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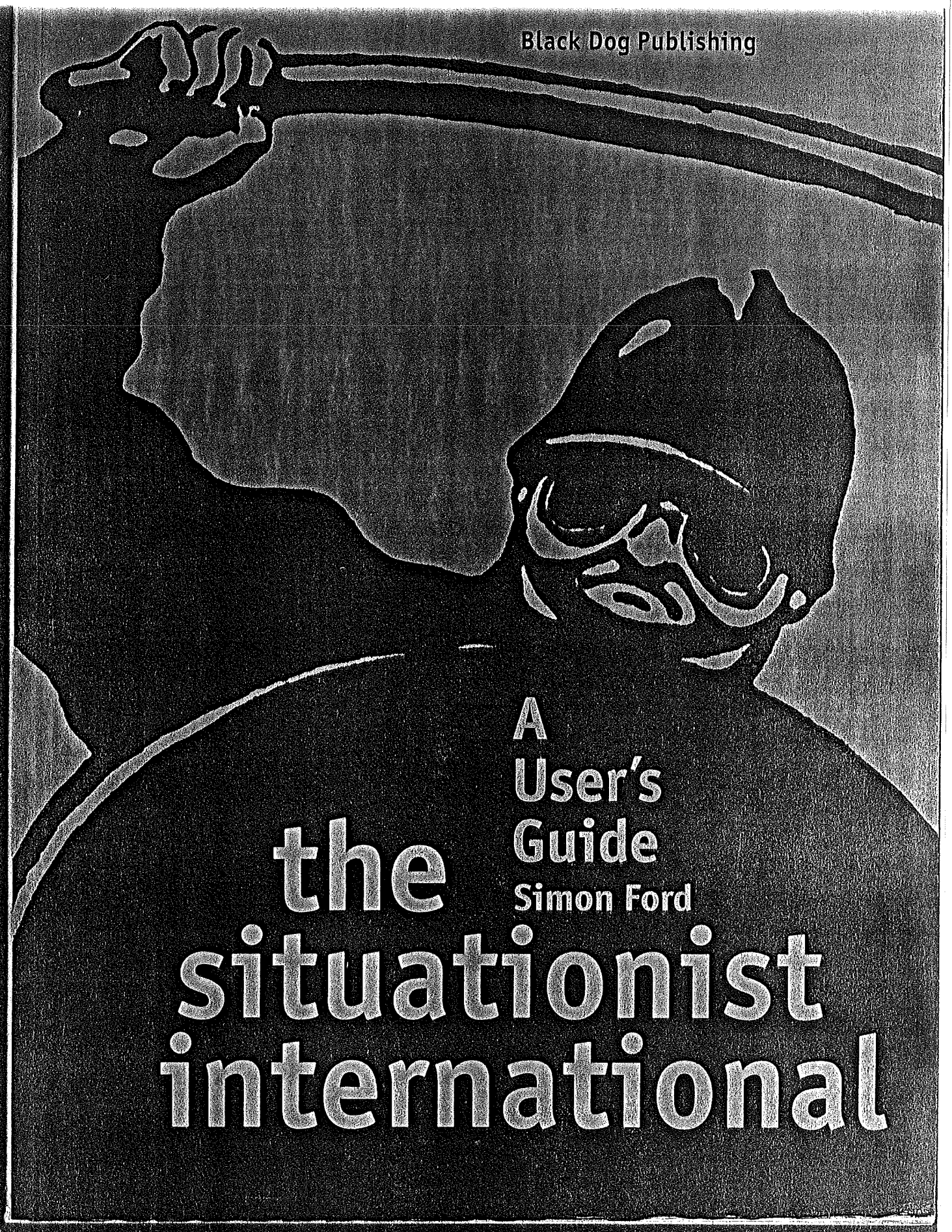

the situationist international

A User's Guide

Simon Ford

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Introduction

Formed in 1957 and disbanded in 1972, the Situationist International (SI) remains the benchmark against which all would-be avant-gardists must measure themselves. This book provides the first accessible and concise guide to the group, encompassing all the main events of its history, outlining its many critical theories concerning the 'society of the spectacle', and providing access to the latest research on the group. With the SI now well established as part of the canon of the post war avant-garde, its works and commentaries on its works, are regularly recommended to students in such diverse disciplines as fine art, architecture, and cultural studies. In 1988 a leading member of the SI, Guy Debord, stated that such a profusion of information created a contradiction "between the mass of information collected...and the time and intelligence available to analyse it".[1] This plethora of literature about the group, as Debord implied, makes it confusing for the beginner to know where to start. This book has been written to provide just such a starting point.

[1] Debord, Guy, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, London: Verso, 1990, thesis 30.

