch 20 (1955).

[205] Gallimard published it in 1951. In 1939, a year after its original publication in Dutch, Huizinga produced a German version. I'll draw on the English translation: Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture* (Boston, The Beacon Press, 1968).

[206] Huizinga, 191-2; 209-211. We will hear more about his take on Schmitt in Chapter 6. For now, we should note that he wrote that "With the enormous development of industrial power, advancing from the steam-engine to electricity, the illusion gains ground that progress consists in the exploitation of solar energy. As a result of this luxation of our intellects the shameful misconception of Marxism could be put about and even believed, that economic forces and material interests determine the course of the world. This grotesque over-estimation of the economic factor was conditioned by our worship of technological progress, which was itself the fruit of rationalism and utilitarianism" (192)

Huizinga offered an alternative set of parameters for understanding social developments in which art played a central role. In *Homo Ludens,* he argued that there is no clear demarcation of art from play. As evidence of his claim that art 'played', he named the fact that art had throughout its history produced various styles and tendencies with their own set of criteria. "In the very idea of 'style' in art," the Dutchman asked, "is there not a tacit admission of a certain play-element? Is not the birth of style itself a playing of the mind in its search for new forms?" He conceptualized art as playing through stylistic criteria and convention, through its forms, as it were. "A style lives," he thought, "from the same things as does play".[207] Such a ludic impulse was found outside of art as well.

Playing with forms was not only within the purview of art. The other forms structuring the social realm, Huizinga continued, were also originally played. Through a historical narrative stretching back beyond the ancient Greeks, he showed that games preceded not only artistic forms but all forms of society, be they martial, political, judicial. All such forms originally emerged as games. On a general level, he suggested that "Social life is endued with supra-biological forms, in the shape of play, which enhances its value. It is through this playing that society expresses its interpretation of life and the world."[208] He even went so far as to claim that "We might, in a purely formal sense, call all society a game, if we bear in mind that this game is the living principle of

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[207] Huizinga, 186.

[208] Huizinga, 46.

all civilization."[209]

This meant that to Huizinga playing held a privileged position in historical developments. "In culture we find play as a given magnitude existing before culture itself existed, accompanying it and pervading it from the earliest beginnings right up to the phase of civilization we are now living in."[210] Indeed, civilization as such, Huizinga concluded, "does not come from play[;] … it [rather] arises in and as play."[211]

But, though harkening back to the origins of civilization, the play impulse's presence had been diminishing for a long time. The role of play in society, Huizinga argued, had been steadily losing out to more instrumental perspectives for two centuries. Utilitarianism did not only have a deep effect on the intellectual life of the 18th century. Its dominance was furthered by the Industrial Revolution in the subsequent century. Work and production now became ideals. "The great currents of [19th century] thought, however looked at, were all inimical to the play-factor in social life," Huizinga wrote. "Even art and letters, once the 'first fine careless rupture' of Romanticism had exhausted itself, seemed to give up their age-old association with play as something not quite respectable. Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism and the rest of the of that dull catalogue of literary and pictorial coteries were all emptier of the play-spirit than any of the earlier

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[209] Huizinga, 101. "The inference from all this", he went on, "is that in the absence of the play-spirit civilization is impossible"; through the game civilization channels the agonistic impulses into games with rules. Without such games, these impulses are given free rein, either "the doctrine of yesterday which interpreted history as the product of 'inevitable and immutable' economic forces, or [the one that] sets up brand-new 'Weltanschauungen', which merely put a pseudo-scientific label on the eternal desire to succeed and excel" (101).

[210] Huizinga, 4.

[211] Huizinga, 173.

styles had ever been."[212]

This had not ceased to be the case. It had, he thought, rather gotten worse.[213] Huizinga noted that "in the more highly organized forms of society religion, science, law, war and politics gradually lose touch with play, so prominent in the earlier phases." Not even the dominant modes of culture were played any longer.[214] The link to playing is only kept alive in a few select spheres in society. "The function of the poet still remains fixed in the play-sphere where it was born," he claimed. "Poiesis, in fact, is a play-function."[215] Indeed, he continued, "The affinity between poetry and play is not external only; it is also apparent in the structure of creative imagination itself."[216]

Huizinga's work bolstered LI's sense of ludic art's larger social significance. Debord paraphrased the Dutchman. "*La culture, dans ses phases primitive*," he noted, "*porte les traits d'un jeu, et se développe sous les formes et dans l'ambiance du jeu*."[217] And from this insight he drew favorable conclusions for the importance of LI's project. Evoking the intimate relationship between playing and the formation of civilization, he claimed that within LI "*nous travaillons à l'établissement conscient et collectif d'une*

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[212] Huizinga, 192.

[213] Huizinga, 202-3.

[214] Huizinga, 192.

[215] Huizinga, 119.

[216] Huizinga, 132.

[217] Debord, 'L'Architecture et le jeu' (Potlatch 20 (1955)

nouvelle civilisation."[218] Huizinga's theories allowed Debord to cast LI's project as a laboratory that linked the micro to the macro level; the Dutchman enabled him to connect the intangible and transient moods and behaviors in a Parisian moment to the roots and on-going formation of (western) civilization.

But, while drawing on Huizinga, LI re-situated his theories. The arena in which their poetic practice would be 'played out' was the urban everyday: they wanted to play with new behaviors, not the stylistic conventions of artistic genres.[219] The latter had, as we learned, been killed off by modernism. For the first time in 1954, LI claimed to be interested in a poetic practice that was provisional but experienced, one that was of an urban 'situation'.[220]

Though this attempt to connect 'their' urban game to Huizinga's perception of poetry evoked an embryonic sense of what would become the constructed situation, it was merely associated with one of the praxes that eventually made up SI's 'situation': the dérive. A year after first mentioning the 'situation', LI associated poetry's disappearance as conventionally know with its re-emergence on the streets: "*Les «*

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[218] Potlatch 1, 1954. A year later, in 'L'Architecture et le jeu' (Potlatch 20 (1955), he even went on to proclaim that "*Il s'agit maintenant de faire passer les règles du jeu d'une convention arbitraire à un fondement moral*".

[219] In an even clearer example, LI argued that "*Les hasards et les pouvoirs de l'urbanisme, que nous nous contentons actuellement d'utiliser nous ne cesserons pas de nous fixer pour but de participer, dans la plus large mesure possible, à leur construction réelle*", he wrote. "*Il faut travailler à la prise de conscience la plus étendue des éléments qui déterminent une situation, en dehors des impératifs utilitaires dont le pouvoir diminuera toujours*" (98).

[220] In response to the Belgian Surrealist Group, who in a special issue of *La Carte d'après Nature* (Brussels, January 1954) asked 'Quel sens donnez-vous au mot poésie?', LI said that "*La poésie pour nous ne signifie rien d'autre que l'élaboration de conduites absolument neuves, et les moyens de s'y passionner*." "*La poésie*", it continued, "*est dans la forme des villes. Nous allons donc en construire de bouleversantes. La beauté nouvelle sera DE SITUATION, c'est-à-dire provisoire et vécue*".

formes fixes »—au sens de cadres répondant aux besoins d'un travail donné—qu'il convient maintenant de pratiquer, pourront être momentanément : le procès-verbal de dérive, le compte rendu d'ambiance, le plan de situation."[221] Though this remains a quite elusive statement, what is clear is that the dérive, descriptions of atmospheres, and the planning for a situation were all momentary and were horizontally linked. No one took precedence, nor were they clearly distinguished. They burst onto the streets of the big city,[222] only to disappear a few moments later. The dérive was at this point the poetic practice of the situation based on which LI would lay the groundwork for a new, ludic civilization.[223]

LI's interpretation of how their games would at once transcend a spent modernist paradigm and anticipate the coming of a new civilization did not of course emerge in a vacuum but in a postwar Europe in the midst of an economic boom. Beside and partly because of such unprecedented prosperity, most west European democracies started granting all its inhabitants the legal right to three weeks of annual leave. This was first offered in France by the nationalized Renault factory in 1955. The subsequent year this was extended to all French workers.[224] The increasing amounts of vacation coupled with

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[221] Unsigned, 'Poésie' (Potlatch 24, 1955).

[222] For "*la distraction que nous appelons dérive",* Debord and Jacques Fillon claimed that "*Les grandes villes sont favorables"*(In 'Résumé 1954' (Potlatch 15).

[223] For this Debord wanted all readers of *Potlatch* to know that LI unequivocally depended upon Huizinga. In spite of the Dutchman's 'latent idealism' and apparently narrow sociological focus, "*il est vain*", he claimed "*… de chercher à nos théories sur l'architecture ou la dérive d'autre mobiles que la passion du jeu*", which he had found in the Dutchman's treatise.

[224] Judt, *Postwar,* 332.

the postwar prosperity now produced a new leisure industry.

LI thought that the leisure industry expressed the dominant perception of pleasure, indeed of happiness, in postwar society.[225] This made it the weakest link in society's ideological chain. By intervening there LI believed it could fatally assault postwar, west European society. "*Nous contribuerons à la ruine de cette société bourgeoise*," LI contended, "*en poursuivant la critique et la subversion complète de son idée des plaisirs*."[226]

In its stead LI offered 'the construction of situations'. These "*sera la réalisation continue d'un grand jeu délibérément choisi*." They would offer "*le passage de l'un à l'autre de ces décors et de ces conflits dont les personnages d'une tragédie mouraient en vingt-quatre heures*."[227] As the situation was not yet distinct from the dérive, LI's alternative to the leisure industry would, in other words, take place on the streets of Paris. Their games would be like traveling, but within the city. The backstreets of St-Germain-de-Prés would usurp Club Med's position as the symbol of leisure.

The historically layered urban fabrics of Paris was where LI's game took place. As an urban practice, the dérive was sensitive to developments in city planning. A

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[225] "*Il est permis de penser",* Debord and Fillon had already outlined in 'Résumé 1954', *"que les revendications révolutionnaires d'une époque sont fonction de l'idée que cette époque se fait du bonheur. La mise en valeur des loisirs n'est donc pas une plaisanterie*."

[226] 'La Ligne générale', Potlatch 7

[227] Unsigned, 'Une idée neuve en Europe' (Potlatch 7).

change of setting could be detrimental.[228] And this is what had recently been happening in Paris. As a response to the housing crisis of metropolitan France, politicians of all stripes had favored building quickly and cheaply, without many aesthetic concerns. In doing so, they had inadvertently created slums. In such slums, A.-F. Conord noted, "*un style se développe, qui fixe les normes de la pensée et de la civilisation occidentale du vingtième siècle et demi*." And the new style, far from being ludic, "*c'est le style 'caserne'*."[229]

LI's perception of the threat posed by this new architectural regime was centered on the Swiss architect Le Corbusier. Referring to him and his work, LI announced that "*Dans cette époque de plus en plus placée, pour tous les domaines, sous le signe de la répression, il y a un homme particulièrement répugnant*." In fact to prevent participatory urban construction was, according to LI, what he had in his sight. His ambition was to "*supprimer la rue*." He wanted to build a city in which life was divided into discrete zones and society as a whole was surveilled.[230] If carried out this would undermine their project. For it would imply "*la fin des chances d'insurrection et de rencontres*". The public square would disappear and policing imperatives would control the urban space;

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[228] Debord and Fillon defined the dérive as *"une technique du déplacement sans but",* which *"se fonde sur l'influence du décor.*" That is, they argued, because "*Le décor détermine les gestes*" (In 'Résumé 1954' (Potlatch 15).

[229] A.-F. Conord, 'Construction de taudis' (Potlatch 3, 1954)

[230] Unsigned, 'Les Gratte-ciel par la racine' (Potlatch 5, 1954). In Le Corbusier's plans "*la vie*" was "*définitivement partagée en îlots fermés, en sociétés surveillées*". Indeed, "*aujourd'hui*", due to le Corbusier's prominence, "*la prison devient l'habitation-modèle*". The way in which this anticipates certain of Foucault's guiding insights is not entirely irrelevant. Debord would more or less give up on thinking the question of surveillance and the street together by the mid-1960s. The spectacle then took precedence over surveillance. As a response, Foucault wrote, in often overlooked passage of *Surveillance et punir,* that our society was one of surveillance not spectacle: Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage 1995) 217.

Le Corbusier would manage to complete Haussmann's plans.[231]

While Le Corbusier's popularity threatened LI's project, the ludic poetry of the streets was not primarily concerned with subverting it; such poetic practice was rather a response to the new social phenomena of leisure. "*Dans une société encore provisoirement fondée sur la production nous n'avons voulu nous préoccuper sérieusement que des loisirs*," LI asserted. "*Le vrai problème révolutionnaire est celui des loisirs*."[232] The question of the revolution could be answered on urban streets, but it was not concerned with architecture per se. The recent drift of the latter was merely an irritant, a hindrance. It was the leisure industry that offered new possibilities and, peddling a false game, was its adversary.

B. Jorn and Architecture

While LI's concern with modernist architecture was merely a contingent aspect of a larger project, for Jorn it constituted the very core of his artistic practice. His perception of architecture had been formed in the context of the return to a West European 'normalcy', if of a new kind, in the first postwar years. In multiple articles, he narrated how modernist architecture in general and Le Corbusier's in specific turned from being an emancipatory practice to becoming the aesthetic expression of the State. It was the

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[231] In fact, the article noted that "*On ne saurait oublier que si l'Urbanisme moderne n'a encore jamais été un art – et d'autant moins un cadre de vie* [the realization of which was their project] –, *il a par contre été toujours inspiré par les directives de la Police ; et qu'après tout Haussmann ne nous a fait ces boulevards que pour commodément amener du canon*".

[232] Unsigned, 'Une idée neuve en Europe' (Potlatch 7).

built manifestation of the new political status quo. Any artistic practice critical of the dominant ideology had to start in architecture.

During the first postwar decade, Jorn lived in various places around the Continent. He co-founded CoBrA, an association of experimental artists from Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam, residing in Paris.[233] But what he perceived as his intellectual role, his articles from this time suggest, was to intervene in Scandinavian debates on the postwar reformulation of interwar aesthetics. For even if he was a builder of pan-European networks in Paris, he submitted most of his writings to the North European press.

In these articles, Jorn attempted to locate the point at which architecture moved from harboring possibilities to closing them down. In his first contribution to a public discussion on aesthetics, 'Om arkitekturens kunstneriske muligheder' (1943), written even before World War II had ended, Jorn formulated the question to which many of his later texts tried to provide an answer. He acknowledged that architects had recently solved many of the structural problems that had for a long time troubled architecture. But at the same time a new problem facing architecture had cropped up. In a Copenhagen occupied by the Wehrmacht, he wondered whether rational solutions alone, in buildings as elsewhere, could ever in the long run stimulate, intrigue, inspire. At this point Jorn tied the question to the reactions that architecture elicited. He admitted that such reactions "*er kun stemninger, som miljøet skaber* [are only ambiances that the environment creates]." But he still wondered, "*hvor betydningsfulde er disse stemninger i vort forhold*

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[233] For description of his engagements as artist, see Kurzcynski, *The Art and Politics of Asger Jorn: the avant-garde won't give up* (London, Ashgate, 2014); Troels Andersen, *Asger Jorn. En biografi* (Copenhagen, Borgen, 1997); Guy Atkins. *Jorn in Scandinavia 1930-1953* (London, Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, 1968).

til hele livet? [how significant are these ambiances with regard to life as a whole]."[234] And by expanding the meaning of architecture for society at large and life as a whole, his answer would form the bases for his indictment of what became the dominant trends in early postwar Europe.

Jorn opposed the potential of art to the actual state of architecture. He thought that "*det stemningskabende, [er] det fantasidannende element i vore omgivelser* [that which creates an ambiance is that in our environment which stirs the imagination]." And "*Der skal i omgivelserne vaere støttepelare for menneskets fantasi* [the environment should provide support for people's imagination]."[235] For this to be the case architecture cannot forget its roots in an imaginative art. That is because "*Det kunstneriske er vort fantasilivs centrale miljø* [that which is artistic forms the key milieu for our imagination]." "*Det er det*," he continued, *"der forener realiteterne med mulighederne, det existerende med det, der ikke existerer, med det der var, men ikke laengere er, det der kommer, men endnu ikke er kommet, det mulige med det umulige* [it is that which unites reality with possibility, that which exists with that which does not, that which was but no longer is, that which is coming but has yet to arrive, that which is possible with the seemingly impossible]."[236] This was not, he argued, the present case. And for this Jorn, when he returned to this question after the German occupier had left the Danish capital, blamed

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[234] Jorn, 'Om arkitekturens kunstneriske muligheder' (*A5. Meningsblad for unge arkitekter* (København juli-aug 1943, årg. 2, nr. 3,) p. 18

[235] Ibid. 23.

[236] Ibid. 18.

the uses to which the plans of his former teacher, the Swiss architect Le Corbusier, had been put ever since the end of the war in Europe.

After the conclusion of hostilities in Europe, Le Corbusier's aesthetic program had gained a wide currency. The first postwar decade saw Le Corbusier becoming the predominant west European proponent of functionalism. But that against which his program had emerged in its original historical moment was now forgotten. In 'Menneskeboliger eller Tankekonstruktioner i Jernbeton' (1947), Jorn noted that Le Corbusier had initially wanted to emancipate architecture from the dead weight of the fixed formal language of arts and crafts, which still weighed heavily on the interwar period. But "*Udviklingens dialektik*," he said, "*har paa en maerkelig maade drevet sitt spil med denne teoretiker* [the dialectic way in which history unfolds has played some curious tricks on this theoretician]."[237] For today, without that against which it was originally defined, Le Corbusier's very thought had in its various uses become an equally fixed form.

This had far reaching consequences. In its contemporaneous uses by architects and city planners across the continent Le Corbusier's aesthetic program overlooked the importance of desires and aspirations. "*I stedet for at dyrke livet dyrker Corbusier fornuften, logikken* [Instead of worshiping life Corbusier worships reason and logic]," Jorn argued. "*Alt hvad der ikke er fornuftigt blir negligerat og annulleret* [Everything that is not rational is overlooked or cancelled]."[238] Doing so Jorn thought that Le Corbusier's project was "*konstrueret uden begaer, d. v. s. for døde mennesker. Det levende menneske*

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[237] Jorn, 'Menneskeboliger eller Tankekonstruktioner i Jernbeton' (*Arkitekten* (1947), 61.

[238] Ibid. 61.

begaer og skaber [constructed without desire, that is for dead people. Living people desire and create]."[239] And that such a program grew so popular should have, Jorn implied, set off alarm bells around the continent.

In a way akin to how he questioned architectural restrictions during the Occupation, Jorn asserted that it was crucial to be critical of functionalism's new, postwar dominance without dismissing the benefits to which it has led. He expressed his support for functionalism's role in the rationalization of industrial production and the standardization of goods in so far as this had increased the standard of living. Postwar functionalism had become, as he suggested, "*industrialismens arkitektur* [the architecture of industrialism]." But, by the same token, it had also become "*privatkapitalismens og demokratiets arkitektur* [the architecture of private capitalism and democracy]."[240] It had, in other words, become the architecture of the western bloc, a bloc whose previously fluid geographical and political boundaries crystallized in Europe during these years.

Jorn tried to link the postwar popularity of Le Corbusier to the controlling urges, if not totalitarian impulses, of those administering the rapidly proliferating branches of the West European State(s). "*Corbusier*," he suggested, "*drømmer om døde mennesker, passive mennesker som han, som planledaren vil konstruere livsbetingelserne for. Han vil skrive pagten mellem skabningen og universet* [Corbusier wishes for people to be passive, for people who fatally accept the existential conditions as he imagines them. He wants to

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[239] Ibid. 62.

[240] Ibid. 61.

author the contract between creation and the universe]."[241] In other words, he wanted to control the way in which novelties emerge.

From the perspective of developments inside western Europe, Jorn warned against idealizing the standardization and increased industrial production that had come in the wake of a functionalist hegemony. He wanted to keep the tension alive between the desire for a future that is different and a present which satisfies current needs. He cast this opposition in the binary of art and architecture. "*Arkitekturens kunstneriske indhold kan aldrig blive identisk med dens geometriske konstruktionsprincipers* [the artistic content of architecture can never entirely coincide with its geometric construction]," he contended. "*Kunsten, det er en irrationel menneskelig manifestationstrang, symboltrang, som maa og altid vil staa i et dialektiskt modsaetningsforhold til bygningens konstruktive nødvendighetskrav* [Art responds to an irrational human urge for expression, an urge to symbolize. Art must and always will stand in dialectic opposition to the practical demands to which a building responds]."[242]

To prevent the present architecture from defining, and thus confining, what is possible, Jorn argued that one has to try to shield certain social fields from the closed horizon of functionalism's instrumental rationality. For this purpose he emphasized that which Le Corbusier's postwar advocates wanted to prevent: chaos. "*Kaos betyder liv*," he argued.

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[241] Ibid. 62.

[242] Ibid. 67.

"*Angsten for kaos er angsten for livet* [chaos means life. A fear of chaos is a fear of life]."[243]

The tension between the evolution of life and the rational intention of the master-plans had existed in Le Corbusier's earlier texts. When the Swiss architect had outlined "*de ydre rammer for al menneskelig tilvaerelse* [the parameters for human existence]," he had, according to Jorn, allowed space "*ikke alene for arkitekturen men for en syntese af alle livsfremmende og livgivende samarbejde, hvor der maa vaere plads til alle kraefters frie udfoldelse* [not only for architecture but for a synthesis of all those forces promoting and creating life. He had given room for the free development of all such forces]."[244] In the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the outlines of postwar European societies were actually redrawn, this had, however, been forgotten.

Jorn therefore saw his own project as reminding his contemporaries in Scandinavia what functionalism had meant but had come to imply. In his overemphasis on rationality, Le Corbusier, postwar architectural functionalism's main source of inspiration, propped up the period's increasingly fixed ideological universe. Against its proliferation Jorn tried to ensure that a theoretical position remained from which his contemporaries could challenge the dominance of a rationalizing standardization.[245]

Jorn tried to do this by drawing upon the artistic and philosophical resources of the western cultural tradition. Postwar functionalism adhered to a tendency in western

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[243] Ibid. 62.

[244] Ibid. 68.

[245] Ibid. 66.

culture to superimpose fixed forms onto the practices of life. Ever since the Hellenic age, European culture, Jorn argued, "*har konstruerat i absolutter, og livet maate indrette sig derefter* [has constructed in absolutes, and life has have to adapt to them]". But this defied the reality on the ground, as it were, in architecture. "*En bygning er ikke afrundet, afsluttet tanke, konstruktion eller formel* [a building is not a completed thought or structure]," he wrote. "*Det er en levende organisme med dennes krav om betingelser for at gro og skifte karakter og funktion, afhaengigt af andre levande organismer* [it is a living organism, and like such organisms it may shift its attributes and functions, as they are dependent upon other living organisms]."[246] Buildings are connected to life. So in spite of architectural master-plans, they organically and irresistibly change.

In response to the fixed formal language of functionalism, and in extension to the ideological superstructure of the time-period, and their superimposition on life, Jorn evoked a definition of art which was free of constraints; it remained unattached to the social order and was processual. On a concrete level this partly reflected his own practices. Jorn contended that he did not design a motive before he made an artwork. He claimed to experiment directly with the medium in which he was working.[247] In the processual nature of his practice he expressed, so he believed, the temporality and flow of life. From this Jorn extrapolated that processual art as such defied the imposed borders of architecture. It worked to undermine the forms that fixated life.

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[246] Ibid. 63.

[247] Kurczynski, 31; 81-2; Ohrt, 283.

At the end of the 1940s Jorn framed this dichotomy as that of Apollo and Dionysos.[248] Although he traced this distinction back to ancient Greece, his dichotomy was influenced by the one with which Nietzsche had structured *The Birth of Tragedy.* Jorn was an avid reader of Nietzsche.[249] And like him, he construed the Apollonian forces of order and the Dionysian of disorder as invariants of history.

Jorn evoked Nietzsche instead of Huizinga. His article was written in response to a comment on one of Jorn's reviews in the press by Torbjörn Olsson, a Swedish architect. Olsson likened Jorn's perception of functionalism to Huizinga's of architecture.[250] But instead of picking up on this thread, Jorn—who would eventually say that it was Debord and not Olsson who introduced him to Huizinga[251]—chose to mobilize Nietzsche's dichotomy. His point of employing this classic dichotomy was nonetheless to expose the way in which the current Apollonian hegemony of order had occurred at the expense of a ludic impulse. The time was characterized, he wrote, of "*legens undertrykkelse under fornuftens herredømme* [the repression of the game by the reign of reason]."[252]

The end of the war had tipped the scales further in favor of an Apollonian order over a Dionysian 'ludicity'. Jorn discerned the signs of Apollonian dominance in archi-

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[248] Jorn, 'Apollon eller Dionysos' (*Byggmästaren. Tidskrift för arkitektur och byggnadsteknik* (Stockholm 1947, årg. 26, nr. 17, p. 251-256))

[249] In his work on Jorn, Peter Shield emphasizes this point (see Peter Shield, *Comparative Vandalism: Asger Jorn and the Artistic Attitude to Life* (London, Ashgate, 1998))

[250] Olsson, 'Apollon, Dionysos, och arkitekten', *Byggmästaren. Tidskrift för arkitektur och byggnadsteknik* (Stockholm, nr. 1, 1947), 6.

[251] Jorn did so in the second edition of *Held og hasard,* published in 1963.

[252] Jorn, 'Apollon eller Dionysos', 252.

tecture. The clearest sign, the Dane argued, was the current architectural tendency to build monumentally rather than to be sensitive to, nor even less providing a platform for, life's rhythms.[253] And having linked art to precisely such rhythms, Jorn argued that art alone could reverse this.

Jorn thought that artistic practices could create fissures in the Apollonian order through which Dionysian impulses could flow. Though the monumental objectivity of architecture was distinct from the subjective expression in art, as a practice the latter could leave an imprint on, even modify, objective realities. "*At arbejde er netop at forvandle objektive vaerdier til subjektive vaerdier*," Jorn argued. "*Kunst er den højeste form for subjektivitet,* det er *arbejde for arbejdets skyld, kunst for kunstens skuld, menneskelighed for menneskelighedens skyld* [to work is precisely to transform objective values into subjective values. Art is the highest form of subjectivity. It is work for the sake of work, art for the sake of art, humanity for the sake of humanity]." By linking subjectivity to work, and thus activity, Jorn suggested that it is never fixed, always in process. And, he believed, so is art. It suggests a flow that cannot be dammed. Architecture cannot halt its ceaseless production of human subjectivity. "*Kunsten i arkitekturen er miljøets menneskelige form*", he argued. "*Det er det menneskelige udtryk, menneskets demonstration* [the art in architecture is the human form of the environment. It is the human expression, the manifestation of humanity]."[254]

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[253] Ibid. 252.

[254] Ibid. 255.

To understand what Jorn is getting at here, we should remind ourselves that, in his first article on art's role in architecture, he had argued that artistic practice creates the milieu of our imagination, adding the dimension of possibility to reality. This is why the privileged intellectual faculty for him was the imagination, and, as art alone expressed this, the crucial social role was held by (free) artists. If art now expressed that which is human, he defined the latter primarily as the desire for what is different. Human practice expressed the desire for a transcendence of its context.[255] But, by framing this opposition through the dichotomy of Apollo and Dionysos, he also suggested that the desire for what is absent is a permanent feature of human life. It cannot once and for all be fulfilled.

Jorn did not think that the Dionysian forces could ever permanently besiege the Apollonian order. If this were the case, he would surely have blankly opposed functionalism, and not spent so much time on architecture. Instead he admitted that he had a "*fanatisk interesse for arkitektur* [fanatic interest in architecture]." Indeed, he continued, "*den kunstneriske funktionalisme er det eneste naturlige udgangspunkt ikke blot for arkitekturen men for alle kunstarter* [artistic functionalism is the only obvious starting point, not only for architecture, but for all arts]."[256] For artistic practices do not only express a desire for what is not the case. Such practices become represented in and are also fixed through architecture. Architecture was the Apollonian stage on which his

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[255] Art and life was negatively linked, for both artists and the ceaseless regeneration of life were banished from the masterplan of the functionalist city. "*Det er funktionalismens svaghed*", Jorn thought, "*at den ikke har kunnet tolerere en fri kunst* [it is the weakness of functionalism that it has not been able to tolerate a free art]" ('Om arkitekturens kunstneriske mulighder' 22).

[256] Jorn, 'Lad os holde på formerne' (*Dansk Kunsthaandvaerk* (København juni 1951, årg. 24, nr. 6) p. 110.

Dionysian art practice had to take place. As Nicolas Pezolet has pointed out, he advocated for a counter- rather than anti-functionalist perspective.[257]

Many of Jorn's contemporary critics pointed out already in the 1940s that, by setting up such a dichotomy, he overlooked the fact that buildings were static dwelling places, and not merely provocations for the imagination, or stages for the chorus of life. One such response to Jorn even thought he exhibited a case of artistic imperialism, according to which he exported his preference into fields outside of his expertise.[258]

In her recent work *The Art and Politics of Asger Jorn,* Kurczynski argues that Jorn had a democratic intention rather than imperialist impulses. Jorn, according to Kurczynski, construed art as fundamentally dialogic. His artworks were in conversation with their context. Jorn himself also argued that "*synsvinkeln for et kunstvaerk må ligge i den kultur, det miljø og den verdensanskuelse, der har skabt den* og ingen andre steder, *man kan ikke abstrahere stile fra tiden, sympati for en stil er sympatien for den tide, det samfund, den sociale, politiske, kulturelle og åndelige struktur denne repraestenterer* [the perspective of an artwork lies within that culture, environment, and worldview which brought it about, not in any other places. One cannot abstract tendencies and sensibilities from their time. Nor can one detach the understanding of and partiality to a certain sensibility or artistic tendency from one of the time-period and society that such a current rep-

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[257] Nicola Pezolet, "Bauhaus Ideas: Jorn, Max Bill, and Reconstruction Culture," October 141 (2012); Nicola Pezolet, 'Le Bauhaus Imaginiste contre un Bauhaus Imaginaire: La polémique autour de la question du fonctionnalisme entre Asger Jorn et Max Bill', unpublished MA Thesis, University of Laval, 2008, pp. 52-9.

[258] Bent Salicath 'Arkitektonisk Funktionalisme' (*A5. Meningsblad for unge arkitekter* (København, 1943 årg. 2, nr. 4, s. 6-7). "*Hvad er det for et henrykt vanvid*", he wondered, "*der griber malere og billedhuggere og får dem til at tro, at de er i stand til at udtrykke kunsten i alle dens former*?"

resents on a social, political, cultural and spiritual level]".[259] Indeed, that is why he thought it was so detrimental to, as functionalism wanted, "*løsrive kunsten fra miljøet* [to detach art from the environment]."[260]

Kurczynski points out that the clearest example of Jorn's 'dialogic imagination', as it were, is to be found in his murals.[261] He often did them together with others. And murals are inevitably framed by the buildings which they have decorated, and the quotidian life which they address.

But for my purposes such a reading of Jorn's texts comes off as slightly too literal. From the 1950s onwards, Jorn introduced a more expansive perception of architecture. As we have already seen, in his mid-1950s *Technologiekritik,* there was a slippage between architecture in the sense of the built environment and the techno-ideological superstructure. He there did not only try to explain his own artworks; he had the development and functioning of postwar western culture as a whole in sight. And in his failed dissertation, *Held og hasard* (1952), which he claimed was a conclusion of his writings of the 1940s, he never talked about architecture per se even if the gist of the text was to likewise conceptualize how artworks emerged simultaneously based on and in opposition to their contexts. If interpreted through the lens of these texts, his position on architecture responded to a functionalism, whose ascent to dominance took place during the first post-

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[259] Jorn, 'Tidehvervet i stilforskningen', *Dansk Kunsthaandvaerk* (København juni 1950, årg. 23, nr. 6 p. 120-3), p. 121.

[260] Jorn, Menneskeboliger, 68.

[261] To escape misunderstanding, I should here acknowledge that Kurczynski conceptualizes her argument with the help of Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the singular-universal, not Bahktin.

war years, that provided rational answers but provoked no new questions. It was an ideological architecture that closed the space for dialogue.

By the mid-1950s Jorn had, like Debord, reached the conclusion that a living artistic practice, which expresses a longing for something different, opposed a restrictive architecture. Such a shared perspective underpinned their decision to co-operate at Alba in 1956. But preventing the formal amalgamation of LI and IMIB, Jorn's perception of architecture was not only more abstract than the Frenchman's; it could not be reduced to being the actual site of his aesthetic project, as it was for LI. Jorn's position was also underpinned by dialectic reasoning. If successful, the desires to transcend the current architecture, Jorn argued, in turn erected a new one. Having caught the tail end of the interwar avant-garde period in Paris, he had himself witnessed how Le Corbusier had gone from proposing an emancipatory aesthetic to furnishing a hegemonic ideological framework.

Marking their first co-operation and expressing their mutual misunderstanding, LI published excerpts from one of Jorn's articles on architecture from 'Immagine e forma' as 'Une architecture de la vie' in *Potlatch* 15 in 1954. Jorn there defined architecture as both the culmination of art and the ideological superstructure of a time-period. "*L'architecture est toujours l'ultime réalisation d'une évolution mentale et artistique; elle est la matérialisation d'un stade économique*," he argued in French translation. "*L'architecture est le dernier point de réalisation de toute tentative artistique parce que créer une architecture signifie construire une ambiance et fixer un mode de vie*."[262]

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[262] Jorn, 'Une architecture de la vie', *Potlatch* 15, 1954.

In itself it was a definition that was elusive enough for LI to share, and arguably evocative enough to make them care. But this was only part of this article. In it he pointed out how architectures prevented new desires from emerging. In their selective excerpts LI gave Jorn's argument a positive spin. A different architecture, he seemed to suggest, can be built.

But Jorn's argument was negative.[263] In those passages not excerpted in *Potlatch,* Jorn claimed that artistic interventions, even if they constructed an ambience, could never once and for all escape the strictures of architecture. In an omitted passage, Jorn noted that "*les dernières années ont mené à un mécontentement toujours plus grand contre les conceptions rationalistes du fonctionnalisme*. *On parle toujours davantage d'une révolution contre ses insupportables contraintes*." But, he argued, "*on doit bien réfléchir au caractère d'une véritable révolution, parce que celle-ci ne peut avoir lieu par la destruction de n'importe quoi.*" "*Il est facile et sans doute divertissant de créer de nouvelles*

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[263] Expressed through the dichotomy of Apollo and Dionysos, his understanding of practice was not buoyed by a theory of art as ludic experience. Nor did he, as a possible consequence, advance a positive theory of a participatory aesthetic practice. In the 1940s and early 1950s he merely gestured in this direction."*Social kunst*", he once claimed, is "*kun mulig, hvor kunstnerens oplevelse kan blive … identisk med andre menneskers oplevelser. Den kunstneriske oplevelse er hverken at betragte eller at beundre men at leve sig ind i kunstvaerket* [Social art is only possible where the experience of the artist can become identical with that of other people. The artistic experience is neither one of contemplation nor admiration, but one in which one immerses oneself within the artwork]" (256). In 'Små sjaele - een tanke' (*Information,* 28. sept. 1950) he even emphasized that "*Grundlaget for den kunstneriske oplevelse er faelleskabet,* [the basis for the artistic experience is the community]" (4). But at this point Jorn still thought that the way cultures articulated such a shared experience was symbolically. He believed that "*Kunsten kan kun blive faelles, blive symbolisk om det liv, der er grundlaget for den er faelles* [art can only be shared, become symbolic, if its underlying existential conditions are communal]" (256). He was at this time highly influenced by the symbolic psychoanalysis of Sigurd Nøsgaard. Jorn's focus on symbols around the turn of the decade prevented him from pursuing an inquiry into the conditions for the shared inter-personal experience and practice of art. He did look for signs that the Dionysian life-forms, such as the participatory celebrations, had not entirely disappeared in the West. In 'Poesins väg: Fragment ur en artikel av målaren Asger Jorn' (in *Byggmästaren* (Stockholm, 1951, årg. 30, nr. 4, p. 54-62), he wrote that "*Vi måste lära oss att förstå, att poesi inte är något utanför det elementära livet, att bröd och vin är poesi, att ett hus är en dikt, en stad ett ornament, ett smycke* [We have to learn to see that poetry is not something foreign to the elementary in life, but that bread and wine are poetic, and that a house is a poem, a city an ornament, a piece of jewelry]" (55). But this was all just evocative fragments, not sustained arguments.

conceptions opposées aux précédentes," he continued in the part of the articles which LI did not excerpt, "*mais la culture en est le contraire: elle est l'élaboration et la transformation continue des phénomènes déjà existants.*" So he urged his contemporaries instead that "*nous devons conserver ce qui nous paraît matière active dans l'héritage du fonctionnalisme*."[264] Rather than to be destroyed, one needed to subvert its praxis.

Jorn wanted to repurpose the instruments of the instrumental rationality powering functionalism. "*Vor tids store aestetiske opgave*," he thought, "*er netop at menneskeliggøre tekknikens moderne former, at besjaele stoffet* [the great aesthetic task of our time is precisely to make the modern forms of technology adapt to human priorities. We need to animate the substance of such forms]."[265] This was because "*Kunstens mål* … er *mennesket,* og *mennesket er en* form*,* en levende form*, og kunstens opgave er at* forme *sig efter mennesket* [the purpose of art is what is human, and what is human is a form, a living form. The task of art is to trans-form itself according to shifting nature of what is human]."[266]

So when Jorn identified architecture simultaneously as the culmination of art and as ideological deterrent for new wishes and desires, he did not mean that the aim of artistic practice is to found a political state. With an implicit reference to Le Corbusier's postwar popularity, he rather elaborated on how every successful aesthetic event turns on its initial intentions. The deed becomes a state. And in his day, the state of the art was,

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[264] Jorn, *Pour la forme,* 13.

[265] Jorn, 'Lad os holde på formerne' (*Dansk Kunsthaandvaerk* (København juni 1951, årg. 24, nr. 6) p. 113

[266] Ibid. 114.

what he called, functionalist. It was therefore in this state, characterized by a productivist logic leveling the imagination, that new interventions had to start. He called this perception dialectic monism.[267]

Jorn offered a critique of the dominant imperatives of the moment, not an action plan for how to transcend them. In fact it was because he had remained unable to spell out how the means of artistic practice connected with what he envisioned as political ends that he had in 1956 wanted to establish an institute of artistic experiments and theorizations on level with scientific institutes. This would, he had hoped, lead towards the foundation of an avant-garde movement that, by marginalizing the critics' perception of art, could rekindle the desire to transcend the instrumentalizing ideology of the current period.

If the shared interest in architecture and rejection of Le Corbusier was enough to bring his IMIB and Debord's LI together at Alba, differences remained that could not just be ignored in the summer of 1956. They were divided by a closed political horizon. As the time-period seemed impervious to their hopes, their concern could not furnish a basis of a new organization.

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[267] Influenced by Marxism from an earlier stage than Debord, Jorn from the mid-1950s on thus dialectized the binary of a transient art and a framing architecture. With this he thought, in 'Drøm og virkelighed' (*A5. Meningsblad for unge arkitekter* (København febr. 1949, serie 4, nr. 3, 25-35)), that he had found what marxism had lacked: a perception of aesthetics that was at once materialist and dialectic ('Tidehvervet i stilforskningen', 122). But he did not elaborate on how. It was not until the mid-1950s onwards that Jorn started to often refer back to the constant interplay between the fixing forms of architectural functionalism and the on-going processes of free art. From this point on his aesthetic theories could indeed have been claimed to be both materialist, because of his contention that the processes of artistic experimentation expressed the very practices of life, and dialectic because the traces of, or perhaps rather monuments to, such processual art were architectural.

A few months later the 'ideological architecture' would, however, start to crack. So the following summer LI and IMIB made a new attempt at amalgamating. Debord now argued that a non-signifying artistic practice could capitalize on these recent fissures in the ideological facade. They, he told the gathering of artist groups the following summer, could there create an organization.

III. Path to Unity

In summer of 1957, Debord attempted to overcome the differences that had prevented the unification of the artist groups a year earlier. By capitalizing on the discursive possibilities that had opened in the aftermath of Soviet's invasion of Hungary, he now presented a case to the assembly of artist for how to create a cultural-revolutionary organization. If they unified around the continent and across media by together focusing on constructing new 'situations', they would, he argued, be able to impose their own definition of cultural creation on society. This would not only distinguish them from those working in a spent modernist paradigm but allow them to reimagine the ideological superstructure as a whole.

If the 'ideological architecture' showed no signs of deteriorating in summer of 1956, the fall that followed told another story. It saw events that directly questioned the architecture's solidity. Among the events that *Potlatch* thought inspired hope for the future were "*les premiers résultats politiques de la pression des masses en U.R.S.S., en*

Pologne et en Hongrie" and "*les succès de l'insurrection algérienne et dans les grandes grèves d'Espagne*."[268] They were not alone in thinking that this was the case.

Especially the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in 1956 had a destabilizing effect across Europe. Shortly after Khrushchev repudiated Stalinism in his 'secret speech' 'On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences' that was quickly leaked—and published in installments in the western press[269]—the inhabitants of Budapest rose up against their Soviet-installed overlords. The Warsaw Pact Nations duly invaded Hungary. This was widely seen as an act of aggression. It attracted severe criticism in western Europe and was met with dismay among the many communists for whom Khrushchev's secret speech had suggested that a different state socialism was possible. A general disillusionment grew with the communist cause that had recently been associated with its World War II resistance to Fascism. Many intellectuals not only left the communist parties in western Europe. These parties also lost the sympathy of scores of fellow-traveling intellectuals for toeing the Moscow line about 'Budapest' being an imperialist coup.[270]

In France the consequences of Soviet's invasion of Hungary altered the ideological landscape. In Paris, to which Jorn had returned in the mid-1950s, a leftwing configuration outside of the PCF's orbit emerged. Its interlocutors started theorizing alternative

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[268] Unsigned article, *Potlatch,* no 27, 1956.

[269] In France, to the disbelief of the PCF leadership, *Le Monde* started publishing in March 1956.

[270] Sometimes it led to street fighting, such as in Paris, where the headquarters of the PCF's newspaper, *L'Humanité*, was almost ransacked by an irate crowd (Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958,* trans. Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), 275-6). For the French case generally, see William Lewis, *Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism,* (Lexington Books, 2005), 156; for the Italian case, Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy, 1943-1988* (London, Penguin, 1990), 204-9; and for the general European case, see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London, Penguin, 2005) 318-323.

socialisms of their own. Though the PCF and its sister parties around western Europe saw their intellectual members leave in droves after 1956, many thinkers and artists, previously unaffiliated or not, reserved a cherished place for socialist anti-capitalism and for the people claiming to speak and act in its name. In his response to the events, 'Le Fantôme de Staline', Sartre emphasized the difference between the original instigators in October to those who had by November taken over the events. This distinction allowed Sartre to argue, with merely an oblique reference to the Eastern Bloc, that socialism held a privileged place in History.[271] He refused to unambiguously reject the main actors behind the 1956 invasions of Egypt at Suez, by an Israeli and Anglo-French expeditionary force, and of Hungary, by the Soviet Union, equally.[272] In this he was arguably strident but surely not alone. Even Paul Ricoeur and his journal Esprit, the voice of a Christian

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[271] In what congealed into a Cold War Sartre had once abandoned his initial hopes for a position outside the two power blocks and throughout the 1950s gravitated towards the Soviet camp. He was not alone in this: besides his TM, *Le Monde* and *Esprit* had been neutralist before abandoning this position (Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1997), 43-7). His initial position had been one of three, the other being fellow traveling and Atlanticism, but had gradually disappeared during the 1950s due to its apparent impossibility (Kuisel, 138). He nonetheless emerged as one of the crucial figures for a post-1956 non-Stalinist and non-reformist Left.

[272] Jean-Pierre Sartre, 'Le fantôme de Staline', *Les Temps Modernes,* Novembre-décembre 1956 - janvier 1957 Numéro triple (129-130-131). He thought that the French prime minister Guy Mollet, though nominally of the Left, albeit of the non-socialist radical kind, had joined the Tory premier Anthony Eden to protect 'property' in Egypt. Khrushchev had on the contrary attacked Budapest to save 'socialism', if of a travestied kind, at home. To equally reject Budapest and Suez was therefore still opportunistic at best, naive at worst; it was an opinion, once having entertained it himself, he now scornfully called neutralist. His hopes for French politics was for a de-stalinized PCF – for which, he advised, it should look to the more independent but scarcely less bureaucratic Italian Communist party, PCI – to merge into a popular front with the social democrats in SFIO, who, confusingly, had supported the foreign policies of Mollet.

Left, came down on a similar side.[273] In fact, the double rejection of the 1956 invasions, which was constitutive for what coalesced into a New Left with a famed review in the UK,[274] has no direct equivalent in a French context.[275] The term 'new left' was adopted by a parliamentary grouping around Pierre Mendès France, incidentally in support of the assault on Egypt.[276]

The political positions that appeared in the wake of these events brought the artist groups back together in Italy the following summer. On this occasion they met at Cosio d'Arroscia in the Ligurian mountains.[277] Though the home town of the Italian member Simondo,[278] they were again invited by Jorn. To him the events of 1956 suggested that artists could play a more constructive role in challenging dominant ideologies. This, it seemed, was their chance to offer an alternative to the political superstructures whose ini-

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[273] It should, however, be acknowledged that other contributors to the journal were more skeptical. Yet, in spite of being Christian, the journal was never anti-communist per se (Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958,* trans. Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987) 431; Ricoeur addressed Budapest through a reflection on the difference between social and political alienation in 'The Political Paradox', reprinted in Paul Ricoeur *History and Truth,* (ed) Anthony Steinbock (Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 2007)).

[274] Perry Anderson claimed this when interviewed by Harry Kreisler, of the Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley, as a part of 'Conversations with History', April 27, 2001 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjTKsRfVM9Q). The prospect of such a left, constituted by a double negation, nonetheless disturbed Sartre: *"la triste vérité c'est que la gauche française ne peut se définir aujourd'hui que par un double refus [Suez-Budapest]"* (Sartre, *Le Fantôme de Staline,* 578).

[275] This did not prevent the emergence of a new left of sorts. Published from 1957-1962, the journal *Arguments,* of which we will hear more in chapter 2 and 5, was in many respects similar to the *New Left Review*; and the Marxisant group Socialisme ou Barbarie, active since the late 1940s, rejected both blocs equally, as we will see in chapter 2. But in part because the PCF was much more powerful than the CPGB across the Channel, there was less space in France on which to construct a counter-discourse.

[276] Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958,* trans. Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), 432.

[277] Laruent Gervereau, 158.

[278] Ohrt, 169.

tial construction and then entrenchment through technological means he had tracked since the end of the war. The historical moment revealed possibilities for which he had advocated for a decade. He had criticized developments in the eastern as well as western part of the continent by mobilizing designations such as first 'functionalism' and then a 'technical architecture'. But at the same time he had not given up the idea, articulated in 1948, that "*Der findes intet andet organisk og naturlig samfundssystem end den socialistiske raadsrepublik* [there is no other social system that is at once organic and self-evident than the socialist republic of councils]."[279] And the events of especially Budapest, where the people rebelled by constructing councils in opposition to the rigid ideological architecture imposed from Moscow, seemed to prove him right.[280]

In advance of the second meeting, during spring of 1957 Jorn had worked out his differences with Debord and Bernstein.[281] They agreed that it was the initial leftwing opposition in Budapest that they wanted to resurrect through aesthetic means across the continent. As Potlatch noted, in Budapest, "*dans une périlleuse confusion, le retour des*

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[279] Jorn, 'Drøm og virklighed' *A5. Meningsblad for unge arkitekter* (København april 1948, serie 4, nr. 2) p. 26.

[280] It should be acknowledged that the groups who reacted to 'Budapest' based on the prerogatives of the Left were not in the majority, either in Paris or elsewhere. To name but two examples from France, one may note that the crowd attacking the HQ of L'Humanité was led by the far-right nationalist in Jeune Nation (Rioux, 275-6) and, a few years later, the rightwing ultras of French Algeria cast themselves in the role of insurgent Hungarians. (See William Lewis, *Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism,* (Lexington Books, 2005); Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York, NYRB Classics, 2006)).

[281] In a letter to Simondo (3 April 1957) Debord wrote that he, Bernstein and Jorn had agreed upon the central tenets of the organizations.

vieux mots d'ordre pourris du nationalisme clérical procède de l'erreur mortelle que fut l'interdiction d'une opposition marxiste."[282]

Calibrating the possibilities opened by such historic events, Debord proposed a project to the artist groups gathered in Italy for the second time that he claimed could undermine what Jorn had cast as the time-period's dominant structures. His 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale' ('Report')[283] was his interpretation of the agreement that he and Bernstein had struck with Jorn about how art could capitalize on, indeed be in the vanguard of, the new political developments. Based on but vastly expanding LI's positions, it was the longest text he produced before the 1967 *La Société du spectacle.*[284]

In his 'Report', Debord asserted that the current geo-political architecture was less stable than it seemed. Seen from a global perspective it was, Debord claimed, marred by contradictions. The contradictions were partly caused by the fact that the organization of the means of production had not been 'rationalized'; postwar capitalism had been able to ensure its own continuance. But it had achieved this, he argued, while losing its sense of ideological superiority.

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[282] Unsigned article, *Potlatch,* no 27, 1956.

[283] Guy-Ernest Debord, 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale', in *Textes et documents situationnistes 1957-1960,* (ed) Gérard Berréby (Paris, Éditions Allia, 2004).

[284] Hussey, 113; Jappe, 99.

In the West, capitalism had introduced new ways of postponing its own supersession that were all acknowledgments of its inefficiencies. Debord named these as state interventions that rationalized the market and the policies that mitigated class oppositions. To Debord, who at this point entertained some sort of ideal-typical perception of capitalism, this meant that in the West the hegemonic ideology had lost its coherence. Its proponents now included previously opposing political strands, such as the advocates of the Church and social democrats. The great mix of supporters pointed to the ideology's historical contingency; it no longer claimed to be the pinnacle of development.[285]

Such apparent contradictions were not the only ones affecting the West. Advocating for the state socialist alternative to capitalist societies, the international workers movement had meanwhile failed to present an appealing case in all but a few local instances. The only encouraging examples came, according to Debord, from the anti-colonial struggles in the South. But they were ultimately limited in scope. "*Ainsi [le capitalisme]*," he wrote, "*a pu maintenir jusqu'à présent les anciens rapports sociaux dans la grande majorité des pays hautement industrialisés*" ('Report', 1).

In fact the tensions structuring global politics had, he argued, produced a precarious ideological stasis in both Cold War camps. Though coherent, the ideology of the Eastern Bloc was doctrinaire and had little to do with the emancipatory promise of Marxism, least of all in its favored artistic form—social realism. As "*La pensée bourgeoise [est] perdue dans la confusion systématique, [et] la pensée marxiste profondément al-*

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[285] "*L'idéologie de la classe dominante*", he wrote, "*a perdu toute cohérence, par la dépréciation de ses successives conceptions du monde, qui l'incline à l'indéterminisme historique ; par la coexistence de pensées réactionnaires échelonnées chronologiquement, et en principe ennemies, comme le christianisme et la social-démocratie*" (2).

térée dans les Etats ouvriers," Debord concluded that, "*le conservatisme règne à l'Est et à l'Ouest*" ('Report', 6).

Such bipolar stasis directly affected modern culture. "*L'éclatement de la culture moderne est le produit*," Debord claimed, "*sur le plan de la lune idéologique, du paroxysme chaotique de ces antagonismes*" ('Report', 2). What had collapsed in modern culture was the conscious search for, and the ability to produce, that which was, or felt to be, new. The global stasis engendered by the structuring 'contradictions' between East and West prevented culture from continuously modernizing. Modernism, as the period knew it, had become a straitjacket.

This had far-reaching consequences that were accentuated by the historical moment. The lack of innovation occurred in relief of an era that had increasing resources at its disposal. They were after all in the midst of a postwar economic boom. The new resources of the time-period would have allowed, Debord thought, for a reconfiguration of the institutionalized form given to society's dominant wishes and desires for the future. "*Notre époque*," he argued, "*est caractérisée fondamentalement par le retard de l'action politique révolutionnaire sur le développement des possibilités modernes de production, qui exigent une organisation supérieure du monde*" ('Report', 1).

But this had failed to happen. The obsolete superstructure still erected over western societies had proven unable to harness the abundant postwar resources. "*Les ressources de l'époque en permettent la réalisation [des désirs nouveaux]*," he thought, *"mais la structure économique retardataire est incapable de mettre en valeur ces ressources*" ('Report', 2).

The dominant ideology reproducing western society's economic structure instead co-opted any attempts at re-configuration. "*L'idéologie dominante organise la banalisation des découvertes subversives, et les diffuse largement après stérilisation*," he argued. "*Dans le domaine de la culture la bourgeoisie s'efforce de détourner le goût du nouveau, dangereux pour elle à notre époque, vers certaines formes dégradées de nouveauté, inoffensives et confuses*" ('Report', 2).[286]

However internally diverse, the ruling stratum of society—the author of the dominant ideology—allowed for subversive intellectual and artistic creations if such innovations were isolated from each other. It could then commercialize them: "*Par les mécanismes commerciaux qui commandent l'activité culturelle, les tendances d'avant-garde sont coupées des fractions qui peuvent les soutenir, fractions déjà restreintes par l'ensemble des conditions sociales*" ('Report', 3).[287]

Such fragmentation allowed the dominant ideology of the West, even if incoherent and contradictory, to undermine the social conditions for innovations on everything but an individual basis. The fragmentation of different artistic media segregated individual artists from each other, and cut the authors off from the meaning of their work. And a fragmented field of artists had proven unable to shield itself from the superimposed interpretations of their practices. "*Le point capital du débat est toujours le renoncement à une*

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[286] This, he continued, was done through "*l'annexion partielle des valeurs nouvelles et une production délibérément anticulturelle avec les moyens de la grande industrie*" (2).

[287] He goes on to note that "*Les gens qui se sont fait remarquer dans ces tendances sont admis généralement à titre individuel, au prix des reniements qui s'imposent*" (3).

revendication d'ensemble, et l'acceptation d'un travail fragmentaire," which Debord claimed made it "*susceptible de diverses interprétations*" ('Report', 3).

To Debord the social and aesthetic fragmentation had ensured that artists were unable to authoritatively imprint their practices with meaning. Only if they were united, he thought, would they able to curate their own practices, and thereby to capitalize on the intellectual and aesthetic freedoms granted in western society. "*Une des contradictions de la bourgeoisie, dans sa phase de liquidation, se trouve être ainsi de respecter le principe de la création intellectuelle et artistique, de s'opposer d'emblée à ces créations, puis d'en faire usage*," he argued. "*C'est qu'il lui faut maintenir dans une minorité le sens de la critique et de la recherche, mais sous condition d'orienter cette activité vers des disciplines utilitaires strictement fragmentées, et d'écarter la critique et la recherche d'ensemble*" ('Report', 3). An organization alone could refuse not only the utilization of their initially radical innovations but of instrumentalization as such within society.

Debord advocated for uniting the aesthetic experimentation into a collective front. To do so had traditionally been the task of the avant-garde. And historically, he noted, experimental artists had learned to refuse their organizational fragmentation from the realm of revolutionary politics. They had transposed such a political refusal into the realm of culture.[288] To unite now would not only distinguish the audience members, to whom he spoke, from those merely continuing in the path of interwar modernism. It

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[288] "*La notion même d'avant-garde collective, avec l'aspect militant qu'elle implique, est un produit récent des conditions historiques qui entraînent en même temps la nécessité d'un programme révolutionnaire cohérent dans la culture, et la nécessité de lutter contre les forces qui empêchent le développement de ce programme*", he argued. "*De tels groupements sont conduits à transposer dans leur sphère d'activité quelques méthodes d'organisation créées par la politique révolutionnaire, et leur action ne peut plus désormais se concevoir sans liaison avec une critique de la politique.*" (3)

would also question interwar modernism's extant formal dominance.[289] Such unification among artists working across artistic media could indeed upend the balance of power in contemporary culture.

Collective aesthetic action, Debord told his audience, could undermine those obsolete superstructures whose continuance were guaranteed by the precarious global ideological equilibrium, an equilibrium which had been reached due to the bipolar, antagonistic division of the world and in spite of the apparent contradictions within the ruling ideology of the western camp. For it would reinstate a desire for the transcendence of the current ideological architecture. "*Il ne s'agit pas pour une entreprise de cette nature d'avoir absolument ou relativement raison*," he wrote, "*mais de parvenir à catalyser, pour un certain temps, les désirs d'une époque*" ('Report', 4). As desire, as such, is never expressing a longing for what is available but always for what is not, this suggests that as organization they would aim to engender a yearning for a new epoch. Because the advocates of this desire were marginal and fragmented, such a desire had been overridden, if not lacking, since the early days of the Cold War.

When thus casting the central opposition that an avant-garde organization had to bridge, Debord resumed the line of thought that Jorn had left off. "*Le principal drame affectif de la vie*," Debord thought, was "*le conflit perpétuel entre le désir et la réalité*

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[289] "*L'importance de l'avant-garde expérimentale dans la société est apparemment inférieure à celle des tendances pseudomodernistes qui ne se donnent aucunement la peine d'afficher une volonté de changement, mais qui représentent, avec de grands moyens, la face moderne de la culture admise",* he argued*. "Cependant, tous ceux qui ont une place dans la production réelle de la culture moderne, et qui découvrent leurs intérêts en tant que producteurs de cette culture, d'autant plus vivement qu'ils sont réduits à une position négative, développent à partir de ces données une conscience qui fait forcément défaut aux comédiens modernistes de la société finissante. L'indigence de la culture admise, et son monopole sur les moyens de production culturelle, entraînent une indigence proportionnelle de la théorie et des manifestations de l'avant-garde*." (11)

hostile au désir" ('Report', 21). And, right now, he continued, "*il faut définir de nouveaux désirs en rapport avec les possibilités d'aujourd'hui*" ('Report', 14). To define new desires would be to belong on the side of the future, to be, historically speaking, avant-garde.

Debord confirmed Jorn's belief in why 'free artists' were needed. He argued that the project of those assembled in the Ligurian mountains in summer of 1957 would be to unearth and conceptualize new desires. He linked this need to the aim of LI's project: "*Nous devons ... opposer concrètement, en toute occasion, aux reflets du mode de vie capitaliste,* d'autres modes de vie désirables ; détruire … l'idée bourgeoise du bonheur." What is more, like Jorn before, he compared the experiments this would entail to scientific research: "*nous devons inciter les personnes qui détiennent certaines des vastes ressources qui nous font défaut à nous donner les moyens de réaliser nos expériences, par un crédit analogue à celui qui peut être engagé dans la recherche scientifique*" ('Report', 22).

Debord rooted Jorn's belief that experimental artistic practices were able to produce new desires in a perception of the historical primacy of culture. "*Ce que l'on appelle la culture reflète, mais aussi préfigure, dans une société donnée, les possibilités d'organisation de la vie*", Debord argued ('Report', 1). As a realm in society, culture was, according to such a definition, a well placed point of origin for a project wedded to a different future.

Interventions in culture could evoke, what Debord framed as, a superior organization. This would not only rekindle the desire for other ways of representing and organiz-

ing the world. By virtue of taking place in culture, such interventions would also prefigure social developments. He told his audience that "*nous ne devons pas refuser la culture moderne, mais nous en emparer, pour la nier*" ('Report, 14).

The aim of such artistic practice was to work towards momentarily transcending the current circumstances: "*le but le plus général doit être d'élargir la part non médiocre de la vie, d'en diminuer, autant qu'il est possible, les moments nuls.*"[290] Indeed, "*Notre idée centrale est celle de la construction de situations*" ('Report', 16).

Such constructed situations were both the means and end of cultural revolutionary praxis. They would create the desire for a new ideological architecture among those experiencing them. "*Nous devons construire des ambiances nouvelles*," Debord claimed with reference to such constructed situations, "*qui soient à la fois le produit et l'instrument de comportements nouveaux*" ('Report', 14). Such construction would foster an avant-garde self-consciousness, that is, an awareness of belonging among those who provided the negation to the hegemonic ideology: "*C'est seulement dans cette avant-garde que se constitue insensiblement une nouvelle conception révolutionnaire de la culture*" ('Report', 11). The construction of a new situation was integral to creating a cultural revolutionary organization.

Expressing the desire for a transcendence of the immediate context, such a situation-ist praxis redefined revolutionary action. For this 'cultural revolution' party sympathies were immaterial; it was about changing the superstructures, not adhering to the 'cor-

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[290] He continued claiming that "*On peut donc en parler comme d'une entreprise d'augmentation quantitative de la vie humaine ... Par là même, elle implique une augmentation qualitative dont les développements sont imprévisibles"* (17-8).

rect' policy.[291] In its new guise (cultural) revolutionary praxis would create playful moments, not establish states (nor even less a police State). "*Notre action*," he said, "… *peut se définir sommairement par l'invention de jeux d'une essence nouvelle*" ('Report', 17). To substitute the revolution as conventionally defined for games was itself quite playful, irreverent even. But it was not a joke.

To not lose sight of the way in which Debord's definition of the revolution was at once sincere and facetious, one should arguably keep the two levels at which it worked in mind at the same time. Where the 'situation' on an aesthetic and practical level evoked an attempt to construct what we would today think of as performance artwork, such a performance, on a theoretical and political level, envisioned a way in which to negate the ideological actuality. The ludic performance expressed the unacknowledged possibilities of their moment. It showed that another way of life was possible. The constructed situation would in other words constitute a revolution, but one precipitated through games not guns.

To remember how the practical means corresponded to the theoretical ends would also allow us to understand how such a cultural revolution would have a political impact. It would surely not unseat the occupant of the Elysée Palace, or any other heads of state. But it could seriously undermine one of the means by which capitalism, according to Debord, was reproduced: the spectacle of stupefying culture. "*Il est facile de voir à quel point est attaché à l'aliénation du vieux monde le principe même du spectacle : la non-*

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[291] Debord argued that "*Un intellectuel créateur ne peut être révolutionnaire en soutenant simplement la politique d'un parti, serait-ce par des moyens originaux, mais bien en travaillant, au côté des partis, au changement nécessaire de toutes les superstructures culturelles*" (14).

intervention," Debord argued. "*La situation est ainsi faite pour être vécue par ses constructeurs*" ('Report', 19).

This was Debord's response to the inability of making a subjective imprint on the time-period that Jorn had articulated at the previous congress. The Dane had thought that the alienation due to the instrumental rationality of functionalism could be overcome through aesthetic experimentation with its instruments. But as experimentation had been collapsed into the creation of scandals and put under suspicion politically by Sartre, he had remained unable to sketch how. Debord now faulted the cultural industries for such alienation. Demanding an identification with the real protagonists, be they on screen, on stage, or on the political scene, such industries offered an escapist immersion but in reality produced a passively, consuming spectator. Such passivity constituted, Debord thought, a self-estrangement on the part of the spectator. The 'situation' as game would overcome this alienation because it collapsed the distinction between the creator and receiver. Those who constructed the situation also experienced it. They were participators.

For Debord ludic experience took the place that aesthetic experimentation had had for Jorn. The ludic experience and aesthetic experimentation are analogous in that they envisioned ways of overcoming what they had identified as the main source of alienation. But they did not converge with regard to what they identified as the source of alienation nor the project needed to overcome it. The ways in which they intersected would not be outlined until the publication of IS 1. It is nonetheless clear already here that, when addressing the congregation in Italy in summer of 1957, Debord's 'situation' encompassed

much more than the dérive, from which it had grown, but which he now even disparaged.[292]

With the new, expanded 'situation' Debord managed to tie together what Jorn had not. If they both envisioned ways in which the artistic means could meet their desired political ends, only Debord was able to make such practice integral to creating an organization. His perspective was grounded in the opposition according to which the fragmentation in the contemporary art scene—which, as we have seen, he thought was visible both in the isolated social status of artists and in the modernist formal language still en vogue among them—was faced by the prospective of a future unity. He suggested that one could bring about such by constructing a new situation; it would leave fragmentation behind in aesthetic practice as well as in social life.

But when proposing such ludic practice as a response to a cracking ideological facade, Debord geo-aestheticized the praxis of homo ludens. For Huizinga, the ludic impulse in culture preceded historical changes. It was through which such changes were made. But no physical site had precedence over any other, not even the West.[293] According to Debord, in the 1950s certain cultural scenes were, however, ahead of others.

Debord argued that modern culture was centered on Paris and Moscow. They spread their influence differently. The cultural influence of Moscow was underwritten by political decrees and structures. That was, he thought, because in the East culture was

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[292] "*Un essai primitif d'un nouveau mode de comportement a déjà été obtenu avec ce que nous avons nommé la dérive*", he said. "*Mais l'application de cette volonté de création ludique doit s'étendre à toutes les formes connues des rapports humains … Tout porte à croire que c'est autour de l'hypothèse des constructions de situations que se joue l'essentiel de notre recherche*" (18).

[293] Huizinga, for example, found Japanese culture to be especially playful.

subordinated to politics; it was not prefigurative.[294] Postwar France may have lost its great power status politically, but in culture Paris kept its wide influence. "*Les modes parties de Paris, dans l'élaboration desquelles les Français ne sont pas majoritaires*," Debord observed, "*influencent l'Europe, l'Amérique et les autres pays évolués de la zone capitaliste, comme le Japon*" ('Report', 6). And in the West, such fashions anticipated political events.

Through this division of the world Debord gave himself a privileged position.[295] Together with his wife, Michèle Bernstein, he represented the only Paris organization at the Congress. According to his own distinctions, he spoke from and of the only cultural scene that preceded not only social developments, which he claimed all European cultural scenes did (save the Eastern ones), but cultural trends across Europe and the West. His geographical subject position bolstered his claims. It enabled him to take local Parisian and French examples and then apply them across other national contexts. He even admitted, in retrospect, that he extrapolated from the political and cultural situation in France

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[294] "*Les modes imposées administrativement par Moscou influencent la totalité des Etats ouvriers, et, dans une faible mesure, réagissent sur Paris et sa zone d'influence européenne*", Debord contended. "*L'influence de Moscou est d'origine directement politique.*" (6)

[295] It should perhaps also be noted that, in his geopolitical divisions of aesthetics, Debord reproduced Jorn's conflation of European culture with that of the world. This should maybe come as no surprise. He after all did so while addressing the so called World Congress of Free Artists, which incidentally was entirely made up of Europeans and North Africans, i.e. people who were all still ruled from European capitals. As they were all susceptible to the influence of either Paris or Moscow, one could deduce that Debord assumed everyone was.

[296] Within the prospective organization, "*Je prendrai des exemples en France*", he wrote, "*qui connaît certainement les phénomènes les plus avancés de la décomposition culturelle générale qui, pour diverses raisons, se manifeste à l'état le plus pur en Europe occidentale*" (in 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes', Potlatch 29, Nov 1957).

when depicting Europe as a whole.[296] Parisian culture operated as barometer of wider, continental changes.

Based on the alleged influence of Paris on the continent, Debord claimed to speak to the congregation of their future. The future of which Debord told them was one in which its ideological superstructure was in a state of decay. "*L'aboutissement présent de la crise de la culture moderne est la décomposition idéologique*," he claimed. "*Rien de nouveau ne peut plus se bâtir sur ces ruines, et le simple exercice de l'esprit critique devient impossible, tout jugement se heurtant aux autres, et chacun se référant à des débris de systèmes d'ensemble désaffectés, ou à des impératifs sentimentaux personnels*" ('Report', 9).

From his privileged vantage point on History, Debord believed himself able to discern how the intellectual repercussions of the events in 1956 had shaken the foundations of this ideology. "*Tout indique, depuis 1956*," he proclaimed, *"que nous entrons dans une nouvelle phase de la lutte ; et qu'une poussée des forces révolutionnaires, se heurtant sur tous les fronts aux plus désespérants obstacles, commence à changer les conditions de la période précédente*" ('Report', 10).

While upheld by the cultural industries, Debord, like Jorn, now claimed that the current ideology was predominantly defined by functionalism. Indeed, what easily comes off as an attempt to convince the large contingent of IMIB members in the audience of his claims, Debord named postwar functionalism's reactionary turn as the signifi-

cant evidence for the decomposition of the currently hegemonic ideology.[297] It furnished the most serious example of such ideology's inability to harness new innovations and instead prop up obsolete ways of life. "*C'est un signe plus grave de la décomposition idéologique actuelle, que de voir la théorie fonctionnaliste de l'architecture se fonder sur les conceptions les plus réactionnaires de la société et de la morale*," he contended. "*C'est-à-dire qu'à des apports partiels passagèrement valables du premier Bauhaus ou de l'école de Le Corbusier s'ajoute en contrebande une notion excessivement arriérée de la vie et de son cadre*" ('Report', 10). It was, in other words, functionalism's ascent to dominance, which had occurred while it reinforced retrograde lifestyles, that to Debord exposed the decadent state of the 'ideological architecture'. The members of the congregation had not missed out when they had not been invited to Le Corbusier's avant-garde festival in Marseille the previous summer!

Functionalism's dominance did not only to Debord signal its lost emancipatory quality, as for Jorn, but that it was also part and parcel of a general trend of ideological disintegration. Functionalism's proliferation was, according to such an interpretation, not a threat. It rather signaled its bankruptcy, and eventual doom. In fact, to Debord, a deteriorating functionalism provided an opportune context for the emergence of a new avant-garde movement. He told his audience that, due to the recent historical changes, "*La minorité avant-gardiste peut retrouver une valeur positive.*" ('Report', 10)

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[297] Debord cast functionalism as the most important example of ideological decomposition directly following upon his observation that "*Il faut critiquer les activités importantes pour l'avenir, celles dont nous devons nous servir.*" (10)

As a continentally foreboding yet in Paris imminently collapsing edifice, functionalism provided Debord's argument with a way to project his belief in the historical primacy of Paris (culture) onto a European scale. By bringing up functionalism, he linked the concerns of Paris to those of other European countries. IMIB was founded in opposition to postwar functionalism, which grew to include an instrumentalizing ideology more generally. The movement's existence proved that the nefarious tentacles of such tendencies had been perceived to stretch across the continent. The organization had participators from Scandinavia and the UK, the Benelux and Italy.

Debord challenged his audience. In light of what had happened in the past year, he told them that "*Il ne s'agit pas de savoir si ceci vous intéresse, mais si vous pouvez vous-mêmes vous rendre intéressants dans les nouvelles conditions de la création culturelle*." Within this window of historic opportunity, "*Votre rôle, intellectuels et artistes révolutionnaires, ... est de chercher ce que fait l'avant-garde internationale, de participer à la critique constructive de son programme, et d'appeler à la soutenir*" ('Report', 22).

IV. The Situation and the Inter-National: Paris and the continental compromise

With some noteworthy exceptions,[298] the secondary works on SI have tended to portray Debord's 'Report' as SI's manifesto.[299] And it is true that Debord's 'Report' occasionally reads as one. In it he told the listeners, and eventual readers, that "*La minorité situationniste s'est constituée d'abord comme tendance dans la gauche lettriste, puis dans l'Internationale lettriste qu'elle a fini par contrôler"* ('Report', 21). As representative of this group, he stated, "*Nous devons nous déclarer prêts à reprendre la discussion, sur la base de ce programme, avec tous ceux qui, ayant pris part à une phase antérieure de notre action, se trouveraient encore capables de nous rejoindre*" ('Report', 22).

But other passages of Debord's 'Report' rather suggest that it was a proposal. Lowering his self-assured guard, Debord at one point added that "*Les techniques*

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[298] In the secondary literature in English, the exceptions to this tendency to conflate Debord's project with SI's are Stewart Home's *The Assault on Culture* (1988) and McKenzie Wark's *The Beach Beneath the Street* (2011); and among the exceptions in other languages, one especially needs to mention Roberto Ohrt's *Phantom Avant-Garde* (1990).

[299] As noted in the introduction, this is often part of a larger argument. In his intellectual biography *Guy Debord,* Vincent Kaufmann argues that the SI's project is more or less merely the continuation, if not the momentary regression, of LI's. Debord was, according to such a perspective, the undisputed author of the guidelines for SI praxis. Though Kaufmann provides the clearest example of this tendency to grant precedence to the French section of SI, he is far from alone. Andrew Hussey's *Game of War* (2001)*,* Anselm Jappe's *Debord* (1992), Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes* (1994), Raymond Spiteri's 'From Unitary Urbanism to the Society of the Spectacle' (2015) all read SI's program as Debord's. In Spiteri's case, it is most noteworthy. Even though SI did not form until after the 1957 meeting, he reads Debord's suggestion of the centrality of unitary urbanism at the 1956 conference as the commencement of SI. But as I will show unitary urbanism was subordinate to the situation once SI did form until the Dutch section redefined its role (see Raymond Spiteri, 'From Unitary Urbanism to the Society of the Spectacle', *Aesthetic Revolutions,* (ed) Ales Ergavec (Montreal: McGill Queen's Press, 2015), 180-1.

situationnistes sont encore à inventer."[300] He was open to the possibility of negotiation: "*Nous devons définir collectivement notre programme et le réaliser d'une manière disciplinée, par tous les moyens, même artistiques*" ('Report', 16). It all depended upon who was included in that 'nous'.

What chronologically undermines the argument that Debord's 'Report' marked the start of SI is the fact that the conference, at which the 'Report' was presented, was only retroactively decided to have constituted the origin of the group. A month after the conference, the congregation had yet to settle on a name. Its possible designation hardly entered into the correspondence leading up to the conference. Such questions were first raised in those written after the summer's meeting. In a letter to the Italian artist and former IMIB member Piero Simondo dated 22 August 1957, he acknowledged the need to "*chercher un titre éventuel*."[301] But Debord wanted to wait with so doing until Jorn and Rumney had returned to Paris from Italy, where they had stayed behind.[302]

That the Ligurian conference gained the status of SI origin, and that as a consequence Debord's 'Report' was more or less SI's manifesto, should arguably be seen as part of the group's foundation myth. In 'Pas d'indulgences inutiles' in IS 1, Bernstein

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[300] This, it should be noted, did not mean that they were unrealistic. For, he continued, "*nous savons qu'une tâche ne se présente que là où les conditions matérielles nécessaires à sa réalisation existent déjà, ou du moins sont en voie de formation*" (20) In a way reminiscent of Jorn's perception of the practice of the free artist, he argued that this vouched for their novelty: "*Nous n'avons pas de recettes, ni de résultats définitifs. Nous proposons seulement une recherche expérimentale à mener collectivement dans quelques directions que nous définissons en ce moment, et dans d'autres qui doivent être encore définies. La difficulté même de parvenir aux premières réalisation situationnistes est une preuve de la nouveauté du domaine où nous pénétrons.*" (21)

[301] Debord to Simondo 22 August 1957

[302] Debord to Simondo 22 August 1957

articulated the line that many have uncritically reproduced. She claimed that "*une période de discussions, de pourparlers à égalité entre divers groupes, commencée au congrès d'Alba, s'est close à Cosio d'Arroscia au profit d'une organisation disciplinée*" (IS 1, 25-6). But it was with the benefit of hindsight that the SI emplotted the meeting in its own narrative as its first annual conference, to be followed by yearly summits in Paris (1958), Munich (1959), London (1960), before fizzling out in Gothenburg (1962).[303] And IS, SI's journal, never published Debord's 'Report' as a launching manifesto.

The evidence we have suggests that Debord's 'Report' helped deepen the co-operation between the different artist groups by providing a framework for the discussion that they had already started. Debord, Bernstein and Jorn had tried to iron out their differences in a host of meetings during spring 1957.[304] According to their textual remains, on none of these occasions did the need for or existence of a name come up. It has even been suggested that Jorn wanted the members of the LI to be incorporated into the IMIB. It was both the largest of the three organizations—three, that is, if one includes

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[303] It is also important to add a note of caution here with regard to the author of the SI's foundation myth. All interlocutors save one ascribe the latter to Debord, but the one who does not, Odile Passot, genders the question. The majority of SI's members were men. Bernstein, who as a woman is often not cast in a leading SI role in the secondary literature, wrote two novels that, according to Passot, deconstructs how gender structured the international (See Odile Passot, 'Afterword', to Michèle Bernstein, *All the King's Horses* (2008).) Even if the question here revolves around whether Debord stole the limelight from Bernstein, such a suggestion of the SI's androcentrism is bolstered by the way Jorn also indulged in certain essentialist tropes regarding gender divisions in his later, post-SI texts that one would assume to have impacted his behaviour within the international. It is especially in *Alfa og omega* (1964) in which Jorn did this. (For an interpretation of how it informed Jorn's art and perception of aesthetics, see Helle Brøms, 'Masculine Resistance: Expressions and Experiences of Gender in the work of Asger Jorn', *October,* Summer 2012, No. 141.) A sustained scrutiny of the heroic masculinity of SI's project remains to be written.

[304] Debord to Simondo, 3 April 1957.

the one man psycho-geography association of London, often conceptualized as a part of IMIB—present at Cosio d'Arroscia and the one featuring the most prominent members. He saw no need for it to change its name.[305] In his 'Report', Debord unveiled other plans.

