

Catastrophe and the Situationist Limit

by BieneBaumeisterZwiNegator, London 07-11-2008, unabridged version

1968

In May 1968 the proletarian revolution returned to the western world in the shape of the “movement of the occupations” starting in France. Not only did the working class then directly seize the means of production of a whole economy in an advanced capitalist country, but also this *objectively practical* emergence was backed by a *mass-scale subjective* appropriation of communist theoretical issues such as “abolition of capitalist commodity production”, “smash the state apparatus instead of conquering it”, “the modern revolution either exists as a fête, or it does not exist at all”, “the commune on a world scale is based on the realisation of human dreams against all forms of alienation”, and so on. Vague as these theoretical traces in the mass-consciousness of those days appeared, they were strong enough to bring about a sudden material break-through – an actual critique of political economy *in practice* by the wage-labouring class *on its own* – without being instantly produced by an economical crisis, nor by a political instability. It went just the other way round: a political crisis, including the tumble of state power, as well as an economic crisis ensuing the political instability, were the *results* of a sudden outbreak of proletarian revolt against *the ensemble* of everyday life.

The Situationists became so well-known to an extent that contrasted to their size in membership and to all the other extremist organisations on the left during that time, just because this development (i.e. the course of events in 1968) had been predicted by their “revue internationale situationniste” since the early 1960ies and especially so in their rare but outstanding theoretical publications.¹

They had elaborated a concept of “theoretical praxis” or “practice of theory” – as they called it² – which gave them a singular position contrasting to most of the traditional and New Left organisations, towards a practical driving part that they themselves called “taking petrol to where there is fire”.

Thus, whilst those few revolutionary organisations that did not ignore the existence of Situationists before 1968 took their concept of theory and praxis for “a theory without praxis”,³ the situationist dialectical “practice of theory” enabled them, especially so since the Strasbourg scandal in 1966 and worldwide publication of “On the Poverty of Student Life”, to find out and to accelerate a turn to mass-scale “theory of praxis” more rapidly than anybody else⁴ (the “Enragés” at some French universities proved most close to them in practice, revolutionary ideas, and motivation, but were not theorists in the first instance).⁵

For the Situationists in the mid-sixties there was „no doubt for anyone who examines the question coldly that those who really want to shake an established society must formulate a theory that fundamentally explains it, or which at least has the air of giving a satisfactory explanation of it. As soon as this theory has been divulged a little (even before it comes to be exactly understood) – provided that the work of dissemination is done in confrontations that disturb the public peace – the discontent felt everywhere will be heightened and made more bitter by the sole faint knowledge of the existence of a theoretical condemnation of the order of things. And after that, it is by beginning to conduct with anger the war for freedom that all proletarians can become strategists.”⁶

Revolutionary uneasiness had grown under the surface of one of the most saturated as well as politically balanced post-war systems of consumer-capitalism – the Gaullist presidential regime with its strong “popular front”-traditional bourgeois-democratic opposition and trades-unions-machines, – amidst modern everyday-life and within the working-sphere of the affluent society, a general discontent to an amount which could lead to a general social explosion when a handful of situationist non-student “enragés” provoked the student rebellions – starting on a seemingly isolated minority scale in France from the Strasbourg Scandal at the end of 1966,⁷ ending up in a mass scale general wildcat strike following the occupation of universities starting at Nanterre and Paris in May 1968 and concentrating in the situationist activities by the CMdO (Council for the Maintenance of the Occupations) during the following weeks of factory-occupations all over the country.

The situationist impulses were strikingly “non-economist” altogether, they left the bread-and-butter-issues over to the trades-union-apparatuses just as they left the political questions of the day - such as the parliamentary-democratic problem of de Gaulle’s governmental system – to the left-wing political parties. The situationist impetus was a theoretical one in the sense of the early Marx’ proclamation: “The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.”⁸ To resume our thesis here: The Situationist International apparently made this come true by means of a modern type of “theoretical practice” or “practice of theory” they had developed since their origins from the “Lettrist International” in the early 1950ies, and this new type of theoretical and practical art-of-war – as they saw it⁹ – was the critique of spectacular commodity-production.

Neither Vitalism nor Lifestyle

This critical theory intended a radical attack on the limits of modern life.

„Life” not conceived in an obscure vitalistic meaning, but in full rational perspective of dialectical and materialist historicity:¹⁰ ranging from the historical process of the social reproduction of material life to the focus of individually lived experience in modern everyday life – whereby the limits are marked in the forms of spectacular images: defined to be the normative images of capitalist reproduction into which social and individual life as a whole vanishes or disappears at the moment of commodity-production and -consumption¹¹ and under the condition of class separations.

Before and during the 1968 events, the special limit of modern proletarian revolution as the Situationists saw it was the traditional leftist imagery of “revolution” itself: all forms of a *representation*¹² of the proletariat, such as by (post-)stalinist, (neo-)leninist, trotskyite, or maoist parties, as well as the semi- or non-party organisations of leftwing and council-communist tradition (“mini-bureaucracies”), and, last but not least, anarchism in its collectivist and syndicalist as well as in its individualist and spontaneity-stricken forms.¹³ Even the pro-situationist fashion and fan-club scenery following the Strasbourg scandal irradiation of an S.I. legend since 1966 and, more than ever, the years immediately after 1968, was harshly rejected by the extremist nucleus of the S.I. around Guy Debord, characterising *pro-situationism* to be nothing but “a manifestation of a profound alienation of the *most inactive* sector of modern society that was becoming vaguely revolutionary.”¹⁴ Therefore, the S.I. was dissolved in 1972 by the extremist minority¹⁵ as it had more and more become something like “a collective star” among other leftist stars for this public sector of modern western society which demands to consume some up-to-date “revolutionary ideology”.¹⁶

So, if there ever was a necessity to “burn Situationism”, Guy Debord and some late situationist comrades brought the petrol to this critical fire when they showed the social origins of prosituationists¹⁷ in their class-analysis of *the conduct* of the “*cadre*” (or *leading executive personnel*)¹⁸ within modern capitalist society; and when they demanded to develop the critique of political economy further. As they stated for the beginning 1970ies: “the veritable split of the Situationist International” had left behind a contemplative unity of prosituationist mythologists organising itself around the image of the past organisation and its future fragmentation on the one side, namely in the spheres of positive left-wing bourgeois management of politics, art and culture; whilst on the other side, the *negative* and *destructive party* (Marx) of modern society had *proceeded* in the direction of a final supersession [*Aufhebung*] of the S.I. after the 1968 insurrection: “From now on, the situationists are everywhere.”¹⁹ Everywhere, they meant to say, where the totality of bourgeois spheres – such as politics and the state-apparatus, art and the cultural institutions, “revolutionary ideology” and recuperation²⁰ by leftist cadres etc. – are attacked practically and burnt theoretically by the neo-communist critical elements.²¹

The limit of *the S.I. in its time* had proved to be the same lack of proletarian activity within the vague revolutionary upheaval that projected its insufficiency into an image of “activism” and “revolutionary life-style”. It is exactly this spectacular image of “Situationism” that has survived, and is about to recuperate the critical theory of “The Society of the Spectacle” including its author Guy Debord, turning him into the icon of Situationism after his death in 1994.

The limits of the proletarian offensive in May and June 1968 were soberly made clear by the situationist analysis in the same year: “Just as it was not enough to simply ignore the State, there were certainly no sufficiently clear perspectives. Too few people had a coherent revolutionary theory, and its dissemination among the masses had to overcome extremely unfavorable conditions. Apart from the power of the existing order's spectacular media, there were the counter-revolutionary bureaucracies, which had at that time been unmasked by far too few.” (René Viénet: *Enragés and Situationists in the Movement of the Occupations – May 1968*).

All these insufficiencies resulted in the incapacity of all proletarian efforts of that time to organise itself in a new form of cosmo-communist revolutionary association as class-of-consciousness.²²

The situationist limit within its critique of the proletarian limit in its time can only be found out if prosituationist imagery – being the persisting glorification of *Situationism* up till now – is demolished, and the critical theory of spectacular society is set free in the course of its self-criticism. This critical rescue in the sense of what Walter Benjamin conceived as *construction and destruction*²³ is what remains of the S.I. and it can only mean to burn all the stickers of Situationism and the Debord-cult, Vaneigem-cult etc. in the heat wave of a critical actualisation of the theory of spectacle itself.

Do we live in a society of the spectacle?

The notion of “spectacle” as conceived by Debord in his 1967 fundamental analysis is *explicitly based on* Marx’ analysis of capitalist mode of production – adding to the critique of political economy, something that we might call a *critique of political imageology*. This operation is necessary after a century of continuous victory in the course of formal and real

subsumption of global life under capitalist commodity production. The point of "The Society of the Spectacle" is that real subsumption under the production of images goes along with the real subsumption of everything under the capitalist production of commodities.

"As indispensable embellishment of currently produced objects, as general articulation of the system's rationales, and as advanced economic sector that directly creates an ever-increasing mass of image-objects, the spectacle is the leading production of present-day society." ("The Society of the Spectacle" [TSS] §15)

"Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the result and the project of the dominant mode of production. It is not a mere decoration added to the real world. It is the very heart of this real society's unreality. In all of its particular manifestations — news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment — the spectacle represents the dominant model of life." (TSS §6) As commodity form turns social labour and social action into "a social hieroglyph" (Marx), this hieroglyphical character adheres to every product in totalised commodity society. Not only the gadget and the star-commodity of the moment, but each particle of the commodity-output as a whole fulfills the function of a normative image of perfectly *social* production which is private at the same time. The mystification of the highly social character in its contradiction to private production under the condition of the existing separation of the producing individuals and groups, is thus veiled in the form of "money one can only look at".²⁴

More than that, money which engenders money is an image of real capital: of its seemingly occult quality. The real exchange of *living labour* for *dead labour* is turned into the apparition of "labouring money", self-extension of capital without limits.

The spectacle is thus to be defined as "*capital* accumulated to the point that it becomes image." (§34²⁵) Nothing else can be seen any more but the *capitalist form* of social production, circulation, distribution, and consumption.