The story of the SI necessarily begins with its immediate precursors, the Lettriste International (LI). Founded by Debord and a gang of Parisian Left Bank delinquents in 1952, the group soon distanced itself from the older Lettriste movement led by Isidore Isou. Over the next few years the LI developed many of the practices that would become synonymous with the SI, namely *détournement*, psychogeography, and unitary urbanism. The LI disbanded in 1957 to make way for the formation of the SI. At first hesitatingly and then with growing confidence Debord took control of the new group. He edited its journal, *Internationale situationniste*, and ruthlessly pursued the expulsion of anybody not reaching his high standards for the group. The first of the great upheavals that periodically shook the SI took place in 1962 with the expulsion of the most artistically inclined members, the so-called 'Spurists' and 'Nashists'.

cf Breton + Surrealists

The group's restrictive and exclusive recruitment policy meant that it was never in danger of becoming a mass movement, but with its small group of dedicated followers it remained well positioned for agitation and conspiracy. At any one time its membership averaged between ten and 20 people, predominantly male and mostly based in Paris.[2] This post-'split' era saw the publication, in 1967, of the two key works of Situationist theory, Debord's

[2] "In all, 63 men and seven women from 16 different countries were members at one time or another." See: Ken Knabb ed, *Situationist International Anthology*, Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981, p. 376.

The Society of the Spectacle and Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Shortly after these books appeared the group played its small but none the less significant part in the events of May '68. The end of that uprising can now be seen as the harbinger of the death of the SI's own political and cultural interventions. The final chapter in this book examines the reasons for the group's dissolution in 1972 and outlines its subsequent legacy, especially its infiltration into popular culture.

At particular points in the following narrative I break the chronological structure to provide brief accounts of key artists associated with the SI, namely Ralph Rumney, Asger Jorn, Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, and Constant. Each of these artists could justifiably claim significance for their work and careers beyond their membership of the SI. This independent importance equally applies to the groups immediately preceding the foundation of the SI; the Lettriste movement, Cobra, and The International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. But this book is about the SI and that means there is relatively limited space available for these artists and art movements outside of their involvement with the SI. Ironically it is around these 'peripheral' areas that the most fruitful research concerning the SI is taking place.[3] This book would not be possible without the help of the many people involved in the dissemination of Situationist ideas through the translation and publication of key texts both in print form and on the Internet. The Further Information section at the end of this book provides a listing of the best examples of this work plus the addresses for some of the most useful websites currently available.

Just one example of this being the long overdue reassessment of the Second Situationist International currently being carried out and recorded by Infopool.
See http://www.infopool.org.uk/situpool.htm

Despite the many individuals involved with the SI, this book shares with many others an arguably disproportionate focus on the life and work of one man, Guy Debord. This is problematic for a number of reasons. Throughout his life Debord worked best in collaboration with other artists and writers, and over the years these included Michèle Bernstein, Gil J Wolman, Asger Jorn, and Alice Becker-Ho. Without the supporting structure of the SI and the contacts it gave him, Debord could have remained just an obscure character on the fringes of French culture. Equally, however, without the dogmatic and dogged commitment of Debord the readily conflictive nature of the SI would have meant its early demise. For many years the survival of the SI was Debord's main vocation and, as such, it must be considered as one of his greatest achievements.

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The importance of Debord in relation to the other members of the SI is just one of many problems for a book about the group. Its opposition to anything resembling academic discourse and its gleeful ridicule of journalistic attempts to describe its operations point to a purposely elusive character. The SI sought to escape these particular forms of understanding and insisted instead on defining itself in its own terms. This was a familiar avant-gardist strategy and not the only one employed by the SI. Others included the use of exaggeration and self-mythology. For example, Debord knew that the best way to ensure the SI's immortality from 1972 onwards was to publicly announce its death. It was this instinct for scandal and self-serving embellishment that later attracted the attention of the 'Pop Situationists' Malcolm McLaren and Tony Wilson. However, what these later manifestations of Situationist inspired subversion could never emulate was the group's very longevity and the seriousness of its project. As Debord wrote in 1961, a guide can only take you so far: Revolution is not "showing" life to people, but making them live. A revolutionary organisation must always remember that its objective is not getting its adherents to listen to convincing talks by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves, in order to achieve, or at least strive toward, an equal degree of participation.[4]

[4] Debord, Guy, "For a Revolutionary Judgement of Art", in Knabb, *Situationist Internationol Anthology*, 1981, p. 312.

1931-

Guy Debord and the Lettriste Movement

Guy Debord.

