

Theses on the Situationist International and Its Time

By Guy Debord¹

1

In a moment of universal history, the Situationist International imposed itself as the thought of the *collapse of a world*, a downfall that has now begun under our very eyes.

2

The French Minister of the Interior and the federated anarchists of Italy share the same rage: in a period that seemed so hostile to its existence, such an extremist project has never affirmed its hegemony in the struggle of ideas (itself the product of the class struggle) in so short a time. The theory, the style, and the example of the SI have today been adopted by thousands of revolutionaries in the principal advanced countries – but, more profoundly, it is the totality of modern society that seems to have convinced itself of the truth of situationist perspectives, whether to realize them or to fight against them. Books and texts published by the SI have been translated and commented upon everywhere. Its demands have been posted in Milan factories as well as in the University of Coimbra. From California to Calabria, from Scotland to Spain, from Belfast to Leningrad, its principal theses are being spread around anonymously or have been proclaimed in open struggles. For their part, those submissive intellectuals who are currently beginning their careers find themselves obliged to disguise themselves as moderate or demi-situationists. If nothing else, they aim to show through this that they are equipped to understand the final moments of the system that hires them. If the widespread influence of the SI can be denounced everywhere, it is because the SI itself is nothing more than the concentrated expression of a historical subversion that is *everywhere*.

3

What are known as “situationist ideas” are merely the first ideas of the period of the reappearance of the modern revolutionary movement. What is radically new about them corresponds exactly to the new characteristics of class society, to the real development of its temporary successes, its contradictions, and its oppression. For the rest, it is certainly revolutionary thought – the thought that has been born in the past two centuries, the thought of history – which has *come into its own* in the current conditions. It has in no way been *revised* from its former positions, which have been bequeathed to the ideologues as a “problem”; rather, it has been *transformed* by modern history. The SI has only succeeded by expressing “the real movement that surpasses existing conditions” and by *knowing how to express it*. In other words, it has known how to make its own unknown theory² understood from the subjectively negative

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² “Chotard! Now do you understand that you are a shithead and a political wimp? [...] Will you understand that there is no theory and practice other than that of the proletariat itself, that a theory is situationist to the extent that situationists expose its moments and data? [...] Those who think that theory is an assemblage of concepts, namely, their own, can only stand in opposition to other people’s ‘concepts.’ Should their propaganda and their lies succeed with the masses, they would always wonder how such a phenomenon could ever have been brought about. They

aspect of the process, from its “bad” aspect. This aspect of social practice, although initially unaware of it, creates this theory. The SI itself belonged to this “bad aspect.” Finally, it is not a question of a theory *of the SI*, but of the *theory of the proletariat*.

4

Every moment of this historical process of modern society that realizes and abolishes the world of the commodity and that also contains the anti-historical moment of society *constituted as a spectacle*, has led the SI to be *everything that it could be*. The SI must arrive at a better recognition of its truth in the process of social practice and in the moment that is now manifesting itself as a new era; it must know what it wanted, what it accomplished, and *how* this was accomplished.

5

The SI did not only witness the arrival of modern proletarian subversion, it *arrived with it*. It did not announce this subversion as an exterior phenomenon, by means of a frozen extrapolation of scientific calculation: it went to meet it. We have not put our ideas “in everyone’s mind” through some unknown influence, as only the bureaucratic-totalitarian spectacle can do and without any lasting success. We have exposed the ideas *there were necessarily already there* in these proletarian minds, and, in exposing them, we have contributed to making such ideas active, as well as to rendering the critique in acts more theoretical and more determined to make its time out of time. What was at first *censored* in people’s minds was naturally also censored by the spectacle, when it was able to express itself socially. Today, this censorship is definitely being exercised over almost all of the revolutionary project and over revolutionary *desire* among the masses. But theory and criticism in acts have already created an unforgettable opening in spectacular censorship. The *repression* of the proletarian critique has come to light; it has acquired a memory and a language. It has embarked upon the *judgment of the world* and, since the dominant conditions have nothing with which to plead their case, the sentence only poses the problem that it must resolve: its execution.

6

Since it had generally arrived within the pre-revolutionary moments of modern times, the SI openly proclaimed its goals – and almost everybody wanted to believe that it was all a joke. The silence that was maintained about this by the specialists of social observation and the ideologues of workers’ alienation for a dozen years (a very short period on the scale of such events) – however disturbed it may have been towards the end by the reverberation of several scandals, which were wrongly considered as peripheral and without a future – had not prepared the false consciousness of the submissive intelligentsia to expect or to understand what erupted in France during May 1968, which since then has only deepened and broadened.³ At this time, the

would never know to whom they could attribute their success, nor even what this success is [...] Nobody will be surprised if the proletariat comes to realize theory, as long as this theory implies the conscious transformation of the world. Chotard won’t be surprised if that happens, within limits. But what shocks him is that the proletariat is realizing situationist theory and not his own.” Juvenal Quillet and Schumacher, *History of the Council of Nantes*, Nantes, June 1970.

³ “At the beginning of 1968, a critic who dealt with situationist theory mockingly called to mind ‘a glimmer that wanders vaguely between Copenhagen and New York.’ Alas, the little glimmer became that same year a holocaust that has arisen in all the citadels of the old world. [...] The situationists have uncovered the theory of the underground movement that torments the modern age. While the pseudo-inheritors of Marxism forgot the role of the

demonstration carried by history (and certainly not by situationist eloquence) destroyed, on this point and many others, the conditions of ignorance and false security maintained by the spectacular organization of appearances. The only way for one to prove his correctness dialectically is by manifesting himself in the *moment of dialectical reason*. Just as it immediately assembled its partisans in the factories of every country, the occupations movement immediately appeared as incomprehensible as it was terrifying to the masters of society and their intellectual executors. The propertied classes are still trembling, but they understand it better now. At first this revolutionary crisis presented itself solely in the form of pure thoughtless negation to the dim consciousness of the specialists in power. The project that it expressed, the language that it used, were untranslatable for these managers of *thought without negation*, impoverished to the nth degree by several decades of mechanical monologue. Here, inadequacy only imposes itself upon them as a *nec plus ultra*; the lie has reached the point where it can only believe in itself. To those who reign in and by means of the spectacle – in other words, with the practical power of that mode of production that has “detached itself from itself and has built itself an independent empire within the spectacle” – the real movement that remained exterior to the spectacle and that managed to disturb it for the first time presents itself as unreality realized. But the same revolutionary movement that was speaking so clearly in France at that moment had already begun to manifest itself everywhere else. The French branch of the Holy Alliance of society’s owners initially saw its imminent death in this nightmare; then, it deemed itself to be safe for all time; finally, it oscillated between these two errors.⁴ *Another time* began, for its associates as well as for the Holy Alliance itself. It was discovered that the occupations movement, unfortunately, had a great deal of ideas, and that these ideas were situationist: even those who were ignorant of these ideas seemed to determine their positions with them in mind. The exploiters are once again counting on containing these ideas, but they are despairing of ever forgetting them.

7

The occupations movement was the outline of a “situationist” revolution, but it was only an outline in terms of the practice of a revolution and in terms of a situationist consciousness of history. At this moment a generation began to be situationist on an international level.

8

The new era is profoundly revolutionary, and it *knows that it is*. On every level of modern society, *nobody can* and *nobody wants to* continue as before. Nobody can peacefully manage the course of things from the top any longer, because it has been discovered that the first fruits of the *supersession of the economy* are not only ripe, but they have, in fact, begun to rot. At the base, nobody wants to submit to what is going on, and the demand for *life* has now become a

negative in a world swollen with positivity and simultaneously relegated the dialectic, whose language, whose ‘insurrectional style’ [the situationists] once again found.” François Bolt, “The Situationists and the Cannibalist Economy,” *Les Temps Modernes*, No. 299-300, June 1971.

⁴ “A seizure of consciousness (and of speech) that takes its source from the intellectual (and practical) activities of a minority of insolent but lucid rebels: the Situationist International. Now, by an apparent paradox whose secret belongs to history, the SI has remained practically unknown in our country for the past ten years. That is something that could very well justify Hegel’s reflection, ‘All important revolutions that strike our eyes must be preceded in the spirit of the age by a secret revolution, which is invisible to most and even less noticeable to its contemporaries, and which it is as difficult to explain verbally as it is to understand.’” Pierre Hahn, “The Situationists.” *Le Nouveau Planète*, No. 22, May 1971.

revolutionary program. The secret of all the “wild” and “incomprehensible” negations that are mocking the old order is the determination to make one’s own history.

9

The world of the commodity, which was *essentially* unlivable, has become *visibly* so. This knowledge is produced by two mutually reactive movements. On the one hand, the proletariat wants to possess its entire life, and to possess it *as life*, as the totality of its possible realization. On the other hand, the dominant science, the science of domination, is now calculating the precise, constantly accelerating growth of internal contradictions that suppress the *general conditions of survival* in the society of dispossession.

10

The symptoms of revolutionary crisis are accumulating by the thousands, and their seriousness is such that the spectacle is now *obliged to talk about its own ruin*. Its false language evokes its real enemies and its real disaster.⁵

11

The language of power has become frantically reformist. It shows nothing but well-being in every store window, all sold at the best price; it denounces the ever-present defects of its own system. The owners of society have suddenly discovered that everything has to be changed without delay, in teaching as in urbanism, just as thoroughly in the way work is lived as well as in technological orientation. In short, this world has lost the confidence of all its governments; they then propose to dissolve it and constitute another. They only observe that they are more qualified than revolutionaries to undertake this overthrow that requires such experience and such incredible means, which they justly possess and, therefore, which they are accustomed to using. Look at them, wearing their hearts on their sleeves, those regulators who shoulder the obligation of programming the qualitative, and those managers of pollution whose first task they have assigned themselves is to lead the struggle against their own pollution. However, confronted with the old defeats of the revolution, modern capitalism had previously presented itself as a reformism *that had succeeded*. It prided itself on having achieved this liberty and this commodity well being. One day, it hoped to succeed in delivering its paid slaves, if not from salaried work, then at least from the abundant remains of deprivation and excessive inequality inherited from its formative period – or, more precisely, from those deprivations that it saw fit to recognize as such. Today, what’s more, it promises to deliver them from all the new perils and displeasures that it is precisely engaged in mass-producing, as an essential characteristic of the most *modern* commodity taken in its entirety, and it is the same expanding production, touted so highly up until now as the ultimate cure-all, which will have to correct itself, always under the exclusive control of the same bosses. The discomfiture of the old world appears fully in this ridiculous language of *decomposed domination*.⁶

⁵ “*Society of the Spectacle* . . . has led the discussion of the entire ultraleft since its publication in 1967. This work, which foreshadowed May 1968, is considered by many to be the *Das Kapital* of the new generation.” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 November 1971.