Capitalist mode of production as a totum appears to be a portrait of the best of all worlds possible. Depicting humankind as devoid of contradictions between its life and its products, it is the ever more perfected portrait of *alienation* – alienation of the whole individual from the social totality, that is, from all the social as well as individual possibilities, already given in a merely *abstract* reality, of historical development.²⁶

At the nucleus of the basic structure of capitalist commodity production – as exposed by Marx in the analysis of the value-form(s) – we find *the equivalent-form*: which Marx calls "the mirror of value".

The mirror-of-value is the decisive moment within the fetishist structure – or better still: the fetishist operation – of modern human social acting. That is because the mirror-of-value changes its functions according to the "three particularities of the equivalent-form": from a *passive* role – that is: reflecting the *active* role/part of the *relative* value-form *within the act* of value-form-equation – the equivalent-form changes to an *active* role, that is: the mirror-of-value shows to all the other products their own value, by means of representing their bodies in its own body, which serves as the bodily expression of their social substance (= that is: objectified labour) and gives them the image of this value-substance *by means of reflection*, which is the most active role of the mirror-of-value as against the whole world of products remaining in the *relative* value-form.²⁷

The notion of spectacular production itself unfolds this fundamental structure of fetishist reflection, projection, and the corresponding material world of mono-relational imagery.²⁸

Likewise, the mirror-of-value is the decisive moment within the basic dialectics of the *economic structure* on the one level of analysis, and of the political as well as further ideological *superstructure* on the other level of analysis. Taken in its real identity, this dialectics is centered in the non-identical social acting of the value-form, which brings about

the social identity as a whole: this *non-identical identity* can be analysed as the open totality of a complex-of-complexes. That is what Lukács called it at the same time when the Situationists elaborated the everyday-life exploration of fetish-forms around the modern reproduction of economic wealth and social, as well as psychic, privation (“poverty of wealth”, “unity of poverty”, and “augmented survival which is itself stuck in the realm of privation”,²⁹ is what they called it).

The first classical³⁰ analysis of this “moment in the development of commodity production”³¹, under the title “The Society of the Spectacle”, is a reflection of these each one reflecting itself in all the 220 others, just as its subject matter, the affluent society of late capitalism, is the real reflection of every individual and its needs as well as social relations in the gigantic mirror-of-value that expresses its dreams, and constitutes its limits at once. Thus the dialectics of basic structure and superstructure is shown in terms of a social critique of a “dream-(filled) sleep” of society, as Walter Benjamin had put it: “The *superstructure* is *the expression* of the *substructure*.”³²

This Marx-oriented line of critical analysis³³ is opposed to all economic as well as all subjectivist *reductionism* of ‘capitalism’ to *either* so-called ‘economic basis’ *or* to its ‘superstructure’. That is to say: neither ‘political economy’ on the one hand nor ‘discourse theory’ on the other hand alone are able and useful paradigms to conceive of *the process of multiplied fetish-forms* in the dialectics of real ‘identical subject/object’. The critical theory of “the society of the spectacle” is one of the most advanced and complex attempts to seize this dialectical “identical and non-identical process”, not in an abstract, “esoteric” manner³⁴ but to seize it in terms of all the driving (manifest as well as latent) *separations* of modern class-society: the proletariat as the *subject* of world production in the last instance, *and* as the mere *object* of the “automatic subject” which is capital, *at once*. The notion of “the spectacle” gives a key to explore the ensemble of separations more and more *concretely* as a *totality* (see TSS §54-57, §72), *mediated* by human *imagery* in its socio-psychoanalytical meaning, and how to subvert it practically as the question of “hic Rhodus, hic salta!”:

How can the mirror-of-mirrors, this totality of human self-distortion, be smashed, on the basis of ongoing conflicts in the spheres of spontaneous as well as manipulated everyday life, in a strategically associated way by *enfants perdus* elements constructing situations, in a way that can lead to *the* situation that makes all turning back impossible, from the beginning of a transition to a communist production and distribution on a world-scale?

„These interrelated activities provide a preliminary sketch of the project of a permanent revolution. Our position is that of combatants between two worlds — one that we don’t acknowledge, the other that does not yet exist. We must precipitate the crash; hasten the end of the world, the disaster in which the situationists will recognize their own [*viz.: partisans*].”³⁵

Marx had depicted the constellation of the epoch which the “completion of a world market”³⁶ had brought about:³⁷ He characterised this constellation as a mere tendency, however, not as a deterministic “necessity”, as he confronted it at once with all the “moments that delay and check this movement” economically.

Until the mid-twentieth century, this disastrous continuity had reached such an intensity on every, not only on the economic, level that the historical materialist Walter Benjamin tried to check allegorically in his famous interpretation of a painting by Max Klee as “the angel of history”:³⁸

“His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it

before his feet.”

What Marx in his era and the Situationists in their time had predicted in view of the possible action of modern proletariat: to create “a situation ... that makes all turning back impossible”,³⁹ this abstract perspective had turned out to show, in the course of the century between them, a more precise concretisation; until the 1940ies modern history ended up as a development of a catastrophe from which there was no return, and not alone in respect to the defeat of proletarian revolution between 1921 to 1938. This revolutionary conception has been forced, since the mid-twentieth century, to determine its image of the *Weltlauf* (= the course of history according to Hegel) as well as its self-perception in an utterly radical new way, in a fundamentally different way facing itself amidst a catastrophic logic of wage-labour/capital which – as Marx put it in the Communist Manifesto” – in one word, *creates a world after its own image*, and in doing so has reached a stage of perfection at which – as Guy Debord later stated: – the sovereign rule of the integrated spectacular order does not tolerate any objection, it does not stand for back talk.⁴⁰

As can be seen by the document quoted above, the Situationists attempted to face both historical situations strategically: the revolutionary as well as the disastrous *dynamis*. But we have to ask:

Were they able, after all, to mediate realistically these antagonistic potentialities and necessities, which would have meant to encounter the ruling closed world-image (*Weltbild*) of totalitarian spectacle? Were they able to break this “empty continuum” (W. Benjamin) of images in their epoch, by means of bringing it to a standstill in the sense of revolutionary discontinuity, this method of suspension that the historical materialist Walter Benjamin conceived to be “the dialectical image”? Or, to put this question vice versa: Were the Situationists able to confront the breakage of the “history of progress” by the radical “remembrance” [*Eingedenken*]?⁴¹

To answer this, after having given a short explanation on why we live in a society of the spectacle, our next question is:

What does “catastrophe” mean for an actualisation of situationist critique of history?

The Situationists were among the first post-war communists who tried to smash the distortion-mirror of the continuity of historical and revolutionary ”progress”. They did so against a closed ideological façade of economic welfare-state prosperity in the Western world and Japan during the Fifties and Sixties in general, and against the political division-of-labour in particular between the left-wing “camp” in- and outside the world under the “pax americana” and “eternal summer” propaganda⁴² for a proletariat that had allegedly ended up as a positive, lonely but happy crowd in each of the two blocs of states in which the continuous perfection of the world-market had resulted after two world wars. The situationist negation began at that point where the historical materialist Walter Benjamin had interrupted the course of left-wing ideology nearly thirty years before as he had stated: “The concept of progress must be grounded in [the idea of] catastrophe. That things are ‚status quo’ is the catastrophe.”⁴³

The analogy – or, better still: homology – of the situationist concept of history to that of Walter Benjamin – who expressed the same horizon of social time-space, the Paris of the surrealist movement and of the exiles envisaging bourgeois Europe under the national-socialist and the stalinist alliance – is striking.

Again, in the 1960ies, the *image* of history in general, and of revolutionary history in particular, is at stake since the S.I. started with its programmatic and radical disillusionment, as expressed, for instance, in the words of the 1966 “Address to the Revolutionaries in Algeria and in all Countries”:

“Comrades,

The collapse of the revolutionary image presented by the international communist movement is taking place forty years after the collapse of the revolutionary movement itself. This time gained for the bureaucratic lie — that supplement to the permanent bourgeois lie — has been time lost for the revolution.

It is first of all necessary to recognize, without holding on to any consoling illusions, the full extent of the defeat of the entire revolutionary project in the first third of this century and its official replacement, in every region of the world and in every domain of life, by delusive shams and petty reforms that camouflage and preserve the old order. The domination of bureaucratic state-capitalism over the workers is the opposite of socialism — this is a fact that Trotskyism has refused to face.”⁴⁴

In this new „offensive and defensive pact with the truth”,⁴⁵ the situationist intolerance against all forms of traditional continuity, “progressive” lies and false allies comes to the opposite conclusions compared to many Trotskyites nowadays – for example, the 1966 address supports “those comrades who have burnt the Koran in the streets of Baghdad!”

However, taken at their own radically demanding criteria concerning disillusionment, the Situationists were not as consequent in their outspoken critical implications as was the critical theory with Adorno and the “Frankfurt School”, after Benjamin’s death – that is: after the Shoah.

Since the Shoah⁴⁶ means and actually was: *the catastrophe* – so far not alone of human history in general but of the working class movement and its revolutionary conceptions of emancipation in particular⁴⁷ – it caused a gigantic and singular breakage of the image of social and historical totality: firstly, modern society has turned out to be “the anti-Semitic society.”⁴⁸ This means that the conflicting structures of modern barbarity and of “civil society” are basically one; and secondly, this structural antinomy means that “revolutionary coherence” has been put into question much more radically than the left-communist, and also situationist self-image of revolutionary ethics and strategy used to consider.