The suggestions in Debord's 'Report' still needed to be corroborated by his audience. After presenting his 'Report' in Italy, he asked Jorn somewhat sheepishly: "*J'espère que tu es content de mon Rapport?*"[306] Hindsight suggests that Jorn thought that Debord had taken their shared concerns in the right direction. Once Jorn and Rumney were back in Paris, at the end of summer 1957, it was decided that the recent conference in Italy had given birth to a new association—the situationist international.[307] But Jorn did not agree on every position in Debord's 'Report'. Nor did the other ex-IMIB members.

Debord's 'Report' elicited responses from members of the other artist groups. It did so both at the conference and after.[308] Though we cannot know for certain what happened at the conference, in the 1957 letter correspondences between those present at Cosio Debord's interlocutors hardly come off as feeble characters. The perception of

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[305] Hussey, 112.

[306] Debord to Jorn 8 July 1957.

[307] In a letter to Midhou Dahou on November 18 1957, Debord wrote that a 'Situationist' International had appeared three months earlier, i.e. in September rather than August, not to say June. One is therefore led to deduce that the name gained permanence shortly after Debord's letter correspondence with Simondo, presumably in discussion with Jorn, and possibly too with Rumney, in early September 1957.

[308] For Debord's 'Report' as being the basis of discussion at Cosio, see Guy Debord, *Correspondence: the Foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)*, (ed) Alice Debord, trans. Stuart Kendall and John McHale (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2009), 38, footnote 8.

Paris' privileged role in the historical geography of European culture that underpinned the 'situation' was challenged from the outset. The ex-IMIB members were uneasy about the way this gave a controlling position to Debord and Bernstein within the new international. Jorn reprimanded Debord and Bernstein for trying to run their collaboration as they had the LI. Almost a generation older than Debord and Bernstein, he, having lived through historical ruptures, reminded them of their lack of experience.[309] And the Italian branch reacted against the part of the 'Report' that supported Bernstein's claim that the meeting at Cosio had produced '*une organisation disciplinée'*. They argued for a relative autonomy of the different branches within the new organization.[310]

As a consequence, once the artist groups amalgamated, the new organization was divided into national chapters. This did not entirely conform to Debord's wishes. Part of the reason why he had insisted on the centrality of the 'situation' was to prevent any accusation that the SI's members had specialities dependent on nationality.[311] But because of the Italians' input, the new aesthetic front was structured as a federated

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[309] Incensed over a case of miscommunication Debord and Simondo told Jorn that he "*devra s'excuser pour ses méthodes et le ton employé; et faire son autocritique*". They warned him that "*Nous sommes des spécialistes de la rupture*" (letter to Jorn, 4 February 1957). In no doubt as to who had written the letter, Jorn reminded Debord and Bernstein of his prior experience (in an undated response). "V*ous écrivez que vous êtes des spécialistes de rupture. On m'a déjà dit cela. Je refuse de croire que vous n'êtes que ça, comme j'ai toujours refusée de le croire, même quand vous le dit vous même. Dans le langage à laquelle je me suis habituée on s'appelle les spécialistes de ruptures des PROVOCATEURS. Ma vie a trop souvent été dépendu à la détection des provocateurs éventuelles pour que je ne les voit pas, et rien n'indique à moi la justification de vous classer dans cette catégorie.*" Marginalizing their imperious demands he continued that "*Je suis trop vieu [sic] pour me laisser prendre dans un jeu de rupture. Je suis un spécialiste d'autocritique. Tout mon travail n'est que ça*". Instead he implied that their posture was, if anything, immature for "*je trouve que notre tâche commun est trop important pour que nous avons le temps de trop les* [their disagreements and miscommunications] *contempler*".

[310] Debord letter to Straram 3 Oct 1958

[311] Debord letter to Straram 3 Oct 1958

coalition of artists (IS 5, 22).

And yet we should not overlook that it was thanks to the ‘Report’ that such a new coalition of artists came about. If the desire within these artist groups to discuss these matters indicate that there was, as Jorn had assumed, an alignment of concerns around the continent, the fact remains that Debord’s suggestion of an apt qualifying adjective for their united organization won the day. This testifies to his influence. As a prospective project, Debord's ‘situation’ formed a sort of conceptual framework based on which the various artists could articulate what united them.

The ‘Report’ should be seen as that which instigated, and provided the boundaries of, the theoretical conversation on what would constitute SI praxis aesthetically and organizationally. According to what is left of Debord’s letter correspondence, in SI’s first year this conversation engaged at least Jorn and Constant, the Italians and the Belgians. Published in summer of 1958, the first issue of IS, SI’s journal, would eventually run two pieces on constructing situations whose titles appear to express the objections that Jorn and the ex-IMIB members had to Debord’s ‘Report on the Construction of Situations’. One article was tellingly called ‘Problèmes préliminaires à la construction d’une situation’, and the other, no less revealing in its modesty, given that the constructed situation would be ludic, ‘Contribution à une définition situationniste du jeu’. The organization to which the ‘situation’ gave a name became inter-national rather than post-national, a network rather than a disciplined organization.

Though this conversation modulated some of Debord’s wishes for the organization, the discussion in itself was to some extent planned. In spring 1957 Debord

and Bernstein had agreed with Jorn that all disagreements should be brought up in an open discussion. All SI action, they thought, had to first be collectively vetted.[312] As a discussion on their disagreements, the responses to Debord's 'Report' followed this model.

This discussion did not marginalize Paris. In part because of the centrality that such responses gave to the 'Report', French became the vehicular language of the organization. Debord contentedly observed that, like the way the 'the situation' had become the qualifying adjective to the international, all members ultimately united around the centrality of French: the international's official journal came to be published only in French.[313] This was partly for pragmatic reasons: before the Germans entry into the international, everyone spoke it. But this choice had wider consequences. Even if certain non-French members were skeptical of Debord's claim that the Parisians experienced their shared concerns in a heightened state and were therefore uniquely placed to articulate a response to this predicament for the continent as a whole, the choice of French as the organization's language set Paris up to become the hinge of their international conversation. The Paris branch provided both the terms and the language in which the direction of the movement was debated.

Having established the centrality of Paris for the international, Debord turned the fact that the discussion among the members had questioned some of his suggestions into a virtue. What Debord strictly opposed was the meaning to a fixed ideology of

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[312] Debord to Simondo 3 April 1957.

[313] Debord letter to Straram 3 Oct 1958

'Situation*ism*'.[314] Instead he argued "*L'Internationale situationniste est constituée* nominalement, *mais cela ne signifie rien que le début d'*une tentative *pour construire au-delà de la décomposition, dans laquelle nous sommes entièrement compris, comme tout le monde. La prise de conscience de nos possibilités réelles exige* à la fois *la reconnaissance* du caractère pré-situationniste, *au sens strict du mot, de tout ce que nous pouvons entreprendre,* et la rupture sans esprit de retour avec la division du travail artistique."[315] For the time being, Debord summarized SI's project in the following, very tentative way: "*Le travail collectif que nous nous* proposons *est la création d'un nouveau* théâtre d'opérations culturel, *que nous plaçons par* hypothèse *au niveau d'une éventuelle construction générale des ambiances par une* préparation, *en quelques circonstances, des termes de la dialectique décor-comportement*."[316] He emphasized the situation was still to be constructed. And if such construction evoked the possibility for art to transcend the atomization of artistic genres and for artists to quit their social fragmentation by forming an organization, it was in reality the conversation on the 'situation' that ensured the latter.

While SI's positive project had to be defined theoretically as a 'proposal' to 'prepare' a 'hypothesis', practically it had already started. In renouncing a fixed rule book, when aligning around the prospect of a unified praxis, the members had to negotiate what their project would be. For the international to persist thus demanded

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[314] Simondo, an Italian member, inquired about the status of 'Situationism', a noun Debord mobilized once within scare quotes in his 'Report'. Seemingly embarrassed, Debord denied the validity of any such thing (Debord to Simondo 22 August 1957).

[315] Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes', Potlatch, Nov 1957

[316] Debord, 'Encore un effort si vous voulez être situationnistes', Potlatch, Nov 1957, my emphases.

participation from its members. In this sense SI did not only break with the dominant ideology of contemporary society in imagining new ways to make use of the postwar prosperity and technological advancements. In debating how to do so, their organizational praxis opposed the lack of participation in such decisions in west European society at large.

This even impressed Jacques Ellul. The critic of the ideology of 'technique' eventually sought Debord out. He told him that he had followed the international from the start and approved of its project.[317] The fact that the guidelines for SI praxis was not fixed indeed invited the members to become mediators and not only intermediaries of the international. As the 'situation' still needed to be constructed, the members of SI could at once discuss the international's aesthetic project and express its organizational practice. Debord even wanted to conflate the two: the international, he thought, should itself become an experimental praxis.[318] As we will see, this formed the basis of the way SI attempted to not further the reign of 'technique' organizationally. But in 1957 this all lay in the future.

By early fall in 1957, SI had set up the conditions for becoming a hinged network. It connected artists for whom the dominant developments in postwar society were alienating. While they all thought that only experimental artistic practice could establish a counter-project, their unity was hinged on their having a shared conceptual outline for

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[317] Debord to Françoise Lung (15 Dec 1962). As if to highlight the sources of the project of which Ellul approved, Debord suggested for Lung, who was interested in Ellul's relation to SI, to read Jorn's mid-1950s texts on 'technique'…

[318] Debord to Simondo 22 August 1957

such a praxis. And as the Paris-based proponents provided it, Paris became the most important node of the international, its hinge. But as the proponents elsewhere pushed back against some of Paris's centralizing urges, they ensured that SI would become a network, not a disciplined organization.

2. The Modernity of the International: Expansion without Participation 1957-1958

In its first year the Situationist International went from being a protean idea to an expanding international organization. In this chapter I will explain this expansion by examining how SI was able to make a name for itself. Following Casanova, I examine how the situationists drew on the cultural and symbolic capital of the French metropolis: Paris. I argue that their project earned the title 'modern' because Jorn and Debord presented it as an original and important intervention at that site of aesthetic consecration, at political, socio-economic, and existential levels.

This analysis, however, will also draw our attention to the limitations of SI's project in its first year of existence. While fulfilling the necessary conditions for being a network, it hardly lived up to its own vision of organizational praxis. The members wanted not only to numerically expand but also, through their performative construction of a situation, to enable and spread participation outside of France. And yet the circle of active participants remained restricted to the Parisian hinge.

So though SI expanded because it met Casanova's requirements for what was modern, it failed its own definition upon which this claim to modernity depended. In this sense SI had by 1958 the necessary conditions for becoming a continental a network: its hinge intervened with an original project at the hub of postwar modernity. But it did not have what it saw as all the sufficient ones: the peripheral nodes translating that modernity to their contexts in a way that ensured a continental-wide participation.

I. The Cultural Revolution and Cultural Capital: *the* Avant-garde and Paris

The Counter-Institution: The Original Intentions of the Avant-garde

In the first article in the first issue of its journal *L'Internationale situationniste* (IS), published in June 1958, SI expressed its desire to update the avant-garde. The international wanted to resurrect the original intentions of the interwar avant-garde. These, it argued, had once been to present an emancipatory aesthetic project. But renewing this project for a new era was not done easily. And any attempt, IS 1 argued, had to be done with reference to Surrealism.

In 1958 Surrealism loomed large for SI. In his response to Jorn's question of how to frame the narrative of a postwar avant-garde association, Debord suggested in his 'Report' that its defining trait would be that "*Nous voulons le changement le plus libérateur de la société et de la vie où nous trouvons enfermés*." In this respect, IS 1 acknowledged, "*Un movement plus libérateur que le surréalisme de 1924 … ne peut pas se constituter facilement*." And yet, it added, "*Ce qui n'enlève rien à la nécessité pour un mouvement révolutionnaire dans la culture, de reprendre à son compte, avec plus d'efficacité, la liberté d'esprit, la liberté concrète des moeurs, revendiquées par la surréalisme*" (IS 1, 5).

When identifying the cultural-revolutionary practice as indicative of the original promise of Surrealism, SI construed *Parisian* Surrealism as an institution.[319] Debord claimed that it was one of the main pillars of the cultural and political superstructure of

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[319] As I will expand on further down, Surrealism had far outgrown its Parisian origin. However, here it is the metropolitan version that SI had in mind.

France, next to Catholicism and de Gaulle: "*Le surréalisme est connu du grand public comme l'extrême du modernisme et, d'autre part, il est devenu objet de jugement universitaires. Il s'agit bien d'une de ces choses qui vivent en même temps que nous, comme le catholicisme et le général de Gaulle*" (IS 2, 33). Behind this cheeky remark, there was a serious intent. It touched the question of the social role of the avant-garde, which went to the heart of SI's project.

To understand how a cultural revolutionary praxis could constitute an institution, we need to conceptualize institutional continuity through its practice. In *Forms,* Levine argues that an institution is less an edifice than a practice, rhythm, or pattern. Such practices endure, but not without changing. Once reiterated, they also morph. But, she adds, they keep the original motivation from the institution's instituting moment. And yet the institution outlives its original creators. Its practices are continued by new proponents, who assume the role of the institution's creators. An institution is therefore, Levine concludes, characterized at once by a perpetuation of practices, or underlying patterns, and a surrogation of practitioners.[320]

SI accordingly construed the avant-garde through its practices' desire to redefine what art could be in a way that would have purchase on political developments. Debord argued that the avant-garde had to rearrange the parameters for what constituted a successful artwork. It had to break with the traditional aspiration of art, which, according to Debord's definition, was "*de faire sentir, dans la privation et l'absence, certains élément passés de la vie qui, par une médiation artistique, échapperaient à la confusion*

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[320] Levine, 58.

des apparences, l'apparence étant alors ce qui subit le règne du temps. Le degré de la réussite esthétique se mesure donc à une beauté inséparable de la durée, et tendant même à une prétention d'éternité" (IS 1, 20).

An artwork, Debord thought, should no longer eternalize a moment but produce one. In contrast to the conventional sense of art, he argued that "*Le but des situationnistes est la participation immédiate à une abondance passionnelle de la vie, à travers le changement de moments périssables délibérément aménagés*" (IS 1, 20). Indeed, "*La réussite de ces moment ne peut être que leur effet passager*" (IS 1, 20).

To momentarily experience normally overlooked aspects of everyday life had once been Surrealism's aspiration. Early Surrealist novels described how the occurrence of unexpected quotidian moments gave the narrator insights into a reality, or a sur-reality, beyond the ideologically structured surface. "*Le côté progressif du surréalisme*," Debord observed, "*... est dans sa revendication d'une liberté totale, et dans quelques essais d'intervention dans la vie quotidienne*" (IS 2, 33).

Surrealism had, as IS 1 acknowledged, originally elaborated on various ways of escaping the rule bound logic of society. Surrealism's 1924 manifesto had argued for a resistance to the proliferation of, what it called, 'the reign of logic', which was threatening the space for the imagination.[321] Surrealism could in this sense be said to be reacting against modern society's need for things to be predictable and repeatable.

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[321] André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 9. Already in the second sentence of the (first) *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton had professed that though 'man' is an "inveterate dreamer", he has "trouble assessing the objects he has been led to use" (3) because "the imagination" had been increasingly enclosed "to be exercised only in strict accordance with an arbitrary utility" (4). The manifesto located the guiding principle of the contemporary society, that Surrealism opposes, as being the "reign of logic" (9).

This modern tendency has been scrutinized by many scholars, most famously by Max Weber. The founder of German sociology discerned that the drift of western modernity was to codify convention. It made practices reliable and calculable. He conceptualized this as a rationalization and cast bureaucracies as the main driver of this development. He famously suggested that such practices disenchanted the world. They brought a secularizing mastery to it.[322]

Providing an almost diametrically opposed vision to Weber's, but no less modern, Surrealism wanted, through its artistic practice a few decades later, to re-enchant the world. It has been argued that the desires expressed in Surrealism cannot be understood unless they are seen against the backdrop of Max Weber's suggestions. Weber thought, in the words of one such interlocutor, Michel Löwy, that "the quintessence of modern Western civilization is … action with a rational purpose, utilitarian rationality. This permeates every aspect of life in our society and shapes our every gesture, every thought, and every aspect of our behavior" to the point of becoming a "veritable steel cage", which "confines us in spite of ourselves. And Surrealism is, first and foremost", he goes on, "an enchanted means we can use to destroy the bars of this prison and regain our freedom."[323]

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[322] Weber described its foundations in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons (New York, Charles Scribner's & Son, 1958), and then its consequences in *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* (ed) Günther Roth & Claus Wittich (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1968).

[323] Michel Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2010), pp 1-2. Weber makes this arguments about modernity becoming a steel cage in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit,* trans. Talcott Parsons, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 2009, pp. 38-9. Surrealism's continuing purpose, Löwy goes on, is to react against: "the quantifying mind of the bourgeois universe, to commercial reification, to the platitudes of utilitarianism, and above all, to the *disenchantment of the world*" (30).

To further establish Surrealism's negative connection to a Weberian (though not necessarily Weber's) perception of modernity, we should note that, Walter Benjamin, Surrealism's greatest interlocutor, lauded the force of the 'dialectic images' of Surrealist art.[324] He argued that these images, consisting of shards from multiple temporalities, interrupted the continuum of history that a rationalizing 'historicism' had established. For they brought "the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in these things to the point of explosion".[325] They disjointed a previously integral, secularizing time.

Surrealism's resistance to the reign of logic, and the linear trajectory of modernity as described by a Weberian historicism, initially played out on Parisian streets. In its two founding novels, Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* (1926) and André Breton's *Nadja* (1928), Surrealism varyingly described sudden irruptions in Parisian everyday life. Such events caused frissons that they strongly favored. Seemingly coming from nowhere, they broke with a causal logic according to which the future emerged along a line of steady progression from the past.

For such resistance Surrealism mobilized the unconscious. Surrealism invested the unconscious with the emancipatory possibility of harboring a freedom not yet subjugated by the dominant, rule-bound logic of the modern world. As for Freud it was

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[324] If originally a heuristic tool to explain a historical developments, Weber's perception of modernity became a normative model copied around the world. That this model's geographic origin was not determining, and thus that its application was politically neutral, has been widely criticized, especially by postcolonial theorists. One of them, Chakrabarty, who we met in the introduction, has highlighted this model's implicit perception of an integral historical time, according to which what is modern first occurs in the West, and then in the rest of the world. Following Benjamin, he called this time 'historicism'.

[325] Walter Benjamin, 'On Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', *New Left Review,* I/ 108, March-April 1978: http://newleftreview.org/?view=137

connected to earlier historical eras.[326] Such eras had not been left behind but co-existed with the present within everyday life.

In the Surrealist novels, the co-existence of multiple historical times within the unconscious was mapped onto the urban fabric. The city harbored historical layers underneath the superimposition of a modernizing reign of logic. The moments that immersed the narrators of Breton's and Aragon's self-proclaimed 'anti-novels', that brought about the "immense forces of atmosphere" of which Benjamin wrote, were invoked by old-fashioned objects and historical locations.

In its clearest evocation of how such frissons of surreality pierced the linearity of progress, Aragon described a kind of counter-cartographic knowledge of a city's subconscious, and its impact on the inhabitant. In his novel the protagonist's sense of self organically emanated, if suddenly, through the experience of the historically multi-layered city. "*Je m'avance dans le particulier*," Aragon wrote already in 1924,[327] *"Je m'y perds*." And, far from being a loss leading merely to confusion, "*le signe de cette perte*," Aragon had noted, *"est la véritable connaissance*."[328] Evoking the French translation of Hegel's *Begriff* but relating it to aesthetic discovery, "*[La notion]*", Aragon concluded,

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[326] See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its discontents,* trans. David McLintock (London, Penguin, 2004).

[327] The chapter, 'Paris Peasant', that would eventually name the full (anti-)novel was published in 1924.

[328] Louis Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris,* (Paris, Gallimard, 1972) 244-5.

"*m'échappe où je l'atteins*."[329] He simultaneously finds knowledge and himself as a surrealist. This was a surreal knowledge defying a Weberian, secularizing mastery.

It was with the help of the unconscious that Surrealism hoped to precipitate what SI called a 'cultural revolution'. Surreal epiphanies, the novels showed, momentarily suspended the veneer of order. They rejected the superimposed logic. On an ontological level they, Aragon argued, showed that disorder preceded order (despite the structure of the words, he acknowledged, seemingly pointing in the other direction: the former, *dis*order, in having a prefix easily leads one to believe stemmed from the latter, order). He posited an original chaos in the world. But as such a chaos was unthinkable, ad hoc solutions had been invented, such as divinities, in order to insist on order.[330] On a quotidian, experiential level the epiphanies piercing this film of order exposed the currents within urban everyday life that contradicted a Weberian rationalization. Arguing in favor of them, Surrealism found them marvelous.[331]

Having such aspirations made avant-garde practice a sort of counter-institution that questioned the hierarchy of values ultimately upheld, indeed legitimated, by the

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[329] Aragon, 244. For the way in which the French translation of Hegel informed its reception, Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'The Reception of Hegel and Heidegger in France: Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968), Jean Hyppolite (1907-1968), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)', in *Modern European Criticism and Theory: A Critical Guide* (ed) Julian Wolfreys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), with regard to the Surrealist interest in Hegel, see especially 205.

[330] Aragon, 233-5. It is the escape from this unthinkable insight of an original and continuously underlining chaos "*d'ou*", he thought, "*[vient] l'explication divine*" (234). In fact, Aragon added in a somewhat existential-Hegelian way that "*l'idée de Dieu au moins ce qui l'introduit dans la dialectique n'est que le signe de la paresse de l'éprit*" (235).

[331] He wrote that "*le merveilleux, c'est la contradiction qui apparaît dans le réel" (*Aragon, 250). According to its manifesto, Surrealism searched for that which was marvellous. This eventually became known as le merveilleux quotidien, which, incidentally, is in French used interchangeably with magical realism.

practices of other social institutions, such as by Church and 'Throne'. As a result the avant-garde would not only, in accordance to Jorn's definition, have no vested interest in the present order. Its practitioners would, like those of Jorn's free artists in a time asking for industrial design, be actively counteracted. They had to be seen, Debord argued, "*comme une union de tous ceux qui revendiquent le droit à un travail que le condition social entravent maintenant*" (IS 1, 21). But in postwar western Europe, for Surrealism this was less and less the case.

The Avant-Garde and Postwar Modernization

SI raised doubts about the **'**radicality**'** of postwar Surrealism. Debord argued that it had failed to tackle the socio-economic developments emerging after the war. As a consequence SI cast Parisian Surrealism as its historic precursor, not as a contemporary competitor. Claiming the legacy of what it considered to be the avant-garde's emancipatory strand, SI wanted to assume the role previously occupied by Surrealism as representatives of the Paris avant-garde.

At this time the avant-garde was increasingly questioned. Many pundits argued that aesthetic innovation as a whole had reached an impasse. Not only did a piece on the current aesthetic impasse from *Le Monde* find its way into IS; "*on ne sait plus qu'inventer', entend-on partout*" (IS 2, 6) the SI journal quoted France's newspaper of record as saying. Often, the letter exchanges between the international's members also addressed Robert Estivals' pessimistic sociological treatise on the postwar Parisian avant-gardes, *La*

philosophie de l'histoire de la culture dans l'avant-garde parisienne depuis 1945.[332] A year prior to Debord giving his 'Report' to the meeting of IMIB and LI, et al, in northern Italy, even Roland Barthes had declared the avant-garde to be cornered in Paris.[333] This was the case, Barthes thought, because the society which it rejected now valued its contributions. As Debord pointed out, it was no longer a counter-institution; its practices were not oppositional.

SI thought that the problem was that Paris Surrealism, though espousing a revolutionary aesthetic, had been realized in a pre-revolutionary society. The first lines of IS 1 stated that "*Dans le cadre d'un monde qui n'a pas été essentiellement transformé, le surréalisme a réussi.*" As a consequence the current implications of Surrealist aesthetics ran counter to the original, revolutionary intentions: "*Cette réussite se retourne contre le surréalisme qui n'attendait rien que du renversement de l'ordre social dominant*" (IS 1, 3).

Postwar Surrealism could not satisfy the expectations that interwar Surrealism had originally raised: "*Les surréalistes de 1958 sont devenus incapables de s'y rallier [d'un movement plus libérateur que le surréalisme de 1924], et sont même résolus à le combattre"* (IS 1, 5). Society had caught up with it: "*Le monde moderne a rattrapé l'avance formelle que le surréalisme avait sur lui*" (IS 1, 3).

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[332] Beside doubting SI's continuance, Estivals did not endear himself to its members by casting the Lettrists in the central role on the Paris stage. Debord expressed his annoyance in a characteristic, yet incomparable way: "*Ce type* [Estivals] *serait la tête de jeune Turc idéale pour la polémique s'il était ministre de la Culture, ou même à la place d'Herbert Read* [head of ICA in London]. *Mais je crois qu'on ne puisse se justifier de poursuivre un dialogue avec un tel sous-produit obscur de la niaiserie sociologisto-universitaire?*" (Debord to Jorn, 6 July 1960)

[333] Matei Calinescu, *Fives Faces of Modernity,* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1987) 120.

In Paris postwar Surrealism had been unable to escape the intensification of a postwar instrumentalization. After the war a disenchanting world had, SI argued, co-opted Surrealism's re-enchanting practices: "*tout ce qui a constitué pour le surréalisme une marge de liberté s'est trouvé recouvert et* utilisé *par le monde répressif que les surréaliste avaient combattu*" (IS 1, 3, original emphasis). Automatic writing, one of its signature inventions, had for example become a managerial technique, called 'brainstorming', designed to rationalize decision making. It had even recently been suggested, IS quoted a 'source' as claiming, that "*La technique est devenue une thérapeutique contre le virus révolutionnaire*." (IS 1, 4).

What SI had in mind was the influx of American management techniques to postwar western Europe behind many of the trends Ellul conceptualized as advancing the ideology of technique. As the second largest recipient of US postwar aid to Europe, France opened its market to American products.[334] But the Marshall plan did not only ensure that the French consumer could purchase American goods. It also encouraged France, like other west European countries, to send delegations across the Atlantic to study the new social scientific methods developed in America. Soon its university departments adopted the new academic methodology. This had ramifications for France's

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[334] The UK received the largest share of the Marshall aid, but France was granted the most substantial share of free grants (Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958,* trans. Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), 127). Both France and Britain got more than West Germany.

self-perception; US social science started guiding the way in which French academics measured France.[335]

As SI suspected, the expansion of such empirical social science had a political agenda. By exporting it Washington hoped to contain the allure of Marxism. Its focus on quantity would obviate the need to study events, and thus both past and possible historical changes.[336] It has in hindsight been suggested that the importation of 'modern' social science with its quantitative methodology was as important in entrenching west European postwar capitalism as the dawn of an increasingly interlinked Trans-Atlantic market.[337]

The American academic influence that came in the wake of the Marshall Aid shaped France's institutional framework. Once setting the research agenda of university departments, it also guided the policies whose implementation created a growing state bureaucracy. And such growth was not insubstantial. The French State proved to be the most eager proponent of those trends that had emasculated Surrealist practices: no other western country pursued a state-led modernizing agenda as aggressively as France; no governing elite in any west European country embraced postwar modernization as thoroughly. In the early postwar years, France **"**became the first Western country", according to Tony Judt, "to commit itself wholeheartedly to economic growth and modernization as

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[335] Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America;s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2005), 336-375; Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies. Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1996), 157-196.

[336] Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1994), 186-7. This was, in other words, the soft power arm of the American postwar dominance over the western camp. The hard power was, meanwhile, kept in the shadows (in Europe, that is, not in Latin America): the so-called 'Stay Behind' movement, tasked with preventing the Moscow-aligned communists from ever ascending the summit of power, would not be exposed until the early 1990s.

[337] de Grazia, 336-375; Ross 157-196.

a public policy."[338] Certain historians have noted that, by modernizing its institutional framework, France made up for the inaction during the dying interwar days of the Third Republic.[339]

Criticizing the American influence on France filled Paris intellectuals with purpose. It allowed them to engage with questions of politics and aesthetics, economy and philosophy at the same time. For it has been suggested that the US represented in their eyes both capitalism and bourgeois philistinism.[340] The PCF's case was bolstered by such a critique. It gained in standing by being on the right side of received opinion.[341] But it would be wrong to think that the PCF in anyway monopolized the critique of American culture. It was even entertained by intellectuals of an Atlanticist persuasion, such as Raymond Aron, for whom American culture was hardly alluring.[342] Taking a stand against the academic trends and consumer goods arriving from the US was for many of its proponents equal to favoring peace and civilization.[343]

Many historians have questioned what motivated so many to contribute to this critique. Behind it, some historians have pointed out, lay a fear that the Americanization

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[338] Judt, 70.

[339] This has been suggested both by Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years,* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co, 1996), 173, and Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent* (London, Vintage, 2000) 313.

[340] Jean-Phillipe Mathy, *Extreme-Occident: French Intellectuals and America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993), 162.

[341] For a critical account of this, see Francois Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion,* trans. Deborah Furet (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[342] On how Aron disliked US culture, in spite of being anti-communists, see Judt,, *Postwar,* 218-.

[343] Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1997), 17.

of France would relegate intellectuals and artists to the marginalized status to which their opposite numbers were confined in the US.[344] Others have contended that the French postwar critique of America recycled some of the Euro-centric tropes originally put forward by those arguing for a 'third way' during the 1930s. The postwar position, such an argument goes, resembled that of the interwar non-conformists who wanted a Europe that was neither bolshevik nor capitalist, neither left nor right. The latter constituted a socialist critique of materialism that has been accused of constituting a particular French brand of 1930s fascism but also of being the kind of anti-liberal attitude skeptical of Anglo-American capitalism that smoothed the way for a postwar Franco-German friendship: "The non-conformist intelligentsia would produce a critique of Americanization and modernity," one historian has claimed, "to help European elites [re-]define their heritage."[345]

It is certainly true that the critical discourses in Paris suggested that there existed a widespread malaise with developments seen as expressive of postwar modernity. Many critics fret over the imminent disappearance of quality in the face of the postwar onslaught of quantity.[346] And 'quality' was, incidentally, a concern that resonated within deep layers of the French population.[347] Being at once elusive and evocative, 'quality'

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[344] Kuisel, 121; Mathy, 140-150.

[345] John Hellman, *The Communitarian Third Way: Alexandre Marc and Ordre Nouveau, 1930-2000,* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2002), 10. The suggestion that the non-conformist position that was neither left nor right indeed constituted a French fascism was first made by Zeev Sternhell in *Ni droite ni gauche. L'idéologie fasciste en France* (Paris, Éditions de Seuil, 1983).

[346] Kuisel 113-4.

[347] Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies,* 128.

united the 'people' with its thinkers, the rural, reactionary Right with the metropolitan, progressive Left; to some extent it could be said that this was also the main concern of Poujade, a populist spokesperson of shopkeepers and farmers of the Southwest shooting to fame–-and attracting notoriety–-in the mid-50s as representing the antipode to Mendès France, whose technocratic regime allegedly acquiesced to West German re-armament and American hegemony.[348] However, it should be noted, before stretching the affinities shared between leftwing intellectuals in Paris and Poujade too far, that many of the former thought the southern politician a closet fascist. Indeed, it would be wrong to write off such sentiments as all being reactionary or self-serving, as it would be to collapse the postwar critique into its interwar precursor.

SI's point was that the avant-garde, if it were to remain a counter-institution, had to update its praxes in the face of the socio-economic developments guided by the post-war techno-politics.[349] A surrealist reference to the unconscious was no longer enough. The 'ideology of technique' was far more all encompassing than the 'Steel cage'. So to honor its initial intentions in the light of the new circumstances, Debord told a meeting of the postwar Paris avant-garde, it had to rethink its practices.

In 1958 representatives from various groups with avant-garde pretensions in Paris congregated to discuss Surrealism today under the heading 'Le Surréalisme, est-il mort

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[348] Rioux argues that the political life in Fourth Republic experienced a deadlock between mendeisme and poujadisme (Rioux, 245).

[349] I should nonetheless note here that SI's rejection of trends coming from the US and USSR in favour of a 'rooted', intra-European inter-nationalism can misleadingly become confused with the anti-semitic rejection of 'Jewish cosmopolitanism'. SI's 'national position' should rather be seen as reflecting that of the various national resistance movements against the recent German occupation. I will address this question more thoroughly in the epilogue.

ou vivant?'. Noël Arnaud hosted the event. It was attended by various Surrealists; Isou and a group ultra-lettristes; and a representative of Surrealist splinter group 'une Tendance Populaire Surréaliste'. Henri Lefebvre had to cancel due to illness.

In his contribution, 'Du Surréalisme a Paris et révélation de leur valuer effective' Debord, representing SI,[350] provoked those present. In a pre-recorded message accompanied by his strumming a guitar, he told them that Surrealism had to update its social and political theory, and drop the subconscious. For Debord the question was not whether Surrealism was dead or alive, it being visibly alive, if on life support, but what its role was today, and whether it could continue to claim that it best represented the counter-institution of the avant-garde.

SI did not, in other words, find that that it had become obsolete nor impossible for aesthetic experiments to disrupt the ruling logic of society. Through his redefinition of aesthetic practice Debord also put the focus on the experience of everyday life: "*Les situationnistes envisagent l'activité culturelle … comme méthode de construction expérimentale de la vie quotidienne*" (IS 2, 20). In this way "*L'art peut cesser d'être un rapport sur les sensations pour devenir une organisation directe de sensation supérieures*" (IS 2, 21). Doing so the international still wanted to find an expression that would be *libérateur* from the rule bound society in which they found themselves *enfermé*.

But as such a logic had become more pervasive, avant-garde practice could not continue on the beaten paths. The present moment had no use of Surrealism's focus on

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[350] At the end of his presentation outlining his vision of a new kind of avant-garde practice, he announced that "*c'est dans cette ligne qu'avancent mes camarades de l'Internationale situationniste*" (IS 2, 34). In the pre-recorded message, the latter was followed by rounds of applauds.

the unconscious: "*Le côté rétrograde du surréalisme s'est manifesté d'emblée par la surestimation de l'inconscient, et sa monotone exploitation artistique"* (IS 2, 33).

As the unconscious was to no use, artistic practices' relation to that which imprisoned the time-period, which Surrealism called the reign of logic and SI the advancement of technique, Debord went to on, had to be recast. The postwar avant-garde could no longer depend upon "*l'idéalisme dualiste qui tend à comprendre l'histoire comme une simple opposition entre les précurseurs de l'irrationnel surréaliste et la tyrannie des conceptions logiques gréco-latines*" (IS 2, 33). Such a one-sided dichotomy had made Surrealism ill equipped for envisioning ways of making use of "*des moyens techniques supérieurs de notre temps*" (IS 2, 33).

To SI, culture, if a discrete sphere, related to society. As "*complexe de l'esthétique, des sentiments et des moeurs*," culture, IS 1 repeated from Debord's 'Report', designated the way "*par lequel une collectivité réagit sur la vie qui lui est objectivement donnée par son économie*" (IS 1, 14). Now such material conditions were rapidly changing. Culture, IS 1 continued, could reflect or anticipate the quotidian possibilities this disclosed (IS 1, 14). Here, before elsewhere, society's future developments were visible. As history's 'formal laboratory', culture was a privileged site for steering such social changes if it engaged with them.[351]

The proponents of the avant-garde had to get their hands dirty. Striking a very Jornian note, Debord contended that the revolutionary practice of the avant-garde would

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[351] But culture could not, given the current state of things, overlap with such possibilities. It was not everyday life, for which IS 1 tellingly did not provide a definition. Nor, SI somewhat curiously seemed to suggest, was it the current superstructure.

be its re-appropriation of technologies, and the subversion of their applications. "*Il n'y a pas de liberté dans l'emploi du temps sans la possession des instruments modernes de construction de la vie quotidienne*," he contended. "*L'usage de tels instruments marquera le saut d'un art révolutionnaire utopique à un art révolutionnaire expérimental*" (IS 1, 21).

By updating the aesthetic praxes for the era of 'technique' in Paris, SI would, Debord now claimed, not only usurp Surrealism's role as representative of the Paris avant-garde but renew its lease on life as a counter-institution. It would not flee in the face of the quantification dominating the era, but disrupt its praxis. With reference to changes needed for the realization of Surrealism's liberatory aspiration, Debord asserted that "*Nous savons que ce changement est possible* par des actions appropriées."[352]

Poetry and Engagement

SI articulated its desire to renew the avant-garde with the help of one of Sartre**'**s concepts: the situation. Sartre occupied the summit of the Paris scene. He was also famously averse to avant-garde experimentation. Deploying 'his' 'situation', SI inverted the assumptions underlying his rejection of Surrealism.

No one had a greater sway in defining the preoccupations of the French capital than Sartre. The received idea, Paige Arthur suggests, is that "the postwar intellectual field represented a historical passage from Gide to Sartre."[353] And occurring at a time

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[352] Debord, 'Report', 1, my emphasis.

[353] Paige Arthur, *Unfinished Projects,* (London, Verso, 2010), 44, footnote 4.

before de Gaulle 'stole' anti-Americanism and the Structuralists challenged the positions underpinning his intellectual ascendence, he was at the apogee of his influence—hence his occasional nickname, Cathedral Sartre, and his often remarked upon all but institutional status.[354]

As the towering intellectual figure in Paris, Sartre cast a shadow also on Debord's and Jorn's relationship. Italian-based Jorn had in 1954 established a connection with Parisian Debord based on the hope that aesthetic means could have political ends, but neither based on the aesthetic means Sartre had in mind nor those political consequences Sartre had ascribed to avant-garde experimentations. By organizing a meeting for artists in the non-signifying arts in 1956, Jorn had wanted them to emerge from Sartre's shadow.

When elaborating on the need to construct **'**situations**'** in 1957, Debord evoked the possibility to undermine Sartre**'**s aesthetics from within. He adopted the crucial term of Sartre's philosophy. But by also repurposing it, he implied that the new international's practice could defy Sartre's guidelines. They could subvert the mimetic bias of Sartre**'**s committed aesthetics.

To be sure, Sartre was not the first to mobilize the 'situation'; Debord could have got it from elsewhere. Both Heidegger and Jaspers had already used closely related notions. In *Being and Time* Heidegger addressed the scholarship on analysis situs, but Jorn did not make Debord aware of it until 1960.[355] Where Heidegger's mobilization first

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[354] On Sartre's all but institutional status, see Dominick LaCapra *Preface to Sartre* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987)**;** on existentialism's immense popularity, see Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975).

[355] In an undated letter to Debord, probably sent in the summer of 1960, Jorn told him about this scholarship and stressed the urgency for the international to familiarize themselves with it.

became 'situation' when translated into French, Jaspers had theorized the 'limit-situation', or *die Grenzsituation* even in the original German. And even before becoming so for the two phenomenologists, the situation had been an integral part of the conceptual vocabulary of Max Weber's sociology. The latter theorized the meaning of a 'class situation' when working out the multiple ways in which societies stratify.[356] But that was half a century earlier, and across the Rhine.

Even if not being the first to do so, Sartre was the one theorizing the situation most prominently in Debord's proximity. In fact, the concept of the situation had become ever more closely associated with Sartre during these years in France.[357] The concept's intellectual roots had also been explored by others within SI. Sartre's 'situation' was indebted to Kierkegaard, of whom Jorn was an avid reader; Jorn's non-SI work abound with references to the Danish theologian.[358] For Kierkegaard a situation cannot be separated from change and movement. It is brought into being by a decision of an autonomous person. As such the category describes a turning point that defies calculation

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[356] In this sense Weber's concept, in relating to the anomic reality of a *Gesellschaft,* is opposed to any concept associating to a *Gemeinschaft* and to 'status groups' which, though also linked to a *Gesellschaft,* obstruct for the market principle to gain free rein, i.e. the principle producing 'the class situation' (See Max Weber, 'Class, Status, Party', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (ed) H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1957), especially 181-5).

[357] Besides acknowledging the affinities between Debord's and Sartre's deployments of the situation, Andrew Hussey stresses the crucial fact that the publication of Sartre's articles from *Les Temps moderns* (TM) as essay collections was called just *Situation.* In other words, the name of the texts that to some extent defined and surely defended Sartre's position as public intellectual coincided with that of SI's project. Unbeknownst to Hussey, Jorn drew attention to this coincidence as well (in a letter to Debord, 13 February, 1964).

[358] This is especially the case in *Naturens ordning* (1962) and *Ting og Polis* (1963), two works to which I will return in the epilogue.

and plans. And yet it never evokes an unchecked action.[359] Kierkegaard influenced Sartre in thinking that, for a free action to be realized, it needed to face a factual resistance. As a negative project, freedom depended upon the context it resisted.[360] Conceptually, Sartre's situation was the resistance needed for the free construction of SI's situation.

Inadvertently underlining the urgency for interlocutors to work out the relation between Sartre's and SI's 'situations', Bernstein, the only surviving founding member of the international, has been deliberately ambiguous on this note. In response to an interviewer's questions a decade ago, Bernstein answered that it may have had something to do with Sartre's deployment.[361] On the one hand, her inconclusive answer suggests that she indulges speculations about such relations without vouching for their truth. On the other, it is clearly not a resounding no.

Staking out his position during the early days of the Fourth Republic in a recently liberated Europe, Sartre contributed to setting the tone for the intellectual debate of the new era. It has been argued that his "existentialism had the important role of providing a new language and assuming the necessary transition between the political commitments of the Resistance and those of the postwar period."[362] Through the imperative of

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[359] Ohrt, 161-8. Interestingly, Ohrt interprets the way SI related to prior theories of 'situations' exclusively through Jorn's texts in his chapter on the situation. Needless to say, this is a rare move in the secondary literature.

[360] Wark, 56-7.

[361] Andrew Hussey, *Game of War* (London, Pimlico, 2002), 105.

[362] Rioux, 431.

'commitment', Sartre articulated how literature could have traction on politics without adhering to the once explosive, if now ineffectual, aesthetic strategies of interwar Montmartre and Montparnasse.

Theorizing and producing literature was not a side-project for Sartre. In English-speaking countries it is often supposed that Sartre earned his importance in French intellectual life thanks to his philosophy, when in reality, Perry Anderson argues, he equally benefitted from the privileged role of literature in France.[363] With *What is Literature?* (WIL), he now offered a framework for the way in which its social importance should be understood by critics and the public, and how this should be used by authors.

In response to interwar aesthetic practices, in WIL Sartre argued in defense of a politicized aesthetic of *engagement* with the world as is right now. *Les Temps modernes* (TM), his journal, Sartre boldly proclaimed, would be aloof of nothing.[364] And his literature would be one that in sharp relief to many of those by his associates on the Left was without self-described avant-gardistic ambitions.[365] "*Dans la littérature engagé*," he wrote in an almost populist vein, *"l'engagement ne doit, en aucun cas, faire oublier ... de*

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[363] Perry Anderson, *The New Old World,* (London, Verso, 2011), 142-3.

[364] Sartre, 227. Almost reminiscent of Churchill's 1939 appeal to the British people for sacrifices, Sartre rather promised only dirty fingers. Other authors, he thought, should follow suit and write for, not only against, their juncture in history.

[365] It may sound like Sartre strikes a chord familiar from Benjamin with regard to favouring a politicized aesthetics (as a response in Benjamin's case to an aestheticized politics), but he is not: he mentions the Frankfurt School as little as any German literature save Kafka. His examples, though occasionally branching out to address authors' present situation in the UK, US, and Italy, are mostly confined to France. In *Notes to Literature,* Adorno argues that such an exclusion of German literature not only informs its conclusion but makes it inapplicable to the situation east of Rhine, if not everywhere (Theodore Adorno, 'Commitment', *Notes to Literature. Volume Two,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1991)).

servir la collectivité en essayant de lui donner la littérature qui lui convient."[366]

Sartre conceptualized how this would be done through his concept of the situation. Rather than focusing on formal experimentation, which, according to Sartre, was tantamount to a rejection of the socio-political circumstances, Sartre now encouraged postwar authors to articulate and thus render situations visible, which was a first step towards changing them. "*En parlant je dévoile* la situation *par mon projet même de la changer; je la dévoile à moi-même et aux autres pour la changer*," Sartre wrote ('WIL', 73, my emphasis).

In Sartre's phenomenological magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness* (B&N) (1943), the situation is described at once as an analytic tool and a call to action. The situation was, according to Fredric Jameson, "a term which allowed [Sartre] to transform all first-order thoughts and perceptions, desires and observations, into acts and choices." This related to Sartre's perception of the subject. It has been argued that the primacy in postwar France of a conception of the subject as embattled and emptied out and thus in need to struggle "with the forces of reality" was by and large due to Sartre's B&N.[367] Having no permanent essence of its own, the subject, so the argument goes, has to constantly negate, and thereby transcend, the circumstance in which it found itself in order to define itself. Only such a constant motion could push it from being in-itself to for-itself. It has to define its own situations. "The general, inspecting the battlefield to

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[366] Sartre, 30. From now I will make running references in the text to this work as WIL.

[367] Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2010), 204-5.

come," Jameson notes, "reorganizes its landscape into a situation".[368]

This now also held true for signifying art. "*Ainsi le prosateur est un homme qui a choisi un certain mode d'action secondaire qu'on pourrait nommer l'action par dévoilement*," Sartre wrote in WIL. *"L'écrivain 'engagé' sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c'est changer et qu'on ne peut dévoiler qu'en projetant de changer*" ('WIL', 73).

In WIL*,* Sartre claimed that literature's role was, in a sense, to remind the reader that s/he was a co-producer of the situation. "*Écrire*," he wrote, "*c'est donc à la fois dévoiler le monde et le proposer comme une tâche à la générosité du lecteur*" ('WIL', 109). When depicting the world as 'situations', literature made the need to act an indispensable part. Indeed, "*L'oeuvre d'art est valeur parce qu'elle est appel*" ('WIL', 98).

Committed writing reminds the reader that he or she is "condemned to be free"-– required to choose simultaneously him/herself and the situation. "*Pour nous, le faire*," Sartre wrote, "*est révélateur de l'être, chaque geste dessine des figures nouvelles sur la terre, chaque technique, chaque outil est un sens ouvert sur le monde; les choses ont autant de visages qu'il y a de manières de s'en servir*" ('WIL', 264).

The freedom to which committed writing condemns the reader is a freedom to act within the given context. In WIL, the author, like the implicit subject of B&N, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' (1945), and *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946), had to work through the objective cultural forms at hand. The creation of situations was not fanciful.

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[368] Fredric Jameson, 'Badiou and the French Tradition', *New Left Review,* no. 102, 2016, p. 102.

Having no recourse to an alternative, interior reality,[369] it brushed up against the material and ideological reality of this world. "*Il ne s'agit pas de choisir son époque*," Sartre wrote resisting certain modernist strategies, "*mais de se choisir en elle*" ('WIL', 265).

There is, in other words, nothing polemically gratuitous in politicizing literature. It is rather a realistic assessment. For "*L'écrivain est* en situation *dans son époque*" ('WIL', 13, his emphasis). In fact, "*L'homme*," author or otherwise, "*n'est qu'une situation*" ('WIL', 27).

To Sartre writing was a political praxis. "*C'est notre tâche d'écrivain que de représenter le monde et d'en témoigner*" ('WIL', 307), he wrote. "*Il faut prendre position dans notre littérature, parce que* la littérature est par essence prise de position" ('WIL', 300, my emphasis).

He rebuked his predecessors for being oblivious of this need to take a position bearing witness to social injustices. When assessing the legacy of the Parisian interwar avant-garde, he claimed that its members tried to escape their circumstances by subordinating the political needs of the present to the aesthetic demands of the future. He did acknowledge that "*Puisque la matière et l'outil de l'écrivain, c'est le langage, il est normal qu'il revienne aux auteurs de nettoyer leur instrument. Cette [est la] fonction négative de la littérature*" ('WIL', 300). But, he continued, "*Aussi n'est-ce plus la négativité seule qui peut servir l'histoire, même si elle s'achève en positivité. L'écrivain isolé peut se limiter à sa tâche critique mais notre littérature, en son ensemble, doit être*

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[369] He appealed for "*des romans de situation"* ('WIL', 252) that depicted "*l'universel concrète*" through a perspective without either interiority or omniscient narrator ('WIL', 257).

surtout construction" ('WIL', 311).

Sartre defined literary construction based on his perception of literature's social role. According to Sartre, the ruling ideology obscured the way in which the political system functioned. What such an ideology hid could be spotted, Sartre claimed, when one of the parts of its chain (of associations and assumptions) broke down. Such parts, which he called tools, allowed the chain to function. Once a tool broke the violence inherent in the reproduction of the ideology's domination, based on which the time-honored order still depended, became visible.[370] As a whole, literature, Sartre thought, should commit to unveiling this chain.

Sartre's aim to propose a new aesthetic project, while putting the political sympathies of interwar aesthetic experimental tendencies under suspicion, fettered a committed literature to a certain formal moderation. "*Chaque livre,*" he declared, "*propose une* libération concrète *à partir d'une* aliénation particulière" ('WIL', 119, his emphases). It cannot promise liberation from alienation tout court. Literature's commitment to such liberation rather resides in its willingness to mediate between the particular context and the universal questions at stake: "*L'écrivain est médiateur par excellence et son engagement c'est la médiation*" ('WIL', 124). By identifying commitment with mediation, Sartre broke with the various attempts to close the distance between life's practices and art's forms, one of the *Leitmotifs* of avant-garde practice. For as mediator the writer's

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[370] He wrote that "*Lorsque vous vous servez d'un outil, c'est pour produire une certaine modification qui, elle-même, est le moyen d'en obtenir une autre, plus importante, et ainsi de suite. Ainsi êtes-vous engrené dans un enchaînement de moyens et de fins dont les termes vous échappent et trop absorbé dans votre action de détail pour mettre en question ses fins dernières. Que l'outil vienne à casser, l'action est suspendue et la chaîne entière vous saute aux yeux…. le monde entier se dévoile*" ('WIL', 274).

position is distinct from the audience's. In WIL Sartre advocated for a mimetic aesthetic to which his own novels had not always conformed.[371]

Only Sartre, the foremost public intellectual of Europe, could invest such moderate aesthetic suggestions in the hope of radical outcomes.[372] Sartre arguably squared his realist aesthetics with his radical politics through recourse to his own postwar importance. For committed literature to have political consequences Sartre had to link such writing to the agency of the audience. "*Il ne suffit pas*," he wrote, "*d'accorder à l'écrivain a tout dire: il faut qu'il écrive pour un public qui ait la liberté de tout changer*" ('WIL', 196). In other words, for it to have an effect it had to be widely read, and thus able to activate a large audience, indeed an audience large enough to change everything. But who, one wonders, had such an audience except for Sartre?

Though the international likewise wanted to transform the world by creating a situation, it surely could not count on Sartre's audience. SI had to theorize a way for art to create the political change in itself, not through its audience. Their 'situation' could not support a chasm between artist and spectator. Insofar as its construction was dependent

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[371] Published in 1945, *Le Sursis* was formally experimental in a way reminiscent of literary high modernism. What is more, a year after he published WIL, he rethought the relation between aesthetics and politics in 'Black Orpheus', his preface to *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (ed) Léopold Sédar Senghor (1948). Poetry was no longer written off. For the way such choices suggest that Sartre was not as unequivocally committed to realist writing as his argument in WIL makes it seem, see Geoffrey A. Baker, *The Aesthetics of Clarity and Confusion: Literature and Engagement since Nietzsche and the Naturalists* (Cham, Switzzerland, Palgrave Macmillan 2016), especially 163-190

[372] Though, it should be noted, he also argued that the only way for literature to relinquish its independence and negative streak without becoming a petrified bourgeois ornament was for it to position itself against the mystifying ideology of the hegemonic class as a whole. With neither metaphysical categories to lean back on nor a destructive urge to unleash to keep kitsch at bay, art needed to be constantly on guard against the establishment, forever plotting to turn it into its embellishment. It would have to remain in opposition or it would not be at all!

upon participation, it would rather bridge the distance between the two poles inside of Sartre's situation. In this it paid tribute to the interwar avant-garde rather than rejecting it.

As a performance piece, the situation collapsed the distinction between creation and reception. In his 'Report', Debord had contrasted the situation to precisely the kind of artworks in which a line separates the audience from the participant. "*Le rôle du 'public', sinon passif du moins seulement figurant*," he had there claimed in the only passage that was reproduced in IS 1, "*doit y diminuer toujours, tandis qu'augmentera la part de ceux qui ne peuvent être appelés des acteurs mais, dans un sens nouveau de ce terme, des viveurs*."[373] The choice of calling the participants 'viveur' suggests that they were not merely an audience of the directed situation. They experienced the situation because they were co-producers, as it were.

Debord's 'situation' deliberately broke with the primary vehicle for 'situationist' art in its Sartrean guise. This was not only the medium of literature, but the genre of prose. Sartre favored non-experimental prose as it could appeal to broad audiences and, as 'signifying', bear witness of the world. It unveiled the world and thus created situations for its readers. But Sartre's committed literature also adhered to the mimetic conventions of realism. He associated prose's implicit other, poetry, with esoteric detachment and political irresponsibility. He identified poetry as the repository of avant-garde negation whose interwar excesses had alienated readers and led impresarios to prepare

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[373] Debord, 'Report', 19.

the ground for the failure of the Phoney War and consequent Occupation. Its privileged form was destruction.[374]

While SI also claimed to reject the destructive tendency in interwar aesthetic practices, SI's own constructions were poetic. Like Isou and the Lettrists, LI had moved poetry from the page to the street. But to explain the import of pushing poetry beyond what had traditionally been its limits, LI had, unlike the older Lettrists, drawn on Huizinga to whom poetry, broadly defined, was the last ludic sphere. So too now did SI. In IS 1, SI argued that the main artistic medium "*que nous allons remplacer et* accomplir *est la poésie, qui s'est brûlée elle-même à l'avant-garde de notre temps, qui a complètement disparu*" (SI 1, 12, original emphasis).[375] IS 1 invoked Huizinga to suggest that SI's project harkened back to an original conception of poetry, beyond the dawn of a modernity that had closely fettered aesthetics to a realist paradigm and that, according to Max Weber, had specialized people's roles (IS 1, 10). Situationist poetics aimed to unearth a fully participatory practice sidelined in modern society, and overlooked by its modernist aesthetics.

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[374] As we saw in chapter 1, Sartre primarily had the interwar Surrealists in mind. Their "destructive activities and the fanfare raised over them were the luxurious games of young members of the middle class completely at ease in a victorious country that belonged to them" (Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew,* 97). In the defeated France of 1940, they had been neither at ease – Breton famously spent the war in New York, departing on the same ship as Claude Lévi-Strauss (as is depicted in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques,* trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Penguin Books, 1973)) – nor of any help. They had, Sartre concluded in his most damning assessment, in fact prepared the ground for the 1940 defeat; they had implicitly abetted the forces of reaction in France. For, he asked his reader, "*les expéditions punitives des surréalistes ne ressemblent-elles pas aux espièglerie des camelots du roi?*" (WIL, 295, endnote 5). Surrealist pranks had, he responded, propped up the likes of Charles Maurras, the leader of Action Française (WIL, 295, endnote 5).

[375] When suggesting that poetry had already abolished its own limits, SI arguably thought of a development that Rimbaud had started well before Isou reduced poetry to the phoneme. (For this link between poetry in art and in life, see Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (London, Verso, 1988)).

By re-appropriating the 'situation', SI broke with Sartre's aesthetics, according to which only signifying art could be political, without repeating the actual practices of the interwar avant-garde. Rather than being an artistic practice unable to articulate a political stance, as Sartre had argued, situationist construction constituted a civilizational critique. It was mimetic art that, according to Huizinga, came off short as a critique. The Dutch-man had conceptualized the demand for representativeness in art as marking the entry of an instrumental paradigm into the sphere of culture. Poetry, he thought in contrast, was the last bastion of society unoccupied by this paradigm. And it was from here that SI's planned its assault on society's ruling logic.

In this sense Debord, though adopting 'the situation', inverted the assumptions of Sartre's aesthetics. SI's situation rejected the basis of Sartre's rejection of Surrealism. For SI an oppositional and innovative aesthetics had failed because the appropriate actions had not been taken by postwar Surrealism; the world had caught up with it. But by demanding commitment, Sartre's had likewise, SI implied, turned the work of art into a means of reproducing the status quo. He had chosen prose over poetry because its aim was to communicate something. In contrast to poetry, its aim resided outside itself; it was signifying. It alone could 'mediate', that is, commit. In this way Sartre had invited what Jorn had identified as the ruling ideology into the heart of aesthetics. Art was now measured based on its utility; as an instrument, committed art furthered the advance of 'technique'. But art, Debord contended, "*s'agit de produire nous-méme, et non des choses qui nous asservissent*" (IS 1, 21). For such production to take place artistic practice had to engage with historical developments outside of art and thought.

Aesthetics and a new Left

When intervening in the divisive debate on postwar aesthetics, SI did not only confine itself to be updating Surrealism through a re-appropriation of Sartre's concepts. The international also addressed the debate on geo-politics in Paris. The critique of Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in 1956 had there reopened the window for a position on contemporary geopolitics outside of the two Cold War camps. It was now possible to reject the way in which technological advancement steered politics in both Cold War blocs from the left. The international was one of the groups arriving on the scene with the intention of capitalizing on this window of opportunity. SI refused the bipolar logic that up until then had underwritten most political choices in Europe. But alone in Paris, it did so through aesthetics.

In the shadow of a sullied but still dominant PCF, a new political constellation took shape. This was not the anti-stalinist non-parliamentary Left of old, which at this point, as during the days of Trotsky's and Breton's friendship, was still largely Trotskyite—though no longer featuring a Surrealist contingent of any consequence—but would take on a distinctly Maoist color come the 1960s. Nor was it one of the various compromises struck with 'reformism'. It was rather a new configuration within the intellectual Left that was, to varying degrees, independent from the institutional structures of

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[376] The most elaborate example of this conceptualization is found in Phillipe Gottraux, *Socialisme ou Barbarie: un engagement politique et intellectuelle dans la France de l'après-guerre,* (Lausanne, Éditions Payot, 1997), 12; 199-219.

communism.[376] And after emerging from the latter's shadow, it ceased being in opposition to acting in the political field.[377]

That these new groups were anti-capitalist without belonging to the PCF did not, however, single them out. For we should here remember that every political party of the Fourth Republic had at least paid lip service to anti-capitalism. It has been suggested that the growth of the French State in favor of an administered capitalism, which the ruling parties oversaw, was its direct product. It was both a sign of weakness and a way to close ranks against the only true enemy of 'property' in the National Assembly, the Moscow-aligned communists.[378] Indeed, the PCF was perceived as the 'foreign' party for more reasons than one.[379]

The PCF's dominance gave those Marxisant groups rejecting the Moscow-alignment a certain coherence. But it also created an intensely competitive environment.[380] Counter-intuitively, it has been suggested that it was their shared intellectual horizon, furnished by the imperative of engagement in politics and reference to a more unorthodox

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[377] This had been the case earlier: the major outlets for the intellectual left, *Les Temps modernes* and *Esprit,* kept a polite distance to PCF, notwithstanding Sartre's various interventions and philosophy of engagement nor PCF's occasionally quite violent denunciations of 'bourgeois' existentialism (Gottraux, 13). Come the early 1960s, Sartre and his circle will form the vanguard of the political conversation on issues such as decolonization (for its consequences, see Paige Arthur, *Unfinished Projects,* 2010).

[378] Richard Vinen, *Bourgeois Politics in France 1945-1951* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2-5; 174. Vinen suggests that only those few with impeccable Resistance records could afford being perceived as Right-wing (Vinen 123).

[379] Rioux, 254-285.

[380] Gottraux, 205.

Marxism, that polarized them.[381] For while breaking with the Soviets they, as we have seen, hardly endorsed America. So these groupings within the new leftwing cluster have been divided based on their autonomy from PCF's line. These were the existentialist one of Sartre and his TM set; the 'revisionist' camp of Henri Lefebvre and the circle around the journal *Arguments*; and the gauchistes of Socialisme ou Barbarie (SouB).[382] If the first one was still close to a fellow-traveling position–-albeit a reformed popular front one, as evidenced in Sartre's overtures to SFIO–-and the second had abandoned the party line but not marxism–-if of the new, unorthodox, critical kind–-the third was and had always been fiercely independent. And it was within the third one that, according to Gottraux, a historian of the French autonomous Left, SI emerged.[383]

SI was one of the groups emerging in the late 1950s that was entirely independent of the PCF. In this the international followed in the path forged by SouB. For close to a decade before SI's emergence, SouB had been active as the lone independently dissenting Marxist voice.[384] It had relentlessly criticized the USSR from the left.[385] Indicatively, both of the group's co-founders, Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort, even eventually abandoned Marxism—in order to stay radical (in the literal adjectival, non-

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[381] Gottraux wrote that *"La contrainte thématique induite par la problématique de l'engagement, et par le référent incontournable que constitute dans ce cadre le marxisme, polarise la gauche française"* (268).

[382] Arthur Hirsh, *The French Left. A History & Overview* (Montreal, Black Rose Books, 1982) xi.

[383] Gottraux, 219.

[384] Hirsh, 113.

[385] It argued that the Soviet Union was not ruled by a bourgeoisie but by a bureaucracy. The latter may not have owned the means of production but they disposed of them; the proletariat was powerless in the East as well (Richard Gombin, *The Radical Tradition: a study in modern revolutionary thought,* trans. Rupert Swyer (London, Methuen Books, 1978), 41-3.

parliamentary substantive, sense).[386] And in a rare because uncompromising way, SouB refuted PCF's line on Budapest.

But SouB rarely addressed questions without bearing on politics, let alone aesthetic concerns.[387] While the relative independence from the PCF indisputably constitutes an important criterion for understanding the liberty of these groups, it primarily concerns the freedom to position themselves on the Paris scene. The content of that position should not be neglected. Where aesthetics was of utmost concern for the international, it was not of much import to SouB. Thus the two groups' proximity should not be overestimated, as it often has been in the secondary literature.[388]

SI was keen to point out its difference from SouB. SI wrote off SouB's marxism brusquely. The group was accused of treating the proletariat as "*une sorte de Dieu Caché de l'Histoire"* (IS 2, 10). SouB were, Debord noted, 'workerists' rather than marxists.[389]

While it is certainly true that SouB invested much hope in the working class, this was not uncommon. Though breaking with the PCF, few on the new left abandoned the party's political tropes. The public expression of the malaise with postwar modernity was in fact coincidental with a resurgence of discursive attention given to the proletariat. The

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[386] Baptiste Eychart, 'Castoriadis et l'autonomie', *Le Monde diplomatique* (French edition), Mars 2015, 26; Warren Breckmann, *Adventures of the Symbolic,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 147-166.

[387] Gottraux, 221-227.

[388] Marcus, Hussey, and Kaufmann stress this relation. Focusing on SouB, Gottraux notes that a co-operation existed while also emphasizing that many in SouB remained distinctly unmoved by Debord's positions.

[389] Debord letter to Frankin 8 Aug 1958. In this letter, Debord very critically describes a meeting of the non-aligned Parisian left in which he was attacked as an *agent provocateur* by SouB. He in turn accused them of being 'workerists', indeed of believing in the divine potency of the proletariat.

tendency to mobilize tropes so closely associated with the PCF as the proletariat was in part due to obvious historical reasons. The worker was put at a premium in postwar Europe as the continent needed to be rebuilt after a devastating war. And not only were industries booming; the labour unions of early postwar Western Europe could as a consequence exert considerable political pressure. They wielded power in a way unheard of during the interwar era. Though articulated as part of a philosophy of engagement by some, this also led to a glorification of the working class by middle class radicals. As a trope often wielded by the anti-American side, the proletariat experienced a wild upswing among literary intellectuals during the first decades after World War II. This tendency, spreading across western Europe, has in hindsight been seen as an imaginary over-investment of the working class's political power.[390]

When criticizing the host of malevolent trends in postwar France, chief among them a homogenizing quantification of life associated with the US, SI took a different tack. It mobilized art. If Debord had told the art scene to relate aesthetic experimentation to the socio-economic developments, Jorn argued that the political debate could only escape the logic of such developments through the avant-garde.

As the only one in IS 1, Jorn took a position on the debate on postwar modernization in Paris. He situated the cultural revolutionary practice of the avant-garde with respect to it. Like others in Paris, he observed that the kind of modernizing craze in Europe threatened to foreclose any future political ruptures by further solidifying the alienating

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[390] Judt, 199.

ideological structures. But in a slightly less common way, he thought it was up to the avant-garde to keep the belief in non-alienating spaces open.

Jorn argued that the principle effect of postwar modernization was the spread of automation. The postwar technological architecture had, he believed, automated modern society. "*L'automation n'est pas une action dans un domaine, qui provoquerait une anti-action*," he argued. "*C'est la neutralisation d'un domaine, qui en viendrait à neutraliser aussi les champs extérieurs*." "*Si des actions contradictoires n'étaient pas entreprises en même temps*," automation, as the social practice favored by technology, would alienate humans from their desires, wishes, imaginations (IS 1, 24).[391]

Automation's main proponents were technicians and scientists. Like those making the case for functionalism, these proponents cast it as emancipatory. And akin to his critique of functionalism, Jorn argued that this could only be the case if such proponents used the instrumental logic of automation to transcend this very logic. "*Si, comme le prétendent les savants et les techniciens, l'automation est nouveau moyen de libération de l'homme, elle doit impliquer un dépassement des précédents activités humains*," he argued. For "*Ceci oblige l'imagination active de l'homme à dépasser la réalisation de l'automation même*." But, he wondered, "*où trouvons-nous de telles perspective, qui rendraient l'homme maître et non esclave de l'automation*?" (IS 1, 23)

Jorn traced the rise of automation in both eastern and western Europe. Following Ellul, he suggested that it transcended capitalism. Automation, he thought, not only infil-

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[391] As we will see in chapter 3, Constant had a different take on where such automation was leading and the role of artists for it.

trated multiple spheres of postwar European society but had become the telos of all other social developments, be they a planned production in the East or burgeoning culture, sports and leisure industries in the West: "*L'automation est maintenant au centre du problème de la domination socialiste de la production et de la prééminence des loisirs sur le temps de travails. La question de l'automation est la plus chargée de possibilités positive et négatives*" (IS1, 22).

Jorn thought that this was an especially pressing political question because automation also took place in Eastern Europe. The state socialist countries had, in other words, failed to offer a socialist vision transcending automation. "*Le but du socialisme*," he noted, "*est l'abondance: le plus grand nombre de biens au plus grand nombre de gens*". But as it was currently interpreted, this "*implique statistiquement la réduction jusqu'à l'improbable des apparitions de l'imprévu. La croissance de nombre des biens réduit la valeur de chacun*" (IS 1, 22).

In fact, if anything, state socialism had proven to be an advocate of automation. "*Cette dévalorisation de tous les biens humains à un stade de neutralité pour ainsi dire parfaite sera le résultat inévitable d'un développement purement scientifique du socialisme*," he argued with reference to the Cominform theories that had guided east European policies. "*Il est regrettable*," he continued, that *"bien des intellectuels ne dépassent pas cette idée de la reproduction mécanique, et préparent l'adaptation de l'homme à ce futur incolore et symétrisé*" (IS 1, 22).

This had decreased the attraction of the anti-capitalist cause in the West. As a consequence of the belief in such automation, emanating from Moscow to its satellite

states in eastern Europe and mouthpieces in the West European communist parties, "*les artistes, spécialisés dans la recherche unique, se tournent avec hostilité, en membre croissant, contre le socialisme*." This had happened with good reason: "*A l'inverse les politiques du socialisme entretiennent la méfiance contre toutes les manifestations de puissance ou d'originalité artistiques*" (IS 1, 22).

But it was not only the dominant strands of socialism which had failed to live up to its promise. It was also the groups claiming avant-garde status: "*Il y a, dans toutes les tendances 'd'avant-garde', un défaitisme à propos de l'automation ou, au mieux, une sous-estimation des éléments positifs de l'avenir dont les débuts de l'automation révèlent brusquement la proximité*" (IS 1, 22). Marrying his previous IMIB-stance to Debord's on the need to update Surrealism, he turned the relation to automation into the defining question for the avant-garde: "*l'attitude défaitiste ici, la démission devant les possibilités de l'époque, est symptomatique des anciennes avant-garde*" (IS 1, 23).

Such a failure on the part of socialism and the present avant-garde suggested the need for a new way to cast the role of experimental cultural practices. "*La valeur de l'automation dépend donc de project qui la dépassent, et qui dégagent de nouvelles énergies humaines sur un plan supérieur*," he contended (IS 1, 23). "*L'activité expérimentale dans la culture, aujourd'hui, est ce champ incomparable*" (IS 1, 23).[392]

Jorn argued that only the experimental practice of the avant-garde could make

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[392] Jorn, in other words, identified the reason for the bipolar ideological stasis, indeed conservatism, differently than Debord had in his 'Report'. It had become the case, the Dane suggested, because automatism ruled in both Cold War camps. As we will see, this perception echoed into the assumptions of 'Problèmes' and 'Contribution' and now implied that the avant-garde international had to stretch across the Iron Curtain.

sure that the standardized way in which a postwar society satisfied human needs did not stifle the continuous creation of desire for other, post-automated societies. "*L'idée de standardisation*," he wrote, "*est un effort pour réduire et simplifier le plus grand nombre des besoins humains à la plus grande égalité*." And the postwar prosperity, to which it had given birth, "*peut aboutir à un abrutissement total de la vie de l'homme, ou à la possibilité de découvrir en permanence des nouveaux désirs*" (IS 1, 24-5). As Jorn saw it, *"Il dépend de nous que la standardisation ouvre ou non des domaines d'expérience plus intéressants que ceux qu'elle ferme*" (IS 1, 24-5).

In response to the increasingly fixed political horizon, Jorn, like Debord, thought that the avant-garde had to advocate not against modernity, like Surrealism or certain reactionary politicians in France, but for an alternative modernity drawing on the newly acquired prosperity: "*des éléments d'une vie nouvelle doivent déjà être en formation parmi nous – dans le champs de la culture*" (IS 1, 23). The avant-garde had to ensure that a desire for a post-automatic society subsisted, inspiring new practices. "*Ces nouveaux désires ne se manifesteront pas tout seuls, dans le cadre oppressif de notre monde*," Jorn noted. "*Il faut* une action commune *pour les détecter, les manifester, les réaliser*" (IS 1, 24-5, my emphasis).

The Modernity of the Participatory Avant-Garde

It was with an aesthetic game that SI envisioned performing an answer to the question of how to use the new prosperity. The constructed situation would not only break with the instrumental imperative behind postwar modernization but reimagine the

ways in which society harnessed production. And, what is more, as a bonding experience, such construction would produce the participatory international. In 1958 the originality of this project was recognized in Paris. SI's intervention was deemed 'modern'.

As the recent technological advances had further reduced the space for playing, the free rein of the game constituted, according to SI in 1958, the emancipatory aesthetic project that postwar Surrealism had failed enact. The progression of "*technique*," which was articulated through a functionalism that at this point also included the field of industrial design,[393] "*cherche à éliminer entièrement le jeu*" ('Problèmes', IS 1, 12).[394] To SI this meant that "*la seule issue progressive est de libérer ailleurs, et plus largement, la tendance au jeu*" (IS 1, 12).

Such ludic liberation had large political aims in sight: "[*le*] *but* [*de jeu*] *doit être au moins de provoquer des condition favorables pour vivre directement. Dans ce sens* [*le jeu*] *est encore lutte et représentation: lutte pour une vie à la mesure du désir, représentation concrète d'une telle vie*" (10). SI's games had a twofold aim. They connoted a struggle for a new measurement of life. This would be a measurement in which a desire for what is different and thus at present absent takes center stage rather than instrumental utility. But as games conducted by pleasure seekers ("*viveurs*"), they

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[393] "*Les partisans de l'industrial design*", it noted, "*se plaignent du pourrissement de leur action par la tendance de l'homme au jeu*" (12).

[394] The broad definition of the spectacle, in which the spectator does not participate but merely identify with the real actors on stage, on screen, or on the political scene, is meanwhile only explicitly evoked in a quote from Debord's 'Report' at the top of 'Problèmes', not in the body of its text nor in that of 'Contribution'.

were also the very performance ("*représentation*") of precisely such a life.[395]

Because of its introduction of revolutionary ambitions into aesthetics in Paris, SI was soon after IS 1's publication courted by Henri Lefebvre. In France he was the foremost (humanist) Marxist philosopher and the theoretic discoverer of everyday life.[396] He made various overtures to the organization in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[397] When Lefebvre first contacted SI, he did so based on his 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire' (1957), which had just been published in *Nouvelle Revue Française.*[398]

In 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', Lefebvre claimed that recent developments forced independent thinkers, theorists, and artists to take on a more prominent social role than before. They legitimately demanded a larger social role by speaking to the concerns of society as a whole. Such new demands on artists and intellectuals were prompted by an "*idéal socialiste ou communiste*," which post-1956, "*n'échappe plus à la*

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[395] The latter is supported by the next sentence: "*Le jeu est ressenti comme fictif du fait de son existence marginale par rapport à l'accablante réalité du travail, mais le travail des situationnistes est précisément la préparation de possibilités ludiques à venir*" (10).

[396] It has been argued that everyday life had already been discovered as a theoretical region of study across the Rhine by the likes of Heidegger and Lukács, but that, once crossing into *la douce* France, *Alltäglichkeit* lost its negative valence. With regard to how Axelos' relate to Heidegger, but equally applicable to Lefebre's relation to him, Poster suggests that its expression is the typically French "lightness of tone far removed from the spirit of his Teutonic teacher" (Poster, 227).

[397] According to Wark, Lefebvre encountered Debord for the first time in 1957 (Wark, 94). He expressed his excitement about the SI, after reading the third issue of IS, to Debord (in a letter on 3rd January 1960). He reiterated this in *Introduction to Modernity* (1962), which consists of essays he wrote in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and in a post-script to his 'moments' essay in 1973 (in the second edition of *La Somme et le reste)*. He then contextualized the SI as emerging between his first *Critique* and text on revolutionary romanticism.

[398] Henri Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', *La Nouvelle Revue Française,* no. 59 (October 1957)

mise en question."[399] This did not, a still French communist party (PCF) member Lefebvre thought, obviate the need to do it on behalf of the working class. But, anticipating his exit from the PCF, he did not seem to place much hope in the working class, nor its discredited political institutions, doing so on its own.[400] For, as the alleged direction of history had been thrown into doubt, intellectuals and artists alone could answer the question: "*Comment le combler, ce vide éthique, esthétique, culturel qui se fait cruellement et profondément sentir?*"[401]

In this climate intellectuals and artists, Lefebvre argued, no longer only represented themselves.[402] Nor, as a consequence, were their concerns only confined to their social sphere. For, even if playing out on the "*plan des valeurs, de la culture, de l'art; en terms marxiste: des superstructures*,"[403] the critical reflections of the intellectuals and artists were, Lefebvre argued, what would allow for a reconfigured perception of the future. "*Un passé disparaît*," he thought, and with their help, *"un horizon nouveau monte devant nous*."[404]

With regard to such reoccupation of ideological positions, in which the working

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[399] Henri Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', *La Nouvelle Revue Française,* p. 646.

[400] This, it should be noted, did not mean that Lefebvre had become conservative. He did not abandon the cause of the working class, as it were; he just did not put much faith in their historical importance any longer (see, for example, 645).

[401] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', 646.

[402] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', 644.

[403] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', 645.

[404] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', 645.

class institutions had lost their claim to radicality to the intelligentsia/avant-garde, Lefebvre evoked an integral element to romanticism. Expressing what now seems to be forgotten possibilities, its various iterations remind the contemporary reader or viewer or listener that past moments were not conceived as satisfactory in their present day. Romanticism had, he argued, juxtaposed a reified world with the hopes for its transcendence. He portrayed romanticism as a reservoir of mis- and displaced hopes, often but not always bolstering the status quo.

Lefebvre did not construe romanticism as historically confined. It did not end in a past epoch. Instead he interpreted it diachronically, having a point of origin but a long life span, transcending various eras. And in contrast to classicism, in its various guises, romanticism insists on a tension, be it between the hero(ine) and his/her context in a novel, or more generally between hopes for something different and reality as is, art and life: "*Dans le classicisme, l'accord est essentiel; le désaccord—le conflictuel—se subordonne à un accord initialement accepté*". "*Tout romantisme se fonde*," on the contrary, "*sur le désaccord*."[405]

The tension at the heart of romantic art formed the basis for Lefebvre's perception of the need for a revolutionary romanticism. By insisting on the disjunction between hope and reality, romanticism held out a promise that, even if yet to be fulfilled, could, once articulated, destabilize the status quo. Most often, Lefebvre conceded, romantic art had not done so. It instead favored a flight into a parallel reality or to the future, or even

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[405] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', 667.

by escaping into the imagination or the past.[406] But his new kind, revolutionary romanticism, would not escape this predicament: "*La distance ... par rapport à l'actuel, au présent, au réel, à l'existant, se prend*," he rather argued "*sur le signe du possible*."[407] Indeed, "*La dialectique du possible apporte la clef pour ouvrir les portes fermées du présent*."[408] And due to his/her being aware of this, the revolutionary romantic was, Lefebvre claimed, plagued by the possible: "*L'homme en proie au possible, telle serait la première affirmation de l'attitude romantique révolutionnaire*."[409]

Nothing less than the hopes invested in the modern project as such were at stake for Lefebvre. "*Le nouveau romantisme (révolutionnaire)*," he wrote, "*... se propose de donner une signification nouvelle à ce mot si vague et dont on a tant abusé: le* moderne."[410] This was, he thought, because nowhere was the inherent instability of modernity more clearly displayed than in contemporary art; modern art's very existence had after all been problematized.[411]

Though Lefebvre was—and indeed in this article, set himself up to be—a crucial arbiter of what was modern in Paris, Debord rejected the suggestion that SI members

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[406] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionaire'. 655-7.