⁶ “What strikes me about the ads of today is the extent to which the language they use has been superseded. It antedates the great fissure which since 1968 has been zigzagging through society, and which has been more or less concealed in the underbrush. [...] Advertizing must integrate the problems of civilization if it really wants to be useful, in other words, not to content itself with short-term selling, but to fortify the consumer at the medium and long-term rates. [...] Motivational research techniques – I was the first to introduce them into France – have given us

Customs improve. The meaning of words participates in it. *All respect for alienation is lost everywhere*. Youth, workers, people of color, homosexuals, women, and children dare to want everything that has been *forbidden* them; at the same time, they refuse a large part of the miserable results that the old organization of class society permitted to be acquired and supported. They want no more bosses, no more family, no more State. They criticize architecture and learn how to speak to each other. And in opposing a hundred individual oppressions, they are in fact opposing alienated work. The *abolition of wage labor* is now on the order of the day. Every area of a social space that has been increasingly fashioned by alienated production and its planners today becomes a new terrain of struggle, from primary schools to public transportation, psychiatric asylums, and prisons. All the churches are decomposing. Amidst general hilarity, the curtain is falling on the old tragedy of the expropriation by the bureaucratic class of the workers' revolutions, which in the last twenty years has been played as a simple exotic comedy. The clowns are bidding farewell in their own styles. Castro has become a reformist in Chile, while staging a parody of the Moscow trials back home, after condemning the occupations movement and the Mexican revolt of 1968, while applauding the actions of Russian tanks in Prague. At the very moment when its remaining faithful Western spectators, bourgeois and leftist alike, had heralded the culmination of its triumph in the long struggle that had divided the exploiters of China,⁷ the burlesque two-headed gang of Mao and Lin Piao has fallen back into the terrorist disorder of this bureaucracy that has been smashed to bits (it was in no way a question of dealing with or refusing to deal with the United States, but only of finding out *who* would receive Nixon in Peking along with his aid). If humanity can separate itself so joyously from its past, it is because what is *serious* has returned to the world with history itself, which reunifies it in its truth. No doubt the crisis of totalitarian bureaucracy, as an aspect of the general crisis of capitalism, is investing itself with specific qualities, as much through the particular socio-juridical modes of the appropriation of society by the bureaucracy constituted as a class, as through its definite retardation in the development of commodity production. The bureaucracy has its place in the crisis of modern society primarily because it is the proletariat that will destroy it. The threat of proletarian revolution, which has dominated all bourgeois and Stalinist politics in Italy for three years and which entails the open association of their common interests, is simultaneously weighing on the so-called Soviet bureaucracy. Delaying the hour of the workers' uprising is the *only real concern* of its global strategy – which dreaded most the Czechoslovakian events and hardly flinched at the independence of the Romanian bureaucracy – as well as of its policemen and psychiatrists. Along the Baltic coast, the sailors and dockworkers have already begun to communicate their experiences and their projects to each other again. In Poland, through the insurrectional strike of December 1970, the workers succeeded in making

the means for a thorough knowledge of the consumer, but in general these techniques are only used to construct a mode of speech that still possesses a unique meaning. Tomorrow's advertising will be obliged to enter upon the path of genuine communication, in which each of the two interlocutors receives the other's influence, and becomes aware of it, in a dialogue in which the weapons are as equally matched as possible." Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet, *Le Monde*, 9 December 1971.

⁷ "Already the warlords are reappearing under the uniform of independent 'Communist' generals, directly negotiating with the central power, and carrying on their own politics, particularly in outlying regions [...] It is the worldwide dissolution of the bureaucratic International that is being reproduced on the Chinese scale at this moment, in the fragmentation of power into independent provinces. [...] The mandate from Proletarian Heaven has run out." *Internationale Situationniste* #11, October 1967.

the bureaucracy totter and in once again reducing the margin for action of its economists; the price increase had been rolled back, wages were increased, the government fell, and the agitation remained.⁸ But American society is decomposing just as rapidly, and this decomposition has reached into its army in Vietnam. This “drug army” has to be withdrawn because its soldiers no longer want to fight, and they will fight in the United States. Wildcat strikes are going on all over Europe, from Sweden to Spain, and now the industrial bosses or their newspapers are trying to teach the workers a lesson by persuading them of the usefulness of unionism. In these “bacchanals of truth in which no one remains sober,” the British proletarian revolution will not fail to keep its appointment this time; it will be able to drink at the source of the civil war that has up until now marked the return of the *Irish question*.

13

Among the exploiters, and among many of their victims who have definitively renounced their own lives in according a neurotic acquiescence to the ruling order, the decline and fall of this order are being felt with anguish and fury. On the individual level, these emotions are manifested in a fear and hatred of youth that have been pushed to an unprecedented level. But deep down inside, they are only afraid of the revolution. Youth, as a passing stage, is not what is threatening the social order; it is, rather, the modern revolutionary critique in acts and theory that is increasing every year and taking off from a historical point of departure that we are now living through. It begins momentarily among youth, but *it will never grow old*. The phenomenon is in no way cyclical; it is cumulative. When its agitation still seemed linked to the student milieu, youth never struck fear into anyone. Certainly, it was there that neo-bureaucratic leftism – that nursery of the old world in which one disguises oneself in the panoply of several hero-fathers who in fact rank among the fathers of existing society – found its recruiting ground. Youth became a force to reckon with when it was ascertained that subversion had reached into the masses of young workers, and that the hierarchical ideology of leftism would not recuperate it. This youth is being shoved into prisons, and it is rebelling in the prisons. Even though there remains a lot for it to understand and invent, and even though it preserves a lot of backward qualities, it is a fact that never before has youth been *so intelligent*, nor so determined to destroy the established society (the *poetry* that is in the SI can now be read by a 14-year-old girl, and on this point Lautréamont’s wish has been gratified). Those who repress youth wish in reality to defend themselves against the proletarian subversion with which youth is largely identifying, and with which youth will come to identify even more. Even those who make this equation recognize how much this condemns them. The panic inspired by youth, which so many want to conceal under so many inept analyses and pompous exhortations, is founded on their simple calculation: in only 12 or 15 years from now, young people will be adults, adults will be old, old people will be dead. The representatives of the power-holding class thus have an absolute need to reverse the

⁸ “Just one remark, comrades. I hope that Comrade Gierek is truly announcing a new day. In this case, we have to support it. How? By speaking. Because telling the truth is our only weapon. Lies are worthless to us. We must continue to direct the discussions in this direction. The workers know quite well that two currents have formed in our ruling classes. Both of them are squabbling. If the current that led the old politics regains ground, then we strikers will all get put away.”

“I would like to answer Comrade Gierek when he says that we have to save our money, that money with us is precious. We are aware of that. It’s our blood that’s in it. But we can get money from those who are living too well. To put it in a nutshell, comrades, our society is divided into classes.”

The interventions of two delegates from the A. Warski departments of naval dockworkers of Szczecin, Poland, 24 January 1971 (published in *Gierek confronted by the Szczecin Strikers*, Éditions S.E.L.I.O., Paris, 1971).

gradual decline of their rate of control over society in a very short time; and they have every reason to believe that they will not reverse it.

14

While the old world of the commodity is disputed by the proletarians on a level that their critique had never before reached, the level that is alone capable of suiting their ends (a critique of the totality), the functioning of the system has itself entered upon the path of its self-destruction in its own movement. The *crisis of the economy* – in other words, of the entire economic phenomenon – a crisis that has become more and more obvious in recent decades, has opened up a qualitative threshold. Even the old form of the simple *economic crisis*, which the system succeeded in overcoming (it is well known *how*), has reappeared during the same period as a possibility in the near future. This is the effect of a dual process. On the one hand, the proletarians, not only in Poland but in England⁹ or in Italy as well, in the guise of workers who are breaking out of the union framework, are imposing wage demands and working conditions that are already seriously disturbing the forecasts and decisions of the Statist economists who manage the progress of concentrated capitalism. The refusal of the current organization of work in the factory is already a direct refusal of the society that is founded on this organization, and in this respect several Italian strikes broke out the morning after the bosses had accepted all the preceding demands. But even a simple wage demand, when it is renewed with enough frequency and whenever it fixes a sufficiently high percentage of increase, clearly shows that the workers are becoming conscious of their misery and of their alienation in the *entirety* of their social existence, for which no wages can ever compensate. For example, once capitalism has arranged the suburban living areas for the workers to its satisfaction, the latter will soon be led to demand that their laborious hours of daily transportation be paid in a manner commensurate with what these hours actually are: a real *time of labor*. In all these struggles that recognize salaried work, unionism itself must still be accepted in principle; however, it is only accepted as an apparently poorly adapted form that is constantly *left behind*. But the unions cannot last indefinitely in such a socio-political conjunction; and *they are aware that they are washed up*. In the speeches of bourgeois ministers and Stalinist bureaucrats, *the same fear* finds the same words: “I’m asking, is it going to start all over again like it did in 1968? And I answer: no, it must not begin again” (Declaration of Georges Marchais at Strasbourg, 25 February 1972). On the other hand, the proletarians of the society of commodity abundance, in the guise of consumers who are disgusted with the poor quality “semi-durable goods” with which they have long been saturated, create ominous difficulties for the progress of production. Thus, the only avowed goal of the current development of the economy, which is effectively the only condition for survival of all within the framework of the system dependent on commodity work – the *creation of new jobs* – leads this enterprise to create jobs that the workers no longer want to take upon themselves, in order to produce the increasing amount of goods that they no longer want to buy. But the comprehension that the commodity economy, with that very technology whose development is inseparable from

⁹ “It is clear that the miners have won an almost total victory [...] Fully acting within legal limits, the strikers succeeded in blocking the deliveries of coal that had already left the mines, as well as the deliveries of substitute fuel destined for the thermal centers [...] The pay raises granted vary between 15 percent and 31 percent and are therefore far higher than the ceiling of 8 percent that the government had succeeded in imposing on the wage demands of the public and private sectors [...] In short, the government hopes to save its wage policy anyway, but qualified observers find it hard to see how Mr. Heath will now be able to resist the railway workers, bus drivers, teachers, and hospital workers, whose demands are along the line of 15 to 20 percent and sometimes even higher.” *Le Monde*, 20-21 February 1972.

its own, has *gone into agony* must be grasped on a far more profound level. The recent appearance within the spectacle of a flood of moralist speeches and promises for direct remedies concerning what governments and their mass media call *pollution*, wishes to conceal that evidence which it is simultaneously forced to reveal: capitalism has finally proven that *it can no longer develop the productive forces*. It has not shown itself incapable of pursuing this development *quantitatively*, as many have deemed to understand it, but, rather, *qualitatively*. Quality, however, is here in no way a historical or philosophical demand: it is a historical question par excellence, that of the very possibilities for the continuation of the life of the species. Marx's statement – “The proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing” – finds its ultimate meaning in this moment; and the proletariat that arrives at this concrete alternative is truly the class that realizes the dissolution of all classes. “Things have therefore reached the state where individuals must appropriate the existing totality of productive forces, not only in order to affirm themselves, but, in short, to assure their very existence” (*The German Ideology*).