The Shoah not only destroyed every unfractured hope for emancipation from the forms that mankind reproduces against itself, but has once and for all made obsolete any faith in a steady, kind-of-guaranteed progress or breakthrough of revolutionary history, and of communist theory at the same time. For this catastrophe of the history of human species as such (“Gattungsmäßigkeit an und für sich” – as Lukács put it) neither an adequate notion nor an image are possible, but only a cipher such as “Auschwitz”. Since the coherence of the “kategorial imperative” by Kant and by Marx has evidently been “eliminated” by the Hitler, a new coherence of practical reason was tried to conceive in Adorno’s theoretical attempt: “Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative upon humanity in the state of their unfreedom⁴⁹ to arrange their thinking and conduct, so that Auschwitz never repeats itself, so that nothing similar ever happen again. This imperative is as unmanageable vis-à-vis its foundation as the given fact formerly was to the Kantian one.”⁵⁰

Continuity and discontinuity of history so far cannot be „mediated“ any more without some deep self-deception of the revolutionaries, in an image of communist-proletarian coherence. This feeling for the lie of false leftist “incoherent coherence” was expressed by the Situationists as they confirmed: that for all their modernism, the rescue and return of the revolutionary proletariat from the 19th century was the only thing they wished for – and

when, at the same time, they urged to leave the 20th century as rapidly as possible.

We can only presume: the historical, life-history proximity to the Shoah – from which some of those only had a narrow escape who later on became Situationists in France, in Scandinavia, in the Mediterranean region and Israel⁵¹ – might have been stupefying to a degree at which a psychic self-defence / self-protection against the traumatising effects possibly prohibited their direct look back into the catastrophe – comparable to the narrative about “Lot’s Wife” in the Torah. Or, to make use of another image from mythology in our attempt to understand this situationist limit:

The portrait of mankind in the mirror of this history has since then changed into something like a face-of-the-Medusa. Most left-wing partisans have avoided even to take a closer look into this mirror. Those who did, often used to become some sort of paralysed.

The syndrom of modern anti-Semitism: crucial for revolutionary communist critique

In a plagiatory, that is, actualising use of Horkheimer’s famous dictum⁵² it reveals its truth also when read vice versa: “Who does not wish to speak of anti-Semitism should also be silent about capitalism.”

The critical theory exiled in the USA had the clearest view of the consequences for the revolutionary possibilities of the working-class-movement. Only to mention here Adorno’s statement on the historical shift: the shift from the proletariat (before 1933) to “the Jews” (since 1938) “as the counterpoint opposite to the concentration-point of modern power”.⁵³

Also to mention Franz Neumann, in his study “Behemoth”⁵⁴, who was the first to analyse the national socialist image of the “Prolet-Arians” as the projection in the distortion-mirror of an anti-Semitic New World Order, regarding themselves as anti-capitalist.

And we mention the analysis of the “Elements of anti-Semitism” in the fundamental study “Dialectics of Enlightenment”: “The Jew(s)” as “the image of (...) happiness without power, wages without work, a home without frontiers, religion without myth.”⁵⁵

This type of critical theory results in the logical and historical necessity of classless society⁵⁶ and Adorno & Horkheimer – though still formulating all this philosophically – concluded their analysis of anti-Semitism, openly arguing for the violent overthrow of the material conditions of class society and anti-Semitic society: “Enlightenment which is in possession of itself and coming to power can break the *bounds* of enlightenment.”⁵⁷ (emphas. by BBZN)

Even though some of its members either escaped the European machinery of national socialist German annihilation, or later on had the opportunity to perceive the Auschwitz-trial in Western Germany in the early 1960ies – which they ignored – the situationist anti-spectacular type of critical theory does not even once or twice speak adequately about ‘Auschwitz’⁵⁸.

Yet we think that the whole situationist theory of the spectacle is unthinkable without this cipher, as “Auschwitz” set the background of the whole situationist effort to break up the paralysis – the paralysis facing the historical catastrophe, a paralysis which even the S.I. did not overcome. “Despite” their suppression (amnesia).

If the most elaborated forms of modern capitalist fetishism are threefold, as Marx has already shown in the analysis of the “religion of everyday life”⁵⁹ culminating in “the trinary form” and as anti-Semitic projection is the concentration of this modern religion-of-everyday-life, so

the theory and practice of anti-spectacular critique can give us some more elaborated analytical instruments to actualise a defetishising imageology which destroys modern capitalist and barbaric anti-Semitic projections in their ideological crossover and their overdetermined forms of political practice. By now, both syndromes of modern blindness (“not to wish to speak of capitalism” and “not to wish to speak of anti-Semitism”) have grown the more effective in their interplay, the more narrow-minded their enlightened enemies have remained, mythically, in view to the common socio-psychological fundament they share.

Blind spots with the Situationist International (S.I.) and with the Frankfurt “Institute of Social Research” (I.S.) critical theory

After the Shoah, a secondary anti-Semitism became popular⁶⁰, and under the pretext of anti-imperialism a worldwide right-wing as well as left-wing imageary concentrates the well-known anti-Semitic projections on Israel, “the Jew among the states” (Hans Mayer). Not only do so-called socialist anti-Zionists forget all critical standards of materialist historical differentiation within what Marx calls “the un-equal development” of world-capitalist totality when they ignore the historical *particularity* and the singularity of the genesis, foundation and circumstances of the modern Jewish state. But many of those false critics of the lonesome sheltering power for the Jews in an anti-Semitic world reveal their more or less unconscious motives whenever they attack its distorted-mirror-image as the concentration-point of imperialism, capitalism, colonialism, war-mongering, and worldwide danger as the outpost of “the US-Eastcoast connection”⁶¹ And whilst the “Protocols of the Sages of Zion” and Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” are booming in the Islam-dominated societies and especially so in the Arab countries, not a few leftist militants have arrived at the pathetic projection of Israel or “USrael” as the incarnation of – not only an aggressive bourgeois policy but – of the Nazi legacy itself.

The critical theory with Adorno and Horkheimer held an unwavering position of partisanship for Israel, also when of course they had objections on the level of concrete questions of political and military handling in detail. They always knew and made clear that Israel is the Jew among the States in a necessarily anti-Semitic world.

The situationist position towards Israel was a broken one: before the 1967 war they denounced an anti-Israel eliminatory policy (such as by the maoist China), but since the Six-Days War they were evidently in favour of Israel’s enemies. But in each case the situationist analysis did not in a single word touch the nerve; the big taboo around the true reason of the eventual coming into existence of Israel was implicit in all their statements; never mind if it was a communist critique of everyday life in bourgeois Israel in 1961 by the member of the S.I., Jacques Ovadia who lived there; or when five years later the situationist author Mustapha Khayati, with his Tunesian background and later PLO membership, supported an outright eliminatory position grounded on the argument that Israel had been “organised with Rothschild capital”, and that the Jews there allegedly did to the Arabs what had been done to themselves in Europe.⁶²

In a word: this situationist equalization merely “forgot” the Shoah.

This rigid abstracticism in the situationist critical theory might be seen as the reverse of the medal if we appreciate the situationist maximalism⁶³ with respect to the issues of state and politics. Their uncompromising political abstinence – which is certainly owed to a rather unconscious anarchist mark – excluded any consideration of revolutionary “real politics” (“*revolutionäre Realpolitik*” – sic Lukács) such as the International Workers’ Association (the First International) in the era of Marx had developed it. The S.I., however, confined its

minimalist activity to the level of mere workers' coalitions or revolutionary alliances,⁶⁴ and avoided any intervention on the level of bourgeois states and their foreign policies and world scale civil war. When Marx urged the International Workers' Association to intervene on this level whenever possible, he had in mind – not something like the later stalinist ideology and tacticism of a so-called “peoples' front” in its categorical subordination under “its” imperialist bourgeoisie, but – the ever necessary strategic alliances with all bourgeois democratic elements of modern civilisation against the powers of regressive antidemocratic despotism and barbarity. And, facing the weakness and failure of these civilizing elements, revolutionary political realism has to support the forces of self-defense the more so, since the struggle against modern “decadent” capitalism (“late capitalism”) is inseparable from the struggle against inherent anti-Semitism:

“I have, of course, long since abandoned my anti-Zionism, which was based on a confidence in the European labour movement, or, more broadly, in European society and civilization, which that society and civilization have not justified. If, instead of arguing against Zionism in the 1920s and 1930s I had urged European Jews to go to Palestine, I might have helped to save some of the lives that were later extinguished in Hitler's gas chambers.”

(Isaac Deutscher: *The non-Jewish Jew, and other Essays*. Oxford 1968)

When criticising the abstractness in the situationist critical theory we must also point to a corresponding abstractness in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School when it comes to their naivety towards – or, should we say, entanglement within – the state apparatus, a certain blindness, presumably resulting from the objective helplessness facing the effective function of the universities and other bourgeois ideological institutions in particular. Between the *de facto* “institutionalism” of the “Institute of Social Research” (I.S.) in the USA and Western Germany on the one side, and the anti-politics of the Situationist International (S.I.) in Western Europe on the other side, a gap remained which revolutionary critical theory today can only name in the first instance: its implications of the underlying social being were in both cases, according to their respective consciousness, a respective lack of radical materialist critique of state and politics. But though they seem to have converged arriving both at theorems of some “state capitalism” tendency⁶⁵ the limit of the S.I. at this point was not at all that of a blind spot facing state-power as such. The Situationists' advantage compared to the “Frankfurt School” critical theory was just its consciousness when positioning themselves (after the “artists' faction” had left the S.I.):

“All the specializations of illusion can be taught and discussed by the tenured thinkers.⁶⁶ But the situationists take their stand in the knowledge that is outside this spectacle: we are not thinkers sponsored by the state.”⁶⁷

Therefore the Situationists were able theoretically to face the crucial question of political transition as the precondition for a communist revolution, in such a clear formulation that the limit of a century of socialist and state-communist party-ideologues as well as of anarchist idealists was for the first time overcome since Marx had shown at the Paris Commune paradigm, that – as Engels also put it:– this form of working class rule *is not a state-power* any longer in the sense of the word,⁶⁸ and that it even transcends democracy (by fulfilling it most consequently): we are talking about the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. The S.I. has for the first time drawn the consequences from the (later) bolshevik and the stalinist falsification of this term, whose really existing party-state dictatorship *over* the proletariat guaranteed the terror of state-capital accumulation on the basis of wage-labour and forced labour; and their so-called planned economy meant nothing but a bourgeois-bureaucratic dictatorship over the needs. The situationist critique shows the necessity of an *anti-state* dictatorship of the proletariat in its own right, which means the rule of the needs and their realisation: the realisation and satisfaction on a mass-scale of *enormous needs*, as Marx has

called them, and of *the radical needs*, that is, all in all: only the empowerment of revolutionary desire by the vast majority can enable them for the real transition of bourgeois-capitalist civilisation into a communist civilisation in the psychogeographical sense:

“The history that threatens this twilight world could potentially subject space to a directly experienced time. Proletarian revolution is this critique of human geography through which individuals and communities could create places and events commensurate with the appropriation no longer just of their work, but of their entire history. The ever-changing playing field of this new world and the freely chosen variations in the rules of the game will regenerate a diversity of local scenes that are independent without being insular. And this diversity will revive the possibility of authentic journeys — journeys within an authentic life that is itself understood as a journey containing its whole meaning within itself.