[407] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', 667.

[408] Lefebvre, ibid, 669. It could be worth reasserting here that Lefebvre never cited, for example, Ernst Bloch. Nor indeed did SI. The knowledge in France of the Frankfurt School seems to have been limited in the 1950s.

[409] Lefebvre, ibid, 664.

[410] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionnaire', 671.

[411] Lefebvre, 'Vers un romantisme révolutionaire'. 657-9.

were revolutionary romantics.[412] "*La révolution communiste n'est pas faite et nous sommes encore dans le cadre de la décomposition des vieilles superstructures culturelles*,", Debord dismissively paraphrased Lefebvre's argument (IS 1, 21). "*Henri Lefebvre voit justement que cette contradiction est au centre d'un désaccord spécifiquement moderne entre l'individu progressiste et le monde, et appelle romantique-révolutionnaire la tendance culturelle qui se fonde sur ce désaccord*" (IS 1, 21). He did not buy Lefebvre's take on the 'modern' as a noun, but he did unwittingly pay tribute to it as adjective.

Conforming to the contestatory logic of aesthetic modernism, Debord brusquely claimed to find Lefebvre's suggestions insufficient, defeatist even. "*Nous serons des 'romantiques-révolutionnaires', au sens de Lefebvre*," Debord self-assuredly contended, "*exactement dans la mesure de notre échec*" (IS 1, 22). In Casanova's terms, the ludic 'situation' was a "still more present present, as yet unknown."[413] For only if SI succeeded in overhauling the criteria for art and cultural creation more broadly would they become situationists: "*si nous ne parvenons pas à une action situationniste, nous ne permettrons pas une publicité sur cette étiquette factice*" (IS 2, 11). The ability to reorganize the taxonomy of what constituted art was the premise of the situation, and indeed raison d'être of the international. If they failed they would merely be one in a row of revolutionary romantics.

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[412] All SI members did not reject Lefebvre's position as curtly: some, such as Raoul Vaneigem, would eventually adopt it. But as Vaneigem did not join SI until 1961, the way he did so falls outside of the framework for my dissertation.

[413] Casanova, 91.

It has been suggested that Debord's rejection of Lefebvre's approaches was his founding gesture as a situationist.[414] It could equally be said that it was the instituting moment of SI as an avant-garde movement. For the dialectic of Lefebvre's acknowledgement of SI's originality and of Debord's refusal of the metric for such recognition conformed to the logic of modernism.

What Lefebvre overlooked, according to Debord, was that SI's own claim to an original politico-aesthetic position on the Paris scene was the participatory artwork; SI's practice was organizational. Debord opposed the content of revolutionary romantic art—which was the belief that the future could be different, even if that currently seemed impossible—to the form art with a similar purpose would take. Lefebvre had prematurely overlooked the shape of artistic practice "*en se satisfaisant* d'un contenu: *la conscience du possible-impossible (encore trop lointain), qui peut être exprimée sous* n'importe quelle forme *prise dans le cadre de la décomposition*" (IS 1, 21). Doing so Debord thought that "*Lefebvre renonce par avance à toute expérience de modification culturelle profond*" (IS 1, 21). Here Debord arguably evoked *expérience* in the sense of experience and of experiment.[415] For he went on to suggest that such modifying practice

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[414] Micheal Trebtisch, preface to Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday lIfe: Volume 1,* (London, Verso, 2008), xxii.

[415] This was not new. Marrying the two had, as we saw, underpinned his response to Jorn's call for a new organization connecting aesthetic means with political ends through the 'situation' at the Alba meeting in 1956. For he goes on to suggest, in line with Jorn, that the members of the international had to depart from contemporary avant-garde biases. They could not reproduce the latter's lack of interest in technology. As we have seen, they thought that this aloof attitude with regard to the changes outside of what was conventional perceived of as culture had merely worked to prop up a postwar status quo whose ideology was in reality decomposing. If Debord had refrained from excerpting some passages of Jorn's 'Image et forme' in LI's journal in 1954, he now showed that they had made an impact. He married Jorn's experimentation with the instruments through which functionalism functions, as it were, to his focus on the aesthetic experience.

would not only offer new definitions of art and culture, which Lefebvre could then add to the repository of revolutionary romanticism; it would perform them as a new *form* of life.

For the way in such modification produced a new form of life, SI drew on Huizinga, who was then still unknown to Lefebvre. If the reference to Huizinga had been implicit in Debord's 'Report', it was explicit in IS 1. And to carve out a space for ludic participation had been one of Huizinga's own ambitions. "From the point of view of a world wholly determined by the operation of blind forces, play would be altogether superfluous," he wrote. As such play is free, voluntary activity.[416] It therefore only works in contexts where it "breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos."[417] In this a game, Huizinga thought, has to succeed in making all players suspend disbelief. That is, he said in a passage of etymological gymnastics, the Spiel must put a spell on them; the ludic, as is suggested in il-ludere, must immerse them in the illusion.[418] It has to suspend the belief in the normal ordering of society; that is, in SI's case, it has to discontinue the rule of technique.

According to Huizinga, contemporary culture primarily played either in contests or as representations. The former, sports, though steadily gaining ground during the past two centuries, did not express a true ludic impulse. It rather, SI claimed by paraphrasing Huizinga, evoked the historical contemporaneity of the inception of sports and industrialization: games became competitive (that is sports, as '*le jeu*' means both) at the

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[416] Huizinga, 7-8.

[417] Huizinga, 3.

[418] Huizinga, 3.

same time as, and in the same place whose, society first industrialized.[419] In an industrializing Britain, these novelties alleviated the monotony of working class life. But "*Le sentiment de l'importance du gain dans le jeu*," born in this time period but still present, "*est le mauvais produit d'une mauvaise société*" (IS 1, 10). Sports express the false ludicity of a society wedded to rooting out a truly ludic impulse at the altar of production. It should therefore not be confused with the ludic situation. In games it was the playfulness induced by ludic ambiances that SI sought. "*L'élément de compétition*," on the other hand, "*devra disparaître au profit d'une conception plus réellement collective du jeu: la création commune des ambiance ludiques choisies*" (IS 1, 10).[420]

When showing how desires that prefigured changes in production would be manifested through ludic situations, SI leaned on Huizinga's other kind of playfulness: 'representation'. By representation the Dutchman did not mean that a game imitated something else. It rather made something present. "Here representation," he wrote, "is … *re-presentation*". Through the example of rituals, he argued that the ludic act "causes the worshippers to participate in the sacred happening itself. As the Greeks would say 'it

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[419] Huizinga, 196-7.

[420] But nor should sports merely be encompassed under the label of the 'spectacle'. For while it is true that professional sports formed a part of a growing entertainment industry, in which the spectator identified with the players in an alienating way, this was a social domain that LI and Debord had not previously addressed. It was also primarily described in IS as a reflection of the changes in production, not as a co-optation of the challenges to them. The sports industry was presented as a false competitor to the ludic situation, and not as functionalism, the technical architecture based on which such a situation had to be constructed. In spite of the fact that the instrumental imperative had become so prominent that it had undermined one of the two ways of playing, SI was not quite as despondent about the future as the Dutchman. They did not think that such an imperative existed only in a zero-game-relationship with ludicity. For it had contributed in bringing about the unheard of prosperity that postwar western Europe enjoyed. And, SI thought, "*des tendances progressives du jeu apparaissent, en relation avec le développement même des forces productives*". (9) Postwar prosperity also offered new possibilities. Though it had been produced by the instrumentalizing tendency that Huizinga had identified, such prosperity inevitably posed questions regarding its purpose.

is methectic rather than mimetic'".[421] The audience not only participates but creates the action. In a similar fashion the soil in which the new situationist desires could come about was if not provided then to some extent re-discovered, and thus rendered present, by SI practice.

The experimental practices that constituted a situation would exhibit the new desires and wishes. "*La direction réellement expérimentale de l'activité situationniste est l'établissement, à partir de désirs plus ou moins nettement reconnus, d'un champ d'activité temporaire favorable à ces désirs*," 'Problèmes' argued. "*Son établissement des désirs primitifs, et l'apparition confuse de nouveaux désirs dont la racine matérielle sera précisément la nouvelle réalité constituée par les constructions situationnistes*" (IS 1, 11). Devoid of a space for subjective latency, insofar as SI shunned the unconscious, situationist construction invoked a constructivist perception of desires. The new desires would come about in the ludic experimentation with the means that modern society had at its disposal.[422]

Huizinga enabled SI to conceptualize the construction of such shared experiences as formative. According to Huizinga, "the ritual act has all the formal and essential

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[421] Huizinga, 15.

[422] SI believed that the avant-garde had to reject the increasing predictability of modern society, but not society tout court. For in contrast to the Surrealist recourse to the subconscious, ludicity allowed SI to actively engage, rather than shield themselves from, the instrumentality of the world. It has been suggested that SI's reluctance to elaborate on any hidden psychic world or indeed complex inner life situates the international within a French humanist tradition construing desire as socially constructed. This was, according to Anselm Jappe, SI's signal contribution to the French postwar discussion on (imaginary) desire. He suggested that "*la grand originalité–et d'une certaine façon la limite–de leurs idées dans ce domaine est la conception du désir comme une force non pas inconsciente et liée aux besoins, mais consciente et choisie par l'individu*" (Anselm Jappe, *Debord,* (Arles, Editions Denoël, 2001), p. 191).

characteristics of play … in so far as it transports the participants to another world."[423] This was not its intention. Indeed, a "performance is its own end."[424] But its 'spell', as it were, remained after its conclusion. The performance of such an alternative order leaves a mark on the players. "A play-community generally tends to become permanent after the game is over," Huizinga wrote. "The feeling of being 'apart together' in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game."[425] He even noted that playing "promotes the formation of social groupings."[426] Though far from a ritual, the ludic situation was the performance of a future beyond instrumentalism, a world ruled by transfigured parameters.[427] Following Huizinga, SI in 1958 reinforced Debord's 1957 claim that such playing would be constitutive of the organization.

Though SI did evoke the ambience, if not the spell, of their game, for the international participation was crucial. The participatory form, Debord said in an elusive passage, would be communicated through the experimental modification of culture; it would be, he seemed to suggest, the communication that was the experimental

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[423] Huizinga, 18.

[424] Huizinga, 203.

[425] Huizinga, 12.

[426] Huizinga, 13.

[427] Jorn would later question the conflation of the game and the ritual along the lines of what Agamben claims, in *Infancy and History* (London, Verso, 2007), 67-86, that the game is a diachronic intrusion in a synchronic universe, whereas the ritual synchronizes the diachronic. But neither Jorn, nor anyone else in SI, had yet worked out their positions on such matters in 1957-8.

modification of culture: "*Il faut mener à leur destruction extrême toutes les formes de pseudo-communication, pour parvenir un jour à une communication réelle directe (dans notre hypothèse d'emploi de moyens culturels supérieurs: la situation construite)*" (IS 1, 21). Guided by the ideal to construct situations, such practice, which SI called détournement, has been seen as advocating for a kind of cultural communism.[428] As a modifying re-appropriation of cultural forms, it momentarily upends that which ossified these forms in the first place: the boundaries imposed by private property.[429] As I am trying to understand SI's project in light of its organization, it is the participatory nature of this practice that is of especial interest to me.[430]

If the ludic form of the cultural revolution would first take shape in what Huizinga had called the 'play community', the praxis of this play community, Debord now suggested, was to open a space for dialogue. Doing so within the prefigurative site of culture would perform the future of society, as it were. "*C'est sa possibilité*," he argued with reference to "*l'apparition concrète de l'ordre mouvant de l'avenir*"—which he claimed was "*déjà présente parmi nous*"—"*qui dévalorise toutes les expressions dans les formes culturelles connues*" (IS 1, 21). The '*parmi nous*' could mean among us in the present day, or among us in the international, or both: the situation, as we have seen, was the performance of the international and of a future way of life that already existed

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[428] McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of my Century,* 49.

[429] Wark, 39.

[430] I will return to the question of SI and communism in chapters five and six.

latently due to the postwar prosperity.[431] By opening a dialogic space, SI's artwork would dodge the instrumentalism of the historical moment by constructing a platform from which to question such developments.[432]

This suggests that the 'situation' was no longer merely a project and an organizational tool for the international; in theory the situation had become a project as organizational tool. Besides expressing the international's project, it constituted the international as project. "*La vraie question oppose un moyen artistique isolé à l'emploi unitaire de plusieurs de ces moyens*," SI argued (IS 2, 7). "*Un détail ou un autre de notre entreprise n'a aucune sorte d'intérêt si tous les éléments qui passent à travers l'I.S. ne parviennent pas à se constituer en groupement situationist agissant, sur* le terrain qui doit être le nôtre" (IS 2, 11). The latter were the parameters which kept everyday life and ludic art practice apart. The performance of the organization would change such parameters. Only this would make them an international play community; only this, Debord implied in his response to Lefebvre, would renew the 'modern project'.

Though announced in Paris, a constructed situation could, they believed, renew the desire for a post-automatic state across the continent. And others agreed: SI expanded substantially in its first years. That the situation was defined in Paris was not unimportant for the international's expansion. Recognized as an original politico-

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[431] The moving order, Debord later noted, was the morphing form of the international; SI wanted to be defined by its praxes, not to turn into a doctrine or institution (as conventionally defined) (Debord to Jorn, 23 Aug 1962).

[432] Though the idea that the dialogue, or the organized encounter, constituted the form of the artwork was new, Debord had already fronted the dialogue in art. Cabañas argues that the ciné-clubs were central to the Lettrist cinema out of which Debord grew. Isou even quoted Debord saying that "The Cinema is dead. There can be no more film. Let us proceed, if you like, to the debates" (From Isou's 'Esthétique du cinéma, quoted in Cabañas, *Off Screen Cinema,* 109).

aesthetic project in the French capital, SI could make a claim on being 'modern' that resonated across Europe. But another reason why the association initially attracted members was, as we shall see, the way in which the 'situation' responded to theses members' predicament at the continent's site of aesthetic consecration.

The Modern Situation and the Alienating Experience of Paris

In the 1950s Paris was the hub of European intellectual and aesthetic exchange. As the city projected its interest onto the continent, foreign artists migrated there in large numbers. In this section I will argue that the 'situation' conceptualized their circumstances. While unique in bringing socio-economic developments into the purview of the avant-garde and aesthetic experimentation into that of the post-Budapest new left in Paris, SI's project to construct a situation also suggested something more basic. The situation itself, as a ludic practice breaking with the dominant instrumental paradigm, answered to the predicament of its implicit authors. It responded to the sense of being alienated in the metropole. And as the specific source of such alienation was at this historical moment shared across Europe but most keenly felt in Paris, I will contend that this contributed to making the situation attractive to artists around the continent.

For an emerging international stretching across the continent, it easily comes across as a curious decision to focus its energies on Surrealism. According to Eric Hobsbawm, Surrealism had merely been the dominant interwar avant-garde tendency in a trans-Atlantic Latin world, not in Central, Eastern or Northern Europe. It was centered on Paris. From there its aesthetic influences spread primarily southwards, across and around

the Mediterranean, and south-westwards, towards the Caribbean and South America.[433] Besides this 'Latin' network, there was, Hobsbawm also claims, one revolving around a Berlin-Moscow axis.[434] It was here that the original Bauhaus school belonged. It drew its faculty from all over central and eastern Europe, and eventually furnished the dominant formal language across artistic media in the capitals of Germanic Europe, from Vienna to Stockholm, and Amsterdam to Helsinki. The Weimar Republic, and especially Berlin, has been seen as the nexus of what has been called a 'Constructivist International'.[435]

SI emerged at a time when the links connecting the central-eastern axis had, due to the division of Europe into two hostile camps, been eclipsed. We should in this respect recall that Debord had included a gesture in this direction in his 'Report'. Moscow, he had there argued, now imposed its aesthetic trends all the way to (East) Berlin through political channels; the aesthetic experimentation opposing such super-imposition had, it is implied, been subdued, and the oppositional networks split up. If avant-garde at all, such artist associations were no longer counter-institutions. East European society did not

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[433] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes,* (London, Abacus, 1995) 180-1. It spread to a lesser degree in other directions too: Surrealism was, for example, crucial for the avant-garde of both Czechoslovakia to the East and Belgium to the North.

[434] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes,* 182.

[435] "Germany was Russia's major window to the west", Hobsbawm goes on. "Berlin was both the main centre of the anti-Soviet emigration and the first stop on the western excursions of the new Soviet intellectuals and artistic revolutionaries, some of whom published a multilingual review there." This reflected the participants in the Bauhaus. "The Bauhaus was throughout its existence a collective of Germans, Austro-Hungarians, Russians, Swiss and Dutch. It is characteristic that what amounted to a 'Constructivist international', as John Willett described it, was set up by a collection of Hungarians, Dutch, Belgians, Romanians, Soviet Russians and Germans at a meeting in Weimar with prospective headquarters in Berlin." (Eric Hobsbawm, 2008. 'Diary'. *London Review of Books* vol. 30 no. 2 pp. 34-35.)

allow for them. With respect to the nodes of the former East-Central network that were still in the western bloc, it should also be noted that this was a time during which the German-speaking cultural scene especially found itself on the back foot. A generation prior it had been one of the continent's laboratories of aesthetic experimentation and banks of intellectual exchange.[436] Now it merely occupied a peripheral position in such productions.[437] It had not only lost its intellectual hinterlands to the East but also to the North.[438] For obvious historical reasons the German-speaking intellectual exchange was concerned with domestic issues relating to the war.[439]

As the continental engine room for aesthetics, *Mitteleuropa* had been replaced by a trans-Mediterranean France. This had contributed to making French the postwar language of the avant-garde.[440] And SI was no exception: though multilingual, French was its vehicular means of communication. The cultural revolution was expressed in a French vocabulary.

This did not mean that the avant-garde expressions in other idioms had

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[436] Centered on Berlin, "post-revolutionary Central and Eastern Europe" was, according to Hobsbawm, "the crucible for what after 1917 was the major generator of intellectual and artistic innovation". But, he argues that "this was the last time Germany was at the centre of modernity and Western thought."

[437] Judt, 203-5. I will return to what this meant in practice in the next chapter.

[438] This happened in the East for obvious political reasons. In the North such a shift had its roots in political history but was most noteworthy in culture: Scandinavia, once heavily inspired by German culture and the educated segments of the population well-versed in the German language, turned its interests in an Anglo-Saxon direction after 'Stunde Null'. (For the case in the largest Nordic country, see Johan Östling, *Nazismens sensmoral* (Stockholm, Atlantis, 2008))

[439] Renewing German intellectual life in literature was a crucial concern of the Gruppe 47 and scrutinizing the long lines of development in German cultural history that led to Nazism was important for painters, such as Baselitz, Kiefer, Richter, Polke, et al. The film makers uniting around the Oberhausen Manifesto in 1962 took a different tack. For them "Papas Kino war tot".

[440] On French as still the avant-garde language, see Wark, 116.

disappeared. Persisting, they increasingly intermingled with those modes of expression that had originated in France. As we have seen, for Jorn, in spite of living in Paris, Surrealism had been merely one of many avant-garde currents. And as an interwar precursor, it was not necessarily more important than the Bauhaus, which he had originally wanted to join in the 1930s and to whose model he would look again for inspiration to his next project in the 1960s. Nor, as we will see, was it for the Dutch branch, who eventually became prominent within SI. Amsterdam-based Constant even questioned Surrealism's centrality. He did not believe that it had earned its privileged position.[441] But ever since they had been silenced in their central European heartlands during the 1930s and 1940s, the non-Parisian avant-garde traditions had occupied a more marginal position in artistic production.[442]

Due to the aesthetic hierarchies of postwar Europe, Paris avant-garde idioms were not only the most prominent; the (counter-)institutional legacy of the Paris avant-garde loomed the largest. As we have seen, SI targeted Surrealism. But when so doing, it took aim on a metropolitan Surrealism, which, because of Surrealism's global spread, was by this point only one of its many incarnations. There was, for instance, a new group of Surrealists in Belgium that did not conform to SI's portrayal of postwar Surrealism as an effete aestheticism. It was very politicized.[443]

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[441] This can be gleaned from Debord's response to Constant, 8 Aug 1958, where the Frenchman defends "la place privilégiée de [Surrealism]".

[442] As Ohrt emphasizes throughout his work, this was very much the case in the Federal Republic. German Dada was all but forgotten.

[443] Ohrt, 82. Before the foundation of SI, Debord had collaborated with one of them: Marcel Mariën. As we saw in chapter 1, LI had published articles in *Les Lèvres nues,* the journal Mariën published in Antwerp.

The criticism of the postwar avant-garde had not decentralized Paris as a hub projecting its aesthetic trends and intellectual debates onto the continent. The geo-political shifts following upon the conclusion of World War II had rather ensured that the modernity of Paris aesthetic and intellectual trends had no real challenger in Europe. Its pre-occupations were at SI's inception still followed around Europe. There was "Only one city, one national capital," Tony Judt argues with reference to postwar Paris, "whose obsessions and divisions could both reflect and define the cultural condition of the continent as a whole."[444]

While postwar Paris intellectuals' critique of America responded to local needs, they had a far-reaching impact. For this debate in the French capital was closely followed elsewhere, even in the other imperial centers. In fact, questioning an American-inspired postwar modernization rendered Paris even more central for 1940s and 1950s intellectual networks. The flash points for armed conflict might have occurred elsewhere, but it was in Europe the two super powers invested most of their ideological clout.[445] Vindicating French intellectuals' tendency to employ abstract universals when discussing a local predicament, this confrontation found its most concentrated form in the Continent's capital; the ideological stakes of the early Cold War, it has been argued, were nowhere higher than in Paris.[446]

Such intellectual and aesthetic centrality of the French capital attracted people

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[444] Judt, 209.

[445] de Grazia, 345.

[446] On the propensity to speak in universal terms, Rioux 430-1; on the ideological stakes, Kuisel 24.

from afar. Paris was in the late 1950s home to countless numbers of dissidents from other cultural traditions. Since the interwar years, when almost all the central European states had fallen to more or less fascist dictatorships, the French capital had been the home by choice to exiled artists and intellectuals.[447] This had continued after the war. Another wave of 'white' emigrés were now added to the 'red' ones who had stayed and to the original 'whites' (who came after the Russian Revolution). In a way perhaps only comparable to the years around 1848, when Heine and Marx, the Young Italians and the Young Poles, congregated in the French capital, it was teeming with bohemian discontents from elsewhere.[448] Among those from elsewhere contributing to a critical discourse about modernization around this time in Paris, one should at least count Cioran and Goldmann, Koestler and Milosz, Castoriadis and Axelos, Ionesco and Becket, Goytisolo and Fejtö.

But, though the foreign intellectuals intervening in the debates in the French capital were mostly continental Europeans, they also came from further afield. We should not forget the contributions to the Paris cultural conversation by the likes of Césaire and Senghor, Fanon and Memmi from places still under French control nor by those from countries with traditionally francophile elites, such as Persian Shariati, Egyptian Taha Hussein, or the Latin American authors who would eventually make up

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[447] Judt, 209.

[448] Judt, 210. As an example of the city's attraction, writers as different as Günter Grass and Paul Celan, for instance, opted, to live in Paris in the 1950s.

the 1960s 'Boom' (of magical realism).[449] Among the dissidents present in the French capital there were also those who did not necessarily contribute to the local debates but for whom the experience of living in Paris was still formative. In this category one should include the famous North American community of authors and the large contingent of Scandinavian artists and authors.[450] For the latter two groups especially, Paris was also attractive because it was affordable. Though the French economy was growing at an unforeseen rate, the glory in *Les Trentes Glorieuse* had yet to become visible for the majority of the population.[451] What was perceptible for all in the Fourth Republic, however, was inflation. It was not only considered to be the republic's most pressing political question.[452] It also made Paris cheap for those with harder currencies than the franc.

Originally arriving in Paris on motorcycle in the thirties to attend Léger's L'Académie de l'art contemporain, Jorn's trajectory quite neatly aligned with the historical

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[449] For an account of the Asian and North African intellectuals present in Paris at this time, see Pankaj Mishra's *From the Ruins of Empire* (London, Picador, 2013). For how the francophile tendencies of the Latin American elites motivated many Latin authors to spend time in Paris, see Edwin Williams, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (London, Penguin Books, 2009) 280-310; 513-555.

[450] Despite the wide variety of discontents residing in Paris at this moment, a dominant part, Wark nonetheless suggests, was played by the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians (Wark, 8). For a personal account of the latter community, see Stig Claesson, *Efter oss syndafloden* (Stockholm, Bonniers, 2002). With respect to the North American community of authors in Montparnasse, Debord, in his 'Report', noted that they played no role in Paris' intellectual discussion. They constituted an island onto themselves. Interestingly, this was not the case with the Anglo-Saxons of SI: Rumney had been part of the same milieu as LI, and Trocchi provided the connections that enabled Beckett to be translated into English.

[451] While the economy of the Fourth Republic experienced the unprecedented annual growth rate of 4,5%, the Fifth Republic's rate was even higher. Until 1970, it grew by almost 6% yearly, a rate outpaced only by Japan (William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954,* (Raleigh, University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 204-5).

[452] Rioux points out that the French opinion polls of the late 1950s indisputably suggests the stability of prices to have been the major political issue of the day (Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958,* 197).

conjunctures making Paris a magnet for artists and intellectuals.[453] Upon leaving his native Denmark, he had initially gone to the site of the original Bauhaus school. But he came too late: the Nazi regime had already closed it. So Jorn, like many others finding themselves on the eastern side of the Rhine in the late thirties, ended up on the Left Bank of the Seine.[454]

Jorn's postwar choices indicate how Paris' status as the continuing home by choice to artists and intellectuals not only bypassed but was in crucial respects bolstered by the rupture of the war. Once World War II broke out, Jorn returned to Copenhagen, where he came to take an active part in the local resistance to the German occupation. He sheltered fugitives and helped with the clandestine printing of the communist paper *Land og Folk.* Together with other young Danish artists, he also produced the art journal *Helhesten*, which, by linking African art, jazz and Surrealism to Nordic folk art, refused the Nazi embrace of the Scandinavian cultural heritage.[455] As he did not make much headway on the Copenhagen art scene and his relationship with the Danish communists was turning sour, he chose to leave Denmark soon after the conclusion of hostilities. This

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[453] For a description of the Danish artists in Paris before and after World War II, see Marianne Barbusse, 'Danske kunstnere i Paris', *Frankrig–Danmark. Kunstforbindelser i det XX århundrede / La France–Le Danemark. Les relations artistiques au xxène sciècle* (ed. Matianne Barbusse, Benedicte Bojesen), catalogue to exhibition at Sophienholm 29 June - 22 September 1996, pp. 11-21.

[454] For Jorn's biography, see Troels Andersen, *Asger Jorn. En biografi* (Copenhagen, Borgen, 1997); Guy Atkins, *Jorn in Scandinavia 1930-1953* (London, Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, 1968); Guy Atkins, *Asger Jorn 1954-64: The Crucial Years,* (London, Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, 1977); Karen Kurczynski, *The Art and Politics of Asger Jorn: the avant-garde won't give up* (London, Ashgate, 2014).

[455] Kurczynski, 27-8. The ability to pursue such activities suggest that one should not compare too closely Jorn's fate with many others in Paris: the Nazi occupation of Denmark, while coercive and brutal, did not in severity compare to the Nazi occupations of eastern Europe, nor did it to that of, say, the Netherlands.

time around Germany was not an option. So in 1946 he was back in Paris, where he could subsist on his meagre income, in part made up of commissions from the articles he contributed to the Scandinavian press.[456]

In a certain way Paris created Jorn. It was in the French capital he set out to be, and indeed became, a European artist. He irreversibly remade himself there: in 1946 Asger Jørgensen became Asger Jorn.[457] And as 'Jorn', he, together with a few Benelux artists, such as Karel Appel, Christian Dotremont, and Constant, walked out of the Paris 'Conférence du Centre international de documentation sur l'art d'avant-garde' in 1948.[458] This marked the start of neo-expressionist Co(penhagen)Br(ussels)A(msterdam). After its dissolution, Constant moved back to Amsterdam, but Jorn stayed put in Paris. Due to his and his family's poor living conditions, he afflicted tuberculosis, which forced him to temporarily leave Paris together with Dotremont for a Danish sanatorium.[459] But he returned in the mid-50s, at which point he was able to acquire an atelier.[460]

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[456] On his lack of success in the Danish artworld after the war, see Ohrt, 110. With regard to Jorn's relationship with the communists, it should be acknowledged that the secondary literature divide on whether Jorn was formally excluded from the Danish communist party, or just socially ostracized in it. Troels Andersen, for instance, observes that there is no record indicating his exclusion from the party (Troels Andersen, *Asger Jorn. En biografi* (Copenhagen, Borgen, 1997), 97). However, Jorn claimed himself, in a letter to Constant, that "*Je ne suis pas membre du parti communiste depuis janvier 1948*" (Jorn quoted by Gervereau, 31). And *Land og Folk* would run a critical review of his Marxist treatise *Vaerdi og økonomi,* of which we will hear more in chapter six.

[457] Kurczynski, 74.

[458] Steven Harris, 'How Language Looks: On Asger Jorn and Noêl Arnaud's *La Langue verte*', *October* 141 Summer 2012, pp. 111-2, footnote 3.

[459] Kurczynski, 84.

[460] Ohrt, 144.

Acutely aware of the hierarchies that structured the art world, Jorn believed he needed a Paris interlocutor.[461] In the mid 1950s Jorn met Debord, who he sometimes, only partly ironically, referred to as his 'André Breton'.[462] It was on the fringes of the Paris scene that Debord's break-away fraction of the Lettrist had articulated the first ideas that would culminate in the 'situation'. And also these locales attracted artists from afar. The Lettrists had been founded by Isou, a Jewish Rumanian. LI included members from across La Francophonie, from Belgium as well as the Maghreb, and had even one member living in Quebec. And their milieu was captured by Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken in his *Love on the Left Bank.*[463]

If attracting dissidents from elsewhere and allowing them to lead a life that would have been harder not only in a totalitarian East Bloc but also in a still comparatively puritan Anglo-sphere,[464] Paris was not a tolerant haven.[465] As the capital of one of continen-

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[461] Ohrt, 169. He feared that his art, like that of other Cobra members, would end up a North European affair with limited impact.

[462] Ohrt, 169. He thought that Italian art, with which he had been closely associated during his IMIB time, was innovative in practice but under-theorized (Ohrt, 151).

[463] Ed van der Elsken, *Love on the Left Bank* (Manchester, Dewi Lewis Publishing, 1999). This work portrays young people in St Germain-de-Prés in the mid-1950s, and Debord allegedly features in one of the images: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/feb/10/van-der-elsken-left-bank

[464] As Sante writes: "Until not long ago … there existed the option … to thumb one's nose at the directives of fashion and progress and authority and carve out an eccentric path of one's own - this more so in Paris than anywhere else, because there willful eccentricity was respected if not necessarily understood" (Luc Sante, *The Other Paris* (New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2015), 18.

[465] This was especially the case for women, for whom the avant-garde allowed leading a kind of life otherwise impossible (for the case of the women in LI's milieu, see Wark, 7-17). This of course did not mean that life as a woman was necessarily easy in these circles. Jacqueline de Jong, a Dutch SI members from 1960 onwards, has described Debord, Jorn, and especially Pinot Gallizio as 'macho' in 'A Maximum of Openness: Jacqueline de Jong in conversation with Karen Kurczynski', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *Expect Anything, Fear Nothing* (Copenhagen, Nebula, 2011), 188-9.

tal Europe's dominant powers, its street names and monuments testify to historic and imperial glories. In Paris an architecture had been erected with the express purpose to remind, if put negatively, the foreigner that s/he is not French and therefore does not belong to the national narrative. In an arguably incomparably successful way, its planners, from Haussmann and onwards, have, according to Sadler, "tried to make the city into a mnemonic (memory aid), mapping into its chains of monuments or sites that would act as a sort of text, reminding the pedestrian of official history and knowledge."[466]

Living in the midst of French imperial glory, the aesthetic discontents, foreign or otherwise, formed an embodied, as it were, counterweight to the spatialization of French history in the physical geography of Paris. That they did not belong to French history—nor were indeed yet honored in its canon, which many foreign artists eventually were[467]––triggered some of the more important impulses behind aesthetic modernism. In fact it has been suggested that the social status of the immigrant artist cannot be detached from the content s/he produced.

In *Politics of Modernism* Raymond Williams links avant-garde art's experimentation directly to its authors' social alienation. Behind such aesthetic practices he discerns the marginal position of the artists and intellectuals. Speaking about the artists behind the twentieth century modernism and avant-garde, Williams writes, "the most important gen-

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[466] Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City,* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1999) 99.

[467] This holds true both for the literary and (fine) artistic canon. With regard to the latter, one may note that Paris still does not have a museum comparable to Tate Britain in London or the Whitney in New York, partly, this leads one to assume, because international modernism was somehow indigenously Parisian. (By the inverse token, but equally telling, one may also note that London did not have a museum of international modernism until Tate Modern opened in 2000.)

eral element of the innovations in form is the fact of immigration to the metropolis, and it cannot too often be emphasized how many of the major innovators were, in this precise sense, immigrants." This is a shrewd observation. For like the way in which the communist international with its promise of a universal home attracted a disproportionate amount of people from ethnic minorities, the avant-garde, irrespective if based in Zürich, Paris, or Berlin, was in large parts made up of foreigners.[468] "At the level of theme," he contends with regard to the makeup of the avant-garde, but which also holds true with regard to western Marxists, "[their predicament] underlies, in an obvious way, the elements of strangeness and distance, indeed of alienation, which so regularly form a part of … [its] repertory."[469]

Like earlier artists in Paris, the predicament of the SI members, who came from various countries and far-flung regions of the Hexagon to the French capital, fed into the content they produced. In 1957-8 SI's members were a group consisting of what was mostly relatively marginal artists and intellectuals. The fame (and notoriety) of Debord, Jorn and the others still lay in the future. As we will see in the next chapter, such recognition was faster approaching for some than for others. But as index of their current obscurity, we should recall that no IMIB or LI member was invited to participate at the festival of the avant-garde in Marseilles. Though having a glossy journal, the international

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[468] For the case among heterodox Marxists, see Martin Jay *Marxism and Totality* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1985).

[469] Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism* (London, Verso, 2007), 45.

assembled some among the many people with artistic hopes and intellectual aspirations who either lived or was occasionally in Paris.

If we follow Williams, we could suggest that the desire to construct situations expressed the status of the international's members in Paris. It originally grew out of the marginal position of LI's members. While many LI members had grown up in Paris, at least some must have felt distinctly foreign to the French authorities, which still had not acknowledged their recent complicity in the Nazi deportations of French citizens, some of whom were the LI members' parents.[470] Come 1958, the new international used LI's 'situation' to positioned itself against the allegedly obsolete formal language of the inter-war avant-garde. Espoused by outsiders and foreigners, it marked a refusal of the hegemonic aesthetic parameters by those such parameters (still) rejected. The members had united in an international because they "*ont ressenti le besoin objectif de cette construction [des situations] à travers un même état de manque de la culture, et à travers les mêmes expressions de la sensibilité expérimentale immédiatement précédente*" ('Problèmes', IS 1, 12).

Constructing a situation would, Debord had argued, not only counteract the aesthetic exclusion of experimental artists but also their social isolation. Their current fragmentation, he had claimed in his 'Report', were part and parcel of the kind of divide and rule logic underwriting the precarious postwar ideological architecture. This was a novel

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[470] Both Mension and Wolman had parents sent to camps; Wolman's dad never came back (see Wark, 16; 35) Bernstein's parents were active in the Resistance (see the information on Michel Bernstein on the website of Le Musée de la Résistance: http://museedelaresistanceenligne.org/media1772-Michel-Bernstein, accessed 5 March 2018). For the French state's delay in recognizing its part in such war crimes, see Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, University of Harvard Press, 1994).

take on a typical case. "Liberated or breaking from their national and provincial cultures, placed in quite new relations to those other native languages or native visual traditions, encountering meanwhile a novel and dynamic common environment from which many of the older forms were obviously distant, the artists and writers and thinkers … [of the avant-garde] found," Williams claims, "the only community available to them: a community of the medium, of their own practices."[471]

The desire to create an international constructing its own 'situation' resonated widely. If the fact that Jorn and Debord positioned it at the continent's site of aesthetic consecration facilitated its spread, it struck a chord because it responded to recent socio-economic developments shared across Europe. In the first postwar decade, all of Europe experienced an advancement of 'technique'. But it was especially felt in France where the State pursued incomparably aggressive modernizing policies.

Belonging at once to the continent's peripheries and its metropole, Jorn was the one who to a large extent spread SI's message among the foreigners in Paris and to artist groups across the continent. As a polyglot, he could do so. Using his language skills and drawing on his networks, he recruited the peripheral branches within SI that had not participated in IMIB. Among those whose SI membership one can attribute to Jorn, besides the ones previously in IMIB, are its substantial German and eventual Scandinavian

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[471] Williams, 45. Some of those in the avant-garde who were already at home in the metropole drew on ethnological collections and scholarship to create this sense of distance. For the case of Surrealism, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1988), especially the chapter 'On Ethnographic Surrealism'. The fact that the Parisian Surrealists needed to take the detour around Musée de l'homme arguably suggests why they were content with being on the receiving end of their project, sur-reality, rather than, like SI, creating it: they were neither culturally marginal nor legally foreign. (This does not imply that the Surrealists' early advocacy against French colonization was somehow spurious. But to relate such positions to Surrealism's use of ethnology is beyond the scope of this dissertation.)

branches, and some members of its Dutch branch, such as Jacqueline de Jong and, according to some, even Constant, who had only been loosely affiliated with IMIB.[472] Nor should one exclude that the swelling of the Italian branch or the increasing number of foreign artists in Paris associating with SI was unrelated to Jorn's propensity to attract co-operators.[473] It has been suggested that Jorn's greatest contribution to the SI was his ability to attract members.[474] It worried Debord[475] and was spoofed by Bernstein.[476] At its 1960 peak SI included branches from Scandinavia to North Africa, and loosely affiliated sympathizers from Tel Aviv to Montreal.

To these branches Jorn, through his co-operation with Debord, offered a collective aesthetic intervention aimed to destabilize the seemingly fixed aesthetic and political goals of contemporary society. For Jorn, who one of his interlocutors calls a 'nomad', the sense of being foreign was, his arguments for soliciting a way to unify Europe's free artist groups in 1956 suggested, as tied to the loss of control over the meaning of his artworks as to living in a foreign place.[477] According to his definition of architecture as a frozen

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[472] In *Asger Jorn 1954-64: The Crucial Years,* Guy Atkins suggests that Jorn recruited Constant (63).

[473] The most famous example of the latter was probably the German artist Hans Platschek.

[474] Atkins, *Asger Jorn 1954-64: The Crucial Years,,* 55.

[475] Debord to Constant, 16 Oct 1959.

[476] In her satirical roman à clef, *The Night,* Bernstein described a Danish artist in Paris called Ole. He was "none other than the founder of the Python movement, already famous in certain avant-garde circles … Python, as few people know, represents the initials of: Paris, Yokohama, Tunis, Hamburg, Oslo and Namur; Ole's groups having members in these six towns, and principally in the last three" (Michèle Bernstein, *The Night,* trans. Clodagh Kinsella (London, Book Works, 2013) 61).

[477] For Jorn as a nomad, see Laurent Gervereau, *Critique de l'image quotidienne. Asger Jorn* (Paris, Cercle d'art, 2001)

event and art as a subjectively produced, and indeed subject-producing, practice, the two senses of being foreign had the same source: the fixation of the present horizon. So he wished to unseat the critics and architects of policy who currently enjoyed the privileged position to define the significance of subjective practices, but who enclosed its living nature in an existing architecture.[478]

This would not of course have been running counter to Debord's intentions. The Frenchman's 'Report', we should recall, tied the social fragmentation of artists to the current popularity, yet political emasculation, of modernist art; as guardians of the status quo, critics, in his view, wanted feeble artists and art practices that did not disrupt the hegemonic ideology. Debord's project to construct a 'situation' provided a way for Jorn to shield himself from the assessment of art critics and curators, and to challenge a reified, indeed reifying, ideological architecture.

The first illustration of the need for the international came shortly after its formation. In 1957 the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam staged an exhibition on Cobra that did not include Jorn and Constant.[479] Jorn took offence. "*Asger*," Debrod wrote, "*pense réussir à tirer parti de l'exposition Cobra d'Amsterdam d'une façon décisive.*"[480] The

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[478] By calling a 'World Congress' for free artists in 1956, he wanted to form an association whose collective contestation of received ideas would undermine those defended by professional tastemakers. And the need for this was something, the timing of his actions suggest, he acutely felt in Paris. While he had long opposed a living art to a reified architecture, he had moved to the French capital in 1955, only a year prior to organizing the first meeting for the nine artist groups in Italy. As he contacted the Danish authorities this time telling them that he had emigrated, it appears as if he intended to stay; Jorn signed a 'départ des émigrés' in 1955 (Gevreau, 105-8). Shortly thereafter he made his attempt to expand and entrench his artist associations.

[479] To get a sense of SI's take on this, see 'Ce que sont les amis de 'Cobra' et ce qu'ils represent', (unsigned) IS 2, 4-6. The museum had exhibited Cobra already in 1949 (for this see Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire* (Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 1998) 12).

[480] Debord to Gallizio, 23 Nov 1957.

international wrote a public letter to the museum. "*L'intérêt de Cobra*," the letter reads, "*a été de créer un climat de recherche expérimentale, un perpétuel renouvellement, et non un formalisme de plus*."[481] The letter disputed the continuance of Cobra, claiming that it was a movement that lasted from 1947 to 1951. At that point the most advanced members continued experimenting, whereas the others went on working in the already set formal mold. This meant that the members of the former group, who had stayed true to this imperative to experiment, "*se trouvent naturellement aujourd'hui dans l'Internationale situationniste*" (IS 2, 6). SI presented a collective front on the art scene.[482]

In Jorn's hands, constructing a 'situation' got a distinctly pan-European bent. As automation proceeded unabated on both sides of a divided continent, such practice had to be resisted across Europe. He appealed to the entire swath of territories that had once been part of the Bauhaus catchment area and that could possibly be SI's.[483] His sense of the need for a postwar avant-garde was not confined to the old borders dividing a Constructivism from Surrealism. In fact, though he lived in Paris, Jorn was a founding member of SI's first German section, which consisted of him and Hans Platschek, an artist of German descent who also lived in the French capital.

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[481] Letter signed by Debord, Jorn, Korun and Pinot-Gallizio to Willem Sandberg 25 January 1958.

[482] SI's claim to represent the legacy of Cobra was accepted by the crucial institutions. This exhibition was meant to tour various cities of Western Europe and North America. But "*Devant notre opposition*", IS 1 proudly noted, "*le Stedelijk Museum retira son accord*" for such a tour.

[483] In its first rendition, of which I am concerned, SI never gave up on the hope of recruiting members east of the Iron Curtain. It, for example, discussed the possibility of holding one of its annual conference in Warsaw (IS 7, 31).

The international marginalized professional taste-makers and architects of modernizing policy. As SI's German branch, Jorn and Platschek published in 1958 a manifesto whose title re-appropriated the ticket for stasis on which Adenauer ran for chancellor in 1957: 'Nevenruh! Keine Experimente!' First on display at Gallerie van den Loo in Munich in 1958,[484] the manifesto outlined the need to belong to an international:

> *Nur für Künstler! Grundlegende Fakten der Kunsttragödie des 20. Jahrhunderts: Kunsthändler sind Diebe; Farbenhändler sind Räuber; Kunsthistoriker sind Betrüger; Kunstkäufer sind Idioten; Kunstkritiker sind Lustmörder; Sammler sind Pervertierte; Trotzdem geht die Kunst Ohne diese notorischen Verbrecher kaputt!*[485]

With the help of the international, the 'situation' articulated a way to transcend the alienating predicament of the contemporary artist. It promised to overcome Jorn's and the other SI members' sense of being strangers to, that is being estranged from, the superimposed meaning of their and any artistic practice, indeed any subjective, lived expres-

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[484] Ohrt, 185-6.

[485] Reprinted in Gérard Berréby (ed) Textes et documents situationnistes 1957-1960 (Paris, Éditions Allia, 2004), 43.

sion.[486] By envisioning ways of turning the Paris outsiders among their numbers into insiders of an international association, indeed of 'History',[487] the 'situation' quickly multiplied SI's branches. The participatory project of constructing a 'situation' *theoretically* tied the branches into, what with reference to Williams could be called, one 'conceptual community'.

The numeric expansion of the international was testimony to the originality of SI's project and that the concerns of the metropole and the peripheries of the continent coincided. But, while seemingly bolstering SI's status as 'modern', such expansion did not in itself meet SI's own criterion for what constituted a modern project, which was premised on the constructed situation's ability to refuse the logic of technique. The participatory construction, SI believed, evoked the possibility of a different kind of organizing; SI was an aesthetic project as organization. In its first year of existence, however, the international failed to live up to this ideal. Everyone in SI did not participate equally; its project was administered and directed from Paris.

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[486] IS 1 also did single out those artist who did not similarly have a unifying curation, and who therefore did not control the meaning of their own art so as to position it against the entire architecture. SI rejected the **'**Angry Young Men**'** of Britain: "*[ils] sont venus à changer d'avis, simplement, sur quelques conventions sociales, sans voir* le changement de terrain de toute l'activité culturelle*, que l'on observe manifestement dans chaque tendance avant-gardiste du siècle*" (IS 1, 5). The international also questioned the relevance of the Nouveau roman and the Nouvelle Vague in France. In sharp relief of the dogged independence, if not self-reliance, of SI neither French current was baptized by the auteurs themselves. French critics named them, the former in *Le Monde*, the latter in *L'Express*, the same year as SI invented itself.

[487] As per Paris' centrality, its project attempted to be ahead, indeed shaper, of cross-continental trends. This would not only make the marginal foreigners in the French capital subjects of History. Insofar as trends are irreversible, they would also thereby be the agents of the future. By constructing situations, Jorn and the other SI members cast themselves in the role of insiders of an international who, first unbeknownst and then in specific contradistinction to art critics, redefined what art could and should be at its center.

II. Direction without Participation: the Administration of the International

While constructing situations had in 1958 become the unifying prospect of the new international, it did not yet guide its praxis. In fact, in IS 1 the egalitarian suggestion of participation for all, inscribed in such construction, came with a caveat. Certain members were deemed more important than others when constructing situations. For the latter, it was now asserted, needed direction. And as no clear line divided the construction of a situation from the continuous recreation of the international, this had repercussions for its organizational praxis. In the first year of its existence, the Paris hinge alone transmitted SI's project across the continent. It enjoyed a monopoly on deciding what and who belonged to the international.

Even if SI did not announce its existence through a manifesto, the first issue of IS outlined its project through a set of definitions. IS 1 defined five concepts laying out SI praxes. Four of them – détournement, psycho-geography, unitary urbanism, and the dérive – had the holistic aim of engendering new affective milieux.[488]

Though it would produce a ludic ambience, the 'situation' was different:

> *La conception que nous avons d'une 'situation construite' ne se borne pas à un emploi unitaire de moyens artistiques concourant à une ambiance, si*

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[488] "*Détournement d'éléments esthétiques préfabriqués*" outlines an "*intégration de productions actuelles ou passées des art dans une construction supérieur de milieu*". Psychogeography is the study of the "*effets précis du milieu géographique, consciemment aménagé ou non, agissant directement sur le comportement affectif des individus*" (IS 1, 13). Unitary urbanism is the theory of "*l'emploi d'ensemble des arts et techniques concourant à la construction intégrale d'un milieu en liaison dynamique avec des expériences de comportement*" (IS 1, 13). And a dérive is a "*mode de comportement expérimental lié aux conditions de la société urbaine: technique du passage hâtif à travers des ambiances variées*" (IS 1, 13).

> *grandes que puissent être l'extension spatio-temporelle et la force de cette ambiance. La situation est en même temps une unité de comportement dans le temps*. *Elle est faite de geste contenus dans le décor d'un moment. Ces gestes sont le produit de décor et d'eux-mêmes. Ils produisent d'autres formes de décor et d'autre gestes* (IS 1, 11).

Part of the new behavioral setting that would be brought about by the constructed situation was the choreography of those constructing the situation. As we have seen, integral to Jorn's wishes and Debord's suggestion of how aesthetic practice would make a dent in the architecture that determined the current situation and create a new one was that such practice had to be constructed by a collective front. "*La situation construite*," 'Problèmes' argued, "*est forcément collective par sa préparation et son déroulement*" (IS 1, 12). A single artist would not, as Debord and Jorn had pointed out, affect society's framework; only a large front would. This, according to IS 1, begged the question: "*Comment peut-on orienter ces forces?*" (IS 1, 11)

Such a collective project, it was now acknowledged, had to be somehow directed:

> *Il semble … qu'un individu doive exercer une certaine prééminence pour une situation donnée; en être le metteur en scène. A partir d'un projet de situation … il faudrait sans doute discerner entre un directeur - ou metteur en scène: chargé de coordonner les éléments préalables de construction*

> *du décor, et aussi de prévoir certaines* interventions *dans les événements* (IS 1, 12).[489]

Though the director's aim was to highlight the lack of participation on other occasions in society,[490] his/her role inscribed a hierarchy in situationist practice. This had far reaching consequences. Constructing a 'situation' was not only about engendering a ludic ambience within a conceptual community in opposition to a context defined by an alienating 'technique'. It was also about creating the play community of 'situationists'. A situationist, one of the definitions in IS claims, is "*celui qui s'emploie à construire des situations*" (IS 1, 13). The situation, in other words, defines the situationist, and not vice versa; only lastly does the definition state that a situationist is a member of the Situationist International.[491] But as the situation's construction would be directed, everyone was not 'situation-ists' to the same degree.

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[489] Though the article added, "*Naturellement le rapport entre le directeur et les 'viveurs' de la situation ne peut devenir un rapport de spécialisation*" (12), it had opened for the fact that all participants were not equal in situationist construction.

[490] The constructed situations, 'Problèmes' noted, was thus easily associated with the work of other artists, such as the theatre of Pirandello or Brecht. The latter's Berliner Ensemble toured France in 1954. This was the first time Brecht plays were staged, at least on this scale, there. These performances became very influential - hence the need for SI to distinguish its project from them. (For a short overview of Brecht's reception in France, see Marie-Noël Rio, 'Retrouver le rire de Bertolt Brecht, *Le Monde Diplomatique,* juin 2017, 27; for an eye witness account, see the 1958 introduction to Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life,* Vol 1.)

[491] It is the situation that produces the situationist, which as a consequence makes possible the international of situation-constructing situationists, and not the reverse. A "*situation construite*", the definition in IS 1 also reads, is "*Moment de la vie, concrètement et délibérément construit par l'organisation collective d'une ambiance unitaire et d'un jeu d'événements*" (IS 1, 13). A "*situationniste*" can designate, it continues, both *"ce qui se rapporte à la théorie ou à l'activité pratique d'une construction des situations*", and "*celui qui s'emploie à construire des situations*" (IS 1, 13).

Nor, by the same token was everyone participating equally in the international. Only the 'situation' concerned the praxis of the international as a whole. As a graph in an SI leaflet called 'Nouveau Théâtre d'opérations dans la culture', published the same year, showed, the praxes of which IS 1 provided definitions were hierarchized. At the top of the pyramid of praxes was the 'situation'.[492] Its practice alone was organizational—and its construction would have a director.

In SI's first year of existence, the theoretic imperative to momentarily employ a *metteur en scène* for situationist construction turned, if you will, into the more permanent role of a *metteur en ordre* for positioning the international. The Parisian branch filled it. No one had a larger say in what constituted SI practice than Debord. Though Debord had not been a part of Cobra, and was only alerted to the fact of the 1957 exhibition in Amsterdam by Jorn, it was the Frenchman who, for example, ended up outlining SI's position. Debord and Jorn planned it together. "*Je crois que tu as tout à fait raison à propos de l'exposition Cobra*," Debord told Jorn, "*nous devons essayer d'utiliser la réussite de Cobra en nous présentant comme le dépassement obligé de cette époque*."[493] But Debord alone persuaded the museum's curator, Willem Sandberg, to open his doors for a future

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[492] The leaflet was produced by the French section, and reprinted in Gérard Berréby (ed) *Textes et documents situationnistes 1957-1960* (Paris, Éditions Allia, 2004), 47.

[493] Debord to Jorn 9 Sept 1957

performance of the new organization. This was an exercise that would prove costly for the international. But that all lay in the future.[494]

For now we should note that the Paris office's assumption of this role within the expanded international was to a certain extent based on the centrality of Paris and the French language for the continent. Debord and Bernstein helped the non-French members to liaise with Paris galleries and mount exhibitions.[495] Debord also edited the French-language version of Jorn's essay collection, *Pour la forme,* and Bernstein curated shows by members of the Italian branch.[496] Though becoming more important in the art world, the peripheral members needed the Paris members both logistically and linguistically.

The centrality of the French SI branch also foregrounded Paris trends within the international. Debord conceptualized SI's sublation of Cobra with reference to the Paris art world where the latter had recently been hyped as avant-garde movement: IS 2 noted that *France-Observateur* and *Le Monde* both ran articles on Cobra in fall of 1957 (IS 2, 3-5). The first two issues of IS also denigrated many artists in Paris who, SI claimed, had neglected to redefine the boundaries for postwar art practices. Such artists were motivat-

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[494] Debord, Jorn, Gallizio and Korun had written a letter to Sandberg, curator of the Stedelijk, protesting the exhibition. As an alternative Debord suggested to the Stedelijk a performance of the new organization and its new criteria for art and life. But far from establishing the international, this attempted construction of a situation in Amsterdam would undo the network, come 1960, as we will see eventually.

[495] As decided at the second SI conference, held in Paris in 1958, Bernstein contacted the Drouin gallery on Pinot Gallizio's behalf (Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto (eds), *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing* (Milan, Charta, 2005), 64-6; 113). The gallery's owner, René Drouin was one most renowned gallerists in postwar Paris; having exhibited among others Wols, he was crucial for the re-emergence of modern art after the war (Ohrt, 193).

[496] I will return to what its consequences were for the organization and how such curation was nationally bound in the next chapter.

ed by an allegedly obsolete expectation of art. This was expressed in that their formal language had stopped evolving. "*Péret et ses amis*," IS noted with regard to a prominent postwar Surrealist formation, "*sont les conservateurs d'un monde artistique qui se ferme… Ils sont du côté de ceux qui veulent prolonger sa 'noblesse' en faisant décorer des frigidaires par les peintres modernes. Mais cette noblesse est finie avec l'ancien régime de la culture*" (IS 2, 3-4). They were clothed in garments sown, as it were, for a different epoch. They no longer fit the exigencies of the age.

Debord and to some extent Bernstein distinguished the members of the international from other artists in Paris. "*Nous ne reconnaissons pas nos contemporains dans ceux qui se satisfont de trop peu*," IS claimed (IS 2, 4). It attacked those accepting the "*critères dominants de la réussite*" (IS 2, 11). Those artists who had started theoretically anew, but who, due to their success, had gained a vested interest in current society were accused of entrenching the dominant, if decomposing, ideology. Though SI's members had by this point had group shows together with artists from across the continent, the targets in IS were conspicuously Parisian.[497] Tapié, leading light of the then fashionable Tachisme, was on the receiving end of an endless barrage of invectives; he was, for example, accused of being a secret agent of the Vatican. His tachiste colleague, the painter George Mathieu, did not fare much better: he was an alleged royalist (IS 2, 7). The blue paintings of Yves Klein made him, in turn, "*spontanément en*

[497] Only in Italy, SI's member had exhibited together with Roberto Matta, Lucio Fontana, Scanavino, Enrico Baj, Dangelo, Max Ernst, Karl Otto Götz, Simon Hantai, and more. By 1958, this meant that they were already in touch with representatives from, and thus in competition with, movements and currents such as Movimento Spaziale (Fontana) and Pittura Nucleare (Baj) in Italy as well as the Nouveaux Réalists (Dufrêne, Klein) and the Surrealists in Paris. They were also known to journals such as the Swiss *Phases*, the Belgian *Les Lèvres nues*, and the Dutch *Forum,* as well as to institutions such as the ICA in London and the Stedelijk in Amsterdam (Ohrt, 145; 159).

avance sur la vague fasciste qui progresse en France" (IS 2, 7).[498]

If excessive in their severity, SI's attacks on other artists were neither gratuitous nor uncommon in this context.[499] For we have to remember that the attacks were launched from, and thus in the language characterizing the aesthetic debate in, the French capital. A recent interlocutor has claimed that an "arms race of increased bidding," engendering a continuous radicalization, characterized this scene.[500] And within it the question of art had become over-determined by the increasingly vocal camp who in the wake of Sartre's WIL questioned the possibility of formal aesthetic innovations tout court. Such positions contributed to making the tone in these discourses incendiary; another contributing factor, which I will elaborate on in the last chapter, was the tendency, of which Sartre and indeed SI among others were guilty, to divide positions in

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[498] And yet, in spite of having been vilified by the international, some of them allegedly made tacit overtures to SI. "*Mathieu, qui pourtant ne peut pas ignorer ce que nous pensons de lui, essayait en mars dernier de faire glisser une de ses oeuvres dans une construction d'ambiance situationniste projetée*", Bernstein wrote in IS 1. "*Et Tapié n'en vient-il pas à dire*", she asked *"…. 'Comme le passionnel est autre, à son échelle tout change dans les structures du comportement: l'oeuvre complète à l'échelle de maintenant est celle où les structures autres, donc ensemblistes, transcendent un contenu au moins passionnel'*" (26). This, the Paris branch believed, was a direct effect of the international's extension around the continent. "*Nous sommes devenus plus fort*", Bernstein noted, "*plus séduisants donc*" (26). The increasing numbers within the international allowed for SI to show a unified front, against such approaches and artistic events, across borders.

[499] There were nonetheless artists, especially authors, whose work, for example, Debord and Jorn admired immensely, such as Musil's and Malcolm Lowry's for the former, and Kafka's for the latter. Jorn even translated Kafka into Danish.

[500] Niilo Kauppi discerned such traits to have been central to the intellectual debates in 1960s Paris. "Theoretical radicalization", he writes in his sociology on the origins of 'French Theory', "took the form of an arms race of increased bidding, of an escalation in the frequency of breaking the rules of the established game ('philosophy of transgression') that quickly outpaced the logic of political radicalization". He even suggests that it led to a "pathology of radicalism … that could be distinguished from the normalcy of rational debate". But then these proponents together with the avant-garde "had different ends: escape through feedback into indeterminacy and the critique of the French bourgeois order" (Niilo Kauppi, *Radicalism in French Culture: A Sociology of French Theory in the 1960s* (London, Routledge, 2010), 8).

collaborator (i.e. fascist) and resister, still present from the war.

In his eagerness to ensure SI's ability to impose its own parameters for art on the time-period, Debord instrumentalized SI's branches. He administered the international's branches' positions on artists in vogue. When an opportunity to speak with one cross-continental voice presented itself to SI already in its first year of existence, he capitalized on it. In 1958 Guglielimi, a young Italian painter, defaced a painting by Raphaël in Milan. He stuck a handwritten note on it saying "Long Live the Italian Revolution! Down with the Government of the Church!"[501] The Vatican and the Italian State were up in arms, as was most of the peninsula's intellectual scene. The young man eventually repented and was 'merely' sent to a mental asylum. Once he had read about the case in the French press Debord contacted SI's Italian branch. "*Il me semble que l'acte de Guglielmi, nous avons intérêt, et aussi le devoir de le défendre*," he told his Italian colleagues Pinot Gallizio and Melanotte. "*C'est tout à fait dans nos idées, jusque l'attaque contre l'art-dans-les-musées (cf. les idées de Jorn à ces propos)*."[502] The Italians duly did so. They and Jorn handed out a tract defending the action outside La Scala, at Piazza del Doumo in Milan.[503] "Freedom," it said, "consists above all in destroying false idols".[504] For the mostly Parisian audience of IS, SI's Italian branch was

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[501] Hussey, 137.

[502] Debord to Pinot-Gallizio and Melanotte, 16 June 1958.

[503] Hussey, 137.

[504] 'Difendete la liberta Ovunque', quoted in *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* (eds) Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto, (Milan, Charta, 2005), 117.

presented as one of the few voices staunchly defending Guglielimi; speaking in SI's name, Jorn, the IS article went on, had even claimed that the young Italian's act was the one that lay at the root of all art (IS 2, 30).

For Debord, this scandal presented an opportunity to defend SI's position on Paris-based artists, but, thanks to its international reach, this time through recourse to SI's Italian branch. Debord had planned on doing so before the scandal broke. Half a year earlier Debord had told Pinot Gallizio, of SI's Italian branch, that "*le Tapie dont tu me parles … est notre pire ennemi à Paris, sur le plan de la théorie de l'art il soutient un faux modernisme lié à toutes les entreprises réactionnaires (Georges Mathieu)*." Debord therefore asked the Italians to align their position to the Paris office's. "*Si tu peux l'insulter, au nom des situationnistes italiens*," he wrote, "*ce serait d'un bon effet de publicité pour [les situationnistes à] Paris*."[505] In the summary of the 'Guglielimi affair' in IS, SI evoked both the over-determination of the Paris art scene, due to which their assessment were excessively severe, and prided itself on its ability to co-ordinate trans-national responses: "*la juste position de la section italienne dans cette affaire pourtant d'un bout à l'autre bien rationnelle, a contribué à augmenter son isolement parmi la canaille intellectuelle d'Italie, dont certain éléments nauséabonds … après avoir frauduleusement tourné atour des situationnistes, ont compris et clairement révélé où était leur vrai camp: Michel Tapié, le néo-fascisme français d'exportation, les curés qu'ils ne peuvent oublier*" (IS 2, 30).

Paris also directed the first physical intervention in SI's name. The intervention

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[505] Debord to Pinot Gallizio, 13 Jan 1958

took place on the eve of the Brussels World Expo of 1958. The Expo was the first world exhibition since the end of World War II. It was a much larger and significant event for the postwar political order than the 1954 Milan Triennale, Jorn's intervention at which had given birth to IMIB. It signaled the arrival of a new kind of normalcy. For many, it even suggested the normalization of the new world order. Slowly but surely shedding its pariah status, West Germany was, for example, invited. That the Expo was held expressed the increasing optimism of the time-period. Conveyed by its symbol at the time and its most lasting monument in hindsight, Atomium, the massive sculpture of a unit cell of an iron crystal, such optimism was linked to scientific and technological developments. And, confirming SI's long-running perception, this was expressed in Expo's main focus: architecture, with Le Corbusier playing a privileged role.[506] In fact the Expo manifested the very contradictions that had motivated the artist groups meeting in 1956-7 to co-operate as an international. For besides being an ode of praise to technology and science, which had been made possible by the postwar economic growth, and including the old perpetrator nation, West Germany, the Expo featured colonial components. In a way not too different from the world expositions before the war, the Congo and Rwanda-Burundi were 'presented' by the Belgians. This evidenced the longevity of the formally obsolete and ideologically bankrupt interwar superstructures.

A few days before the Expo officially opened on the 17th of April, the UNESCO-affiliated association of international art critics, Association Internationale des Critiques

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[506] Robert W. Rydell 'Brussels 1958', in: John Findling (ed), *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1988*. (New York / London, Greenwood Press, 1990) 312.

d'Art (AICA), met in the Belgian capital (on the 14th of April). AICA was an association whose aim, since its founding in 1948, was to unite critics around the world. A year prior to the Expo it had held a conference on a topic close to SI's concerns: 'Methods and Terminology of Art Criticism, Everyday life and Value of forms'.[507]

Intervening at the meeting, SI questioned the raison d'être of AICA. From SI's vantage point the establishment of AICA came off as a rearguard action to shore up support for the resuscitation of the status quo ante in which artists were divided and thus defenseless against co-optation. "*Dans la mesure où la pensée moderne, pour la culture, se découvre avoir été parfaitement stagnante depuis vingt-cinq ans; dans la mesure où toute une époque, qui n'a rien compris et n'a rien changé, prend conscience de son échec, ses responsables tendent à transformer leurs activités en institutions*," it told AICA. "*Ils en appellent ainsi à une reconnaissance officielle de la part d'un ensemble social à tous égards périmé mais encore matériellement dominant*" (IS 1, 29). The international's crucial accusation to the AICA conference was that, having missed these historical developments, makes clear that "*vous n'avez rien en commun qu'un rôle à tenir*" (IS 1, 29).

The international advocated for the unity of artists against critics. Together and across borders, SI claimed, artists were now curating themselves. SI's tract was signed by the SI branches of Algeria, (West) Germany, Belgium, France, and Italy and Scandinavia (i.e., by Khatib, Platschek, Korun, Debord, Pinot-Gallizio, and Jorn). In the new reality, discerned and championed by the international, the critics had lost their role:

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[507] For themes of previous conferences, see AICA's website: http://aicainternational.org/en/

"*L'Internationale situationniste ne vous laissera aucune place*." The existence of SI showed that "*vous êtes dépréciés par l'Histoire*" (IS 1, 29).[508] SI proclaimed: "*Dispersez-vous, morceaux de critiques d'art, critiques de fragments d'arts. C'est maintenant dans l'Internationale situationniste que s'organise* l'activité artistique unitaire *de l'avenir*" (IS 1, 29, my emphasis).

In spite of this message of unity, the international did not produce a collective performance in Brussels. The Belgian branch alone carried this message. Only its members spread the actual text. While the descriptions in IS 1 are evasive on this point—one, 'Action en Belgique contre l'assemblée des critiques d'art internationaux', even falsely claimed that the international as such descended on Brussels on the 12th spreading it—IS 2 admits to it. "*La légère avance qui nous sied était parfaitement exprimée*," it reads, "*par le slogan que notre section belge jetait, en avril 1958, à la tête des critiques d'art réunis en assemblée mondiale*" (IS 2, 4). No other members than Korun of the Belgian section ran into the law afterwards.

Nor did the conceptual unity of the international in Brussels reflect a supersession of an artistic division of labour within it. The plans for how SI would disrupt the AICA meeting had been drawn in Paris. Debord wrote to the Belgian section that "*La proposition de Korun concernant une action à tenter à l'occasion de la Conférence internationale des critiques d'art ... a trouvé ici la plus grande approbation.* Nous nous arrêterons, *si vous êtes d'accord,* au plan suivant: nous allons imprimer à Paris *2 000 exem-*

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[508] It situated its project in the following, familiar way: "*La carence principale de la critique dans l'art moderne est de n'avoir jamais su concevoir la totalité culturelle, et les conditions d'un mouvement expérimental qui la dépasse perpétuellement. En ce moment, la domination accrue de la nature permet et nécessite l'emploi de pouvoirs supérieurs de construction de la vie*" (29).

plaires d'un tract à jeter dans cette réunion – si possible lors de sa séance inaugurale – au moment même où l'un de nous, prenant soudainement la parole, en lira le texte (un peu avant d'autres exemplaires auront été postés à destinaton des journaux d'Europe)."[509] As entities the national branches were deliberately excluded in such plans. Upon Debord's initiative only one person per branch signed the tract. The tract's content was never brought up in an open discussion.[510]

The dialogic form that Debord had evoked in his response to Lefebvre failed to materialize. In 1958 SI's organizational practice rather reads as a monologue in which the central hinge of the network planned and the peripheral nodes executed. We never hear of the latter. The Belgian branch did not translate the project. They merely implemented it. For us, reconstructing the story in hindsight, they have not left a trace of their subjective imprint on the organizational practice. In Latour's terms, they, like the Italians with regard to the Guglielimi affair, remained intermediaries of SI's project at this time.

But to be an organization primarily made up of intermediaries was hardly SI's aim. Such organizational practice evokes the way of organizing that the ideology of technological advancement required, and this was an ideology that their raison d'être was to shun. Participation required mediators of its project.

That SI had an international extension without being participatory in 1958

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[509] Debord to the Belgian section, 13 March 1958, my emphases.

[510] Debord wanted to produce the sense that the international was run by a central council. "We think that it will be necessary to emphasize the centralized aspect of the [situationist] movement", Debord wrote to the Belgian SI member Korun 8 April 1958. "I believe that, in this respect, the signature upon the anti-AICA tract by the six people responsible for it is good, implicitly introducing the idea of a sort of central committee formed of delegates from each section."

suggests that a Paris-based project was a necessary conditions for its emergence. But as participation was its aim, this also implies that the international did not perform its own internationality. For its praxis to thus conform to its theory, the peripheral nodes needed to translate the project to their local contexts. Otherwise SI's network did not open a space for dialogue.

Rather than a performance, the 'situation' was during the international's first year of existence a disciplinary concept. At SI's second conference in Paris in January, almost half of the Italian branch was excluded for deviating too far from the 'situation's' envisioned practice.[511] In March Debord and Jorn demanded of Rumney, the only Brit, to prove his worth with respect to SI's position.[512] As he failed to do so on time, he too was excluded.

An implicit Paris-centrism formed the basis of the early exclusions. Throughout 1958 Jorn pleaded with Platschek to stop collaborating with Panderma, a Swiss group. It was, SI claimed, "*un de ces vastes rassemblements où des gens qui n'ont aucun rapport entre eux joignent pour un jour leur signature sous un manifeste*." The latter was full of "*considérations critiques tout à fait acceptables, parce que malheureusement fort banales, sur l'usure de l'art moderne et les répétitions de ce qui s'appelle avant-gardisme, tourne court par une profession de foi dans l'avenir qui, seul, l'intéresse les signataires*" (IS 2, 8). Jorn's opinions of the group was underpinned by a historicist

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[511] According to an explanatory footnote by Alice Debord in a letter from Debord to Midhou, 18 Nov 1957, three out of the seven Italians were excluded.

[512] Debord and Jorn to Rumney, 13 March 1958.

topography. To emphasize how the Basel-based group was "*extrêment insignifiante*," he told Platschek that he "*ne vois pas comment* [*Panderama*] *peut arriver à avoir une importance qui dépasse* l'intérêt purement local de son pays".[513] As the German did not cease collaborating with the Swiss, he lost his place among SI's number around the turn of the new year. He sensed the spatial hierarchies at work behind this decision. "*Il faut*," he responded, "*exterminer les concierges de Paris dont l'esprit de contrôle a infecté les intellectuels révolutionnaires*".[514] Certain rules applied to the Paris-based founders of the international, others to the peripheral branches: straddling the divide, Jorn was exhibited at the 1958 Expo without it affecting his status as member.[515]

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[513] Jorn to Platschek, 13 March 1958, my emphasis. For IS he thought that the case was the reverse. In a letter sent shortly afterwards to Debord and Bernstein about IS' first issue, he wrote that "*Je suis trés fièr de participer à cette revue [,] qui, je trouve[,] [est] une manifestation d'une importance historique*". In other words, IS was a journal of Parisian importance.

[514] Quoted by Debord in letter to Melanotte, 10 Feb 1959.

[515] Kurczynski, 169; Ohrt, 188. Nor indeed did doing the same affect that of Constant, who, as we will see in the next chapter, was increasingly challenging Jorn as the primary interlocutor of Debord.

3. The Participatory International: Situationist Practice 1958-1959

This chapter shows how the peripheral branches 'wrote back' by translating the 'situation'. If the organization had failed to become participatory in Brussels in late spring and early summer 1958, as it was still directed from Paris, during the following year the cross-continental artists within the international molded the organization's project to their needs. They made use of different praxes to implement the situation's anti-instrumentalizing aesthetics: the Italians pioneered an industrial painting; the Dutch claimed unitary urbanism as their own; and a new German branch introduced a kynical perspective. Their way of doing so was informed by the varying legacies of the interwar avant-garde(s) in their countries and addressed their immediate political context. But when moving SI praxes in previously unforeseen directions, they questioned some of the 'situation's' original assumptions, such as the ontological priority of culture and the continental centrality of the Paris cultural scene.

As a consequence such diversity re-opened the debate about what constituted the constructed situation and what the larger social meaning of the international was. The peripheries demanded a definition that represented them and their interests. They wanted SI to be an organization whose project valued their contribution. But their visions for a redefined project did not align. These debates came to a head at the 1959 annual conference in Munich. There, all branches wanted to impose their translation of SI's project. As all mediated it, the organization engaged its largest circle of interlocutors.

This marked a moment when the distance that had separated the international 'situation' from the national branches, the creator of the project from its receivers, the art

work from the network, was bridged. Because the debate on SI's project proved divisive at the Munich conference, it came to reflect the original aim of the international: as Jorn had hoped in 1956, the international, now a cross-continental network, established a platform for a Pan-European conversation on how non-signifying art politically challenged the postwar geo-political architecture. Even if no ludic situation was intentionally constructed, the international opened a dialogic space, which, Debord had contended, the situation was supposed to bring.

In the rise and fall narrative of this dissertation, this chapter recounts the moment of glory before the international started to fall apart. And no one, I will show, did more for its emergence than Jorn. While Debord chose to republish his 1956 'Théorie de la dérive' in IS 2 (1958), which entrenched the Paris branch's claim on the dérive, and thus to the practice at the root of the 'situation', Jorn adopted one of LI's practices for his own artworks: détournement. In 1959 he exhibited 'détourned' paintings. Realizing its logic, his paintings re-appropriated the originally LI practice of re-appropriation. Doing so showed how such practice could be used by the entire international; Jorn translated the originally Parisian project for the members living elsewhere. Empowering the peripheral members to make the SI's project their own, he created the conditions for an organizational praxis in which the unity of its aim was not in opposition to the diversity of its means.

Dérives in Urban Paris

The French SI branch had proven to be the international's most influential. More

than any other, its members had defined the international's conceptual framework and organizational practice as per the 'situation'. But among the artistic praxes within the international, Debord and Bernstein primarily coveted the one from which the situation originally sprang: the dérive. During these years, IS republished Debord's 1956 'Théorie de la dérive' and Bernstein produced two novels for which the dérive is a central motive. As such, the dérive had not only predated the emergence of the international. It was also the one closest to Surrealism and most dependent on Paris. While more marginal on the European art scene than others in the international, Debord and Bernstein exerted a significant influence on the international based on the dérive's intimate relation to Paris.

In her romans-à-clef, *All the King's Horses* and *The Night* (originally published in 1960), Bernstein described the same set of Paris bohemians.[516] While the former novel satirizes the literature by the likes of Françoise Sagan and the latter the aesthetic of the Nouveau roman of Alain Robbe-Grillet, the cast of characters in Bernstein's novels were meant to resemble the members of SI.[517] There is the Danish painter Ole, who mostly just talks about aesthetics. And there is the French male-female couple at the center, the complications in whose love life the novels follow. Though satirical, the novels for this reason provide a glimpse into the central pre-occupations of Debord and Bernstein.

The novels' characters do not leave metropolitan France. With the exception of a journey to the Côte d'Azur, they stay in Paris. Traversing it, they show the city to the

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[516] Michèle Bernstein, *All the King's Horses,* trans. John Kelsey (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2008); Michèle Bernstein, *The Night,* trans. Clodagh Kinsella (London, Book Works, 2103). In the preface to the latter, she concedes that it is hard not to read the novels in hindsight as roman-à-clefs (Bernstein, *The Night,* 10-1).

[517] Bernstein, 'Preface', *The Night,* 11.

reader. "*La Nuit* is about the Paris of 1957," Bernstein has said. "If *La Nuit* is a love story, it's not for him, or for her, or for someone else, or for me. It's a love story, a story of lost love. For the streets".[518] For Parisian streets, we should add.

Wooing another young woman he meets, the French male character in *The Night*, who the reader is supposed to associate with Debord, takes her on nocturnal stroll around the Left Bank. "'We have walked a lot', says Carole. 'When I am alone I tend to walk a lot'," Gilles responds.[519] "Higher up Rue Mouffetard, Gilles and Carole say nothing. Without conferring they both know where they're going, where the detours of the adventurous Contrescarpe region surely lead."[520] But this is not a conventional romance. "At the Contrescarpe, where all noises have died away, Gilles and Carole head to the centre of the square, onto the raised island bordered by cobblestone, and sit on the curb near a tree".[521] Their nocturnal stroll in spring of 1957 ended with the two drifters leaving the fifth arrondissement.

Debord and Bernstein surely did take their walks seriously. "The dérive wasn't a hobby, we wanted to make it a way of life," Bernstein has said. "Letting our steps guide us through the city (the dérive is urban) without following a set path or pursuing any particular goal. Letting oneself be drawn by the forces emanating from houses, paving

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[518] Bernstein, 'Preface', *The Night,* 14

[519] Bernstein, *The Night,* 66.

[520] Bernstein, *The Night,* 101.