15

The society that has all the technical means to alter the biological bases of existence throughout the Earth is also the society that, by means of the same separated technical-scientific development, disposes of all means of control and mathematically sound prediction to measure in advance exactly what degree of decomposition of the human milieu can be produced by the growth of the alienated productive forces of class society. Identical calculations are being made with reference to *how long* this growth can last, depending upon an optimum prolongation or not. Whether it is a question of the chemical pollution of the air we breathe or of the adulteration of foodstuffs, of the irreversible accumulation of radioactivity by the industrial use of nuclear energy, or of the deterioration of the water cycle from the subterranean springs to the oceans, or of the urban leprosy that is continuing to spread out in place of what were once the town and the countryside, or of the “population explosion,” of the increase in suicides and mental illnesses,¹⁰ or of the threshold approached by noise pollution – everywhere, *partial* awareness of the impossibility of going any further (which is more or less urgent and more or less mortal according to the individual case), constitute a picture of general degradation and *general powerlessness*, insofar as they are specialized scientific conclusions that merely remain juxtaposed. This woeful overview of the map of alienation just before its engulfment is naturally accomplished in the fashion that the territory itself was constructed: by separate sectors. No doubt these recognitions of the fragmentary are forced to recognize from now on, through the unfortunate accordance of all their observations, that every efficient short-term modification of a determined point collides with the totality of the forces at work and can ultimately lead to a more decisive loss. However, such a science, the servant of the mode of production and limitations of the *thought* that it has produced, cannot conceive of a true reversal of the course of things. It does not know how to *think strategically*, which nobody asks it to do anyway; no more does it possess

¹⁰ “In twenty years (1950 to 1970), the annual statistics of mental patients have quadrupled throughout France; at the current rate, in the Parisian area, one-quarter of all long-term hospitalizations are motivated by these disorders [...] Such an increase, discovered in analogous proportions in all the so-called industrialized countries, from all evidence does not seem to be the effect of any kind of rapid hereditary degeneration of their citizens. No more is it due to a measurable progress in the means of thwarting mental disorders, as is the case in other areas of pathology [...] The role of psychiatrists is to anticipate or treat mental disturbances. It is not concerned with remedying these collective disorders for better or worse, since these disorders have been caused not by individual troubles but by the inadequacy of social structures to the temperaments of the majority of mankind.” Dr. Escoffier-Lambiotte, *Le Monde* 9 February 1972.

the practical means of intervening in it. It can only talk about its expiration, and about the best palliatives that would postpone this expiration if they were firmly applied. Thus, this science shows to the most ridiculous degree the uselessness of knowledge without means of use and the nullity of nondialectical thought in an era carried away by the movement of historical time. Thus, the old slogan “Revolution or Death” is no longer the lyrical expression of consciousness in revolt; it is the *last word of the scientific thought of our century*. But this word can only be spoken by others, and not by that old scientific thought of the *commodity*, which reveals the insufficiently rational bases of its development at a moment when all its applications are deployed in the strength of a fully irrational social practice. It is the *thought of separation*, which has only been able to increase our material mastery through the methodological paths of separation, and which in the end recovers this separation accomplished in the society of the spectacle and its self-destruction.

16

The class that monopolizes *economic profit*, having no other goal than to preserve the dictatorship of the independent economy over society, has up until now had to consider and direct the incessant multiplication of the productivity of industrial work as if it were always a question of the *agrarian mode of production*. It has constantly pursued the maximum of purely quantitative production, in the manner of ancient societies that, since they were themselves effectively incapable of ever extending the limits of real penury, had to reap *everything that could be reaped* every season. This identification with the agrarian model is expressed in the pseudo-cyclical model of the abundant production of commodities in which the *wear and tear* of produced objects, as well as their spectacular image, has been consciously integrated. This is done in order to maintain artificially the *seasonal character* of consumption, which justifies the incessant renewal of productive effort and maintains the proximity of penury. But the *cumulative activity* of this production, indifferent to use or injury (and in fact indifferent to its own power, *which it wishes to ignore*,¹¹ has not allowed itself to be forgotten and returns in the form of pollution. Pollution is therefore a sickness of bourgeois thought, which totalitarian bureaucracy can only poorly imitate. It is the supreme stage of *ideology materialized, effectively poisonous commodity abundance*, and the real, miserable foundations of the illusory splendor of spectacular society.

17

Pollution and the proletariat are today the two concrete aspects of the *critique of political economy*. The universal development of the commodity has been completely verified as the realization of political economy, in other words, as “renunciation of life.” At the moment when everything has entered the sphere of economic goods, even spring-water and the air of towns, everything has become *economic sickness*. The simple immediate sensation of “nuisances” and dangers that become more oppressive as the months go by, and that initially and principally assault the great majority of people (the poor, in other words), already constitutes a major factor

¹¹ “The victory of the autonomous economy must at the same time be its defeat. The forces that it has unleashed suppress the *economic necessity* that formed the immutable base of ancient societies [...] But the autonomous economy separates itself forever from profound need to the very extent that it emerges from the *social unconscious* that depended on it without knowing it [...] At the moment when society discovers that it depends on the economy, the economy, in fact, depends on it. This subterranean power, which has increased to the point of appearing in an extreme form, has also lost its power.” *Society of the Spectacle*.

in revolt, a vital demand of the exploited that is just as *materialistic* as was the struggle of the workers in the 19th century for the possibility of eating. Already the remedies for the totality of the sickness that production creates are too expensive for it at this stage of commodity richness. The relations between production and the productive forces have finally reached a point of radical incompatibility, because the existing social system has bound its fate to the pursuit of a literally unbearable deterioration of all the conditions of life.

18

This admirable coincidence appears with the new era: revolution is desired in a total form at the very moment when it can only be accomplished in a total form, and when the totality of the functioning of society becomes absurd and impossible outside that accomplishment. The basic fact is not so much that all the material means exist for the construction of a free life in a classless society; rather, it is that the blind under-employment of these means by class society can neither interrupt itself nor go any further. Never in the history of the world has such a conjunction existed.

19

The greatest productive force is the revolutionary class itself. The maximum development of the productive forces now possible is, quite simply, the use that the *class of historical consciousness* can make of it, in the production of history as the field of development, by endowing itself with the practical means of this consciousness: the future revolutionary councils in which the totality of proletarians will have everything to decide on. The necessary and sufficient definition of the *modern* council is the *fulfillment of its minimum tasks*, and this definition is required in order to differentiate the councils from their weak and primitive beginnings that were always crushed before they could follow the logic of their own power, and hence to recognize it. These minimum tasks are nothing less than the definitive practical settling of *all* the problems that class society is currently incapable of resolving. The brutal downfall of *prehistoric* production, which only the social revolution of which we are speaking can bring about, is the necessary and sufficient condition for the beginning of an era of great historical production; the indispensable and urgent renewal of the production of man by himself. The abundance of the current tasks of the proletarian revolution is accurately expressed by the difficulty it confronts in conquering the initial means of formulating and communicating its project: organizing itself in an autonomous manner, and through this determined organization, understanding and explicitly formulating the totality of its project in the struggles in which it is already engaged.¹² On this central point, the last wall will topple; the whole world resembles Poland in the spectacular monopoly of social dialogue and analysis. When the workers can assemble freely and without intermediaries to discuss their real problems, the State begins to dissolve. The following negative fact also makes it possible to decipher the force of the proletarian subversion that has been increasing everywhere during the last four years: it remains on a far lower level than the open revolutions that proletarian movements *that did not go as far* were once able to affirm. These movements *thought* they recognized their programs, but they recognized them as the *least* programs. The proletariat is in no way led to be “the class consciousness” by some intellectual talent or some ethical vocation, nor for the pleasure of realizing philosophy, but simply because in the last analysis there exists no solution other than to possess history in the era when men find

¹² “This theory expects no miracles from the working class. It envisages the new formulation and realization of proletarian demands to be a long-term task.” *Society of the Spectacle*.

themselves “forced to consider the conditions of their existence and their reciprocal solutions with undeceived eyes” (*The Communist Manifesto*). That which will make the workers *dialecticians* is nothing other than the revolution that at this time they will have to conduct themselves.

20

In *The Origins of Leftism*, Richard Gombin states that “what recently were considered marginal sects are now taking on the aspect of a social movement,” which in any case has already shown that “organized Marxism-Leninism” is no longer the revolutionary movement. Gombin thus refuses to group the neo-bureaucratic repetitions, from the numerous brands of Trotskyism to the different kinds of Maoism, under his highly inappropriate term “leftism.” Although he shows himself to be very friendly to the various semi-critiques that at one time were blurted out by the submissive intelligentsia of the last thirty years, Gombin hardly finds anything outside the Situationist International¹³ in his analysis of the origins of the new revolutionary movement, with the exception of the return of the Pannekoekist tradition of council communism. Although “its great ambitions already deserve mention,” the current subversion, according to Gombin, is certainly not assured of making itself the mistress of world society. He considers that the contrary results might very well be produced, i.e., the absolute perfection of the “era of management,” in such a way that this subversion can only appear historically as a final upsurge of vain revolt against “a universe that is tending toward the rational organization of all aspects of life.” But since it is easy to declare everywhere else (excepting Gombin’s book) that, despite its fine intentions and its deceitful justifications, this universe has only followed the path of rampant irrationalization, which is culminating in the current asphyxiation – the final alternative that this sociologist [Gombin] formulates has nothing in common with reality. If one studies such subjects, one could hardly be more *moderate* than Gombin, and only the malady of the times has been able to constrain sociology to take up such studies. Still, Gombin clumsily manages to leave his readers with no other possible solution than an audacious assurance of the ineluctability of the victory of the revolution.

21

When all the conditions of social life change, the SI, standing at the center of this change, discovers that the conditions in which it has acted are being transformed faster than the rest. None of its members could ignore this, nor ever thought of denying it, but in fact many of them did not want to *touch the SI*. They did not even make themselves the conservers of past situationist activity, but of its *image*.

¹³ “But [the situationists] do not pretend to make the only decent analysis of Marx; in reality, they are ‘superseding’ Marx, and they are not Marxists in the current sense of the word [...] The radicalism of this conception can be perceived; the break with the entire left wing movement of this half-century that they are effecting confers on it a millenarian, heretic status [...] Since the mid-Sixties, if not before, the situationists have predicted and announced ‘the second proletarian assault on class society’ [...] The style that they have elaborated, which has attained remarkable cohesion, summarizes certain processes of Hegel and the young Marx, such as the inversion of the genitive (weapons of criticism, criticism of weapons), and of Dadaism (rapid-fire delivery, words used in a meaning different from their classical meaning, etc). But it is above all a style that is penetrated with irony [...] Just before the month of May 1968, the situationists believed that the decisive historical moment was approaching [...] During the course of the ‘events’ of May-June 1968, the situationists found occasion to apply their ideas in depth as well as organizationally, initially in the first occupation committee of the Sorbonne, and finally in the Committee for the Maintenance of the Occupations (CMDO).” Richard Gombin, *The Origins of Leftism*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1971.