The most revolutionary idea concerning urbanism is not itself urbanistic, technological or aesthetic. It is the project of reconstructing the entire environment in accordance with the needs of the power of workers councils, of the anti-state dictatorship of the proletariat, of executory dialogue. Such councils can be effective only if they transform existing conditions in their entirety; and they cannot set themselves any lesser task if they wish to be recognized and to recognize themselves in a world of their own making.” (TSS §§ 178, 179)⁶⁹

Thus, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat which abolishes itself as a class together with every social separation in history, can only mean to set free and make real the radical needs, including the need of “travail attractif”.⁷⁰ This does not mean any “utopianism”, but on the contrary, the concrete realisation of total appropriation of the material and cultural means of life including all their possibilities.

Thus, the „political period of transformation“ (Marx), after the bloody experiences of the century of class-wars, since its first proletarian attempt by the “assault on heaven” (“Himmelsstürmer”, sic Marx)⁷¹ in the Paris Commune, is rescued in its “messianic” trajectory, in the sense of “annihilation” of the state machinery right from the beginning, as the precondition of communist self-administration, pointed out by non-utopian, materialist historians from Karl Marx to Walter Benjamin.⁷²

Benjamin especially pointed out Marx’ scientific achievement of consequent „secularization of messianism”, whereby the non-utopian, politically concrete communist critique of state-socialist (social-democrat) and opportunist attentism on the left is made possible again. The situationist critique of “rushing into sordid reformist compromises or pseudo-revolutionary collective actions”⁷³ takes up this recognition of “revolutionary opportunity in every moment” in its conception to create situations beginning the destruction of all the intolerable spheres of separations of class-society in the here-and-now, especially so the state apparatuses in all their forms, as the precondition of “the” revolutionary situation. “Waiting for the revolutionary situation” and being fixed – positively or negatively – to the state power, are both the reverse of the same medal: state-fetishism; the revolutionary-realist opposite can only be an active “savoir attendre” (“know how to wait”) as characterized by the situationist critical theory/praxis.⁷⁴

Most of all this anti-utopian situationist concept of bringing about the classless society, according to Benjamin’s “messianic time”, is concentrated in its appropriation of history in the first place (“But classless society does not mean the conception of the final point / an ending of a historical development.” W. Benjamin: Paralipomena I,3,5 – our translation, BBZN), but the empowerment of revolutionary desire to set free the radical needs by the producing class on its own is identical with the *beginning* of *human* history:

This is possible only when individuals are “directly linked to universal history” and dialogue arms itself to impose its own conditions.”⁷⁵

The danger of remaining abstract in all that maximalism, the limit of what state-socialists like to call “revolutionarism”, is overcome or mediated by the situationist “minimalism” of a whole set of forms and techniques of everyday-life-criticism along practical experimenting – which is impossible to sketch out here, but – which prospects, all in all, a subversive path to this breakthrough and final empowerment of revolutionary desire. The situationist slogans in the May’68 uprising summed it up in the form of graffiti such as “realize your dreams!” (“prenez vos rêves pour réalité”) or “la révolution en service de la poésie”⁷⁶ etc.

In this context only, the question of aisthesis, that is: the question if, after “Auschwitz”, making poems is still possible or not (in an ethical as well as aesthetical sense), is answered implicitly by the situationist critique of art and culture: in the negative! Art has become a limit in itself, it has to be superceded into a revolutionary subversion by aesthetic means – by new forms *against* politics and art!⁷⁷

Whoever tries to continue with and within the separate spheres of art, of politics or even “political art”, cannot reclaim the situationist delimitation – or has to recuperate fragments and call this “Situationism”. So, the blind spot of all the recuperators can be seen at once: it is the stubborn fetishist complex of “politics and state” inseparable from “avant-garde and art”. The destruction of the fetish-forms such as “politics” and “art” is only possible in the situationist program by *détournement* in every sphere of social separations, in a process by more and more collective experiments in the communication of the lived, and by constructed situations beyond party politics, art academies, reclaim-the-streets-rituals and culture congresses.

Transgressing the limit: conditions

The possibility of the Shoah has proved *the mental state of the proletariat* to be the decisive modern limit of human history of civilisation and revolutionary empowerment for a communist transition. A certain situationist shortsightedness has become evident in respect to what Marx sums up as “the general law of capitalist accumulation”. The “accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, moral degradation, at the opposite pole” is nothing else than the process of proletarianisation.⁷⁸ Being part of this process, the S.I. itself was still part of the limitation of revolutionary chances in its time insofar as it adhered to the unscratched image of a historical shape of the “non-ambivalent” proletariat before 1938. What has to be examined *scrupulously* in a present and future that needs “situationists to be everywhere” – in the sense of new kinds of communist “enfants perdus” – is *the ambivalence* of the proletariat of which the elements of communist consciousness are a driving part and in which they try to organise the class-of-consciousness on a cosmopolitical scale.

The diagnosis by Marx himself of a “progressive mob” in the course of the history of class struggles in general and the formation of a modern proletariat one in one with capitalist accumulation⁷⁹ conceives a “human pack” in its ambivalence that is unfolding on the basis of objective and subjective existence of social formations of production, and of a *regressive* mob respectively. “But the comfortable delusions and almost childish enthusiasm⁸⁰ with which we welcomed the revolutionary era (...), have gone by the board.” – such were the sobering insights that Marx resumed in a letter to Engels resuming the ambivalence of revolutions in an era of “nation building”. “Moreover, we now know what role stupidity plays in revolutions,

and how they are exploited by blackguards⁸¹ within the inner class-contradictions (based on economic competition and psycho-social rivalry) especially so in revolutions.⁸² This diagnosis of the “subjective factor” in the dialectics of progressive and regressive moments of proletarian constitution has to be further elaborated as the radical critique,⁸³ radical in the sense of what Marx postulates as “demonstrating ad hominem”.⁸⁴ After the historical defeat in the 20th century, it has become a question of death and life to detect the anti-Semitic structure of modern “religion of everyday-life” can do away with the limitations of a one-sided, historically optimist *image* of “the revolutionary class” *per se*. The modern proletariat *actually* is a processing ensemble of contradictions in an open, non-determinist reality which can never be „represented“ by “revolutionary ideology” and the monologue about “historical progress”.

Gender trouble and critique of everyday life

In this context, one of the most fatal and most ridiculous limits of the situationist critique of the separations was its blind spot concerning the separation by gender. In the course of “pre-history” of mankind that has not overcome its character of (pseudo-)natural-“history” even at this stage of capitalist-bourgeois-civilisation, the socio-cultural varieties of gender have been kept to be reduced to the difference of biological sex(es) whilst the polymorphous multiplicity of “sex” itself has been normatively forced into the binary matrix of the poles of “the masculine” and “the feminine” according to socio-historical divisions of labour, thus reproducing a vicious circle of “naturalising” class-separations in terms of gender and sexes: a most fundamental form of individual adjustment for class-hierarchy, basically still within the institution of family. Although the Situationists attacked the institution of family in an abstract way⁸⁵ as well as the oppression of women, they did not subvert the heterosexist matrix in their critique of everyday life or in their own organisational structure, nor did they make this much of an issue in the critical theory of the Situationists.⁸⁶ But for a critical reception and “supersession” of their antispectacular theory and praxis today this can only mean that the image of history in terms of merely natural separations along the traditional divisions of labour, active/passive-role models etc, must and can be radically subverted if we take abstract materialist maximalism over from the situationist approach in order to make it become concrete. The historical abolition of the gender-matrix is an inalienable precondition for breaking the limitations of social individual in its disposable social space-time.

To do away with these limitations affords the destruction of their normative legitimising images – not alone concerning gender and not alone concerning social classes isolated from each other – but in their complex totality as fragments of a gigantic fetish, the fetish of modern “everydaylife-religion” (“Alltagsreligion” – Marx) which always includes anti-Semitic matrices. How to break up this ensemble of reflections and projections in the modern subject/object-identity of world-market-production, is a program for psychogeographical exploration along a set of open questions that we can only mention here, concluding with some necessary sensible abstractions emerging from the concrete situationist practice of theory, and theory of practice in its time.

Aiming at cooperative critique

Who is the actual (shape and anatomy of) modern proletariat, what are its radical needs, revolutionary passions and desire?

What does “psychogeography”, the situationist method of exploration of the “north-west

passage of modern communist revolution”, mean today?

How can we – i.e.: the global *aggregate worker*⁸⁷ – wake up from the nightmare of disappropriated history, learning to decipher the contemporary dream(filled)sleep of the proletariat, and what can we do for the destruction of the ruling images (especially the ruling images of “revolution”) that make the existing social order continue on and on as a chain of catastrophe?

What does it mean to construct “the *dialectical* image” of associated appropriation of the social means of life by the global labourer herself?