[521] Bernstein, *The Night,* 109.

stones, and windows. Planning nothing in advance … Like a sacred ceremony subordinated to the will of chance."[522]

In his 'Théorie de la dérive', originally published in 1956 in *Les Lèvres Nues,* the journal of the Belgian Surrealists, but reprinted in IS 2, published in December of 1958, Debord argued that the dérive can both be intended to study a specific territory and produce "*des résultats affectifs déroutants*" (SI 2, 21). This duality is akin to the loss of self leading to the discovery of the surreal in Aragon's novel. The counter-cartographic practice at once reveals something about the city and creates a formative frisson of excitement for the discoverer. As for Aragon, the two are interlinked, and cannot be clearly separated.

Obviously aware of the proximity to similar Surrealist pursuits in Paris, Debord stressed what divided them. The actual activity of the dérive was mostly an aimless stroll, favored by the fin-de-siècle flaneur and the interwar surrealist alike.[523] But "*le concept de dérive … oppose en tous points aux notion classiques de voyage et de promenade*" he insisted (IS 2, 19). "*Il est indissolublement lié à … l'affirmation d'un comportement ludique-constructif*" (IS 2, 19). For Parisian Surrealism the frissons denoted a momentary experience of an originary chaos. In such moments the subject was on the receiving end of 'surreality'. For SI the 'situation' was ludically constructed. The subject experienced it as participator, not receiver.

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[522] Bernstein, 'Preface', *The Night,* 13.

[523] On a more general level, it should be noted that the urban stroll as artistic practice and motive has by no means abated. It is a Parisian pastime as alive as ever. Its clearest example is maybe today to be found in film. From Rohmer's oeuvre to Bertrand Bonello's recent *Nocturama* (2016), Paris has remained an artwork in which one walks around, loses oneself, intervenes, terrorizes…

This reflected the historical moment. Driven by a Weberian rationalization, which had come so far that Ellul called theirs a technological civilization, history had further decreased the space for chance to evade determinism and for chaos to pierce the veneer of order. Surrealism had, in Debord's view, over-emphasized the role of chance already during the interwar period: "*Une insuffisante défiance à l'égard du hasard condamnait à un échec morne la célèbre déambulation sans but tentée en 1923 par quatre surréalistes à partir d'une ville tirée au sort*" (IS 2, 20).

Experimenting at a historical moment when chance had further decreased, SI had to more systematically study what determined urban life. It was still the case that, "*du point de vue de la dérive, il existe un relief psychogéographique des villes, avec de courants constants, des points fixes, et des tourbillons qui rendent l'accès ou la sortie de certains zones fort malaisés*" (IS 2, 19.) But such psycho-geographic currents needed to be systematized. And dérives could play a vital role in this: "*Les enseignement de la dérive permettent d'établir les premier relevés des articulations psychogéographiques d'une cité moderne*" (IS 2, 23).

With the help of the dérive, Debord envisioned producing alternative maps: "*on mesure les distances qui séparent effectivement deux régions d'une ville, et qui sont sans commune mesure avec ce qu'une vision approximative d'un plan pouvait faire croire*" (IS 2, 23). This would be a kind of mapping that, besides featuring aerial photographs,[524] would outline the experiences of urban areas. It would take, what he called, the city's

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[524] "*On peut dresser, à l'aide de vieille cartes, de vues photographiques aériennes et de dérives expérimentales une cartographie influentielle qui manquait jusqu'à présent*" (23). Debord produced alternative maps of Paris: *Guide psychogéographique de Paris* (1956) and, together with Jorn, *The Naked City* (1957). For reproductions of these, and other maps they found inspiring, see Sadler, 82-7.

'ambiance units' into account: "*Au-déla de la reconnaissance d'unités d'ambiance, de leurs composantes principales et de leur localisation spatiale, on perçoit leurs axes principaux de passage, leurs sorties et leur défenses*" (IS 2, 23). According to Luc Sante, such "units are collective, anonymous works achieved over long passages of time through accretion, accident, habit, juxtaposition, improvisation, endurance and one or more inexplicable X-factors - a sort of blend of theater and sculpture enacted upon the city and adapted to the *longue durée*".[525] SI offered such *unités d'ambiance,* Sadler has suggested, as an alternative to Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation.*[526]

The dérive suggests in this context that SI, like the turn of the century flâneurs and Surrealism before it, ascribed a great importance to the urban affective ecology both epistemologically and aesthetically. In fact, in its attempt to produce a new kind of mapping, SI followed in its precursors footsteps. For as Eric Hazan has noted, "it was flâneurs who erected the metropolis into a theoretical object" at the same time as they saw "the big city as raw material, roaming it as support for artistic creation."[527]

In a time-period under the spell of a technological craze, this ecology was generally underappreciated. This was especially the case in the less fashionable neighborhoods in Paris, where it remained acutely overlooked. This is where Debord probed the most. According to Kaufmann, "*le Paris légendaire de Debord, celui dans lequel il dérive, est une Paris voué à l'étranger, à l'étrangété, au depaysement, à ceux qui voyagent, à ceux*

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[525] Sante, *The Other Paris,* 28.

[526] Sadler, *The Situationist City,* 69-70. In this, SI did not entirely break with Le Corbusier, who had also been interested in ambiance, but the international excluded building new architecture (Wark, 19-20)

[527] Hazan, *The Invention of Paris,* 316.

qui ne sont pas chez eux."[528] This was the North African Paris of Barbès and Belleville, the Jewish Paris of the Marais, and the Paris of the exiled Spanish republicans around Place de la République and Bastille, as well as the old LI haunts around 'Continent Contrescarpe' in the fifth arrondissement. The dérive allowed the Franco-French participants to get of a foreign sense of their city, an experience contradicting that of a goal-directed city planning and white-washed newspaper reporting.[529]

They were interested in the liminal experience of the non-equivalence of the map and the territory, of the dominant imperative and everyday life. To appreciate what SI was after, it is important to not confuse affect with emotion. Affect, Fredrik Tygstrup, a literary theorist, contends with reference to the concept of the situation, differs from feelings. If the latter is something one has, the former is something one is in; if the latter belongs to a subject, the former produces subjectivity.[530] And if one perceives of affects as something in which someone is rather than something someone has, Tygstrup goes on, one has inscribed affectivity in a spatial discourse.[531] The close link between affect and subjectivity suggests that SI still inhabited a theoretical universe in which, as Peter Sloterdijk once put it, the "propositional subject was not the world principle"; "The ac-

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[528] Kaufmann, *Guy Debord,* 170

[529] Tongue in cheek, SI even offered to take bourgeois Parisians for tourist trips through these areas. For a critique of this, see Sadler, *The Situationist City,* 56. I will return to what such suggestions imply in the next chapter.

[530] Frederik Tygstrup, 'Affekt og rum', *Kultur & Klasse*, 116, Vol. 11, 2013, 19. Tygstrup is not the first to address these questions. There has been an 'affective turn': Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2010). But Tygstrup does so with explicit reference to the 'situation'.

[531] Tygstrup, 24.

cusative [object] is," in their theories, "still untameable".[532] As a consequence, as Sloterdijk notes apropos the founding premises of an economy of affects, "It is not the human beings who have their passions, but rather it is the passions that have their human beings"; or to paraphrase: it is not the situationist who masters the affective ecology, but it is through the latter that the SI members could become situationists.[533]

The former LI members of the international therefore continued exploring the territory of Parisian everyday life. They "*étude des lois et des effets précis d'un milieu géographique consciemment aménagé ou non,* agissant directement sur le comportement affectif" (IS 2, 23, my emphasis). The affective ecologies of (eastern) Paris would give them a situationist subjectivity.

If Paris would create them, they in turn wanted to recreate the French capital. Through its focus on the affective fabric of the French capital, the dérive had a larger social aim: "*Il ne s'agit plus de délimiter précisément des continents durables*, *mais de changer l'architecture et l'urbanisme*" (IS 2, 23). Debord's alternative cartography would, by influencing they way people live, change the actual city.

But, while they held themselves in high regard, Paris did emphatically not belong to them. Like the characters in Rivette's ironically titled film from these years, *Paris nous appartient* (premiered in 1961, but set in 1957), they were still marginal. At a time before Bernstein's novels had been published and Debord recognized as a perceptive crit-

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[532] Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation,* trans. Mario Wenning (New York, Columbia University Press, 2012), 9.

[533] Sloterdijk, 9.

ical theorist, they were, as we will see, in fact more marginal than others in the international, many of whom were starting to achieve art world successes.

Nonetheless, they still represented Paris in SI. While the other branches came into their own during these years, they had to contend with the fact that Paris had an oversized importance for Europe, which had given the former LI members within SI leverage. For as the site of the dérive and hub of European arts and letters, Paris was where the international staked its claim to represent the avant-garde. It was the site of the cultural revolution. This was also true for Jorn.

Détournements in the Paris Art world

In 1959 Jorn returned to the question of form, which for him transcended aesthetics. The opposition of dynamic and static forms played out across society, from its art to its techno-political architecture. In his practice he attempted to resist that which prevented new forms from appearing and existing ones from trans-forming. If he had a year earlier identified the main cause of such formal ossification in postwar society as a standardizing automation, he now trained his gaze on the impact of a levelling monetarization, which was acutely felt in the art world, for it questioned the very existence of an avant-garde. And to save the avant-garde from recuperation by institutions and markets, Jorn mobilized an originally LI praxis: détounement. With its help he showed how European aesthetic practices could defy the developments that lead many to believe that the center of the art world had moved across the Atlantic.

Jorn's (intellectual) context was to a large degree defined by the art world. Whenever Debord spoke of Jorn in his letter exchanges, he was typically waiting for him to return to Paris. Jorn was, seemingly, always on the move. Rather than a place, the constant poles of his life appeared to have been to work inside of international organizations and on art projects. After he left Denmark in the early 1950s he had worked in associations of artists around the continent for half a decade. But now, more clearly than before or after, such work related directly to changes in the art world.

In the art world, the avant-garde had a new enemy. Behind some of the Paris dismissals of fine art as avant-garde practice that we met in the last chapter was fine art's co-optation by the powers that be. These were both the market and the State. During the early postwar decades, the art market experienced an exponential boom. The 1950s had seen art prices take off for the first time in half a century. Though art had been collected for centuries, recently produced works now became assets. To the consternation of those involved,[534] interwar modernist art pieces that once provoked outrage were for instance cherished on the market.[535] As Serge Guilbaut has noted, "high culture" now took "… its place in a consumer culture."[536]

For artists with avant-garde ambitions, the recuperation of modernist art provided the blue print for an undesirable future. The basis for the avant-garde's claims to a van-

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[534] Duchamp, for instance, "lamented that the urinal with which he had once challenged the bourgeoisie was now admired for its aesthetic beauty" (Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London, Routledge, 1992), 77).

[535] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes,* 502-8.

[536] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983), 92.

guardist position at the front of history was commercialized. The aporias in which avant-garde art found itself during these years has perhaps most eloquently been captured by Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, whose brother Christian's first wife, Nanna Enzensberger, Jorn eventually married. Reflecting on the irreconcilable demands on art a year after this SI imploded, he suggested that "The future of the work of art is sold before it has even occurred. What is steadily being offered for sale is, as in other industries, next year's model. But this future has not only always begun; it is also, when tossed out into the market, always already past."[537]

Such commodification was dependent upon institutional approval. It was primarily the latter which fueled the suggestion that the avant-garde was dead. In the most famous iteration of this argument, Peter Bürger, in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* reads the inorganic content of the pieces by interwar avant-garde artists as reacting to the institutionalization of art and art as institution. Refusing both, artists produced, what he called, anti-art. But, like Barthes, Bürger clearly demarcates the historic from the neo-avant-garde, though producing similar art, because postwar institutions had adopted to it.[538] Modernism, even if still producing disharmonious content, had found its way into the canon. The case for the importance of the New York school of abstract expressionists

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[537] Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, 'The Aporias of the Avant-Garde', *The Consciousness Industry,* (originally published 1962), trans. Michael Roloff (New York, Continuum Books/ Seabury Press, 1974), 24-5.

[538] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (originally published in 1973), trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 55-9.

was for instance made by the city's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) together with its most prominent art critics.[539]

This was not a trivial development for the power structures of the art world. As Guilbaut has argued, it provided the decisive push for the New York art scene to not only cease thinking in aesthetic categories imported from Paris but, in the eyes of many, supersede the French capital as the western center of art.[540] MOMA was the institutional expression of New York's refusal of Paris dominance.[541] And thanks to the museum, New York certainly did become the home to the highest grossing artists.[542]

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[539] Guilbaut, 6.

[540] Guilbaut, 44-5; 66; 115; 174-7. Though, it should be noted, this was an opinion emphatically not shared by SI and its likes. For them, the New York scenario rather illustrated a decomposing aesthetic regime. The abstract expressionists did not, as SI, name themselves. The term was coined by art critic Robert Coates, and they were heavily promoted by Clement Greenberg. Appreciated by the market and championed by art institutions, their abstract expressionism could not without cause be seen as the highest state of what SI cast as an obsolete modernism.

[541] Guilbaut, 45; 78-9; 85.

[542] Guilbaut, 91-2.

But more importantly for SI, whose horizon was by and large bound by Europe,[543] it also had theoretical implications. To understand how it is useful to note that a decade before the publication of Bürger's famous study, Enzensberger, indisputably influencing his German successor, had claimed that the avant-garde "movement … did not survive the historic condition that elicited it. Conspiring in the name of the arts is only possible where they are being suppressed."[544] The adversarial relation to art institutions had been constitutive for the avant-garde.

Based on his earlier aesthetic theory, Jorn questioned this assessment of the post-war avant-garde by inverting the argument's logic. The art market, he thought, did not champion art but denied it. Postwar liquidation forced the subjective imprints and poly-semic objects that constituted artworks into a one-dimensional framework. It was a new adversary. As institution the art market was hostile to Jorn's perception of art as the priv-ileged site for producing new knowledge and illuminating unknown aspects of known

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[543] SI duly, if rashly, dismissed the American trends that are often perceived as crowning New York as the new centre of art. This even included those working on projects similar to theirs, notably Allan Kaprow's invention of 'happenings' in New York at this time, and the performances prefiguring Kaprow's own, by the likes of John Cage and Buckminster Fuller at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Jorn to some degree was at odds with the US as a whole. He failed to obtain a visa for an exhibition of his art in Pittsburgh. And when he was awarded a prize by the Guggenheim, he declined it in the most ungraceful way possible. His later texts express a clear dislike of the American restrictions of a European room for geo-political manoeuvre. He wanted to counter-act this from becoming the case culturally: in the Scandinavian press, he argued for the fact that SI aesthetic inventions did not only precede similar ones, such as those at Black Mountain College, in America but that they should be understood through to their own concepts and not as 'European happenings' (Jorn, 'Kunst og ordrer. Om forraederi, reproduktionens maengdevirkning og den store kunstneriske masseeffekt' *Politiken,* 21. aug. 1964). As he was the primary recruitment agent of new SI branches, SI, it should also be noted, was an international without presence in New York, though not absent on the American continent. The composition of SI's members were throughout its original period all European or North African. The international would eventually establish a presence in North America, come the early 1960s. It is noteworthy that SI did so among Francophones in Montreal, thanks to a former member of LI dodging the Algeria war draft by moving to Quebec, and not amidst the new center for the art world/market in New York.

[544] Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry*, 40

phenomena. The most pressing issue now was for Jorn to disallow the increasing post-war liquidation of art to define it, and thus to restrict its meaning.

This time around, he mobilized the practice of 'détournement' to oppose static forms.[545] Originally theorized by LI, détournement was a practice premised on the polysemy of expression.[546] After quitting the Lettrists, the LI members, Tom McDonough writes, "realized that the dominant language could be critiqued not merely by reducing it to semantic rubble (as the Lettrist had done) but also by turning it against itself, by rerouting language from a given context into a new one of their own devising."[547] The practice of détournement allowed them to "construct a language of negation out of fragments of the dominant discourse, out of the very depths of reification."[548] In Jorn's hands, such practice resisted what he now thought was the main cause of formal ossification in postwar western Europe.

When Jorn mounted an exhibition of détourned paintings, 'Peinture détourné', at R.A. Augustinci's Galerie Rive Gauche in Paris 1959, to reflect upon art institutional approval and art market monetarization was arguably what he had his eyes on. For these paintings he added motifs on top of canvases he had found at flea markets. These paint-

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[545] Jorn had already evoked the possibility to 'détourn' paintings to Constant when they were both still in Cobra. But he did not then have the vocabulary to express its import. He called it '*Nachbesserung'* (Ohrt, 208).

[546] Debord and Wolman had produced an article on détournement, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement' published in *Les Lèvres Nues,* no 8, 1956.

[547] McDonough, *"The Beautiful Language of my Century",* 26.

[548] McDonough, *"The Beautiful Language of my Century",* 8.

ings differ from conventional ones insofar as they were not painted on blank canvases, but on already existing material. Jorn's curation for the 1959 exhibition stated:

Soyez modernes,

collectionneurs, musées.

Si vous avez des peintures anciennes,

ne désespérez pas.

Gardez vos souvenirs

mais détournez-les

pour qu'ils correspondent à votre époque.

Pourquoi rejeter l'ancien

si on peut le moderniser

avec quelques traits de pinceau?

Ça jette de l'actualité

sur votre vieille culture.

Soyez à la page,

et distingués / du même coup.

La peinture, c'est fini.

Autant donner le coup de grâce.

Détournez.

Vive la peinture.

In changing the significance of the canvases, insofar as they were not originally canonized work, détourned paintings defied the perception that art's meaning could be fixed, by

any institution, be it a museum or the market. It exposed how the recuperation of art was not an appreciation of it, but an abolishment of the avant-garde's counter-institutional role.

To acknowledge his debt to previous experimental practices that had refused art-institutional valuations, Jorn eventually produced a détourned painting with the inscription: 'L'avant-garde se rend pas'. This was added onto an oil painting of a little girl, on which Jorn had also added a mustache. The latter was a clear reference to Duchamp, who had once added a mustache to a reproduction of Mona Lisa.[549]

But in his choice of canvas on which to add a mustache, Jorn also addressed the new situation: the postwar commodification of art. Where Duchamp, whose inaccessible work now sold for large sums of money, had added a mustache on the most famous paintings in Europe, Jorn did it on what could arguably be qualified as a kitsch painting.

In IS 3, Jorn expanded on this point. Détournement, 'Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude' states, is a continuing practice of the avant-garde, whereby it recycles old artistic elements in new contexts.[550] It does so to prove their polysemy: "*Les deux lois fondamentales du détournement sont la perte d'importance - allant jusqu'à la déperdition de son sens premier - de chaque élément autonome détourné; et en même temps, l'organisation d'un autre ensemble signifiant, qui confère à chaque élément sa nouvelle portée*" (IS 3, 10). As a practice détournement undermines the received

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[549] For a discussion of this, see Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century: Reinventing Contestation in Postwar France 1945-1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

[550] It states that "*Le détournement, c'est-à-dire le réemploi dans une nouvelle unité d'éléments artistiques préexistants, est une tendance permanente de l'actuelle avant-garde, antérieurement à la constitution de l'I.S. comme depuis*" (IS 3, 10).

meaning of something by placing the original phenomenon in another context, which alters its meaning.

SI located the promise of détournement in that it could unearth the negative moment of a postwar modernization. "*Le détournement se révèle ainsi d'abord comme la négation de la valeur de l'organisation antérieure de l'expression*", the article in IS 3 reads. "*Il surgit et se renforce de plus en plus dans la période historique du dépérissement de l'expression artistique*" (IS 3, 10). It could refuse the practice of the avant-garde from becoming, in Enzensberger's sense, just another commodity to be consumed.

Addressing the art markets increasing claim on art practice, Jorn turned the question of semantics in a monetary direction. "*Le détournement est un jeu du à la capacité de* dévalorisation," the article quoted him saying. "*Les essais de réemploi du 'bloc détournable' comme matériaux pour un autre ensemble expriment la recherche d'une construction plus vaste, à un niveau de référence supérieur,* comme une nouvelle unité monétaire de la création" (IS 3, 10, my emphases). Even if Jorn had here changed the object of his critique from automation, on which he had focused a year earlier, the gist remained the same: to refuse the ramifications of the one-dimensional scales from reducing what is 'human' and necessarily pluri-dimensional and in a constant state of transformation. In this case it referred to the semantically reductive scale of a monetary currency.

Jorn adopted LI's détournment to show the European art scene that it did not have follow the American one down the path of institutional suffocation and monetary reduction. In his hands, the practice suggested that valuations shift and that art can provide the platform for a critical dialogue on what is valued, indeed valuable. This is further under-

lined by the fact that with his détourned paintings he transitioned from a formal language in his practice, established in his Cobra-days, that could be, and indeed has been, compared to that of the New York school.[551]

This caused a stir. Debord was pleased. Though normally skeptical, if not suspicious of the art world, he praised Jorn's exhibition. "*L'exposition des peintures détournées de Jorn a été, je crois*," he wrote in a letter to equally skeptical Constant, "*une assez dure rupture avec le même milieu*", i.e. the Paris gallery scene.[552]

The resistance to the leveling and standardizing developments, affecting the western world, started, Jorn's actions suggest, within Paris culture. His exhibition attempted to disrupt this postwar tendency from taking over a new arena. The future would first appear, it seemed, at a Left Bank gallery. To oppose such consequences of postwar modernization, he drew on the dialectic logic of aesthetic modernism. He relied on its implicit historicist topography.

And yet, in his advocacy for the avant-garde to oppose the status quo, Jorn did not sense a need to quit painting, as so many others around this time in Paris also within SI. As we saw in the previous chapter, in 1957-8 Debord and Jorn had questioned those still working in the Cobra mold. But Jorn's recent turn suggests that they had done so for different reasons. "*Les groupes du mouvement Cobra, étaient réunis sur la proclamation d'une recherche expérimentale dans la culture*," the article on Cobra in IS 2 said. "*En*

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[551] This was most recently done at an exhibition at the foremost museum of modern art in Denmark, Louisiana, north of Copenhagen, which in 2014 mounted an exhibition comparing Jorn to Pollock! Kurczynski proves the superficiality of any such resemblance in *The Art and Politics of Asger Jorn* (2014).

[552] Debord to Constant, 20 May 1959

1951, l'Internationale des Artistes Expérimentaux mit fin à son existence. Les représentants de sa tendance avancée poursuivirent leurs recherches sous d'autres formes" (IS 2, 4, 36). For, the article, which was probably written by Debord, noted: "*Cobra ne put mener d'autre expérience effective que celle d'un nouveau style en peinture*" (IS 2, 4). As a medium, painting, Debord implied, was limited, indeed limiting. SI had to look beyond it. To Jorn the difference between the experiments of Cobra and SI resided elsewhere. The former's motifs aligned to an early postwar formlessness; at the time of its existence, the social and aesthetic arrangements were still up in the air. The latter, active a decade later when meanings had crystallized and dominant forms appeared, advocated a dynamic perception of form.[553] As a consequence, its aesthetic practice had moved in an organizational direction, which, to Jorn, did not necessarily discard paintings.

Jorn expressed his belief in the medium's continuing possibilities with the help of an originally LI praxis: détournement. In his hands, such practice blurred the line between artistic practice and aesthetic interpretation. Both constituted interventions dependent upon, indeed enabled by, previous cultural forms. This is further emphasized in the Danish version of the curation, which was printed next to the French. He there translated *détournez* as *forny,* i.e. renew.

Jorn translated LI practices for the artists within SI. He showed the peripheral members that such practices were applicable to their work. These practices were not owned by the Paris branch. This forged a path towards a more participatory international.

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[553] Asger Jorn, 'Livet er en drom. Gaston Bachelard og ildens billede', *Demokraten,* søndag den 20 augusti 1972.

Mobilizing Debord's idea of aesthetic experiments as communication, Jorn transposed the beliefs underlying his aesthetic practice into those he wanted to guide the organization's praxis. He wanted to make SI into a discursive community. And more than anyone else he facilitated SI's communication across Europe. He was often its translator, which was not a trivial feat. As in any international organization, translation posed an issue for SI. In 1957 it was decided, in part because of the cultural capital of Paris, that the lingua franca of the international would be French. As everyone did not speak it to the same degree of fluency, polyglot Jorn gained a crucial role. He translated statements from Italian and Dutch to French,[554] and acted as the translator for the German branch, whose member had limited knowledge of the organization's official language, at the conferences and of SI statements.[555]

More importantly, Jorn defied the former LI's members marginalization of painting by employing what had been one of their praxes. If his détourned paintings cast the work of art as a site of interaction, of dialogue, with multiple layers of meaning, he now allowed for the fact that the question of what constituted a situationist work could be similarly multi-faceted.[556] He brought dialogue into the very Parisian heart of the SI. This opened the path for others to claim SI's concepts as their own. Jorn gave voice to the pe-

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[554] From the Dutch, see Debord's letter to Constant 21 March 1959; and from Italian, see IS 2 regarding Industrial Painting.

[555] From the French to the German, see Debord to Constant, 25 April 1959. At the Munich conference, SI had a professional translator (Ohrt, 200). As we will see, Jorn was there mostly a negotiator.

[556] Without focusing on his détourned paintings in specific, Kurscynski stresses that Jorn's art as a whole was dialogic. It conforms, she claims, to what Jean-Luc Nancy has outlined with his concept of the singular-collective voice (see especially, Kurczynski, *The Art and Politics of Asger Jorn* (2014), chapter two 'Communal expressions').

ripheral branches of the international, because he believed in the need for friction. He wanted to keep a certain amount of tension alive between the fractions within the international.[557] The peripheral branches soon inscribed their works with their own meaning.

Revolution in Italy

As in France, in Italy the postwar art scenes were throughout the 1950s redefining what was formally possible. In fine arts, both Nuclear Art and Spatialism were attracting attention. And in cinema Neo-realism was, next to the Parisian Nouvelle Vague, on everyone's lips.[558] But unlike France, Italy had no unified, or unifying, scene; Rome was but one major city among half a dozen.[559] Where French film heavily featured Paris, Neo-realist film was shot on locations across the Peninsula, and the new movements in the fine and applied arts tended to cluster in the great cities of the North.[560] While re-asserting its position as the focal point of the Italian economy, Milan had, for instance, become an important nexus internationally for contemporary art. Milanese galleries

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[557] Troels Andersen, *Asger Jorn - en biografi.* (Silkeborg: Borgen, i samerbejde med Silkeborg Kunstmuseum, 1994-1997), 101.

[558] According to Agnes Varda, one of the main proponents of the French Nouvelle Vague, in the 1950s and 60s the young, experimental Parisian directors only perceived the Italian directors as their contemporary competitors (Varda, at a Q&A at BFI London, Southbank 2008).

[559] On the decentralized intellectual and artistic scene in Italy, see Judt, 209.

[560] Ohrt, 143-5. The boundaries between these 'scenes' were fluid. Ettore Sottsass, who would become perhaps the most famous industrial designer of his generation, knew Jorn *and* worked at the Milan Triennale of 1957 (Ohrt, 143).

showed new works by the likes of Cy Twombly and Yves Klein, and contributed to the rediscovery of works by Duchamp and various Dada artists.[561]

SI's Italian branch was active across northern Italy and in Paris.[562] By 1958 they had already opposed the Vatican by expressing their support of Guglielimi's vandalism in Milan. When now exhibiting industrial paintings, first in Turn and Milan, then in Paris, Pinot Gallizio and his son Giors Melanotte had their sights on those captains of industry whose capital, they thought, the Church ultimately guaranteed.[563] These were paintings, covering the entire gallery, produced by machines that they sold by the meter.

Encompassing industrial painting within the constructed situation, the Paris branch initially offered a curation of the Italians' art that situated the meaning of such painting in an art-historical context: "*Cette exposition … marque à nos yeux un tournant décisif dans le mouvement de disparition des anciens arts plastiques, un aboutissement qui contient en même temps les prémisses de leur transformation en une force nouvelle, comme l'exprime le slogan de nos camarades italiens: 'Contre l'art indépendant, contre l'art appliqué, l'art applicable dans la construction des ambiances*" (IS 2, 27).

Bernstein thought that such painting in mobilizing the large scale of industrial production demanded a revaluation of art: "*La domination progressive de la nature est*

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[561] For Milan's newly acquired importance, and its relation to the city economic importance, see Jaleh Mansoor, *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Modernism and the Beginnings of Autonomia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 55-6.

[562] For, as for so many other Europeans at this time, the French capital functioned as an important hub also for Italian artists. But, as we will see, more clearly than Jorn, the Italians in SI intellectually still had a foot planted in their homeland.

[563] In 1958, they exhibited at the Notizie gallery in Turin, where Debord's 'Report' was also on display, and at the Montenapoleone in Milan. The following year they exhibited at the Douin Gallery in Paris (Ohrt, 193; Debord's letter to Melanotte, 10 Feb 1959).

l'histoire de la disparition de certain problèmes, ramenés de la pratique 'artistique'—occasionnelle, unique—à la diffusion massive dans le domaine public, tendant même finalement à la perte de toute valeur économique" (IS 2, 27). From the perspective of Paris, industrial painting was interesting as an illustration of how to push this postwar quantifying tendency to its logical conclusion. It evoked a loss of economic value tout court. For, Bernstein continued, "*Au stade où nous parvenons maintenant, qui est celui de l'expérimentation de nouvelles constructions collectives, de nouvelles synthèses, il n'est plus temps de combattre les valeurs de vieux monde par un refus néo-dadaïste*." On the contrary, "*Il convient—que ces valeurs soient idéologiques, plastiques ou même financières—de déchaîner partout l'inflation. Gallizio est au premier rang*" (IS 2, 28).

While Bernstein had been instrumental in getting the Italians to mount their exhibition in Paris,[564] the Paris SI branch did not have the final say on the meaning of industrial painting. After Jorn's intervention they could not dictated what constituted situationist practice. A year later, the Italians offered their own curation. And they had a more directly political take on their practice.

In his own curations of his paintings, 'Discours sur la peinture industrielle et sur un art unitaire applicable', Pinot Gallizio argued that artists could sow the seeds of chaos. Inspired by Paul Dirac's theory of 'anti-matter, he engaged a metaphysical line of argument to situate art's role in society.[565] "*La grande ère des résines est commencée et, avec*

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[564] As we saw in chapter two, she had throughout 1958 liaised with the gallery (Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto (eds), *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing* (Milan, Charta, 2005), 64-6; 113).

[565] Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto (eds), *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing* (Milan, Charta, 2005), 29.

elle, ouvert l'usage de la matière en mouvement," he wrote. "*La micro-molécule colloïdienne marquera profondément le concept de relativité; et les constantes de la matière subiront leur définitive chute; et s'effriteront dans les mains des puissants toutes les idéologies de l'éternité et de l'immortalité; et les soucis d'éterniser une matière se réduiront toujours plus à leur néant, laissant la joie inépuisable du perpétuel nouveau aux artistes du chaos*" (IS 3, 31).

Artists wanting to undermine the currently hegemonic ideology had, Pinot Gallizio argued, the general drift of Being on its side. As Bernstein, he wrote this in a society that was experiencing large-scale transformations, while beset by inflation. But unlike in her context, in Italy such developments set processes in motion with unforeseeable consequences. "*La société brevetée*," he asserted, "… *est près de finir*" (IS 3, 32).

All the lines of tensions in postwar Europe ran through Italy. "Of all the countries in western Europe, it was Italy that had most directly *experienced* the plagues of the age", according to Judt.[566] Europe's East and West, north and south collided on the peninsula. The East and the West faced off there ideologically; both hegemonic nations of the Cold War camps had mouthpieces on the domestic arena. In the PCI Italy had the largest communist party in the western world, while its capital, Rome, provided the seat of the Pope and the Vatican. The latter had more than a finger in domestic politics. The Church supported the Christian Democrats that had through US backing and much scare-monger-

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[566] Judt, 206.

ing become the party of the State.[567] While Moscow and Washington both fielded if not quite representatives of their interest then at least sympathetic interlocutors of their cause in parliament, the US State Department alone had a foot in the door of the Quirinal Palace.[568]

Italy was also divided geographically. Acute since Italian unification, its North-South division had been further entrenched by recent events. As a site of fierce battles at the end of World War II, northern Italy had seen what was in reality a civil war. Against the retreating Germans and the remnants of the Fascist State, a powerful resistance movement of some hundred thousand partisans had risen from which the democratic Italian State drew part of its postwar legitimacy.[569] Southern Italy had meanwhile been liberated from Mussolini's rule by American troops. It has been argued that, as a consequence, "the social and administrative structures inherited from the Fascists thus survived unscathed" there.[570]

Recent decades had put these dividing lines in flux. Once the postwar economic miracle had reached across the Alps, a massive migration from the South to the North en-

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[567] The decisive election was the one in 1948, which the Christian Democrats won, thereby establishing its firm postwar grip on the State. In this election, "American intervention", Ginsborg writes, "was breath-taking in its size, its ingenuity and its flagrant contempt for any principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another country" (Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy, 1943-1988* (London, Penguin, 1990), 115). As in Greece, the Anglo-American intervention in Italy was a response to the USSR's even blunter tactics in Czechoslovakia.

[568] This was especially the case with reference to foreign policy. In domestic policy, the Christian Democrats had much more room for manoeuvre. But even there the US ambassador Clare Booth Luce played an active role. She let the party leadership as well as the management of major enterprises, such as FIAT, know what was expected of them in the struggle against communism.

[569] Ginsborg, 70.

[570] Judt, 257.

sued on the peninsula. Northern Italy needed labor to fuel its booming industries. But the infrastructure of its cities was not ready to accommodate the migrants. Poorly built neighborhoods without basic services emerged around Milan, Turin, Genoa. On top of their dismal living conditions, the southerners, who could often only speak in dialect, tended to be assigned to the worst position within workplaces. This triggered resentment. So rather than fulfilling "any dreams of social harmony …. [the Italian economic miracle] was," according to Ginsborg, "… responsible for the explosive meeting of southern youth with northern labour and Resistance tradition".[571] In the mid to late 1950s, the political future seemed as a consequence much more unwritten in Italy than in France. Due to such mixing of the north and south, the balance between east and west still appeared to be unstable; some tenets of the social contract were still being negotiated.

From an Italian perspective, modernization was not merely standardizing, and thus alienating. Even in comparison to France, for a West European country Italy had experienced a belated start to modernization. This was a 'belatedness' that had not escaped notice. So when *il miracolo economico* set off on the peninsula, the sense of acceleration was keenly felt. This made the ultimate destination of its trajectory seem less certain.[572] It demanded intellectual attention.

Like France, early postwar Italy played host to a wide-ranging intellectual conversation on social, political, and aesthetic developments. But unlike in France, important

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[571] Ginsborg, 253.

[572] For the experience of the acceleration of modernization as de-stabilizing in Italy, see Jaleh Mansoor, *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Modernism and the Beginnings of Autonomia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 20.

parts of this critical dialogue took place within the orbit of the communist party. While part of the Cominform, the PCI was less doctrinaire than its French counterpart. As executor of Gramsci's *The Prison Notebooks,* published posthumously in 1947, the party had at its disposal a rich intellectual resource, which proposed a Marxism that did not construe culture as a derivative field but one where hegemony could be won.[573] This attracted intellectuals and artists: "After 1948, the spoils of the Liberation were divided. Power fell to the [Christian Democrats]; culture to the PCI. Christian Democracy controlled the levers of the state, Communism attracted the talents of civil society. The PCI's ability to polarise Italian intellectual life around itself, not only in a broad arc of scholars, writers, thinkers and artists but a general climate of progressive opinion, was without parallel elsewhere in Europe."[574] This also held true within SI.

Only in Italy was SI's cultural resistance to the postwar techno-political modernization supported by the local communist party. The experimental laboratory at Alba, which had been a focal point of IMIB activities, was sponsored by the town's mayor. A PCI member and former Resistance activist, the mayor had also hosted the 1956 World Congress of Free Artists at the town hall and encouraged some of the participant to help work on a mobile structure for the town's Roma camp, of which we will hear more below. For now we should note that, as at least a partial consequence, only in Italy was SI's

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[573] This is not to say that Gramsci thought that a hegemonic cultural positions was enough to break the power of capital.

[574] Perry Anderson, "An Invertebrate Left." *London Review of Books* 31 no. 5 (2009): 12-18, https://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n05/perry-anderson/an-invertebrate-left

cultural revolution cast in a way that aligned with the targets of a communist party, if not with its exact current position.[575]

Pinot Gallizio thought that the current ways of being in the world were defined by industrial scales and motivated by production. Like the others in SI, his project was articulated against the backdrop of an overvaluation of instrumentality. "*En ce moment, l'homme fait partie des machines qu'il a créées*," he claimed. "*Il est nié et dominé par elles"* (IS 3, 33). Already in his contribution to the Congress of Free Artists in 1956, he had found that "the machine is suffocating us with the money it is creating."[576]

This did not have to be the case. "*Il faut s'aviser de que la machine est l'instrument apte à créer un art industriel inflationniste*, et fondé d'abord sur l'anti-brevet," he wrote. He proposed that "*il faut dominer la machine en la vouant au geste unique, inutile, anti-économique. Ceci aidera la formation de la nouvelle société, post-économique mais sur-poétique*" (IS 3, 33). Though this suggestion chimes with Bernstein's curation, behind it lay a belief, which was not as prominent in her text, that postwar modernization could be a destabilizing force.

Artists could play a constructive role in this shift. "In every age," he argued in 1956, "the artist has contributed to create machines". But a machine in itself "does not

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[575] Though this took place long before the historic compromise between the PCI and DC, the former did not attempt to the take over the State by any means other than by those outlined in the constitution. While excluded from many levers of the State, the party, with an eye to the needs of the Soviet Union, focused its power on the local level and in the labour unions.

[576] Pinot Gallizio, *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* (eds) Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto, (Milan, Charta, 2005), 130.

create". It only "executes orders". "The creator of new things are artists".[577] When in 1958-9 articulating how the artists would do so, he responded to the challenge posed by industrial design—widely felt in northern Italy, its new heartland—as articulated by the head of postwar Bauhaus, Max Bill: "*[die Künstler müseen sich mit dem Problem der Serieproduktion befassen*".[578] "Industrial painting," he answered, "provides a synthesis of the dialectics between creativity and seriality, reversing the meaning of both terms."[579] What Jorn had called 'Free Artists' could produce a serial production not guided by instrumental rationality.

For this to happen, aesthetic creation had to work towards steering the machines. Pinot Gallizio advocated for a collective enterprise that experimentally re-appropriated the industrial techniques that currently dominated human society.[580] By producing on a grand scale but without only churning out identical products, industrial painting was, he claimed, a first step in this direction: "*L'homme va vers l'expression d'un sens collectif, et vers l'instrument adapté à sa transmission: un système de 'potlatch', de cadeaux qui ne peuvent être payés, sinon par d'autres expériences poétisantes*" (IS 3, 32). Such art, playing with the means of industry, would dis-alienate 'man' living under the sign of technique. It would free 'him' from the means of communication that were not adopted

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[577] Ibid, 130.

[578] Ohrt, 143.

[579] Pinot Gallizio, *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* 157.

[580] "*Notre travail a servi à réunir beaucoup d'artistes sur ce point que l'unité de la culture est la seule idée capable de dominer la machine* (35).

to human scales but standardized by instruments. It would introduce a new economy of expression, one not of scarcity but of an ever increasing abundance.

As Paris argued, this would initially lead to a devaluation of artworks.[581] Introducing non-equivalent objects and non-quantifiable acts, such art practice would in the long run also produce a general inflation.[582] It would challenge the gold-standard guaranteeing a decomposing ideology. It would undermine its currency: "*Le nouveau conçu dans le hasards d'une création infinie, issue des énergies libérées de l'homme contribuera à la déroute de cette valeur-or, image de l'énergie congelée de l'infâme système bancaire, désormais en décomposition"* (IS 3, 31-2).

But this would have social repercussions, both for the role of art and factories, that Paris had not foreseen. "*Le perpétuel nouveau abolira l'ennui et l'angoisse créés par l'infernale machine, qui est reine du tout-pareil*," he suggested. "*Les nouvelles possibilités créeront le monde nouveau du tout-divers*" (IS 3, 32).

Crucially, he asserted that a world in which machines adapted to, and worked for, human desires, rather than vice versa,[583] was not a vain hope. It was a possible scenario. Together, he claimed, they could "*fonder enfin une culture industrielle au niveau des pouvoirs d'une ère qui commence à peine: la grande ère atomique*" (IS 3, 35).

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[581] "*La peinture industrielle a été la première tentative menée à bien d'un jeu avec les machines, et le résultat immédiat fut la dévalorisation de l'oeuvre d'art*", he wrote (34).

[582] He was not the first artist to be interested in inflation in Italy. At a Milan gallery, Yves Klein had shown eleven "identically signed and formatted, yet differently priced, blue monochrome paintings" (Mansoor, 42).

[583] They will have to be "*docilement captives de nos désirs"* (32). For "*La nouvelle culture industrielle sera produite dans le peuple, ou ne sera pas.*" (32)

His way of describing how was not without a certain Futurist inflection. With its Italian avant-garde precursor it shared an impatience with the effete men of letters standing in the way, and a glorification of speed and destruction, absent elsewhere in the international. "*L'époque des mandarins est close*," he announced. "*De nouvelles expressions dignes des nouveaux instruments briseront les plumes inutiles, et effaceront toute l'encre amère qui a mortifié le monde, jusqu'à son dernier vestige*" (IS 3, 32). In this, he had heeded the call of his and Jorn's friend and erstwhile collaborator, the nuclear artist Enrico Baj. The latter had contrasted, what he cast as, SI's situated art to a radiating one. "I … hope," he told Pinot Gallizio, "you can bring within situationism, whose weakness is the 'staticness', our typical Italian and futurist dynamism."[584]

It is clear that Pinot Gallizio's wanted to re-appropriate machine practices in a more explosive context than the others in the international. "*Seules, la création et la destruction continues et implacables, indissolublement constitueront la passionnante et inutile recherche d'objets d'un emploi momentané; minant les bases de l'économie' détruisant les valuers ou empêchant leur formations*," he claimed (IS 3, 32). "*Dans ce qui est maintenant devant nous, le temps sera d'abord une valuer émouvante, une nouvelle monnaie de choc*" (IS 3, 32).

When doing so, Pinot Gallizio wanted his art to do more than merely to re-appropriate instrumental practices; unlike Debord, Bernstein and Jorn, he foresaw the need and possibility to expropriate the means of production. For to properly unleash the potential

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[584] Baj to Pinot Gallizio, Aug 1958, quoted in *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* (eds) Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto, (Milan, Charta, 2005), 33.

integral to modern technology, to build a post-economic and abundantly ludic society, they, he thought, needed to take over the ownership of machines. He addressed their current owners: "*Vous, seigneurs encore puissants de la Terra, tôt ou tard, vous nous donnerez les machines pour jouer, et nous les disposerons pour l'occupation de ce temps libre que vous vous régalez par avance*, *avec une insane gloutonnerie, d'employer à la banalité perfectionnée, et au décervelage progressif*" (IS 3, 32).

When wanting his industrial paintings to cause an inflation flooding the current economy of scarcity, Pinot Gallizio, in other words, argued for revolutionary practice as conventionally defined. In his visions, "property will be collective and will rapidly self-destruct."[585] So while industrial painting did, as the Paris curation suggested, construct ambiances, it was also, the Italian artist argued, the first move towards repurposing factories—in this case, into laboratories: "*Seigneurs puissants et symétriques, la dissymétrie, à présent à la base de la biologie moderne, va inondant les domaines artistiques et scientifique, ruinant votre monde symétrique, calculé d'après les axiomes d'un lointain passé*" (IS 3, 33). In Italy, cultural experimentation still related to the social revolution. Aesthetic interventions to qualitatively change society was there believed to overlap with political ones by both the local communist party and the SI branch.[586]

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[585] He did so in the unabridged version of his text reproduced in *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* (eds) Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto, (Milan, Charta, 2005), 173.

[586] As Pinot Gallizio noted in his speech to the World Congress of Free Artists, "the social decomposition of the bourgeois world in all shapes and sizes is happening - you are the new catalysts that will germinate fresh hope" (*Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* (eds) Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto, (Milan, Charta, 2005), 130).

In 1959, Pinot Gallizio let the readers of IS 3 know that, from his perspective south of the Alps, the temporary, geopolitically circumscribed, ideological stasis looked much more precarious than from Debord's and Bernstein's point of view in Paris. Modernization hid a disruptive side. Introducing useless, unique, and anti-economic elements to production, industrial painting would unleash it. The artists were "in the position of catalysts". They were "the grey eminencies of chaos".[587]

Utopia in Amsterdam

The Dutch shared a techno-political vision with the Italians for a way out of the postwar aesthetic impasse. "*A quoi servent les inventions techniques les plus étonnantes, que le monde voit à se disposition en ce moment*," they asked, "*si les conditions manquent pour en tirer profit, si elle n'ajoutent pas aux loisirs, si l'imagination fait défaut?*" (IS 3, 37) So in response Constant designed grand plans in which the current economic energies were harnessed. But, if the Italian take on the 'situation' had linked artistic experimentations with the social revolution—a connection made probable in Italy because of its position at the confluence of East and West, North and South—the way in which the Dutch branch molded the SI's project to the local requirements of the Netherlands eclipsed the link. The country was firmly entrenched in the Western camp politically, but its artists had played a role along the central-east European avant-garde axis historically. To respond to their postwar context, the Dutch SI, drawing on aesthetic legacies

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[587] Pinot Gallizio to Baj, Aug 1958, quoted in *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* (eds) Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Maria Teresa Roberto, (Milan, Charta, 2005), 33.

besides Surrealism, questioned the centrality of the 'situation', indeed of the cultural revolution, for SI. And, like Jorn, they did so by making use of a Parisian concept for aesthetic practice, unitary urbanism.

To influence SI's direction, Constant wanted to take Jorn's role as Debord's closest collaborator and primary interlocutor. He and Debord enjoyed a lively correspondence. The year and a half following upon the summer of 1958, Debord sent more letters to Constant than all other SI members put together.[588] Its impact was on display in IS 2. In his first article in IS, in the second issue, Constant questioned Jorn's motivation for opposing functionalism with free artists. By arguably misconstruing Jorn's response to Max Bill, the postwar head of Bauhaus, which had just been republished in the French language volume *Pour la forme* (1958), edited by Debord, he argued that Jorn's reluctance to, like himself, give up painting after Cobra suggested a rejection of technology.[589]

Jorn and Constant had first met at a Miro exhibition in Paris in 1946.[590] At the conference of Le Bureau Internationale du Surréalisme Révolutionnaire, organized by Christian Dotremont in a Brussels café a year later, Jorn cast himself as the spokesperson of a non-existent Danish experimental group. This impressed the Dutch people in the

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[588] During 1959, according to Guy Debord, *Correspondance. Volume 1 juin 1957 - août 1960,* (ed) Patrick Mosconi & Alice Debord (Paris, Fayard, 1999)

[589] The Dutchman had given up painting in 1953 because he did not think it had any "transforming potential" (Catherine de Zegher, 'Introduction', *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* (ed) Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 10). Constant had since been offered a professor's chair at the new postwar Bauhaus at Ulm, which he declined (all according to Jorn in an undated letter to Debord sent in the summer of 1960). What prompted his criticism of Jorn was a passage from *Pour la forme* excerpted in the museum journal of the Stedelijk (Ohrt, 195).

[590] Ohrt, 99.

audience. Together with Corneille and Karel Appel, Constant followed suit and formed the Reflex group.[591] In Paris the following year, the two 'groups' merged to become Cobra together with Dotrement.[592] The Cobra artists aimed to resist what they perceived as the tendency among artists to collaborate with the driving forces of postwar society. They wanted to break away from an image of artistic creation that furthered the "dominant mechanisms of social control".[593] For them, the ludic creativity of children took its place.

Neither Constant nor Jorn had stopped believing in the need for some kind of ludic creativity to break with the hegemonic paradigm. The differences between Jorn's and his position now, Constant claimed in 1958, resided in the measures with which they thought that one could oppose functionalism by constructing new ambiances and not whether functionalism should be opposed. "*Je crois que les recherches purement formelles, si l'on s'en empare pour les transformer à nos fins*," he wrote to this end, "*sont très utilisables*" (IS 2, 26).

Constant's attack on Jorn was published as a dialogue between the Dutchman and the editorial team. As a member of the editorial team, Jorn wanted it to be published.[594]

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[591] Mark Wigley, 'Paper, Scissors, Blur', *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* (ed) Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 44.

[592] Ohrt, 104.

[593] Wigley, 'Paper, Scissors, Blur', 34.

[594] "*Il va de soi que la liberté de discussion que j'ai déjà garantie entre nous (dans la revue de l'I.S.) permet toute attaque, aussi direct qu'il faudra, contre les conceptions de Jorn - ou d'un autre. Jorn, avec qui j'ai discuté sur la base de ta lettre, est naturellement lui-même d'accord sur ce principe*" (Debord to Constant, 25 Sept 1958).

The international, he believed, would be dialogic or it would not be situationist. Constant, however, thought that the situationist dialogue would take place elsewhere.

As if confirming his own artistic trajectory, Constant's projects within SI posited architecture as the telos, rather than the state or a site, of aesthetics.[595] The four Dutch members were all either architects by trade or of persuasion, the foremost of whom was Constant. The shared professional affiliation was not accidental. In order to counter-act the alleged dominance of painters in SI, Constant made the conscious effort to attract architects.[596]

In the following issue of IS, he now construed architecture as Jorn and Debord had originally done artistic (ludic) practice. "*Depuis bien longtemps*," Constant wrote in line with SI's 'situation', "*l'architecture est devenue un jeu de l'espace et de l'ambiance*." It is in the international, he continued, that "*Nous voulons ... nous en servir plus consciemment*" (IS 3, 38-9).

In 'Une Autre ville pour une autre vie' ('Une Autre ville'), Constant presented a vision of plastic, urban architecture. "*La ville future*," he wrote, "*doit être conçue comme une construction continue sur piliers*" (IS 3, 39). His illustrations show a construction standing on pillars above the current city. The elevated construction carried a continuously morphing environment.

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[595] In 1956, Constant had developed an exhibition at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum together with Aldo van Eyck. The exhibition catalogue contended that architecture had become more important than painting (Ohrt, 110).

[596] Based on Debord's letter from the spring of 1959 - Constant's are not to my knowledge published - one can tell that they discussed the relative status of painters and architects and that Constant argued that the latter should take precedence over the former (see especially Debord's answer to Constant from 3 March 1959).

Indisputably visionary, 'Une Autre ville' questioned the taken-for-granted boundaries of architecture. It has been compared to other experimental architecture practices at this time, such as Archigram in Britain, Yona Friedman in France, and the members of the 'Team 10' around Europe.[597] Like theirs, in Constant's definition of architecture it was no longer a static edifice. It was rather a vehicle for ensuring that a city's mode of life was not fixed: it not only supported, rather than tore wholes into, the quotidian fabric; it facilitated for surprising encounters and novel experiences.[598] As Wark has pointed out, "rather than lines that make borders, Constant's *experimental geography* proposes lines that make connections."[599]

Constant rethought the use and purpose of architecture. In SI language, he détourned it. According to one interlocutor, he détourned Le Corbusier's Cité Radieuse.[600]

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[597] For the similarity of the Team 10 - which included Aldo van Eyck, who would later write in the *Situationist Times,* the English-language journal of SI 2 - and SI, see Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City,* 29-31; for how Archigram was influenced by SI, especially by Constant, see Sadler 132-3; and for how Friedman was also influenced by Huizinga and Caillois but did not take a stand against Le Corbusier, see Sadler 128-9, 134.

[598] At the 2015 Utopian Studies conference in Pittsburgh, PA, Franziska Bork-Petersen of Copenhagen University conceptualized this part of Constant's architecture as an experience jukebox (4th of November 2015). On the same note, Mark Wigley suggests that "New Babylon is a vast machine, a mechanism that repeats itself endlessly, automatically, yet allows people to collectively realize their every-changing fantasies" (Mark Wigley, 'Paper, Scissors, Blur', *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* (ed) Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 29).

[599] Wark, 140, his emphasis.

[600] Anthony Vidler, 'Diagrams of Utopia', *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* (ed) Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 83.

According to another, he "*hat die Grundstruktur chaotisiert*". He thought of masterplans as a labyrinth in which to play.[601]

Constant's 'Une Autre ville' conjured up a space in which the noncompetitive but participatory game would reign supreme. Ambiances, and thus desires, would continuously be recreated: "*Les différents étages seront divisés en des espaces voisinants et communiquants, qui offriront la possibilité de créer une variation infinie d'ambiances, facilitant la dérive des habitants, et leurs fréquentes rencontres fortuites*" (IS 3, 39-40). In this way his 'Une Autre ville' articulated a desire for a scenario in which functionalism no longer was the aesthetic expression of the prosperity of the time-period.

Though Constant always withheld its exact outlines,[602] 'Une Autre ville', by being couched in future tense, implied that Constant envisioned permanently overcoming a functionalist paradigm by projecting future alternatives onto current cities. He wrote that "*les villes future que nous envisageons offriront une variabilité inédite de sensations dans ce domaine, et des jeux imprévus deviendront possible par l'usage inventif des conditions matérielles*" (IS 3, 39). In the same way as Jorn and Debord, Constant believed that playing exposed the plasticity of fixed ideas and set forms. Like Debord, he focused such no-

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[601] Ohrt, 126. Gervereau notes that the scenario conjured up in Constant's New Babylon is the ultimate situationist one (Gervereau, 133); as I will argue in the next chapter, it is a vision of urban totality seen from the vantage point of situationist redemption.

[602] That Constant never provided more precise descriptions, in spite of working on his project until 1974, suggests, according to Mark Wigley, that he wanted to provoke a desire for its scenario. For, he notes, "desire, by definition, cannot be seen as such. It is precisely what is missing, what is yearned for, what will come. It is the city of the future" Mark Wigley, 'Paper, Scissors, Blur', *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* (ed) Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 52.

tions on the urban environment. But for the Dutchman alone, this was not an already existent environment.

Constant disrupted the correspondence of ends and means in SI's project. In 'Une Autre ville', theory no longer coincided with praxes. As Mark Wigley notes, "Play was the whole point of [Constant's project] but not its mode of production".[603] Playing would happen later.

And yet Constant articulated his project with the help of unitary urbanism. Constant had first heard of unitary urbanism at the 1956 meeting of LI and IMIB at Alba. Representing LI, Wolman had made a case for how a unitary urbanism could transcend Corbusian functionalism. It would, he had suggested, give ambience and desire their due. For the organizations, while officially adopting Wolman's statement, this only led to brief moments of co-operations. But it helped Constant conceptualize his thoughts on art after Cobra and in the shadow of functionalism.[604] In spite of the fact that "*Les jeux et émotions réels* dans les villes actuelles *sont inséparable des projets de l'U.U*. [unitary urbanism]," he argued that this was in reality only the case as "plus tard les réalisation de l'U.U. *ne doivent pas se séparer de jeux et d'émotions qui naîtront dans cet accomplissement*" (IS 3, 14, my emphasis).

Constant presented unitary urbanism less as a reaction against functionalist strictures than as their sublation. Being "*en train d'inventer des techniques nouvelles*," Con-

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[603] Wigley, 'Paper, Scissors, Blur', 37.

[604] Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon : the hyper-architecture of desire* (Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 1999), 14-6. Constant's deployment of these terms would outlive his collaboration with SI.

stant argued that through unitary urbanism "*... nous faisons des maquettes et des plans pour des villes futures*" (IS 3, 38). Such blueprints envisaged the totality of "*le milieu urbain comme terrain d'un jeu en participation*" (IS 3, 13).

Outlining a transcendence of functionalist city planning, Constant's project adapted to its scale. It would create full neighborhoods. Collapsing the distinction between art and life, it envisioned a total transfiguration of everyday urban life (IS 3, 35-8). His project, Wigley writes, evokes "a huge atmosphere jukebox that can only be played by a completely revolutionized society".[605] Alone among those who molded SI's project to their local context, the Dutch actually offered a counter-project.[606]

The unitary urbanism of Amsterdam was not just a praxis that could be encompassed within the umbrella of the Paris situation. Constant's 'Une Autre ville' offered total dis-alienation for its future inhabitants. For its establishment he needed none of the other praxes repurposing existing phenomena. Existing arts were irredeemable. His plans were premised on the belief, departing from SI's initial compromises which enabled the merger of the artists in IMIB with the theorists in LI, that "*les art traditionnels*," be they painting or architecture, "*ne pourront pas jouer de rôle dans la création de l'ambiance nouvelle dans laquelle nous voulons vivre*" (IS 3, 38).

And yet, by the publication of 'La Déclaration d'Amsterdam' in December 1958, Constant had convinced Debord, while outmaneuvering Jorn, that a unitary urbanism un-

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[605] Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon,* 13.

[606] "*La construction des quartiers",* Constant argued, *"est en désaccord évident avec les modes de comportement établis, et d'autant plus avec les nouveaux modes de vie que nous recherchons*" (IS 3, 37).

derpinned by research into the 'situation' took precedence over the construction of one (IS 2, 32-3).[607] Together Constant and Debord offered, what they called, a minimum definition of situationist action. "*Une situation construite*," the final and conclusive tenet in their program announced, "*est* un moyen *d'approche de l'urbanisme unitaire"* (my emphasis). And *"l'urbanisme unitaire est* la base indispensable *du développement de la construction des situations, comme jeu et comme sérieux d'une société plus libres*" (IS 2, 32, my emphasis).

Constant swayed Debord into embracing a different praxis than the one that would create the situation and thereby the network of united artists with which Debord and Jorn intervened in the heated discussions on the possibility of a postwar avant-garde a few years earlier. In contrast to the temporary nature of the construction of a situation, unitary urbanism was in search of affective permanence:[608] "*La construction d'une situation est l'édification d'une micro-ambiance transitoire et d'une jeu d'événement pour un moment unique de la vie de quelques personnes*." But, Constant and Debord continued, "*Elle est inséparable de la construction d'une ambiance générale, relativement plus*

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[607] Sadler notes that this 'Declaration' was the product of Debord's and Constant's lively letter correspondence (Sadler, 121). Debord and Constant had been in touch about various modifications of the SI program since 1957 (first letter 19th of Jan). They had together try to push back the residual 'pictorial' interests among the members (8 Aug 1958), which got its clearest expression in Constant's 'attack' on Jorn.

[608] The dérives, the most Parisian tenets of the situation, had envisioned a temporary intervention making a permanent imprint. "*Nous menant après les études préliminaires*", Khatib wrote par rapport of the dérives, *"qui s'imposent … à instaurer des ambiances nouvelles, situationnistes, dont les traits essentiels sont la courte durée et le changement permanent*" (IS 2, 13).

durable, dans l'urbanisme unitaire" (IS 2, 32).[609] As if validating Constant's mobilization of LI's unitary urbanism, Debord named Constant's 'Autre ville'. He called it 'New Babylon'.[610]

They now played with the idea to found a city rather than pursue that of a performance creating an international. Though such an aspiration was hardly realistic, the Dutch political context allowed for optimism. Holland was, according to Debord, "*un pays à haut niveau de vie où un État bourgeois démocratique aménagé intervient dans l'urbanisme*." If still undesirable, it merely "*exerce sur ... [l']anarchie naturelle [d'urbanisme] une autorité réformatrice*."[611]

And though Amsterdam was not yet the 'situ'-liberal city it would be in a decade,[612] and the paternalistic pillars structuring Dutch society into mutually segregated religious and political communities were yet to fragment, the Dutch members of SI

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[609] In spite of Debord's explicit adhesion to Constant's ideas in his letter correspondences and articles for IS, his even co-signing a manifesto or sorts marginalizing his 'own' situation, 'La Déclaration d'Amsterdam', most secondary works still suggest that Debord changed focus because of his co-operation with the group Socialisme ou Barbarie, on the fringes of the Parisian left. The latter was, however, only ever rewarded a dismissive comment in IS. And even if it would be the case that SouB influenced the Frenchman, Debord articulated his new perspective by supporting Constant's. (Exploring the links between SouB and Constant's New Babylon is, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation.)

[610] Gervereau, 131. As Wigley points out, it is not until IS 4 that Constant calls his project by this name (Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon,* 16).

[611] Debord to Constant, 4 April 1959. He opposed this to "*la réaction monopoliste et catholico-militaire en Europe*".

[612] In the local elections of 1970, the Kaboteurs, a group of SI inspired politicians, won 11% of the vote and five seats on city council (Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London, Routledge, 1992), 91-3).

agreed.[613] From their perspective it seemed as if "*Nous nous trouvons à l'aube d'une ère nouvelle, et nous essayons d'esquisser déjà l'image d'une vie plus heureuse et d'un urbanisme unitaire; l'urbanisme fait pour plaire*" (IS 3, 37). It would allow for a reconfiguration of Amsterdam. Based on the implied critique of the present day by unitary urbanism, Constant reminded his readers that "*le centre d'Amsterdam n'est pas un musée, mais l'habitat d'hommes vivants*" (IS 3, 16). He wanted to stop its old neighborhoods from being turned into tourist zones, where social relations of a more permanent nature would become impossible.[614]

For such plans the Dutch drew on avant-garde legacies in addition to Surrealism. In their 'Première proclamation de la section hollandaise de l'I.S.', the Dutch (A. Alberts, Armando, Constant, Har Oudejans) had displaced artistic practice into architectural plans. "*L'urbanisme unitaire sera l'activité, toujours variable, toujours vivante, toujours actuelle, toujours créative, de l'homme de demain*," they claimed (31). Though the focus is here on constant regeneration, they evoked the possibility of erecting platforms at which (re)creation at large took place. In scale such ideas were more akin to construc-

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[613] On the pillars of Dutch society, see Judt, 263-5; and for a personal account of the growth of a liberal Amsterdam in between these pillars, see Geert Mak, *In Europe: Travels through the Twentieth Century,* trans. Sam Garrett (New York, Vintage, 2008) 635-641.

[614] He worried that "*dans les vieux quartier, les rues ont dégénéré en autostrades, les loisirs sont commercialisée et dénaturés par le tourisme*", and that as a consequence "*Les rapports sociaux y deviennent impossibles*" (IS 3, 37).

tivist projects than Surrealism's.[615] Among the former, one should count the visions of a plastic architecture proposed by the Dutch group de Stijl, which eventually influenced the Bauhaus school.[616] Constant had been introduced to the works by de Stijl artists, such as Rietveld, J.J.P. Oud, Mondrian, van der Leck, and van Doesburg, by the Dutch architecture theorist and 'Team 10' member Aldo van Eyck after quitting Cobra. In them and early Soviet experimentation, he found new ways to create the conditions for everyone to be creative. They moved him towards architecture, which, he realized after early postwar visits to bombed-out British and German cities, could fill a social role.[617] This belief was bolstered when he was offered the chance to imagine a way to house the Roma community that every year camped at Alba.[618]

When now conceptualizing such beliefs through 'unitary urbanism', Constant persuaded Debord to relativize the importance of Surrealism. Interested in the experimental projects that had once been relevant for the Berlin-Moscow axis,[619] Constant wanted to

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[615] In a way that was not qualitatively different from that of which Jorn in the 1940s had accused Le Corbusier, an accusation which we met in the first chapter, they aspired to write the guidelines for the contract between creation and the universe, between what will come and what is. Though, it should of course be stressed that, following prior SI plans, their artwork was not fenced off, defined, or fixed; art practice should not strive to eternalize, but to create and recreate. It should outline constant interventions. Theirs envisioned "*un environnement fonctionnel passionnant"*, one transcending rather than reinventing, functionalism (IS 3, 12).

[616] On the Netherlands as one of the countries producing an avant-garde, see Anderson, 'Modernity and the Revolution' (1984).

[617] Benjamin Buchloh, 'A Conversation with Constant, *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* (ed) Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 16-25. Jorn's standing in Constant's eyes surely was not helped by having had the audacity to criticize de Stijl for lacking a theory of practice (Ohrt, 289).

[618] Ohrt, 118.

[619] On the division between those trends and artists orbiting around Paris and those belonging on a Berlin-Moscow axis, see Hobsbawm, 180-2.

update the practices of the so called constructivist international.[620] This prompted Debord to acknowledge that "*Je connais très peu l'avant-garde constructiviste entre les deux guerres, dont tu parles*". Such ignorance had led him to draw hasty conclusions. "*Sans doute*," he went on, "*j'ai négligé cela comme recherche plastique pure, ce qui n'excuse rien*."[621] Creativity for all, Debord conceded, could be sought outside of Paris' streets and its avant-garde canon.

This also meant that the Dutch did not, as Surrealism, want to expose an underlying, indeed repressed, originary chaos. Nor did they intend to map the contemporary city's overlooked affective ecologies, as was the wish of the French branch. They rather envisioned a space where life could flow unhindered and ambiances and experiences reproduce themselves. This would be, in Jorn's terms, a life in turns created by and creating dynamic forms. "*En renonçant à la forme fixée,* nous gagnons toutes les formes*, que nous inventons et rejetons ensuite*," they wrote. "*Cette nouvelle attitude implique aussi que nous renonçons à l'oeuvre d'art. C'est l'invention ininterrompue qui nous intéresse: l'inventions comme mode de vie*" (IS 3, 30-1).

In the Dutch project, Debord's response to Lefebvre—in which he argued that SI's project did not, like Surrealism, only focus on how the content of aesthetics expressed a longing for something different but what form it would take—got its most concrete example. In their hands this turned into the imperative to construct new cities. They imag-

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[620] This is clear from Debord's answer to Constant 8 Aug 1958. Debord had to 'defend' Surrealism against other avant-garde tendencies: "I do not believe that we would like to over-estimate the importance of surrealism in comparison with the other investigations that you mentioned".

[621] Debord to Constant, 3 March 1959.

ined scenarios in which new ways of using architecture allowed for playful experiences to ceaselessly emerge. And for such master-plans, however détourned, they had no need of current 'reality', or prior artistic practice. "*L'artiste d'aujourd'hui affronte un vide culturel absolu: absence d'esthétique, de morale, de style de vie*," they argued. "*Tout est à inventer*" (IS 3, 30).[622]

Impudence in the Federal Republic

Gruppe Spur, SI's new German branch, did not second the Dutch branch's attempt to reinvent the designs of the constructivist international for a new era. The Munich-based group was inspired by another Central European, interwar avant-garde tactic: the impudence of the German Dadaists. And Spur believed that this sensibility could be projected onto canvases.

Spur's position interested Jorn, who first met its members at the gallery of Otto van den Loo in Munich in 1958.[623] Fresh out of art school, the members of Spur—Heimrad Prem, Helmut Sturm, Hans-Peter Zimmer, and Lothar Fischer—were among the few avant-garde artists in early postwar West Germany who had joined forces to become a collective.[624] They rejected the compartmentalization of art within postwar society,

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[622] "*Contrairement à ce que pensent les fonctionnalistes*", Constant proclaimed together with A. Alberts, Armando, and Har Oudejans in the 'Première proclamation de la section hollandaise de l'I.S.', "*la culture se situe là où finit l'utile.*" Indeed, "*Les nouveaux pouvoirs se dirigent vers un complexe des activités humaines, qui se trouve au-delà de l'utilité: les loisirs, les jeux supérieurs*". (SI 3, 30)

[623] Ohrt, 197.

[624] According to Richard Langston, "Although the avant-garde collective along with the concomitant genre of the manifesto did resurface after 1945, Germany's post-fascist avant-gardes are more often than not the labor of unaffiliated individuals" (Richard Langston, *Visions of Violence: German Avant-Gardes after Fascism* (Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 2007), 20.

which they thought that the academic abstractionists favored.[625] For Spur the role of the artist was not distinct from the rest of society.[626]

This was on display in their early interventions. The most famous of these took place in January 1959.[627] It had been announced that Max Bense, a philosophy professor at Munich university, would give a lecture at the city's museum of ethnology. It attracted the local intelligentsia. When they arrived, the members of the audience, in which one found newspaper reporters from among other outlets the *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* were surprised to find a suitcase rather than Bense at the podium. Inside it lay a hidden tape recorder. As it switched on, a voice claiming to be Bense's said that, due to urgent business matters, he was unable to give his lecture in person. He had instead decided to send an audio recording of it. But the recording was in fact made by Spur. On it H.P. Zimmer read a non-sensical collage of quotes of Bense's texts.[628] It was met by a roar of approval from the unwitting crowd. When the real source of the lecture was discovered, it caused a scandal.[629] Soon after, Spur was included in the international as the German branch.

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[625] For the way Spur rejected abstractionists, see Mia Lee, 'The Return of the Avant-Garde in Post-War West Germany', *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* Vol. 60, Number 3, (2014), p. 410; For the way such abstract painters taught within the academies, see Ian Wallace, *The First Documenta, 1955* (Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2011).

[626] Diedrich Diederichsen, 'Self-Persecution: The SPUR Group and Its Texts: The Neo-Avant-Garde in the Province of Postfascism', *Grey Room*, no. 26, (Winter 2007), p. 60.

[627] It should be mentioned that as early as 1957, they put on an informal painting-performance in the Botanical Gardens of Munich (Hussey, 136).

[628] Diederichsen, 70, footnote, 17.

[629] Hussey, 136.

While Spur's interventions intrigued the Paris branch, not least because they resembled former LI practice,[630] the Germans entertained an aesthetic theory that had more in common with Jorn's. Bense, who they ridiculed, proposed a 'scientistic aesthetic' related to that of the postwar Bauhaus school at Ulm.[631] Like Jorn, Spur refused art to be functionalized. As artists they did not want the place in society that the techno-political architecture had reserved for them. "*Wir wagen es, unsere Stimme gegen den ungeheuren Koloß des technisierten Apparates zu erheben*," they wrote in a 1958 manifesto co-signed by Jorn. Like the Dane's belief in free art, the manifesto thought that "*Die Kunst ist die letzte Domäne der Freiheit*" and that "*Die künstnerlische Forschung ist frei und hat mit Wissenschaft und Technik nichts zu tun. Wir sind dagegen, daß man heute die Kunst verwissenschaftlichen will und sie zu einem Instrument der technischen Verblödung machen will*."[632]

While not confined exclusively to the gallery space, their artistic practices had not outgrown canvases. They rejected those who saw painting only as a means of provocation.[633] The manifesto believed in art's political importance. "*Es gibt heute eine zukunftsträchtige, künstlerische Aufrüstung im Gegensatz zur moralischen Aufrüstung. Europa*

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[630] For as Zimmer notes, "Mit anarchisch-revolutionären Aktionen wie dem Bense-Skandal hatte sich die deutsche Gruppe für die SI legitimiert" (Nina Zimmer, 'Die Gruppe Spur 1957-1966, in *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni1 – Die Situationistische Internationale (1957 – 1972)*, (ed) Stefan Zweifel/ Juri Steiner/Heinz Stahlhut (für Museum Tinguely), Zürich/Basel 2006, 243 f.)

[631] Diederichsen, 62.

[632] Reprinted in Gérard Berréby (ed) *Textes et documents situationnistes 1957-1960* (Paris, Éditions Allia, 2004), 89.

[633] Ohrt, 215.

steht vor einer großen Revolution, vor einem einzigartigen kulturellen Putsch," the manifesto said. "*Die Welt kann nur durch uns enttrümmert werden. WIR SIND DIE MALER DER ZUKUNFT*".[634]

This choice should be seen in light of their nationality. In the Federal Republic modern art had not yet gained the renown it had in France. According to Ohrt, in the 1950s, "*die Moderne war überhaupt unbekannt*".[635] This was in part because the Nazi authorities had closed down the collections of modern art within Germany. They had uncoupled Germany from international aesthetic trends.[636] The local collections of modernist art would not re-open for the public on a more permanent basis until the very end of the 1950s.[637]

An intellectual conservatism set the tone in West Germany in the first two decades after the war. Heidegger's philosophy dominated the humanities departments[638] and Carl Schmitt, though barred from holding academic positions, remained hugely influential for the public conversation. Through a network of scholars, he, according to one historian,

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[634] Berréby (ed), *Textes et documents situationnistes 1957-1960,* 89.

[635] Ohrt, 186.

[636] Zimmer, 'Die Gruppe Spur 1957-1966', 243. This was maybe less the case in literature and theatre. Though Musil had died in exile, Mann and Brecht were still alive. And, as noted in chapter two, the performances of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble caused a stir in Paris in the early 1950s. But indicating the relative provinciality among a younger generation of West German authors, there was no sharp distinction between existentialism, which had a substantial following on the Right Bank of the Rhine, and surrealism (Langston, 59-60). What is more, some of the principle authors to eventually renew German-language theatre, literature, and poetry lived during this time abroad: Peter Weiss in Stockholm, Günter Grass and Paul Celan in Paris. In the 1950s, such authors were still "received with varying degrees of suspicion within the Federal Republic of Germany" (Langston, 60).

[637] Ohrt, 186.

[638] Peter Osborne, 'Redemption through Discourse', *New Left Review* 108, November-December 2017, p. 128.

"smuggled … conservative contraband into mainstream media."[639] While absent in person from the public sphere, his intellectual presence could be widely felt. He was the '*éminence gris*e' in the new West German State.[640]

Though growing in number, the dissident voices remained relatively few.[641] As long as the Federal Republic still boasted a prominent illiberal Right, those to its left on the political spectrum often joined forces.[642] They argued that Germany could only become a 'normal democratic country' if it was tied more closely to the West. In hindsight the need for such *Westbindung* has often been cast as the dominant thrust of the political and cultural initiatives in the early Federal Republic.[643]

Aesthetic modernism was an important vehicle with which such German democrats tried moving the Federal Republic towards the western camp. As a part of the Bonn Republic's alignment with the West, the first Documenta exhibition was organized in Kassel in 1955. It aimed to rehabilitate the modernist art that the Nazis had deemed 'de-

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[639] Jan Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Postwar European Thought* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003), 60. Scholars from across Europe came to visit his remote home at Plettenberg, one of whom was Kojève, who we will hear more about further down. Schmitt created a sort of alternative republic of letters.

[640] Müller, 60-2. Among the other crucial contributors to an early postwar conservatism – who had, like Heidegger and Schmitt, sympathized to varying degrees with the Nazi cause without that causing serious reputational damage during these years – one should mention Arnold Gehlen and Ernst Jünger.

[641] The many prominent intellectuals in the so-called *Flaghelfer* generation – those blessed with a late birth, and only drafted into the war effort during its dying days – had not yet, or had just, entered the public stage. Habermas, Grass, Enzensberger, Luhmann, et al., would not become influential public figures until the 1960s.

[642] For a description of this, and of when this union of convenience ended, see A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[643] For a discussion on it with respect to West Germany's most famous public intellectual, see Matthew Specter, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

generate'. Documenta's founding curators wanted at once to ensure the return of modernism to Germany and the re-integration of German art in European cultural and political life.[644]

While outnumbered, there was also another current opposing the extant illiberal right in the Bonn Republic. It drew on a local intellectual tradition more skeptical of the 'West'. Max Weber had argued that instrumental rationalization drove occidental developments. Informing the way western polities were ordered, it led to "the iron cage" of bureaucratic capitalism. This insight had been foundational for the Frankfurt School, some of whose interwar members, such as Horkheimer and Adorno, returned to Germany from American exile in the late 1940s.[645]

Re-opening the Frankfurt School in the early 1950s, Adorno and Horkheimer cut lonely figures on the West German scene.[646] They even worried whether they would find any worthy successors.[647] Stunned about the way people went about their lives as if nothing had changed, they thought that the Third Reich had succeeded in creating a kind of person acquiescing to power. Domination, they believed, continued under new ideologi-

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[644] For the way they did so, and its ideological meaning, see Ian Wallace, *The First Documenta, 1955* (Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2011).

[645] Specter, 2-3; 15-6. The famous work in which they worked out the consequences of this logic, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* originally published in Amsterdam in 1947, was not yet widely available. It would take another two decades until it was (Diederichsen, 63).

[646] Perry Anderson, *The New Old World,* 222.

[647] They had held out a hope that Rolf Dahrendorf would lead the way for a new generation before he resigned. In early 1956 he was replaced by Habermas (Osborne, 126). Three years later Habermas also resigned. He found Horkheimer – who accused him of being too Marxist – too conservative (Osborne, 134).

cal guises.[648] Though such a conclusion hardly made them popular among anti-communist liberals for whom the great dividing line in postwar Europe was whether a society was totalitarian or not, they far from sided with any communist parties. When returning from America, they had chosen to settle in West rather than East Germany. They had lost any faith that a popular insurrection could be emancipatory. The proletariat had not reached ideological 'maturity'; the revolution would not happen.[649] A critical perspective, not commitment to any cause, guided their inquiries. In fact, they even agonized over whether to sign petitions for causes they supported. (One of the political positions they nonetheless took in public was one in support of Anglo-French assault on Egypt in 1956.)[650]

Adorno increasingly placed art in the center of his critiques. Like the sponsors of Documenta, he championed modernism. But for him the autonomy of modern art had given it a powerful, dissonant side, which refused serving political projects. He insisted on experimental art's ability to escape the grip of the State and the market. He believed that its *Ausdruck* was different from a reified *Kommunikation.* He would eventually sug-

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[648] For this, see Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (London, Verso, 2016), especially the chapter 'The Ghost Sonata', 262-279.