Guy Louis Marie Vincent Ernest Debord was born 28 December 1931 in the Mouzaïa quarter of Paris. His father, Martial Debord, died in 1936 when Debord was just four years old. His mother, Paulette, subsequently remarried and Guy spent much of his childhood under the care of his maternal grandmother Lydie Hélène Fantouiller, known as 'Manou'. The family's slow but steady decline in fortunes was only halted when Paulette met Charles Labaste, a prosperous notary based first in Pau and then in Cannes where Debord finished his schooling.[1] As a child he spent hours playing with his toy soldiers (an interest that would later develop into a love of military strategy and the works of Clausewitz and Machiavelli). With maturity his reading preference gravitated towards literary outsiders and rebels, particularly the poet and adventurer Arthur Rimbaud, author of *Une Saison en enfér* (*A Season in Hell*) and the seeker of poetic insights through the "rational disordering of the senses". An avid visitor to the cinema Debord also styled himself on the 'literary bandit' Pierre-François Lacenaire, a historical character that featured in Marcel Carné's classic 1945 film *Les Enfants du Paradis* (*The Children of Paradise*).

[1] For the best account of Debord's childhood see Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2001, pp. 13-26.

Debord's childhood and adolescence coincided with a period of great change in French society. Fundamental transformations in lifestyle occurred with the expansion of university education, more leisure time for workers, and increasing amounts of disposable income being spent on consumer goods such as fridges, washing machines and televisions. On the cultural front, the Surrealists still maintained a firm hold over the avant-garde, with their charismatic leader André Breton and their exploration of the use of the unconscious and chance in the making of art and in the conversion of ordinary life into the extraordinary. Debord quickly saw through Breton's increasing supernaturalism and tended to favour figures peripheral to the group, such as Breton's friend and eventual suicide, Jacques Vaché, and the boxer-adventurer-provocateur Arthur Cravan.[2] But Debord followed the Surrealists in his taste for the work of the nineteenth century author of the nightmarish novel *Les Chants de Maldoror* (*Maldoror and Poems*), Isidore Lucien Ducasse (Comte de Lautréamont).[3] In this book Lautréamont famously described beauty "as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing

[2] Cravan was born in Lausanne in 1887 as Fabian Avenarius Lloyd. He first arrived in Paris in 1911 and disappeared forever in Mexico in 1919. In later years Debord used his influence at Éditions Gérard Lebovici, to have a collection of Cravan's work published. See: Arthur Cravan, *Deuvres: Poems, Articles, Lettres*, Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1987. For accounts and examples of work by Cravan and Vaché see Robert Motherwell ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981.

[3] Knight, Paul trans., *Maldoror and Poems*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978.

machine and an umbrella". Another of his sayings "Beautiful as the trembling hands of alcoholism" would later find its way into Debord's *Panegyric*.[4]

Debord, Guy, *Panegyric: Volume 1*. London: Verso, 1991, p. 37.

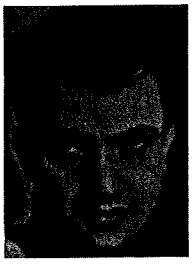
Guy Debord, 1963.

Lautréamont's death, like Debord's, would partly derive from his excessive drinking, in his case, absinthe. Apart from a love of alcohol the main lesson Debord learnt from these various sources was that an interesting life was just as important as the creation of art. Later, borrowing a quote from Chateaubriand, Debord would modestly claim for himself this laudatory self-assessment: "Of the modern French authors of my time, I am therefore the only one whose life is true to his works."[5]

Debord, *Panegyric*, p. 46.

By the 1950s the Surrealists' influence and reputation was beginning to wane. Many individuals in the movement were now rich and famous artists. They were represented by the finest bourgeois art galleries and the national museums of the world fought for possession of examples of their works. New movements, albeit to varying degrees Surrealist in tone, were beginning to emerge, such as Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism. But these held little interest for the young Debord. In 1963 he derided the post war avant-garde for its careerism and for its corruption of earlier avant-gardist ideals. He described the new avant-garde as merely "taking up the style invented before 1920 and exploiting each detail in enormously exaggerated fashion, thereby making this style serve the acceptance and decoration of the present world".[6] Debord would have to look elsewhere for a movement he felt worthy of his involvement. In April 1951, at the age of 19, he attended the Fourth Cannes Film Festival. Bored with the superficiality of film industry glamour, he was excited to come across the Lettristes, a group of artists from Paris determined to upset proceedings and show a film, *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (*Treatise on Slime and Eternity*), by the group's leader, Isidore Isou. Partly in recognition of the group's tenacity, Cannes jurist Jean Cocteau, invented a new prize, the *Prix de l'Avant-Garde*, and awarded it to Isou.

Debord, Guy, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics or Art" in Elisabeth Sussman ed., *On the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: the Situationist International 1957-1972*, Boston, MA: MIT Press; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1989, p. 153.



Isidore Isou.