An inevitable part of the historical success of the SI led it in turn to be *contemplated*, and, through such contemplation, the uncompromising critique of all that exists came to be *positively appreciated* by an ever-broadening sector of impotence that had become pro-revolutionary. The negative force that was set in motion against the spectacle found itself slavishly admired by spectators *as well*. The past conduct of the SI had been completely dominated by the necessity of acting in an era that at first *did not want to have itself talked about*. Surrounded by silence, the SI had no support, and many elements of its work were to a certain extent constantly *recuperated* against it. It became necessary for it to reach the moment when it could be judged, not “by the superficially scandalous appearance of some of the activities through which it manifests itself, but by its *essentially scandalous* truth” (IS #11, October 1967). The calm affirmation of the *most general* extremism, as well as the numerous exclusions of inefficient or indulgent situationists, were the weapons of the SI in *this* fight, a fight that was not waged in order for the SI to become an authority or a power. Thus, the tone of incisive pride that was frequently adopted in many forms of situationist expression was legitimate; above all because it fulfilled its purpose in permitting the immense task to be pursued and carried out. But it stopped being convenient as soon as the SI had made itself known to an age that no longer considers its project to be completely improbable,¹⁴ and it is precisely because the SI had succeeded in this that this tone became *outdated*, for us if not for the spectators. Doubtless the victory of the SI seems to be as debatable as the victory that the proletarian movement has already attained by virtue of its renewal of the class war. The visible part of the crisis that is emerging in the spectacle is disproportionate to its *depth*, and along with this victory, that of the SI will always be *held in suspense* until prehistoric times have passed from the scene. But for those who “listen to the grass growing,” the SI’s victory is also *indubitable*. The SI’s theory has penetrated the masses. It can no longer be liquidated in primitive solitude. Certainly it can still be falsified, but under very different conditions. No historical thought can dream of guaranteeing itself in advance against all incomprehension or falsification. Since it already does not pretend to bring to bear a definitively coherent and worked-out system, it would be even less possible for it to present itself for what it is in such a perfectly rigorous manner that stupidity and bad faith would be forbidden among everyone who had anything to do with it, and in such a way that a universal lesson would be imposed upon everyone. Such an idealist pretension can only support itself through a dogmatism that is always already doomed to defeat, and dogmatism is always already the inaugural defeat of such thought. Historical struggles, which correct and improve any theory of this kind, are equally the terrain of reductive interpretative errors such as, frequently, selfish refusals to admit even the most obvious meaning. Here truth can only impose itself by becoming a practical force. It only demonstrates that it is a truth insofar as it only requires the least practical forces to set even greater ones into motion. Thus, if the SI’s theory can now be often misunderstood or improperly translated, as has sometimes happened with the theory of Marx and Hegel, it will know how to return in all its authenticity on every occasion when its time arrives historically, beginning with today. We have left the era when we could be falsified or eradicated *without recourse*, because our theory is now benefiting, for better or for worse, from the *collaboration* of the masses.

¹⁴ “When one reads or re-reads the issues of the SI’s review, it is certainly striking to see at what point and how often these *fanatics* have made judgments or exposed viewpoints that were eventually concretely verified.” Claude Roy, “The Desperadoes of Hope,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 February 1971.

23

Now that the revolutionary movement is everywhere alone in undertaking to speak seriously about society, it must find *in itself* the war that it had previously carried on unilaterally on the fringes of social life by initially appearing as completely foreign to all the ideas that society could then pronounce on what it believed itself to be. When subversion invades society and broadens its specter throughout the spectacle, the spectacular forces of the present also manifest themselves within the interior of our party – “a party in the eminently historical sense of the term” – because it has had to take charge effectively of the totality of the existing world, including its weaknesses, its ignorance, and its alienations. It inherits all poverty, including intellectual poverty, which the old world has produced, because poverty is ultimately the *old world's true cause*, even though it was necessary for it to support such a cause with grandeur.

24

Our party enters the spectacle as its enemy, but as an enemy that is now *known*. The former opposition between critical theory and the apologetic spectacle “has raised to the victorious upper element and presents itself there under a clarified form.” Those who *only contemplate* today's revolutionary ideas and tasks, and particularly the SI, with the fanaticism of a pure, disarmed approval, principally manifest the fact that at the moment when the ensemble of society is forced to become revolutionary, a vast sector *does not yet know how to be revolutionary*.

25

Enthusiastic spectators of the SI have existed since 1960, but at first in a very small number. In the past five years, they have become a multitude. This process began in France, where they received the popular appellation of “pro-situ,” but this new “French disease” has reached many other countries. Their quantity does not multiply their emptiness: all of them made it known that they completely approved of the SI and did not know what else to do. They remain the same even after becoming numerous: if you've read or seen one, you've read or seen them all. They are a significant product of modern history, but they produce nothing in return. The pro-situ milieu *apparently* represents the theory of the SI that has become ideology – and the passive vogue of such an absolute and absolutely useless ideology confirms *in absurdo* the evidence that the role of revolutionary ideology was realized with the bourgeois forms of revolution. But in reality this milieu expresses that part of real modern opposition that has *still* had to remain *ideological*, the prisoner of spectacular alienation, and only *informed* according to its own terms. The pressure of history has today increased to the extent that the bearers of an *ideology of historical presence* are forced to remain perfectly *absent*.

26

The pro-situ milieu possesses nothing but its good intentions, and it wants to engage in illusory consumption of the profits, simply by expressing its *extravagant pretensions*. In the SI this pro-situ phenomenon was unanimously disapproved to the extent that it was seen as an *external* inferior imitation, but not everybody understood it. Pro-situism must not be recognized as a superficial and paradoxical accident, but rather as a manifestation of a profound alienation of the *most inactive* sector of modern society that was becoming vaguely revolutionary.¹⁵ We had to

¹⁵ “The pro-situ regression was considered as an aberration, as the refuse of a movement, a gossip-clique, and never as what it really was: the qualitative weakness of the *ensemble*, a necessary moment in the global progress of the revolutionary project. *Situationism* is the crisis of youth of situationist practice that has attained the *decisive* moment

recognize this alienation as a real *infantile disorder* of the appearance of the new revolutionary movement – first of all, because the SI, which can in no way be external or superior to this movement, was certainly not able to hold itself above this kind of deficiency and could not pretend to avoid the critique it needed. On the other hand, if the SI were to keep on continuing as before in other circumstances, it could have become the last *spectacular ideology* of the revolution, and it could have excused such an ideology as well. The SI would then have risked hindering the *real situationist movement*: the revolution.

27

The contemplation of the SI is only a supplementary alienation to alienated society, but *the mere fact that it is possible* explains inversely the fact that the SI currently constitutes a real party in the struggle against alienation. To understand the pro-situs – in other words, to combat them – was a prime necessity for the SI; it did not limit itself to sneering abstractly at them for their nullity and because they were not privy to the situationist aristocracy. At the same time, we had to understand how this image of the situationist aristocracy could have been formed, and which *inferior stratum* of the SI could have satisfied itself by externally endowing itself with this appearance of hierarchical valorization, which only came to it as a *title*. This stratum had to be a nullity enriched by the mere *diploma* of its membership in the SI. Such situationists not only manifestly existed, but revealed by experience that they wanted nothing more than to persevere in their *certified insufficiency*. They kept company with the pro-situs, but by defining themselves as hierarchically quite distinct from them, in that egalitarian belief that defined the SI as a monolithic ideal in which everyone thinks about everything from the start and just like everybody else, and, indeed, acts on it to perfection. Those people were the very people who neither thought nor acted in the SI, but they still claimed to possess such a mystical decree, and they were the ones whom the pro-situ spectators were hoping to approach. All those who scorn the pro-situs without understanding them – beginning with the pro-situs themselves, each of whom wanted to affirm himself as highly superior to everyone else – simply hope to make people believe, as they do, that they were granted salvation by some *revolutionary predestination*, which would absolve them from proving their own historical efficiency. Participation in the SI was their Jansenism, and the revolution was their “hidden God.” Thus sheltered from historical practice, believing themselves to be kept apart from the poverty of the other pro-situs by who knows what favor granted by the world, they only saw poverty in this poverty, instead of seeing there as well the derisory part of a profound movement that will ruin the old society.

of its first important, extensive development, the moment at which it must practically dominate the spectacle that is seizing it [...] This comfortable installation in the positive characterizes the *situ role*; indeed, the more effective the objective place of the SI in current history became – and it will be the same for all revolutionary organizations – the more perilous its heritage became for each of its members to bear [...] May 1968 was the realization of modern revolutionary theory; its weighty confirmation, as it was partly the realization of the individuals who participated in the SI, notably by virtue of the revolutionary lucidity to which they gave proof in the movement itself. But the occupations movement remained the conclusion of the SI's long practical research, without being its supersession [...] When the situationists, who plainly served as a model for the current that they supported, practiced their own self-examination by engaging in an ‘orientation debate’ that had to disengage the superior modalities of their existence, the satellite groups, a hundred steps behind, constituted themselves solely on the inadequate basis of a practice limited by several certainties that derived from the SI's previous existence.” *For the Intelligence of a few Aspects of the Moment*, anonymous pamphlet, Paris, January 1972.

28

The pro-situs did not see in the SI a determined practical-critical activity explaining or advancing the social struggles of the age, but simply extremist ideas; and not extremist ideas so much as the idea of extremism; and, in the last analysis, not so much the idea of extremism as the image of extreme heroes gathered together in a triumphant community. In “the work of the negative,” the pro-situs fear the negative, as well as work. After having arrogated the thought of history unto themselves, they remain desiccated because they understand neither thought nor history. In order to attain the affirmation of an autonomous personality, which greatly tempts them, all they lack is autonomy, personality, and the talent to affirm anything.