[649] Jeffries, 275-6. The old, radical strand of the Frankfurt School, Habermas for instance thought, was kept alive by Marcuse, but he lived in the US. Anti-capitalist positions would not return on a broad level in West Germany until in the student movement of the 1960s. The public return of the Frankfurt School critique of instrumentality happened earlier. It occupied academia and the *Feuilleton* sections of the broadsheets once Adorno and Karl Popper started their *Positivismusstreit* in 1961 (Osborne, 133-4).

[650] Jeffries, 297.

gest that "Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness."[651]

Steeped in Adorno,[652] then still little read in Paris, the German SI members also emphasized art's freedom to reject social demands and ability to break with an instrumental paradigm.[653] For them, art was the negative moment of a positivist trend. But their way of expressing this did not go to find inspiration at Adorno's Grand Hotel Abyss.[654] To provoke the ire in Munich, the former *Kunststadt* of the Third Reich, they drew on the vulgar idioms of the Weimar era gutter.

The German SI members wanted to piss against the wind of idealism. In this the Spur manifesto did not cast the opposition dividing the time-period as being between dynamic and static forms, as Jorn had. It rather opposed a postwar classicism to what could be conceptualized as kynicism, previously absent from Jorn's thought. In his *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983), Sloterdijk distinguished kynicism from an 'enlightened' ideology critique.[655] Ironic and sarcastic, it was a cheeky 'critique' that mocked rather than questioned the ruling ideology, deploying a rational discourse less than bodily fluids and gut-

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[651] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 227.

[652] Wark, 110. The only other SI members well-versed in Adorno was, according to Ohrt, the Italian member Olmo, whose text 'Per un concerto di sperimentatione musicale' addressed Adorno's aesthetics (Ohrt, 188). But he belonged to the Italians excluded in the international's first year of existence.

[653] Zimmer, 243

[654] Lukács famously claimed that Adorno and Horkheimer stayed at Grand Hotel Abyss (see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1973).

[655] Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason,* trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

tural laughters. Though tracing the practice's genealogy back to the ancient Greeks, Sloterdijk thought it got its modern expression in interwar Dadaism. But he did not mean those Dadaists who, upon the conclusion of the First World War, left Zurich for Paris, where they inspired the creation of Surrealism, but those moving to Berlin. Their militant impudence challenged the good taste of the Weimar Republic and their decadence the 'constructivist international'.[656]

SPUR reinvented the kynicism of the German dadaists for a new epoch.[657] "*Statt eines abstrakten Idealismus fordern wir einen ehrlichen Nihilismus*," its manifesto stated. "*Wir fordern den IRRTUM*," it continued. "*Die Konstruktivisten und die Kommunisten haben den Irrtum abgeschafft und leben in der ewigen Wahrheit. Wir sind gegen die Wahrheit, gegen dans Glück, gegen die Zufriedenheit, gegen das gute Gewissen, gegen den fetten Bauch, gegen die HARMONIE*." Indeed, "*WIR FORDERN DEN KITSCH, DEN DRECK, DEN URSCHLAMM, DIE WUSTE*."[658]

Spur wanted to expose the historical continuities beyond *Stunde Null,* the convenient fiction that, upon its creation, the West German State had started from scratch. The Spur members had experienced first hand the rehabilitation of previously purged Nazis at the Munich Academy of Art.[659] They thought that the techno-rationalism that powered the West German *Wirtshaftswunder* enabled a collective amnesia. Drawing on cultural

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[656] Holger Freiherr von Dobeneck, *Das Sloterdijk-Alphabet,* (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2006) 56-7.

[657] Ohrt, 187.

[658] Berréby (ed), *Textes et documents situationnistes 1957-1960,* 89.

[659] With regard to the rehabilitation of ex-Nazis at the Munich Academy of Arts, see Lee, 409-410.

lineages beyond year zero, their artistic provocations aimed to bring out the disguised authoritarian reflexes of the German authorities.[660] They had hit the sore spot: while many strands of the modernist aesthetic that had previously been labeled 'degenerate' were being incrementally integrated in the cultural life of a rearmed, Nato-allied West Germany, the Documenta exhibition had stayed away from the Berlin Dadaists.[661] They were still toxic.

Kynicism did not appeal to the French.[662] Privately, Debord disapproved of the manifesto's positions: "*je ne vois pas quel renforcement nous apporte ce groupe allemand*." The recent autonomy of the Italian and German also branches worried him. "*Il s'agit*," he said, "*d'être vigilant*."[663]

Notwithstanding such disapproval in the metropole, the German and Italian branches undertook interventions on their own. Together they criticized the Spanish painter Cuixard. At the 1959 Sao Paolo Biennale Cuixard had denounced the communist sympathies of his fellow Spanish artists Saura and Tapiés. In a tract advocating positions in the international's name, 'Difendiamo la libertà', they attacked Cuixard for thus cynically trying to increase his chances of winning a prize.[664]

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[660] Diederichsen, 62-3.

[661] The only exception was Schwitters. The Russian constructivists and revolutionary, but figurative, artists, such as Kollwitz were also excluded. Such choices have been seen as eminently political. See for example, Wallace, *The First Documenta, 1955.*

[662] Nor indeed did it to the Munich public: to some, its provocations resembled those of the SA (Ohrt, 187).

[663] Debord to Constant, 16 Oct 1959

[664] Pinot-Gallizio, *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* 120. For the tract, see Berréby (ed), *Textes et documents situationnistes 1957-1960,* 147.

Such organizational independence would have been censured a year earlier. But in 1959 the French could not stop it. Although Debord now turned to Constant for support to enforce his line, Jorn had enfranchised the trans-Alpine and trans-Rhinean branches. Unlike the case at the second conference in Paris, which saw the exclusion of more than half of the Italian branch for not toeing the French line, at the third SI conference, the German and Italian peripheral branches were not excluded. They rather demanded for SI to rethink its project. This exposed the fragile common ground underlying the Franco-Dutch co-operation and provoked an inter-national dialogue.

The Situation in Munich

From the 17th to the 20th of April 1957, 15 months after the previous conference in Paris, SI held its third 'annual' conference in Munich. SI branches were present from all the countries—save Luxembourg, plus Denmark—that had just founded the European Economic Community, EEC, the precursor to the EU, in Rome: Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and West Germany. The only absentees were the Algerians,[665] which, lest we forget, represented a territory also part of the EEC, though one with a special status.[666]

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[665] Though the consequences of the French war in Algeria was brought up at the conference, which we will hear more about in the next chapter, the fact that the Algerian branch was absent was not mentioned in IS 3.

[666] For its special status, see Allan F Tatham, 'Don't Mention Divorce at the Wedding, Darling! : EU Accession and Withdrawal after Lisbon', in (ed) Andrea Biondi and Piet Eeckhout, *EU Law After Lisbon* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 143-5. The next chapter will outline why SI's Algerian branch was not present.

All the local, European modifications of the 'situation' came to a head in Munich. Here the peripheries wrote back. Upon the publication of IS 3 in 1959, SI's journal not only ran declarations from Amsterdam, Paris and Copenhagen that suggested conflicting ways of codifying the international's praxis; it also featured articles contradictorily suggesting both that unitary urbanism was at the center of SI pre-occupations and that détournements was their shared praxis.[667] The different branches demanded their projects to be represented at the conceptual center.

All branches now saw themselves as interlocutors of the 'situation'. This even held true of the newest branch. The intellectual positions behind their practice was not left unquestioned at the conference.[668] But representing one among what was now many ways of translating SI's aesthetic resistance to a postwar instrumental paradigm, the Germans held their ground. Jorn even had to temper some of their claims.[669] In fact when the Munich conference decided to let other cities and national branches share the responsibility of certain functions with the French capital, the German branch was a contender. Next to the Dutch, it was the one that the conference acknowledged had been making progress (IS 3, 21). So SI's members agreed upon plans to publish a German-language edition of IS.

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[667] Détournement is defined as the praxis of the international: its deployment was, IS 3 claimed, "*la signature du mouvement, la trace de sa présence et de sa contestation dans la réalité culturelle d'aujourd'hui*" (IS 3, 10).

[668] Thomas Drehe, "Zwischen Kunst und Lebensform. Von den Lettristen zu den Situationisten", in *Neue Bildende Kunst*, issue 6/1992, p.11-15

[669] Ohrt, 200.

Amsterdam was nonetheless mostly to gain from such organizational restructure decentralizing the international. It was decided that *Potlach*, the not yet defunct former publication of LI, would tentatively move to Amsterdam, but continue being published in French (IS 3, 21). If Dutch as a language made no pretense of providing a vehicular means of communication, either in SI or elsewhere, the Dutch still wanted to make Amsterdam a hub for the network. They wanted to establish a permanent Amsterdam office for unitary urbanism.

With the establishment of the new office, the Dutch intended to institutionalize a part of SI's project under their auspices. To sell his plans Constant argued that having an office devoted to unitary urbanism would be institutionally akin to the Experimental Laboratory at Alba, which SI had inherited from post-Cobra IMIB. But the letter correspondence between Debord and Constant leading up to and following the conference paints a different picture. The Alba laboratory was created by and for painters and sculptors. These were the groups whose influence Constant wanted to check by attracting architects to the international. By establishing a new office, Debord and Constant now plotted ways to further marginalize these groups. Debord and Constant wanted to make Amsterdam the foremost new SI branch.[670] And unitary urbanism, we should not forget, was the SI praxis that the Dutch, hardly incidentally, wanted to encompass all other. In his 'Rapport inaugural de la conference de Munich', Constant argued "*Une praxis situationniste dans la perspective d'un urbanism unitaire doit être notre première tâche, et le but principal*

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[670] To allay any possible fears of this being the case Debord had before the conference persuaded Constant to call it merely an office of unitary urbanism, and not, as Constant had desired, a center (Debord to Constant, 30 April 1959.)

de notre réunion actuelle. Nous ne devons pas nous quitter sans avoir examiné en commun les possibilités qui existent déjà pour des expériences pratiques" (IS 3, 26).

With the help of Debord, the Dutch managed to persuade the others of Constant's plans for an addition to SI's institutional framework. The prominence of Constant within the international matched his rising star outside of it. He was invited to participate at the second edition of Documenta in 1959. The original exhibition in 1955 had turned out to be so popular that it had been decided that Documenta would return for a second time. But this time the focus was on contemporary art. Though often remembered as the Documenta that brought European attention to American abstract expressionism, it was equally the edition at which a European generation of artist who had come of age artistically in the late 1940s and throughout 1950s made their imprint. Many painters belonging to the same circles in Paris as SI's members were exhibited, such as Karen Appel, a former Cobra member; Hans Platschek, a German painter who had been a part of SI but was excluded at the turn of the year 1958-9; Jean Dubuffet and Henri Michaux. And indeed so too was Jorn.

When supporting the Dutch, Debord's organizational practice had not changed. He still wanted to administer the international. As he had lost some of his leverage, due to the recent diversification of SI praxes and some of its members' newfound fame, he now did so through recourse to Amsterdam: within the international "*les positions les plus avancées sont prises en Hollande et en France, mais l'extension de ces positions devra se produire aussi dans les autres 'sections', si nous faisons bien notre travail, et ce processus débordera rapidement les anciens leaders artistiques de ces groupes*." And

"*Pour cela*," he continued, "*il ne faut évidemment pas se fier à une justesse abstraite de nos idées, mais travailler à répandre partout nos problèmes - et nos ébauches de solution*." With regard to Dutch publishing *Potlatch,* he concluded that "*Notez à ces propos que les publications officielles de l'I.S. sont maintenant contrôlées par Paris et Amsterdam. À nous d'utiliser ces moyens*."[671]

But Constant's and Debord's intention to re-centralize the international, if now through a poly-centric core, ran up against the united front of peripheral branches and members wanting SI theory to be practiced. An SI fraction consisting of the Italians and Jorn "*s'inquiète*," the description from the conference noted, "*de l'autonomie qu'il* [Constant's permanent office] *peut prendre dans le mouvement, et ... de la dangereuse spécialisation qu'il risque d'y acquérir*" (IS 3, 19-20). Jorn and the Italians took issue with the establishment of a permanent office based on an SI principle guaranteed by the 'situation': the indivisible international. It was with the 'situation' that SI presented a unified front on a cultural scene dominated by the various aesthetic compromises with a postwar instrumental paradigm, notably Le Corbusier and Max Bill's postwar Bauhaus. Their importance had not diminished; they both, it should be noted, also exhibited at Kassel in 1959.

Jorn argued that a marginalization of the situation's centrality in the SI nomenclature, as Constant desired, questioned the international as project. For the situation, we should recall, was not just a praxis; it related to the organization as a whole. He thought that "*[Si] la réalisation de l'urbanisme unitaire deviennent l'unique but du*

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[671] Debord to Constant, 26 April 1959

situation[n]isme, comme ça l'est dans le programme de Constant, alors à ce moment l'urbanisme unitaire deviennent anti-situationniste."[672]

Though an office for unitary urbanism was created, Jorn and the peripheral branches ensured not only that constructing a situation remained the international's focus but that the creation of a participatory avant-garde international continued being a project. As a translator of SI's project and in between the branches, Jorn empowered the members to resist the Franco-Dutch centralizing drive. Even though Constant kicked off the conference with a 'report' that sidelined the situation, Jorn directed the subsequent discussion away from unitary urbanism toward the 'situation'.

Following the way in which he had re-appropriated the originally LI practice of détournement, Jorn asked for everyone's input on the 'situation'. Engaging the newly expanded circle of interlocutors in SI, he asked all present to consider three possible definitions of a 'situation'. It could be envisaged "*comme un lieu utopique; ou comme une ambiance isolée où l'on peut passer; ou bien comme série d'ambiances multiples mêlées à la vie"* (IS 3, 20). The first definition of a situation—as utopian site—was a sop to Constant, one that everyone disliked.[673] All members voted for the last option. Insofar as it imagined an active practice intermingling with life, it challenged Constant's and Debord's Amsterdam declaration, which had established a distinction between a temporary situation and a permanent unitary urbanism. And as organizational practice, the way to

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[672] Jorn in an undated letter to Debord, summer 1960. It is clear that it was sent in June or early July as Debord responded to it on 7 July 1960. This was a long letter from which I will draw extensively below. I will refer to its date merely as summer 1960

[673] Jorn to Debord, summer 1960.

reach this decision undermined Debord's and Constant's efforts to centralize the organization under a unitary urbanism.

Jorn ensured that the question of the situation's construction could not be detached from the creation of the international as network. The unanimously adopted definition suggested not only that the 'situation' was still at the center of SI concerns, but that it was the way in which SI communicated on itself as a project. The question of how to construct a situation was inseparable from the question of the reason for the international's existence. As the situation envisioned creating a dialogic space, the international's practice approached the situation's theory.

Asking the question, Jorn let the same principles guide his aesthetic and organizational practice. This time he did not reject the monetary leveling of naturally polysemic art but facilitated everyone's participation in the international. He turned the national branches into mediators of SI's project by ensuring that the shared desire to break with an instrumental paradigm remained conceptually articulated through the Paris-based project to construct situations.

For this to happen, it was crucial that Jorn's definition of the situation was minimal. The winning option only evoked its status as "*série d'ambiances multiples mêlées à la vie*." As a definition, it pales in comparison to the elaborate Franco-Dutch theories of unitary urbanism. Such relative under-theorization allowed the various national branches to extrapolate on the meaning of SI's project.

Soon after uniting around a minimally defined 'situation', the national branches addressed questions with broader social significance. Such questions intersected with the

needs of the different branches: as the newest branch, the Germans wanted a clearer sense of organization; practicing in a country in social flux, the Italians meanwhile requested a straighter organizational line on the proletariat and the revolution (IS 3, 19-22). So at the conference the members attempted to relate the new but isolated definition of the situation to its organizational practice and to revolutionary praxis. This triggered a far reaching dialogue in Munich.

Such discussions were based on a suggested 'Appel aux intellectuel et artistes révolutionnaires', written in Paris and Copenhagen. "*Les défaites de la révolution, et la prolongation d'une culture dominante formellement décomposée s'expliquent réciproquement*," this call said (IS 3, 22). For it continued, by quoting Marx' '18th Brumaire', that "*la révolution sociale ne peut tirer sa poésie du passé, mais seulement du future*" (IS 3, 23). Advancements in technology had, however, already made this future available: "*Les forces matérielles de notre époque … entraînent la transformations des expression isolées et durables en actions collectives momentanées*" (IS 3, 22). Now it was up to them, as cultural revolutionary artists, to repurpose such advancements to reconfigure life.[674]

For such re-appropriation, practice, not theory, would have to speak. A new employment of life called for new professions, not the establishment of doctrines (IS 3,

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[674] "*La base sociale pour la révolution culturelle*", the appeal argued "*existe déjà parmi les artistes qui sont arrivés à l'extrême du modernisme possible dans la société ancienne, et ne peuvent s'en contenter*" (23).

23).[675] "*Nous désignons la voie de l'urbanisme unitaire, du comportement expérimental, de la construction des situations vécues comme un premier terrain d'expériences*," the appeal claimed (IS 3, 23). For this "*il faut entreprendre un vaste travail commun, à partir de la critique désabusée de tout le champ d'action où est enfermée la culture traditionnelle à la fin de son auto-destruction; et à partir de la conscience de l'unité profonde de toutes les tâches révolutionnaires*" (IS 3, 23).

This appeal reflected SI's status as cross-continental organization. Its lines of communication were still routed through Paris. They communicated in French and based on the situation as project. But the appeal was planned to be published in, what would later become, all three procedural languages of the European Commission. Besides the French-language original text, SI would translate it into English and German. And like other European co-operations, it led to long negotiations.

Indicative of the fact that the international now encompassed conflicting perspectives with regard to both what defined their time-period's political context and on which aesthetic legacies to draw, the discussion of the appeal opened up multiple fractions. The branches did not agree upon what constituted the unity of the revolutionary tasks. In fact they did not even speak of the same kind of revolution. They saw it through their respective contexts.

Amsterdam entertained a different perception on historical transformations than other SI branches. For the Dutch the superstructure merely reflected the underlying 'in-

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[675] It stated that "*Une nouvelle avance de la révolution est liée à la constitution d'une passionnante solution de remplacement dans l'usage immediate de la vie… Les révolutionnaires dans la culture ne doivent pas trouver de nouvelles doctrines mais de nouveaux métiers*" (23).

frastructure'. They upheld the precedence, if not the ontological priority, of the base for historical change. "*Une révolution dans la vie*," they thought, "*précède une révolution dans l'art* (IS 3, 30-1). A materialist perception of history underpinned their unitary urbanism. This was visible in Constant's New Babylon. As Wark has suggested, Constant's blueprints' depiction of a future city hovering over the material base—or as the French say, the infrastructure—of the existing one can be read metaphorically: as if it were envisaging a state beyond functionalist alienation.[676] The ludic ambiences of New Babylon could, Ohrt also notes, only be realized after the 'real' city, above which it stood, had experienced a qualitative break.[677] Everything, the Dutch claimed, had to be invented anew.

This meant that cultural interventions right now were futile in Amsterdam. "*La culture est déjà si démodée, tellement arrièrée si elle est comparée à la réalité de la vie*," Constant noted. "*Avant qu'on puisse avancer, toute l'arsenal des conventions culturelles doit être renouvelé*" (IS 3, 30). His historical materialism was deterministic rather than dialectic.

The Dutch believed that in the long haul history would in itself lead to a state in which their unitary urbanism could be realized.[678] Coming to fruition in a distant future, such a historical tendency should be conceptualized as a long evolution (IS 3, 23).

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[676] Wark, 138.

[677] Ohrt, 127.

[678] As Ohrt observes, "*Constant hat die Verantwortung für 'New Babylon' einer abstrakten Menschheit und ihrer nicht weniger abstrakten Geschichte übertragen. Von ihr würde diese Stadt irgendwann verwirklicht werden. Er selbst durfte sich von ihr entfernen; er war als ihr Illustrator ausgestellt*" (Ohrt, 137).

Meanwhile, the task for intellectuals and artists was, they thought, to articulate an image of this future state. Doing so, "*ce sont les intellectuels qui se révoltent contre la misère culturelle*," Constant claimed. "*L'unité avec une révolution sociale inexistante est utopique*." In fact, he went on, "*ce qui lie l'avant-garde actuelle, c'est la révolte contre les conditions culturelles existantes*" (IS 3, 23). Superstructural decomposition, not social revolution, was, he thought, what united those present.

From an Amsterdam perspective, the reference to the revolution in the appeal was not warranted also because the Dutch associated such references with the working class, and they did not think that this class inspired any hope for progressive change. "*Nous n'avons pas besoin d'une conception dogmatique de la révolution*," Constant argued (IS 3, 23). To Constant the trope of the revolution arguably came off as dogmatic because in his context it most likely was. That is, it was a dogma in which a doctrinaire communist party believed—though no longer in practice the Dutch social democrats—not a foreseeable possibility.[679]

In such positions, they could have been expected to be supported by the German members. In West Germany, the main proponents of a heterodox Marxism at Frankfurt had not only chosen not the settle in the communist East. They rejected positive political projects for negative critique. For Adorno and an increasingly conservative Horkheimer even taking public positions appeared as too compromising. Adorno favored the dissonant chords in artistic experimentation. But such positions had influenced SI's Munich

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[679] Like in Scandinavia and west Germany, industrial relations were much less acrimonious in the Netherlands than in France or Italy, or even Britain, and the Dutch social democrats in the PvdA were in coalition governments with the Catholic party. The Communist Party's leader Saul de Groot meanwhile resisted grassroots attempts of a post-1956 de-stalinization (Judt, 370-2; Mazower, 290).

branch in a way that clashed with Constant's. Irreverent painters, the Spur manifesto assumed, would emancipate a staid Federal Republic from a repressive morality. The German members were suspicious of the Franco-Dutch insistence on a "*dépassement de l'art*."[680]

The Dutch would find no sympathy among the Italians or French-speakers. From northern Italy, the ideological architecture looked different. The Italians had been the ones to advertise the need for SI to relate its project to the 'revolution'. Like the Dutch, they conceptualized it as ultimately socio-political. But they occupied a position diametrically opposed to that of the Dutch.[681] For in Italy, as we have seen, the social revolution was not only a foreseeable possibility; larger numbers of artists and intellectuals than elsewhere also belonged to the communist party orbit, where heterodox opinions co-existed, however uneasily, with the official party Marxism. This brought para-institutional revolutionary energies into the institutional universe of communism.

The Paris-based members combined the Italian and German perspectives. As we have seen in the previous chapters, like the Germans, they kept clear of the communist parties, but, like the Italians, they believed in the revolution. Now Frankin, a Francophone Belgian closely affiliated to the Paris-based members, related SI's aesthetic experimentation to a positive reference to the proletariat. This confused Constant: "*Si André Frankin constate que 'le prolétariat risque de disparaître sans avoir fait sa révolution', je*

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[680] Zimmer, 243

[681] Such Italo-Dutch differences did not stop Constant and Pinot Gallizio from collaborating on a mobile camp for the Roma community of Alba outside of the conference setting. They continued corresponding about it until after both had left the international (see *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura = the laboratory of writing,* 217-232).

demande pourquoi on voudrait lier nos activités à une révolution qui risque de n'être jamais faite" (IS 3, 24).[682]

What the Dutch missed was that the nature of the revolution had been redefined. "*La perspective de la révolution sociale est profondément changée par rapport à tous ses schémas classiques*," Debord argued. "*Mais elle [la révolution] est réelle*" (IS 3, 23).

The site of the revolution had moved. "*Faire la révolution sociale et politique n'est pas suffisant*, *si cette transformation ne s'accompagne pas dans la culture d'un bouleversement qualitatif*," Frankin thought (IS 3, 24). Cultural practice needed to expand its site of action. It had to move into the milieu of technology. The current case, in which cultural practice was separated from technology, had engendered an alienation "*plus profonde et plus indéracinable que l'aliénation économique*" (IS 3, 25). Ultimately, a qualitative transformation would be defined by a new employment of technology in which instrumental imperatives did not take precedence: "*la tâche révolutionnaire primordiale du siècle … est la disparition du milieu technique par la technique elle-même*" (IS 3, 25).

As a consequence of being played out at a new site, the revolution would be led by a subject with new attributes. This subject was still likened to the 'proletariat' but it was not necessarily composed of the working class.[683] Debord had drawn on Marx to

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[682] In fact he refused what he saw as the obsolete binary opposing reform to revolution. Instead he framed SI's choice as concerning realism and practice.

[683] In the passage Constant questioned, Frankin pointed out that, *analogously* to how the proletariat might disappear without having fulfilled the task through which it was defined, the cultural revolution might become a mere PR exercise unless it occupies itself with technology. This was a way to place SI next to the proletariat that would, as we will see in the next chapter, continue to confuse the Dutch.

make a distinction between the revolutionary proletariat and the existing one: "'*Le prolétariat est révolutionnaire ou n'est rien'*." And, he suggested to Constant, it is in this distinction that SI could find its role: "*C'est par là que notre propre travail expérimental d'une nouvelle culture-usage de la vie est à la fois* justifié *et* utilisable *par le mouvement révolutionnaire authentique*."[684] This movement was hardly the existing communist parties. Its outline was still to be determined: "*nos perspectives en tant que telles sont, je crois, un moyen de lutte pour la pensée d'une révolution authentique*."[685] Because Constant failed to understand this by fixating on the reified meaning of the terms 'proletariat' and the 'revolution', Debord, who had previously supported most things Dutch, now accused them of being 'reformist' (IS 3, 23).[686]

As SI was not run as a monologue from Paris anymore, the appeal was not published. The internal divergences prevented the publication of the international appeal to likeminded artists and intellectuals. But the aborted plans for publication did not make the appeal inconsequential. The case was rather the contrary.

IS 3 observed that the discussion on the appeal itself was highly significant. It was so important, it seems, that they decided to publish it in its own journal (IS 3, 24). That the peripheries had written back was something the international wanted to exhibit.

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[684] Debord to Constant, 21 March 1959.

[685] Debord to Constant, 11 March 1959.

[686] It should be noted that he had had his doubts with regard to the Dutch too. "*On trouve, à l'origine de votre position*", Debord wrote to Constant (on 4 April 1959), "*une distinction entre l'urbanisme unitaire et l'ensemble du mouvement situationniste. Vous créez arbitrairement un* conflit de préséance *entre plusieurs aspects d'un problème, alors que la nouveauté et l'importance de ce problème résident principalement dans son caractère* indivisible" (his stresses). But before the Munich conference, he was more interested in controlling the international than in voicing these doubts. A peripheral front did so for him.

And what such exhibition showed was that the unity around a minimally defined situation had produced a polyphonous international.

In Munich the unity in SI theory was not opposed by the diversity of the branches' practices. The branches of the network shared an anti-instrumental aesthetic aim. If questioned by some, this objective was still articulated through the need to construct a situation. The irony here is that, when SI advocated for a more robust message of unity a year earlier in Brussels, the participatory basis of this message was not practiced to any meaningful degree inside of the international. Now, when it was, it prevented the international agreeing on the wording on its appeal for a broader unity. This suggests that because the way that the 'situation' related to the cultural revolution was in flux, the international's conversation on it was participatory. The under-theorization of the project allowed for different practical visions to coexist and collide. Uniting around the 'situation' but disagreeing on politics, the international constituted itself as a cross-continental dialogue on its project.

With input on its originally Parisian project from *outre-Alpes, outre-Rhin, outre-Quiévrain,* SI performed itself as a cross-continental network. Even if the international did not attempt to construct a situation in Munich, the disagreements on its political meaning opened the dialogic space that a constructed situation would bring. The international practice that prevented the publication of the appeal expressed SI's theory.

In Munich, the international's practice unified the diversity of the international: for a moment, SI was an international conversation hinged in the Paris situation but with mediators across the continent. But as this was made possible by the under-theorization

of the situation, the balance between unity and diversity within the international would prove precarious. It was vulnerable to external shocks. And, as we will see in the second half of this dissertation, such shocks were just around the corner.

The international's practice would soon depart from its theory. Because of the worrying political developments in France, SI displaced its attempt to construct a situation to Amsterdam, where it failed to elicit the same type of trans-continental participation as the Munich conference. This prompted an intellectual rescue attempt of SI's project, which produced the clearest theoretical articulation of SI's position, culminating in SI's finally publishing a manifesto. But, re-asserting the leadership of Paris, such theorization was bought at the expense of international diversity and a participatory organizational praxis.

Second Part: The Fall of the Situationist International

4. The Displacement of the Situation 1959-1960

Though translated into contexts around the continent in the last year and a half of the 1950s, the international network kept its Parisian hinge. The various national branches agreed at the Munich conference on retaining the originally Parisian 'situation' at its center when attempting to put out a call to artists even further afield. But if the members decided to keep the French capital as an anchor for their project, the sands were shifting and over the next few years Paris and its relations to the rest of Europe would undergo a dramatic, and for the Situationist International, cataclysmic change.

By the late 1950s France's war in Algeria threatened to undermine the conditions that had made Paris a hub for, and French the vehicular means to express, postwar European intellectual and aesthetic trends. The relative tolerance towards the aesthetic and political discontents had done much to make French capital a home to the avant-garde. Their migration to and presence in the city guaranteed the return on its historically accumulated cultural capital. But as France found itself increasingly in a War over its own identity, the space in Paris for radical art started to close down.

At first SI tried to calibrate such changes by displacing the 'situation'. French Algeria, if you want, moved the 'situation' outside of Paris. In 1960 SI tried constructing one in Amsterdam. If the Munich conference had created a participatory international, the Amsterdam performance did not, however, construct a participatory situation. Led by the Dutch, this performance failed to merge the diverse practices of the international. A product of the local circumstances, Dutch theory did not resonate in the other branches.

It hindered participation. The Paris-based members blamed the provinciality of Amsterdam. As the Dutch capital was not a hub for Europe's intellectual and aesthetic trends, it, they thought, did not enjoy enough cultural prestige for SI's cultural revolution to start there.

French Algeria in Paris

At the root of the 'situation' was the dérive. Though the 'situation' had outgrown it, such an urban praxis linked SI's project to Paris. It did not only relate closely to its urban fabrics and affective ecologies. It was in conversation with the city's artistic traditions. Requiring a certain tolerance of errant behavior and of foreign dissidents, the social conditions for the dérives were meanwhile those that had made Paris a hub for European arts in the first place. The practice directly capitalized on what ensured the return on the city's accumulated cultural capital.

"*La dérive*," Khatib, an Algerian SI member, stated in IS 2, "*est un mode de comportement expérimental dans une société urbaine*" (Khatib IS 2, 13). In 1958 Khatib explored the ludic possibilities among the food stalls at Les Halles in Paris. This was one of only two dérives described in the pages of IS 1-7 (1958-1961).[687] Within the international, as more generally, the dérive, if theoretically applicable to any city, was closely connected to the French capital; among SI's praxes, it was the Parisian response to an alienating postwar modernization.

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[687] The other one was Ralph Rumney's in Venice, the description of which he submitted to the Paris office too late, which led to his exclusion from the international.

At the outset Les Halles seemed to provide an opportune site for Khatib's exploration. Among them, he wrote, "*Les situationnistes se sentent capables, grâce à leurs méthodes actuelles et aux développement prévus dans ces méthodes, non seulement de réaménager le milieu urbain, mais de le changer presque à volonté*." Indeed, "*... ce que nous voulons n'est pas moins qu'*une intervention directe, affective" (IS 2, 13, my emphasis).

The food market constituted an exception to the logic that Marx had thought ruled capitalist society. Here "*Il faudrait profiter du recul de l'activité pratique-alimentaire pour encourager le développement sur une grande échelle des tendances au jeu de construction et à l'urbanisme mouvant spontanément apparues 'dans*," what Marx named, "*les eaux glacées du calcul égoïste'*" (IS 2, 17). The food market seemed to be the opportune place to for a ludic intervention in urban ambiances.

But apart from the apparent plasticity of the designs at the food market, the rigidity of the rules organizing the urban space reflected what SI saw as the ideological architecture of the time period. "*Le monde dans lequel nous vivons, et d'abord dans son décor matériel, se découvre de jour en jour plus étroit*," Khatib argued. "*Il nous étouffe. Nous subissons profondément son influence; nous y réagissons selon nos instincts au lieu de réagir selon nos aspirations. En un mot, ce monde commande à notre façon d'être, et par là nous écrase*" (IS 2, 13).

SI's ludic urban practice defied a functionalist city planning. The dérive appreciated the city's affective ecologies. It was guided by 'ambiance units'. And, according to Sadler, "some unities of ambiance acted as stations on the drift, junctions in

the psychogeographic flow of Paris".[688] One such junction, or *plaques tournantes*, was Les Halles: "*une solution qui va dans le sens d'une société nouvelle commande de conserver cet espace au centre de Paris pour les manifestation d'une vie collective libérée*" (IS 2, 17).

With its labyrinthine paths and mobile architecture of food stalls, Les Halles offered the opportune site from which to oppose the superimposed modernizing framework that had no truck with ambiance units. At Les Halles, the latter famously won out. Due to the prominence given to functionalist imperatives, in 1960 it was decided that Les Halles would be razed; the demolishment begun in 1969. The continuing existence of '*le ventre de Paris*' had detrimental consequences, it was alleged, for the flow of traffic and was replaced by – what else? – an underground shopping center.[689]

With Les Halles still standing what stopped Khatib from finishing his dérive was not, however, a transgressive functionalism. It was rather that, as a North-African, he was subject to an infringement of his civil rights. "*Notre collaborateur a été victime des règlements de police qui, depuis le mois de septembre* [1958]*, interdisent la rue aux nord-africains après 21h 30*," the editors of IS 2 noted. "*Après deux arrestations et deux séjours dans des 'Centres de Triage', [Khatib] a dû renoncer à la poursuivre*" (IS 2, 18). By imposing a curfew only targeting the North Africans of Paris, the French State pre-

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[688] Sadler, *The Situationist City,* 88.

[689] Luc Sante, *The Other Paris,* (New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2015), 9-11; 15-6.

vented Khatib from finishing his dérive.[690] It denied him the chance to develop a situation-ist sensibility when immersing himself in the affective currents of the food market.

In Paris politics was changing. In response to the new measures, in his pre-recorded message to the gathering discussing Surrealism's continuance, Debord included a warning about the political transitions taking place in France: "*n'oubliez pas que votre problème le plus urgent reste de combattre la dictature en France*" (IS 2, 34). In the French capital artistic experimentation faced new restrictions.

If Paris' relative hospitality to foreign dissidents of all stripes had vouched for its postwar centrality in intellectual debates and for aesthetic trends, French political development had by the end of the decade started undermining part of the foundations of its capital's cross-continental influence. A facet of French politics differentiating it from most of Europe's demanded attention: its crumbling empire. And French imperialism threatened the time-honored tolerance in Paris at the turn of the decade.

That France was losing its overseas colonies was of course nothing new. If France had yet to grant independence to the majority of its African possessions, it had lost its mandate over Syria and Lebanon, granted by the Sykes-Picot agreement, in 1946. It had also failed to reimpose its authority after World War II in Indochina by stamping out an insurrection. It gave up its claim on the possession in 1954.

Nor was it new that those colonies France had left were marred by bloody insurrections. SI's lifespan overlapped with much of the war in Algeria, the bloodiest of them

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[690] This curfew was announced by the police on 2 September 1958. It eventually fell into disuse, and new curfews were announced in 1961. At that point, they specifically targeted muslim Algerians, not as in 1958, North African workers (see Sylvie Thénault, 'Des Couvre-feux à Paris en 1958 et 1961: Une mesure importée d'Algérie pour mieux lutter contre le FLN', *Politix*, vol. 84, no. 4, 2008, pp. 167-185).

all. If SI in its first rendition started in the Ligurian mountains in 1957 and ended in 1961, the international lasted from the year of the Battle of Algiers to the first round of negotiations between the French government and the FLN at Evian and the consequent but foiled OAS putsch… And LI, the precursor of SI's Paris branch, had been favoring decolonization early on.[691]

But even though the failed Anglo-French invasion of Egypt over the Suez canal occurred at the same time as Soviet's successful subjugation of Budapest, such events had little initial impact on SI.[692] In spite of Ben Bella, eventually the first president of an independent Algeria, being kidnapped by the French (in breach of international law) the very same day Soviet tanks rolled into the streets of Pest,[693] it was the latter intrusion which acted as the impetus to SI's project.[694] Shaking the bipolar stasis, it made the construction of a situation, with its implicit link to the establishment of councils, which would engender a desire for a different ideological architecture, seem more feasible.

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[691] Its journal, *Potlatch,* often addressed the insurrections in Algeria. IS did not do so to nearly the same degree. As an illustration of how the question of Algeria independence was relegated to a less prominent position once LI merged with artist groups from around the continent, IS 1 did publish an article on these developments d'outre mer but on the last page of the journal and in a smaller font!

[692] As we saw in chapter 1, in *Potlatch* 27, which dealt with the political events of 1956, there was no mention of Suez. The issue instead argued that the developments of historic significance were the incipient emergence of SI, the risings against Soviet authority in Poland and Hungary, and the strikes in Spain and the insurrection in Algeria.

[693] For the Ben Bella capture, Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York, NYRB Classics, 2006), 161.

[694] It is important to note that 'Budapest' highly influenced the French rightwing in a way unrelated to SI. The OAS, the terrorist wing of pied noir intransigence in the face of Algerian self-determination, cast themselves in the role of Hungarian insurgents and the French troops in Algeria as the occupying Soviet army.

The developments to which Suez led had not all the same gone unnoticed. The French reason for invading Egypt was partly motivated by the deterring effect a defeat of Nasser (and his pan-Arabism) would have on the FLN.[695] As they lost, it instead proved to be a catastrophic loss of face for the French in Algeria. The armed forces attempted to prevent this fallout. Besides hardening the attitudes among those stationed in Algeria, it widened the gulf to the authorities in Paris, not only leading to multiple French regime changes in quick succession but to the political resurrection of General de Gaulle.

After the last cabinet of the Fourth Republic resigned at the end of May 1958 due to the volatile situation in Algeria, the French president, then a much less significant position than in the subsequent republic, heeded his generals' plea—and, to many, implicit threat of a coup d'état—and asked de Gaulle to form a cabinet (which henceforth became known in certain quarters as a 'surgical coup').[696] A week later the General went to Algiers to placate its inhabitants. With oblique intentions, he there told a cheering crowd that he had understood them, and with a questionable mandate he then called a referendum on the creation of a Fifth Republic.[697] Even though the FLN discouraged the Muslim population from voting, Algerians of all ethnicities and religions awarded de Gaulle a

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[695] Regarding how Mollet's government wanted to influence the FLN by attacking Suez, see Horne, 164-5.

[696] Sartre and the TM-set thought of de Gaulle's ascension to power in 1958 as a coup (Arthur, *Unfinished Projects*, xxi). It was surgical because de Gaulle became the sovereign without either violence or election. For the later reception of de Gaulle's surgical coup, see Javier Cercas, *The Anatomy of a Moment,* trans. Anne McLean (New York, Bloomsbury, 2011).

[697] In this sense there were clear parallels to the unforeseen way in which he would hail a free, that is independent, Quebec in Montreal almost a decade later… Blanchot argued that de Gaulle, when legitimating his seizure of power, did not give the French people a political solution; he offered them salvation: "*Il n'est pas l'homme d'une politique, mais la souveraineté compréhensive ('Je vous ai compris'), qui comprend tout et, en cette compréhension, satisfait à tout*" (Maurice Blanchot, *Ecrites Politiques, 1953-1993* (Paris, Gallimard, 2008), 35).

vast majority of its votes. So too did the voters in metropolitan France.[698] Now having a legal mandate to reshape the French polity, de Gaulle duly expanded French efforts to stifle what was still domestically conceptualized as an illegal insurrection in French départements d'outre-mer, not a war, and definitely not a foreign war.[699] The FLN paid in kind the following months.

De Gaulle's return to power worried Debord. He was concerned that the events set in motion by the general's new regime would make SI's original project difficult in Paris. In a letter to Jorn, Debord told him that "*Aujourd'hui avant l'aube, le F.L.N. a déclenché le terrorisme en France. Ceci paraît une réaction de désespoir*."[700] Regardless of the intentions behind such acts the introduction of the Algerian war in metropolitan France would, Debord realized, have repercussions for the proponents of experimental culture in the capital. "*Tout ce qui doit être fait* ici *(exposition, etc)*," he wrote, "*doit être fait vite*."[701]

Debord had a valid point. SI soon attracted the attention of the French police, which FLN bombings had put on high alert. Debord was interrogated. The police, he claimed, "*veut considérer l'I.S. comme une association pour en venir à la dissoudre en*

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[698] Judt, 287-292.

[699] France did not acknowledge that it was a war until 1999. Expanding the war effort in 1958 de Gaulle was neither wildly successful nor original. The intention to pacify insurgents in the *bled* while offering provisions in education and local government had been suggested before, e.g. in the '*loi cadre'* of the Fourth Republic.

[700] Debord to Jorn, 25 August 1958.

[701] Debord to Jorn, 25 August 1958, my emphasis.

France." They, an offended Debord thought, cast SI as a bunch of thugs.[702] The imperial war erased the line that separated avant-garde provocation from terrorist agitation. In the eyes of the State, SI's project, which plotted to subvert the imperatives guiding social and public policies, was now suspect, even if SI aimed to achieve this through aesthetic means.

SI praxes did not primarily oppose imperialism. They tried to dodge its material manifestations: the international did not engage in ludic praxes in the loci from and on which French imperial power was projected.[703] Paris was, Maurice Agulhon suggests, divided along a line running from north to south. The squares on its western side hosted all monuments to French military glory, while those to the East honored the republican ideals and the lost hopes of past insurrections. Located in the second arrondissement, Les Halles might have been at the center of Paris but well to the east according to Agulhon's division.[704]

SI even actively avoided those parts of Paris that French imperialism had re-ordered. Haussmann's plans for rebuilding Paris were a part of the same epoch that renewed French imperialism after 1848.[705] And during their aimless strolls, Debord, Bernstein et al. explored the areas into whose fabric Haussmann had not cut his straight lines

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[702] Debord told Pinot Gallizio 17 July, 1958.

[703] For the itinerary of dérives that are not mentioned in IS, see those traced by Kaufmann, *Guy Debord,* 170-1, and Hussey, *Game of War,* 90-2.

[704] Maurice Agulhon, 'Paris, a Transversal from East to West', in (ed) Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman,, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *The Realm of Memory: The Construction of the French Past* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996), 523-552.

[705] David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London, Routledge, 2005), 99-100.

of grand boulevards.[706] Rather than (north) western Paris, they liked doing so either in the animated north-eastern Barbes and Belleville districts or in the south-eastern fifth arrondissement, where they especially enjoyed frequenting the bars of Spanish republicans and North African laborers. This was a neighborhood that in the late 1950s was "still filthy and wretched". According to the Paris psycho-geographer Eric Hazan, "the Place de la Contrescarpe," to where SI had moved its office soon after its foundation, "had more tramps than Situationists, and there were some cafés that were hard to enter if you were not a ragged alcoholic. There were no tourists, restaurants or shops to be seen. Hotels rented rooms by the day to immigrant workers without asking to see their papers."[707] The larger Quartier Latin was one of the few medieval areas overlooked by Haussmann.[708] In a way that strikes the contemporary reader as quite insensitive, SI even played with the thought of guiding tourists through the areas in which they 'slummed' it. Such a proposed venture points to how SI saw these neighborhoods as places from where a State-led modernization could be resisted, rather than as dwelling places of 'real' imperial subjects.[709]

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[706] Haussmann, Sante observes, "was said by his contemporaries to be possessed by the *culte de l'axe,* the religion of the straight line" (Sante, *The Other Paris,* 41).

[707] Eric Hazan, *The Invention of Paris: A History in Footsteps,* trans. David Fernbach (London, Verso, 2011), 19.

[708] The other was the Marais - Temple - Saint-Antoine area in the third and fourth arrondissement (Sante, 44-5).

[709] As we will see in chapter 7, Debord eventually re-conceptualized the metropolitan everyday life as colonized. If he had entertained a 'colonial problematic' at this point, he would surely have understood in which position the proposed venture put him and his fellow SI members…

A historical division of Paris that more clearly guided SI practice than the one based on the presence of imperialism was the one which partitioned a Resistance from a Collaborationist Paris. The two divisions were not distinct from each other. But where the German occupation comes into view, French imperialism remains hazily in the background of the greatest dérive of SI: Bernstein's *The Night.* In it Gilles, Debord's alter-ego, strolls on the Left Bank with his lover Carole. Walking rue Cajus from the Pantheon, they "follow the same pavement occupied exclusively by the church, on whose wall Gilles mechanically takes in the whiteness of a stone tablet. This tablet … commemorates a young man … who died a hero's death on the 23rd of August 1944."[710] This was not entirely coincidental. We should recall that Debord thought that the surrealist had over-emphasized the role of change; SI had to more carefully chose where to dérive.[711] The Left Bank, where this dérive took place, had hosted both Resistance and collaborationist activities. The attitude adopted toward the German occupation of the 1940s, as towards that of 1870, differed more sharply on the opposing sides of the Right bank. The major activity of the Resistance was concentrated to the East and collaboration to the West, centering on the Champs Élysées.[712] SI never dérived on the western side. Like Jorn, the former LI members' associated German occupation with postwar modernization.

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[710] Bernstein, *The Night,* 38.

[711] Debord, 'La théorie de dérive', IS 2, 20. For instance, they never ventured near the set of Grands Boulevards where Aragon spent much time - and for good reasons: the arcade to the Opera had been torn down.

[712] Hazan, 229-231.

While the international, especially its French branch, supported the anti-colonial cause, situationist construction was invested in the possibility of a Pan-European counter-modernization.[713] This is clear in the way Khatib, by choosing Les Halles as site of his dérive, opposed the new plans for the food market. Much discussed at the time, traffic circulation was also the topic of one of the only four IS articles signed solely by Debord while Jorn was still an SI member. None of these concern imperialism.[714]

Historical changes in postwar Europe had made such a project feasible. As the alienation of such modernization had been acutely felt in Paris, due to its State's unprecedented modernizing zeal, it had there led to a critical debate that demanded intellectual attention across the continent. The city became a magnet for foreign dissidents of all stripes. In part because of the city's relative tolerance of such foreigners and of independent cultural production in general, Paris emerged as the postwar intellectual hub of Europe.[715] This allowed SI to bring together branches from across the continent through an originally Paris-based project. SI's existence was a testament to the fact that Paris and the continent shared similar concerns. But the Algerian war put the conditions centralizing Paris—the shared concerns with the rest of the continent and its relative tolerance—in question.

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[713] As we have seen, Jorn associated such counter-modernization with a World War II resistance. And as noted in the introduction, so too does Roberto Ohrt.

[714] These texts were 'Thèses sur la révolution' (IS 1, 20-1), 'Théorie de la dérive' (IS 2, 19-23), 'Positions situationnistes sur la circulation' (IS 3, 36-7), 'A Propos de quelques erreurs d'interprétation' (IS 4, 30-3).

[715] I will address the loss of the other reason in chapter 7: come the early 1960s, Paris was no longer quite as affordable for foreigners at it had been a decade before.

In Paris SI's ludic aesthetic practice was now opposed by more than the instrumentalizing paradigm of its time-period. The colonial restrictions did not, however, outline the basis for a new adversarial relationship to society through which the avant-garde could renew its sense of larger social importance. De Gaulle's regime rather seemed to Debord to be incrementally closing the space, opened by the events in 1956 that shook the precarious global stasis, in which they could construct their situation creating an international. Khatib's failure was the first sign that both SI's theory and praxis relied upon a vanishing post-Budapest moment in Europe.

Due to the impact the Algerian war had on metropolitan France, the Munich conference wondered whether the international network could continue being hinged in Paris. The international "*constate la quasi-dissolution des activités de groupe de l'I.S. en France*," which it "*explique par les conditions de l'écrasant conformisme, d'inspiration militaire et policière, qui domine dès à présent le nouveau régime de ce pays, et la longueur de la guerre colonialiste en Algérie*" ('La troisième conférence de l'I.S. à Münich', IS 3, 21). What it did not note was that these conditions prevented the Algerian branch from molding the praxes of the situation to its preferences; it was the only SI branch that did not attend the Munich conference.

As the Algerian war had come to undermine the time-honored, if relative, tolerance of the French capital, SI did, however, question if Paris would remain the hub for modern culture. The international announced that "*Paris ne peut plus être désormais considéré comme le centre des expériences culturelles modernes*" (in 'La troisième con-

férence de l'I.S. à Münich', IS 3, 21). Experimental experiences were not allowed there anymore.

The International in Amsterdam

As the authorities' toleration of foreign dissidents was what had traditionally underpinned Paris' centrality for European networks, so too for SI's, the international considered moving part of what had been Paris' role to other cities. Some responsibilities that had previously been Paris' for the international moved elsewhere directly. Unlike *Pour la forme,* Jorn printed his *Critique de l'économie politique* in Brussels, a work of which we will hear more in the next chapter. As if to dispel any doubt for his reasons why, the jacket cover included an image of French parachutists in Algeria. To move other responsibilities, such as the printing of IS, was merely discussed.[716] But such considerations played a crucial part when SI took a central decision for the future of the international.

Having performed as a network of mediators in Munich, indeed having created a participatory international, SI wanted to construct a participatory situation. Due to the war in Algeria, Paris was not considered as a possible site. With a famously liberal museum offering to host SI, Amsterdam instead seemed like an auspicious stand-in.

Unlike the French, Dutch democracy was not currently under intense domestic stress making its elected officials suspend certain civil liberties. The Netherlands had by the late 1950s already managed to grant Indonesia independence, if reluctantly, and was

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[716] Hussey, 157.

on its way from being a society defined by its paternalistic 'pillars' to a famously liberal one, centered on its biggest city. Its political scene did not have anyone resembling de Gaulle, neither in stature nor as myth maker.[717] Though boasting a Resistance of its own, the country was contentedly liberated from Nazi occupation by Canadian forces in 1944.[718] Indeed, Debord now distinguished between the "*la réaction monopoliste et catholico-militaire en Europe*," which he often conceptualized as a Fascist wave, seen in France and, "*un pays à haut niveau de vie*" with "*un État bourgeois démocratique amé-nagé*," like the Netherlands.[719]

This strengthened Constant's relative position within the international. When singling himself out with regard to the question of the revolution in Munich, Constant undermined part of his influence, especially since he also alienated Debord who had previously supported most things Dutch. The other part, however, remained: the metropolitan ramification of de Gaulle's reluctant decolonization. This displaced any attempt of constructing a 'situation' from Paris. The other great dérive by SI's Paris members during these years is a case in point: Michèle Bernstein's *La Nuit* moved it to the realm of literature.

A relatively liberal Dutch society refocused such attempts on Amsterdam. While

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[717] Though, it should be noted, the Netherlands had segments of the population, especially those who had lived in the Dutch East Indies, who were resentful of the country losing its overseas colonies; such opinions did not, however, destabilize Dutch democracy. It rather pushed it in the direction of European co-operation (see Judt, 280-1).

[718] For a description of the almost mythic, and very eroticized, role Canadian soldiers held in early postwar Netherlands, see Ian Buruma, *Zero Hour: A History of 1945* (London, Penguin, 2013), 14-5, 23.

[719] Debord to Constant, 4 April 1959

experiencing neither racially selective curfews nor a partial state of exception, the city featured rarely modern cultural institutions. In the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam had one of the museums in western Europe most hospitable to experimental postwar art.[720] This was in part thanks to its curator Sandberg. He had exhibited many of the SI artists. Jorn, Constant, and Pinot Gallizio had all mounted shows there. And as de Gaulle was driving SI out of Paris, he had offered SI an opportunity to perform at the museum. This offer was originally his way of apologizing for mistakenly exhibiting painters under the Cobra label in 1958. He had promised this to Debord, but Constant was the one who liaised with the museum.

As SI's next performance was to be held at the Stedelijk, Dutch interests colored its aim. "*L'expérience situationniste de la dérive*," the unsigned article presenting the ideas for such activities claims, "*étant en même temps moyen d'étude et jeu du milieu urbain*". And, instead of being one of the tenets of the constructed situation, such situationist experiment "*est*", it revealingly goes on, "*sur le chemin de l'urbanisme unitaire*" (IS 3, 15). Reflecting the transitions in the international due to the worsening political climate in France, the project of Amsterdam—unitary urbanism—took explicit precedence over that of Paris—the dérive.

And yet, even if evoking the path towards a unitary urbanism, the performance would start in a dérive, even though the dérive, we should remember, had been at the basis of first LI's and then SI's Paris branch's attempt to take over Surrealism's position

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[720] For the Stedelijk's and Sandberg's, its curator, role in postwar west European art, see Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London, Penguin, 2014).

on the Paris avant-garde scene. As an urban praxis it was intimately associated with the materiality of the French capital. Its search of ludic possibilities depended upon the city's affective ecologies.

Though dérives were indigenous to Paris, post-imperial Amsterdam came in early spring of 1960 to host the first performance in SI's name since Brussels two years prior. It would not 'only' be a dérive. It was meant to be a performance of and by the international. Even if Constant enforced a definition according to which the dérive would lead to unitary urbanism, others thought of it, because of its collective nature, as constructing a situation. "*Le manifestation d'Amsterdam était le premier essa[i] d'orchestration du mouvement entier*," Jorn noted. This was important because "*Jusqu'a [maintenait] toutes* les situations *qui date dans le mouvement situationniste ont été des réalisations inférieurs des individues* [sic] *ou des fractions du mouvement*."[721] Even Debord was taken by the importance of the performance. "*Cette manifestation*," he wrote to Constant, "*jugera le mouvement dans son ensemble—et, dans le pire des cas, d'une manière definitive!*"[722]

True to SI's objective to open up a space for dialogue, SI envisaged a study of the Dutch city through ludic experiments on, and experiences of, communicative devices. The international planned a "*dérive radiophonique*" that was based at the Stedelijk Museum but branched out into the city. The discoveries in the city during a three day dérive would be broadcast at the museum with the help of a radio transmitter. This would allow

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[721] Jorn to Debord, summer 1960, my emphasis.

[722] Debord to Constant, 7 September 1959

SI "*faire voir simultanément une sorte de jeu, et des publications théorique (accompagnées de plans et de maquettes)*" at the museum. They hoped this would "*concrétiser l'unité [théorique et pratique] de cette question*."[723] It would make it clear that "*il ne s'agit pas d'une exposition, mais d'une construction neuve*."[724]

Over a few days in March in various places around Amsterdam, SI tried putting its theory into practice. This was complicated by the Dutch SI branch. The choice of location granted their agenda center stage. But in their project, the theoretical ends were separate from the practical means. They did not conceptualize the international as a form in and through which ludic encounters could appear. The dialogue would happened elsewhere. They brushed off the need to have an open discussion on the Amsterdam performance. They took charge of the planning. SPUR was, for instance, excluded from the performance.[725] According to Debord, the Dutch did not even think of it as a collective project.[726] They, he thought, had sabotaged its preparation.[727]

Constant disrupted SI praxis at the Stedelijk. It is hard to tell exactly how he did so. No sources recount the failed venture. In IS 4, SI blamed the Stedelijk (IS 4, 5). As part of the construction SI envisioned turning the museum into a labyrinth. By erecting a tunnel of Pinot Gallizio's industrial painting and 'détourned' palisades by the Belgian SI

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[723] Debord to Constant, 26 Jan 1959.

[724] Debord to Constant, 7 September 1959.

[725] Ohrt, 219-220.

[726] Debord to Jorn, 8 Jan 1960.

[727] Debord to Asger Jorn, 6 July, 1960.

member Maurice Wyckaert, they wanted to create "*un milieu mixte, jamais vu*" in which the distinction between indoor and outdoor would be abolished. Rain would be falling, outdoor noise made, and wind blowing inside (IS 4, 6). As the museum's board of directors questioned some of these details and Sandberg had safety concerns, the Stedelijk was an easy public target. But in private Jorn and Debord held Constant responsible. Their disappointments are there for us to see in hindsight. Jorn complained bitterly about *"Le dilettantisme du bureau d'Amsterdam*," which had created an "*anti-situation*." He even called the entire enterprise "*L'Affaire d'Amsterdam*."[728] Debord was no less scathing. He thought that the failure in Amsterdam was due to "*une certaine tactique d'intimidation appliquée à Munich*." In fact, "*les oppositions personnelles … se sont toujours ajoutées aux autres problèmes quand il s'agissait des Hollandais*." Debord and Jorn agreed that "*la sanction de tout ceci est la dissolution du 'Bureau d'urbanisme unitaire'*."[729]

Letting Constant's aim direct the international's performance seems to have frustrated it. What the Dutch SI branch offered could be seen as an institutional critique of art.[730] Constant produced diagrams and models of future cities without need for museums. As a parody of a modern museum, he had even once considered naming one of his models "*nouveau Stedelijk Museum*".[731] It was architecture as anti-art. Aiming to eman-

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[728] Jorn did so in the undated letter to Debord, summer 1960. Debord agreed in his response sent on the 7th of July 1960.

[729] Debord to Wychaert, 14 March 1960

[730] If the construction of a situation suggested that SI's outsiders quite literally tried to create a community of the medium in Paris, the irrealizability of Constant's New Babylon imply that his strategies were much closer to those Peter Bürger has identified in the historic avant-garde.

[731] Debord to Constant, 8 Oct 1959.

cipate art from the confines of the gallery, from the canvas, and maybe even from the need of (art) history, he refused to co-ordinate with Sandberg at the Stedelijk and collaborate with the others.[732] He wanted to save SI from the fate of Cobra.[733]

Constant's project was profoundly optimistic. We should recall that the Dutch orientation within SI, not yielding an organizational practice, would not produce a collective situationist performance until after the qualitative break. Elaborating on a vision of urban totality seen from the vantage point of situationist redemption, the Dutch research project was post-revolutionary.[734] New Babylon was a city for the future. But this was a future in whose coming it strongly believed. The political developments would lead to a state in which the infinite riches of human creativity would be given free rein.[735]

Such optimism was at least in part informed by the local context: Constant, the main proponent of the Dutch project, did not need to realize the project yet. Illustrating his lack of urgency to do so, Constant, when eventually quitting SI almost a year later, initially asked if he could merely suspend his membership (IS 5, 10). Being at home already, Constant could continue commuting between his present urban research and his

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[732] Jorn and Debord agreed that he had refused to cooperate in their letter correspondence in the summer of 1960.

[733] Debord and Constant worried that Sandberg would want "to present a scandalous, innovative movement (and … try to officially tie it to COBRA)", 25 Sept 1959.

[734] For a recent take on the post-revolutionary quality to Constant's new babylon, see Sarah Williams Goldhagen, 'On Architecture: Extra Large', *The New Republic,* August 2006.

[735] As Ohrt notes, "*Gewisse unumgängliche Vorausetzungen - eine revolutionären Umvälzung der Gesellschaft und die Entfaltung der schöpferischen Kräfte aller Menschen - müssen zwar erfüllt sein, bevor seine Modell-Arbeit sich zu einer Arbeit in der Wirklichkeit verwandeln würde, wer aber an der Verwirklichung von New Babylon zweifle, der zweifle eigentlich an der schöpferischen Fähigkeiten des Menschen und habe keine wirkliche Vorstellung von den Revolution*" (Ohrt, 127).

future city located at a forever receding horizon while awaiting the moment for its realization. Unitary urbanism, with its implied demand for something enduring, only offered to engender Constant's space for dialogue and endlessly new experiences in the infinite long haul.[736]

Constant did not share the status of the SI members in Paris that once made the 'situation's' ability to construct an international attractive: the estrangement experienced in exile or on the margins. He had no need for what Raymond Williams called a 'community of the medium'. Constant was relatively famous in the Low Countries. Like Jorn, he was a public figure in his home country;[737] but unlike Jorn, he had not left it. And he had no need to enter into a self-imposed exile: no de Gaulle threatened his project; he could afford double crossing Sandberg, who, rare among the curators of the day, in Jorn's eyes was "*ce que je m'appelle un vrai révolutionnaire*."[738] Constant would in half a year get a new chance to explain this theories at the museum.[739]

It has been argued that SI's praxis folded under the contradictions of its theory. "Throughout the 1950s," Sadler suggests, "[SI] had written as if the construction of the situation and of unitary urbanism was a realizable proposition, and that utopia could in-

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[736] IS 4 includes Constant's 'Description de la zone jaune'. His piece describes a neighbourhood, the yellow zone, in which his plans have been implemented.

[737] He had recently been invited to address both the Stedelijk and the Academy of Architecture. He was also a frequent contributor of *Forum,* a journal of architecture (Ohrt, 216-7).

[738] Jorn to Debord, undated letter summer 1960

[739] Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire,* 10-12.

deed be built."[740] It was not, he implies; the Amsterdam performance was doomed. His perspective is informed by a focus on Constant's contributions. But, as we have seen, they were the only ones that could be accused of being utopian. The others, on the contrary, envisioned no fixed *topos*, only an experiental *tempus*, as it were.[741] And the aim to establish (a desire for) post-instrumental spaces and practices was hardly inherently impossible.

To Debord and Jorn, the failure rather proved that Amsterdam could not assume Paris's role within SI. Jorn argued that the praxis of the Dutch within the organization showed that they had a project that did not allow for it. He regretted that historical events had allowed the Dutch to lead the performance. In hindsight, it appeared to him that Constant had deceitfully capitalized on Paris' inhospitality at this juncture: instead of defending the first, utopian option for the definitions of the 'situation' at the Munich conference, the Dutchman had in Amsterdam a year later tried to marginalize the 'situation' as the international's constitutive project.[742] "*C'est ici*," Jorn thought, "*où se trouve le conflit non-résolu dans le mouvement, et qui est l'essence même de l'affaire d'Amste-*

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[740] Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City,* 152. As if all SI's art had not been precisely about participation, Sadler continues on the same note that "With the abandonment of early situationism, the SI abandoned its *imagining* of utopia - a devastating decision, surely unprecedented in the history of the avant-garde, and yet at the same time surely the situationists' greatest contribution to that history: the recognition that in changing the world, avantgarde art cannot be a substitute for the popular redistribution of power" (161).

[741] As Thomas McDonough argues, "there could be no 'situationist architecture', only a situationist use of its means. In contrast to the spatial utopia of New Babylon, the locus of *détournement*'s criticality was time - or better yet, it was the realm of historicity, the provisional rather than the eternal" (Thomas McDonough, 'Fluid Spaces: Constant and the Situationist Critique of Architecture', *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* (ed) Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 101).

[742] Jorn in an undated letter to Debord, probably from the summer of 1960.

rdam, et qui montre que l'accord qui était le résultat des conférences de Munic [sic] a été une manoeuvre, un compromis, et pas le résultat d'une comprehension supérieure."[743] Though envisioning a ceaseless dialogue, unitary urbanism was not in itself an artwork geared towards opening a space of international dialogic encounters. Its main proponents cared little for SI's continental extension and communication. An Amsterdam UU office was ill-prepared to be the international's new hinge.

Nor was Amsterdam as a city an important enough hub for SI's performances there to reverberate around the continent. No newspapers clippings followed their failure to construct a situation in Amsterdam. As IS meticulously documented the press SI received—and anxiously complained about the coverage the international did not receive, notably from Parisian intellectual journals, such as Arguments—this suggests that it did not cause a stir. The transcendence of art as the epoch knew it did not happen.[744]

Debord and Jorn gave a more specific analysis of the problems, that as we shall see in the next chapter, also related to Amsterdam's international standing. They thought that the Dutch SI branch had failed to understand that the 'situation' sought to change the path of history, in the present, not prepare for a future transformation. The corollary of their claim that the 'situation' would have an impact in the present was a belief that they needed to draw on past attempts to change history's course. Debord agreed with Jorn that

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[743] Jorn to Debord, undated letter, summer 1960

[744] Under the heading, 'Renseignements situationniste', every IS issue listed, and often quoted from, articles either on or mentioning SI. In IS 4, this section makes no mention of any with regard to the Amsterdam performance (IS 4, 12-5).

"*Si nous sommes pour un avenir sans histoire, nous sommes pour un avenir sans situations, parce que [les situations]… f[ont] l'histoire*."[745]

Most importantly, Debord and Jorn related SI to that earlier revolutionary force: the 'proletariat'. "*Comme les prolétariats, théoriquement, devant la nation, les situationnistes campent aux portes de la culture*," they claimed. "*Ils ne veulent pas s'y établir, ils s'inscrivent en creux dans l'art moderne, ils sont les organisateurs de l'absence de [l'] avant-garde esthétique*" (IS 3, 7). In much the same way as the proletariat heralded the end of capitalist society in Marxist theory, SI called time on a decomposing culture.

Debord and Jorn took from this analogy that the situationist construction could only affect the course of history, if they mobilized a 'total perspective'.[746] As revolutionary praxis aspired to disrupt the reproduction of the status quo, it needed to understand how society functioned. And for this it required a total perspective from where it could gauge how the sum of society was more than its parts. As Debord and Jorn had suggested in the ultimately unpublished call discussed in Munich, "*le dépassement révolutionnaire des conditions existantes dépend d'abord de l'apparition de perspective concernant* la totalité" (IS 3, 22). They thought that the cultural sphere was the weak link in contemporary society: "*Les défaites de la révolution, et la prolongation d'une culture dominante formellement décomposée s'expliquent réciproquement*" (IS 3, 22). A total perspective could draw attention to such cultural decomposition.

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[745] Jorn to Debord, summer 1960. In the original quote it says that "*Si nous sommes pour un avenir sans histoire, nous sommes pour un avenir sans situations, parce que ceux la fait l'historie*". Such grammatical mistakes suggest that the letter was written in haste; it dealt with a matter, one thus would assume Jorn to believe, of great urgency.

[746] Ibid.

This, the Paris-based members believed, could fatally undermine society as whole. For if communism had been the specter haunting a *vormärz* Europe, according to the famous first lines in the Communist Manifesto, the questioning of postwar culture was, they thought, what haunted postwar Europe: "*La civilisation bourgeoise, maintenant étendue à l'ensemble de la planète, et dont le dépassement n'a encore été accompli nulle part, est hantée par une ombre: la mise en question de sa culture, qui apparaît dans la dissolution moderne de tous ses moyens artistiques"* (IS 3, 3). To capitalize on this was SI's chance.

Debord reproached Constant for misunderstanding this:

> *Notre activité nécessaire est dominé par la question de la* totalité. *Prenez-y-garde. L'urbanisme unitaire n'est pas une conception de la totalité, ne doit pas le devenir. C'est un instrument opératoire pour construire un décor étendu. L'urbanisme unitaire est 'central' dans la mesure où il est le centre d'une construction générale d'un milieu. On ne peut penser, par cette vision théorique, ni même par son application planifiée, déterminer et dominer un genre de vie. Ce serait une sorte de dogmatisme irréaliste.*[747]

Constant had confused his suggestion of a positive praxis with a critical perspective. In doing so, he inadvertently proved to Debord that cultural changes happened in Paris first.

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[747] Debord to Constant on 4 April 1959 (his stress).

But where did this new emphasis on "totality" come from? In casting his argument in this way, Debord was invoking the new theoretical developments that had only recently hit the French capital. In effect, Debord argued that the Dutch did not sense the urgency of constructing a 'situation' right now because they were not *au courant* with the historical theory that offered new avenues for questioning the instrumentalizing modernization of postwar Europe: the critical interpretation of Marxist texts by the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács that had not stopped in Amsterdam on its way from its central European heartland to Paris. Lacking Paris's dense international connections, Amsterdam could not, Debord implied, become the hinge of their international association.[748]

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[748] He had criticized the Dutch for having a parochial perspective also on other matters. In March 1959, he rejected the basis of the way they doubted the working class's continuing radicalism. The increased standard of living enjoyed by the western working classes, Debord told them, had been made possible by colonial exploitation of other parts of the world. And the political upheavals in these parts of the world, such as the risings against the European empires by the anti-colonial movements, disputed the Dutch branch's optimistic and reformist perception of history as a placid evolution, only sped up by intellectuals, towards a better employment of technology. Global capitalism, Debord argued, would not reform itself, and their limited horizon missed this (Debord to Constant, 4 April 1959).

5. Intellectual Openings in Paris 1959

As a hub for the intellectual and cultural networks of Europe, Amsterdam did not compare to Paris. As we saw in the second chapter, the way Paris shrewdly invested its historically accumulated cultural capital in a time experiencing new geo-political divisions had made it the postwar hub for the continent. The dividends from such investments enabled the city to project its local concerns along the channels of continental networks. As the city had a disproportionate sway over the definition of the modern, it was where ideologies faced off, intellectual currents converged, and artistic reputations were made; Paris thus became the postwar court of appeal for intellectual opinion and site of consecration for aesthetic trends. In part that was made possible, I followed Casanova in arguing, because its cultural capital attracted foreigners.[749] They exported Paris trends abroad. But, as we shall see, this process had a flip side; those foreigners imported foreign trends to the French capital.

Establishing connections to their homelands, the discontents who came to Paris because it was a hub also made the French capital an international "hinge". In more mundane language, this meant that Paris was 'in the know' more often and more consistently than anywhere else. As Latour suggests, what makes a place international according to a network analysis is not that it overlooks local concerns. A place becomes international because it enjoys a density of connections to other places; it is kept *à jour* with other local preoccupations. The foreigners in Paris, who had migrated there because it was a hub, made sure that this was the case.

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[749] Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters,* 24-30.

Paris's status as a hinge meant that while the legal space for situationist practice had closed down in Paris, the intellectual space for its ideas remained open. This space had even expanded. In the late 1950s a new wave of Marxist scholarship emerged in western Europe. It drew on the heterodox Marxism of interwar central Europe, which, by redefining revolutionary praxis, rejected the economic determinism of Cominform Marxism. This allowed contemporary intellectuals to conceptualize ways in which to break with the instrumental logic of postwar modernization right now.

Though reaching many western European countries, this scholarship did so unevenly. At a time when its interwar sources were still barely known in Amsterdam, they had given birth to a new discourse in the French capital. The Paris-based members in SI capitalized on this to marginalize the Dutch. Though the realization of SI's project had become more difficult practically in the French capital, these trends helped make it conceivable there intellectually.

Totality

Paris in the last years of the 1950s was astir with the early writings of the Hungarian Marxist György Lukács.[750] The concept of 'totality', to which Debord referred in 1959, can be traced to Lukács's 1923 *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (translated as *History and Class-Consciousness*). In this work, Lukács offered an interpretation of Marxism inspired by Hegel, which remained relatively little known in western Europe, outside Germany, until the late 1950s.

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[750] Debord letter to Jorn, 11 July 1959.

In *History and Class-Consciousness,* Lukács scrutinized how the principles guiding the economy intruded into all sectors of life. He suggested that the logic ruling the market place subjugated other spheres; it even threatened the most intimate ones. In this he drew on Marx's argument that economic exchange depends upon the ability to compare the most diverse kind of goods. As the universal equivalent, money fills this function. It allows goods to become merchandize for a market. And, Lukács stressed through his concept of reification, such exchange value infiltrated all human relations.[751]

Where Lukács broke new ground was in his description of how the supremacy of the market could be challenged. While the laws guiding the market affect everyone, they do not do so, he argued, in the same way. He suggested that for the bourgeoisie this situation appears to define human reality, whereas for the working class it is experienced as an inhuman existence. He therefore sought a transcendence of the current reification, because of which all of life was determined by the economy, in the proletariat's experience.[752]

To politicize the inhumanity of the market, Lukács deployed a perspective from which life was seen to encompass more aspects than the economy. Breaking with the economism that Engels had imprinted on the Marxism of the Comintern,[753] Lukács argued that such a vantage point defined revolutionary thought: "It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference be-

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[751] See Gyorgy Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 83-110

[752] See, Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* 149-209.

[753] Jappe, *Debord,* 40-1.

tween Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality … The Primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of revolution in science."[754] Such a holistic category stood in sharp contrast to what Lukács called the antinomies of bourgeois thought. It created the basis for his belief in overcoming the division between subjects and objects within history: "if we are able to regard the whole of reality as history (i.e. as *our* history, for there is no other), we shall have raised ourselves in fact to the position from which reality can be understood as our 'action'."[755]

For Lukács, the category of totality showed that, while the working class was currently an object of history, the proletariat could become its subject: "since consciousness here is not the knowledge of an opposed object but is the self-consciousness of the object, *the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of the object*."[756] Once the proletariat takes a totalizing view, it can become the subject of history. Putting aside reifications, it then becomes the totality of society.

But this was a wager. Unlike more orthodox Marxist scholarship, Lukács did not suggest that the working class was the subject of history by virtue of any pre-determined scheme. He rather thought that the proletariat could become this subject if it became conscious of its constitutive role in history: "the fate of the revolution (and with it the fate of mankind) will depend on the ideological maturity of the proletariat, i.e. on its class

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[754] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* 27.

[755] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* 145.

[756] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* 178, emphasis in the original.

consciousness."[757] For Lukács, the revolutionary proletariat was not an empirical reality. It was a theoretical construction.[758] His wager that the proletariat "can change the world," Timothy Bewes has argued, "is the very means by which that entity and that change is brought about."[759]

Because of its heterodox Marxism, *History and Class-Consciousness* received a checkered reception history on its way to Paris. It had been condemned by the Comintern in the mid 1920s. While in exile in Moscow in the 1930s, Lukács had also felt compelled to retract its argument. He returned to Hungary after the war to become a professor in Budapest. In an intellectual context circumscribed by Stalinism, he did not pick up where had left off. What has been called 'the accursed book of Marxism' became hard to find.[760]

After Khrushchev's 'secret speech', 'On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences', in which the Soviet leader questioned the excesses of Stalinism, things changed. Lukács participated in Imre Nagy's government whose independent initiatives prompted the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Once Moscow had re-imposed its order, Lukács was imprisoned for his role but spared execution.[761] Though he still kept his

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[757] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* 70

[758] Timothy Bewes, *Reification, or The Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 2002), 67.

[759] Bewes, 66-7.

[760] Jappe, *Debord,* 41.

[761] Titus Stahl, "Georg [György] Lukács", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Accessed 1 Feb 2018: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/lukacs/

distance from *History and Class-Consciousness*, his work began to appear in western Europe.[762]

In the large western countries of continental Europe Lukács' renown preceded the reception of his early work. In France Lukács was already well known. He had debated how Marxism related to Existentialism with Sartre in Paris in the late 1940s. Launched at a point when he acquiesced to the dominant thrust of Cominform Marxism, his intervention had received significant attention.[763] It was addressed in journals such as, among others, Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* and Bataille's *Critique*, the PCF's journal *Cahiers du communisme* and the anti-communist *Preuves*.[764]

At this point France had had a long history of socialism, but, in comparison to Germany, not a wide array of Marxist schools.[765] There was a brief flurry of innovative Hegelian Marxist works in the first postwar years.[766] But as the Cold War hardened positions, the PCF shunned anything affiliated to Hegelian perspectives.[767] This had an impact in part because unless you spoke German in France in the 1950s, the PCF

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[762] Jappe, *Debord*, 41.

[763] On how Lukács had retracted the argument in his earlier work in 1930s, and been to Paris in the late 1940s, see Titus Stahl, "Georg [György] Lukács", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Accessed 1 Feb 2018: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/lukacs/

[764] See François H. Lapointe, *George Lukács and his Critics. An International Bibliography with Annotations (1910-1982)* (Westport, Connecticut & London, Greenwood Press, 1982).

[765] Jappe, 185.

[766] William Lewis, *Louis Althusser and the traditions of French Marxism* (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2005), 127-9.

[767] Lewis, 138.

controlled your access to marxist texts.[768]

Lukács' heterodox Marxism re-emerged in Paris in the late 1950s. Starting in 1957, excerpts from his *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* were made available in French translation in the *Arguments* journal.[769] The translation was part of the journal's interest in unearthing alternative marxist traditions that had bypassed France. In this it continued a line of inquiry that in Paris had recently been started by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

After having fallen out with Sartre over *Les Temps Modernes*' increasingly pro-Soviet line a few years earlier, Merleau-Ponty noted in the mid-1950s that it had become harder and harder to identify the polarization of society of which Marx had written a century earlier and to which communist parties still paid tribute. In *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (1955) he turned to a body of works that, in Sadie Plant's pithy definition, explored the way modern capitalism was able "to contain, rather then to produce, class conflict."[770] By doing so, he has been credited with introducing to France the heterodox Marxist tradition that had been flourishing across the Rhine for a quarter of a century. This body of works have often been grouped together as belonging to a West European marxist discourse, although many of its initiators were born and worked in central Europe. The historians who have framed the works by these critical marxists as

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[768]There was no available translation of Marx's oeuvre into French at this time. What existed was various excerpts and pamphlets produced by the PCF (Hussey, *Game of War,* 114-5).

[769] Jappe, *Debord,* 40-1. The full text was not translated until 1960.