How can an empowerment of the self-organisation for the class-of-historical-consciousness become possible by means of theoretical praxis, which is “the domain of danger”?⁸⁸

¹ See: “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy” (USA 1965), “The Totality for Kids” (USA 1966, orig. 1963; a first approach to historically seize the genesis of spectacular class-society in terms of “Basic Banalities”), “On the Poverty of Student Life” (1966); “Root Structures of Reification” (1966 [literally:] “The Elementary Structures of Reification”), “The Revolution of Everyday Life” (“Manual of the *Ars Vivendi / Savoir Vivre* for the Young Generations”), and “The Society of the Spectacle” (1967).

²

See, f.i., Guy Debord “The Society of the Spectacle” (= **TSS**): thesis §90; and: Guy Debord, Gianfranco Sanguinetti: *Theses on the Situationist International and its Time*. in: *The Veritable Split in the International – Public Circular of the Situationist International*, Paris 1972. (= **TVS1972**): theses §§ 46,47.

³

One year after the upheaval in France 1968, the situationist „Revue“ resumed: “Until recently, even those who readily recognized an interest in some points of our theory regretted that we ourselves made the whole truth of that theory contingent upon the return of social revolution, which they considered an incredible ‘hypothesis’. Conversely, various activists with no real contact with reality, but taking pride in their eternal allergy to any relevant theory, posed the stupid question: ‘What is the SI’s practical activity?’ Lacking the slightest comprehension of the dialectical process through which the real movement ‘meets its own unknown theory,’ they all wanted to disregard what they believed to be an unarmed critique. Now this critique is arming itself. The ‘sunburst that in a flash reveals the features of the new world’ was seen in France in that month of May ...” (French orig. in: **internationale situationniste** [= **i.s.**] N°12/1969). At the moment of this statement, the Situationists were preparing their 8th Conference, in Venice at the end of September 1969, facing a well-nigh revolutionary situation in Italy based upon “the movement of the subaltern [proletarianised strata]” evolving rapidly.

⁴

In 1972 the last S.I.-members state that many of the books about the May 1968 “movement of the occupations” have tried to distinguish between the Situationists on the one side, presenting them as some brilliant precursors and theoreticians, and those who had actually taken part in the practical movement in 1968, on the other side. The situationist comment points to “the old-school nuance” of this distinction between those who allegedly do nothing but “give expression to a historical trend”, and “those who put it into action”. The Situationists contrast this pattern with “the scandal which is crucial and which this kind of historical research tries to conceal”, namely, the central fact that these same Situationists just had been there: on the barricades, in the Sorbonne [university occupation], in the factories; and that the Situationists were right to say: “There we made *the theory of the moment itself*.” This is verified, in the situationist retrospective we render here, by the loads of texts circulated during those weeks by the S.I. and the CMdO (= Council for the Maintenance of the Occupations) in France and abroad, if you consider “how clearly these texts understood the event, and how much more clear-sighted – compared to the best journalists and historians – they pointed to the consequences; in particular if you read what could be taken as “the last will and testament of the whole movement of the occupations”: the May 30th “Address to all the Workers” by the “Enragés-S.I. Committee and the CMdO” (documented in: René Viénet: *Enragés and Situationists in the Movement of the Occupations – May 1968*. [French orig.: Paris 1968]). Grasping the revolutionary moment, so the Situationists tried to explain then, all historically possible of the whole of society is concentrated in no more than “three or four hypotheses by the revolutionary moment, in which hypotheses can be realized clearly how their relative strength is gradually developing, as well as their growing and their turning over” – contrasted by the usual unpredictability of social *routine*. In their reflections on routine “in its general truth, in which it can be realized as *this determined* routine, thus enabling us to predict its main direction”, and *normal* routine, the course of which is “unpredictable in its singular developments and interactions since it is resulting from / produced by an infinite number of diverging processes”, the situationist summary makes its own distinction: “The leftists could only recognize the Smolny again, or the Long March, and as a result their operations in 1968 Paris were even more clumsy than they would have been – without Lenin – in the Smolny in 1917. The [proletarian] masses, on the contrary, had a sense that the possible change of their life was already present.” In the situationist memory not one of all the leftist radicals who spoke in the mass meetings “had the slightest view to not only what was to happen, but also to what could possibly occur: many did not even understand how little far the course and consequences were from an utmost [counterrevolutionary] repression at the falling back of the movement”. And resuming the four years after 1968, the situationist diagnosis of “the dialectics of leftwing radicalism and the spectacle” comes to the conclusion that leftism, since then, has permanently demonstrated “all the extraterrestrial irrationalism that ever is possible”. (See: TVS1972, “Notes for the Use of Historiography on the S.I. from 1969 to 1970.”)

In her academical comparative studies (since “*Die Phantasie an die Macht*”- *Mai 1968 in Frankreich*” Frankfurt/Main 1995) on „the 1968 movement“ in the western world, the German professor *Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey*, also teaching in Paris and Oxford (2007/2008), reproduces the same distorted image of social history, falsifying the S.I. in particular into a confused epiphenomenon, more or less reducing it to the usual cliché of a post-dada-/post-

surrealist bohemian artists' would-be-“avantgarde” between “anarchist” spontaneism and ambitions to build a cadre in order to organize a new youth-movement. She does not even consider the theory of “The Society of the Spectacle”, and their practical impact she sees in another special sort of *representation*: f.i., the Enragés “acted on behalf of the Situationist International” (1995:148) etc. etc.

5

Julien Freund in: *Guerres et Paix* N°4/1968:

„L’observateur ne peut qu’être frappé de la rapidité avec laquelle la contagion s’est propagée dans toute l’Université et en général dans les milieux de la jeunesse non universitaire. Il semble donc que les mots d’ordre lancés par la petite minorité de révolutionnaires authentiques aient remué je ne sait quoi d’indéfinissable dans l’âme de la nouvelle génération. (...) Il faut souligner ce fait: nous voyons réapparaître, comme il y a cinquante ans, des groupes de jeunes gens qui se consacrent entièrement à la cause révolutionnaire, qui savent attendre selon une technique éprouvée les moments favorables pour déclencher ou durcir des troubles dont ils restent les maîtres, pour retourner ensuite à la clandestinité, continuer le travail de sape et préparer d’autres bouleversements sporadiques ou prolongés suivant le cas, afin de désorganiser lentement l’édifice social.” (Quoted in: *La Véritable Scission dans l’Internationale. Circulaire Publique de l’Internationale Situationniste. Paris 1972* [= **LVS1972**], annotation in thesis §39.)

Francois Bott in: *Les Temps Modernes*, Juin 1971:

„Au début de l’année 1968, un critique, traitant de la théorie situationniste, évoquait, en se moquant, une ‘petite lueur qui se promène vaguement de Copenhague à New York’. Hélas, la petite lueur est devenue, la même année, un incendie, qui a surgi dans toutes les citadelles du vieux monde. (...) Les situationnistes ont dégagé la théorie du mouvement souterrain qui travaille l’époque moderne. Alors que les pseudo-héritiers du marxisme oubliaient, dans un monde bouffi de positivité, la part du négatif, et du même coup mettaient la dialectique chez l’antiquaire, les situationnistes annonçaient la résurgence de ce même négatif et discernaient la réalité de cette même dialectique, dont ils retrouvaient le langage, ‘le style insurrectionnel’ (Debord).” (Quoted in: *ibid.* (LVS1972), annotation in thesis §5.)

Pierre Hahn in: *Le Nouveau Planète*, Mai 1971:

„Prise de conscience (et de parole) qui prend sa source dans les activités intellectuelles (et pratiques aussi) d’une minorité de contestataires insolents mais lucides: l’Internationale situationniste. Or, par un paradoxe apparent dont l’histoire a le secret, pendant dix ans et des poussières, l’I.S. est restée pratiquement inconnue dans notre pays. Voilà qui pourrait justifier cette réflexion de Hegel: ‘Toutes les révolutions importantes et qui sautent aux yeux doivent être précédées dans l’esprit de l’époque d’une révolution secrète, qui n’est pas visible pour tous, et encore moins observable par les contemporains et qu’il est aussi difficile d’exprimer par des mots que de comprendre.’” (Quoted in: *ibid.* (LVS1972), annotation in thesis §6.)

Le Nouvel Observateur, 8.2.1971:

“Quand on lit ou relit les numéros de l’I.S., il est frappant, en effet, de constater à quel point et combien souvent ces *énergumènes* ont porté des jugements ou exposé des points de vue qui furent, ensuite, concrètement vérifiés.” (Quoted in: *ibid.* (LVS1972), annotation in thesis §22.)

Le Nouvel Observateur, 8.11.1971:

“*La Société du Spectacle* (...) a nourri les discussions de toute l’ultra-gauche depuis sa publication en 1967. Cet ouvrage qui prédisait Mai 1968, est considéré par certains comme *Le Capital* de la nouvelle génération.” (Quoted in: *ibid.* (LVS1972), annotation in thesis §10.)

Richard Gombin, *Les Origines du Gauchisme* (Paris 1971):

“Mais ils [= les situationnistes] ne prétendent pas faire la seule bonne exégèse de Marx: en réalité, ils ‘dépassent’ Marx et, dans le sens courant du mot, ne sont pas marxistes. (...) On voit ce que cette conception a de radical; la coupure qu’elle opère avec tout le mouvement de gauche de ce demi-siècle lui confère une teinte millénariste, hérétique. (...) Dès le milieu des années soixante, sinon avant, les situationnistes prévoient et annoncent ‘le deuxième assaut prolétarien contre la société de classes’. (...) Le style par eux élaboré et qui a atteint une remarquable cohésion reprend certains des procédés de Hegel et de Marx jeune, comme l’inversion du génitif (armes de la critique / critique des armes), au dadaïsme (débit verbal rapide, mots employés dans un sens différent du sens classique, etc.). Mais surtout c’est un style qui est pénétré d’ironie. (...) À la veille du moi de mai 1968 les situationnistes croient que le moment historique décisif approche. (...) Au cours des événements de mai-juin 1968, les situationnistes ont eu l’occasion d’appliquer leurs idées tant pour ce qui est du fond que de l’organisation, d’abord dans le premier comité d’occupation de la Sorbonne, ensuite au sein du comité pour le maintien des occupations (C.M.D.O).” (Quoted *ibid.* (LVS1972), annotation in thesis §20.)