Isou, whose real name was Jean-Isidore Goldstein, was born in 1925 in Botosani, in the Romanian province of Moldavia. Isidore Isou's adopted name appears to have been coined in alliterative honour of the original Dadaist provocateur, Tristan Tzara, also of

Romanian Jewish origins. Isou arrived in France in 1945 determined to make a name for himself amongst the literati of Paris. To this end early in 1946 he formed the Lettriste movement with Gabriel Pomerand.[7] Isou's theory was based on a cultural process that began with an 'amplic' phase (outward looking) before being superseded by a 'chiselling' phase (inward looking, where subjects are reduced to ever smaller units of investigation). Such chiselling led to the deconstruction of words into their component parts, namely letters, as he explained in his Manifesto of Lettriste Poetry:

For more on the history of the group see Stephen C Foster ed., "Lettrisme: Into the Present", special issue of *Visible Language*, vol. 17, no. 3, Chicago, IL,Summer 1983.

Destruction of words for letters.
ISIDORE ISOU: Believes in the potential elevation beyond WORDS; wants the development of transmissions where nothing is lost in the process; offers a verb equal to a shock. By the overload of expansion the forms leap up by themselves.
ISIDORE ISOU: Begins the destruction of words for letters.
ISIDORE ISOU: Wants letters to pull in among themselves all desires.
ISIDORE ISOU: Makes people stop using foregone conclusions, words.
ISIDORE ISOU: Shows another way out between WORDS and RENUNCIATION: LETTERS. He will create emotions against language, for the pleasure of the tongue. *It consists of teaching that letters have a destination other than words.*
ISIDORE ISOU: Will unmake words into their letters. Each poet will integrate everything into Everything. Everything must be revealed by letters.[8]

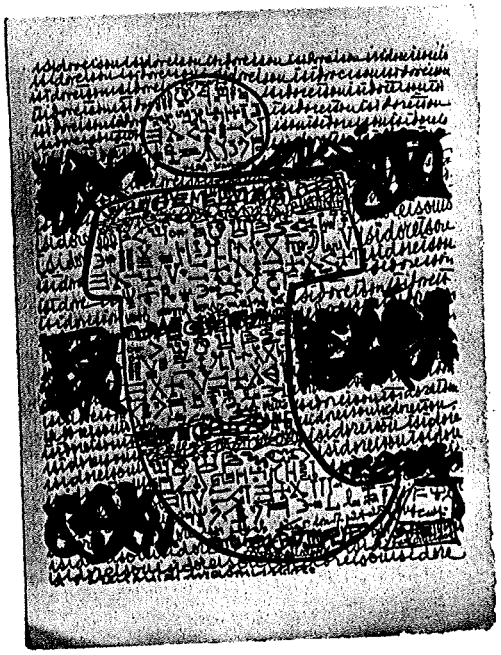
First published in Isidore Isou, *Introduction ô une Nouvelle Poésie et une Nouvelle Musique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1947. Available in English translation at http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/lettrist/isou-m.htm

Maurice Lemaître (with Isidor Isou, Gil J Wolman, Marcelle Dumont-Billaudot and Christiane Guymer), *Le film est déjà commençe?*, 35mm, 1951.

Isou also explored the visual dimension of language, through the merging of poetry with modern painting–creating a form of Concrete poetry or Dada and Futurist word-collage. This technique was initially called "metagraphics", but eventually became known as "hypergraphics". The movement's other key theorist, Maurice Lemaître, described it as a synthesis of many forms of communication, as an "ensemble of signs capable of transmitting the reality served by the consciousness more exactly than all the former fragmentary and partial practices (phonetic alphabets, algebra, geometry, painting, music, and so forth)".[9]

A particularly novel aspect of Isou's theory focused on the recognition of a 'youth problem'. In his text *Traité d'économie nucléaire: le soulèvement de la jeunesse* (*Treatise on Nuclear Economy: Youth Insurrection*) rebellious youths were encouraged to reject their future subservient role in society and described as the new proletariat, a potentially revolutionary class with nothing to lose. Around him he gathered his own group of young and disaffected youths including: Serge Berna, Jean-Louis Brau, François Dufrêne,

and Gil J Wolman. One of the group's earliest events was an evening of recitals at the nightclub, Le Tabou, 33 rue Dauphine in October 1950. Lettriste events took on many of the characteristics of Dada cabaret especially with its transformation of sound and meaning into noise and gibberish. Likewise the soundtrack to Isou's film, *Treatise on Slime and Eternity*, consisted of sound poetry and arbitrary noises. A year later another of his films, *Débat sur le Cinema (Debate over the cinema)*, 1952, consisted purely of the audience discussing what a film might be.



Isidore Isou, *Douze Hypergraphies*, 1964.