29

The pro-situs have learned en masse that revolutionary students can no longer exist, and yet they remain *students of revolution*. The more ambitious among them realize the necessity of writing and even publishing their writings, in order to publicize abstractly their abstract existence, believing that this is the way to be somewhat consistent. But in this area, it is necessary to have read something in order to know how to write, and it is necessary to know how to live in order to read: and that is what the proletariat must learn from one operation alone in the revolutionary struggle. However, the pro-situ cannot envisage real life with a critical eye, because the whole point of his attitude is to effect an illusory flight from his distressing life, trying to conceal it and especially trying vainly to mislead others on this matter. He must postulate that his conduct is *essentially* good, because it is radical – ontologically revolutionary. With regard to this crucial imaginary guarantee, he *shrugs off* a thousand circumstantial errors or comic deficiencies. At best, he only recognizes them as the *result* that, to his detriment, has been brought about. He consoles and excuses himself by affirming that he will never make such mistakes again and that, on principal, he will never cease to improve himself. But he is left powerless when confronted with his ensuing mistakes – in other words, with the practical necessity of understanding *what* he is doing *when* he is doing it: evaluating conditions, knowing what one wants and chooses, what will be the possible consequences of this and how best to master them. The pro-situ will say that he wants everything, because in reality he despairs of ever attaining the least real goal, and he wants nothing more than to publicize the fact that he wants everything, hoping that someone will immediately admire his assurance and his good will. He needs a totality that, like him, is devoid of all content. He ignores dialectics because in refusing to see his own life he refuses to understand *time*. Time scares him because it is made up of qualitative leaps, irreversible choices, and opportunities that will never return. The pro-situ despises time as a simple uniform space that he will traverse, constantly enriching himself, from mistake to mistake and deficiency to deficiency. The pro-situ detests critical theory whenever it is blended with concrete facts – hence, whenever it has an effective existence – because he is always afraid that it applies to his own case. Every *example* horrifies him, because he only really knows his own, and that is what he wants to conceal. The pro-situ wants to be original by reaffirming what he has recognized as henceforth evident along with so many others. He has never dreamed about what he could do in various original situations that are themselves always original. The pro-situ, who swears by the repetition of certain generalities, calculating that his mistakes will be less precise and his self-critiques immediately easier, treats the problem of organization with special predilection. He does so because he is searching for the philosopher’s stone that could accomplish the transmutation of his well-deserved solitude into a “revolutionary organization” that will be useful

to him. Since he doesn't know what it's all about, the pro-situ only sees the progression of the revolution to the extent that it *concerns itself with him*. Thus, he generally believes it necessary to say that the May movement has "ebbed" since its occurrence. But, all the same, he likes to repeat that the age is becoming more and more revolutionary, so that people might believe that he resembles it. The pro-situs erect their impatience and their impotence as criteria of history and revolution; and thus they see almost nothing going on outside of their well-insulated hothouses, where nothing really changes. In the last analysis, all the pro-situs are dazzled by the SI's success, which for them is indeed quite spectacular, and which they bitterly envy. Naturally, all the pro-situs who have tried to reproach us have been so ill-treated that they finally find themselves constrained to reveal, even subjectively, their true nature as *enemies of the SI*; but it all comes down to the same thing, because they do not remain in this new position for very long. These toothless curs would certainly like to discover *how* the SI could have done what it did, and to discover if the SI were not somehow *guilty* of having supported such a passion in the first place; and then they use the recipe for their own profit. The pro-situ, a *careerist* who knows that he has nothing, is led to proclaim from the outset the total success of his ambitions, postulating that they were attained the very day that he devoted himself to radicalism. The most pinheaded fuck-up will assure everybody that he has known everything there is to know about festivals, theory, communication, debauchery, and dialectics for several weeks now; all that he needs is a revolution to realize his good fortune to the full. He thereupon begins to await an admirer who never shows up. The particular form of bad faith that reveals itself in the eloquence through which this walking platitude shows off can be noted here. First of all, he speaks of revolution the most whenever he is least practical; whenever his language is deadest and most tight-fisted, he pronounces the words "lived" and "passionate" most often; whenever he demonstrates the most infatuation and vain opportunism, he always has the word "proletariat" in his mouth. All this goes to show that modern revolutionary theory, which has to make a *critique of life as a whole*, can only be degraded into a total ideology among those who want to take it up without knowing how to practice it. This ideology leaves nothing true in any of the aspects of their impoverished lives.

30

While the SI has always known how to scoff pitilessly at the hesitations, weaknesses, and failings of its first efforts, while showing at every moment the hypotheses, oppositions, and ruptures that have constituted its history (notably by publishing in 1971 the complete edition of the review *Internationale Situationniste*, in which this process is registered in its entirety), the pro-situs, on the contrary, have constantly pretended to be able to admire the SI *en bloc*. They are wary of going into the details of confrontations and choices (which can be read about everywhere), in order to limit themselves to complete approval of everything that had occurred. And at present, even though there is something fundamentally Vaneigemist about them, all the pro-situs are bravely kicking Vaneigem when he is down, forgetting that they have never given proof of one-hundredth of his former talent; and they are drooling over violence, which they understand no better. But the slightest real critique of what they are dissolves the pro-situs by explaining the nature of their absence, for they themselves were nothing but contemplative, or, in the case of some, nearly always contemplative, and who could rejoice in sustaining a certain interest as members of the SI: at the moment when they had to leave the SI, they denounced the harshness of a world in which they found themselves forced henceforth to act *on their own*. And

in meeting with identical conditions, almost all of them rejoined the insignificance of the pro-situs.

31

When the SI initially chose to emphasize the collective aspect of its activity, and to present the majority of its texts in relative anonymity, it was because nothing of our project could really have been formulated or executed without this collective activity, and because it was necessary to prevent the designation among us of several personal celebrities whom the spectacle could have manipulated against our common goal. This succeeded because not one of those who had the means of acquiring personal celebrity, at least to the extent that he was in the SI, wanted to use these means; and because those who could have wanted to, did not have the means. Doubtless the bases of the subsequent constitution of the ensemble of the SI as a *collective spectacle* by the sitophile mystique were formed through that. However, this tactic was good, because what it allowed us to attain was infinitely more important than the inconveniences that it was able to foster at the next stage. When the revolutionary perspective of the SI was only *apparently* our common project, it was first of all necessary to defend its very possibilities of existence and development. Now that it has become the common project of so many people, the needs of the new age will find themselves – beyond the screen of unreal conceptions that cannot translate themselves into forces and even into sentences – the deeds and precise facts that the current revolutionary struggles must appropriate and verify, and which they will supersede.¹⁶

32

The truest cause of the misery of the SI's spectators does not lie in what the SI has or has not done, and even the influence of several stylistic or theoretical simplifications of situationist primitivism has only played a very minor role. The pro-situs and the Vaneigemists are for more the product of the weakness and general inexperience of the new revolutionary movement, and of the inevitable period of sharp contrast between the magnitude of the task and its limited means. The task that one takes up as soon as one really begins to approve of the SI is itself overwhelming. But for mere pro-situs, it is absolutely overwhelming – from which stems their immediate confusion. The slowness and harshness of this path creates, in the weakest and most pretentious part of the current pre-revolutionary generation, the mirage of a kind of *touristic short cut* towards its infinite goals. This part of the revolutionary generation still only knows how to think and live according to the fundamental models of the dominant society, but in different terms. As a compensation for his immobility and his *real suffering*, the pro-situ consumes the *infinite illusion* of being not only en route towards, but literally always on the threshold of entering the Promised Land of happy reconciliation with the world and with himself, where his unbearable mediocrity will be transfigured as life, as poetry, as importance. This goes to show that the spectacular consumption of ideological radicalism, in its hope of hierarchically

¹⁶ “As with hard water, the real force of situationist theory is its infiltration. Let's continue, but let's not stay in the same place. And the question of nondialectical supersession remains. Politics gives no answer. The terrain is mined. It only prolongs the question. So everything has to be begun again and that's why I am a situationist in 1971. As for being in the International: take up the subjective work of the situationists of 1957. That's the task. That's what's left of the SI [...] The SI's right, an age is over, maybe the 20th century's already over, and its 'course amounts to the best attempts so far to leave the 20th century' (IS #9). I'm convinced that the practical and theoretical distance that was installed in the last ten years between the First International and the Situationist International is the same distance that remains to be installed between the SI and what has to be done [now]. Isn't it conscious of that?”
Bartholome Behour, *On the International Superintendance of Situationists*, (Paris, August 1971).

distinguishing itself from its neighbors, and in its deception, is identical to the effective consumption of all spectacular commodities¹⁷ and, like it, is condemned.

33

Those who describe the truly sociological phenomenon of the pro-situs as something unheard of and completely unimaginable prior to the stupefying existence of the SI are quite naive. Whenever extreme revolutionary ideas have been recognized and taken up by an age, a certain sector of youth has rallied to the cause with entirely comparable enthusiasm; notably among the intellectuals and *déclassé* semi-intellectuals who aspire towards the possession of a privileged social role, a category whose quantity has been multiplied by modern teaching (while its quality has been considerably lowered). No doubt the pro-situs are visibly weaker and more unfortunate, because the demands of the revolution are more complex today, and the sickness of society is more widely felt. But the one fundamental difference between today and the periods in which the Blanquists, the so-called Marxist Social Democrats, or the Bolsheviks recruited for their respective organizations resides in the fact that formerly these types of people were marshaled and employed by a hierarchical organization, while the SI has kept the pro-situs out en masse.

34

In order to understand the pro-situs, their social base and their *social intentions* must be understood. Generally, the first workers to be inspired by situationist ideas came from the old ultra-leftist movement and were thus marked by the skepticism that follows from its longstanding inefficiency. They were initially very isolated in their factories and relatively sophisticated in their knowledge of our theories – and their knowledge remained unused, however penetrating it may have been at times. These workers could frequent (not without contempt) the infra-intellectual milieu of the pro-situs and become infected with many of its defects. But the workers who collectively discovered the perspectives of the SI since then, whether in a wildcat strike or in any other form of a critique of their conditions of existence, in no way became pro-situs. And for the rest, outside of the workers, all those who have taken up a concrete revolutionary task or who have effectively broken with the dominant lifestyle, are not pro-situs either; the pro-situ defines himself first of all by his flight before such tasks and before such a rupture. The pro-situs are not all students actually pursuing some kind of qualification through the exams of the current sub-University, and *a fortiori* they are not all sons of bourgeois. But all of them are bound to a determined social stratum, whether they actually intend to acquire the position, or whether they restrict themselves to consuming its specific illusions in advance. This stratum is that of the cadres¹⁸. Although it is certainly the most *apparent* sector in the social spectacle, it seems to remain unknown to the thinkers of the leftist routine, who have a *direct interest* in sticking to the impoverished summary of the 19th century definition of *classes*: either these thinkers want to conceal the existence of the bureaucratic class in power or aiming at totalitarian power, or else, and often simultaneously, they want to conceal the existence of their own conditions of existence and their own aspirations as sparingly privileged cadres in the relations of production dominated by the current bourgeoisie.

¹⁷ “In the image of the happy unification of society by consumption, real division is only *suspended* until the non-fulfillment in the consumable.” *Society of the Spectacle*.

¹⁸ *Translator*: executives or highly paid white-collar workers.