[770] Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London, Routledge, 1992), 14.

participating in a larger European discourse of 'Western Marxism' have tended to focus on its inception. One way of doing so has been to emphasize the enduring influence of Lukács, and especially his Hegelian focus on the self-production of the social 'totality', on this discourse; another way has been to stress that the attempt to rethink an orthodox marxism was a reaction to the implicit impotence of political marxism outside of eastern Europe.[771] Both perspectives underline the extra-French geographical roots of this current. And yet, it should be noted that, it was actually through Merleau-Ponty that this scholarship became known as 'Western Marxism'; its 'proponents' did not self-identify as western Marxists nor did they necessarily correspond with each other.[772] Besides differing from a classical marxism, the implicit contrast embedded in this name is arguably with the *eastern* marxism of the Cominform. In 1950s Paris, a critical, mostly Germanophone Marxism of *Mitteleuropa* became western.

Regardless of its exact nomenclature, in France this heterodox Marxism provided a vocabulary for expressing skepticism about certain key leftwing dogmas. As western Europe experienced unparalleled growth, its working classes received a share of the wealth, affording them to lead lives undreamt of during the interwar years. This weak-

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[771] For an example of the former, see Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality. The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1985), and for the latter, see Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London, Verso, 1976).

[772] As was the case within SI, the national frontiers still imposed important boundaries to such dialogues, even between France and Germany. Before Marcuse's rise to prominence, the Frankfurt School was not widely read in France (for example, see Michel Foucault, *Remarks On Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 115). And based on Adorno's text on 'Commitment', one gets the sense that not even Sartre, though obviously known as author and playwright, was fully available across the Rhine: Adorno's text on commitment, though published in 1962, makes no note of Sartre's recent Marxist turn in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (see Theodore Adorno, 'Commitment', *Notes to Literature. Volume Two,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1991)).

ened their rebellious resolve. Even if the main leftwing parties in France did not follow the Social Democrats of Scandinavia and West Germany in abandoning revolutionary rhetoric or the aim of full nationalization, the trends that authored the exponential post-war growth made people question the alleged inevitability of the qualitative break.[773] This was maybe most clearly on display in Merleau-Ponty's own text.

In *Les Aventures de la dialectique,* Merleau-Ponty questioned the applicability of some of the crucial tenets of Marxist ideology while emphasizing the methodology of its theory. He described a development within the Marxism he called Western. It had expanded its range of themes. Due to the amelioration of the working class's postwar social reality, many marxists had turned their gaze towards the superstructure. They tried to identify alternative revolutionary possibilities in the cultural arena. But they still posited the proletariat as the primary revolutionary subject. William Lewis, a historian of French marxism, suggests that for Merleau-Ponty "the final result of this process was the formulation of a Marxism where an ideal proletariat is still identified with the future of humanity but no actual proletariat can be found that corresponds to this ideal."[774] In this theory, the theoretical negation of contemporary society remained but that negation's material and historically effective counterpart had disappeared. Merleau-Ponty promoted a Marxism that stressed the dialectics of history without positing an end, or telos, to it.

Though few went as far as Merleau-Ponty, after the events of 1956 a space opened up in the political landscape in which a new leftwing discourse formed. Initially,

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[773] Mazower, 320; Judt, 403-6.

[774] Lewis, 146.

its main proponents were the political grouping composed of ex-communists who had left the party after Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary, but the *marxisant* groups and thinkers soon multiplied.[775] They often kept the crucial concepts of marxism, such as socialism and communism, the proletariat and the revolution. But they related them to a dialectical perspective. Though questioning many of the dogmas that underpinned the PCF's marxism, this discourse even affected the party. Due to the de-stalinization process that Khrushchev set in motion, the Cominform, which had guided the PCF's Marxism, was dissolved in 1956.[776] As a consequence, a certain rapprochement took place between the communists and the socialists in SFIO.[777] The PCF also opened the door for more research into marxism. It established Le Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes and appointed the humanist marxist Roger Garaudy as its head.[778]

Wanting to put SI's project on a more secure theoretical footing after the failure in Amsterdam, the SI members in Paris attempted to position the international in this general trend. Debord, Jorn and Frankin corresponded about it throughout the latter half of 1959. This led to an article on SI's aesthetics and Marxism in IS 3 (1959): 'Le Sens du dépérissement de l'art'. In it, SI traced the current impasse for artistic creation to the general reluctance on the part of the founders of marxist thought to treating the question of art. But it acknowledged that contemporary critical marxists were redressing this prior

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[775] Rioux 276.

[776] Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Theories and Debates Since 1917,* trans. Jurriaan Bendein (Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2007), 159.

[777] van den Linden, 177.

[778] Garaudy's humanist marxism nonetheless remained a minority voice within the party (Lewis, 156).

neglect in France (IS 3, 4).

However, the Paris-based member did not include the outlying branches in SI's network in their correspondence on this trend. The Italians and the Germans could have been aware of these intellectuals developments anyway. In Italian journals, Lukács' thoughts on aesthetics and political positions were not only discussed occasionally throughout the entire 1950s. Thomas Munzer, who wrote the first exegetical article on Lukács in the first issue of *Arguments* in 1957, also had an essay on Lukács published in an Italian journal the very same year.[779] For a German-speaking intelligentsia, Lukács had never entirely slipped out of view. His relationship to Thomas Mann and debates with Brecht continued to be studied. Even if he was not held in high esteem by the Frankfurt School in the 1950s, he made his presence felt by continuing to write in German.

For the Dutch, the case was different. Though Lukács was probably known in the Netherlands, the Hungarian's positions on aesthetics and politics had not been showered with remotely the same attention as in France. None of his works was even reviewed in a Dutch speaking publication until 1959. What is more, the first study that did catch notice in Holland was one of his recent defenses of realist aesthetics, not the accursed book of Marxism from 1923.[780]

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[779] Thomas Munzer, 'A propos de Lukacs', *Arguments* 1, Paris, 1957; Thomas Munzer, 'Il giovane Lukács', *Ragionamenti* 9, Milano, 1957.

[780] Lukács' *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus* (Hamburg, 1958) was reviewed by a V. Leemans in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 21, 1959. For Lukács' reception, see François H. Lapointe, *George Lukács and his Critics. An International Bibliography with Annotations (1910-1982)* (Westport, Connecticut & London, Greenwood Press, 1982).

Within SI, the Dutch were oblivious to the intellectual changes elsewhere on the West European Left. Constant was at a clear disadvantage. The Dutch ignorance of Lukács and his French reception was reinforced by Debord. While in his correspondence with Jorn and Frankin, Debord consistently brought up Lukács's ideas, with Constant he never once referred to the Hungarian thinker. He merely evoked the intellectual trends in Paris that had brought Lukács's concept to the Left Bank in their rich letter correspondence during these years.[781]

This seems to have been a conscious strategy by Debord. The Dutch decision to subordinate constructing a situation in favor of their unitary urbanism was predicated on the historical subordination of culture to life. Whereas a situation could be constructed right now, unitary urbanism would have to await a qualitative historical rupture. Life, as we saw, had to change first; its trajectory had to run it course before it could emerge out of economic subservience. This was threatening the very geo-cultural assumptions of the 'situation' that centralized Paris for the international. For 'life' (whether defined by the economy or not) recognized no geographical hierarchies. It happened everywhere. The situation, on the other hand, depended upon a historicist topography. Cultural developments, of which the constructed situation would be the avant-garde, prefigured those in a life determined by the economy, according to SI definitions.[782] And cultural trends in

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[781] He did so in two letters I referenced in chapter 3, sent on the 11th and the 21st of March 1959.

[782] We should recall that IS 1 defined culture not only as "*complexe de l'esthétique, des sentiments et des moeurs, par lequel une collectivité réagit sur la vie qui lui est objectivement donnée par son économie*". It also defined culture as a "*reflet et préfiguration, dans chaque moment historique, des possibilités d'organisation de la vie quotidienne"* (IS 1, 14).

Paris anticipated changes elsewhere. The 'situation' could spread from its Parisian roots to the international's peripheral branches.

What further supports such a view is that Debord, while mobilizing Lukács's concept of 'totality' to marginalize the Dutch, kept Constant et al. in the dark about the more problematic aspects of Lukács' reception. In the French context, Lukács's work was not only seen to encourage new ways to conceptualize political struggles. The dominant figures in the French reception of his work and in that of a more heterodox Marxism in France more generally also came to complicate any facile understanding of emancipation.

Two of the most influential proponents of a Hegelian Marxism in France were Lucien Goldmann and Henri Lefebvre. In 1959 both Goldmann and Lefebvre re-positioned the major tensions driving history and recast its protagonists and major consequences. They questioned the belief that society, due to an ever widening polarization between the interests of labour and capital, would inevitably experience a proletarian revolution. Instead they saw quantification as society's main development. And such a trend, they believed, would not inevitably be overcome, especially because postwar western Europe had through increasing social protection and spreading of prosperity alleviated the downsides and thereby entrenched the perceived legitimacy of the political system. Only in rare circumstances, they thought, could its consequences be temporarily suspended.

Reification

More than anyone else, it was Lucien Goldmann who brought an interest in early Lukács to the Hexagon.[783] As Mark Poster has observed, "the link between Lukács and the French was in great measure forged by Lucien Goldmann".[784] Sharing the fate of so many of intellectuals in his generation in central and eastern Europe, the originally Jewish-Rumanian Goldmann had been uprooted by the interwar political turn first to authoritarian regimes, then to Nazi occupation. He had left Bucharest for Vienna in 1933, where he had come across Lukács' early work. He soon moved on to Paris.[785] He was forced to flee to Switzerland during the German occupation. But he returned to Paris after its liberation, where he soon published his first study related to Lukács' thought.[786]

In 'Réification', published by *Les Temps modernes* in spring 1959, Goldmann directly addressed Lukács's *History and Class-Consciousness*. This essay was initially a speech Goldmann gave to the philosophy society of Toulouse in 1958. As a sign of the growing interest in the alternative readings of Marx in France, Goldmann had been asked

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[783] Arthur Hirsh, *The French Left. A History & Overview* (Montreal, Black Rose Books, 1982), 89.

[784] Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser,* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976), 47.

[785] Martin Jay, *Totality and Marxism: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984), 305-6. Goldmann's personal trajectory and research interests makes him a typical proponent of what Jay and others have called 'Western' Marxism. This did not end here for the Eastern Europeans. For a succeeding generation, the postwar turn to Soviet communism in eastern Europe displaced a new cohort: Agnes Heller, Leszek Kollakowski, and, from a previous generation, Ernst Bloch, are just few of those whose marxism fell out of favour with their country's rulers and therefore had to leave.

[786] This was '*La Communauté humaine et l'univers chez Kant*' (Paris, Press Universitaires de France, 1948). Two years later he continued with 'Georg Lukacs l'essayiste', in *Revue d'Esthétique*, no 1, 1950. (For this, see Lapointe, *George Lukács and his Critics. An International Bibliography with Annotations (1910-1982*).

to speak on the different European interpretations of Marx.[787] Even if mentioning certain famous texts, Goldmann did not spend much time on any theorist except for Lukács.

Goldmann questioned the reasons behind the primacy of materialism in 'official' Marxism. He argued that Marx's suggestion of the ontological priority of matter was not universal and unchanging; it was a historical observation. It "*signifie chez Marx seulement qu'au cours de toute l'histoire passée … les hommes ont été obligés de consacrer la plus grande partie de leur activité à résoudre les problèmes qui concernent la production et la distribution des richesses matérielles*" (RD, 67-8). But, "*et cela est évident, cette thèse n'implique nullement l'idée d'une passivité particulière de la conscience et de la pensée théorique par rapport à l'activité économique*" (RD, 68). It only does so in the Marxist ideal-type of classic capitalism; in reality, "*la vie sociale … constitue toujours une* totalité *structuré*" (RD, 67, my emphasis). What had been intended heuristically had, according to Goldmann, in 'official Marxism', which neglected the totality of social life, been interpreted as gospel (RD, 68).

Left unquestioned and taken for an eternally valid description of 'reality', such a doctrine had had debilitating consequences for Marxist theory. It had left marxism unable to assess the economic changes experienced in western Europe since the war. The 'official Marxism' of Cominform and, prior to that, Comintern had not, Goldmann thought, produced any new theory of note over the past quarter century. It had not only let interpretations ossify and dogmatize but been instrumental in France's ability to

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[787] Lucien Goldmann, *Recherche dialectique* (Paris, Gallimard, 1959), 65. The section on Lukács in *Recherche dialectique* was first published as 'Réification' in *Les Temps Modernes,* n. 156, Feb-March 1959. From now, I will make running notes to this article in the text as RD.

overlook the rich scholarship of an earlier generation, notably Lukács' (RD, 64-5).

Writing in the wake of 1956, Goldmann noted that Marxism was just coming out of a crisis (RD, 64-5). He wanted to capitalize on the discursive openings in order to re-situate the relation between the superstructure and the base and, at the same time, to emphasize the viability of the supposed but forgotten method of marxism: dialectics. With its help, he outlined how a good became a commodity in the Marxist ideal type of classic capitalism (RD, 66), that is, how value is created, measured, and distorted. But stressing the heuristic nature of the model he argued that if the base had kept its dominance over the superstructure in the present moment, it was for different reasons, as capitalism itself had changed.

When drawing on Lukács critical concepts to map the recent development, Goldmann did not focus on the category of totality. Goldmann explored the continuing hold of the base on the superstructure with the help of Lukács' concept of reification. "*Ce que nous désignons par le terme* réification," Goldmann wrote, "*étant en premier lieu l'apparition dans la vie sociale des* processus économique *en tant que* phénomènes autonomes *et par cela même purement quantitatifs, sa première conséquence est de soustraire presque entièrement ces phénomènes à l'action de la superstructure en renforçant au contraire leur action sur celle-ci*" (RD, 86, his stresses). The concept of reification had enabled Lukács to scrutinize how exchange value, by measuring exclusively by quantity, made sure, in Goldmann's rendition, that "*tout élément qualitatif est éliminé de manière radicale*" (RD, 77).

Goldmann did not explicitly relate the scenario described by the concept

reification to a postwar western Europe awash with new consumer goods. But, reminiscent of the master tropes in the French debate on American influence, he did forebodingly suggest that such scenarios led to "*la transformation des relations humaines qualitatives en attribut quantitatif des choses inertes*" (RD, 78). It showed how "*l'homme devient ainsi esclave de lois abstraites et de choses inertes*" (RD, 85).

When outlining the logic of reification, Goldmann marginalized Lukács' historical wager. Goldmann argued that the prominence of reification held true for the working class as well. The worker differs from others in a capitalist economy because he (invariably) is totally alienated in his work: "*Pendant le temps de travail, l'ouvrier ne s'appartient plus; il n'est plus lui-même, devenu non seulement objet mais encore objet d'un autre, il est, en même temps, 'réifié' et 'aliéné'*" (RD, 96-7). Working for someone else, he is only able to 'find himself', or to put it more 'marxistically', to produce his own subjectivity, in the private sphere of quotidian life (RD, 95). So far, so Lukácsian. But instead of using this contrast between objectifying work and possibly subject-producing free time as a dialectical lever to argue for the working class's role as subject of history able to usher in a post-capitalist state, as had Lukács, Goldmann observed that, while in theory a protest against reification, the working class was in reality often a co-producer (RD, 96-100). Exchange value had yet to reign supreme on certain margins of economic life, but that was truer, Goldmann conveyed, within families than among members of a specific class (RD, 84).

Instead of re-situating the hope for a transcendence of reification at a new historical juncture, Goldmann focused on how reification was reproduced in the present.

He claimed quantity still reigned supreme over quality, the rationalized over that which is living, on both sides of the Iron Curtain (RD, 102). In the East, the primacy of the economy had merely been replaced by one of politics. (In the West, politics had also gained an increasingly important position, as evidenced by the proliferating state bureaucracies, but without usurping economy's imperative function (RD, 101-2).) While acknowledging that the growing importance of state planning over the economy had seen an alleviation of reification in both East and West (RD, 106), he entertained no illusions about the societies produced by Soviet and its satellites.[788] Goldmann's conclusion was stark and provocative: socialism did not exist (RD, 101).

Goldmann did recognize the importance of retaining concepts such as socialism and the proletariat. He dialectically differentiated between the class-for-itself and the class-in-itself. He used the concepts to encourage (French?) sociology to resist the tendency to deploy a static quantification, which only accounted for the class-in-itself, when studying society. He surely had the importation of quantitative American social science in mind. The latter had introduced a perspective that, according to Goldmann, cast individuals as quantifiable objects, as homo economicus. Its normative image of

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[788] By drawing on the reality of state socialism, he pointed out an inconsistency in marxist theory. The predictions of a future socialist society without reification would herald the return of that which is concrete and significant. But Goldmann observed that for Lukács and other perceptive Marxists this rests on a contradiction, which had led to terrible consequences for east European countries. On the one hand it assumed that a socialist society would keep certain forms, even if reified, from a pre-socialist society, such as universal values and the respect of individual liberties; but that, on the other, its institutional pillars would give way for a more authentic human community, including everyone and stretching everywhere (102). The reality of eastern Europe had, however, shown that not only had the authentic human community *not* emerged but the respect for the pre-state socialist forms, as individual liberties and universal values, had still disappeared (104). Needless to say, Marx could not have foreseen this. But, Goldmann continued, Marxists needed to address it but with new concepts and east European reality in mind (104-5). Such an endeavour constituted "*une des tâches le plus importantes parmi celles qui se posent aux penseurs socialistes de notre génération*" (106). Arguably, his call would not be answered until Kollakowski's three volume history of marxism was published in 1978.

human actors was then that of alienated and reified spectators (RD, 77). It overlooked that the current conditions were historically contingent: "*l'économie marchande masque le caractère historique et humain de la vie sociale [en?] transformant l'homme en élément passif, en spectateur d'un drama qui se renouvelle continuellement et dans lequel les seuls élément réellement actif sont les choses inertes*" (RD, 79).[789]

But Goldmann renewed a Marxist critique of capitalism without proclaiming the latter's abolition. He questioned the value of only mobilizing the class-for-itself (RD 77). He did not repeat the wager that the 'proletariat' would change the world. For this reason it has been argued that he promoted Marxism more as a methodology than a political program. Edward Said, for instance, thought that Goldmann turned "Lukács's theory of reification into an essentially scholastic rather than revolutionary mode of analysis."[790]

And yet, even if vague on reification's possible transcendence and such a process' author(s), Goldmann still dialectically reserved a place for a negative moment in his theory. His theory contained an extra-reificatory space, as it were. He construed this both as hope and occasional reality. "*De temps à autre, il est vrai*," he wrote, "*de grands cataclysmes sociaux, tout en renforçant la reification chez les uns, remettent à nu, chez les autres, la véritable réalité sociale et humaine*". But, he continued, "*De pareils états*

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[789] In its bleak picture of an instrumentalizing modernity, Goldmann's argument drew on Heidegger in addition to Lukàcs, two philosophers whose projects' similarity he had already compared. Half a decade earlier, Heidegger had scrutinized the insatiable thirst for resources characteristic of modernity in 'The Question concerning Technology'. He described such mining as due to the instrumentalization of the world: it had gone from being a 'dwelling place' to a 'standing reserve'. This description continued the line of argument he had started in 'The Age of World Picture'. He here contended that this had all started once the world could be perceived as a picture. It could then be controlled and, its properties, quantified…

[790] Edward Said quoted in Timothy Bewes, *Reification, or The Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 2002), 28.

d'esprit restent l'expression d'une situation exceptionnelle qui ne survit pas longtemps" (RD, 85). These moments end and the social equilibrium is reinstated when the bureaucratic apparatus re-establishes its hold over quotidian life.[791]

Due to their plastic perception of the world, artists had a role to play here. Reification did not only break an original unity of subject and object, producer and product, spirit and matter. It fixed their separation (RD, 98). Experimenting with matter, art could bridge such divisions. In this respect artists differed from thinkers: "*Le penseur ne fait ensuite que constater cette rupture en la prenant pour un phénomène fondamental et naturel de la vie humaine*" (RD, 98). Artists had been known to take a different tack. "[*Les*] *peintres surréalistes*," Goldmann took as example, "*... comprennent que leur peinture ... n'ont aucune valeur spirituelle tant qu'elles n'ont pas réussi à s'incarner, à trouver le contact avec le peuple, avec la réalité et la matière pour devenir des réalités actives et agissantes*" (RD, 85). When thus closing the gap, kept open by the abstract laws of inert objects, they contributed to reification's temporary suspension (RD, 85).

But, while the history of art could furnish examples of occasions when society's instrumentalizing quantification had been suspended, Goldmann did not vouch for artists' political importance. This was not a new wager. For instead of such cultural expressions affecting the economy, the latter has circumscribed the room for movement of the former.[792] The predominance of reification had relegated aesthetics to a marginal pursuit;

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[791] He wrote that "*Il suffit que l'équilibre soit rétabli pour que le mécanisme ... de la vie social quotidienne rétablisse la réification*" (85). Jorn will make a similar claim.

[792] This was, he thought, the paradox behind romanticism: the struggle for subjective authenticity in a world of objective inauthenticity.

only a qualitative break, he thought, could change its position (RD, 88-90). Art could only permanently merge with everyday life and produce a 'style' in an ideal classless society. "*En tant que phénomène autonome*," he thought, art "*sera amené à disparaître dans une société sans class. Il n'y aura probablement plus d'art séparé de la vie parce que la vie aura elle-même* un style*, une forme dans laquelle elle trouvera son expression adéquate*" (my emphasis, RD, 24).

Alienation

Similar blows to naïve communist optimism were thrown by others in Paris. The same year, Lefebvre pointed out that emancipatory moments inevitably transition from oppositional to hegemonic. In his 'Théorie de moment' (TDM), he nuanced Goldmann's suggestion that reification could temporally be suspended. This piece was the theoretic distillation of *La Somme et le reste* (1959), a collection of meandering essays and poems informed by the chain of events started by 'Budapest':[793] with its publication, his three-decade-long stint as paid up member and unofficial philosopher of PCF came to an end.

Less influenced by the Hegelian Marxism of Lukács than by the first encounter with Hegel in interwar France, his theory, hinged on contradictions, stressed the dialectics of history.[794] Before World War II, Lefebvre had been a part of the Philosophies group.

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[793] Henri Lefebvre, 'Théorie des moments', in *La Somme et le reste* (Paris, Bélibaste, 1973). From now on, I will make running notes in the text as TDM.

[794] The most famous part of this encounter was Kojève's seminars. Though not a participant at these seminars, Lefebvre met Kojève several times to talk about Hegel: for these meetings, see Andrew Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City* (London, Routledge, 2002), 74-6; and for the importance of Kojève and his seminars on Parisian intellectual life more broadly, see Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005), 65-83.

Unlike Kojève and many of those he inspired, the Hegel texts that the members of this group focused on was *The Logic* and the 'Histoire générale de la conscience humaine' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit.*[795] This had led Lefebvre to an interest in alienation.[796] Stifled as part of the PCF's purge of Hegelian influences, this interest re-emerged when he quit the party. In his 'Théorie de moment', he described both the exuberance of the moments that upend the time-honored order of things and how swiftly such a moment transformed from being universalist in aspiration to becoming universal by fact of brute force.[797] Even more troubling for SI, he argued that these moments were often originally games. He brought the logic of reification into the ludic experience.[798] He questioned what could be called SI's wager.

In order to outline how a moment emerged and made an impact, Lefebvre contrasted the intelligible models of reality to the sensible world. "*Le sensible [de réalité]*," he argued, "*ressemble davantage à* la parole *humaine qu'à* la langue *comme forme et structure*" (TDM, 296, my emphasis). As the language of human speech, the 'sensible' reality is marked by profusion, redundancy, excess. There prevails, he argued, an "*ab-*

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[795] Kojève had focused on the dialectics of recognition between the master and the slave. For him, Lewis argues, the "world … unfolds as essentially a violent place" (Lewis, 137). And for those he inspired, especially the existentialists, "Hegel became primarily a phenomenologist of individual experience" (Lewis, 137).

[796] For Lefebvre, Hegel was, in Lewis' terms, "a dialectical logician or a chronicler of the development of the absolute spirit through its self-alienation" (Lewis, 137).

[797] This might sound as if he is striking a Durkheimian note. This is vaguely plausible if one inverses the consequences: Lefebvre sketched a 'moment' whose effervescence challenged, rather than as for Durkheim confirmed, the social order.

[798] Certain tenets of his theory even coincided with SI's on the 'situation's': in a language strongly reminiscent of SI's definition of the situation at the Munich conference, but including important qualifications, Lefebvre observed that "*en elle [la quotidienneté], les moments virtuels sont à la fois mêlés et séparés*" (312)…

sence de séparation entre la nature et l'homme (social), même quand le social croit se séparer de la nature" (TDM, 297). Sensible reality expresses the language of phenomena themselves. They together made up a 'natural' reality. It should be noted that he here evoked a dichotomy of signifying and non-signifying practices, which Sartre too had used in *WIL* (if, as we will see, with the opposite intentions). The fact that Lefebvre mobilized a binary in which *langue* opposed *parole* right now cannot be detached from the remarkable late reception of Ferdinand de Saussure in Paris. His local target was Saussure's main contemporary interlocutors: the Structuralists. He put them under political suspicions by relating the binary that underpinned their theories to the technocratic models guiding postwar modernization.[799]

Lefebvre argued that sensible reality, stretching from the flora and fauna of the natural world to the speech of everyday life, differs from the language of science. The latter defined the 'models of reality'. If the former suggests, evokes, expresses, the latter only signifies: "*Dans la parole, la redondance est aussi considérable; et c'est pourquoi la parole vivante exprime, suggère, évoque, au lieu de simplement signifier*" (TDM, 296). And "*La signification*," he observed, "*c'est le désert de l'essentiel*" (TDM, 296).

But, articulated through the language of science, the models of reality had the upper hand. Imported to France from US social science departments, such models guided the process of postwar modernization, as we saw in chapter two. Lefebvre criticized their lack of historical sense. Like Goldmann, he questioned the way such models did not see

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[799] For a longer description of Lefebvre linked the two, see Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1996), especially the chapter 'New Men'.

past the present moment when measuring society; blind to everything but 'signifying' facts, they favored an overly one-dimensional perspective. But, more clearly than Goldmann, he argued that such models were more than only academic: they had a political purpose. He alternatively called them "*models des stabilités*" and "*schemes des équilibres*" (TDM, 295).

Underpinned by a perspective disallowing historic events, and thus social transformations, the models scheming for equilibrium would create, Lefebvre feared, 'the ideology of technique' they described. He perceived a bias towards a specific kind of social harmony in them. The models of social science intended for postwar modernity to converge with the discipline's own ideal-types. They depicted and, by the same token, tried to usher in "*un monde cybernétique, complètement rationalisé, d'où la redondance serait exclue, où tout serait significatif*" (TDM, 296).

To challenge both the accuracy of such models' depiction of reality and the implementation of such interpretations in reality, as it were, Lefebvre argued that an equally important feature of modernity is the reaction against the superimposition of technocratic models. "*La modernité*," he argued, "… *va vers un tel monde [cybernétique, complètement rationalisé], mais en même temps de façon spontané et confuse réagit contre lui et réinsère l'inutile*" (TDM, 296). The gist of Lefebvre's theory was to show how the sensible, that is 'natural', world overflowed the 'models of stability.' He contended that "*[La] réalité n'est pas seulement sensible … mais elle se découvre par contraste avec 'les modèles'*" (TDM, 295). "*Elle*," he continued, "*déborde les schémas d'équilibre; ils éclatent*" (TDM, 295).

The political significance of Lefebvre's suggestion arguably went beyond a critique of postwar social science. For we have to remember that he conceptualized resistance to normative models, even if expressed through non-utilitarian means, as not in itself useless on a political scene still reeling from the impact of the insurrections in Budapest. Such and other uprisings were not mere luddite blips on the way to an irrevocable, modernized state-designed future.

Rather this was the dialectics of modernity. The historical logic that it discerned was at work in both the supposedly socialist states and their capitalist neighbors: "*une telle conception*," of the dialectic of modernity, "*dépasse le pluralisme comme le totalitarisme*" (TDM, 310). It was a rationalizing modernity with no iron cage at its end point. Indeed it lacked a telos.

So far, so revolutionary romantic, it would seem. But moving outside of the narrow confines of a perception of romantic art as an imaginative corrective to its day, he now outlined the mechanics and consequences of social change. The form that the reaction against the superimposed model took was not consciously created. Such rebellions erupted, but they did so according to preexistent, though normally latent, dispositions. The latter formed a canal through which the 'natural' world surged forward. They constituted 'moments' suspending the models of stability. They inserted instability in a world overlaid by schemas of equilibrium.

He explained this with the help of the category of totality. 'Moments' have kept, he claimed, "*quelque chose de leur participation initial à la totalité*" ('TDM', 301). That is, when erupting a 'moment' temporarily reunites nature, as in the sensible world, and

culture, the superimposed framework. In this way it breaks the barriers constitutive of civilization. A civilization, Lefebvre argued, always divides nature from culture. A 'moment' brings back a pre-civilizational unity. In other words, Lefebvre refused the outline of the current division of nature from culture, which various models of stability were scheming to fix, by evoking the occasional return of an originary, cosmic totality.

Even if giving a few examples of 'moments', the only one upon which Lefebvre elaborated was the game. It is therefore hard not to read his new interest in light of Huizinga's work on ludicity, which had been so influential to SI. This was at least how Debord interpreted Lefebvre's theory. He thought that Lefebvre's *La Somme et le reste* was a combination of Marx, Goldmann, and Huizinga.[800] The theory of moments made Lefebvre one of the few in the new leftwing configuration in France besides SI to engage with the question of games.

It is not improbable that Huizinga influenced Lefebvre. Although he never mobilized the concept of totality, the Dutch historian argued that ludicity preceded culture. Put differently, he too conjured up the extant presence of a practice originating in a pre-cultural past. Given that Huizinga and Lefebvre wrote at different historical moments and, to some extent, from the vantage point of varying cultural traditions, it would be mistaken to give too much attention to the fact that one mobilized 'culture', the other 'civilization'; it is more important to note that the concepts fill roughly the same function. Furthermore, culture, itself being played, is far from merely signifying to Huizinga.

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[800] Debord to Frankin, 26 Jan 1960.

But, even if true, one should not let such similarities obscure the differences. With the game, Huizinga described social competitions and rivalries within history that were *not* martial. He explicitly contrasted the practice of *homo ludens* not only to the one with which he associated (Soviet) Marxism, but also to the one described by the Nazi 'crown jurist' Carl Schmitt.[801] For the latter, the division of friends and enemies was an existential fact. They were engaged in a war to death. No cultural forms sublimated this conflict; their antagonism held ontological priority to Schmitt.[802] For Huizinga, playing could neither be encompassed by the ontological struggle between friends and enemies nor by the dialectics of masters and slaves. It was freely created and could thus be abandoned.[803]

The game for Lefebvre was not freely created. "*Tout peut se jouer et devenir jeu*," he wrote, as long as "*le jeu, ayant ses catégories propres, révèle une modalité de la présence*."[804] But "*[des] jeux spécifiques ne naissent pas brusquement, produits par une volonté abstraite de jouer.*" In fact "*La volonté abstraite de jouer ne crée que des jeux sans profondeur, sans réalité*" (TDM, 301).

As the formal structure of a moment, Lefebvre's game moved outside of Huizinga's orbit. Rather akin to Benjamin's dialectic image, it reflected and exposed normally

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[801] Huizinga, 209-211.

[802] Their antagonism, Schmitt argued, occurred in the political domain. Huizinga reacted against the Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political,* in which Schmitt elaborated on these questions (Huizinga, 209-211).

[803] Huizinga, 210-1.

[804] In other words, "*parce qu'il a ses catégories propres, le jeu présente un monde*" (Lefebvre 301).

invisible contradictions. By doing so, the Frenchman claimed that the 'moment' affected that which separated culture from nature: "*Chaque moment, totalité partielle, réflète ou réfracte une totalité (la praxis globale) y compris les rapports dialectique de la société avec elle-même et les rapports de l'homme sociale avec la nature*" (TDM, 308).

For these moments that suspend the social harmony as defined by the models of stability also engender a form. "*Un moment, d'abord*," he contended, "*définit une forme et se définit par une forme*" (TDM, 306). A civilization is a framework of such forms: "*toute civilisation est* créatrice de formes" (TDM, 307, original emphasis).

A form is the way in which civilization sublates its 'natural' origins. Marrying the formal objectification of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* to a Freudian perspective, Lefebvre argued that "*Les forms de civilisation prélèvent leurs éléments dans la nature*" (TDM, 308). Indeed, in a way that had once been seen as producing the discontents of civilization, "*[Les instincts et besoins naturels] insèrent le naturel dans le structure de la conscience civilisé*" (TDM, 308).[805]

As ossified moments, a civilization is an architecture of forms. "*La civilisation reflète la nature*," he argued, "*… mais le rapport qu'elle implique diffère radicalement d'un reflet passif*" (TDM, 308). A civilization is not merely a passively reflecting superstructure: "*Elle arrache à la nature des éléments naturels pour les métamorphoses profondément en les insérant dans des formes: dans un ordre humain*" ('TDM', 308).

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[805] Following Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals,* Freud thought it had produced the discontents of civilization in *Civilization and its Discontents,* (1930).

Civilizations differ from each other in the way in which they stratify moments; the form they give to its natural content. Lefebvre believed that "*ce qui diffère du tout au tout … entre les culture et les civilisations, entre les classes et les groupes, c'est l'ordre imposé au chaos originaire. C'est la manière de répartir les moments, de le discerner et de les distinguer, de les hiérarchiser, de passer de l'un à l'autre, de les unir*" (TDM, 300). The way to stratify forms at his and SI's historical moment was decided by the models of stability.

But, however ossified they later become, forms, by originally emerging as 'moments', carry the germ of their own impermanence. For forms, Lefebvre thought, can never change the 'content': "*La forme de civilisation permet l'introduction d'éléments matériels extrêmement différents*." But "*Elle*," he continued, merely "*règle leur ordre, leur succession, non leur matérialité…*" (TDM, 307). And yet forms are that based on which the conflict between 'nature' and formal models are solved.

The tension between the models and 'nature' are never dissolved, only ever moved to a different formal level: "*La civilisation se conçoit sous cet angle comme ce qui naît des conflits entre l'individuel et le social dans leur unité dialectique*." But, crucially, a civilization is also "*[ce qui] tend à résoudre le conflit en partant des éléments matériels et formels qui constituent les données du problème*" (TDM, 308). As a Hegelian dialectic without end, this conflict cannot be reconciled, but its local iteration can be surpassed.

Lefebvre divided natural content from cultural form in order to vouch for the precarious status of the current models of stability. By construing the tension generated by

such a division as constitutive of modernity, he could argue that the current models would not be permanent: "*la conscience individuelle pouvant refuser la forme élaborée socialement et historiquement. Elle peut aspirer à d'autre formes*" (TDM, 309-10). Indeed, "*Le moment que je vais vivre*, *je dois le recréer pour le vivre; je le découvre, mais comme forme, de sorte que pour rendre mienne cette forme, je dois la réinventer*" (TDM, 311). 'Moments', producing new forms, would recur, ensuring the transience of such models.

But this also meant that the emergence of a moment was for Lefebvre inseparable from its formalization. "*Je puis m'y engager jusqu'à m'y laisser prendre*," he noted with reference to the momentary emergence of a new form. "*Parce que le jeu est un moment, [le jeu] tend un piège*" (TDM, 302).[806] So though Lefebvre, like SI, evoked the immersive character of games, it for him implied something different: "*La théorie ... se constitute*[,] *du point de vue qui nous occupe ici, en lutte perpétuelle contre l'aliénation qui la guette*" (TDM, 313).

Seen through a diachronic frame stretching back to before the dawn of culture, the alienating dialectic always remained. "*Il y a un absolu dans le moment du jeu*," he warned, "*et cet absolu*," which was applicable also to the redefined situationist game, "*représente une aliénation spécifique*" (TDM, 302). While the framework of forms engendered a general alienation (TDM, 312) and a moment only a specific one, actors could never escape a formal imprisonment: as forms objectified, actors went from specific to

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[806] Another example of such a surrealist reflex is when he notes that "*Les vrais jeux dérivent d'objets magiques et cosmiques. Ces objets se déplacèrent au cours de la croissance de la civilisation, et se subordonnèrent au jeu comme tel, en gardant quelque chose de leur participation initiale à la totalité*" (301).

general alienation. From his remove, the production of totality in a forming moment seemed almost autonomous of the actors who produced it.

Even if Lefebvre directly challenged the historical perspective of economic determinism, human beings were, in his theory, still the play-thing of larger historic forces. The force of the 'moments' always escape their authors; though they are created, the creators will inevitably be faced by their product as something alien. For what ensured the dynamism of these moments were their rules, not their instigators. Such rules organically emanated from within the moment yet somehow trans-historically connected to or coincided with previous ones.

Lefebvre's assessment had ramifications in the entire theoretical edifice that SI had built. Like SI's situations, his 'moments' advocated for the possibility that non-signifying practices might disrupt the reproduction of a signifying architecture. SI had refused Sartre's mimetic aesthetic because it, like this architecture, demanded for art to be signifying. To SI, such an instrumental demand was alienating. Now Lefebvre claimed that the same held true for its poetic rejection. For him the 'moments' were not only transient and recurring but, leaving a lasting imprint on the formal framework, *necessarily* alienating.

Though they did not acknowledge it to their peripheral colleagues, the Paris-based members of the international were profoundly affected by Goldmann's and Lefebvre's 1959 articles, which highlighted that Lukács' theory could be used to argue for two contradictory points. When he rejected an economically determinist schema of history for one in which the 'revolutionary proletariat' would become its subject, Lukács

depended on a wager. This had bolstered SI's hope to revolutionize culture through its constructed game. The international positioned itself analogously to the proletariat. But, as it turned out, Lukács' theory could also be evoked to question the longevity of the revolutionary moment and whether it would be at all emancipatory. The tension between these two claims demanded a tighter theorization of SI's project, which came to tie the project more clearly to Paris. In the next chapter, I will show how it triggered Jorn and Debord to push SI's project further in a voluntaristic direction. This resulted in SI belatedly producing a manifesto. But, not acquainted with these intellectual trends in Paris, the Dutch's priorities were not reflected in it. In fact, they felt alienated by it.

6. The Theorization of the Situation 1960

This chapter homes in on the ways in which Debord and Jorn tried to save SI's project by addressing the new intellectual trends in Paris around 1960. They both capitalized on heterodox marxism's break with economism. SI, they claimed, responded to contemporary reification. Debord positioned SI's response primarily with reference to the construction of situations. He wanted to save the possibility of a non-alienated form of playing. He balanced the desire that 'the situation' have an impact with the need to stop it ossifying. Jorn placed SI within a larger social perspective. To him the most pressing case of contemporary alienation was found in the widely perceived inability to contest the postwar ideological framework. Seemingly fixed, this framework had collapsed the expectation of the future into the experience of the present. As representative of the avant-garde international, SI, Jorn thought, had to focus its energies on re-opening this gap.

Jorn's and Debord's ways of positioning SI shaped its manifesto. Published in summer of 1960, the manifesto cast SI as a dis-alienating force whose ludic praxis militated against the prevailing culture of conservation propped up by both Cold War blocs. The international's interventions, it claimed, would usher in a participatory, dialogic culture of encounters and constant re-evaluations.

But by more tightly theorizing SI's project, in practice the manifesto was closing the space for the international's own discussion. If SI had hosted a wide-ranging conversation on its limits and purpose in Munich because it remained under-theorized a year earlier, it now tied SI to Paris. This sidelined the members in the other branches. Intellectual unity was bought at the cost of aesthetic diversity.

The Constructed Game

When deploying Lukács's concept of totality to reprimand the Dutch SI branch for inflating the importance of unitary urbanism, Debord thought that SI were the only actors on the Paris scene resisting the techno-politics of western Europe with a ludic practice. But Jorn soon discovered that Lefebvre pursued a similar line of argument in his 'Theory of moments'.[807] Lefebvre's new departures caught SI off guard. His exit from the PCF had assured him of a pivotal role in the post-Budapest debate within the new leftwing constellation of Paris, structurally comparable to the one Sartre had enjoyed in the earlier discussion on postwar aesthetics. It brought him in from the cold for the constitutionally anti-institutional SI: while Lefebvre's 'revolutionary romantics' never merited more than terse rejections from SI in 1958, because this concept appeared to imply that artistic practice had little purchase on historical changes, in 'Le Sens du dépérissement de l'art' ('Le Sens'), published in IS 3 in December 1959, SI acknowledged Lefebvre's importance in re-thinking the role of art in society. He, 'Le Sens' claimed, was one of two contemporaries who had made a valuable contribution to a marxist theory of aesthetics (IS 3, 4).

But Lefebvre's theory of 'moments' also called for more extensive engagement. His new theory of 'moments' brought his immense philosophical erudition and critical prestige to bear on a matter deceptively similar to that occupying the international. This

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[807] It is clear from Debord's response to Jorn on 2 July 1959 that he had just done so; Lefebvre's work was published in April 1959.

posed a challenge to SI. The correspondence between the SI members indicate that the proximity between Lefebvre's 'moment' and their 'situation' was considered to be threatening the originality and thus, according to what Casanova discerned as the inner logic of Paris modernism, the raison d'être of the international. It delayed their response. The challenge was such that, though SI's Francophone members had known of Lefebvre's essay since summer, none of them was able to produce a response for IS 3, published in December 1959. They continued corresponding about Lefebvre's article until the end of February 1960.[808]

That response, 'Théorie des moments et constructions des situations', did not appear until June 1960. This unsigned article acknowledged the proximity between Lefebvre's theory and SI's project: "*Les problèmes de la création de la vie quotidienne sont directement concernés par la théorie des moments*" (IS 4, 10). Indeed, "*Lefebvre, en analysant le 'moment', a montré plusieurs de conditions fondamentales du nouveau terrain d'action où va maintenant une culture révolutionnaire*" (IS 4, 11). As SI defined the avant-garde as "*un mouvement révolutionnaire dans la culture*" (IS 1, 5), he, in other words, mapped the terrain for contemporary avant-garde practice. This had far-reaching consequences.

For SI, avant-garde praxis was ludic. Barring competitive games, SI indiscriminately endorsed playing. Though SI's branches did not advocate for the same praxis, they all shared a belief, based on Huizinga's contention that the new forms of civilization emerged through playing, that transformative aesthetics was ludic. The game's immer-

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[808] The last letter was between Debord and Frankin, on 22 February 1960.

sive character collapsed the distinction between producer and receiver, subject and object. Unlike mimetic art, whose aim to signify upheld this distinction, it momentarily suspended the dominant instrumental paradigm. SI's wager, if you will, was that a ludic poetics would emancipate quotidian life.

Lefebvre's new theory undermined this assumption. Lefebvre introduced Huizinga's *Homo ludens* into a larger historical scheme. He thought that a non-signifying practice, such as games, could overflow the boundaries of signification upon whose imposition a civilization depended. It could blur the distinction between a sensible reality—which did not signify and was thus deemed insignificant—and what he called the models of reality, which defined what was significant (TDM, 295-300). As such boundaries were not only drawn by but also propped up the hegemonic ideology, ludic practice could shake society's entire hierarchy of values. Such suggestions supported SI's aspirations. But Lefebvre also thought that the immersion in such ludic moments threatening the social hierarchy was a new formal prison. The moment in which the dominant instrumental premises were suspended would not in itself be liberating, because the player was captive of the rules of a game s/he had not created. In this way his theory of moments directly challenged the crucial belief of SI's project: ludic practice, whose attempted construction unified the international, was, he claimed, in itself alienating (TDM, 302-313).

Lefebvre's inference was especially problematic for Debord. In part this was because when questioning the emancipatory status of playing, Lefebvre could be said to address Debord's critique of his revolutionary romanticism. Lefebvre now took into account the experience of modificatory experiments on cultural forms, which Debord had

charged him of overlooking in his 1957 theorization of revolutionary romanticism, and such praxis, Lefebvre seemed to respond two years later, was alienating too.

Such a conclusion also complicated Debord's position within the international. Debord had recently rescinded his support of the Dutch suggestion that SI's emancipatory aesthetic playing would appear within the framework of a post-revolutionary unitary urbanism. He now claimed that the 1960 performance in Amsterdam had been intended to create new games, i.e. a situation, and not anything related to unitary urbanism: "*Cette opération de dérive, si elle s'accompagnait de relevés du terrain, à interpréter ultérieurement dans les travaux d'urbanisme unitaire, et si elle pouvait avoir un certain aspect théâtral par son effet sur le public, était principalement destinée à réaliser un jeu nouveau*" ('Die Welt als Labyrinth', IS 4, 7). Debord did not share the Dutch's belief that history would in the long run bring about the opportune framework for emancipatory playing. A heterodox marxism had suggested to him that SI had to create the conditions themselves. In 'A Propos de quelques erreurs d'interprétation', also published in IS 4, he situated SI's project by again evoking Lukács' concept of totality. But this time he associated the concept with a dialectical perspective on history.[809] Placing the emphasis on the transience of the present moment in a society dominated by past attempts at eternalization, the construction of a situation, he implied, would provide such a society's dialec-

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[809] The article was written in response to one on SI by Robert Estivals, a scholar of the postwar Paris avant-garde. Estivals had, it claimed, tried to interpret SI's rejection of a decomposing culture with 'bourgeois categories'. This led him, according to Debord, to falsely suggest that a dualism underpinned SI's project. He did this, Debord argued, because he had not adopted the category of totality. What Estivals therefore lacked, Debord wrote, "*c'est la dialectique*" (Debord, 'A Propos de quelques erreurs d'interprétation', IS 4, 31).

tical negation (IS 4, 31). But such a 'situation' could only take the place of unitary urbanism in SI's project if it actually led to a dis-alienating kind of playing.

Debord poured his energy into showing that the constructed situation could still be a site of non-alienating ludic encounters: 'Théorie des moments et constructions des situations' was almost certainly written by him.[810] To isolate only those parts of Lefebvre's historical schema that questioned SI's assumption was not an easy task. "*Le moment, comme la situation, est au* meme temps *proclamation d'absolu et conscience de passage*," he wrote (his emphasis). But, he also noted, "*[le moment] est* effectivement sur le chemin *d'une unité du structural et du conjonctural*" (IS 4, 11, my emphasis). Even if there can be no ultimate reconciliation of the opposition between what is sensible and significant, as this antagonism was, according to Lefebvre, a structural fact of history, the local iteration of it can be surpassed in moments of effervescence. In such moments, the formal superstructure was remolded to accord with the flux of life. However, these moments inevitably turned into ossified forms while life carried on. "*Le moment tend à l'absolu, et s'en défait*," Debord pithily wrote (IS 4, 11). The certainty of this trajectory makes the 'moment' different from the constructed situation.

Debord tried to save the situation from Lefebvre's suggestions that it was in itself alienating and would inevitably end up contributing to a general reification, by emphasizing that it was still to be constructed. As such, it could be chosen voluntarily. When De-

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[810] So his letter correspondences imply: he talked about it with Jorn and Frankin from summer 1959 to end of winter 1960, and he quoted passages from the text before its publication in a letter to Frankin (22 February 1960).

bord wrote in the future tense that "*Ce qui caracteriséra la situation, c'est sa praxis même, sa formation délibérée*," the important word was *délibérée* (IS 4, 11).

The construction of a situation would mark a new departure in history. As praxis, it would point in a "*direction*", towards a new "*sens*" (IS 4, 10). It would carve out a path that could be followed. In this sense it would be "*répétable dans une certaine mesure*" (IS 4, 10).

But the actual construction of a situation cannot be copied: "*[la situation] n'est pas en elle-même répétable comme le 'moment'*" (IS 4, 10). It does not last. A situation "*rompt radicalement avec les oeuvres durables. Elle est inséparable de sa consommation immédiate*" (IS 4, 10).

Debord positioned the constructed situation between Lefebvre's moments and quotidian instants. Like an instant in daily life, it is ephemeral and unique. But while an instant appears and disappears without leaving a trace, the situation makes a lasting imprint. It fractures the formal superstructure bequeathed by history. This disrupts the reproduction of such a structure: "*Les moments construits en 'situations' pourraient être considérés comme les moments de rupture*" (IS 4, 11). Though transient, the 'situation', like Lefebvre's moments, disrupts what a postwar economism had outlined as the continuum of history. But in a way that is not immediately clear, it somehow did so while also allowing control to remain in the hands of its instigators. A 'situation' neither depended upon nor left an ossified form.

In his defense of the situation, Debord weighed the desire for SI's project to make an impact—and thus be more enduring than an instant—against the fear of it becoming

hegemonic and thus alienating like the 'moment'. This was a tricky negotiation. Acknowledging the difficulty, he ended the article with a question: "*le problème de la* rencontre *de la théorie des moments et d'une formulation opérationnelle de la construction des situations pose la question suivante*: *Quel mélange, quelles interactions, doivent survenir entre l'écoulement (et les résurgences) du 'moment naturel', au sens d'Henri Lefebvre, et certains éléments artificiellement* construits*; donc introduits dans cet écoulement et le perturbant, quantitativement et, surtout, qualitativement?*" (IS 4, 11, his emphases).

The Game of the Avant-Garde

In first *La Critique de l'économie politique, suivi par la lutte finale* ('Critique'), and then its Danish language expansion, *Vaerdi og økonomi,*[811] Jorn continued Debord's line of argument. Inspired by Goldmann, whose article 'Réification' Debord attached in a letter to him shortly after its publication,[812] Jorn elaborated on the need to think stasis and flux, theory and praxis, the techno-political architecture and avant-garde art together. He drew on the concept of reification's ability to, as one scholar has suggested, alert "us to the dialectical interpenetration of consciousness (subject) and world (object), to the intimacy between thought and action, and to the necessary mediation of the opposition of

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[811] Jorn, *La Critique de l'économie politique, suivi par la lutte finale* (Brussels, May 1960); Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi* (Copenhagen, Borgens førlag, 1961).

[812] Debord letter to Jorn, 11 July, 1959. As we saw above, this article was first published in TM, Feb-March 1959, and later reproduced in *Recherche dialectique* (1959).

materialism and idealism."[813] He did so to argue in favor of the avant-garde wager on the future.

To situate SI's project in light of contemporary reification, Jorn introduced a new concept: space-time. If abstract in the extreme, space-time clearly did not denote a static understanding of the present moment. For time, Jorn argued in a seemingly self-explanatory way, can be understood as little without space as vice versa. They had to be thought together, but not as two separate categories that structured our understanding. Jorn thought they were intertwined. "*L'action de l'espace-temps*," he claimed in the excerpt of his 'Critique' in IS 4 called 'La Fin de l'économie et la réalisation de l'art' ('La Fin'), "*est le processus, et ce processus est lui-même le changement du temps en espace et le changement de l'espace en temps*" (IS 4, 19).

By establishing an opposition between space and time, yet insisting on their interpenetration, as 'space-time', Jorn suggested that the meaning and values constitutive of reality were always in motion. In fact, reality was this moving process. "*Ni l'espace ni le temps*," he wrote, "*ne possèdent une réalité, ou valeur, hors du changement, ou processus, c'est-à-dire hors de la combinaison active espace-temps*" (IS 4, 19).

As a concept 'space-time' highlighted the fact that the process of reality was defined by tension. Even if the poles of this conceptual dyad morphed into each other, as when space is temporalized and time spatialized, such a tension based on their difference always remained. This meant that history, the medium of their encounter, did not follow a linear trajectory. Unlike its meaning in physics, which Jorn took an idiosyncratic inter-

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[813] Bewes, *Reification,* 90.

est in,[814] the concept of space-time does not here outline a continuum: "*l'espace-temps qui est réservé à l'existence de l'espèce humaine sur la terre manifeste sa valeur en évènements*" (IS 4, 19). Focusing on events, 'space-time' helped Jorn magnify the ruptures within history.

Jorn placed tension centrally in his understanding of the changes wrought by postwar modernization. In his *Naturens ordning* (1962), in which he continued elaborating on these themes but with a slightly modified vocabulary, Jorn suggested that "*Bevaegelser er det instrumente, hvormed man konstaterar positioner, og positioner er det instrument, hvormed man konstaterar bevaegelser* [movement is the instrument through which one identifies positions, and positions are the instruments with which one discern movement]."[815] Fixed positions were dependent on movement. Their fixation, Jorn implied, should be understood in light of the flux they refused.

Without concern for such interaction, the dominant models of postwar modernization had, Jorn thought, asserted the primacy of a single form.[816] When it imposes its priorities, such a form, Jorn claimed, turns into a containing form. It submits the process of history to its rules. Protecting *a* state (of affairs) by erecting (it as) the State, the container form was the bureaucratic ideology *par excellence*: "*La bureaucratie est la forme-récipient de la société: elle bloque le processes, la révolution*" (IS 4, 21). It abolished the

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[814] In *Naturens ordning,* he directly engaged with Niels Bohr.

[815] Jorn, *Naturens ordning,* 22.

[816] Jorn, *Naturens ordning,* 30.

medium for the encounter of space and time, movements and positions, events and structures.

Such developments were, Jorn contended, rampant in eastern Europe: "*le système socialiste est fondé sur la mise en dépôt de toute la production sans exception*". This happens "*avant sa distribution, dans le but d'assurer un contrôle parfait de cette distribution*" (IS 4, 21). The State takes control over all of society's production so that it can direct the distribution of such production in society.

When describing eastern Europe, Jorn's critique of contemporary society had more in common with Goldmann's than Lefebvre's. Lefebvre held that the flux of 'sensible reality' went on regardless of civilizational superimposition: "*La forme, indépendante de la matérialité du contenu, ne s'impose pas à lui [au contenu], ne le déforme pas; elle lui laisse une certaine liberté, tout en lui assignant un rôle et une place dans l'ensemble*."[817] What the East European case illustrated to Jorn was that the state contained the process that (re)defined reality; it tried to dissolve the contradictions whose interplay produces history. When speaking of production, Jorn did not only refer to the industrial production of goods. He meant the way society had produced itself through his-

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[817] Lefebvre, 'Théorie des moments', 307. We should recall that Lefebvre described how a moment of effervescence overcomes the opposition between a structural fact, the conflict nature-culture, and the current conjuncture, such a conflict's formal expression. It, he argued, erases the distinction between ontology and axiology, between what is and its value (TDM, 310-1). But Lefebvre also explained that while the momentary exuberance dies down, the form it took endures. A moment's ossified form keeps up the appearance of the previous reconciliation between being and its negation. But such a synthesis has now passed. The form is imposed in the interest of eternalizing the present. He conceptualized the form doing so at the current juncture as a model scheming for equilibrium. This was ultimately always a vain hope.

tory. Dictated by the needs of a bureaucracy, the State wanted to set the historical course of such production in advance.[818]

Where state socialism had gone wrong, Jorn agreed with Goldmann, was that it had not updated its theoretical tool box. Following Marx, state socialism believed, according to Jorn, that an increase in quantity would lead to a qualitative break. It would lead, as Marx had evoked a century earlier, to a jump from the kingdom, or perhaps tyranny, of necessity to the kingdom of freedom. But "*cette double augmentation*," Jorn argued, "*est forcément identique à la diminution de la valeur, de l'espace-temps*." In practice, "*c'est cela la réification*" (IS 4, 19). Deprived of instruments capable of investigating the meaning of society's development, state socialism used its blunt tools in a way that instead contained this development.

Rather than disappearing, reification was, Jorn thought, reproduced by new means in postwar Europe. It was not the market that turned qualitatively different phenomena into equivalents to ensure their quantifiability; it was now the state. Like the indicative planning of the West European State, the centralized planning of the East European State depended on a perspective that favored abstract categories over concrete facts. But this had not led it to a jump in quality as (classical) Marxism promised. According to Jorn,

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[818] Lefebvre could bypass such a conclusion after, unorthodoxly, equipping himself with a triad rather than a dyad: instead of a base and its superstructure, he distinguished between three levels. (To a minor extent, this distinction find its way into Jorn's theory. In *Naturens ordning,* Jorn distinguishes between high and low culture in a way reminiscent of Lefebvre's separation of civilization and culture (*Naturens ordning* 133-5).)

the increase in the production of quantity experienced in eastern Europe had rather led to a decrease in the value of phenomena and praxes.[819]

Jorn thought that such reification within East European societies was due to the un-dialectical Marxism that guided them. Articulated as a *raison d'état*, the increase in quantity according to a set masterplan had produced societies in which past models subjugated future possibilities. "*I begivenhedernes braendepunkt*," Jorn wrote about such societies, "*er det allerede blevet fortid og historie* [the past already reigns in the focal point of historical becoming]."[820] For though often invoking a dialectical materialism in official discourse, such societies were in reality guided by a deterministic perspective. Dialectics becomes deterministic, Jorn argued, when mobilized to predict the future through economic laws.[821] Identifying the future with the past, it turns history from being a medium of contradictions to a source of conviction.

Dependent upon a type of economism, the theory of state socialism had not broken with the basis of capitalism. Capitalism, Jorn argued, depended upon the socialization of consumption: "*La richesse dans la variabilité de la consommation a été économisée par le capitalisme, parce que la marchandise n'est rien d'autre qu'un objet d'usage socialisé*" (IS 4, 20). Socialism's promise to socialize production was a continuation of this. It professed that an increase in quantity would lead to one in quality when, in (East European) reality, in fixing the targets it denied the qualitatively different.

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[819] On this failure in socialist economics, see Jorn, *Naturens ordning*, 5.

[820] Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi*, 43.

[821] Jorn, *Naturens ordning*, 37.

Though state planning restricted the rule of the market, state socialism reproduced the leveling logic of money. As the only totally socialized merchandize, money operates as the master measurement for modern society: "*Penge er målet for den sociale eller faelles tid. Men skal dette mål vaeret retfaerdigt … da arbejder pengene mod en nivellering af variationerne i det sociale tempo* [Money is the measurement of collectively shared, i.e. society's, time. In order to justify its measurements, money works towards leveling any variation in the pace of society's development]."[822] A monetary scale can incorporate everything into its evaluative framework. But when doing so, it enforces a parameter of value without room for any variability other than a quantitative one.

Money economizes all valuation. Rather than pointing to money's inherent flaws, this capacity, Jorn thought, only increases its currency. A monetary quantification not only overlooks qualitative differences. As a dominant measurement, it produces a world in its own image: it creates a world without singular qualities. Indeed, as the Danish noun *mål* can mean both measurement and target, the quote above can be read as a critical observation of how the two come to coincide: how money becomes its own target.[823]

As measurement and target, money delivers on modernization's underlying assumption–-evenness of space, homogeneity of time–-by uprooting, or perhaps better steamrolling over, its biggest foes: inconsistency, heterogeneity, uniqueness,

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[822] Jorn, *Vaerdi og Økonomi,* 77.

[823] The quote said: "*Penge er målet for den sociale eller faelles tid. Men skal dette mål vaere retfaerdigt … da arbejder pengene mod en nivellering af variationerne i det sociale tempo*". It could also be translated as money is the measurement of collectively shared, i.e. society's, time. In order for this to be a justified target, money works towards levelling any variation in the pace of society's development.

difference.[824] But, when doing so, it, Jorn thought, relies on a misconception. For, as he already wrote in *Held og hasard,* originally published in 1952, "*Det kan altså ikkes tales om en 'objektiv vaerdi' i samme forstand, som der tales om numerisk objektivitet, da vaerdiskalen er knyttet direkte till hvert objekt som dets subjektivitet* [one cannot equate objective value with objective quantity, since valuation, i.e. the evaluative scale, is directly tied to each object. The value of an individual object is its subjectivity]."[825]

Wanting to break with a quantifying economism, Jorn moved the question of value from its content to its form. In this he broke with Marx who had thought that labor was the content of value. A form to him merely concealed this reality. As Wark has remarked, from Jorn's perspective, when thus identifying wealth with value "Marx lacks a sense of the materiality of forms."[826] To bring it out Jorn, Wark notes, "shifts attention away from exchange to production, but not to production as quantity, but production as quality, as difference. The key to this is not labor as the universal content of value, but form as difference, as the production of differences. Labor may be the content of value, but creation is its form."[827]

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[824] With regard to the topic of this dissertation–postwar Europe–Kristin Ross is a good example of someone contending that this was its modernization's most significant promise (Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies,* 10-11). She is of course not the first to highlight this underlying assumption. Already Walter Benjamin did so in his philosophy of history. For an example of how it has been used in historiography of other time periods, see especially Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities.* It should also perhaps be noted that, in spite of the geopolitical proxy wars occurring in the Hexagon and animating the Left Bank, money's swift ability to iron out contradictory value and make valuations predicable was what at this time was foremost on French minds. Rioux points out that the French opinion polls of the late 1950s indisputably suggests the stability of prices to have been the major political issue (Rioux 197).

[825] Jorn, *Held og hasard,* 107.

[826] Wark, 86.

[827] Wark, 87-8.

Giving form to value, artists—or form-givers as certain kinds of creators are called in the Scandinavian languages—assume for themselves a prominent position. They should, Jorn thought, occupy a position at the juncture of 'space' and 'time', that is, the point where the fixed forms of taxonomies and measurements converged with the ceaseless fluidity of social life, where the modernizing steamroller ran into jagged ground.[828] They had to experiment with the parameters based on which society understood and measured itself.[829]

Though non-signifying art could not articulate a 'problem', experimental practices could be made to call attention to that which was overlooked right now. They could bring out concrete features of life from the imposed, abstract models in which such features were denied: "*Det, der i virkligheden sker når et faenomen gøres nødvendigt, er det man kalder dets 'entfremdung', dets fjernelse fra den menneskelige opmaerksamhed* [What in reality happens when a phenomenon becomes necessary is what is called its '*Entfremdung*' (from itself). It is removed from human attention]."[830] In this way Jorn advocated for what Anselm Jappe has called *"une libération du concret*."[831]

Art could disrupt the hold that leveling measurements had on postwar society. To do so, Jorn thought that it should emphasize the contradictions that were papered over. According to Jorn, this was the aim of the 'situation': "*Nous avons choisi d'appeler*

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[828] Jorn, *Naturens ordning,* 24.

[829] Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi*, 30.

[830] Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi*, 120.

[831] Jappe, 218-9.

'mise en situation' la formation d'un antagonisme ou d'une contradiction".[832] As he interpreted it, situationist construction wanted to re-insert a gap between what is and its value, life and the way it is measured. Their non-identity was the dialectical engine of history.

When trying to re-introduce the strain integral to modernity that postwar modernization had tried to relieve,[833] SI should not adopt, Jorn argued, Lefebvre's Olympian perspective from whose heights alienation appeared omnipresent. It resembled an abstract model too much. SI had to focus on what was present but overlooked. "*Chaque révolution vue de distance prend l'optique d'une simple réforme. La différence entre révolution et réforme et même immobilité*," Jorn argued, "*n'est que une simple question de précence [sic] ou distance, même absence, ce que on s'appelle la réification ou 'entfremdung', et le situationnisme est avant tout la révolte contre la réification, sinon le situationisme [sic] n'est rien.*"[834]

And yet, his way of doing so was not entirely unlike the way Lefebvre conceptualized the meaningful meaninglessness of the burst of nature that was a moment. Art, Jorn claimed, "*c'est la prodigalité*." As such, it constituted a practice whose precise meaning was not immediately available: "*L'art est l'invitation à une dépense d'énergie, sans but précis en dehors de celui que le spectateur lui-même peut y apporter*" (IS 4, 19).

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[832] Jorn, *De la méthode triolectique dans ses applications en situlogie générale,* (Århus, Institut Scandinave de Vandalisme Comparé, 1964) (Éditions en langues Étrangères), 9.

[833] As we saw in chapter two, this had been the perspective underlying SI's attempt to update Surrealism's intentions. It guided how SI rejected an expanded 'reign of logic' across new practices.

[834] Jorn to Debord, letter summer 1960.

Like Lefebvre's burst of nature, art emerges as valueless, worthless, excessive. Everything that is new does: it does not fit into the current paradigm of value and signification. And unless it is new, it is not art.[835]

Jorn positioned the international's positive project as, somewhat counter-intuitively, a materialist but aesthetic voluntarism. He differentiated what he called a materialist worldview from a materialist attitude to life. Only the latter primarily aimed to transform matter into life, and art, which Jorn thought belonged to the infrastructure of society, was one of its primary expressions: artistic practice, Jorn argued, was action. As Wark has suggested, such a materialist attitude to life aspired to mold nature into second nature.[836] In *Held og hasard,* Jorn mobilized Goethe for this point. "*Der Künstler*," he quoted Goethe writing, "*hat zur Natur ein zweifaches Verhältnis: er ist ihr Herr und ihr Sklave, insofern er mit irdischen Mitteln wirken muss um verstanden zu werden, ihr Herr aber, insofern er diese irdischen Mittel seinen höheren Intentionen underwirft und ihnen dienstbar macht*."[837]

Jorn's take on SI's project complemented Debord's. If Debord's situation, as outlined in his 'Report' and re-confirmed in 1960, spoke directly to the logic of what Casanova defined as modernist contestation, Jorn's aesthetics addressed the content of such contestation: the framework through which phenomena are assessed, that is, the frameworks that valorize, or perhaps simply, the parameters of value. This intention mo-

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[835] Jorn, *Held og hasard,* 46.

[836] Wark, 50-1.

[837] Goethe quoted in Jorn, *Held og hasard,* 133

tivated his own practice. In his détournements, Jorn wanted to bring objects out of invisibility. In the transition, during which aesthetic practices call attention to something or someone and therefore move from the sphere of invisibility to visibility, a redefinition of value, indeed what is valued, happens.[838] For Jorn, situationist practice would provide evidence that history had not ended, that the process of reality was still in motion. "*Dans le concept de la situation*," he asserted, "*l'événement et le temps doivent être impliqués*."[839]

To Jorn this possibility had been demonstrated by Huizinga. In his copy of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens,* which he owned in German translation, Jorn had written that an alternative title would be 'Spel og skønne kunster' [Playing and the fine arts]. That is, because "*Spel*", he noted in a margin, "*fardrer variabilitet* [playing engenders difference]."[840] By engendering difference, artistic practices questioned, according to Jorn, the ossification of meanings generally and a predetermined direction to history

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[838] If framed in the terms of Jacques Rancière, Jorn could be claimed to suggest that the artwork, by having an effect on the production of meaning, redraws the lines distributing the sensible. Rancière writes that while "aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense …. as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience [,] … Politics revolve around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak" (Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics,* trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, Continuum, 2006), 13). So a political aesthetics raises the question of "the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, its forms of visibility and of its organization" (Rancière, 18). This connects to Debord's take on the situation, especially if one remembers the etymological roots of the sensible in French, *sens.* That is, it refers, besides to sense, also to the *meaning* and the *direction* of something. As we will see, Jorn's political aesthetics wanted to expand on what it was sensible to ask or wish for; that is, more precisely, for what one can expect of the meaning and direction of modernity. I will briefly return to the role that what Rancière called 'the part that has no part' plays for Jorn in the epilogue.

[839] Jorn, *De la méthode triolectique dans ses applications en situlogie générale* (Århus, Institut Scandinave de Vandalisme Comparé, 1964), (Éditions en langues Étrangères), 7. The anonymous preface, possibly written by Hans Kjaerholm, suggests that this text was Jorn's reflection on his SI's involvement.

[840] Jorn had noted as much on p. 27 of his Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Hamburg: Rowholt, 1960).

specifically. It disputed the leveling of meaning inherent to a monetary quantification of society.

We can situate the role Jorn gave to SI at this specific historical juncture, by bringing to mind the two categories put forward by Reinhart Kosselleck, with which Jorn's has a clear, albeit anachronistic, affinity. In addition to Weber's contention of modernity's innate tendency to codify convention—'rationalization', as he called it—Kosselleck has claimed that the modern period introduced an increasing divergence between experience and expectation.[841] Though mobilized as meta-historical categories, he anthropologically anchored them by geometrical (or topological, if you will) metaphors. A historical actor is bound by a *room* of experience but motivated by a *horizon* of expectation.[842] In contrast to the Weberian thesis on the teleology of modernity, according to which modernity was gravitating towards becoming an 'iron cage', this allows Kosselleck to bring out another facet of modernity: the hope that the future could be totally different.

Ever since the developments experienced in Europe started being perceived as unique and singular, i.e. as History, which he locates at the end of 18th century, Koselleck's two categories have no longer been each other's mirror images.[843] That is, as

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[841] Reinhart Kosselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time,* trans. Keith Tribe (New York, Columbia University Press, 2004), 267.

[842] The influence of experience, being " assembled into a totality, within which many layers of earlier times are simultaneously present, without, however, providing any indication of the before and after" (Kosselleck, 260), is expressed spatially. "The horizon", meanwhile, articulates the future because it "is that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen" (Kosselleck, 260-1).

[843] "No longer", Koselleck argues, "can expectation be satisfactorily be deduced from previous experience" (268).

experience does not limit expectation, they could neither coincide nor be deduced from each other.[844] "The presence of the past," he writes, "is distinct from the presence of the future." For "if the whole of history is unique, then," he crucially points out, "so must the future be: distinct, that is, from the past."[845]

With the help of Kosselleck, we may note that what Jorn really criticized in the kind of modern society generated by Cominform marxism and American social science was its loss of friction between the experience and expectation. "*Måling*," Jorn thought, "*er simpelthen den systematiske og automatiske ophaevelse af fremtiden, dens integration i realiteten som et absolut neutraliseret element, en maengde* [Measurement is simply the systematic and automatic abolition of the future. It integrates the latter in reality as an absolutely neutral element, as quantity]."[846] Such a priority of quantitative increases established a continuum between Kosselleck's categories; it subordinated expectation to experience, future possibilities to present realities, the flux of time to the inertia of space. A horizon of expectation was no longer forever eluding the room of experience; it had become its corollary.

In response to what was generally considered postwar socio-economic progress, Jorn turned the question of alienation on its head: the problem was no longer scarcity, but abundance; the question was not when a quantitative increase would lead to a qualitative break, but, as his title 'La Fin de l'économie et la réalisation de l'art' suggested, if an

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[844] Kosselleck, 260.

[845] Kosselleck, 268.

[846] Asger Jorn, *Naturens orden* (København, Borgens Førlag, 1962), 102.

economization of variability had led to an estrangement of the present condition from its (forever shifting) future goals. "*Økonomi*," he thought, "*må ... vaere neutraliseringen af en variabilitet eller af rigdommen i en konstans, en ligevaegt mellem produktion og konsumtion* [Economics is the neutralization of variability. An abundance of variability is economized by reducing it to an invariant: the equivalence of production and consumption]."[847] The increasing standard of postwar living had standardized life. The quantitative increases had led to a qualitative drought. Postwar society was marked by a scarcity of difference. His Danish title, *Vaerdi og økonomi,* should arguably not be translated as value *and* economics, but as value *opposed to* economics. Art expressed a valuation in opposition to economization. To Jorn, who in this was probably influenced by Bataille, it offered a scale that valued gratuitous abundance.[848]

Jorn conceptualized the semantics of history in economic terms. Such a transposition allowed him to suggest that art's realization stood in a dialectical relation to the status quo since it remained antithetical to the current monetary economy. "*Rigdom må vaere det tilfaeldige og umiddelbart unyttige, det, jeg har defineret som det aestetiske, variabiliteten eller foranderligheden, det ustabile og flygtige i tilvaerelsen* [Abundance is the ephemeral and the immediately unnecessary/useless, that which I have defined as aesthetic variability or transformativity, that which is unstable and volatile in life]."[849] Natu-

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[847] Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi,* 78.

[848] In his *La Part Maudite* (originally published in 1949), Bataille thinks economy based on abundance and excess rather scarcity.

[849] Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi,* 78. To underline the proximity between his line of argument here and Bataille's, Jorn actually went on to relate his theory of value to the potlatch.

rally polyvalent, art was in this sense intrinsically anti-capitalist. It was not only always in excess of any fixed definition of its value, but, expressing transformativity itself, it could never accumulate; it defied the logic undergirding capital.

Through art, Jorn re-situated the relation of what was structural in modernity to what was conjectural at his juncture. Already in 1952, he wrote that "*Det aestetiske udvilking er i sit inderste vaesen et kreditsystem, en uafbrudt investering i det ukendte, hvori det ikke findes nogen påviselig daekning, kun risiko … Europa har i århundreder levet på kredit og forventet efterbevilling - til hvem? Til sin fremtid* [The aesthetic evolution is in essence a credit system, an unceasing investment in the unknown, in that which has no assets only risks … Europe has for centuries lived on such credit - to whom? To its

future]."[850] He not only believed that the future could be totally 'other'.[851] Jorn also thought art was well placed to renew this wager, because it alone could refuse expectations from being subjugated to a fixed experience.[852] Irrepressibly polysemic, art rather sought ways to create, he claimed in a direct reference to Lefebvre, schemas of semantic disequilibrium (IS 7, 30). It demanded new interpretative frameworks that were not one-dimensional, and thus biased towards the current models of stability.

In all of his texts written in light of a heterodox marxist discourse in Paris Jorn suggested two interrelated things: that aesthetics is that which stands in opposition to that

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[850] Jorn, *Held og hasard,* 138. In his only text for IS, 'Esquisses programmatiques', the Belgian SI members Frankin shared this desire. In a letter to Jorn 16 July 1960, Debord relayed that Frankin endorsed the Dane's 'Critique'. He found it "excellent". Frankin elaborated on similar themes through his concept of a "*Non-Avenir*". But rather than rejecting the future, he wanted with its help to rethink the utopian horizon outside of the confines of institutionalized forms. "*Le Non-Avenir n'est ni la négation de tout avenir, ni la possibilité d'une prévision politique quelconque à partir des conditions données; c'est à la fois la réalisation de tout avenir, en tant que la situation actuelle le contient fragmentairement, et la recherche des moyens propres à maîtriser l'immédiat*" (16). It would be "*la création d['une] … historie sans temps mort … où les sensations et sentiment ne dépendraient plus de la mémoire, mais de l'épanouissement de toutes les virtualités de l'être…*" (IS 4, 17).

[851] This was, according to Kosselleck, a belief driving the convulsions of modernity (see Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society,* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2000)). Without the backdrop of such hopes, it is hard to understand the avant-garde's inflated claims of the importance of its modernist contestations. And within SI, Frankin explicitly evoked this heritage. "*Le Non-Avenir*",he argued, "*est l'application politique d'une vue d'ensemble de la temporalité révolutionnaire au XXe siècle*" (IS 4, 16). The hopes and longings of modernity has since the publication of Koselleck's first work become a highly politicized field of research. Both Francois Furet and Peter Sloterdijk have theorized how the, if not denied then, continuously deferred fulfillment of this promise upped the stakes until it became an all-consuming, feverish dream. The desire for what the revolution redeeming modernity would bring became insatiable. Where Furet scrutinized its murderous consequences in the twentieth century, Sloterdijk outlined how the disappointments of the denied realization accumulated in banks of rage (See Francois Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion,* transl. Deborah Furet (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000), and Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation,* trans. Mario Wenning (New York, Columbia University Press, 2012)). Recently, Alain Badiou and Bernard Stiegler have inverted this claim. Based on the attraction of ISIS for European youth, they have drawn the opposite conclusions: the 2015 acts of terrorism in Paris were due to the French- and Belgian-born perpetrators not believing that the future could be any different from a drab present. (Bernard Stiegler did so in an interview with Le Monde on 19 Nov 2015: http://www.lemonde.fr/emploi/article/2015/11/19/bernard-stiegler-ce-n-est-qu-en-projetant-un-veritable-avenir-qu-on-pourra-combattre-daech_4813660_1698637.html?xtmc=stiegler_avenir_daech&xtcr=1. Alain Badiou did so in a column in Le Monde on 28 Jan 2016.)

[852] Jorn, *Naturens ordning,* 61-7.

which defines the current order of things and that aesthetic experimentation fills this role by being the social mechanism which (re)values or (re)valorizes: "*La valeur de l'art est ainsi une contre-valeur par rapport aux valeurs pratiques, et se mesure en sens inverse de celles-ci*" (IS 4, 19). Art is always abnormal because it is new. It does not fit into the current regime of normality. But, this does not mean that Jorn contended, as the received idea goes today, that this regime is dependent upon art for its normality. It rather means that once the abnormal emerges on the horizon, the days are numbered for the current regime.[853]

Aesthetic creation, Jorn thought, threatens the current regime of normality. And right now, SI, he believed, owned the sphere of creativity: "*n'importe quelle invention nouvelle est situationniste. Les nouvelles inventions n'appartiennent qu'à nous, non seulement parce qu'elles peuvent nous servir mais parce que nous sommes les nouvelles inventions dans leur multiplicités globale. Voilà notre monde*."[854] What held true for the individual art object was also the case for the avant-garde's only artwork: the avant-garde itself and the world it created (*notre monde*, in the quote above, referring to both). The very organization of the avant-garde expressed the wager on the future.

This was a bold claim. To be persuasive, it had to balance two competing needs. On the one hand, SI needed to shore up its project intellectually. After the failure in

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[853] On this note, it should maybe be observed that Debord was not the only one inspired by Lukács. "In each society, the ruling class legitimizes its own dominance with reference to certain valuations (Wertungen)", according to Lukács. "However, if that class then begins to experience these very same valuations as problematic or sterile, this signifies the beginning of its downfall" (Lukács, GW 15: 47).

[854] Jorn claimed this under the pseudonym Georg Keller IS 7, 30. He had outlined his intervention in an undated letter to Debord called 'L'Intervention au conference S. de l'I.S. Göteborg' and signed as George Keller.