In April 1950, a year before Debord's arrival on the scene, the Lettristes achieved national notoriety when Berna, Michel Mourre, Ghislain Desnoyers de Marbaix and Jean Rullier disrupted Easter Mass at Notre-Dame in Paris. Dressed as a Dominican monk, Mourre delivered a blasphemous sermon written by Berna:

> Verily I say unto you: God is dead. We vomit the agonizing insipidity of your prayers, for your prayers have been the greasy smoke over the battlefields of our Europe. ... Today is Easter day of the Holy Year. Here under the emblem of Notre-Dame of France, we proclaim the death of the Christ-god, so that Man may live at last.

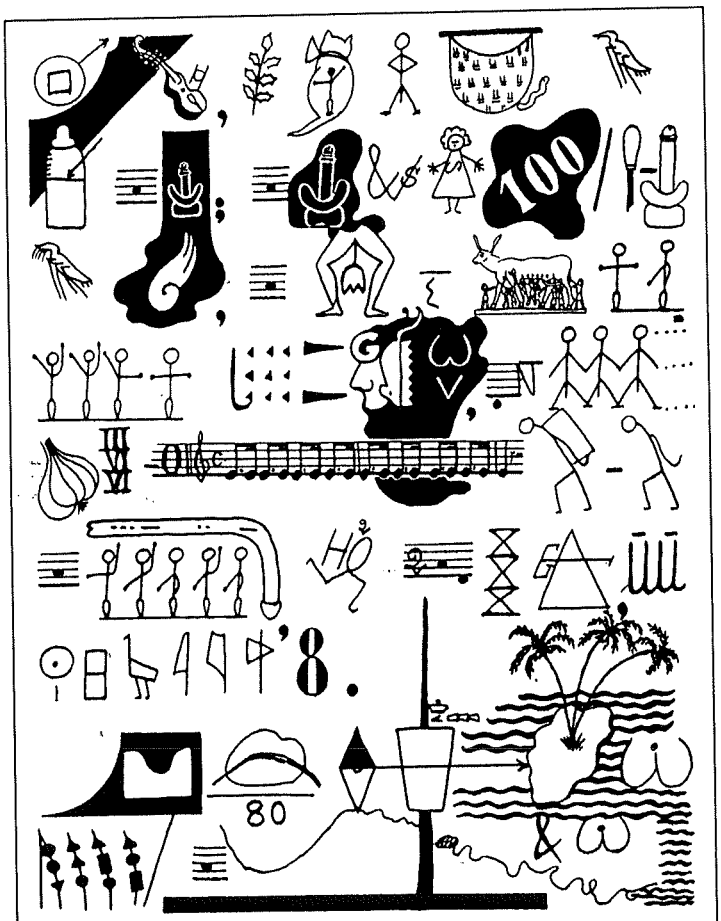
In attempting to escape the angry and increasingly violent congregation, the four were 'rescued' by the police and Mourre was later charged with impersonating a priest.[10] It was just the kind of scandal that Debord would later seek to emulate.

[10] The affair and resulting scandal is recounted in Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1989, pp. 279-284.

During the summer of 1951, Debord often visited Isou in Paris. In the winter he moved there permanently, ostensibly to become a law student at the Sorbonne. In his memoirs he gave the following prosaic account of his arrival:

Before the age of 20, I saw the peaceful part of my youth come to an end; and I now had nothing left except the obligation to pursue all my tastes without restraint, though in difficult conditions. I headed first towards that very attractive milieu where an extreme nihilism no longer wanted to know about nor, above all, continue what had previously been considered the use of life or the arts.[11]

Debord, *Panegyric*, London: Verso, 1991, p. 15. Translated by James Brook. Available at http://www.chez.com/debordiana/english/panegyric.htm



« Saint-Germain-des-Prés est un quartier de Paris, où les filles viennent la nuit, pour se faire violer, où chaque homme veut dépuceler la vie. La vie et les filles s'en retournent pucelles, la fleur entre les jambes, car nous sommes une génération, dont les hommes ayant trop fait la queue au cours de la récente guerre, l'ont perdue ce jourd'hui.

Mon quartier est une île qui nage sur la Seine. »

Gabriel Pommerand, extracts from *Saint-Ghetto-des-Prêts*, 1949.

On arrival in October he stayed at the hôtel de la Faculté on the rue Racine with a balcony overlooking the boulevard Saint-Michel. From here he ventured out into the local streets and bars, making contact with an 'attractive milieu' that later became known as 'the tribe'.