6

„(...) il n’est pas douteux, pour qui examine froidement la question, que ceux qui veulent ébranler réellement une société établie doivent formuler une théorie qui explique fondamentalement cette société; ou du moins qui ait tout l’air d’en donner une explication satisfaisante. Dès que cette théorie est un peu divulguée, à condition qu’elle le soit dans des affrontements qui perturbent le repos publique, et avant même qu’elle en vienne à être exactement comprise, le mécontentement partout en suspens sera aggravée, et aigri, par la seule

connaissance vague de l'existence d'une condamnation théorique de l'ordre des choses. Et après, c'est en commençant à mener avec colère la guerre de la liberté, que tous les prolétaires peuvent devenir stratèges." (Préface à la Quatrième édition Italienne de *La Société du Spectacle*, in: Guy Debord OEuvres, Paris 2006: p.1464)

⁷ In 1967 already, „in the afterword of their edition of Khayati's text, the English Situationists wrote: 'The most highly developed critique of modern life has been made in one of the least highly developed modern countries — in a country which has not yet reached the point where the complete disintegration of all values becomes patently obvious and engenders the corresponding forces of radical rejection. In the French context, situationist theory has anticipated the social forces by which it will be realized.' The theses of 'On the Poverty of Student Life' have been much more truly understood in the United States and in England (the strike at the London School of Economics in March caused a certain stir, the Times commentator unhappily seeing in it a return of the class struggle he had thought was over with). (...) The struggles of the West Berlin students this year have also picked up some aspects of the critique, though in a still very confused way."(orig.in: i.s.N°11/1967)

⁸ “Allein auch die Theorie wird zur materiellen Gewalt, sobald sie die Massen ergreift.“ Karl Marx, Einleitung zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. See also below: annot. 83

⁹ “The theory of the revolution (...) only has an effective existence through its practical victory (...) 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.” (TVS1972: §46)

¹⁰ Just one remark here against the commonplace left-wing prejudice of “vitalism” (*Lebensphilosophie*) with the allegedly “positive” situationist juxtaposition of “life”, “the lived” (*le vécu*) etc. on the “good, revolutionary” side, and the dead(ly) “unhuman abstraction” of value, money, and capital etc. on the bad side of society and history, as is globally and falsely attributed to the situationist critical theorists never mind if they use a Nietzschean concept of “life”, as does more or less Raoul Vaneigem, or a Hegelian and Marxian approach to spectacular “ghost-like world-of-objects” (“gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit”, sic Marx), as is, most of all, the case with Guy Debord.

According to Hegel, *the living* (“das Lebendige”) is always the unity of totality and of individuality; it is individual only as a total one; it refers to / is relating to life as a whole also, only as an individualised one. In this respect, i.e. the process of life, every immediate standing-opposite (“Gegenüberstehen”) and every externity (“Äusserlichkeit”) of objectivity disappear; it has already been transcended into the relation-to-itself (“Selbstbeziehung”) and has become a “liquid” moment; the problem of body/soul-relation does not really exist for life, but only for the dead thing, and on this level it is insoluble, indeed. –

In “The Science of Logics”, Hegel works out the notion of “life” immediately following the chapter on *teleology*— which is the last part of the logic of notion (“*Begriffslogik*”)! “Life” is the first category within “the idea”, which gives an eminently *material* notion of “idea”: developed out of situations of *needs*. To sum it up in a Marxian terminology: “the vivid / living individual”, “the process of life”, “human species” (“*die Gattung*”) in its historical “material life” derive from the concrete social process of work/labour, and from “the system of (natural) needs”, both individually and socially.

According to Marx, “the process of (re-production of) material life” in its everyday-life dimensions as well as in its revolutionary potentiality is driven by the *necessary needs*, and more and more so by “*the enormous needs*” and “*the radical needs*” which it permanently produces.

¹¹

See: The Society of the Spectacle (=TSS): § 42, §2 (among other theses).

„The moment” (in German): 1.) *der* Moment = historical, temporarily; momentary; 2.) *das* Moment = one component part, one side, aspect, or factor, of a thing or process, among others/ different moments; each of which can possibly become the dominating, decisive, determining moment of the total entity (“*das übergreifende Moment*” in Marx’ dialectical terminology). This double-sense of the notion “the moment”, particularly the emphasis on the latter dialectical connotation, tends to get lost in some of the English translations.

¹²

For “representation”, see: TSS: §1, §18, among other theses. An explanation of the many various meanings of “representation”, especially in a situationist glossary, is given (in German) in: Biene Baumeister Zwi Negator, “Situationistische Revolutionstheorie” (Stuttgart 2005) Vol.II.(Kleines Organon): p.217.

¹³

”The one-sidedness of Stirner’s notions on the relations of the Egoist with the organization that he enters or leaves at whim (though it does contain a kernel of truth regarding that aspect of freedom) does not allow any

independent basis for his passive and defenseless ghost of an ‘organization.’ Such an incoherent and undisciplined organization is at the mercy of any individual ‘egoist’, who can cynically exploit it for his own ends while disdaining any social aims it might have (and in fact the Stirnerian individual can just as well enter the most reactionary association for his own personal profit). But a free association — ‘a bond, not a power’ — in which several individuals meet on a common basis cannot be passively subject to someone’s individual whim. Those who wish neither to judge nor to command must be able to reject any person whose conduct would implicate them. When the SI excludes someone, we are calling him to account not for his life but for ours, for the common project that he would falsify (whether out of hostile intentions or through mere lack of discernment). Each side remains individually free (the fact that this freedom is generally impoverished is another problem, without which there would be no need for undertakings like the S.I.), and by throwing back on his own an individual who has always remained autonomous we are only expressing the fact that this autonomy was not able to fulfill itself within our common project. In rejecting someone in accordance with the rules of the game that he thought he had accepted, or had pretended to accept, it is our own resignation that we are rejecting.”

(i.s.N°10 /1966)

“Only historical practice, through which the working class must discover and realize all its possibilities, will indicate the precise organizational forms of council power. On the other hand, it is the immediate task of revolutionaries to determine the fundamental principles of the councilist organizations that are going to arise in every country. (...) The situationists are obviously partisans of organization — the existence of the situationist organization testifies to that. Those who announce their agreement with our theses while crediting the SI with a vague spontaneism simply don’t know how to read.”

(René Riesel: „Some Preliminary Remarks about Councils and the Council-Organisation”, [French orig.] in: i.s.N°12/1969)

14

“The Veritable Split” [TVS1972]: §26+annot.; see also: §21, §24, §31, §32, §36, §63

15

TVS1972: §55

16

TVS1972: §39, §57

17

“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 [sic] 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.” (TVS1972: §37)

18

“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. (...) 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." (TVS1972: §36)

19

TVS1972: §53

20

See, f.i., the explanation of "recuperation" by Simon Ford (who avoids to use the term proper, maybe because the word "recuperation" has been taken from the military sphere): "As Bertolt Brecht pointed out, '*capitalism has the power instantly and continuously to transform into a drug the very venom that is spit in its face, and to revel in it.*' The S.I. called this process 'co-option' - the means by which oppositional and counter-cultural tendencies are appropriated by commercial and bureaucratic interests and then re-presented as safe for mass-consumption. During this process the marginal gets drawn into the center and the experimental becomes conventional. What now can be the point of an avant-garde when, within the capitalist economy, transgression and shock were recognised as necessary stimulants towards increased consumption?" (Simon Ford: the situationist international – A User's Guide. London2005:p.158)

21

" (...) 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." (TVS1972: §54). See also: TVS1972: §43, §52, §53; §58.

22

For "class of (the historical) consciousness" (dating from Lukács: "History and Class-Consciousness", 1923), see, f.i.: TSS: §78, §88, §114, §143; TVS1972: § 47, §48.

23

Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project ([German orig.]: Das Passagenwerk): N7,6:

„Für den materialistischen Historiker ist es wichtig, die Konstruktion eines historischen Sachverhalts aufs strengste von dem zu unterscheiden, was man gewöhnlich seine ‚Rekonstruktion‘ nennt. Die ‚Rekonstruktion‘ in der Einfühlung ist einschichtig. Die ‚Konstruktion‘ setzt die ‚Destruktion‘ voraus.“

N7,7:

„In order for a part of the past to be touched by the present instant [Aktualität], there must be no continuity between them.” [„Damit ein Stück Vergangenheit von der Aktualität betroffen werde, darf keine Kontinuität zwischen ihnen bestehen.“]

N7a,5:

„The materialist presentation of history leads the past to bring the present into a critical state.” [„Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung führt die Vergangenheit dazu, die Gegenwart in eine kritische Lage zu bringen.“]

24

„The spectacle is another facet of money, which is the abstract general equivalent of all commodities. But whereas money in its familiar form has dominated society as the representation of universal equivalence, that is, of the exchangeability of diverse goods whose uses are not otherwise compatible, the spectacle in its full development is money's modern aspect; in the spectacle the totality of the commodity world is visible in one piece, as the general equivalent of whatever society as a whole can be and do. *The spectacle is money for contemplation only*, for here the totality of use has already been bartered for the totality of abstract representation. The spectacle is not just the servant of pseudo-use — it is already, in itself, the pseudo-use of life.” (TSS: §49 – *emphas.* by BBZN)

25

TSS § 34: “Le spectacle est le *capital* à un tel degré d’accumulation qu’il devient image.” (“The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image.”)

26

See: TSS §30, §33, §40. For the materialist historical notion of “alienation”, always see: Mészáros, István: *Marx’ Theory of Alienation*. London 1970; and: Lukács, Georg: *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*. Darmstadt und Neuwied 1986 [last chapter:] “*Die Entfremdung*”.