Capitalism has continuously modified the composition of classes to the extent that it has transformed global social work. It has weakened or built up, suppressed or even created classes that have a *secondary* function in the production of the world of the commodity. Only the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the primordial historical classes of this world, continue to play out the world's destiny between them, in a confrontation that has essentially remained the same. But the circumstances, the scenery, the extras, and even the spirit of the principal protagonists have changed with time, which has led us to the last act. According to Lenin, whose definition in fact corrected that of Marx, the proletariat was the mass of workers employed by big industry, and the most professionally qualified workers found themselves reduced to a marginal, suspect situation, under the notion of a "workers' aristocracy." Two generations of Stalinists and imbeciles, supporting themselves with this dogma, have argued whether the workers who formed the Paris Commune were really and truly proletarians (these workers were still quite close to artisanship or the workshops of very light industry). These same people can also question themselves about the very being of the current proletariat, lost in multiple hierarchical stratifications, from the worker "specializing" in weaving and the immigrant mason to the qualified worker and the technician or semi-technician. They even may go so far as to conduct byzantine researches into whether a train conductor personally produces surplus value. However, Lenin was right in that the proletariat of *Russia*, between 1890 and 1917, was essentially reduced to constituting the workers of large modern industry, which had just appeared in the same period along with the recent capitalist development that had been imported into the country. Outside of the proletariat, no other revolutionary *urban* force existed in Russia other than the radical section of the intelligentsia, while everything went on quite differently in the countries in which capitalism, with the bourgeoisie of the towns, had known its historical appearance and its natural maturation. This Russian intelligentsia sought to realize the political integration of the workers, as do the similar, more modern strata everywhere else. Russian conditions favored an integration of a directly political nature in the enterprises: the professional unions were dominated by a kind of "workers' aristocracy" that belonged to the Social Democratic Party, and more often to its Menshevik than its Bolshevik faction; while in England, for example, the equivalent sector of trade unionists could remain apolitical and reformist. That the plundering of the planet by capitalism at its imperialist stage permitted it to support a greater number of qualified, better paid workers, is a statement that, under a moralist veil, is without any bearing on the evaluation of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat. The last "specialized worker" of today's French or German industry, even if he is a particularly ill-treated and indigent immigrant, benefits from the global exploitation of the producer of jute or copper in underdeveloped countries, and for all that is no less a proletarian. Qualified workers, who have more time, more money, and more education, have in the history of class struggles produced law-aiding voters satisfied with their lot, but they have often also produced extremist revolutionaries, in Spartacism as in the FAI.¹⁹ To consider the sole partisans and employees of the reformist union bosses as a "workers' aristocracy" is to mask the true political-economic question of the external *integration* of the workers under pseudo-economist polemics. The workers have an immediate need for *cohesion* in their indispensable economic struggle. They begin to know how they can acquire this cohesion *themselves* in the great class struggles, which at the same time are always political struggles for all the conflicting classes. But in daily struggles – this class's *primum vivere*²⁰ – , which only

¹⁹ *Translator*: Federated Anarchists of Iberia.

²⁰ *Translator*: *primum vivere, deinde philosophari* ("Live first, then philosophize").

seem to be economic and professional struggles, the workers first obtained this cohesion from a bureaucratic leadership that at this stage was recruited from the [working] class itself. Bureaucracy is an old invention of the *State*. By seizing the state, the bourgeoisie first made use of the Statist bureaucracy, and only later did it develop the bureaucratization of industrial production by *managers*. These two bureaucratic forces were *its very own*, at its direct service. At a subsequent stage of its rule, the bourgeoisie *also* came to use the subordinate and rival bureaucracy that was formed on the basis of the workers' organizations. Similarly on the scale of world politics and the preservation of the existing balance in capitalism's current division of tasks, they begin to use the totalitarian bureaucracy that in many countries owns the economy and the State by itself. The classes in liquidation had constituted themselves as independent isolated producers and could thus no longer endow themselves with a bureaucracy. These classes – peasants, commercial petit bourgeois, etc – sent only their most gifted children into the lower levels of the Statist bureaucracy. But at a certain point in the general development of an advanced capitalist country, they are entrusting their defense – confronted with the bureaucratization and Statification of the modern concentrated economy – to several particular bureaucracies: unions of “young farmers,” peasant cooperatives, unions for the defense of merchants. However, workers in large industries – those very workers over whom Lenin frankly rejoiced that the discipline of the factory had mechanically conditioned them to *military* obedience, to barracks discipline, a path through which he himself hoped to make socialism triumph in his party and his country – these workers, who have dialectically learned the exact contrary of what Lenin stated, assuredly do remain the very center of the proletariat, if not its whole. This is because they nearly assume the essentials of social production and can always interrupt it, and because they are led to reconstruct this production on the tabula rasa of the suppression of economic alienation – more so than anyone else. Any merely *sociological* definition of the proletariat, whether conservative or leftist, hides a political choice. The proletariat can only be defined historically, by what it *can* do and by what it can and must want. In the same way, the Marxist definition of the “petty” bourgeoisie, which has since been used so often as a stupid joke, is at first equally a definition that rests on the position of the petty bourgeoisie in the historical struggles of its time, but, contrary to that of the proletariat, it rests on the understanding of the petty bourgeoisie as a fluctuating and fragmented class, which can only desire successively contradictory goals, and can only change camps with the circumstances that lead it to do this. Torn apart in its historical intentions, the petty bourgeoisie has also been, sociologically, the least definable and the least homogenous class of all. An artisan and a university professor, a secure small businessman and a poor doctor, a discharged officer and a post office superintendent, the lower ranks of the clergy and fishing wardens can all be grouped under “petty bourgeoisie” together. But today – given that all these professions are not founded en bloc in the industrial proletariat – the petty bourgeoisie of economically advanced countries has already left the stage of history for the wings at which the last defenders of eliminated small businesses carry on their debates. It has only a museographical existence left to it, as a ritual curse that every workerist bureaucrat hurls at all the bureaucrats who aren't militants in his sect.

36

Today, the cadres are the metamorphosis of the urban petty bourgeoisie of independent producers *that has become salaried*. These cadres are themselves very diversified as well, but the real stratum of upper cadres, which constitutes the model and the illusory goal for the others, is in fact held to the bourgeoisie by a thousand links, and integrates itself into that class more often

than not. The vast majority of cadres are made up of middle and small cadres, whose real interests are even less separate from those of the proletariat than were the real interests of the petty bourgeoisie – for the cadre never possesses his instrument of work. But their social conceptions and promotional reveries are firmly attached to the values and perspectives of the modern bourgeoisie. Their economic function is essentially bound up with the tertiary sector, with the service sector, and particularly with the properly spectacular branch of sales, the maintenance and praise of commodities, counting among these commodity labor itself. The image of the lifestyle and the tastes that society expressly fabricates for them, its model sons, greatly influences the sectors of poor white-collar workers or petty bourgeois who aspire toward their reconversion as cadres, and is not without effect on a part of the current middle bourgeoisie. The cadre always says, “On the one hand; on the other hand,” because he feels himself to be unhappy as a worker, but wants to feel happy as a consumer. He fervently believes in consumption, precisely because he is paid enough to consume a little more than the others, but it’s a series of the same commodity: the architects who live in the backward skyscrapers they design are rare in number, but the salesgirls of the similarly luxurious department stores who buy the clothes whose distribution on the market they must serve are many. The average cadre is between these two extremes: he admires the architect and is imitated by the salesgirl. The cadre is the consumer par excellence, in other words, the *spectator* par excellence. Thus, the cadre, always uncertain and always deceived, is at the center of modern *false consciousness* and social alienation. Contrary to the bourgeois, the worker, the serf and the feudal lord, the cadre always feels *out of place*. He always aspires to more than he is and can be. He pretends and, at the same time, he doubts. He is the man of *malaise*, never sure of himself, but hiding it. He is the absolutely *dependent* man, who believes that he must demand freedom itself, idealized in its semi-abundant consumption. He is ambitious and constantly turned towards his future – a miserable future, in any case – while he even doubts that he is occupying his current position as well. It is not at all by chance that the cadre is always a *former student* (cf. “On the Poverty of Student Life”). The cadre is the man of *absence*: the ideology of the pure spectacle, the spectacle of *nothingness*, is his drug. It is for him that the decorations of towns are changed, for his work and leisure, from the office buildings to the insipid food of the restaurants in which he speaks loudly to make his neighbors understand that he got his voice training from airport public address systems. He arrives late (and en masse) for everything, wanting to be the one and only. In short, according to the revelatory new acceptance of the old slang word, the cadre is at the same time a *hick*. In the preceding section, we have of course only used the word “man” in order to preserve the simplicity of theoretical language. It follows that the cadre is simultaneously, and in ever-increasing numbers, the *woman* who occupies the same function in the economy and adopts the corresponding lifestyle. The old feminine alienation, which speaks of liberation with the logic and intonations of slavery, reinforces all the extreme alienation of the end of the spectacle. Whether it concerns their trade or their personal relationships, the cadres always pretend *to have wanted what they possessed*, and their painfully hidden dissatisfaction leads them not to want something better, but to have more of the same “enriched deprivation.” Since cadres are fundamentally separated people, the myth of the happy couple proliferates in this area, however much this may be belied by immediate reality along with all the rest. Essentially, the cadre renews the sad history of the petty bourgeois, because he is poor and wants to make it known that he is received among the rich. But the change in economic conditions diametrically differentiates them on many points that occupy the primary level of their existence: the petty bourgeois wanted to be austere, and the cadre must show that he consumes everything. The petty

bourgeois was firmly associated with traditional values, and the cadre must keep up to date with the spectacle's weekly pseudo-novelties. The flat idiocy of the petty bourgeois was founded on religion and the family; that of the cadre is liquefied in the current of spectacular ideology, which allows him no rest. He can follow the dictates of fashion to the point of applauding the *image* of revolution – many were favorable to part of the atmosphere of the occupations movement – and some of them today even believe that they approve of the situationists.

37

The conduct of the pro-situ inscribes itself completely in the *structures* of the cadres' existence, and, at first, as with the latter, this existence belongs more to them as a recognized ideal than as a real lifestyle. The modern revolution, the party of historical consciousness, finds itself in the most direct conflict with these partisans and slaves of false consciousness. It must first of all make them *despair* by *making their shame more shameful still!* The pro-situ are in vogue at a moment when anybody can declare himself a partisan of creating situations that go beyond the point of no return, and where the program of a laughable Western "socialist" party blithely proposes to "change life." The pro-situ is never afraid to say that he lives his passions, engages in transparent dialogue, radically revises love and the festival, just like the cadre who finds the wine he will bottle himself at the wine grower's, or who goes on vacations to Katmandu. With the pro-situ as with the cadre, present and future are occupied solely by consumption that has become revolutionary. In the latter case, it is above all a question of the revolution of commodities, of the recognition of an incessant series of putsches through which prestigious commodities and their requirements replace each other. In the former, it is a question of the prestigious commodity of revolution itself. Everywhere, it is the same pretension to authenticity in a game whose conditions, aggravated even more by impotent cheating, absolutely forbid the slightest authenticity from the outset. It's the same phony dialogue, the same pseudo-culture contemplated hastily at a distance. It's the same pseudo-liberation of customs that only encounters the same stolen passion: on the basis of the same radical, puerile but concealed ignorance. For example, the perpetual tragi-comic ignorance of masculine nonsense and feminine simulation takes root and institutionalizes itself. But beyond all these particular cases, *general simulation* is their common element. The principal idiosyncrasy of the pro-situ is that he replaces the Camelot that the successful cadre effectively consumes with pure ideas. It is the simple *sound* of spectacular money that the pro-situ believes he can imitate with more facility than can that money itself. But he is encouraged in this illusion by the real fact that those commodities that current consumption pretends to admire make more noise than pleasure. The pro-situ wants to possess all the qualities of the horoscope: intelligence and courage, seductiveness and experience, etc. He has never dreamed of attaining them or making use of them, and as a result he is surprised when his fairy tale is shattered once again by the slightest practice, through the unfortunate hazard that *he has never known how to simulate them*. In the same way, the cadre has never been able to make any bourgeois nor any other cadre believe that he is above his status.