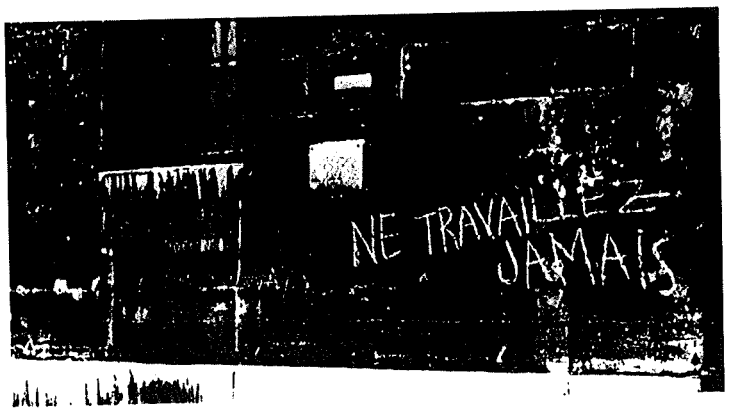
The tribe was made up of a small group of young people who drifted around the bars of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, avoiding work, committing petty crimes and plotting the demise of bourgeois culture. Jean-Michel Mension, a participant and later chronicler of the milieu, arrived there as a 16-year old fresh out of reform school and on the run from his family of "old communist militants". Mension and his friend subscribed to an extreme philosophy of inaction, they were 'slackers' before their time:

> If someone had said ... "I want to be a famous painter", if someone had said "I want to be a famous novelist", if someone had said, "I want in whatever way to be a success", then that someone would have been tossed instantly out of the back room right through the front room onto the street. There was an absolute refusal.... We rejected a world that was distasteful to us, and we would do nothing at all within it.[12]

[12] Mension, Jean-Michel, *The Tribe*, London: Verso, 2002, p. 129.

Debord was very much in tune with this world and added his own summation of its main article of faith when in 1953 he painted on a wall, along the rue de Seine, the phrase "Ne Travaillez Jamais!" ("Never Work!").[13]

[13] A photograph was later published of this graffiti in *Internationale situationniste*, (no. 8, January 1963, p. 42) with the caption "minimum programme of the Situationist movement".



Guy Debord, graffiti, 1953.

Potlatch, Psychogeography, *Dérive*, and *Détournement*

In time-honoured fashion the LI promoted its activities and philosophy through the pages of its own newsletter, named matter-of-factly *Internationale Lettriste*. Four issues appeared between 1952 and 1954 before it was superseded on 22 June 1954 by the first issue of *Potlatch*, subtitled: "The Bulletin of Information of the French group of the Lettriste International". Its mimeographed pages were typed up by Bernstein and edited in succession by André-Frank Conord (no. 1-8), Mohamed Dahou (no. 9-18), Wolman (no. 19), Dahou again (no. 20-22), and Jacques Fillon (no. 23-24).[36] Only 50 copies of the first issue were printed, but from then onwards 400 copies of each edition were distributed. It carried no cover price, and could not be found for sale in any newsagents–its means of circulation was simply as a gift. The journal quickly became the main source, a kind of laboratory of ideas, for what would become the main tenants of the SI. In its pages you will find the first mention of concepts such as psychogeography, *dérive*, *détournement*, and unitary urbanism.[37] As well as introducing these concepts the journal carried concise and informative articles alongside a fair share of wackily utopian proposals. One example of the latter was the suggestion that street lights should have switches on them so that local residents could control them. Another was that museums should be pulled down and their contents distributed amongst the clientele of various bars.[38] The title of the journal, *Potlatch*, drew on the work of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss and his study, *The Gift*, which looked at the exchange of gifts, from canoes to hunting rights, amongst the native American tribes of British Columbia and Alaska.[39] Potlatch described the enhancement of status through ceremonial gift-giving or festive destruction. As a theory of economic exchange based on sacrifice and excess, it attracted the attention of, amongst many others, George Bataille.[40] Most likely, the LI became aware of the concept through Bataille's writings and agreed with his positive analysis of the practice as an exemplary subversion of the concept of exchange value in an act of unproductive expenditure.[41]

All issues were later collected together in: Guy Debord ed., *Potlatch: 1954-57*, Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1985.

In a useful footnote Simon Sadler states that "psychogeography" was first mentioned in *Potlatch*, no. 1 (June 1954); "*détournement*" in no. 2 (June 1954), "*dérive*" in no. 9-10-11 (August 1954); "situation" in no. 14 (November 1954), and "unitary urbanism" in no. 27 (November 1956). See Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998, p. 168.

See Anon, "Plan For Rational Improvements to the City of Paris", in Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa eds., *Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City*, Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; ACTAR, 1996, pp. 56-7. First published in *Potlatch* , no. 23, 13 October 1955.

Mauss, Marcel, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954.

See his "The Notion of Expenditure" in: Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.

For more on Bataille and the LI see: Hussey, *The Game of War*, 2001, p. 84-7.