27

See also, and in full detail: Biene Baumeister Zwi Negator: *Proletariat – Kunst – Sprache. Situationistische Rekonstruktion und Aufhebung*. in: Stephan Grigat e.a. (Hg.): *Spektakel – Kunst – Gesellschaft. Guy Debord und die Situationistische Internationale*. Berlin 2006: S.88passim

28

See: TSS §4, §8-10, §24, §36

29

TSS: §63, §40, §44, §47

30

By “classical” here we mean: founded explicitly in Marx’ critique of political economy. The precursor of Debord’s attempt to encompass the spectacular totality logically and historically was Vaneigem’s essay “The Totality for Kids” (“*Banalités de base*”) in 1963; but this outline of spectacular “basic banalities” was not yet exclusively based in Marx’ theory, neither explicitly nor even implicitly so.

31

“spectacle n’étant défini que comme un *moment* du développement de la production de la marchandise.” (i.s.N°12/1969 [Paris 1997:p.616]:p.48)

³² W.Benjamin: *The Arcades Project*, K2,5:

“On the doctrine of the ideological superstructure. It seems at first sight, that Marx wanted to establish only a causal relation between superstructure and infrastructure [orig. Benjamin: Unterbau; Marx: Basis]. But already the observation that ideologies of the superstructure reflect conditions falsely and invidiously goes beyond this. The question in effect is the following: if the superstructure in a certain way (in the material of thought and experience) determines the superstructure, but if such determination is not reducible to simple reflection, how is it then – entirely apart from any question about the originating cause – to be characterized? As its expression. The superstructure is the expression of the infrastructure [Unterbau]. The economic conditions under which society exists are expressed in the superstructure – precisely as with the sleeper an overfull stomach finds not its reflection but its expression in the contents of dreams [im Trauminhalt] which from a causal point of view, it may be said to ‘condition’. The collective, from the first, expresses the conditions of its life. These find their expression in the dream and their interpretation in the awakening.”

[“Zur Lehre vom ideologischen Überbau. Zunächst scheint es, als habe Marx hier nur ein Kausalverhältnis zwischen Überbau und Unterbau feststellen wollen. Aber bereits die Bemerkung, dass die Ideologien des Überbaus die Verhältnisse falsch und verzerrt abspiegeln, geht darüber hinaus. Die Frage ist nämlich: wenn der Unterbau gewissermaßen im Denk- und Erfahrungsmaterial den Überbau bestimmt, diese Bestimmung aber nicht

die des einfachen Abspiegeln ist, wie ist sie dann – ganz abgesehen von der Frage ihrer Entstehungsursache – zu charakterisieren? Als deren Ausdruck.. Der Überbau ist der Ausdruck des Unterbaus. Die ökonomischen Bedingungen, unter denen die Gesellschaft existiert, kommen im Überbau zum Ausdruck; genau wie beim Schläfer ein übervoller Magen im Trauminhalt, obwohl er ihn kausal ‚bedingen‘ mag, nicht seine Abspiegelung sondern seinen Ausdruck findet. Das Kollektiv drückt zunächst seine Lebensbedingungen aus. Sie finden im Traum ihren Ausdruck und im Erwachen ihre Deutung.“]

33

In 1844 already, Karl Marx gave the methodological indication to begin communist revolution theoretically in the dimension of subjectivity / ideology / social psychology “by analysing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself, whether it manifests itself in a religious or a political form. It will then become evident *that the world has long dreamed of possessing something* of which it has only *to be conscious* in order to possess it *in reality*. It will become evident that it is not a question of drawing a great mental dividing line between past and future, but of *realising* the thoughts of the past. Lastly, it will become evident that mankind is not beginning a new work, but is consciously carrying into effect its old work..” [“durch Analysierung des mystischen, sich selbst unklaren Bewusstseins, trete es nun religiös oder politisch auf. Es wird sich dann zeigen, *daß die Welt längst den Traum von einer Sache besitzt*, von der sie nur das Bewusstsein besitzen muss, um sie wirklich zu besitzen.“ (MEW1:346 = Briefe aus den Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbüchern)]

³⁴ “The double-Marx” (“Der doppelte Marx”, a commonplace term of the early KRISIS, a German pioneer group of a “fundamental critique of value” or a self-styled “different sort of fundamentalism” [sic] since the end-1980ies) in the sense of an allegedly “exoteric” class-struggle-ideologue Marx on the one hand and Marx the “esoteric” critic of “the fundamental” or “basic structure” in the form of “the value” and “the abstract-general of society”, grounded in the demonised “abstract labour” on the other hand. One might as well call this operation a Marx-split. The academical and sub-academical left of the 1990ies knew it under the fashionable names of diverse kinds of “value-critique”. Common denominator is their *omitting* or discriminating the issue of social class antagonism and the underlying relations of private and state *property* as wholesale “traditional Marxism” – *implicitly* including at least half of Marx’ critical theory itself. The essentials of Marx’ critique of political economy: “class divisions / class-antagonism” and “social property relations” (culminating in the central question of communist theory and praxis: how can private class-property of the social conditions of life be abolished?) were declared to be mere epiphenomena or derivatory ideological fetish-forms within the sphere of distribution, juridical expressions and so forth. The modern proletariat was taken for a mere agent / collective character-mask or social personification of *variable capital* (Marx: *variabler Kapitalanteil*); and the modern individual, never mind on which side of “the class (-struggle) fetish”, to be a mere “monad of value” without any subject-quality potentially transcending universal rule of “the commodity-form” (i.e.: circulation), since Marx’ fundamental notion of work and labour was “radically” dispensed with as “ontological”, this attribute serving as a container-formula for anything vaguely meant to be “ahistorical” or “transhistorical” – whereby nothing else was attacked than Marx’ “historical-genetic method” (Lukács) itself. Thus, “work/labour” had to be strictly reduced to a capitalist category as such, whereas before and after capitalist society which had to be conceived as “labour-society” *sui generis*, there should only exist something like “action” or “production” but not work/labour. Consequently, Marx’ theory of work/labour and value was denounced to be either “leftwing-Ricardianist”, if not “metaphysical” etc. etc. Remarkably enough, “the fundamental value-critique” has also tried to recuperate the situationist theory of the spectacle a bit, by means of mutilating “Debord”, simplifying and throwing away exactly the proletariat and the revolutionary concept of self-organisation of “the class of (the historical) consciousness” (see particularly “the falsified Debord apologist” – as we would like to call him – Anselm Jappe).

35

„The 5th Conference of the S.I. in Göteborg“ / Raoul Vaneigem 1961:

“(…) De hâter un fin d’un monde, le *désastre où les situationnistes reconnaîtrons les leurs.*”

(i.s. N°7/1962(1997:p.267):p. 27

[„(…) Das Ende einer Welt zu beschleunigen, die *Katastrophe, bei der die Situationisten die ihrigen erkennen werden.*“ in: SI N°7 (dt.Bd1:279 – *emphas.* in the orig.)]

36

“fertige Herstellung des Weltmarkts” (Marx 1858): histor. Kapital-Mission „ist die Herstellung des Weltmarkts und einer auf seiner Basis beruhenden Produktion. (MEW 29:360). – Compare, f.i.: TSS: §39, §145; TVS1972: §35

37

“Hence the highest development of productive power together with the greatest expansion of existing wealth will coincide with the depreciation of capital, degradation of the labourer, and a most straightened exhaustion of his vital powers. These contradictions lead to explosions, cataclysms, crises, in which by momentaneous suspension of labour and annihilation of a great portion of capital the latter is violently reduced to the point, where it can go on. (...) Yet, these regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher

scale, and finally to its violent overthrow.” (Karl Marx, Capital I, “The General Law of capitalist Accumulation”).

38

Walter Benjamin in his “Theses on the Concept of History”, 1940, thesis §10:

”There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. *Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet.* He would like to pause for a moment so fair [verweilen: a reference to Goethe’s Faust], to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is this storm.” (*emphas.* by BBZN)

39

“Proletarian revolutions ... pitilessly scoff at the hesitations, weaknesses and inadequacies of their first efforts, seem to throw down their adversary only to see him draw new strength from the earth and rise again formidably before them, recoil again and again before the immensity of their tasks, until a situation is finally created that makes all turning back impossible. – Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (preamble to the situationist “Address to the Revolutionaries ...” in 1966).

[“la situation qui rende impossible tout retour en arrière” – sic Marx, quoted in: i.s.N°8/1966(1995:p.455):p.43]

40

See: Guy Debord, “Comments on *The Society of the Spectacle*” 1988: thesis § V:

“The society modernized to the stage of the integrated spectacular is characterized by the combined effect of five principal features: incessant technological renewal; fusion of State and economy; generalized secrecy, *forgeries without reply*; a perpetual present. (...)

The simple fact of being without reply has given to the false an entirely new quality. At a stroke it is truth which has almost everywhere ceased to exist or, at best, has been reduced to the status of pure hypothesis that can never be demonstrated. *The false without reply* has succeeded in making public opinion disappear: first it found itself incapable of making itself heard and then very quickly dissolved altogether. This evidently has significant consequences for politics, the applied sciences, the justice system and artistic knowledge.”