Amsterdam, the members had to more clearly articulate its purpose and impose guidelines to it. But, on the other hand, they had to avoid such guidelines from turning alienating. They could not allow them to form a sort micro-regime of normality within the organization.

Jorn found a way for SI to delineate its project without reifying it. "*Dans chaque collaboration organisée*," Jorn told Debord, "*il s'impose une réification nécessaire à l'originalité absolu de la création individuelle.*"[855] For Jorn, who was a proponent of guidelines to SI praxis and thus also of excluding those who did not follow them,[856] such an agreement on a specific set of tenets would not dent creativity. It would lead to "*une ampleur créatrice*", comparable to the base melody for a jamming session of a Jazz orchestra.[857] But how could that be?

Jorn here worked on a project that in many respects was similar to Sartre's at this time. In his *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960)*,* Sartre attempted to think his previous focus on individual freedom together with a Marxist one on collectivities.[858] It has been argued that Sartre, when doing so, reworked Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole,* which, as saw, Lefebvre had also done in his theory of moments. Lefebvre opposed nature—in which he included everything from the flora and fauna to

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[855] Jorn to Debord, undated letter summer 1960.

[856] Or so Debord claimed in a letter to Constant, 2 June 1960.

[857] Jorn to Debord, summer 1960.

[858] The initial part of the work, *Question de méthode* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), published separately in France (in English it forms the preface of Sartre's work) was in Jorn's library, housed at the archive of Museum Jorn. Jorn had underlined many passages, and offered plenty of thoughts in the margins.

the *parole* of quotidian life—to an imposed *langue* of signification, favored by the cybernetic State. In Sartre's hands, the opposition between *parole* and *langue* became that between praxis and the practico-inert.[859] Similarly to how forms are ossified 'moments' for Lefebvre, the practico-inert is what remains from past praxis to Sartre. But where Lefebvre primarily used this distinction to question the implicit politics of structuralist theories, Sartre also brought such a distinction into the form of organizations themselves.

Like SI and Lefebvre's 'Théorie de moments', *Critique de la raison dialectique* was in part a response to 'Budapest'. In it Sartre tried to work out how emancipatory practices could turn into alienating institutions. To do so he distinguished between 'series' and groups. Coming into being through spontaneous praxis, the group's aim is internal to it: its members share the purpose to dissolve 'serial' collectivities.[860] In the words of one interlocutor, the group allows for a "a reciprocity [between its members that is] mediated by praxis."[861] Serialities meanwhile are made up of atomistic individuals who do not act in concert because their interests do not emanate from within their actual gathering but are external to it.[862] All groups risk turning into such collectives: if the group's survival becomes the members' unifying interesting, the group is on its way of

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[859] Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986), 100.

[860] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason. Volume 1. Theory of Practical Ensembles,* trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Rée (London, Verso, 2004), 418.

[861] Flynn, 115.

[862] Robert Doran, 'Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason, and Debate with Lévi-Strauss', *Yale French Studies*, nr 123, 2013, p. 45.

succumbing to the practico-inertia of its past praxis. It then turns into an alienating institution. But all groups do not follow the same trajectory to alienation.

If a shared purpose initially unifies the members of a group, once a group is established, it can come to rely on a pledge. The latter is not a social contract, but a practical device. It is, Sartre suggested, "an inert determination of the future."[863] With its help, a "group tries to make itself its own tool against the seriality which threatens to dissolve it." Doing so, "it creates a factitious inertia to protect it against the threats of the practico-inert."[864] It asks for a suspension of the immediate personal interests among the members for the sake of the group. But it does not lord over the members. Functioning as what Sartre now called a mediating third, "a pledge is mediated reciprocity."[865] Insofar as it was a self-imposed inertia, the pledge was a wager that one's freedom depended on others'. It is when this wager is forgotten, and thus turns into an external organizing principle, that groups tend to ossify and the members' role are specialized.[866] So while a constant possibility, such ossification does not have to occur.

By emphasizing the dynamic character of social assemblies, Sartre distinguished between an alienating and non-alienating kind of syntheses. He contrasted 'totality', which he related to the practico-inert, to totalizations, with which he showed that a

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[863] Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* 420.

[864] Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* 421.

[865] Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* 419.

[866] Flynn, 119; Poster, 239.

group's form is never set, always in play.[867] A group, he argued, avoids turning into an institution if the 'third', which has united them, allows the members to define, and redefine, themselves through it. That is, if it allows for what Sartre called 'totalizations'. For a social assembly to remain a group and not lapse into becoming a serial collective, it had to be continuously re-totalized by its members.[868] He showed that the group's dis-alienating dynamism of group was not in opposition to that group's need for its members' wishes to be mediated through it. Such wishes ensured its dynamism.

Though less systematic, Jorn argued in a similar vein that, as the avant-garde international is never a finished product, guidelines for its organizational praxis are not by definition alienating. To SI's foundational belief that that the avant-garde constituted itself through its contestatory praxis, Jorn now added that such contestation occurred with respect to the form of the organization itself.[869] The instigator of Jorn's formal games was not alienated to foreign rules, like Lefebvre's player; s/he was rather an interlocutor of a conversation on the rules. The individuality of such interlocutors was not denied by the fact of rules. Constantly up for discussion, the rules were rather the vehicle for these interlocutors self-creation.[870]

Even if guidelines have powerful disciplinary functions, Jorn placed the attention on organizational dynamism. As a third category beyond the subject and object, rules,

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[867] Jay, *Marxism and Totality,* 351.

[868] Jay, *Marxism and Totality,* 351.

[869] I elaborated on this in chapter 2.

[870] Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi,* 95.

Jorn could argue, did not imply a zero-sum-game between those it bound. As organizing instruments, the rules, he rather thought, were means with which to play.[871] For Jorn, the mediating third, if you will, was an instruments that needed to be détourned.

Jorn related such suggestions to the belief motivating his role as an organizer of artists groups. Jorn wanted SI, as an association, to be the "*point de départ de tous les jeux*."[872] For this its way of "scheming for disequilibria" had to be reflected in its plastic organizational form.[873] In one of the few works relating SI in general and Jorn in particular to a heterodox Marxist tradition, Richard Gombin has argued that behind such suggestions is the belief that "the revolt against capital is also a revolt against all the old organizational forms."[874]

By transforming itself, the avant-garde, Jorn thought, performed a transcendence of reification. As a social counter-institution, the avant-garde experiences the transformation of value in itself. It only exists in that transformation: it molded the dominant forms of value and meaning through its own transformation.

At a time when the exact meanings of concepts were in flux, Jorn detached the reified reality of socialism from the hope for transcendence in communism. Where State socialism had gone wrong was in believing that communism would follow upon

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[871] Jorn, *Naturens ordning,* 23-4.

[872] Jorn, writing under pseudonym Georg Keller, in IS 7, 30.

[873] Though Jorn's text in IS 7 did not make it unambiguously clear that he referred to the international here, Debord, who was clearly impressed by this intervention, did: he quoted it with respect to the international as organizationally expressing the moving order of the future, in letter to Jorn, 23 Aug 1962

[874] Richard Gombin's *The Radical Tradition: a study in Revolutionary Thought,* trans. Rupert Swyer (London, Methuen Books, 1978), 108.

socialism, as its continuation. Communism was socialism's negation: "*i sit forhold til kapitalismen er socialismen en modsaetning, en negation. Men russerne har endnu ikke opdaget, at overgangen fra socialisme til kommunisme også må fremtraede som en negation, at kommunismen er socialismens fuldstaendige negation* [Socialism constitutes the negation of capitalism. But the Russians, i.e. the Soviet bloc, have yet to discover that the transition from socialism to communism also must come-into-being as a negation; communism is the total negation of socialism]."[875]

Jorn argued that the transformative praxis of the avant-garde constituted communism: "*Le communisme réalisé sera l'oeuvre d'art transformée en totalité de la vie quotidienne*" (IS 4, 21). In it art would occupy the position that the economy had today. As he made even clearer in the Danish language version, "*Penge er inget andet end kunst forvandlet til tal [,] Den kunstneriske kommunisme vil forvandle livet til et naturligt altomfattende kunstvaerk* [money is nothing but digitized art. Aesthetic communism wants to turn all of life into an artwork]."[876] Society's forms would be plastic, not containing.

The performance of Jorn's ludic communism would create new desires rather than, like the establishment of state socialism, satisfying old ones. It would arouse, not pacify, the forever amplifying expectations of modernity.[877] If money's invention marked the dawn of socialization, its supersession, he argued, would spell the end of the socialist

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[875] Jorn, *Vaerdi og Økonomi,* 53.

[876] Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi,* 77

[877] Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi,* 85.

apparatus ("*le mécanisme socialiste*" (IS 4, 20-1)) that precipitated reification and alienation.[878] The forms of ludic communism would be constantly trans-forming.

In his theory, Jorn thus dissolved the opposition between rules and dis-alienation, organizational mediation and artistic freedom. Forms, in organizations as elsewhere, were not obstacles for changes. Plastic rather than fixed, they were the conditions for trans-formations.[879] As the actual expression of such transformations, the avant-garde would not make the transition of Lefebvre's momentary forms from universal by aspiration to universal by brute fact.

But it was one thing to claim this, another to practice it. As Jorn had written on the first page of his copy of the introduction to Sartre's *Critique, Question de méthode:* "*une pensée [est] transmis[e] en mots [mais] ... [se] réalise en acte*". And as we will see, in part because he cast the avant-garde as change itself, indeed as expressing the wager on the future, Jorn underestimated the hierarchies within avant-garde organizations. His and Debord's theorization had occurred with reference to Paris. And as it shaped SI's manifesto, Jorn and Debord, while arguing for ceaseless dialogue, prevented the outlying branches of SI to regain their status as interlocutors of SI project.

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[878] Underlining SI's geo-political independence, Frankin too posed this as a problem: "*Le socialisme",* the Belgian wrote, *"... ne peut plus être limité à la simple antithèse du capitalism. Tout ce qui retarde l'avènement des masses socialisées est une aliénation renaissante au coeur de la société socialiste"* (IS 4, 17).

[879] Jorn, *Naturens ordning,* 91.

The Endgame of the Manifesto

Like Lefebvre and Goldmann, SI mobilized the category of totality to de-normalize the hegemonic architecture of their postwar present. But where they had complicated the wager associated with this category—Goldmann by focusing on the contemporary reification standing in the way for social changes, and Lefebvre by emphasizing the alienation always coming in the wake of such changes—SI renewed it. And now, they claimed, was the time to act.

Written at the end of May 1960, SI's manifesto announced that the current techno-political framework was a spent force. Its employment of 'techniques' did not satisfy contemporary desires. It alienated them, depriving social life of meaning. Society had to be rejected en bloc: "*tout progrès réel est évidemment suspendu à la solution révolutionnaire de la crise multiforme du présent*" (IS 4, 36).

"*L'objectif le plus urgent que nous fixons*," the manifesto proclaimed, "*... est la prise de l.U.N.E.S.C.O.*" (IS 4, 37) As the UN body for education, science, and culture, UNESCO's origins lay in the conference of the Allied ministers of education (CAME), held in London in 1942. The Anglo-American representatives wanted to establish an institution devoted to education and technical aid. France wished to found one that built on The International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, which after its 1925 start in Paris had engaged the likes of Bergson, Freud, Einstein, Bela Bartok, Marie Curie, Aldous

Huxley, Thomas Mann. When it opened in 1946, UNESCO's mandate, while including culture, conformed more clearly to the Anglo-American designs.[880]

By the time SI envisioned taking over UNESCO, it had just seen an important addition to its mandate and expansion of its organization. Thanks in part to the revenues from the newly nationalized Suez canal, the Egyptian government started constructing the Aswan High Dam in the mid 1950s.[881] But as this construction threatened to flood the Nile, such a project put archeological sites in its vicinity in danger. The Egyptian government issued a call for international help to preserve its cultural heritage.[882] UNESCO's response became the founding moment of its world heritage program, which, as its convention states, seeks to protect cultural and natural heritages and to "ensure that the conservation of sites and monuments contributes to social cohesion."[883] Around the same time, UNESCO expanded. While all its original members were sovereign nation states from the non-communist world, in the late 1950s UNESCO started admitting members from the East Bloc.[884] To SI these things together evidenced the shared structures, in spite of the different ideological facades, of the techno-political architectures: "*la bureaucratisation, unifiée à l'échelle mondiale, de l'art et de toute la culture est un*

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[880] Christopher E. M. Pearson, *Designing UNESCO: art, architecture and international politics at mid-century* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2010), 30-5.

[881] This project was also supported by the USSR.

[882] Elizabeth Betsy Keough, 'Heritage in Peril: a Critique of UNESCO's World Heritage program', *Washington University Global Studies Law Review,* 10.3 (Autumn 2011), 593-5.

[883] UNESCO's World Heritage Convention quoted by Keough, p. 596.

[884] Pearson, xii; 211. It should be noted that some of the original members states, such as Czechoslovakia and China, would soon after UNESCO's establishment become communist.

phénomène nouveau qui exprime la parenté profonde des systèmes sociaux coexistants dans le monde sur la base de la conservation éclectique et de la reproduction du passé" (IS 4, 37).

UNESCO brought together ideological enemies around the values of cultural conservation and aesthetic modernism. Opened in November 1958, UNESCO's large modernist edifice was hailed in the media as the most important new building in Paris since the Liberation.[885] From its conception onward, the building had been envisioned as the material expression of UNESCO. It would be, in the words of one of its historians, "a cathedral of political and aesthetic modernism."[886] And a crucial source of inspiration for many of its plans was Le Corbusier.[887] He imprinted his aesthetic preferences on UNESCO. In the domain of art, its values, he suggested, were best represented by modernist abstraction.[888] The new building was adorned by works of artists who rose to fame in-between the wars, such as Picasso, Henry Moore, Jean Arp, and Calder, as well as less prominently by some younger artists, such as the former Cobra member Karel Appel and Roberto Matta, with whom some SI members had exhibited.[889]

UNESCO seemed like the perfect foil for the international. The institution did not only still sponsor AICA, the international organization of art critics which SI had attacked

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[885] Pearson, xi

[886] Pearson, xiv.

[887] Pearson, 71-4; 81-3.

[888] Pearson, 224.

[889] Pearson, 246-9.

already at the 1958 Brussels World Expo. It awarded an important position to Le Corbusier's visions. The Swiss architecture had been the bugbear of both IMIB and LI. An opposition to the 1956 Festival d'Avant-Garde at his Unité d'habitation in Marseille had been unifying for the groups that became SI. Le Corbusier's wish to synthesize the arts got a concrete form in UNESCO. He thought that, within its institutional framework, a harmonious co-existence of the arts would emerge.[890] To him, UNESCO was a "global foyer of intellectual and administrative enlightenment."[891]

From SI's perspective, UNESCO's arms, by reaching across the ideological divide, carried a decomposing culture. In light of Jorn's recent texts, the institution's focus on conservation and social cohesion came off as an attempt to contain the free valuation of culture. It seemed to express a wish to fix the parameters of value. Indeed, UNESCO appeared like a synthesis that, to put it in Sartre's terms, refused the possibility of new totalizations. As a synthesis expressed in the form of an institution, UNESCO was not only an ossified form in itself. Its mandate was to further the ossification of cultural forms, a mandate it carried out from the vantage point of a modernist cathedral.

SI offered a rival synthesis of the arts. But theirs was not a synthesis literally set in stone as an institution. It was a wager that, if various aesthetic praxes amalgamated in a ludic organization, it would free everyday life from the dead weight of empty moments. Its manifesto called on all revolutionary players: "*Les joueurs révolutionnaires de tous les pays peuvent s'unir dans l'I.S. pour commencer à sortir de la préhistoire de la vie*

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[890] Pearson, 74.

[891] Le Corbusier quoted by Pearson, 117.

quotidienne" ('Le manifeste', IS 4, 36). Under SI's guidance, playing would refuse quotidian life to be defined by ossified scales. It would oppose the absence at the heart of any abstraction: humans. SI's synthesis of the arts, the constructed situation, "*c'est la réalisation d'un jeu supérieur, plus exactement la provocation à ce jeu qu'est la présence humaine*" (IS 4, 36). Rather than the harmony envisioned along classicist lines in Le Corbusier's synthesis, SI wanted ceaseless renewal. It contested UNESCO's reproduction of past structures by inserting what such cultural conservation denied: re-evaluations in the present moment.

SI would bring its project to the corridors of cultural power: "*Nous sommes résolus à nous emparer de l'U.N.E.S.C.O.*" As a premonition, a photo in SPUR 2 of Jorn inside a modernist auditorium is sub-titled: the Danish delegation to UNESCO (SPUR 2, 15). Even if SI's possession of UNESCO would be for only a brief moment, "*nous sommes sûrs*", the manifesto boasted, "*d'y faire promptement un ouvrage qui restera*" (IS 4, 37).

Based on its brief possession of UNESCO, SI would introduce a new set of cultural values that were based on artistic creation rather than conservation, and social contestation rather than cohesion. Defined by encounters and interaction, culture would from now on be dialogic and participatory. It would be lived and direct in a way that produced new kinds of behaviors. Ushering in "*une communication complète*," all values would be contestable and all forms plastic (IS 4, 37). Creation would be everywhere: "*Dés maintenant*," the manifesto stated, "*nous proposons une organisation autonome des producteurs de la nouvelle culture, indépendante des organisations politiques et syndicales qui*

existent en ce moment, car nous leur dénions la capacité d'organiser autre chose que l'aménagement de l'existant" (IS 4, 36).

This new culture would make everyone an artist. It would not do so in the sense of encouraging everyone to try their luck in landscape painting or to expose their inner desires in heartfelt poetry. It rather thought of the canvas in such art as the subjectivity itself. If the instruments of the technological advancements were ludically re-appropriated, it would emancipate people from work and money. This would allow for pursuits that could not be quantified, such as authoring one's own life. The manifesto advocated for "*la valeur du jeu, de la la vie librement construite*" (IS 4, 36). Marking the end of alienated subjectivities, everyone, SI meant, would be the creator of his/her own life.

This drew praise from Lefebvre. In the early 1960s, Lefebvre revealed why SI had caught his interest at a time he was exploring the meaning and course of history after 'Budapest'. After quitting the PCF, Lefebvre did not rediscover his belief in the end of a macro-alienation.[892] But he did think that they could be overcome on a micro-level. For this belief, SI had played a vital role.

In his *Introduction to Modernity* (1962), Lefebvre opposed 'modernity' to 'modernism'. He associated the former with critical reflections on modern society, and the latter with its triumphalist projects. Where the former was society's auto-critique, the

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[892] Lefebvre would eventually note that "Today we are less convinced than Marx that alienation can be absolutely eliminated… Disalienations or attempts at supersession have created new alienations … The 'alienation-disalienation' dialectic is proving more complex and multi-directional … than either Hegel or Marx had imagined. We are forced to give up the idea of an end to alienation via an absolute action, be it philosophical (Hegel) or sociopolitical (Marx)" (Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* (originally published in 1962), trans. John Moore (London, Verso, 1995) 143-4).

latter expressed its ruling ideology.[893] "The birth of modernity," he argued, "… coincided with the beginning of doubt and questioning; the world we call modern was born with the shattering of the modern world, carrying within its heart the principle of its destruction and self-destruction."[894] 'Modernity' introduced 'the negative moment' to modern historical developments.[895]

As we saw in 'Théorie de moment', Lefebvre thought that the negative moment in history had primarily come to be expressed through and as a style. But he now specified that the practitioners of such styles did not fall under one of the macro-categories of the modern world, as peoples, classes, or societies. They were small groups who "act as mediators between individual life and the possibilities inherent in the masses and peoples, social practice, and the economic 'base'. These are the possibilities which the masses and peoples are unable to make explicit."[896] And the typical small group was made up of artists.

By evoking the disjunction between what currently was the case and how it could be, such artist groups had, Lefebvre claimed, succeeded in carving out a space of their own. They had created "micro-societies" that exposed a distance between the developments in the base and the stasis in the superstructure.[897] They showed that, in this fissure

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[893] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 1-2.

[894] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 105.

[895] For the way Lefebvre related a utopian imagination with the negative moment in a dialectic perception of history, see 64-94.

[896] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 93.

[897] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 223-4.

between the actual and the possible, a new style or living arrangement could emerge: with them "art became simultaneously *a way of living, a way of saying, a way of making,* and both life and the work of art were revealed through style."[898]

Lefebvre cast SI as the clearest proponent of such new styles.[899] The international provided the best case for how "the problem of the work of art, and the problem of life-style, of the will to create and of the 'situation' of the work as object and product, were both posed simultaneously."[900] Art and politics, the avant-garde and marxism, he argued, converged in their (life-)style.[901] They posed the question of aesthetic activity with reference to 'technicity', indeed, as we have seen, technocracy.[902]

While it is true that SI's manifesto quite literally argued that it would subvert a triumphalist project of modernism by inserting it with the negative promise of modernity, we should not overlook that part of what might have inadvertently appealed to Lefebvre was that SI did so with an unqualified reference to Paris. The attempts to rescue SI's wager from reification were theorized through Paris discourses. And its manifesto envisioned taking over an institution that, while global in scope, had its headquarters in the seventh arrondissement. But the actual way in which the manifesto suggested of SI to do

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[898] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 271, his emphasis.

[899] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 276; 345-6.

[900] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 271.

[901] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 345-6. Claiming thus he arguably wanted to open a space to critique Marxists from within Marxism through the allegedly forgotten, ironic side of Marx (21). "Authentic Marxist thought has a *style*: the style of the intensification and broadening of life", he wrote. "This style has been completely abandoned by today's Marxists" (140) It was continued elsewhere, namely among artists.

[902] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 276.

so evokes a tension between SI theory, which was now Parisian through and through, and practice, which remained diverse.

The manifesto claimed that UNESCO's centralized structure informed the way it had to be targeted: "*l'existence même de cette concentration directoriale de la culture, localisée dans un seul bâtiment, favorise une mainmise par voie de* putsch" (IS 4, 37). The present moment and the future would, it contended, prove such praxis right: "*comme l'institution est parfaitement dépourvue de possibilité d'un usage sensé en dehors de notre perspective subversive, nous nous trouvons justifiés, devant nos contemporains, à nous saisir de cet appareil. Et nous l'aurons*" (IS 4, 37). What was more doubtful was whether the Dutch would approve. Advocating for a putsch, the manifesto chose voluntaristic action right now in Paris over patiently awaiting structural transformations in Amsterdam and elsewhere.

Such assertions had not been preceded by a discussion. The manifesto was written by those based in Paris. In its German but not French rendition, representatives from all SI branches signed the manifesto. Broadcasting whose manifesto it primarily was, they did so in order of importance: first Debord and Jorn, then Constant and Wyckaert, Pinot-Gallizio and Spur.[903]

This had a chilling effect on both peripheral ends of SI's aesthetic spectrum. In summer of 1960 Pinot Gallizio, more or less, excluded himself: he transgressed what he knew was the boundaries for what SI's French branch considered was an appropriate rela-

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[903] Marking a return to the tract against the 1958 AICA conference in Brussels, the manifesto was signed by the heads of the national branches, not by the branches themselves (with the exception of the Germans). The manifesto was thus signed in *Spur I.* It remained unsigned in IS 4.

tion to the Paris gallery scene. He wanted to continue exhibiting his art more than remaining within the international.[904] But his swift exclusion was not only a symptom of the re-arrangements within the international. It was also a consequence of the latter. Debord wanted to placate Constant, who nursed long-standing grievances with the Italian's perception of art and the revolution, after the marginalization of unitary urbanism and other Amsterdam concerns in the manifesto. Pinot Gallizio was the ideal victim.[905] Because of the manifesto and the circumstances leading to it, this still failed: later the same summer Constant sensed the drift of the international and voluntarily left it.[906] Though he tried making him reconsider multiple times, Debord conceded that to "*reprendre sa liberté vis-a-vis d'un mouvement avec lequel on n'est plus d'accord est parfaitement honorable*".[907]

The unity of purpose in SI theory was bought at the expense of a diversity of practices within the international. For until recently, disagreement was part of the movement. It was the most important point on which the SI members agreed. In contradiction of his rationale for Constant's leaving, Debord had just suggested that disagreement was situationist. "*L'I.S. est évidemment composée d'individus fort divers, et même de plusieurs tendances discernables dont le rapport de force a déjà variée quelquefois*," Debord ac-

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[904] Debord to Prem, 26 July 1960

[905] Debord to Constant, 2 June 1960; Ohrt, 204.

[906] Based on Debord's response, one can sense that Constant took offence by the description of the failure in Amsterdam, 'Die Welt als Labyrinth', in which unitary urbanism is no longer seen as the aim of the manifestation, but as a side-project to it (see Debord to Constant, 11 Aug, 1960).

[907] Debord to Constant, 21 June 1960.

knowledged in the same issue of IS that published the manifesto, but to "*accepter la notion de dirigeant, même en direction collégiale, dans un projet comme le nôtre, signifierait déjà notre démission*" (IS 4, 33).

At its next conference, the organization's practice would depart even further from its theoretical ideal. There the difference between Debord and Jorn, which had been disguised ever since they united in their rescue operation of the international after its failure in Amsterdam, would re-appear. While Jorn wanted SI to practice its theory in a way that unified the diversity of the international, Debord cared for its wager, which he increasingly linked to that other wager: the revolutionary proletariat.

7. The Dissolution of the International

The conditions that made SI's hinged network possible unravelled in the first years of the 1960s. SI was an aesthetic response to the dominant kind of postwar modernization in western Europe. While the latter had been experienced from Copenhagen to Milan, Munich to Amsterdam, Algiers to London, the response to it was in SI conceptualized in Paris because of the city's discursive centrality for European aesthetic trends and political debates. Linking the centre to the outlying nodes of the continent's networks, such centrality ensured SI's cohesion. It provided the international with a unified way to articulate shared concerns around the continent through the Parisian project of constructing a situation. But the international's theory's emphasis on dialogue and interaction also enabled the peripheral branches to contest and re-appropriate Paris positions. Enfranchised by the participatory nature of constructing a situation, these branches molded it to their priorities.

The balance between the dominance of Paris and the agency of the peripheral branches was always precarious. While espousing a participatory theory, the French branch rarely practiced it. In the late 1950s they were outnumbered by the peripheral branches insisting on participation. At Munich, all branches united around a minimal definition of SI's project, which, due to its relative under-theorization, allowed it to be practiced. As the gap between its theory and practice was closing, SI found a unity in its diversity.

But this balance proved especially precarious once it was put to test by historical events. The Algerian war displaced SI's attempt to construct a situation to Amsterdam.

The international failed to practice its theory there, because, once the organization's diversity was no longer unified by Paris, it prevented for a united performance. To rescue the international, Jorn and Debord tried to put it on a more secure theoretical footing. They positioned SI with respect to intellectual discourses and institutions in Paris. While chiming with the historicist geography of European modernism, this came to jar with the international's project. For, as we will see in this chapter, the theoretical unity of SI's manifesto was won at the expense of the practical diversity in the organization. Fixing SI's position, it denied participation, which enforced a Parisian leadership.

Such imposed unity proved no better at weathering the next storm. In the 1960s French internal and external politics ripped Paris from its central position. As the Algerian war intensified, imperialism demanded intellectual attention in Paris. In contrast to the dominant mode of postwar modernization, this was not a problematic shared in the other SI branches across the continent; it singled the French branch out. It had to position itself on an intellectual scene in which anti-colonialism had become a major theme. As a consequence the interests of the hinge and the periphery within SI's network no longer aligned.

This had ruinous consequences for the international. As SI had ceased sharing a problem, the ground now disappeared for a shared solution. So in 1961 Debord, drawing on the new anti-imperialist tropes in Paris, abandoned SI's anti-instrumental aesthetic project to construct a situation. Many prominent interlocutors of the 'situation' left and, shortly afterwards, the cross-continental network fragmented.

Theory without Participation

At the international's conference and collective intervention in London in fall of 1960, SI's theory was not practiced. The need for unity overrode the principle of participation. Contradicting the manifesto's message and sidelining the Germans and Scandinavians, the Franco-Belgian branches capitalized on some of the manifesto's theoretical inflections to assert the centrality of Paris positions also in practice. This opened up a divide within the international between a Franco-Belgian core and a North European periphery, which led SI to a moment of self-doubt: when summing up the London event, SI questioned whether it was even united through a practice anymore.

The 1960 conference took place at Limehouse in the East End a year and a half after the previous SI gathering in Munich. What had happened since they last met was reflected in the set up. For the first time at an SI conference, it had a chairman—Jorn—and it discussed a specific question: "*dans quelle mesure l'I.S. est-elle un mouvement politique?*" (IS 5, 20) Debord wanted everyone to put down their answer in writing. Which social forces, he asked them to reply, could SI lean on, and under which conditions could the international do so? The questionnaire now implied a right and a wrong answer.

Rejecting the implicit expectation, the Germans read a declaration in which they questioned some of the political inflections in the SI manifesto. "*Les signataires doutent fortement des capacités révolutionnaires des ouvriers contre les entreprises bureaucratiques qui ont dominé leur mouvement*," they claimed (IS 5, 20). "*La section allemande estime que l'I.S. doit s'apprêter à réaliser seule tout son programme, en mobilisant les*

artistes d'avant-garde, que la société actuelle place dans des conditions intolérables, et qui ne peuvent compter que sur eux-mêmes pour s'emparer des armes du condition-nement" (IS 5, 20). As in their own manifesto, the Germans still thought that artistic experimentation negates current society, not the working class.

Together with his new deputy, Kotányi, a Hungarian living in Brussels, Debord argued that the Germans had universalized the West German case (IS 5, 20).[908] If the prosperity engineered by the *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* of the Federal Republic had soothed previously restive parts of the population, wildcats strikes did take place elsewhere (IS 5, 21). This was of course a valid point: west German labour relations were the envy of conservative politicians around the continent.

But what Debord and Kotányi overlooked was that the Germans read the question through a West German lens. In their literal interpretation, the Spur members communicated that they had not taken part of the new intellectual developments in Paris. Lukács may have been known in the Federal Republic, but the Frankfurt School dominated the critical discourse on contemporary society, and its proponents had abandoned the proletariat as a subject of history. For Adorno the dialectical negative to West German society's development was found in art. Though producing an art that could hardly have been to Adorno's liking, this too was the case for Spur. The German SI members pushed the boundaries for artistic practice in a society deeply suspicious of such experimentation. They did not need to reposition art with relation to other social forces to regain the ad-

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[908] Kotányi, who had fled Budapest after 1956, wanted to join SI after reading IS. He first met the other members in London (Ohrt, 222-4).

verse relationship to society that once defined the avant-garde. Instead of the proletariat, the West Germans identified with insanity.

If a (techno)rationality could disguise the historical continuities between the Third Reich and the Federal Republic, artists, Spur argued, had to side with insanity.[909] At the London conference, they presented an 'Erklärung der deutschen Sektion des I.S. über den Wahnsinn'. "*Ebenso lange wie die Gesellschaft in ihrer Gesamtheit wahnsinnig sein wird, weigern wir uns auf jeden Fall, das Verhalten eines des Menschen, die die Gesellschaft ändern wollen, mit Wahnsinn bezeichnen zu lassen*," they argued. "*Ebenso absolut weigern wir uns, die Bezeichnung 'wahnsinnig' im Hinblick auf jeden modernen Künstler anzuwenden, da das Kriterium der Vernunft oder des Wahnsinns für die moderne Psychiatrie … nur der soziale Erfolg ist*" (SPUR 2, 7). This did not cause any waves (IS 5, 22-3).

If, as we saw with regard to the previous conference in Munich, such differences of opinion had previously been debated, now there was no discussion. The question of insanity was quietly shelved. The Spur position was merely quoted without comments at the end of SI's long summary of the conference in IS 5. Expressing its local centrality, it featured more prominently in SPUR, the SI journal in Munich. In it 'Erklärung' was set on the page in a way that defied convention but supported its thesis. Expanding in two directions, the title was splashed across the body of the text in a font somewhere between an expressionist calligraphy and the hurriedly painted political slogan on a wall. This

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[909] Diederichsen, 62.

was an attack on linear rationality. The fellow travelers in this struggle were artists and architects, not social classes.[910]

At the conference, Debord and Kotányi enforced their line. Bolstered by Kotanyi's support,[911] Debord demanded of the Germans to withdraw their position. As part of some sort of auto-critique, the Germans stated that "*Nous déclarons nous identifier avec tous les actes déjà faits par l'I.S. avec ou sans nous, et à ceux qui se feront dans tout l'avenir prévisible. Nous sommes aussi d'accord avec toutes les idées publiées par l'I.S., en réservant l'avenir de la discussion d'aujourd'hui, que nous considérons comme secondaire par rapport au développement d'ensemble*" (IS 5, 21).

Debord's demand of the Germans deviated from what he had previously argued for as SI practice.[912] It had only a weak theoretical basis in the manifesto.[913] The manifesto's significance resided to him, this seems to suggest, in its imposition of unified line on the international. In it the international had for the first time articulated one message,

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[910] The article ended with an appraisal of the architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser, famous for his rejection of the straight lines of rationalist architecture. The proletariat was not mentioned.

[911] Ohrt describes how Kotanyi's intransigence over the question of the proletariat led to a two day dispute (Ohrt, 227).

[912] Just a few months earlier, Debord had stressed the polyphony within the organization: "*L'I.S. est évidemment composée d'individus fort divers, et même de plusieurs tendances discernables dont le rapport de force a déjà variée quelquefois*", he had written in summer. To him, this had then implied that "*accepter la notion de dirigeant, même en direction collégiale, dans un projet comme le nôtre, signifierait déjà notre démission*" (IS 4, 33). He had even suggested that to mis-understand this when interpreting SI's project meant to be too Paris-centric! (IS 4, 33)

[913] "*Quelles*", the manifesto had asked, "*sont les perspective d'organisation de la vie dans une société qui, authentiquement, 'réorganisera la production sur les bases d'une association libre et égale des producteurs*'"? It had responded that, "*Dès maintenant, nous proposons une organisation autonome des producteurs de la nouvelle culture, indépendante des organisations politiques et syndicales qui existent en ce moment, car nous leur dénions la capacité d'organiser autre chose que l'aménagement de l'existant*" (37).

and his wish for SI to preserve such unity took priority over its realization of this message's implied practice.

In response Jorn tried to allow for SI's organizational practice to be guided, rather than denied, by its theory. This should not be seen as only his siding with the Germans, though he did hold a theoretical position that, like Spur's, cast art, insofar as it challenged the regime of normality, as by definition abnormal, indeed mad. For he also criticized the distinction that the Germans had established between material and spiritual questions, between aesthetic experimentation and labour bureaucracy. A transcendence of reification demanded them to be thought together, as they had been when he mobilized a spatio-temporal perspective. So to mediate between the branches, he argued for the need of a dialectical perspective through which the mediations between the different realms of society could be recognized: "*Il faut que les valeurs matérielles reprennent une importance 'spirituelles', et que les capacités spirituelles soient valorisées seulement à travers leur matérialisation*" (IS 5, 21).

What was important for Jorn was whether other social actors shared SI's desire for a transcendence of the separation between art and society, spirit and matter, not such organizations' exact constitutions. "*Les mouvements des groupes sociaux sont déterminés par le caractère de leurs désirs. Nous ne pouvons accepter d'autres mouvements sociaux que dans la mesure où ils tournent dans notre sens*," which he defined as being "*contre la spécialisation et la rationalisation, mais non contre elles en tant qu'instruments*" (IS 5, 20). He fronted the wager: "*Nous sommes la nouvelle révolution ...*", and

as such, "[pouvons] *agir avec les autres organisations qui, en dehors de nous, cherchent la même voie*" (IS 5, 20).

This was typical. In Munich SI practice had worked this way. Jorn had allowed for discussions to take place by ensuring the international's unity around a minimal position. This had enabled a wide-ranging conversation among the strong willed members.[914] He tried this again. He appealed to those present based on the lowest common denominator of SI's project: "*en d'autres terms, [il faut] que le monde devienne artistique au sens défini jusqu'a ce jour par l'I.S.*" (IS 5, 21). What took center stage was for SI to precipitate a ludic communism, in which contestation was participatory, the meaning of art practice forever in the making, and organizational forms plastic.

But now Jorn's intention to produce a unity of practice through a diversity of opinions failed. Everyone agreed with Jorn. In contrast to the previous conference, the discussions on this note, once the most divisive single issue within the international, thereby ended here.[915] Individual totalizations based on the organizational pledge did not occur. The mediation for which Jorn advocated in theory did not succeed in allowing for mediators in practice. Jorn, though no fiend of exclusions, soon started worrying about the impact of the manifesto. He thought that a complex of ideas, expressing an interpre-

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[914] Atkins argued that, "as a prototype Marxist intellectual Debord needed an ally who could patch up the difficult human relationships and who could rise above the petty egoisms and squabbles of the members.". Indeed, he contends, "[the members of the SI's] quarrels came into the open the moment Jorn's leadership was withdrawn in 1961" (63).

[915] Jorn would elaborate on a new variant of his metaphysical ideology critique, according to which idealism and materialism had to, like time and space, be thought together in order to save a perspective allowing for 'futurity', both at the conference and subsequently in the longest article in all issues of IS, 'La Création ouvert et ses enemies' (IS 5, December 1960). But the article had little purchase on the organization's practice.

tation of the world, could only produce a finite set of interventions. Once exhausted, such a complex had to give way to a new paradigm.[916] This was starting to happen.

In the unsigned 'leader articles' of IS 5, which were published after the conference, SI reaffirmed its belief in participation. It only did so, however, with reference to the main intellectual preoccupations in Paris. The total perspective and alienation dominated SI's project and not, say, Spur's blurring of the lines between sanity and insanity.[917] With the disappearance of the German dimension, indeed of the international's internal diversity, SI's unity only existed in theory. It was not practiced. The difference from the Munich conference, at which the lines of conflicts seemingly multiplied of their own, where no one could agree on almost anything except for the facts that their opinion was valid and needed to be heard and that SI's project was important, could not be starker. The need to find one line took precedence.[918] This opened for the institutional recreation of SI.

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[916] Asger Jorn, *Ting og Polis* (Copenhagen, Borgens førlag, 1963), 6.

[917] "*Nous savons bien que la culture à abattre tombera réellement qu'avec* la totalité de la formation économique-sociale qui la soutient" (5), it stated. But, it continued, "*la culture est le centre de signification d'une société sans signification … la réinvention d'une entreprise de transformation générale du monde doit aussi d'abord être posée sur ce terrain. Renoncer à revendiquer le pouvoir dans la culture serait laisser ce pouvoir à ceux qui l'ont*" (5). Such a project not only "*s'agit de libérer d'abord les désirs existants, les déployer dans les dimensions nouvelles d'une réalisation inconnue*" (9). It also "*s'agit de schémas, d'équations où les participants pourraient choisir quelles inconnues ils vont jouer, sérieusement, sans spectateurs, et* sans autre but que ce jeu. Voici *assurément un prototype d'arme efficace dans* la lutte contre l'aliénation" (9).

[918] Debord and Kotányi pushed the Germans to retract the suggestion that what had been discussed in London was of secondary importance. Also this the Germans did in the name of not slowing down the progress of the international. IS noted that "*ils retirent la déclaration précédente, non parce qu'ils pensent qu'elle est dépourvue d'importance, mais pour ne pas freiner maintenant l'activité situationniste*" (IS 5, 20). In return, Debord signed the 'Erklärung' of a diminished Spur.

The loss of the polyphony of opinions within the network led to changes in its institutional structure. When it was announced that the bureau for unitary urbanism was moving from Constant's oversight in Amsterdam to Kotanyi's in Brussels, it did not provoke any protests. No coalition re-emerged that advocated for the indivisible international project of constructing a situation.[919] Instead, it was also decided that a central council would be established. Rather than expanding the circle of translators of the 'situation', such a suggestion envisioned decreasing it. Following how the manifesto was signed, it would only engage one interlocutor per branch, and its decision on SI as project would have to be implemented in all branches. The diverse interpretations of the situation would be streamlined. Armed with a manifesto, the central council demanded a say in the various national affairs. Indeed, if it saw fit, it could even purge national branches (IS 5, 22).

The establishment of a central council would replace the federal structure of national branches. In 1957 the responses to Debord's 'Report' by the former IMIB members to which he had presented it ensured that SI became an inter-national rather than a centralized post-national organization. This created the institutional conditions for producing a participatory international. For by enjoying a certain autonomy, all branches were thus allowed to mold the project to construct a situation to their own context. In London in 1960, this "*conception fédérative de l'I.S. fondée sur l'autonomie nationale,*

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[919] This was partly because, upon the publication of the manifesto, the most prominent peripheral members had either, as Pinot Gallizio, excluded themselves or, as Constant, resigned; the Germans stood alone against Debord and his new deputy; Jorn stood with one foot out the door: he spent part of the conference negotiating about future exhibitions. Those present were Debord and Jorn, the German branch (Prem, Sturm, and Zimmer), and some old and new members from the Low Countries (de Jong from the Netherlands and Kotányi, a Hungarian from Belgium; and Wyckaert from Belgium) and new ones from Scandinavia (Jorn's brother Nash and Katja Lindell).

qui avait été imposée dès l'origine par l'influence de la section italienne … est abandonnée" (IS 5, 22).

This marked the first step in institutionally undermining SI's dialogic practice. Inadvertently, SI acknowledged as much: due to the previous importance granted to SI's character as a platform for dialogue, IS 5 felt the need to justify its choices. SI was still, the journal claimed, against bureaucracies and hierarchies. Indeed, it was against "*l'ensemble de la société présente qui ne peut éviter le problème de la récupération de ses infinies capacités aliénées*" (IS 5, 7). Endowing itself with the right to exclude members did not mean that the international had become what it disparaged: "*Le 'terrorisme' de l'exclusion dans l'I.S. ne peut en rien se comparer aux mêmes pratiques dans des mouvement politiques, par des bureaucraties tenant un pouvoir*" (IS 5, 3). But, having chipped away at the institutional pillars constitutive of its previous organizational practice, SI had a harder time defining just what it was now: "*on sait ce que n'est pas l'I.S.; quel terrain elle ne se soucie plus d'occuper … Il est plus difficile de dire où va l'I.S., de caractériser positivement le project situationniste*" (IS 5, 7).

This loss of faith in its project was on display at SI's collective intervention in London. Organized by the British ex-SI member Ralph Rumney, SI was to read its manifesto and screen one of Debord's films at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA).[920] In addition, the members had planned for their conference to have produced a statement that they would unveil at the ICA, followed by a sort of Q&A about SI with the London art

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[920] Sam Cooper, *The Situationist International in Britain,* 68. Rumney also connected Jorn, who had exhibited drawings at the ICA in 1957, to Guy Atkins, who would later become his main English biographer (Ohrt, 129).

scene. The statement merely proposed a negative definition of what was situationist: "*aucune des oeuvres que nous pouvons faire maintenant n'est parvenue au stade situationniste. Nous nous proposons seulement de réaliser bientôt, collectivement, les premiers ensembles pré-situationnistes*" (IS 5, 26). Its only positive claim was that there was a "*une expérience pratique que nous appelons situationniste, et qui est organisée en mouvement international discipliné*" (IS 5, 26). A bewildered and no doubt exhausted audience member nonetheless asked them to elaborate on the meaning of Situation*ism*.[921] Irritated, Debord responded by saying that "we are not here to answer questions from stupid cunts".[922] All SI members stormed out. In less than half a year SI had vexed two of the most progressive museums of Europe.[923]

This episode, showcasing the irreverence of Debord and stout independence of the international from art institutions, has turned into an important piece of SI lore within the secondary literature. So much so that the ICA wanted to present its own view of the events. In a pamphlet, it described the conference as one "whose chairman was stone deaf [Jorn], whose main speaker spoke no English [Debord], and whose participants denied that the meeting existed."[924]

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[921] This question was informed by the fact that the ICA had by mistake advertised the evening as one about International Situationism. But, IMIB and LI had decided already in late summer 1957, there was no such thing.

[922] Hussey, *The Game of War,* 159.

[923] Within SI "*tout le monde est d'avis de traiter avec mépris ce cercle d'esthètes modernistes*" (IS 5, 22). This disregard for the audience did not decrease when SI found Rumney's ICA translation of its statement to be of dismal quality (Ohrt, 229). They re-translated it on their own, which left the crowd hanging for a long time (IS 5, 23).

[924] Quoted by Bob Black, 'The Realization and Suppression of Situationism', retrieved from primitivism.com (accessed 23 June 2017).

But, as we have seen, the case was rather that, as SI's unity was now enforced through Paris leadership, its practice had fallen out of line with its theory. Instead of enabling the ceaseless overcoming of the divisions within artistic practices through a unifying praxis that heightened their differences, as a disciplined organization SI merely negated such differences. The disarray at the ICA reflected an international that was far from ludic. At the museum it did not perform an emancipatory organizational form. In fact, the attempted construction of ludic situations had ceased being the international's unifying project; the organization was now merely disciplined.[925]

The manifesto's promise that SI would overcome an alienating modernization through a participatory project creating a dialogic culture now rang hollow. London was its first test case. And there those who had defined the manifesto refused discussion and participation. The organizational practice in London 1960 parallels that of Brussels 1958. Only certain members were again interlocutors of SI's project. But this time Jorn got cold feet. He had not fully appreciated the centralizing consequences a manifesto would have. By refusing translations, the international had tied its position so closely to Paris intellectual trends that its cohesion became vulnerable for changes there. These would come soon after the branches returned home from London.

A New Resistance in Paris

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[925] They still paid tribute to the possibility of action, but such actions was not specifically called 'situationist'.

In the early 1960s Paris lost its centrality in Europe. Various dates and reasons have been given for when Paris stopped having an oversized importance for the intellectual discourses and aesthetic trends of the continent. Most historians identify some point in the 1960s.[926] So too did SI. In 1960 SI argued that "*Ce rôle, que Paris a tenu presque continuellement jusqu'après la deuxième guerre mondiale*," as the primary site for the production of what is modern and international, "*a maintenant pris fin*" (IS 4, 8).

SI explained this loss by the destabilization of France's democracy by colonial wars. IS 4 argued that it was due to the consequent political changes in metropolitan France. Evoking the Wehrmacht's seizure of the French capital in 1940, the journal ran in 1960 an article on 'La Chute de Paris'. Next to an image of Hitler and Göring, it contended that "*Quelques aspects de l'actualité politique hâtent la fin du rôle privilégié de Paris dans la culture expérimentale*" (IS 4, 8).

If somewhat hyperbolic, 'La Chute' is a testament to the fears elicited by the coercive measures of the new French republic in the members of the international. SI had no doubts about whose position the recent political developments had advanced: "*Les seules forces qui restent en présence en France sont celles qui ont profité de la lutte contre la révolution coloniale pour accomplir leurs programmes*." SI identified these as "*la réaction capitaliste ... et la réaction fasciste de l'armée et des colons*" (IS 2, 10).

But in its response to these developments, SI portrayed the French opposition as partly responsible for marginalizing Paris. "*[L]es extrémistes politiques de cette*

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[926] Judt, for example, argues that its symbolic end took place when Camus died in a car crash in 1960; Perry Anderson suggests that it continued until the energies released in 1968 had fizzled out **(**see section on France in Anderson, *New Old World)*; and Casanova points to the 1960s without naming exactly when.

gauche," it argued, "*ne voulaient surtout pas briser l'ordre social; et les extrémistes intellectuels ne voulaient surtout pas briser les cadres conventionnels d'une culture vidée*" (IS 4, 8). SI traced this reluctance back to the opposition's reaction to de Gaulle's seizure of power.

SI contended that de Gaulle's re-entrance into public life marked a loss of clout among oppositional intellectuals: "*La république parlementaire bourgeoise ayant été balayée en France sans résistance, les intellectuels révolutionnaires dénoncèrent d'une seule voix l'effondrement des parti ouvriers, des syndicats, des idéologies de somnambules et des mythes de la gauche. Seul leur a parue indigne d'être signalé leur propre effondrement*" ('L'effondrement des intellectuels révolutionnaires', IS 2, 8). SI somehow blamed them for failing to prevent the General's return from his country retreat in 1958.

The international thought that de Gaulle's return marked the bankruptcy of a generation of revolutionary intellectuals: "*Ils ne sont jamais parvenus à une conception générale de la pensée révolutionnaire*" (IS 2, 8-9). In fact, "*C'était précisément une génération intellectuelle peu brillante. Les discussions philosophiques, le genre de vie, les modes artistiques qu'ils aimaient était ridicule sur toute la ligne*" (IS 2, 8). Upon the creation of a Fifth Republic, "*Les intellectuels révolutionnaires devront abandonner les débris de leur culture décomposée, chercher à vivre eux-mêmes d'une façon révolutionnaire*" (IS 2, 9). All the counter-hegemonic forces of Paris had proven impotent.

Behind SI's claim was—besides a desire for self-promotion—an interpretation of the Fifth Republic guided by the continuing impact of World War II. This was not an unusual reading at the time. It was not only for SI that General de Gaulle's return to power,

because of the war in Algeria, brought back the memory of the Second World War and the German occupation of Paris. "When viewed in hindsight and with strict objectivity, the Algerian War had only a tenuous relation to the Occupation," Henry Rousso notes. "But," the historian continues "contemporaries did not see it that way. In their imaginations and slogans at times in their actions, the most prominent figures in this new *guerre franco-française* identified with the men and events of 1940".[927] The aura of the Resistance was, so the argument went, the pole around which French politics revolved. And as long as PCF prevailed as 'the party of the Resistance', de Gaulle's role in public life, Pierre Nora also contends, as a consequence remained marginal.[928] With Gaulle at his country home, on the Left the hope of a social transformation could be kept alive, even if the heady days of Liberation were long gone.[929] But upon de Gaulle's return, and with him that of a different Resistance legacy, this hope died.

Perceiving de Gaulle's return through the prism of 1940, and thus as a zero-sum-game with the PCF and with revolutionary intellectuals, distorts the political impact of the war raging across the Mediterranean. For even if unable to stop de Gaulle's return, oppositional intellectuals ceaselessly and very vocally questioned their governments over Algeria policy during these years. Petitions against colonial policies were a permanent

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[927] Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, University of Harvard Press, 1994)*,* 75.

[928] Pierre Nora, 'Gaullists and Communists', in (ed) Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Conflicts and divisions,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 212.

[929] McDonough, *"The Beautiful Language of my Century",* 162.

fixture in Paris. One historian even calls this the era of (French) petitions.[930] Such *engagement* in St Germain-de-Près and the Quartier Latin opposed a dominant objective pursued by the architects of policy at Quai d'Orsay. Unlike in Washington and Moscow, the Cold War never reigned supreme on foreign policy agendas in the imperial capitals of Western Europe.[931] The French foreign office was much concerned with the postwar relation to the (ex) colonies. This demanded of those opposing such policies to take intellectual positions with reference not only to a geo-political East-West but also a North-South axis.[932]

The creation of the Fifth Republic furthered a shift in how an alternative, positive political project was envisioned. Ever since the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Budapest exposed that Soviet military might, not the alluring prospects of a progressive future, underwrote the state socialist regimes of the East Bloc, western progressives had in growing numbers ceased turning to the East for edifying illustrations of their beliefs. For some it marked the bankruptcy of the political subject tout court. In various renditions structuralist thinkers either marginalized it in favor of invisible codes structuring culture (Lévi-Strauss) or as a political fiction always already interpellated by the dominant ideology

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[930] Jean-François Sirinelli, 'Guerre d'Algérie, guerre des pétitions', in (ed) Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli *La Guerre d'Algérie et les intellectuels français* (Paris, Éditions Complexe, 1991), 265-7.

[931] This was the case not only in Paris, but also, for example, in London and the Hague (Judt, *Postwar,* 282).

[932] Le Monde published the first petition on Algeria in 1955 (Sirinelli, 272). It marked a turn. "*Jusque-là*", Sirinelli writes, "*les retombées des rapport Est-Ouest ont dominé l'engagement et les prises de positions des intellectuelles*" (272). The first articles describing the anti-colonial insurrections as a war were published the same year (as articles in L'Esprit or France Observateur, as books, such *L'Algerie hors la loi* by Collette and Francis Jeanson (275)).

(Althusser). But for others it rather marked a turn towards the Third World.[933] For them it was a full-scale re-orientation of revolutionary politics towards non-western subjects of history, hailing those leading the recently decolonized or decolonizing countries as proponents of a new vitalized left. In France the Third World became a space on which to project the revolutionary wishes stifled at home.[934]

As de Gaulle expanded the war in Algeria, his extra-parliamentary French opposition gradually moved away from the belief that a new subject(ivity) would emerge in the metropole and through the proletariat, however redefined, to one imagining that it would appear in the Third World. While it would eventually become associated with Mao, the 'Third World' was a concept originally coined in 1952 in Paris by the geographer Alfred Sauvy as '*le tiers monde*'.[935] Vouching for its revolutionary credentials, the concept had a semantic relation to the third estate, '*le tiers état*', the instigator of the French Revolution. As the decade progressed, Paris discourses went from primarily being structured by a binary opposing the proletariat to the bourgeoise to one pitting the third world against imperialism.[936] It has been suggested that such a semantic transition concealed a certain

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[933] For a contrast between the two positions, see the last chapter in Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies.*

[934] For an account of such political projection in France, see Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East. French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010). Interestingly, Wolin shows how this attitude, in spite of projecting hopes abroad, triggered changes at home.

[935] The Maoist interpretation of the world order would not be conceptualized as three worlds until after SI in its first rendition had long since ceased to exist. As with SI's cultural revolution, *le tiers monde* did not have Maoist connotations at this time.

[936] Jean-François Sirinelli, 'Les Intellectuels français en guerre d'Algérie', in (ed) Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli *La Guerre d'Algérie et les intellectuels français* (Paris, Éditions Complexe, 1991), 19-22.

ideological stasis. For though many oppositional intellectuals quit the PCF after 1956, few totally departed from their previous worldview. The majority rather rejigged their conceptual apparatuses so as to keep the same ideology.[937]

At first SI tried to domesticate a 'Third Worldism' to its categories. It saw possible collaborators in the struggles of the South. "*Nous saluons dans l'emancipation des peuples colonisés et sous-développés, réalisée de s'épargner les stades intermédiaires parcourus ailleurs, tant dans l'industrialisation que dans la culture et l'usage même d'une vie libérée de tout*," 'La Chute' said. "*L'Internationale situationniste accorde une importance primordiale à sa liaison avec les éléments avant-gardistes d'Afrique noire, d'Amérique latine, d'Asie; et pour l'avenir, et tout de suite*" (IS 4, 9).

But this was a rearguard attempt to relate the new concepts, like with the proletariat before, to its subject of history—the avant-garde. And it was not done so easily. The war in Algeria created a new situation for postwar Europe in which the vanguard of the intellectual and aesthetic trends in Paris did not yet speak to the concerns of the rest of the continent.[938] As we will see, French trans-Mediterranean imperialism did not only make Paris an inopportune site for the international's project existentially and politically. Unlike an alienating postwar modernization, the resistance to such imperialism singled France out intellectually. It stripped the international of its shared 'problem'. Though in

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[937] Sirinelli, 18-9.

[938] Anti-imperialism would become a dominant theme across western Europe from the mid-1960s onwards. But then it was primarily positioned against America's war in Vietnam. The opposition to France's war in Algeria did not lead, like the Vietnam war would a decade later, to mass-scale demonstration in other European capitals. It did, however, lead to France being censured by other western nation at the UN (see Horne, *A Savage War of Peace,* 385)**.**

favor of the anti-colonial struggles, SI, as a transnational organization, was at odds with the way in which the interest in Algeria and beyond signaled a larger perspectival shift among Left Bank intellectuals.

The Ecumenical Front rather than the International Network

By late 1960 SI's French Paris-based members sided with the anti-colonial front in the French capital. Though the latter was an ecumenical church that assembled a diverse set of Parisian intellectuals and artists, it was guided by a Sartrean position. It contended that the 'Resistance' had moved off-shore, at least off European shores. To certain crucial non-French SI members, the need for such a move questioned SI's ability to reverse the avant-garde's marginalization by fielding a cross-continental network of cultural revolutionaries.

Upon his return to Paris from London, and the SI conference, in early autumn 1960 Debord found a request for him and Bernstein to sign the Manifesto of the 121 waiting at the SI office.[939] It was Sartre and his TM circle, still reigning at the summit of the Paris scene, though much less dominant academically than a decade earlier, that spread the petition.[940] Initially published in full in early September in the clandestine journal *Vérité-Liberté* and abroad, in Italy (*Tempo presente*) and West Germany (*Neue Rundshau*), it defended the right to dodge the draft and desert from army duty, as its orig-

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[939] Debord to Straram, 10 Oct 1960.

[940] It is still uncertain as to who authored it. Some name Maurice Blanchot as the likely editor (Jean Pouillon, a co-editor at TM at the time, did so in a radio interview in 1993. But it was through the junior TM staff, with Sartre's blessing, that it was sent around to other authors, philosophers, artists, et al in Paris.

inal named suggested, 'Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie'.[941] But as 121 prominent artists and intellectuals originally signed the appeal, it became known as 'Le Manifeste des 121'.

The manifesto positioned the petitioners as a new Resistance. The military practices of Fifth Republic resembled those of the Third Reich. "*Faut-il rappeler*," it wondered, "*que, quinze ans après la destruction de l'ordre hitlérien, le militarisme français, part suite des exigences d'une telle guerre, est parvenu à restaurer la torture et à en faire à nouveau comme institution en Europe?*"[942] It was by now beyond doubt that the French armed forces responded to the FLN terror with torture—indeed, with war crimes of all kinds: summary executions, extra-judicial imprisonments, sexual assaults etc. Mauriac had wondered about the use of torture already in 1955 (as 'La Question' in *L'Express*). In 1958, Henri Alleg's *La Question* confirmed such fears, before the censor pulled the book. Now the genie was out of the bottle.[943]

Such imperial violence, though hardly new, persuaded many to rally for *le tiers monde*. The possibly most famous theoretical articulation of third world anti-imperialism was Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961). Written in Algeria and published after the author's premature death, the work inscribed the consequent violence in the anti-colonial struggle in a French Hegelian discourse. This was a theoretical tradition of

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[941] Sirinelli, 289.

[942] Reprinted in Maurice Blanchot, *Ecrites Politiques, 1953-1993* (ed) Éric Hoppenot, (Paris, Gallimard, 2008), 51.

[943] For the gradual disclosure of the extent to which torture was integral to the French war effort, see Horne 232.

which Sartre was still arguably the most prolific and prominent proponent. He contributed a preface to Fanon's work: "in the first phase of the revolt killing is a necessity: killing a European," Sartre wrote, "is to kill two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed: leaving one man dead and the other man free."[944]

As a public intellectual of unparalleled global reach, Sartre's theoretical activism gave the anti-colonial struggle a typically French accent;[945] speaking of the need to question the way universalism was mobilized he referred almost exclusively to bigoted examples in and about France.[946] The recent years had exposed, he argued, how 'European' humanism depended upon colonial imperialism.[947] When philosophers (in the Hexagon) spoke of the rights of man, or of the creation of the subject, they overlooked, he contended, that such rights and creation were not only denied overseas, but that it was their denial elsewhere that made them possible at home. The unravelling of this (French) dialectic constituted, in his words, a strip-tease of European humanism![948]

Behind Sartre's position was a belief that colonialism was a system. As such it did not only, like State capitalism, lead to alienation but to exploitation: the 'civilizing

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[944] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Preface', in Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York, Grove Press, 2004) lv.

[945] For an appreciation of Sartre's role as a global intellectual, see Paige Arthur's *Unfinished Projects: The Philosophical Roots of Sartre's Anti-Colonial Stance.* For its role in shifting the focus on the French left, see Sirinelli, 19-20.

[946] The one exception was the UK: that is because allegedly only "In France and England", he argued, "humanism claims to be universal" (Sartre, xlix)

[947] Paraphrasing 'colonial' intellectuals, he contended that they had scrutinized how French "humanism wants us to be universal" while "your racist practices are differentiating us" (Sartre, xliv).

[948] Sartre, lvii-i.

mission' in Algeria hid modes of systemic domination. While the French State provided education and an improved infrastructure in Algeria, the European colonizers dispossessed the Algerians of their lands. The two processes were linked. Among the colonizers, Sartre concluded, there were no cases of lesser evils. Racism imbued everything in the colonial system; the colonizers only acted in bad faith. The downsides of the colonial system could not be subjectively refused by the colonizers.[949]

While Sartre had established the distinction between the colonizer and capitalist, Fanon framed the divisions within colonial society in a way reminiscent of Lukács. "For Fanon," it has been argued, "… the theory of reification is more appropriate to colonial than capitalist relations of exploitation."[950] The lines dividing the colonizer from the colonized are clearer. That is because, while capitalism was reproduced ideologically, colonialism was underwritten by violence. A dis-alienated 'new man' would, as a consequence, only be created together with that of a revolutionary Third World. Like for Lukács', writing in the central Europe of 1923, the end of reification was for Fanon in the (still French) Algeria of 1960 inextricably linked with the wager of the revolution.

Fanon would not live to see an independent Algeria, but Sartre would. "What … has happened," Sartre asked in his preface to Fanon's work, as independence seemed in-

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[949] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Le Colonialism est un système', *Les Temps Modernes,* n 123, March-April 1956. See also Jonathan Judaken, 'Sartre on Racism: From Existential Phenomenology to Globalization and 'the New Racism', in (ed) Jonathan Judaken, *Race after Sartre. Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, Postcolonialism* (Albany, SUNY Press, 2008)*,* especially 34-6. According to Judanken, Sartre meant that "racism is enmeshed in the power structure and material system of oppression itself. Discrimination functions … within institutions and everyday practices and policies … The racist system therefore shaped both the colonized and colonizer" (36).

[950] Bewes, *Reification,* 71. Bewes notes that this was first argued by Edward Said in 'Travelling Theory Revisited' (1994).

evitable. "Quite simply this," he answered: "we were the subjects of history, and now we are the objects. The power struggle has been reversed, decolonization is in progress; all our mercenaries can try and do is delay its completion."[951] Sartre vocally supported the new subjects of history.

A direct expression of Sartre's injunction to 'engage' on the side of the (future) 'subjects' of history was his propensity to sign and organize petitions. No one in France put his/her name to more petitions published in *Le Monde* than him from 1946 to 1958, and only one did so from 1958 to 1969.[952] These trends reached a summit in the fall of 1960. *Le Monde* published 18 petitions relating to Algeria alone that autumn.[953] But France's newspaper of record was not allowed to publish the Manifesto of the 121, which in hindsight has become the most famous of all. Due to censorship, *Le Monde* ran on the 6 September, what could be called, a *manifeste manqué*. The text read: "*121 écrivains universitaires et artistes ont signé une pétition sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie*." It also quoted the manifesto's last three propositions,[954] which ended on the Sartrean note: "*La cause du peuple algérien, qui contribue de façon décisive à ruiner le système colonial, est la cause de tous les hommes libres*."[955] Still without the

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[951] Sartre, lx.

[952] Jean-François Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions françaises : manifestes et pétitions au XXe siècle* (Paris, Fayard, 1990), 10; 28.

[953] Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions françaises ,* 210. The positions taken by the petitions had at that point crystallized into two - negotiation or pacification - before gradually evolving into a left and rightwing one (208-9). Very few argued for Algerian independence (only 7 of 67).

[954] Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions françaises,* 213-4.

[955] Republished in Blanchot, *Ecrites politiques 1953-1993*, 53.

full text, the newspaper did not name the signatories until 30 September. As a response to its inability to make the manifesto official, TM published two blank pages in its October issue.[956]

When putting their names to this petition Debord and Bernstein joined an ecumenical front featuring members from both the groups of unpolitical artists with avant-garde pretensions and the political *cellules* without aesthetic concerns against which they had tried to position SI. What is more, among the original 121 signatories one finds many of the most prominent fixtures in the French intellectual firmament. A not insubstantial portion of these had been on the receiving end of ceaseless barrages of SI invective. Beside Sartre's and Lefebvre's the manifesto did not only include signatures by Leiris and Breton, both of whose thought SI had recently declared obsolete (Leiris in IS 1, and Breton and Surrealism throughout the issues of their journal). It also featured directors of the Nouvelle Vague (Resnais and Truffaut) and authors and theorists of the Nouveau roman (Duras, Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Claude Simon); it even included Françoise Sagan![957]

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[956] Jean-Francois Sirinelli, 'Algérie, Manifeste des 121. "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans le guerre d'Algérie"', *Libération,* 12 Janvier 1998.

[957] For an incomplete yet substantial list, see http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifeste_des_121 But among the signatories one does not find any proponents of the recently emergent Structuralism that was challenging Sartre's intellectual hegemony in Paris. Much has been made in the secondary literature of the political significance of this absence for the theoretical current (see especially Ross). But, from what I gather, little archival work has been done: the possibility that Sartre's confidants, aware of his waning intellectual influence, excluded the proponents of the trend unseating him at the summit of the Parisian scene has not been persuasively disputed. In his recent autobiography *Le Lièvre de Patagonie* (2009) Claude Lanzmann, later director of *Shoah* but then junior editor at TM and lover of Simone de Beauvoir, has described how the junior staff, Sartre being in Brazil at the time, contacted possible signatories and penned Sartre's defence (Claude Lanzmann, *Haren i Patagonien: minnen,* trans. Peter Landelius (Stockholm, Lind & Co, 2013), 309-12).

The two French members of the international were not among the original 121.[958] But after the government put in place a heavy handed approach to quiet these signatories the TM group proffered more intellectuals and artists to sign the manifesto. And even after SI's two members had signed, *Le Monde* neglected including Debord's and Bernstein's name when publishing the list of signatories.[959]

But the government made also the new signatories, even those not mentioned in the media, feel their displeasure with the manifesto. "*Pour briser ce mouvement*", IS 5 noted, "*le gouvernement n'hésita pas à recourir à des sanctions exceptionnelles*" (IS 5, 6). In a letter to ex-lettrist and overseas situationist Straram, who had indeed dodged the draft by leaving France for Quebec,[960] Debord described his involuntary visit to Quai des

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[958] An important absence in the list of signatories, either original or late-comers, for the SI is the protagonists of the Lettrist movement, and the editors of the journals *Socialisme ou barbarie* and *Arguments*. An unsigned article in IS 5 abstrusely questions the absence of SI's competitors on the non-aligned intellectual Left. The October issue of Enseignements public, the journal of FEN, published a manifesto. Signed by Lefort and Morin, it asked for a negotiated peace, underlining that there was no longer a French Algeria. Many of the signatories of the Manifesto of the 121 heckled this one. In a letter to Straram, Debord even accused Morin of being obstructionist by setting up his own initiative, destined for irrelevance (10 October, 1960); and so too did an unsigned article but in more convoluted terms (IS 5, 6). But, according to Sirinelli, the FEN manifesto had a greater impact on society at large (Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions françaises,* 220). Both manifestos were opposed by a third, 'Le Manifeste des intellectuels francais' , depicting the signatories in the Manifesto of the 121 as a fifth column. It had 185 signatories (*Intellectuels et passions françaises,* 214-5). Though the populist press claimed that the signatories of the manifesto of the 121 were confined to St Germain-de-Près (*Intellectuels et passions françaises,* 207), it had at that point gathered a number of signatories far exceeding the first 121, so too 185. That the intellectual right rallied around a counter-manifesto nonetheless marked a decisive turn in the French ideological landscape. Although the political right had been reintegrated into the political system for a decade, since Antoine Pinay's became prime minister in 1952, the intellectual right remained decisively marginalized. Opposing the Manifesto of the 121, it was given an opportunity to speak in the name of its favorite trope, nationalism (248-9). For its re-emergence "*le conflit algérien*", according to Sinirelli, "*a été un révélateur - les tendences existent auparavant - mais aussi un catalysateur et un accélérateur*" ('Les Intellectuels français en guerre d'Algérie', 295). (It still had to wait until the late 1970s to seriously challenge the left's intellectual hegemony). As a sign of the changing roles on the French left, no current PCF members signed the original manifesto, according to Horne (416).

[959] Incensed, Debord wrote the editor of *Le Monde* to complain (on 5 October 1960).

[960] Wark, 23.

Orfèvres. But as far as I can tell the police 'only' interrogated him.[961] For others it was worse. "*Tandis que les fonctionnaires (généralement de l'enseignement) étaient suspendus*," IS 5 went on, "*tous les signataires se voyaient bannis de la radio-télévision, leurs noms mêmes ne pouvant plus y être cités; et rejetés des théâtres subventionnés ou des films normalement enregistrés par le Centre National du Cinéma*" (IS 5, 6). Ten people were prosecuted, among them some of the junior staff at TM.[962] Debord still worried both about being arrested together with Bernstein and about IS 5 being seized.[963]

Debord believed that the recent initiatives against the signatories of the Manifesto of the 121, though long in coming, revealed the true face of de Gaulle's government. In hindsight we know that—though paternalist in tone and occasionally authoritarian in style, a combination often seen as partly responsible for triggering the events of May 1968—de Gaulle's regime did not (within Metropolitan France!) excessively abuse the extended powers of the executive branch with which it had endowed the new republic: the general even protected some of his most vocal critics, notably Sartre, about whom he famously quipped, after being pressured to arrest him by rightwing militias due to his

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[961] Debord to Straram, 22 Nov 1960. On his way to and from the London SI conference, the border patrols of both sides of the Channel had, according to Spur 2, also given him a hard time.

[962] Lanzmann, 310.

[963] Debord to Wyckeart, 1 October 1960 and 3 October 1960.

scathing denunciations of the war in the manifesto, "*On n'emprisonne pas Voltaire*."[964] Overseas, the case was different. In 1960 de Gaulle's regime did not seem capable of re-asserting the control over the torturing military in Algeria, which the civil authorities had lost in the dying days of the Fourth Republic.[965]

This worried more people than Debord. It was shared by the French commentariat. *Le 14 Juillet*, for instance, a short-lived journal with illustrious collaborators such as Barthes, Blanchot, Breton, Duras, Lefort, Morin, Nadeau, et al. , ran an initial piece appealing to fight against de Gaulle's power which its authors Dionys Mascolo and Jean Schuster (both of whom SI had criticized) construed as a tyranny if not a fascism in the making.[966]

Only, these apprehensions did not discourage Debord. That members of SI were asked to add their signatures marked the most important acknowledgement of the international's political impact to date. It was a recognition that profoundly pleased Debord. In a letter to another SI member, he wrote that he had "*finally* received an invitation to sign the Declaration."[967]

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[964] Due to the all but mythologized status of this event it is hard to tell fact from fiction. The author of a famous Sartre biography, Annie Cohen-Solal claims that de Gaulle uttered those words upon leaving a meeting with the Council of Ministers in December 1960 (Annie Cohen-Solal, 'Tracking Down a Willing and Reluctant Hero', in (ed) William L. McBridge, *Sartre Life, Times and Vision Du Monde* (London, Routledge, 1996), 209). Others have suggested that what de Gaulle actually said was "Sartre, c'est la France" (Rubén Chuaqui, 'Notes on Edward Said's View of Michel Foucault', in (ed) Ferial J Gbazoul, *Edward Said and Critical Decolonization* (Cairo & New York, American University in Cairo Press, 2007), footnote 20, 112). If he indeed did so, which would not be entirely out of line of his grandiloquent rhetoric, it would suggest that he perceived Sartre as his double…

[965] Horne, 188.

[966] Blanchot, *Ecrits politiques 1953-1993*, 25. On dismissing the people behind *Le 14 Juillet,* see IS 2, 32.

[967] Debord to Wyckaert, 1 October 1960, my emphasis.

The French State's heavy-handed response to the manifesto fired Debord's insurrectionary imagination. He hoped that the government response to signatories of the Manifesto of the 121 meant that "*un conflit très decisif et grave est enfin engagé*."[968] In his letters to various SI members (throughout the fall) he reiterated this hope. It "is an incontestable awakening," he wrote in one. "But," he continued, "so late, and quite small."[969]

This caused Debord to give up on SI's détourned injunction not to 'engage'. Among the signatories of the manifesto of the 121 were not only many to whom SI had defined itself in opposition; these were the revolutionary intellectuals on whom SI had blamed de Gaulle's return. We should also recall that, by re-appropriating Sartre's 'situation', Debord had three years prior inverted the former's demand for artists to 'commit' to the cause of *l'homme libre*: ludic poetics would create an avant-garde international, not instrumentalize art. Art was not, as Sartre believed, "*par essence prise de position*."[970] Such a belief, Jorn and Debord had agreed, was merely furthering the reign of technique.

But the alienation caused by a postwar technocracy paled in comparison to the exploitation of the colonial system. In its face, SI's decision to only construct situations against a vaguely defined but somehow foreboding (Pan-European) modernization appeared suspiciously similar to aestheticism. To not commit to sharing political positions

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[968] Debord, in a letter to Wyckaert, 1 October 1960.

[969] Debord, in a letter to Straram, 31 October 1960. Gilles, the character modelled on Debord in Bernstein's *The Night,* "has a taste for civil unrest. The era of the Fronde would surely have suited him" (Bernstein, *The Night,* 59).

[970] Sartre, *Situations II,* 300.

against (French) imperialism became untenable if Debord wanted to field a project that, even if international, was politically invested in Paris.

After Debord's signed the Manifesto of the 121, the prominent interlocutors of the situation who remained within the international sensed how the drift of French history now directed the organization and quit SI voluntarily. Both Frankin and Jorn started protracted leaving processes in spring of 1961. Against the wish of Debord, who desperately tried to hold onto him, Frankin quit over a disagreement on the political situation in March. Jorn left in April. The Dane still made eventual forays into SI events and meetings, but he was no longer a fixture at its conferences as its translator-in-chief.

Jorn never explicitly elaborated on the reason for his exit. His age has often been seen as motivating it. As Pinot Gallizio and Constant, he was well into his middle age in the early 1960s, while Debord and Bernstein were just turning 30, and de Jong and Vaneigem were still in their twenties. But, after quitting, Jorn hardly showed any signs of fatigue. He established a new organization. Two other factors stand out about his exit: the timing and his definition of the avant-garde.

In April 1961 France experienced a putsch attempt by the rightwing paramilitary organization of the OAS. This coincided with the increasing recognition of Jorn's art. He had recently exhibited at Venice's Palazzio Grassi, the Stedelijk in Amsterdam, and the Louisiana Museum north of Copenhagen, and he was about to exhibit a set of what he called 'Luxury Paintings' in London and a new set of détourned paintings, which he now called 'New Disfigurations', in Paris.[971] While such recognition bolstered his importance

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[971] Kurczynski, 191; 223.

in the art world, it was detrimental for his status within the avant-garde. Only marginal art, Jorn had thought, could be oppositional to the ideological architecture; art had to be seen as abnormal to threaten the regime of normality. What is more, it was precisely because life in the margins of, indeed in opposition to, the hegemonic culture was alienating that the avant-garde artists created communities of practice. Now contributing to the new normal as a recognized artist, Jorn was not alienated but fêted. He did not need the International. He sullied its critical independence.

While the international still needed him, or at least his financial support, SI had a new normality to oppose.[972] Jorn sensed that organizing against the instrumental rationality of signifying art was no longer an overarching concern in France, where the resistance to a metropolitan imperialism called for an instrumentalization of art. According to McDonough, "Jorn was absolutely correct in asserting that Debord adopted a 'utilitarian attitude' toward art, that culture was for him [now] a simple instrumental means."[973] The future of Paris-based SI pointed in an activist direction.

Once Jorn quit, the days were numbered for SI as a Pan-European network. He had formulated the question to which the 'situation' was the answer. Without Jorn's question, Debord moved on to new, seemingly more pressing, issues. Debord rethought how to organize an avant-garde project in a repressive political climate. For this he re-appro-

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[972] Jacqueline de Jong quoted in 'A Maximum of Openness: Jacqueline de Jong in conversation with Karen Kurczynski', in (ed) (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *Expect Anything, Fear Nothing* (Copenhagen, Nebula, 2011), 192.

[973] McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century,* 114.

priated the anti-imperial positions in Paris for SI in a way that did not recreate the network. The international as practice rather ceased to exist even in 'SI' theory.

The Colonization of Metropolitan France

In 1961 Debord announced that everyday life had been colonized. Doing so at Lefebvre's seminar the spring following upon his signing of the Manifesto of the 121, he not only related SI to the new political concerns in Paris. He also argued that Paris itself was in need of a revolutionary movement of decolonization. While still drawing on the 'old' subject of history, the proletariat, for his claims, he abandoned the project to aesthetically unite an international of artists and theorists. If the urgency to resist imperialism in France had questioned whether the national branches were still united by a shared concern with an alienating modernization, Debord now made it clear that he did not want to continue working towards a shared solution. This was a French problem for which the participatory pan-European avant-garde could not help.

Debord was invited to give a talk at Lefebvre's seminar on the everyday at CNRS. Everyday life had not been a concept of which SI had initially offered a definition, as culture or decomposition. But SI had always situated its project in the quotidian realm. "*[S]i l'on considère que la vie quotidienne est à la frontière de secteur dominé et du secteur non dominé de la vie, donc le lieu de l'aléatoire*," Debord said in a way familiar from earlier SI positions, "*il faudrait parvenir à substituer au présent ghetto une frontière toujours en marche; travailler en permanence à l'organisation de chances nouvelles*" (IS 6, 24). This belief in the potential to enhance quotidian contingency by challenging the

entrenched patterns that circumscribed what was ideologically possible did not depart much from previous SI theory on ludic praxis.