The LI's fascination with urban living and chance encounters led

to a number of key discoveries.[42] For the LI the city had to be reinvented on a personal level, to be reconfigured along the lines of a new nomadic lifestyle. Historical precedents included Baudelaire's description of the flâneur and De Quincey's drug-addled wanderings around the back streets of Manchester and London. The LI named its studies in this area psychogeography and by way of illustration Debord wrote in the second issue of *Potlatch* that the 18th century Italian architect and draughtsman Giovanni Battista Piranesi was "psychogeographical in the stairway"; the painter Claude Gelée (Lorraine) was "psychogeographical in the juxtaposition of a palace neighbourhood and the sea"; the French postman and 'outsider' artist Ferdinand Cheval was "psychogeographical in architecture"; Jack the Ripper was "probably psychogeographical in love" and Saint-Just was "a bit psychogeographical in politics (Terror is disorienting)".[43] By 1958, and after four years of honing and experimentation, a precise definition was provided: "Psychogeography. The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals." The word "psychogeographical" described that which "manifests the geographical environment's direct emotional effects" and a psychogeographer was simply "one who explores and reports on psychogeographical phenomena".[44]

This focus on urbanism was undoubtedly linked to the phenomenon of migration from the country to the city then profoundly affecting France and all the major urban conurbations of Europe. For example, in 1954 five million French workers were employed in agriculture and forestry. By 1963 this had dropped to 3.65 million and in 1968 to 2.9 million. See Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 257.

Debord, Guy, "Exercise in Psychogeography" in Andreotti and Costa, *Theory of the Dérive*, 1996, p. 42. First published in *Potlatch* , no. 2, 29 June 1954.

Anon, "Definitions", in Andreotti and Costa, *Theory of the Dérive*, 1996, p. 69. First published in: *Internationale situationniste*, no. 1, June 1958, pp. 13-14.

The chief means of psychogeographical investigation was the *dérive*, which consisted of drifting and deliberately trying to lose oneself in the city. The Surrealists provided a precedent for such journeys, with their aimless excursions dictated by chance, but the LI took this activity to new heights of seriousness and commitment with much less dependence on random factors. A *dérive* could last from anything from an hour to three or four months (Ivan Chtcheglov recommended the latter). In *Theory of the Dérive*, Debord outlined its main elements:

> In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they

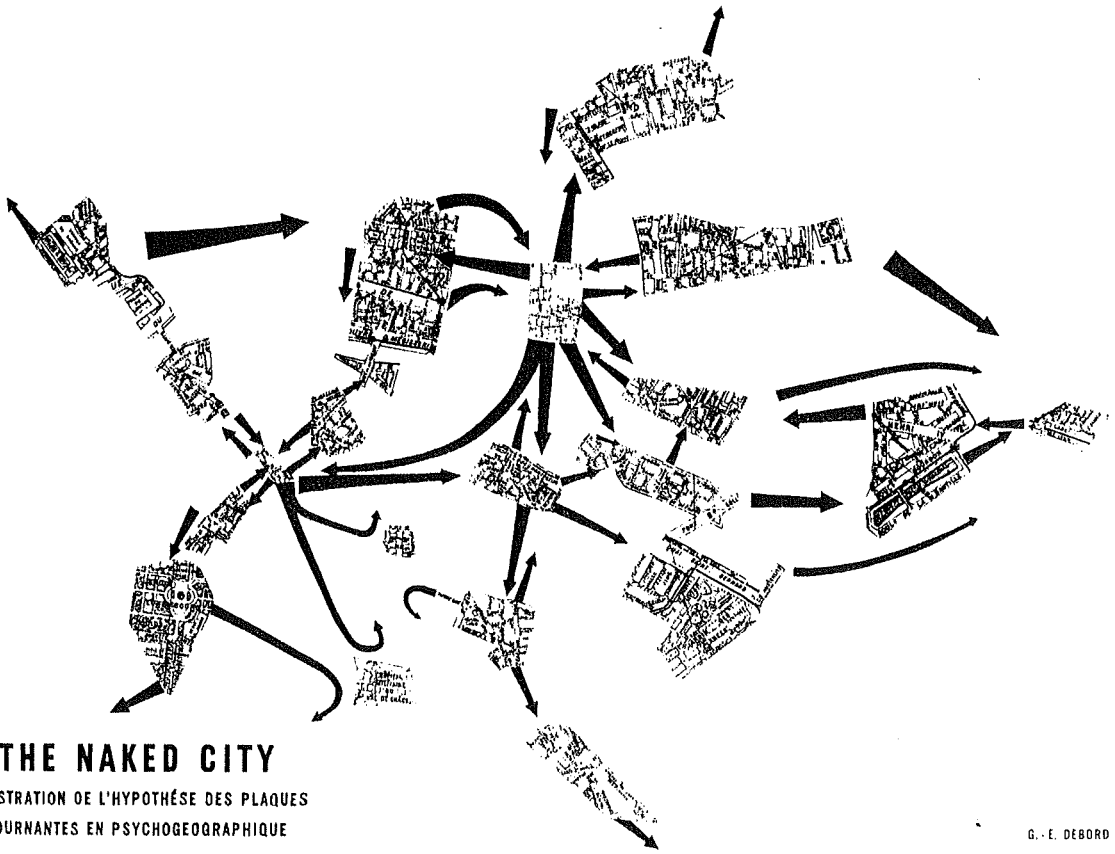
find there. ... From the *dérive* point of view cities have a psychological relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.[45]