38

Naturally, the pro-situ cannot disdain the economic goods possessed by the cadre, since all his daily life is oriented toward the same tastes. He is revolutionary in that he wants to have them without working for them, or, rather, to have them immediately by "working" in the anti-hierarchical revolution that will abolish classes. Fooled by the easy subversion of the feeble

study allowances through which the current bourgeoisie recruits its small cadres from various classes – easily passing on through profits and losses the fraction of these subsidies that often serve to support materially those people who stop playing the permitted games – the pro-situ secretly comes to think that current society should certainly make him live in style, even though he is without work, money or talent, simply by virtue of the fact that he has declared itself to be a pure revolutionary. And beyond that he hopes to get himself recognized as a revolutionary because he has declared that he is one in a pure state. These illusions will quickly pass: their duration is limited to the two or three years during which the pro-situs believe that some economic miracle will save their privileged status – exactly *how*, they don't know. Very few will have the energy and capacities to await the realization of the revolution, which itself will not fail to deceive them partially. They will go to work. Some will be cadres, and most will be badly paid workers. Many of the latter will resign themselves. Others will become revolutionary workers.

39

At the moment when the SI had to criticize several aspects of its own success, which simultaneously permitted and obliged it to go further, it found itself to be particularly badly composed, and not very apt at making self-critiques. Many of its members discovered themselves incapable of even personally taking part in the mere continuation of its preceding activities: thus they were led all the more to find past realizations, which were already inaccessible to them, to be very lovely indeed, rather than to assign themselves even more difficult tasks in superseding the past ones. Since 1967, it was necessary to devote ourselves first and foremost to being present in countries where the practical subversion that sought our theory was beginning, and since the fall of 1968, we had notably acted to make the experience and the principal conclusions of the occupations movement as well known abroad as it was in France.²¹ This period increased the number of the SI's members, but in no way did it increase their quality. Since 1970, the essential part of this task fortunately found itself being adopted and greatly extended by autonomous revolutionary elements. Almost everywhere autonomous and extremist workers' struggles began, the SI's partisans found themselves in precisely the most disturbed countries. However, it remained for the members of the SI to assume responsibility for the position of the SI itself, and to draw the necessary conclusions from the new age.

40

Many members of the SI had never known the time when we said that “curious emissaries are traveling across Europe and points beyond; they meet each other, bearing incredible instructions” (IS #5, December 1960). Now that such instructions are no longer incredible, but are becoming more complex and more precise, these comrades failed in almost every circumstance when it was necessary for them to formulate or support them. Many even preferred not to risk doing so. Next

²¹ “The observer can only be struck by the rapidity with which the contagion has been propagated throughout the entire University and in the areas of nonstudent youth in general. It therefore seems that the watchwords issued by the small minority of authentic revolutionaries have roused something indefinable in the soul of the new generation [...] This fact must be underlined: we are witnessing the reappearance, just like 50 years ago, of groups of young people who are devoting themselves entirely to the revolutionary cause, who know how to await (using a tried-and-true technique) the favorable moments to unleash or aggravate troubles whose masters they remain, in order to return finally to clandestinity, to continue their subversive work, and to prepare other sporadic or prolonged disorders as the case may be, in order to disorganize the social structure slowly.” Julien Freund, *Wars and Peace*, No. 4, 1968.

to those who in fact never really entered the SI, two or three others who possessed some merit in poorer but calmer years, having been completely worn out by the very appearance of the age that they had wished for, had in fact already left the SI, but without wanting to admit it. It then had to be stated that many situationists did not even imagine what introducing new ideas into practice, and, reciprocally, rewriting theories with the aid of facts could *really* mean, but that is precisely what the situationists accomplished.

41

That a few of the first situationists knew how to think, take risks, and to live, or that, among the many who disappeared, several ended up in psychiatric institutions or killing themselves – all this could not hereditarily bestow courage, originality or a sense of adventure on each of the later members. The more or less Vaneigemist idyll – *Et in Arcadia situ ego* – covered over the lives of those who proved their quality neither in their participation in the SI nor in anything in their personal existences, with a kind of juridical formalism of abstract equality. In adopting this conception – which is *still bourgeois* – of revolution, they were only *citizens of the SI*. In reality, and in all the circumstances of their lives, they were *men of approval*; since they were in the SI, they thought they could save themselves by placing everything under the beautiful sign of historical negation, but they contented themselves with a quiet approval of this negation. Those who never said “I” or “you” but always “we” often found themselves below even political militancy, while, since its origin, the SI had been a vaster and more profound project than a simply political revolutionary movement. Two miracles coincided, which to these situationists seemed owed to their discreet but proud debility by the world order: the SI spoke, and history confirmed it. For those who did nothing in it, and who never even did much of anything elsewhere, the SI had to be everything. Thus extremely varied, even opposed, shortcomings reciprocally supported each other in the contemplative unity founded on the SI’s excellence; and this unity was also deemed to guarantee the excellence of what was most obviously mediocre in the rest of their existence.²² The most dreary spoke of the game, and the most resigned spoke of passion. Even contemplative membership in the SI had to suffice as proof of all this – nobody would otherwise have had the idea of crediting them with either playfulness or passion. Although many observers, in the employ of the police and otherwise, denounced the direct presence of the SI in a hundred agitational enterprises that were developing quite well on their own throughout the world, and in so doing were able to give the impression that all the SI’s members were working twenty-four-hours-a-day to revolutionize the planet, we must underline the falsity of this image. On the contrary, history will register the significant *economy of forces* with which the SI knew how to do what it did. And history will do so in such a way that when we say that certain situationists really did very little with the SI, it will be understood that these people literally did almost nothing. Let us add a noteworthy fact, which neatly verifies the dialectical existence of the SI: there was no kind of opposition between theoreticians and practitioners in revolution or in anything else. The best theoreticians among us have always been the best in

²² “The admiring or subsequently hostile excesses of all those who speak of us from the viewpoint of unwanted and intemperately passionate spectators cannot be answered by a ‘situ-braggadocio’ that would help spread the word that the situationists are marvelous people effectively possessing in their lives everything that they have expressed or simply admitted, as a revolutionary theory and program [...] The situationists do not have a monopoly to defend, nor any reward to anticipate. A task that suited us has been undertaken and maintained through good and bad, and in the entire group, correctly with what is to be found here.” Guy Debord, note added to “The Question of Organization for the SI,” *Internationale Situationniste* #12, September 1969.

practice, and those who cut the most sorry figures as theoreticians were equally the most helpless when confronted with every practical question.

42

The contemplators in the SI were *successful* pro-situs, for they saw their imaginary activity confirmed by the SI and by history. The analyses that we have made of the pro-situ *and his social position* fully applies to them, and for the same reasons: the ideology of the SI was carried by all those who did not know how to conduct the theory and practice of the SI themselves. The “garnautins” excluded in 1967 represented the first case of the pro-situ phenomenon within the SI itself, but towards the end of it extended itself even more. Our contemplators apparently substituted peaceful enjoyment for the envious worrying of the vulgar pro-situ. But the experience of their own nonexistence, entering in contrast to the requirements of historical activity that are in the SI – and not only during its past, for they have been multiplied by the extension of the current struggles – caused their anxious dissimulation. It also led them to be even more ill at ease than the external pro-situs. The hierarchical relationship that existed in the SI was of a new, *inverted* type: those who underwent it, concealed it. In the fear and trembling before the end that threatened them, the contemplators within the SI hoped to make it last as long as possible, in their false thoughtlessness and pseudo-innocence, for many also believed that they felt that the time for many historical rewards was coming. They did not receive them.

43

We were there to fight the spectacle, not to govern it. The most cunning of the contemplators no doubt believed that everybody’s attachment to the SI would require that their number or, in one or two cases, their reputation be treated with caution. Here as elsewhere, they fooled themselves. This “party patriotism” has no basis in the SI’s real revolutionary action: “The situationists do not form a distinct party [...] They have no interests separated from those of the proletariat as a whole” (*Avviso al proletariato italiano sulle possibilita presenti della rivoluzione sociale*, 19 November 1969). The SI has never been something to be managed²³ and still less so in the current age. In a very harsh century, the situationists freely gave themselves a very difficult rule of the game, and they usually followed it. It was therefore necessary to chase these useless mouths away, those which could never talk except to lie about who they were and to reiterate glorious promises of what they could never be.

44

If the SI happened to be contemplated as the revolutionary organization in itself – possessing the phantom existence of the pure idea of organization, and becoming an exterior entity for many of its members, simultaneously distinct from what the SI had effectively accomplished and distinct from the contemplators’ personal non-accomplishment, concealing these contradictory realities from on high – it was certainly because such contemplators had never understood nor wanted to know what a revolutionary organization could be, and not even what *their own* could have been. This incomprehension is itself produced by the incapability of thinking and acting in history, and

²³ “Theory becomes the permanent knowledge of secret misery and of the secret of misery. For itself as well, it is the end of the effect of the spectacle [...] Theory, when it exists, is therefore certain of not deceiving itself. It is a subject devoid of error. Nothing abuses it. The totality is its sole object. Theory knows misery as secretly public. It knows the secret publicity of misery. Every hope is permitted it. The class struggle exists.” Jean-Pierre Voyer, *How to Use Reich* (Éditions Champ Libre, Paris, 1971).

by the individual defeatism that shamefully recognizes such an incapacity and does not want to surmount it, but to dissimulate it. Those who idly chose systematic approbation – instead of affirming and developing their real personalities in the critique and in the decision on what the organization does and can do at any given moment – wanted nothing else than to hide this externality by their imaginary identification with the result.

45

Ignorance about organization is the central ignorance in praxis. When it is a *desired* ignorance, it only expresses the timorous intention of holding itself outside the historical struggle, while affecting to stroll alongside as informed and demanding spectators on Sundays and holidays. Error on organization is a *central practical error*. If it voluntary, it aims at using the masses. If not, it is at least a complete error on the conditions of historical practice. Error on organization is therefore a fundamental error in the very theory of the revolution.