But his concern with the everyday now was not primarily concerned with aesthetics. "*La vie quotidienne n'est pas tout*," Debord argued. Nonetheless, "*il faut encore placer la vie quotidienne au centre de tout. Chaque projet en part et chaque réalisation revient y prendre sa véritable signification*." Indeed, for Debord in 1961 "*La vie quotidienne est la mesure de tout: de l'accomplissement ou plutôt du non-accomplissement des relations humaines; de l'emploi du temps vécu; des recherches de l'art;* de la politique révolutionnaire" (IS 6, 21, my emphasis). The mark of revolutionary politics was its concern for everyday life. Such a revolution could no longer encompass artistic practices.

Everyday life was where all political projects were realized. It is where "*se trouve être en ce moment l'enjeu de tout renouvellent révolutionnaire de la culture et de la politique*" (IS 6, 22). But inversely, everyday life was also from where all political projects could be criticized. "*Il me semble*," he argued, "*que ce terme 'critique de la vie quotidienne' pourrait, et devrait, aussi s'entendre avec ce renversement: critique que la vie quotidienne exercerait, souverainement, sur tout ce qui lui est vainement extérieur*" (IS 6, 24).[974] Everyday life furnished the master metric with which to evaluate the emancipatory quality of a political project.

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[974] Debord argued further that in the same way that the (French) bourgeoisie abandoned any transcendental (divine) justification of the social order after the French Revolution, the revolutionary proletariat, if worthy of its name, would likewise leave behind the need to draw on historical models or indeed tropes such as immortality, grandeur, and any claim to art's value being outside of everyday life (Debord, IS 6, 26-7.

Debord brought this political perspective to bear on the epistemological questions raised at Lefebvre's seminar. Lefebvre had just published his second volume of *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1961). In the second installment of his trilogy on everyday life, epistemological questions loomed much larger than in either the first volume (1945) or the second preface to the first volume (1958). He now elaborated at length about the ways in which and the levels on which one can know or get to know, indeed analyze, the everyday. In response some of the contributors to his seminar had questioned whether everyday life could really be claimed to exist as an independent field of study. Some had in vain tried to find the exact location of this ontic region (IS 6, 20-1).

Debord collapsed the epistemological question wondering how one can know the everyday into his wish for political transfiguration.[975] "*Etudier la vie quotidienne serait une entreprise parfaitement ridicule, et d'abord condamnée à ne rien saisir de son objet, si l'on ne se proposait pas explicitement d'étudier cette vie quotidienne afin de la transformer*," he argued (IS 6, 20). "*La modification est toujours la condition nécessaire et suffisante pour faire apparaître expérimentalement l'objet de notre étude, qui à défaut resterait douteux; objet qui est lui-même moins à étudier qu'à modifier*" (IS 6, 20). His

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[975] That he broached epistemological questions suggests that he had finally had the chance to read Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* in full; the whole work was translated to French in 1960. The solution to the antinomies of German idealism, Lukács there argued, was communism. Indeed, he claimed, the workers movement, as Engels once claimed with reference to its German branch, was the 'natural' heir of this philosophical tradition. Since working had turned its consciousness into an object, the proletariat, if overthrowing this reifying regime of labor, would transition from being an object of its process to its subject. Such a revolutionary praxis, he argued, would not only usher in the self-consciousness of the object. It would also bridge the abyss between concept and reality, an epistemological problem running through this tradition from Kant onwards. By casting the proletariat as the object becoming the subject of this process, Lukács, in other words, simultaneously dissolved the epistemological aporia: the proletariat's self-consciousness became interchangeable with History's.

was a reversed Heisenberg's uncertainty principle: he pleaded for a maximum interference with the object so that they could study it.

Like the revolutionary proletariat before it, the everyday had to be created. It was a wager. But contemporary society did not allow for it. So such invention required a revolutionary change.[976] To not have a vested interest in the possible existence of quotidian life was to desire the eternalization of the present political system in which a public life, dominated by alienating and non-participatory institutional structures, opposes a private life, that is—in Debord's playing on the two meanings of *privée*—a deprived life (IS 6, 26). The current state was one in which the everyday was "*organisée dans les limites d'une pauvreté scandaleuse*." This, he argued, "*n'a rien d'accidentel; c'est une pauvreté qui lui est imposée … historiquement selon les nécessités de* l'histoire de l'exploitation" (IS 6, 22, my emphasis).

The doubts about the possible existence of the everyday broadcast the very poverty of quotidian life in current society. But, he noted, this was on the cusp to be changed. "*La difficulté de la reconnaissance même d'un terrain de la vie quotidienne*," he contended "*… c'est … qu'il se trouve être en ce moment l'enjeu de tout renouvellement révolutionnaire de la culture et de la politique*" (IS 6, 21-22).

So the question for him was not if or how the social text was legible but how a new type of social writing could, by marking a transcendence of the division between public and private, bring it to light. This was, he claimed, towards what his colleague

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[976] At one point Debord evokes a very constructivist definition of the proletariat: it is a revolutionary proletariat devoid of positive content, with only a negative function to fill; it is defined by its refusal of the past and of models, indeed of past models (26).

within SI had been working. In his only allusion to the international's newly produced manifesto, he noted that such social writing strived to create conditions in which the present would dominate over the past and creativity over repetition (IS 6, 27). It wanted to create a site defined by conscious choices and quotidian adventures (IS 6, 27).

There were, however, new circumstances impeding such a project. "*Henri Lefebvre a appliqué ici*," Debord noted, "*une extension de l'idée d'inégal développement pour caractériser la vie quotidienne, décalée mais non coupée de l'historicité, comme un secteur attardé*." In the second volume of his *Critique de la vie quotidienne,* Lefebvre had suggested that the cleavages separating everyday life from the institutional framework of French society could be explained by a historically unequal development. This was a figure of thought otherwise applied to the disparities between the western countries and those of the global south.[977] As already foreshadowed in his claim that everyday life had been a casualty of historical exploitation, Debord merely concluded Lefebvre's line of argument. "*Je crois*," he continued, "*que l'on peut aller jusqu'à qualifier ce niveau de la vie quotidienne de secteur colonisé*" (IS 6, 22).

When stretching Lefebvre's suggestion, Debord literally domesticated the recent discursive shifts in French politics; he brought anti-colonial concepts to bear on the metropole. "*On a vue à l'échelle de l'économie mondiale, que le sous-développement et* la colonisation *sont des facteurs en interaction*," he argued. "*Tout porte à croire qu'il en*

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[977] Lefebvre argued that an uneven development separated the different levels. He wrote that "Critique of everyday life generalizes this experience of the 'backward' or 'underdeveloped' nations and extends it to the everyday in the highly developed industrial countries" (Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. 2,* trans. John Moore (London, Verso, 2008) 316). But he rather invested his political hope in the fact that a part of everyday life could not be reached by the institutional framework: the everyday, he wrote, is "something which reveals the inability of [bureaucratic] forms … to grasp the content, to integrate it and to exhaust it" (Lefebvre, 64).

va de même à l'échelle de la formation économique-sociale, de la praxis" (IS 6, 22). Colonization worked the same way globally as within the nationally bound socio-economic frame. At the same time as under-development opens the way for colonization, colonization reproduces this under-development. This was its totalizing dialectics.

The timing of Debord's transposition of colonization is indicative. Debord announced that the metropolitan everyday life was colonized on the eve of the negotiations between the French State and the FLN at Evian that eventually produced an accord in which France granted Algeria independence. "Why should we remain caught up in colonizations that are costly, bloody, and without end," the French president, Charles de Gaulle, wondered the same year with reference to the resources leaving Algeria would free up, "when our country needs to be renewed from top to bottom?"[978] The imperial center was on the threshold of recognizing its *Trentes Glorieuese*. Consciously or not, it was rebranding itself: from being Catholic, imperial, and mostly rural, it became urban, modern, and highly centralized.[979] Turning away from Africa, Paris re-focused its energies on the hexagon.

To Debord the resources pouring into metropolitan France demanded attention. With the funds freed up from decolonization, de Gaulle created a new cabinet position: the minister of culture. Its first and maybe still most illustrious occupant, André Malraux, defined the ministry's task. He wanted it to democratize access to, and spread an aware-

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[978] De Gaulle quoted in Horne, *A Savage Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*, 444.

[979] Ross, 4. Regarding de Gaulle's desire for France to modernize, see Horne, *A Savage Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*, 372; 383-4. I will address this more closely in the epilogue.

ness of, what he called, "the major works of humanity, and particularly of France."[980] He linked this project to the Fifth Republic's five year 'equipment and modernization plan'.[981] The modernizing postwar State now entered the field of culture. While Malraux did not explicitly aim to influence the cultural content that was created by artists, he did share the governing style of de Gaulle's presidential Fifth Republic: all his ministry's policies flowed vertically from the center.[982]

This was the time during which the special relationship between culture and the French State was born. A crucial site for this relation was Paris itself. Malraux established a plan for 'heritage preservation and enhancement'.[983] It safeguarded historical monuments and buildings. But it did so at the expense of the local, affective milieu. Buildings were cleaned and neighborhoods gentrified.[984] As a result many parts of inner Paris lost their mixed-income demographic during these years.[985]

This profoundly affected Left Bank bohemia. Together with the increasing economic growth of France, Malraux's efforts made Paris expensive. Part of Paris's appeal for bohemian discontents from elsewhere, at least for those from Northern Europe and North America, was its relative affordability. Those days were over. So too were those

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[980] Malraux quoted by Andre Girard, 'French cultural policy from André Malraux to Jack Lang: A tale of Modernisation', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Volume 4, 1997, p. 109.

[981] Girard, 110.

[982] Girard, 112.

[983] Girard, 110.

[984] Sadler, 62.

[985] Ross, 152-5.

when one could avoid the homogenizing modernization of postwar western Europe in certain Paris neighborhoods. As Hazan notes, "Contrary to a widespread idea, the final eradication of the Middle Ages in Paris," in which the long arm of the State did *not* reach into every nook and cranny, "was not the work of Haussmann and Napoleon III, but rather of Malraux and Pompidou."[986] The historical foundations for Paris eccentricity were withering away, and with them, the conditions for the practice at the root of the 'situation': the dérive.

Though started when the bloodbath in Algeria was still going on, indeed not even stopping for the OAS putsch attempt, Malraux's initiatives exuded confidence.[987] Paris was *his* stage. If SI had capitalized a few years prior on the fact that "*La civilisation bourgeoise … est hantée par une ombre: la mise en question de sa culture*" (unsigned, IS 3, 3) by wanting to propose a different definition of culture, the situation was now different. UNESCO had to wait. A putsch at the transnational ministry for culture had become less urgent than resisting the widening portfolio of France's.

Drawing on Sartre and Lefebvre, Debord re-conceptualized the metropole. In it "*la vie quotidienne, mystifiée par tous les moyens et contrôlée policièrement, est une sorte de réserve pour les bons sauvages*." And yet the colonized in the metropole are those "*qui font marcher, sans la comprendre, la société moderne*" (IS 6, 22).

Refusing to project revolutionary hopes overseas, Debord had by 1961 received the theoretical tools for him to bring them home. "*L'histoire - c'est-à-dire la transforma-*

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[986] Hazan, *The Invention of Paris,* 19.

[987] Horne, 501.

tion du réel - n'est pas actuellement utilisable dans la vie quotidienne parce que l'homme de la vie quotidienne est le produit d'une histoire sur laquelle il n'a pas de contrôle," he continued. "*C'est évidemment lui-même qui fait cette histoire, mais pas librement*" (IS 6, 22).

Like the peoples who were claimed to be without history before the anti-colonial struggles, it was among 'quotidian (wo)men' were a new resistance could arise. "*La vie quotidienne présente effectivement, jusqu'à présent, une résistance à l'historique*," he contended. "*Ceci juge d'abord l'historique, en tant que l'héritage et le projet d'une société d'exploitation*" (IS 6, 22). Everyday life could refuse the historical narratives at once justifying and reproducing colonialism. As in Africa around this time, the continuing reign of the dialectics of colonialism and underdevelopment could be defeated there.

By establishing an analogy to successful anti-colonial struggles, he evoked the possibility that quotidian (wo)men could be the author of a new history: "*La révolution dans la vie quotidienne bris[era] son actuelle résistance à l'historique (et à toute sorte de changement)*" (IS 6, 27). For this to happen an anti-colonial vanguard was needed: "*La critique et la recréation perpétuelle de la totalité de la vie quotidienne, avant d'être faites naturellement par tous les hommes, doivent être entreprises dans les conditions de l'oppression présente, et pour ruiner ces conditions*" (IS 6, 27).

But for such a vanguard Debord no longer mobilized the international nor mentioned the construction of situations. He explicitly stated, with reference to who could discard the imperial rule over a colonized everyday life, that such transfiguration would not be accomplished by a cultural avant-garde with revolutionary sympathies: "*ce n'est*

pas un mouvement culturel d'avant-garde, même ayant des sympathies révolutionnaires qui peut accomplir cela." On the contrary, "*La transformation révolutionnaire de la vie quotidienne … Ceci va être la tâche d'une organisation révolutionnaire d'un type nouveau, dès sa formation*" (IS 6, 27).

Debord had by now given up the hope of SI taking over UNESCO to superimpose its own definition of culture; his concerns rested with a metropolitan France with a State whose newly instituted cultural ministry colonized the Parisian everyday. In this situation it was, as Sartre declared, colonized 'natives' who furnished the subject of history and thus from whose midst a new revolutionary cadre could form.[988] The cultural avant-garde could no longer modify obsolete cultural forms. In the face of metropolitan exploitation, dis-alienating art practices lost their role.

By not mentioning SI's constitutive project, the construction of a situation, but evoking the need for an anti-colonial practice, Debord's intervention at Lefebvre's seminar at once abandoned SI's shared concern and his suggested solution to it. Before Debord's contribution to Lefebvre's seminar, colonialism hardly featured in SI's political imagination.[989] Debord's insertion of a 'colonial problematic', however redefined and relocated, broke with earlier SI theory. The international had not attracted members from all across Europe by opposing French colonialism, of a new metropolitan or old trans-

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[988] "Natives", Sartre exclaimed, "of all the underdeveloped countries unite!" (Sartre, xlv).

[989] LI's journal, *Potlatch,* often addressed the insurrections in Algeria. IS did not do so to nearly the same degree. As I have noted already, one illustration of how the question of Algeria independence was relegated to a less prominent position once LI merged with artist groups from around the continent was that IS 1 did publish an article on these developments d'outre mer but on the last page of the journal and in a smaller font!

Mediterranean kind. It had even tried to dodge this question, peripheral as well as hexagonal, by constructing a situation in Amsterdam rather than Paris. This was no longer the case. Now Paris reigned supreme: SI's position within French discourses were imposed on the national branches, not molded by them.

The End of the International and of Paris internationality

At the next conference in Gothenburg in early fall 1961, Debord tried to recreate SI in the image he had sketched at Lefebvre's seminar. The Francophone members—Debord, Kotanyi, and Vaneigem, a new Belgian member—now all denied the existence of situationist practice. Until the world had changed all artistic production was, Kotanyi claimed, anti-situationist (IS 7, 27-8).[990] Art could no longer be seen as a negative to society's development. Art itself had to be negated; it could not exist. "*En même temps que diverses nostalgies confuses d'un art positif se diront situationnistes, c'est l'art anti-situationniste qui signalera les meilleurs artistes actuels, ceux de l'I.S., les conditions situationnistes n'étant nullement réunies*," the report from the conference claimed. "*C'est en disant cela que l'on est situationniste*" (IS 7, 28).

This marked a departure, also for Debord. A year earlier he had stressed that "*il n'y a pas de 'situationnisme*'." What existed was the *praxis* of the organization: "*Je ne suis moi-même situationniste que du fait de ma participation, en ce moment et dans cer-*

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[990] The refusal of any 'situationist' practice in 1961 was also due to the fact that people were starting to claim to be situationists without belonging to the international, most recently in London (Debord to Kotanyi, 12 July 1961).

taines conditions, à une communauté pratiquement groupée en vue d'une tâche, qu'elle saura ou ne saura pas faire" (IS 4, 33). The prospect of situationist practice remained.

It did not in 1961. Having invalidated any practice, SI was no longer a dialogue in which the organizational and aesthetic practice, the international situation and the national branches, were discussed together. It was rather a lacuna: in the space which the 'situation' had previously filled now stood the Parisian anti-situation. Introduced in London, the central council was the anti-situation's institutional expression.

In the absence of dialogue, the central council imposed unity by enforcing an SI position. "*L'opinion commune est qu'il faut examiner sévèrement toutes les candidatures, surtout quand il s'agit, comme en Angleterre ou en Allemagne, de groupes artistiques déjà constitués*," the report on the conference by the central council announced (unsigned, IS 7, 25). But this position was not shared. The German branch wanted such vetting to be internal, national affairs. It was overruled: "*La décision de la Conférence est que l'ensemble de l'I.S. doit juger pour tous les pays – ceci étant, dans l'intervalle des Conférences, du ressort du C.C.* [the central council]" (IS 7, 26).

Organizationally and aesthetically, SI had no practice, interpreted differently across the continent, only (French) theory and positions. The difference from the appeal discussed at Munich is striking: the appeal argued that this was not the time for a theoretic elaboration of doctrine but for a practical experiment with new professions. The political developments in France had since closed the door for their emergence.

At the conference the French SI members took the others hostage to the political situation in the Hexagon. The members of the peripheral SI branches wanted to continue

their practices. After Jorn's departure, the most prominent non-Francophone member was his brother Nash. Like the German members, he vehemently opposed the reduction of SI practice to being just conceptual.[991] He advocated against the decision to no longer be concerned with 'positive' art, only 'negative' theory. The decision to disallow this was, he together with Jacqueline de Jong and the Swedish member Ansgar Elde believed, taken against a backdrop of almost Civil War like conditions in the Hexagon. "Paris," they wrote, was

> a witches' cauldron of political instigations and demonstrations, armoured cars in the streets, the bloody shadow of the Algerian War, the O.A.S., the F.L.N., mysterious assassinations and torture. Strikes, police raids, censorship, no Gallic clarity but a dark witches' trial, shootings and reprisals, many dead and wounded.[992]

They were not far off.

Called by the FLN, a demonstration against the curfew that targeted Algerians in the metropole had just gathered 30 to 40 000 participants in Paris. The entire police force of Paris was mobilized. Led by Maurice Papon, once the second in command of Vichy-

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[991] Ohrt, 260.

[992] Jacqueline de Jong, Jørgen Nash, Ansgar Elde, 'Nicht Hinauslehnen! Ne Pas se pencheur au dehors! E Pericoloso sporgersi! Danger! Do Not Lean Out! Det är livsfarligt att luta sig ut! Niet naar buiten hangen!', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *COSMONAUTS OF THE FUTURE,* 72. This text was first as a tract called 'Nicht Hinauslehnen', and was reprinted in *The Situationist Times,* no 1, 1962.

era Bordeaux but more recently in charge of the police in Algeria (1956-1958), it killed an estimated 200 of the demonstrators.[993] The event, Kristin Ross has argued, showed that the state branches of metropolitan France had become intimately linked to the so-called 'police operation' in Algeria and to other colonial conflicts.[994]

The Dutch and Scandinavian members thought that the adverse political climate affected SI praxis. It turned, they thought, "brother against brother" within the international. It had made SI, they claimed, "totalitarian": having abandoned the discussion, SI was now run from the Paris controlled central council.[995]

While the Dutch and the Scandinavians did not think that France could host a positive project in these political conditions, the Paris branch did not (re)consider the need for SI's hinge to relocate. Arguing for theory instead of practice, they assumed that, even without a shared conceptual platform, the new kind of revolutionary organization that Debord wanted to create had to be hinged in Paris. Even if he and the other Francophone members had given up on the 'situation', they still kept the concept's faith in Paris' centrality. In fact, as Paris was allegedly no longer the center of the art world, their renunciation of the constructed situation allowed them to keep their Franco-centrism. Paris might

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[993] Kristin Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2002), 42-53.

[994] Ross points out that Papon did not only employ hardened war veterans of Indochina and ex-army officials from Algeria for the Paris police; he installed torture in Paris (Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives,* 52-3).

[995] Jong, Nash, Elde, 'Nicht Hinauslehnen', 72. For the Paris branch's take, see (IS 7, 54). Speaking about these days, Jacqueline de Jong re-affirmed that "Paris happened to be in an extremely bad situation (10-12 Feb 1962) and to foreigners coming from perhaps too calm countries even if they are Situationists this makes an impression which undeniable" (Jaqueline de Jong, 'Critique of the Political Practice of Détournement', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *COSMONAUTS OF THE FUTURE,* 82. This text was originally published in *The Situationist Times,* no 1, 1962.

have lost its central role for art, but internationality, their actions imply that they still believed, could still only be produced there.

The French branch thought that SI had to adapt to the changing circumstances in Paris. And the way it proposed doing so was for the (French controlled) central council to vet all new members on their positions with the explicit intention to shrink SI's numbers. It started with the established members. Wyckaert was purged in 1961. The Paris branch outsourced the task of excluding him to the German branch. "Here is a letter for Wyckaert that you should all sign, then address to him," Debord, Kotanyi, and Bernstein told them. "It is the official announcement of his exclusion. It is better if it comes from Munich."[996] But the outlying branches of the organization were slipping out of French control.

Outside of both the SI conference circuit and France, an alternative SI had been budding ever since the national branches met in London. Some of the Scandinavian participants had afterwards followed SPUR back to Munich. Organizing activities together, they had there created a parallel SI. The Scandinavians eventually left the Bavarian capital, but the links between the peripheral branches remained.[997] Such links would soon stand the Germans in good stead.

As Paris was occupied with the Algerian war, the Spur group took intellectual positions outside of its reach. In one especially forceful text, 'Erklärung vor dem Fernsehen', they re-asserted that freedom and artistic practice cannot be separated. This im-

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[996] Debord, Kotanyi, and Bernstein to Spur, 17 April 1961.

[997] Ohrt, 240.

plies, they argued, that art has to have the right to insult and defame, even to abolish itself. But the latter would, by the same token, lead to abolishment of the emancipatory project *tout court*.[998] For, as SPUR had by now picked up, "*Die Künstler und die Intellektuellen werden gezwungen, jetzt* ein neues Proletariat *der Minorität zu werden als mindervertige Diener von Volk und Gott*."[999]

If the Munich art scene was now up to date with the intellectual trends of Paris enough to 'détourn' them, the political authorities of the Federal Republic was not as lenient to such expressions as those in the Fourth and Fifth Republics. SPUR was banned from exhibiting at the Haus der Kunst and soon tried in court for sedition.[1000] It was ultimately the German branch that bore the brunt of the law, not the French: in 1962 the Spur journal was confiscated and its authors persecuted for its allegedly pornographic and blasphemous content.[1001] Some Spur members eluded Bavarian justice by staying with Nash and others at their artist commune, Drakabygget, in southern Sweden.[1002]

The Paris branch showed limited sympathy with Spur. The German branch was next in line to be purged. The Paris branch excluded Spur at the same time as its artistic

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[998] Fischer, Kunzelmann, Prem, Sturm, Zimmer, 'Erklärung vor dem Fernsehen', *SPUR,* no 4, 1961.

[999] Ibid, my emphasis.

[1000] Ohrt, 245.

[1001] Diederichsen, 70, footnote 17. Like Debord but decades earlier, two members of Spur eventually committed suicide. Diederichsen evokes the possibility that they had internalized the repressive society's projections. Due to such ideological interpellation, they became mad.

[1002] Hardy Strid, 'Everyone Can Be a Situationist', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *Expect Anything, Fear Nothing* (Copenhagen, Nebula, 2011), 129-130.

impudence was tried in a west German court.[1003] The Paris-centricity of the central council abolished cross-continental artistic solidarity.

But the other peripheral groups, regardless of whether former or current ones, came to Spur's defense. While Paris was occupied by Algeria, they were coalescing into what Stewart Home's calls the 2nd Situationist International.[1004] The new international did not wire its continental communication through Paris. It hardly wired it at all. It even questioned whether it was, strictly speaking, an organization. In its manifesto, 'The Struggle for the Situcratic Society: A Situationist Manifesto', it made a virtue out of its decentralization. It highlighted the differences between a north European organizational practice of movement and mobility and a French striving for the correct position:

> We admit that Scandinavians are feeble planners and probably even feebler at carrying out other people's plans. We do not always distinguish between theory and practice. We intend to produce our theories after the event. Now that we have become involved in a Situationist evolution we are planning towards feasible objectives. The French work exactly

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[1003] For the anger this stirred among the non-French groups, see Jørgen Nash, Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Gordon Fazakerley, Hardy Strid, Staffan Larsson, Ansgar Elde, Jacqueline de Jong, Patrick O'Brien, 'The Struggle for the Situcratic Society: A Situationist Manifesto', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *COSMONAUTS OF THE FUTURE. Texts from the Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen, Nebula, 2015), 88-95.

[1004] Stewart Home, *Assault on Culture,* 41. For the French branch's take, see IS 7, 54.

> the other way round. They want everything straight before they start and everybody has to line up correctly.[1005]

The manifesto was signed by artists from Scandinavia, Britain and the Netherlands.[1006] It explicitly supported Spur against the Bavarian authorities. Spur eventually became affiliated to SI 2 as well.

That an international could form outside of Paris, where internationality and modernity, indeed international modernity and modern internationality, had until recently been produced, confused the French in SI. They accused this new formation of being the creation of a sort of "*national-situationnisme*" (IS 7, 53). Including members from all across northern Europe, its creation rather marked the emergence of a new sort of international network spread over multiple locations while lacking a hinge node.

This was indicative of larger historical shifts. The emergence of a vaguely cohering SI 2 was in step with Paris's gradual loss of centrality for European intellectual and aesthetic trends that started in the early 1960s. If Surrealism had introduced the practice of purging members into artist groups, an organizational practice which had previously been exclusive the domain of political organizations,[1007] such practices petered out once

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[1005] Jørgen Nash, Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Gordon Fazakerley, Hardy Strid, Staffan Larsson, Ansgar Elde, Jacqueline de Jong, Patrick O'Brien, 'The Struggle for the Situcratic Society: A Situationist Manifesto', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *COSMONAUTS OF THE FUTURE. Texts from the Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen, Nebula, 2015), 95. The manifesto was originally published in *Situationist Times* 2 (1962).

[1006] It was also signed by a Patrick O'Brien from Ireland, who in reality was Jorn.

[1007] Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord* (Arles, Editions Denoël, 2001), 90

the Paris avant-garde no longer provided the frame of reference: the manifesto of SI 2 explicitly rejected them. It denounced what it saw as SI's "adherence to old-fashioned, classical and ultra-rigid patterns of organisation." Instead it announced that, as for as it was concerned,

> anyone is free to become a Situationist without the need for special formalities. It is up to the individual to fulfill the Situationist ideology in the best way that seems fit. This does away with all problems of inclusion and exclusion.[1008]

Not incidentally, this manifesto was written in English.

These developments happened concomitantly with the incremental decentralization of the French language. Keeping abreast of these, De Jong, a Dutch SI member, had wanted SI to start publishing an anglophone journal. In the early 1960s, there were, besides the central journal in French, publications in Italy, Germany, and Scandinavia. Referencing these, the article responding to de Jong's suggestion "*constate que … les travail des camarades de l'I.S. comme traducteurs est déjà inférieur à une moyenne convenable quand il s'agit d'assurer les communications courantes entres les sections*" (IS 7, 28). The Paris central council decided for SI to wait with producing an Anglophone journal until SI had a British branch—only that, the article continued, could create "*des condi-*

[1008] Jørgen Nash, Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Gordon Fazakerley, Hardy Strid, Staffan Larsson, Ansgar Elde, Jacqueline de Jong, Patrick O'Brien, 'The Struggle for the Situcratic Society: A Situationist Manifesto', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *COSMONAUTS OF THE FUTURE,* 90-1.

tions saines, non-artificielles" (IS 7, 28). For the Francophone members running the council it was still inconceivable that English was here touted by the Dutch and the Scandinavians as a new vehicular language, not only as the language of the Brits. De Jong eventually did start publishing an English-speaking journal *Situationist Times* from Amsterdam. Because of the lacking solidarity shown by the Paris members towards Spur, de Jong turned it into a competitor to IS.[1009]

It has been argued that, once the *Situationist Times* emerged, French lost its symbolic claim on being *the* vehicular language for the avant-garde.[1010] As the war in Algeria made the project to connect all experimental artists around the continent in a dialogue on how to politicize non-signifying aesthetics impossible, the international avant-garde abandoned French as predominant means of communication. This conversation would now be held in multiple languages, with English as the increasingly dominant tongue. French would not even rule supreme in Paris.[1011]

What remained of the original SI in Paris was by 1962 a Franco-Belgian *cellule*. Gearing up to become the anti-colonial revolutionary movement of the future, SI was then neither Situation-ist nor Inter-National, only Franco-centric.[1012] And yet it is this

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[1009] Karen Kurczynski, 'Red Herrings: Eccentric Morphologies in the Situationist Times', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *Expect Anything, Fear Nothing* (Copenhagen, Nebula, 2011), 131.

[1010] Wark, 116.

[1011] From 1961 De Jong actually lived in Paris, and yet she produced *The Situationist Times* in English (according to 'A Maximum of Openness: Jacqueline de Jong in conversation with Karen Kurczynski', in (ed) Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, *Expect Anything, Fear Nothing* (Copenhagen, Nebula, 2011), 184.

[1012] This would change. Throughout the 1960s, but especially after 1968, SI spread across Europe and the Atlantic. It even influenced political artists in Francophone Africa. As the artist Vincent Meessen has shown, situationist practices and theories were moulded to the local context in Dakar and Kinshasa.

later SI, which Stewart Home's has called the Specto-Situationist International,[1013] that has largely defined its meaning. Normative geographies die hard.

[1013] Home, 41.

Epilogue. The International and the Dialogue: Jorn and Debord 1962-1967

"*Alla kände i luften att landet var på väg att ömsa form. Omvärlden krävde att det skulle bli modernare, gå över till höghus och snabbluncher och stormarknader. Det var det egentliga syftet med femte republiken. Den skulle inte ge sig förrän Paris var en storstad som andra, det mänskligt överlägsna undantaget kunde inte tolereras i de nya strukturerna.* [Everyone could sense that the country was beginning to morph. The rest of the world demanded it become more modern, adopt skyscrapers, lunches on the go, and supermarkets. That was the Fifth Republic's real purpose. It would not give up until Paris had become a metropolis like others. Such a magnificent living exception could not be tolerated in the new structures.]" (Carl-Henning Wijkmark)[1014]

From 1957 to 1961 the Situationist International was a network of artist and theorists across Europe. Critical of the postwar socio-economic reconstruction in western Europe, SI's branches shared a wish to perform an alternative to the guiding ideology. They wanted to construct their own 'situation'. In contrast to the instrumental imperatives that drove 1950s modernization, such a performance would be ludic. It was meant both to start a conversation rethinking how to employ the new technologies and unforeseen prosperity that marked these decades and to turn the SI members who engaged in such a pursuit together into one cross-continental community.

Though the ludic situation was never constructed, the international was. And SI's mode of existence was negotiation: the various national branches argued over SI's project at its annual conferences and in its journal. In this way SI fulfilled its project of opening a space for critical dialogue about the received ideas of the time period. One of SI's most significant achievements was the continental extension of this dialogue; its greatest artwork was the performance of its network.

[1014] Carl-Henning Wijkmark, *Sista dagar* (Stockholm Norstedts, 1986), 267. In French translation, *1962* (1987). (The novel has not been translated into English.)

This did not mean that all opinions in the international dialogue was equally valued. As a network on an art scene structured by a geographical hierarchy, SI had a periphery and a hinge. Its continental communication was wired through Paris. As the primary mediators and translators, the Paris-based members' played the determinative role for defining and positioning SI's project. But it was once the peripheries offered their take on how aesthetic experiments could respond to the techno-political developments that SI became a participatory international. If a shared wish to rethink the imperatives of their time united the international, a federated structure allowed it to harbor different, locally informed perceptions of what was alienating and how such alienation could be suspended.

But spread out across Europe, the network was vulnerable to political changes. In the early 1960s, the intensification of the war in Algeria called for anti-imperial positions in Paris that sidelined the international's dialogic practices and ludic project. Many original members left and the remaining international split into two: one tightly knit group around Debord in Paris that entertained an increasingly restricted perception of SI praxis and another without center that allowed for a range of aesthetic practices to be called situationist.

In this epilogue, I will examine the main post-1961 texts by the international's two founders in light of SI's trajectory: Debord's *La Société de Spectacle* (1967) and Jorn's *Naturens ordning* (1962) and *Ting og Polis* (1963). The different way in which these texts position a participatory project with regard to the question of inter-nationality shed light on their positions within SI. Both Debord and Jorn thought that the space for a

critical dialogue prompted by ludic art was threatened in the 1960s. But their responses to this challenge differed: while Jorn quit the international to start a new organization in Denmark, Debord rethought the ideal praxis of a metropolitan SI. When doing so in an organization without substantial input on praxis from outlying nodes, Debord disregarded international differences. He described a 'spectacle' that was all-encompassing. Its planetary scale and leveling effect propelled him to discount any situationist aesthetic practices. In contrast, Jorn remained attuned to the international diversity within Europe. By elaborating on various historically anchored political ideal-types, he identified the extant friction between the continent's regions. This allowed him to preserve a space for contestatory art.

The Council and the Spectacle

"[*Le spectacle*] *est le soleil qui ne se couche jamais sur l'empire de la passivité moderne.* Il recouvre toute la surface du monde *et baigne indéfiniment dans sa propre gloire.*" (Debord, 1967, my emphasis)[1015]

Theoretically, Debord espoused a dialogic organizational practice. "*Je n'ai jamais voulu, jusqu'ici, jouer personnellement le jeu de l'organisation unitaire et hiérarchisée*," he told Jorn in 1962, a year after the Dane had left the international. "*C'est assez effrayant de voir Estivals* [who had written a work on the postwar Parisian avant-garde], *avec sa lourdeur 'sociologique' … m'attribuer le buts d'Isou - ou ceux de Breton - avec seulement un plus grand réalisme, ou plus de modernisme. Mais c'est entièrement faux*."

[1015] Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* (Paris, Gallimard, 1992) 21. From now on, I will make running references in the text.

He praised "*la formation de l''I.S. dont l'expérience m'a tant apporté en théorie et en pratique*."[1016]

This did not change as the 1960s progressed. Debord continued advocating for the possibility of non-coercive dialogues and a participatory organizational practice. What he thought was vanishing in 1960s society was the space that allowed for such practices. Modern society was preventing its citizens from disputing its course.

In his 1967 *La Société de spectacle* (in translation *Society of the Spectacle* (SOS)), Debord vastly expanded on his previous theories of the 'spectacle'. With the concept of the 'spectacle', he now described a modern society that had seen many of the techno-political trends SI opposed become dominant. What had previously been lived directly now faced the implicit inhabitant of this society as a foreign spectacle. The way in which society represented itself followed its own logic. Its self-representation had become autonomous of the praxes of society: "*Le spectacle ... est le mouvement autonome du non-vivant"* (SOS, 16).

The spectacle was the result and project of the current mode of production. It was "*une idéologie qui a pu retailler tout le réel sur son modèle*" (SOS, 203). It not only demanded passive acceptance; it had already assured itself of this acceptance by precluding any problematizations: "*l'attitude qu'il exige par principe est cette acceptation passive, qu'il a déjà en fait obtenue* par sa manière d'apparaître sans réplique*, par son monopole de l'apparence*" (SOS, 20, my emphasis). The spectacle, Debord went on, "*est le contraire de dialogue*" (SOS, 23).

[1016] Debord to Jorn, 23 Aug 1962.

SOS further radicalized the argument Debord had presented at Lefebvre's seminar at the CNRS in 1961. The room for what had been SI's project was now even more restricted. The spectacle occupied the entirety of social life (SOS, 39). It could have no real interlocutors, only illusory ones: "*le spectacle est le discours ininterrompu que l'ordre présent tient sur lui-même, son monologue élogieux. C'est l'auto-portrait du pouvoir*" (SOS, 26).[1017]

Before SOS's publication, Lefebvre had also updated his take on what had happened in postwar society. Recent developments had brought to light how the status quo was reproduced through what he described as "the ultimate pleonasm: obsessive repetition in the flimsy, artificially sustained and illusory guise of permanent renewal, stagnation beneath the mask of frenetic agitation, news without newness and without a new life".[1018] This obstructed for the ways in which experimental art and critical thought had tended to have an impact on society. The latter now trumped the former on its home turf: novelty. Now "the modern is tapped at source, at the moment of birth—were it possible, even during gestation—and distributed through specially dedicated commercial pipelines." The latter "form a vast apparatus spawning the 'modern', harnessing it almost before it is born and circulating it as just another consumer article."[1019]

Following Lefebvre's lead, Debord defined the spectacle as itself superficially dynamic. It represented a new kind of fluid hegemonic ideology: "*Ce que le spectacle*

[1017] The fictive interlocutors are those marked by spectacular consciousness (see 207).

[1018] Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* trans. John Moore (London, Verso, 1995) (originally published in 1961), 223-4.

[1019] Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity,* 186.

donne comme perpétuel est fondé sur le changement, et doit changer avec sa base. Le spectacle est absolument dogmatique et en même temps ne peut aboutir réellement à aucun dogme solide" (SOS, 65). As ideology the spectacle was not an 'architecture'. It could not be pinned down. It had neither a place nor a name (SOS, 204). It was merely self-evident: "*Le spectacle se présente comme une énorme positivité indiscutable et inaccessible*" (SOS, 20).

And yet, at the most basic level, the spectacle was an image of the current configuration of economic relations. What appeared to be dynamic was that this image changed in step with these relations. In fact the spectacle encouraged such shifts. "*Dans le spectacle, image de l'économie régnante, le but n'est rien, le développement est tout*," Debord contended. "*Le spectacle ne veut en venir à rien d'autre qu'à lui-même*" (SOS, 21).

This undercut the possibilities for resistance. The endlessly repeated but forever shifting spectacle wore its spectators down. Debord warned that "*plus [le spectateur] accepte de se reconnaître dans les images dominantes du besoin, moins il comprend sa propre existence et son propre désir*" (SOS, 31). The spectacle collapsed the hopes for the future into the appearances of the present, expectation into experience, because it mediated all social relations through images of itself (SOS, 16). And such images could not be 'détourned'. The spectacle "*est ce qui échappe à l'activité des hommes, à la reconsideration et à la correction de leur oeuvre*" (SOS, 23). A negative praxis was buried under the crushing weight of positive fact (SOS, 204).

Along with his aspirations for situationist art went Debord's commitment to an International. Though he expressed to Jorn in 1962 how formative the experience had

been to the construction of an international, five years later Debord did not have the creation of a diverse international in mind. It had been the institutional recognition of national differences, through a federated structure, that had made the international participatory. There was no space for the recognition of such differences now. Because the spectacle was so totalizing, Debord only needed to deploy abstract nouns when depicting the current social developments: the evolution of the 'spectacle' merely occurred within 'society'. With the exception of the vague distinction between a diffused and a concentrated spectacle, between, presumably, the western and the eastern blocs, the spectacle came without geographical markers. This was of course part of the point: "*cette puissance d'homogénéisation est la grosse artillerie qui fait tomber toutes les murailles de Chine"* (SOS, 163). It was planetary. It was the result and project of *one* mode of production. According to Debord in 1967, the alienation caused by the dominant ideology was the same for everyone. The spectacle had erased regional differences. It had created an atomized lonely crowd everywhere by replacing horizontal with vertical relations: "*ce qui relie les spectateurs n'est qu'un rapport irréversible au centre même qui maintient leur isolement*" (SOS, 30).

The resistance to the implicit demands of the spectacle therefore could not follow the paths SI had previously beaten. The spectacle reiterated what society "*peut faire*" but refused a dialogue on what was "*possible*" (SOS, 27). In fact it removed the conditions for such a dialogue: it denied the formation of a group ("*toute communauté*") and thus of a community of critical interlocutors ("*toute sens critique*") (SOS, 28). In his 1967 book, Debord never mentioned the construction of a situation. The spectacle had made the

praxis at its Parisian root, the dérive, inconceivable. Such praxis depended on the existence of liminal spaces. Looking for overlooked affective ecologies, it was counter-cartographic. Now there was no space between the spectacle and reality, from which one could contest the former. The map and the territory now entirely overlapped: "*Le spectacle est la carte de ce nouveau monde, carte qui recouvre exactement son territoire*" (SOS, 31). Debord abandoned arts as a vehicle for the construction of a ludico-dialogic space.

As a substitute site for such resistance, Debord identified workers' councils. The 'situation' of course already had an intimate relation to councils: it became the constitutive project for the international in the aftermath of the construction of councils in Budapest in 1956. Drawing on the Dutch Marxist theorist Anton Pannekoek, Debord now argued that the council could be the site at which one could refuse the passive acceptance of the spectator. The council would not come up with solutions but "*propose de problèmes*" (SOS, 116). And the resultant dialogue would engage interlocutors; it would make them active participants of a community. SI's artistic international had been supplanted by workers' council. As Debord wrote, in such councils "*il s'agit de posséder effectivement la communauté du dialogue et le jeu avec le temps qui ont été* représentés *par l'oeuvre poético-artistique*" (SOS, 182, his stress).

The way in which the council would engender revolutionary interlocutors echoed the way in which the construction of a situation was supposed to create the avant-garde international. In the dialogue of the council, the proletariat, according to Pannekoek, comes into its own. It has its own creation as an aim. This was also the case for De-

bord's imagined community: within the dialogue of the council "*[le] produit est le producteur même. Il est à lui-même son propre but*" (SOS, 117).[1020] For Debord the council denoted less a physical space than a dialogic praxis. Such a praxis was not the attribute of a subject but its constitutive predicate (SOS, 197-200).

Universal as the spectacle it contested, this rebellion could speak to all local circumstances, and yet it would have to emerge somewhere. It would occur, Debord asserted, "*là seulement où les individus sont 'directement liés à l'histoire universelle'; là seulement où le dialogue s'est armé pour fair vaincre ses propres conditions*" (SOS, 209). By disregarding regional differences, Debord in this way upheld a historicist topography. Even without the project to construct a situation, with its close links to Paris, certain locations remained more likely to alter the direction of History than others. "*L'histoire universelle est née dans les villes*" (SOS, 169), he suggested, because "*[la ville] est à la fois concentration du pouvoir social, qui rend possible l'entreprise historique, et conscience du passé*" (SOS, 170).[1021] But not all urban areas were equally opportune sites for the coming of such a historical-insurrectionary consciousness: "*La conscience historique qui sait qu'elle a en lui [le conseil] son seul milieu d'existence peut le reconnaître maintenant non plus à la périphérique de ce qui reflue, mais au centre de ce qui monte*" (SOS, 117). This consciousness would gravitate outwards from the center.

[1020] But now Debord concedes that full dis-alienation is impossible. And yet one can create one's own alienation … (158).

[1021] "*La tendance présente à la liquidation de la ville",* he continued, "*ne fait donc qu'exprimer d'une autre manière le retard d'une subordination de l'économie à la conscience historique*" (170).

Though often seen as the culmination of SI's work, SOS ironically repudiates both parts of SI's project, the situation and the international. In fact, if juxtaposed with Jorn's post-SI texts, it could be suggested that Debord abandoned the situation because inter-nationality had faded from view. For, as we shall see, Jorn, by preserving an international framework, gave himself the conceptual tools to keep the situation.

Ting and Polis

"*Den stigende centralisering skaber i de latinske lande rigedom, mens det i de nordiske lande skaber fattigdom* [An increasing centralization creates wealth in the Latin countries, whereas it is impoverishing in the Nordic countries]" (Asger Jorn, 1963)[1022]

Theoretically, Jorn still thought that the domain of art sheltered the resistance to the dominant ideology in the 1960s. It harbored the exceptions to any rule.[1023] "*Kunsten er fest* [art is celebration]," he suggested. "*Kunsten er selve det faenomenale, og det faenomenale er det enastående* [art is that which is phenomenal, and that which is phenomenal is exceptional]" (NO, 33). As such art was the opposite of the *function*al. The artist opposes, Jorn claimed, the (State) *function*aries (NO, 35). From the perspective of the State, "*en kunstner [kan] ikke vaere en helt, selv om han er selvskrevet til at gå forst. Han må vaere noget endnu mer centralt: den impuls, der starter alt, en fjende* [an artist

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[1022] Asger Jorn, *Ting og Polis* (Copenhagen, Borgens førlag, 1963), 197. From now on, I will be making running references in the text to *Ting og Polis* as TP.

[1023] Asger Jorn, *Naturens ordning* (Copenhagen, Borgens førlag, 1962), 140. (From now on, I will be making running references in the text to *Naturens ordning* as NO.) And art's status as exception was, as we have seen that Jorn and Debord had thought, what Sartre forgot.

cannot be a hero, even if he naturally walks first in line. He is something even more important: he is the impulse that starts everything, an enemy]" (NO, 107).

This meant that artists could not have any truck with either the State or the current state of affairs: "*Den skabende elite intet kan have at gøre med magteliten, men må etablere sig som en selvstaendig statsfjendtlig organisme på lige fod med statsapparater, men strengt adskilt fra dette* [the creative elite cannot have anything to do with the power elite. It has to establish itself as an independent body that is hostile to but on an equal footing with the State apparatus]".[1024] If it acquired a vested interest in the present day, the 'creative elite' would rescind its status as counter-institution. And without it, the current state of affairs becomes the State; or to put it in Debord's terms, the map coincides with the territory. Artists ensured that a dialogue about what is valued in society and the direction of history continued (NO, 60-5). Without them, the dialogue is replaced by a monologue extolling the status quo.

If he held on to a belief in art's social importance in theory, Jorn thought that in practice the space for critical art and thought was disappearing in the 1960s. But where Debord cast this development in universal terms, Jorn related it to specific cultural traditions. We have seen how Jorn had previously identified art with the imagination and the avant-garde with the future. Expressing historical transformations, aesthetic experimentation was in society but not of society; as a group, artists had no role in this society other

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[1024] Asger Jorn, *Vaerdi og økonomi* (Copenhagen, Borgens førlag, 1962), 60. From now on, I will be making running references in the text to *Vaerdi og økonomi* as VØ.

than to refuse that its parameters were final. They were a part without a part.[1025] In *Naturens ordning* (1962) and *Ting og Polis* (1963), Jorn argued that the (non)space required for the future to be different was not available everywhere. He distinguished the European countries shaped by the political traditions of the 'Ting' from those formed by the 'Polis'. These concepts are ideal-types whose defining characteristics he traced, in ways that are sometimes hard to follow, to pre-modern states. The former emerged in northern Europe, the latter around the Mediterranean. The 'Polis' had historically been the locus of contestatory art.

The crucial factor was that within the 'Polis' a dual hierarchy of power had been handed down from history. The 'throne' there competed for power with the Church. A worldly power was opposed by a spiritual one. By taking vows of chastity and living in remote geographic locations, monks, Jorn thought, were historically those who did not partake in this world; they had constituted the social group with no part in their society (TP, 117). In modern south European societies, the roles had changed but the tension remained. The State and its functionaries were now faced by an intelligentsia. If the examples he chose are anything to go by, it was especially in France where the power elite was opposed by the creative elite: "*Etableringen af en ret holdbar modsaetning mellem 'gejstlig og verdslig magt' ... blev bestemmende for hele den framtidige franske kulturud-*

[1025] In this sense, he anticipates certain parts of Rancière's argument about how the 'sensible' is distributed. Such distribution, in the words of one Rancière interlocutor, implicitly "renders some claims, identities and possible futures recognisable while silencing others" (Kate Driscoll Derickson, 'Taking account of the part of those that have no part', *Urban Studies,* 2017, Vol 54, Issue 1, p. 45). And for Rancière, this distinction between those who are heard and seen, and those who are not, is constitutive of the order of the police. For Jorn as for Rancière, the privileged political subject are those whose identities and demands are not legible in this distribution. But to Jorn, as we will see, such a distribution belonged to what he called the Polis; it was not *the* mode of governance *as such*.

vikling [The establishment of a lasting opposition between spiritual and worldly powers became determining for all future French cultural developments]" (TP, 134). This had not become the case because the rulers had traditionally shown a relative tolerance towards the critical intellectuals and artists of Paris. It was rather, Jorn thought in a Nietzschean way, because the former had never enjoyed a monopoly on power (TP, 134).[1026]

By Polis, Jorn described a public life defined by strife (TP 181). This was a constitutive antagonism that should not be confused with what Carl Schmitt called the political. Though created by the division of the worldly from spiritual power, it was not primarily expressed in the tension between groups, and even less as an existential struggle between ethnicities. The main consequence of this antagonism was rather that a gap existed between concepts and reality, theory and praxis, form and content (TP 100; 106; 184). As we saw in chapter five, Lefebvre thought that this incompatibility was constitutive of a civilization and that it generated a continuing transformation: the gulf between nature and culture, daily life and superimposed models of stability, ensured the emergence of new 'moments' that re-formed civilization. Jorn thought that it belonged to *Latin* civilization. The latter was expressed through its life rhythms and linguistic forms. There a *coutume* was merely a *costume,* a *habitude* in reality a *habit. Un mode de vie* could, when no longer à la *mode*, be taken off and discarded (TP, 19-20). In fact, intelli-

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[1026] Though Jorn did not cite Nietzsche in *Ting og Polis,* he seems influenced by his notion of a 'will to power'. In *Naturens orden,* he pointed out, however, that the way this played out in aesthetics was not as a will to abnegation, which Nietzsche thought the slave morality of priests had imprinted on the aesthetics of his day (in the *Genealogy of Morals*) (NO, 26). For Jorn intellectuals and artists rather constituted a counter-power that engaged in the world.

gence, he quoted Montesquieu as saying, was in Latin Europe seen as the ability to break with convention (TP 23).

In Paris, this fissure had enabled artists to call traditions and hegemonic frameworks into question. For, according to Jorn, based on this gap, one could question received ideas; it opened a space for resistance to the violence of representations (TP, 103). And art was the privileged medium for resisting oppressions and thus for effecting historic change: if the point of dialectical materialism was to show that nothing lasts (NO, 100), in the 'Polis' this insight was, according to Jorn, interpreted aesthetically (NO, 7).[1027]

What was, according to Jorn, changing in the 1960s was *not* that the Fifth Republic had a State apparatus that turned out to be more inhospitable to the oppositional groups on the Left Bank than that of previous republics. Once the Algerian war ended, the case was rather the contrary. Best symbolized by Malraux's ascension to the ministry of culture,[1028] the State invited artists to take a seat at the table of worldly power. It was no longer threatened by them: when rejecting demands for him to arrest Sartre by quipping that "*on n'emprisonne pas Voltaire*",[1029] de Gaulle, by recognizing the importance to protect intellectuals, dismissed their power. As a consequence, the tension within the

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[1027] Jorn thought that the best example of the aesthetic interpretation of dialectical materialism was Sartre's (NO, 7).

[1028] Jorn often cast Malraux as *the* French author, as symbolizing the cultural conditions of France (see for example TP, 168-9). The author was some sort of eminence grise for Jorn (see Harris, 'How Language Looks: On Asger Jorn and Noël Arnaud's *La Langue verte*', *October* 141, summer 2012, 111-132).

[1029] De Gaulle quoted by Annie Cohen-Solal, 'Tracking Down a Willing and Reluctant Hero', in (ed) William L. McBridge, *Sartre Life, Times and Vision Du Monde* (London, Routledge, 1996), 209).

'Polis' was in the early 1960s disappearing (TP, 118; 182). Art could no longer be a site of resistance and a medium of change.

Such developments in the 'Polis' had far-reaching consequences for Europe as a whole, Jorn thought, because they occurred at the same time as the French State encouraged the construction of a supranational European union. Europe, Jorn suggested, had traditionally been divided into three camps: the eastern Orthodox, the Southern Latin, and the Northern Protestant camps. Though such a division was expressed in and through the different religious denominations that dominated in the respective areas, the religious denominations themselves were "*et resultat af sprogformer, der ... er udtryk for modsatte livsrytmer og som i deres dramatiske samspil har udfoldet det uhyre levende spaendingsfelt, der kaldes den europaeiske kultur* [a result of linguistic forms that express opposing life rhythms. The interaction of such different forms and rhythms have produced the site of tension called European culture]" (NO, 131-2).

Such tensions were changing in the early 1960s. Relations between the western and the eastern parts of the continent were not as strained as in the 1950s. But rather than creating an absence of geo-political hostility, the antagonism merely shifted its form. Jorn no longer thought that the central geo-political question that faced the time-period was the division between two mutually hostile camps in a bipolar world. It was the vanishing division between the southern and northern parts of the continent's western half: "En afspaendning aktualiserer en anden spaendig*, og denne ny spaendig, der i dag automatisk vokser i styrke, er modsaetningen mellem den latinske kulturkreds og resten* [a decrease in tension brings another tension to the fore, and this new tension, which today

only grows, is the opposition between the Latin cultural sphere and the rest]" (Jorn's emphasis, VØ 60).

This development had, he claimed, gone largely unnoticed. But it alarmed him, for he believed that it was the tensions caused by such intra-European diversity that had made European culture "*udganspunkt[et] for al moderne kultur i det hele taget* [the foundation for all modern culture]" (NO, 132). Both *Naturens ordning* and *Ting og Polis* are framed as pleas for tolerance of other cultural practices (NO, 1; TP 6). He wanted to ensure the continuance of two sets of differences: his own guild's in Scandinavia, and Scandinavia's in Europe.

To understand what Jorn is getting at with reference to a European tolerance of regional differences, it is useful to note that the way in which he divided Europe into three units based on their 'linguistic forms and life rhythms' is reminiscent of how Alexandre Kojève had done so a decade and half earlier. In an influential text, 'Outline of a Doctrine of French Policy' (1945),[1030] Kojève feared that all of Europe would soon be divided between two imperial blocks: the Slavo-Soviet and Protestant Anglo-Saxon empires.[1031] Such a division of the continent would quash the specificities of what he

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[1030] Kojève's article recently attracted attention again. As a counter-measure to a Eurozone increasingly run from Frankfurt, a few years ago Agamben proposed anew the creation of a Latin Union: Giorgio Agamben, 'Que l'Empire latin contre-attaque!', *Liberation,* 24 Mars 2013: http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2013/03/24/que-l-empire-latin-contre-attaque_890916 It was met with dismay and disbelief *outre-Rhin:* 'Giorgio Agamben im Gespräch: "Die endlose Krise ist ein Machtinstrument"', *FAZ,* 24 May 2013: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/bilder-und-zeiten/giorgio-agamben-im-gespraech-die-endlose-krise-ist-ein-machtinstrument-12193816.html)

[1031] Alexandre Kojève, 'Outline of a Doctrine of French Policy', trans. Eric de Vries, *Policy Review,* August & September 2004: http://www.hoover.org/research/outline-doctrine-french-policy

called the "Latino-Catholic civilization."[1032] In Europe this civilization had, Kojève claimed, two defining features. Firstly, it was imbued by Catholicism. The Catholic worldview affected everyone, even the anti-clerical free-thinkers. They expressed it in a secularized form. Thus, he argued, "Catholic Christianity … engendered … the Latin spiritual world."[1033] Secondly, this civilization shared a mentality. The Latin "mentality is specifically characterized by that art of leisure which is the source of art in general, by the aptitude for creating this 'sweetness of living' which has nothing to do with material comfort" nor with laziness.[1034] Its concern is with beauty and pleasure.[1035]

To safeguard this specificity, the Latin countries, Kojève suggested, should construct an empire of their own making.[1036] Writing just after the end of World War II, the Franco-Russian believed that Paris had to spearhead a Latin empire consisting of France, Italy and Spain (and the French colonies around the world). This was the only way to prevent France from losing its autonomous agency on the global stage and, indeed, even on the European stage, for Kojève thought that, as a culturally Protestant nation, Ger-

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[1032] Kojève, 6.

[1033] Ibid. 29.

[1034] Ibid. 10.

[1035] Ibid, 10. Kojève's position is close to Lefebvre's: "art and artists … bring something splendid to social life and praxis", Lefebvre argued without specifying where they did so. He rather confirmed Kojève's perception of a Latin position. For "art", he went on, "intensifies life and life's pleasures to the highest degree." (270)

[1036] Ibid, 27.

many would eventually gravitate towards the Anglo-American camp.[1037] Decisions over France's future would then be made in Washington and London. France needed the additional demographic weight of Spain and Italy to assert its will globally. And only de Gaulle, Kojève ultimately believed, enjoyed the stature to achieve this.[1038]

When Jorn wrote his text in the early 1960s, France had taken a different path: it had ensured its geo-political autonomy by carving out a space of its own within the western camp. France's political will had not been bent to exclusively suit Anglo-Saxon interests. Germany had not forced France, as Kojève had worried, into an Anglo-Saxon camp. The establishment of the EEC—in which Kojève had played a part, indeed that he came to support[1039]—rather proved to Jorn that France was bringing west Germany into its orbit. And this is what concerned him.

Jorn feared what he saw as the French imperial ambitions behind the construction of a West European institutional superstructure. De Gaulle was not only trying to colonize metropolitan France, as Debord had implied in 1961. The General had, Jorn thought a year later, his eyes on the rest of Europe. Having failed to keep its possessions in Africa, Paris turned its interests in a continental direction, which it articulated through Brussels (NO, 136-7).

[1037] Kojève wrote this before German division was a fact. He could not know that west Germany would be majority catholic. What is somewhat curious is that, though he evoked a link between protestantism and a focus on work, indeed of capitalism, he never mentioned Weber…

[1038] Ibid, 20.

[1039] Anderson, *New Old World,* 78.

Jorn polemicized against the possible Scandinavian entries into the nascent EEC on multiple occasions. He once tried to stage a demonstration on the highly symbolic site of Himmelbjerget at Jutland together with other, famous Scandinavian artists, such as Aksel Sandemose and Pär Lagerkvist.[1040] He wanted to refuse the six countries of the EEC the right to define what was European (NO, 136-7; TP 9). Resisting Parisian 'neo-imperial' designs was what he had in mind now too. Choosing to predominantly write in Danish rather than French after his SI exit, Jorn emphasized that he "*udsender disse tanker til et skandinavisk publikum* [relays these thoughts to a Scandinavian audience]" (NO, 94). He wanted to send them especially to a Denmark that "*er parat til at bøje sig for faellesmarkedts kulturelle krav* [is ready to submit to the cultural demands of the common market, ie EEC]" (TP, 12).[1041]

Like Kojève before him, Jorn thought that the new geo-political architecture threatened culturally specific life rhythms. But this time these rhythms were Scandinavian, and the imperial superstructure Latin. In Scandinavia, the ideal-typical form that expressed such rhythms was not the 'Polis'. It was the 'Ting', the governing assemblies of the Nordic tradition.[1042] The society formed by these assemblies was less hierarchical than that governed by the Polis (TP 19; 134). It did not have to bolster the legitimacy of

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[1040] 'Nordiske digteres røster vil igen lyde fra Himmelbjerget', *Aften-posten,* 11. nov. 1961.

[1041] As de Gaulle famously blocked a North European expansion in the 1960s, precisely because he feared that the UK's inclusion would move its center of gravity away from France, Jorn would just barely live to see Denmark's entry into the EEC together with the UK and Ireland in 1973. He died the following year.

[1042] Though Jorn is here elaborating on an ideal-type, it should be noted that the name of the national parliaments in Denmark, Norway and Iceland, and the parliaments of Sapmi, Greenland, the Faeroe and Åland islands, reference the 'ting'.

its present order through a recourse to a transcendental source (TP, 140). Power was not a foreign imposition. In fact, in Jorn's rendition, the 'Ting' comes across less as a political body that imposed decrees onto society than a regulative ideal outlining how to make consensual decisions.

In the 'Ting', power flowed in a horizontal direction. The assemblies were self-constitutive and self-legislative. Their laws were binding promises rather than coercive measures. Suspiciously like the pledge in Sartre's groups, such legal promises came into effect when those they concerned declared a belief in them.[1043] What Sartre had called the 'mediating third' was internal to the 'Ting'. By relating the word 'Ting' to be-*tinge* [create], and *be-tingelser* [conditions], Jorn argued that the Ting creates its own conditions (TP 21). There mutually agreed upon conventions provided the conditions for social life. But rather than referencing the 'totalizations' of Sartre's *Critique,* he looked for expressions of such tendencies in early Scandinavian history, in Nordic mythology, and, more recently, in art and thought. In the latter, which had now taken the place of the extra-Scandinavian references in Jorn's thinking, he identified a specific kind of Nordic humanism.

A Nordic humanism helped Jorn to continue advocating for the production of a plastic, forever morphing, social topology that had previously been within the remit of SI. Underlining that he did not break with a situationist intellectual universe, he based this on

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[1043] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* trans. Alan Sheridan Smith (London: Verso, 2004), 417-428. While he does not mention Sartre's attempt in his *Critique* to synthesize Marxism and existentialism in *Naturens ordning* (NO, 1-8), there are certain concepts that are central to Sartre's *Critique* that Jorn adopted in his later texts without attributing them to Sartre, such as dialectical monism and the mediating third.

analysis situ (NO, 15). But the latter now revolved around Scandinavian concepts and thinkers: rather than 'détournement', he evoked a specific kind of Scandinavian 'vandalism' when he spoke of praxes in which something is de-contextualized and then re-contextualized in a way that sheds new meaning on it (TP, 5-30); and Niels Bohr's definition of an experiment took the place of Huizinga's game, even though, to Jorn, both expressed a kind of experiment the experience of which changes the experimenting person (NO, 16; 56).

Jorn had first shown an interest in a Scandinavian aesthetic and intellectual tradition during the German occupation of Denmark. Together with the other contributors to the underground journal *Helhesten,* he had wanted to wrest Nordic culture from the Nazi embrace. This had not changed. Ever since the war ended he had stressed the motives of dissymmetry, labyrinths, and ornaments in Scandinavian folk culture, which he thought related to a Middle Eastern tradition.[1044]

But more clearly than before Jorn now contrasted the existence of such motives within Scandinavian culture to the "*klassiske centraliserede symmetri*" (NO, 138) that formed the dominant aesthetic tradition of France. He thought the latter expressed the political practices of the Polis. Behind the aesthetic symmetries hid the hierarchical systematization of its politics (NO, 138). "*Latinsk udvikling*," he wrote, "*må arbejde i det centraliserede symmetriske strukturering, mens vi i den nordiske kultur er bundet til den dissymetriske struktur* [Latin development works within a centralized, symmetrical struc-

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[1044] For a good example how he links these, see Asger Jorn, 'Poesins väg. Fragment ur en artikel av målaren Asger Jorn' *Byggmästaren* (Stockholm, 1951, årg. 30, nr. 4, pp. 55-60.

ture, whereas in Nordic culture, our development is dependent on a dissymmetrical structure]" (TP 195-6).

While laying claim to a Nordic aesthetic heritage, the Nazis, Jorn thought, defied the practices expressing such a heritage. Though it hardly featured an independent counter-power of artists and intellectuals, their polity was, he argued, run according to the ideal-type of the Polis. In it power flowed vertically from its summit (TP, 162-7). An extreme case, the Nazi State instrumentalized all of life. Culture was no exception. "*Den nazistiske mytologi*," Jorn contended, "*... var kun et instrument og en kulisse* [the Nazi mythology was only an instrument, a Potemkin village]" (TP, 175). Jorn wondered if the Nordic mythology was in his day seen as *the* central feature of Nazism because the Nazi governing practices impressed the West European administrative elites: the focus on mythology allowed these elites to detach a Nazi techno-rationality from its role in the Holocaust and other warcrimes (TP 192-4). Though he never conflated Nazi practices with those of any postwar west European States, with his Polis ideal-type he nonetheless did evoke the specter of total instrumentalization.

If one of the points of Debord's SOS was to show that, as the ruling ideology now mediated every relationship, the discrepancy between expectation and experience had disappeared—which implied that the 'situation' could no longer be constructed—Jorn did not want to give up. He went looking for the negative moment of contemporary developments in Danish theology. He invoked both Kierkegaard and Grundtvig (NO 15). For Jorn, Kierkegaard was somewhat surprisingly an aesthetic thinker: "*Alt, hvad ... Søren Kierkegaard ... har skrevet, er blot aestetik, genial aestetik* [Everything that Søren

Kierkegaard wrote was confined to aesthetics, brilliant aesthetics]."[1045] That is because, Jorn defined aesthetics as that which breaks causalities (NO, 113-5). It refuses laws, be they of socio-economic developments or of natural science.[1046] Interested in the truth of faith, Kierkegaard likewise rejected the scientific definition of truth. He believed that truth had to be witnessed, because it was a miracle that could not be deduced from previous experience. It was a singular event that disrupted the time-honored order of things (NO, 120-3). Such a belief made Kierkegaard, Jorn thought, the first to interpret the world in aesthetic terms. He lay the foundation for an artistic attitude to life in which forms were never fixed, always in trans-formation (NO, 123).

While Kierkegaard allowed Jorn to continue elaborating on his long-running argument about the plasticity of all forms but with Nordic references, Grundtvig enabled him to propose an alternative site to the Parisian avant-garde for practicing this theory. Thanks to Grundtvig, he could this time situate the counter-institution in a popular context. If less famous than Kierkegaard internationally, Grundtvig, who was also a 19th

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[1045] Jorn, *Held og hasard,* 152.

[1046] Already in his 1952 *Held og hasard,* Jorn wrote that "aestetikken [er] identisk med spillet, ekspirementet, eller legen, [den] er tilfaeldighedens virke i det lovbundne [aesthetics is identical to the game, the experiment or playing, it is the work of chance in a universe bound by laws]" (Jorn, *Held og hasard,* 55).

century theologian, had a greater impact on Danish society.[1047] A cultural nationalist,[1048] he founded *folkhøjskolen.* This was a higher institution of learning for adults that did not grant degrees. Spreading throughout Scandinavia, these schools, based on a belief in life-long learning, did not educate according to the instrumental needs of the polity. They were guided by Grundtvig's ideal of *folkeoplysning,* a sort of enlightening formation within the populace as a whole.

Folkhøjskolen provided the model based on which Jorn wanted to re-situate the avant-garde after it had lost its traditional role as the counter-institution of the Polis (NO, 52-5). "*Une résolution a été prise*," SI's Gothenburg conference noted, "*pour le dé-tournement créatif d'une 'université populaire' du Danemark*" (IS 7, 49). Still wanting to re-create the Bauhaus he was too young to join in the 1930s, Jorn's *folkhøjskole* would mix theoretical art with aesthetic experiments (NO, 154). The school would not teach a systematized body of knowledge. He was keen to point out that it was not a

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[1047] Until the 20th century, he was also the more famous theologian of the two. In the 19th century, Kierkegaard's main reception was artistic in Scandinavia: his text influenced the likes of Strindberg, Ibsen, and Edward Munch rather than the Churches of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. It was not until German theologians started taking Kierkegaard's thought seriously in the early 20th century that he came to over-shadow Grundtvig. But the spread of the thought of some of the main German-speaking interlocutors of Kierkegaard, such as Karl Barth, were even then actively discouraged. In spite of Barth's impeccable war-time record, his dialectical theology was accused of being 'Nazi' (for an overview of this, see https://www.svd.se/gustaf-wingren-en-stridbar-och-omstridd-teolog).

[1048] Interestingly, Jorn questioned Grundtvig's cultural nationalism just after the end of the war ('Le livre à l'étranger: Panorama littéraire du Danemark', in, *Le Livre. Revue génerale de l'édition* (Paris juli/aug. 1948, nr. 3, p. 48-9). At that point, such standpoints were too closely associated to the Nazi project. Now he worked to rehabilitate an anti-racist Grundtvig. He contrasted "Hitlers formel 'verdensmagt eller ruin [Hitler's formula: world domination or ruin]'" to Gruntvig's "almenmenneskelige humanisme [universal humanism]" (TP, 170).

university.[1049] In fact, it would refuse any attempt at systematizing. Based on Niels Bohr's 'law of incoherence', it would rather insert dissymmetries (NO, 10-1). In a time of automated attention spans, its aim would be to enthuse; it would offer *begeistring* to the people (NO, 140).[1050] Rather than a dumb-downed "*kunst till folket* [art to the people]," he wanted to create a "*kunstnerisk folk* [artistic people]."[1051] For Jorn the origins of creation were popular.

This became the basis for Jorn's Scandinavian Institute of Comparative Vandalism (SICV). Established at Silkeborg, Jutland in 1961, Jorn engaged scholars from the university in Lund and the national museum in Copenhagen, and Gérard Francesci, an art photographer from Paris.[1052] He wanted to produce more than two-dozen volumes on Nordic folk art that would be available at every local library in Scandinavia.[1053] These would isolate details, such as ornaments, from their context and then compare them across historical epochs and cultural traditions. Such transversal links would *vandalize*

[1049] Jorn was very critical of artists who taught at universities. At the last page of his copy of Sartre's *Question de méthode* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), he wrote that "*L'art dans son développement historique n'a jamais rien en [eu?] a faire avec l'université. En plus c'est le development totalisante de l'universalisme intellectuelle et anti-intellectuelle qui est arrivé au presque-étouffement du developement* [sic] *de l'art. Si les artistes acceptera cette soumission de l'art à l'argen[…*illegible*] universitaire ils risquera eux même la condamnation à mort de l'art.*"

[1050] As someone who has understand both the fact that artworks enthuse, and that they do so especially in the Nordic tradition, Jorn named Dufrenne (NO, 140)! The theory of the phenomenologist did not, however, always meet as welcoming of a reception from Jorn: at the archive of the Jorn museum, Jorn's copy of Dufrenne's *Esthetique et philosophie* had '*con'* written largely in a chapter in which Dufrenne wanted to distinguish technology from aesthetics.

[1051] Jorn, 'Kunsten for folket eller et kunstnerisk folk?', *Information,* 17 august, 1964

[1052] They were initially P.V. Glob and Werner Jacobsen from the national museum; Holger Arbman from Lund.

[1053] Jorn, 'Kunsten for folket eller et kunstnerisk folk?', *Information,* 17 august, 1964

the compartmentalization of art history. Only one volume was published when the project lost momentum in the mid 1960s.[1054]

At first Jorn's reason for funding SICV appears to contradict its project. In the Scandinavian tradition whose existence he wanted to ensure, his project had no place. Power was not divided in the 'Ting'. As Jorn recognized, ever since the Reformation, Scandinavia had not been structured by dual power hierarchies. It lacked the tension between the spiritual and the worldly powers that granted oppositional aesthetics a (non)space in Latin Europe. There was no gap between the individual and convention from where a resistance could be mounted. As a consequence it was not a sign of intelligence to break the rules. It was a sign of lunacy. In the 'Ting', rules were internalized and deviations pathologized (TP 20-3). The exception to the rule was illegitimate and abnormal, not beautiful. The culture of the 'Ting' demanded of content and form to coincide.[1055] This restricted the room for critical thought in northern Europe. There all

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[1054] This was Jorn's and Francesci's *Signes Gravés sur les églises de L'Eure et du Calvados* (published in 1963 in Copenhagen, and in 1964 in Paris). It explores the links between the Nordic bronze age and graffiti in the churches of Normandy (see Niels Henriksen, 'Asger Jorn and the Photographic Essay on Scandinavian Vandalism', *Inferno*, Volume VIII, Article 5, 2003). Troels Andersen has since attempted to fulfill Jorn's project.

[1055] On this note, Jorn evoked a difference between a Latin civilization and a Germanic culture. But he did not mobilize these terms – like many nationalist German intellectuals did before the Nazi era – to put his weight behind a spiritual Germany against a supposedly materialist France. He arguably got the terms from Lefebvre, who used them in 'La Théorie de moments'. And he deployed them to show that Nazi Germany had been structured by the State principles of the Polis, and that many of its leading operators had hailed from southern Germany and Austria. With their help, he tried to rescue a democratic Nordic tradition from a Nazi German embrace.

claims had to be proven and ideals to be practiced (TP 96; 100; 184). No one was without a part in society.[1056]

But when establishing SICV Jorn did not confine its purpose to a national context: SICV was an institutional response to the recent political developments in Europe. Jorn had not only wanted to broadcast the specific values of the Ting in an attempt to refuse the EEC, which was based on the model of the 'Polis', the right to define European culture; SICV was meant to do more than merely protect specifically Scandinavian life rhythms and linguistic forms from being squashed into a 'Latin' geo-political architecture. Through the SICV Jorn tasked a Nordic humanist tradition with filling the vacancy left by Parisian oppositional practice. SICV would "*på kunstnerisk basis … skabe en verdslig gejstlighed, som intet har med sociale magter at gøre* [on an artistic basis create a worldly spirituality that had nothing to do with the powers that be]" (TP, 125). And, *Signes Gravés sur les églises de L'Eure et du Calvados* (1963), the only work it ever produced, was in French!

Though located in Denmark and drawing on a Scandinavian tradition, SICV was Jorn's suggestion of how historic changes could happen in contemporary Europe. As the French State had co-opted Paris artists and intellectuals, the oppositional standpoint had to come from the parts of western Europe still outside of the EEC's institutional framework. Launched from Scandinavia, Jorn wanted SICV to provide the missing (non)space

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[1056] This meant that change happened differently in Scandinavia than in southern Europe. Within polities whose government was informed by the regulative ideals of the 'Ting', aesthetic experimentation, the source of change in the 'Polis', had no role. Ethical consistency took its place. If dialectics was in France thought of as an aesthetic programme for the future, it was, Jorn claimed, in Scandinavia interpreted as an ethical doctrine for contemporary life (NO, 7-8). Radicalism was not about playing with and criticizing conventions, but to live according to one's ideals and to compromise with others. Reformism came naturally (NO, 7-8).

of the Polis—hence its name: just as the vandals had attacked southern Europe from the North during the fifth century, so too artistic vandals would disrupt the dominance of the south in the twentieth.[1057] "*Meget af det nyeste*," he contended, "*har netop sin første kilde i det nordiske, selv om disse kilder aldrig samlede sig til floder hos os selv* [Much of what is modern has the Nordic as its source, but the confluence of such sources can never be Nordic]" (TP, 91). For "*Polis*," he went on, "*[er] rammen om den kunstneriske blomstring. Det er tinget ikke* [the Polis is the framework in which art can grow. The Ting is not]" (TP, 122).

Jorn's sympathies lay neither with a Latin European tradition nor with a Nordic humanism in themselves. He advocated in favor of a Scandinavian political tradition that rejected him and his project in order to ensure the continuance of intra-European differences, which was currently threatened by the expansion of the EEC, because it was the discord between the life rhythms of the different parts of the continent had made Europe the crucible of modernity. Though he did not always stay clear of essentialist tropes and figures, Jorn's overarching project was to provide an alternative perspective to the current juncture, not to glorify any one cultural tradition.

Drawing on his own experience as a continental net-worker, Jorn outlined the conditions under which an international could exist and have a political impact after France had granted Algeria independence and refocused its energies on Europe. Here we should remember that, in its first rendition, SI had not been, like the EU, a product of

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[1057] Unsigned article, 'Skandinavisk institut for sammenlignende vandalisme', *Aften-Posten,* 9 nov. 1961. Jorn elaborates on the vandals as a source for cultural change, rather than as barbarians, in TP 6-14.

French modernization but a response to it. Even if the members responded differently to such modernization, their project could unify an international as long as this remained the case. When no longer so, due to a qualitative shift in the modernization of France, the co-operation dissolved. As when he was part of SI, Jorn believed that it was in Paris where a resistance to the dominant ideology could produce a more modern alternative. But right now such an alternative depended upon the ability to bring a peripheral perspective to the metropole. What was needed was an insertion of alterity from outside of the Six. The Ting is less an essentializing glorification of Scandinavia than an attempt to find ways to ensure that the current state of Europe would not be its end state.

Though one cannot reduce the meaning of Jorn's SICV texts to merely reflecting his life, they do have an autobiographical thrust. They are the expression of a critical thinker and experimental artist whose trajectory had led him in and out of international organizations over the past two decades. Like Debord, he believed that such cooperations had a larger social significance and that their practice was dialogic: "*[Den skabende kunst] arbejder for og i et almenmenneskeligt broderskab, som ikke betyder enighed* [the creative arts work for and through a universal fraternity that is not characterized by agreement]," but strife (TP, 197).

But it was with the 'Ting' that he now posited an ideal organizational practice. And this suggests where Debord and Jorn differed. Still living in Paris, Debord expanded upon his suggestion that the Fifth Republic colonized everyday life: an all encompassing spectacle had now all but erased the space for participatory practice everywhere. To counteract it, SI only needed a metropolitan core. Jorn, who belonged to the metropole

and the peripheries, entertained the idea that historic changes occurred differently across Europe and that one should capitalize on such regional divergence. Instead of finding that a disappearing space for art in France blocked changes in Europe as a whole, he thought that this development called for international collaborations. But, he stressed, "*Kun* mellem *nationer kan man tale om noget internationalt* [one can only speak of internationality if referring to the relation between nations]" (TP, 197, his emphasis).

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