Debord, Guy "Theory of the Dérive", in Andreotti and Costa, *Theory of the Dérive*, 1996, p. 22. First published in *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 8, 1956.

By 1958 the *dérive* had been more simply defined as a "mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiences. Also used to designate a specific period of continuous deriving".[46]

Anon, "Definitions", in Andreotti and Costa, *Theory of the Dérive*, 1996, p. 69.

An account of two early *dérives* appeared in *Les Lèvres Nues*, a Surrealist-influenced journal edited by the Belgian poet Marcel Mariën in Brussels. The first took place on the evening of 25 December 1953 and the second on 6 March 1956. Debord's account of the first *dérive* was more about the people they met than the environments they passed through. Drifting from bar to bar they meet Algerians, West Indians, and Jewish people and



Guy Debord, *The Naked City*, 1958

become involved in real and imaginary pursuits and close escapes. For the second *dérive* he was accompanied by Wolman and after meeting at the rue des Jardines they headed north:

> Despite their intentions they quickly find themselves drifting toward the east and traversing the upper section of the 11th arrondissement, an area whose poor commercial standardisation is a good example of repulsive petit-bourgeois landscape. The only pleasing encounter is the store at 160, rue Oberkampf: "Delicatessen-Provisions A. Breton".

The journey continued into the 20th arrondissement where they discovered an important psychogeographic hub near the canal Saint-Martin. It ended in Aubervilliers in a Spanish bar known as the "Tavern of the Revolters".[47]

Debord, Guy, "Two Accounts of the Dérive", in Sussman, *On the passage*, 1989, pp. 135-9. First published in *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 9, November 1956.

Debord and Wolman also chose *Les Lèvres Nues* to promote their theory of *détournement*.[48] In "A User's Guide to Détournement" they described the process as involving the transformation of both everyday ephemera, such as advertisement slogans and comic strips, and significant cultural products, such as quotations from Marx and old master paintings. These would then be re-presented within a new artistic context:

There is no single word in English that could stand as a direct translation. *Détournement* carries with it something of the following meanings: diversion, rerouting, corruption and hijacking.

> *Détournement* not only leads to the discovery of new aspects of talent; in addition, clashing head-on with all social and legal conventions, it cannot fail to be a powerful cultural weapon in the service of a real class struggle. The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of understanding. It is a real means of proletarian artistic education, the first steps towards a literary communism.[49]

Debord, Guy and Gil J Wolman, "A User's Guide to *Détournement*" in Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works*, 2003, p. 209. First published in *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 8, 1956.

Once again the term found its full Situationist definition two years later in 1958 as the

détournement of pre-existing aesthetic elements. The integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist art or music, but a situationist use of these means. In a more primitive sense, *détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres.[50]

[50] Anon. "Definitions", in Andreotti and Costa, *Theory of the Dérive*, 1996, p. 70.

As a form of creative plagiarism there was little in *détournement* that was particularly novel, except perhaps, its new name and the extravagant claims for its effectiveness. Precursors can be found in the collage work of the Dadaists, the Surrealists and, more closer to home, the word, letter and pictogram collages of the Lettristes. Lautréamont's famous declaration also provides a literary precedent: "Plagiarism is necessary. It is implied in the idea of progress. It clasps an author's sentence tight, uses his expressions, eliminates a false idea, replaces it with the right idea."[51] *Détournement*, therefore, extended beyond the visual arts and into the literary and philosophical realm, with Debord's texts (and later his films), often being liberally sprinkled with *détourned* quotations from his favourite authors. *Détournement* can be seen, therefore, as an extreme form of the redistribution of cultural value.

[51] Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Boo

Asger Jorn, Cobra, and The International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus

Even at this early stage Debord held few illusions about the ultimate worth of art. "A User's Guide to Détournement" opened with the unequivocal statement that:

Every reasonably aware person of our time is aware of the obvious fact that art can no longer be justified as a superior activity, or even as a compensatory activity to which one might honourably devote oneself. The reason for this deterioration is clearly the emergence of productive forces that necessitate other production relations and a new practice of life.[52]

[52] Debord, Guy and Gil J Wolman, "A User's Guide to *Détournement*" in Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works*, 2003. p. 207.