46

The theory of the revolution certainly does not depend on the sole area of properly scientific ideas, and still less on the construction of a speculative achievement, or on the aesthetic of that fiery manner of speech that contemplates itself in its own lyrical glimmers and finds that it's already getting too hot to take. This theory only has an effective existence through its practical victory: here, "great thoughts must be followed up by great deeds; they must be like sunlight, which produces what it lights up." Revolutionary theory is the domain of danger and uncertainty: it is forbidden to people who want the narcotic certainties of ideology, including even the official certitude of being the unswerving enemies of all ideology. The revolution that it concerns is a form of human relations. Revolutionary theory is part of social existence. It is a conflict between the universal interests concerning the totality of social practice, and only thus does it differ from other conflicts. Its laws are the laws of conflict, war is its path, and its deeds are more comparable to an art than to a scientific research or an inventory of good intentions. The theory of the revolution is judged by the sole criterion that its *knowing* must become a *power*.

47

The revolutionary organization of the proletarian age is defined by different moments of the struggle, where it must succeed each time, and in each of these moments, it must never succeed in becoming a *separate power*. It cannot be spoken of by abstracting the forces that it has set in motion in the here-and-now, nor can the reciprocal action of its enemies. Whenever it knows how to act, the revolutionary organization unites practice and theory, which constantly proceed together, but it never believes that it can accomplish this through a mere voluntarist proclamation of the necessity of their total fusion. When the revolution is still distant, the major task of the revolutionary organization is above all the *practice of theory*. When the revolution begins, its major task increasingly becomes the *theory of practice*, but then the revolutionary organization has taken on an entirely different character. In the former circumstances, very few individuals are avant-garde, and they must prove it by the coherence of their general project, and by the practice that permits them to know and to communicate it; in the latter, the mass of workers are *of their time*, and must maintain themselves there as their only possessors by mastering the totality of their theoretical and practical weapons, notably by refusing all delegation of power to a separate avant-garde. In the former circumstances, a dozen efficient people can be enough to begin the self-explanation of an age that contains in itself a revolution that it still does not yet know about,

and that seems to it everywhere to be absent and impossible; in the latter, the vast majority of the proletarian class must hold and exercise all power by organizing itself into permanent deliberative and executive assemblies, which allow nothing to remain in the form of the old world and the forms that defend it.

48

When they organize themselves as the very form of society in revolution, the proletarian assemblies are egalitarian, not because all individuals find each other at the same degree of historical intelligence there, but *because together they effectively have everything to do*, and because together they have every means of doing so. Their direct experience is the total strategy of every moment; they have to engage all their forces and immediately support every risk entailed. In the victories and defeats of the concrete common enterprise in which they have been forced to put their whole lives at stake, historical intelligence reveals itself to all of them.

49

The SI has never presented itself as a model of revolutionary organization, but as a specific organization that has employed itself for precise tasks in a precise age; and even in this it has not known how to say everything about what it was, and has not known how to be all that it said that it was. The organizational errors of the SI *in its own concrete tasks* have been caused by the objective weaknesses of the preceding age, and also by the subjective weaknesses in our own understanding of the tasks of such an era, of the limits encountered, and of the *compensations* that many individuals created halfway between what they wanted and what they could do. The SI, however, which understood history better than anyone in an anti-historical age, still understood history *too little*.

50

The SI has always been anti-hierarchical, but almost never has it known how to be egalitarian. It was correct in supporting an anti-hierarchical organizational program, and in constantly following formally egalitarian rules, through which all its members found themselves recognizing an equal right in decision-making, and even found themselves pressured to use this right in practice. But it was very wrong in *not seeing and talking about* the partially inevitable and partially circumstantial obstacles that it encountered in this domain more thoroughly.

51

The danger of hierarchy, which is necessarily present in any real avant-garde, finds its true historical measure in the relationship of any organization to the outside, to the individuals or masses whom this organization can direct or manipulate. In this point, the SI has succeeded by never becoming a power in any way: by leaving hundreds of its virtual or declared partisans outside of the organization, very often constraining them to act autonomously. It is known that the SI has never wanted to admit more than a very small number of individuals. History has shown that this was not sufficient to guarantee “the participation in its total democracy . . . the recognition and self-appropriation by all . . . of the coherence of the critique . . . in the critical theory itself and in the relationship between this theory and practical activity” (“Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations,” adopted by the 7th Conference of the SI, July 1966) among all its members, and at such an advanced stage. But this limitation had to serve far more to guarantee the SI against the various possibilities of *command* that a revolutionary organization

can exercise on the outside *when it succeeds*. It is not so much because the SI is anti-hierarchical that it had to limit itself to a very small number of supposedly equal individuals; it is, rather, because the SI has only wanted to engage that very small number directly in its action that it has been effectively anti-hierarchical in the essential part of its strategy.

52

As for the inequality that manifested itself so often in the SI, and more than ever when it underwent its recent purification. . . . On the one hand, the supposed inequality falls back into anecdotes, since the situationists who in fact accepted a hierarchical position were those who found themselves to be precisely the weakest; by discovering their nothingness in practice, we have once again fought the triumphant myth of the SI and confirmed its truth. On the other hand, a lesson must be learned from this that generally applies to the periods of avant-garde activities – which we are only now beginning to leave – periods in which revolutionaries find themselves obliged, even if they want to ignore it, to play with the fire of hierarchy, and not all of them have the strength to avoid burning themselves as had the SI: *historical theory is not the place of equality*, and the periods of equal community are its blank pages.

53

Henceforth, the situationists are everywhere, and their task is everywhere. All those who think they are situationists have simply to prove the “truth, in other words, reality and power, that which is material” of their thought before the ensemble of the revolutionary proletarian movement, wherever it begins to create its International, and no longer before the SI alone. As for us, we no longer have to *guarantee* in any way that such individuals are situationists or not, because we no longer *need* to, and we have never found that sort of thing to our taste. But history is an even more severe judge than the SI. On the contrary, we *can* guarantee that those who were forced to leave the SI without having found there what they had endlessly assured themselves of finding – the revolutionary realization of themselves – and who therefore had ordinarily found nothing there other than the stick with which to beat themselves – are no longer situationists. The very term “situationist” was only used by us to communicate a certain number of perspectives and theses in the renewal of the social war. Now that this has been done, this situationist etiquette, in a time that still has need of etiquettes, can remain for the revolution of an age, but in an entirely different way. What the modalities of the current struggle will determine (what cannot be determined by any organizational a priori) is how a certain number of situationists can be led to associate directly with each other and first of all by embarking upon the current task of passing from the first period of the new revolutionary slogans that have been adopted by the masses to the historical comprehension of the theory as a whole and to its necessary development.

54

The first revolutionaries to have devoted intelligent pieces to the recent crisis in the SI and to have approached an understanding of its historical sense, have up until now neglected a fundamental dimension of the practical aspect of the question: the SI effectively possessed an account of everything it did, a certain practical power, which it only used for its self-defense, but that could certainly detract from our project were it to fall into other hands. Applying the critique that the SI had so correctly applied to the old world to the SI itself is not only a theoretical affair on a terrain where our theory incidentally found its adversaries: it is a precise critical-practical

activity, which we carried on by *breaking* the SI. For example, a very small number of opportunists, by assuring themselves the routine fidelity of many honest comrades, could have tried to keep control of the SI for some time, at least as an object of a *negotiable prestige* – however, they were carried away by their weakness to an extent that they even showed themselves to be insufficiently far-sighted and demanding. There, those who were so helpless and devoid of importance everywhere else had their only weapon and their only importance. It was only the consciousness of their excessive incapacity that held them back from using this position, but, in the last analysis, they felt themselves to be constrained.

55

The orientation debate in 1970, as well as the practical questions that simultaneously had to be resolved, showed that the critique of the SI, which encountered unanimous approval on principle immediately, could only become a real critique by progressing toward practical rupture. The reason was because the absolute contradiction between the eternally affirmed accord and the paralysis of so many in practice – including the most minimal practice of theory – was at the very center of this critique. Never had a rupture been so predictable in the SI. And, therefore, this rupture had become urgent. Throughout the development of this debate, those who constituted the then-existing majority of the members of the SI – a majority that, incidentally, was formless, without unity, action, or admitted perspective – saw themselves as badly mistreated by an extreme minority, and with good reason. It was no longer possible to grant any more respect to these people without lying. And it is well known that “men must be treated with great respect, or eliminated, because they revenge themselves on light offenses, and they can no longer do so on grave ones.”

56

It was then enough to declare that a break had become necessary. Everyone had to choose sides, and everyone, incidentally, had his chance, since the question that was to be resolved was infinitely more profound than the obvious weakness of such and such a comrade. The fact that this forced break had *on the other side* produced no split-off who could support himself in no way changes its character as a real break, but only confirms its content. In the SI, to the degree that its numbers diminished, the maneuvering capacities of all those who would have liked to preserve something of the status quo also diminished. The very fact that this break’s program constituted the abolition of the preceding comfort of those “situationists” who accomplished nothing of what they affirmed or countersigned made it even more impossible for the others to persevere in the same bluff without immediately having the conclusions drawn from it. Those who do not have the means of fighting for what they want or against what they do not want – such people can only exist for a short time.

57

Contrary to the preceding purifications, which had to aim at reinforcing the SI in less favorable historical conditions (and which reinforced it on every occasion), this one aimed at *weakening* it. It is once again incumbent upon us to point out that there is no supreme savior. The method and the goals of this purification were naturally approved of, and without exception, by the external revolutionary elements with whom we were in contact. It will be quickly understood that what the SI has done in the recent period during which it maintained relative silence, and which is explained in the current theses, constitutes one of its most important contributions to the

revolutionary movement. Nobody has ever seen us mixed up in the affairs, rivalries, or company of the most-leftist politicians or the most-advanced intelligentsia. And now that we can flatter ourselves on having acquired the most revolting celebrity status among this rabble, we will become even more inaccessible and clandestine. The more famous our theses become, the more obscure we ourselves will be.

58

The real break in the SI has been that same break that must now operate in the vast, unformed movement of current opposition: on the one hand, the break enters all of the revolutionary reality of an age, and, on the other, all the illusions concerning it.

59

Far from pretending to blame others for the defects of the SI, or to explain them by the psychological quirks of several unfortunate situationists, we accept on the contrary these defects as having also been a part of the historical operation that the SI has conducted. The game was nothing else. Whoever creates the SI and whoever creates situationists has to have created their mistakes as well. Whoever helps the age in discovering what it can do is no more shielded from the blemishes of the present than he is innocent of the most deadly things that might occur. We recognize all the SI's reality, and, in sum, we are glad that it is the way it is.

60

Let us cease to be admired as if we could be superior to our times, and let the age recoil from itself while admiring itself *for what it is*.

61

Whoever considers the life of the SI finds there the history of the revolution. Nothing has been able to sour it.