Thesis § IX:

(...) But of all social crimes, none must be seen as worse than the impertinent pretension to still want to change something in this society, which thinks that it has only been only too kind and patient, but which no longer wants to be blamed.” (*emphas.* by BBZN)

41

Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project: N8,1:

W. Benjamin’s historical-materialist concept of “Rettung” is based on the “consideration that history is not simply a science but also and not least a remembrance [*Eingedenken*]. What science has ‘determined’ remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness [*Eingedenken*] can make the incomplete into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete.” [„(...) Überlegung, dass die Geschichte nicht allein eine Wissenschaft sondern nicht minder eine Form des Eingedenkens ist. Was die Wissenschaft ‘festgestellt’ hat, kann das Eingedenken modifizieren. Das Eingedenken kann das Unabgeschlossene (das Glück) zu einem Abgeschlossenen und das Abgeschlossene (das Leid) zu einem Unabgeschlossenen machen.“]

N2,2:

„It maybe considered one of the methodological objectives of this work to demonstrate historical materialism which has annihilated the idea of progress within itself. Just here historical materialism has every reason to distinguish itself sharply from bourgeois habits of thought. Its founding concept is not progress but actualization.” [“Es kann als eines der methodischen Objekte dieser Arbeit angesehen werden, einen historischen Materialismus zu demonstrieren, der die Idee des Fortschritts in sich annihiliert hat. Gerade hier hat der historische Materialismus alle Ursachen, sich gegen die bürgerliche Denkgewohnheit scharf abzugrenzen. Sein Grundbegriff ist nicht Fortschritt sondern Aktualisierung.“]

N7,7:

„In order for a part of the past to be touched by the present instant [Aktualität], there must be no continuity between them.” [„Damit ein Stück Vergangenheit von der Aktualität betroffen werde, darf keine Kontinuität zwischen ihnen bestehen.“]

N9,4:

“What are the phenomena rescued from ? Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they are fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination [*Überlieferung*], their ‘enshrinement as heritage’. – They are saved through exhibition [*Aufweisung*] of the fissure [*Sprung – which also means: leap*] within them. – There is a tradition [*Überlieferung*] that is catastrophe.” [Orig.: „Wovor werden die Phänomene gerettet? Nicht nur, und nicht sowohl vor dem Verruf und der

Missachtung, in die sie geraten sind, als vor der Katastrophe, wie eine bestimmte Art ihrer Überlieferung, ihre ‚Würdigung als Erbe‘, sie sehr oft darstellt. Sie werden durch die Aufweisung des Sprungs in ihnen gerettet. – Es gibt eine Überlieferung, die Katastrophe ist.“]

And from the view of “the Now of recognizability / the moment of awakening [Jetztzeit]“: N3,1:
“(…) It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: it is not progression but image. Only dialectical images are authentically historical, i.e. not archaic images. The image that is read – which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability - bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.” [“(…) Nicht so ist es, dass das Vergangene sein Licht auf das Gegenwärtige oder das Gegenwärtige sein Licht auf das Vergangene wirft, sondern Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt. Mit anderen Worten: Bild ist die Dialektik im Stillstand. Denn während die Beziehung der Gegenwart zur Vergangenheit eine rein zeitliche ist, ist die des Gewesenen zum Jetzt eine dialektische: nicht zeitlicher sondern bildlicher Natur. Nur dialektische Bilder sind echt geschichtliche, d.h. nicht archaische Bilder. Das gelesene Bild, will sagen das Bild im Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit trägt im höchsten Grade den Stempel des kritischen, gefährlichen Moments, welcher allem Lesen zugrunde liegt.“]

N7a,5:

“The materialist presentation of history leads the past to bring the present into a critical state.”

[„Die materialistische Geschichtsdarstellung führt die Vergangenheit dazu, die Gegenwart in eine kritische Lage zu bringen.“]

42

The S.I. analysed this as the production of the *diffuse and the concentrated spectacular* (see: TSS: §§63 – 65, §109) cold-war- and social-pacification-machines that competed in historical optimism and a “classless class-society” (Adorno).

43

W.Benjamin, The Arcades Project, N9a,1:

“Der Begriff des Fortschritts ist in der Katastrophe zu fundieren. Dass es ‘so weiter’ geht, *ist* die Katastrophe.”

See also: *ibid.*, N10,2:

„Definitions of basic historical concepts: catastrophe – to have missed the opportunity [i.e.:for revolutionary action]; critical moment – status quo threats to be preserved; progress – the first revolutionary measure taken.”

[„Definitionen historischer Grundbegriffe: Die Katastrophe – die Gelegenheit verpasst zu haben; der kritische Augenblick – der status quo droht erhalten zu bleiben; der Fortschritt – die erste revolutionäre Maßnahme.“]

See also: W.Benjamin: „Theses ‚On the Concept of History‘“, thesis X:

„The mode of thought which we pursue today (...) at a moment wherein the politicians in whom the opponents of Fascism had placed their hopes have been knocked supine, and have sealed their downfall by the betrayal of their own cause (...) starts from the assumption that the stubborn faith in progress of these politicians, their trust in their “mass basis” and finally their servile subordination into an uncontrollable apparatus have been three sides of the same thing. It seeks to give an idea of how *dearly* it will cost our accustomed concept of history, to avoid any complicity with that which these politicians continue to hold fast to.” [„Der Gedankengang, den wir hier verfolgen, (...) in einem Augenblick, da die Politiker, auf die die Gegner des Faschismus gehofft hatten, am Boden liegen und ihre Niederlage mit dem Verrat an der eigenen Sache bekräftigen, (...) geht davon aus, dass der sture Fortschrittsglaube dieser Politiker, ihr Vertrauen in ihre ‚Massenbasis‘ und schliesslich ihre servile Einordnung in einen unkontrollierbaren Apparat drei Seiten derselben Sache gewesen sind. [Diese Betrachtung] sucht einen Begriff davon zu geben, wie *teuer* unser gewohntes Denken eine Vorstellung von Geschichte zu stehen kommt, die jede Komplizität mit der vermeidet, an der die Politiker weiter festhalten.“]

44

„Comarades,

L’écroulement en miettes de l’image révolutionnaire que présentait le mouvement communiste international suit avec quarante années de retard l’écroulement du mouvement révolutionnaire lui-même. Ce temps gagné par le mensonge bureaucratique, ajouté au permanent mensonge bourgeois, a été du temps perdu par la révolution. (...) Pour cela, il faut d’abord reconnaître dans toute son étendue, sans avoir gardé aucune illusion consolante, la défaite de l’ensemble du projet révolutionnaire *dans le premier tiers de ce siècle* et son remplacement officiel, en toute région du monde aussi bien qu’en tout domaine, par des pacotilles mensongères qui recouvrent et aménagent le vieil ordre. La domination du capitalisme bureaucratique d’État sur les travailleurs est le contraire du socialisme, c’est la vérité que le trotskisme a refusé de voir en face.” i.s.N°10/1966 (1997:p.455):p.43 *passim*

45

“La seule voie du socialisme, en Algérie et partout, passe par ‘un *pacte offensif et défensif avec la vérité*’, selon le mot d’un intellectuel hongrois de 1956.” (i.s.N°10/1966:p.19=1997:p.431)

(German version: „Verteidigungs- und Angriffspakt mit der Wahrheit“ [presumably by Lukács])

Hebrew word for "catastrophe"

We hope very much that there is no necessity today to explain, here and once more, why it is a definite break with the progressive history of human species when one part of it annihilates other parts selected by state-people's executioners on a mass-scale and by means of a special system of modern industry for this purpose, but decisively so based on mass paranoia among normal modern citizens with an explicitly rationalist and scientific motivation of this most barbarian act in human history so far.

See, f.i., Isaac Deutscher's conclusion in: „The Jewish Tragedy and the Historian“ (last chapter in „The non-Jewish Jew, and other Essays“ Oxford 1968 (German edition: Berlin 1977: S.104):

„Für einen Historiker, der die Massenvernichtung der Juden zu begreifen sucht, besteht die größte Schwierigkeit in der absoluten Einmaligkeit dieses schrecklichen Geschehens. Es wird niemals nur eine Frage der Zeit und der historischen Perspektive sein. (...) Dass ich auch jetzt nicht in der Lage bin, als Historiker objektiv über die jüdische Katastrophe zu schreiben, liegt – dessen bin ich mir sicher – nicht an meiner persönlichen Betroffenheit. Es liegt weit eher daran, dass wir es hier mit einer ungeheuerlichen, verhängnisvollen und unheimlichen Degeneration des menschlichen Charakters zu tun haben, die der Menschheit immer ein Rätsel bleiben und ihr immer wieder Angst und Schrecken einjagen wird.“

For this classification, see: Adorno & Horkheimer: Dialectics of Enlightenment, the chapter: "Elements of anti-Semitism".

"...im Stande der Unfreiheit", sic Adorno – which can only mean: an unconditional imperative within the given status quo of class societies, not being historically-morally authorized to subordinate this task to, or postpone, suspend it until the "final solution" of class-conflict, social class-divisions, exploitation, war and imperialist genocide.

„Hitler hat den Menschen im Stande ihrer Unfreiheit einen neuen kategorischen Imperativ aufgezwungen: ihr Denken und Handeln so einzurichten, dass Auschwitz nicht sich wiederhole, nichts Ähnliches geschehe. Dieser Imperativ ist so widerspenstig gegen seine Begründung wie einst die Gegebenheit des Kantischen. Ihn diskursiv zu behandeln, wäre Frevel: an ihm lässt leibhaft das Moment des Hinzutretenden am Sittlichen sich fühlen.(...) Nur im ungeschminkt materialistischen Motiv überlebt Moral.“ (Theodor W. Adorno: Negative Dialektik. [GS 6]: S. 358)

Let us also think of the situationist origins within the Lettrist Movement around Isidore Isou whose anti-art objectifications in Paris immediately after the war mirror the traumatic effect of his Rumanian-Jewish background.

(„ Der 20jährige Isidore Isou (Jean Isidore Goldstein, geb.1925) emigriert aus Bukarest nach Paris, wo er die lettristische Bewegung begründet: im Sinne eines radikalisierten Neo-Dadaismus verkündet er "la première internationale poétique" und zwar als "INTERNATIONALE LETTRIQUE", die keiner Erklärung durch Spezialisten der Interpretation bedürfte, weil sie eine tiefere und universelle Ebene der Verständigung aufsuchte, eine Dichtung für die Masse, zu der die Gesetze der herrschenden Kultur den Zugang nicht regeln könnten [– und zwar durch] die Auflösung des Wortes in die Buchstaben. Isou preist die Verlagerung der eigentlichen Dichtung in den Vortrag, in die Aktion vor der Menge – und später mit der Menge – als eine seiner großen Erneuerungen." Roberto Ohrt, Phantom Avantgarde . Hamburg 1990: S.18f, 23. There you find a reproduction of the typescript of the following Isou-document.)

To give an illuminating example from this earliest lettrist period: here is an excerpt from one of Isou's first poems (audio-document: http://www.larevuedesressources.org/article.php3?id_article=511):

La Guerre (War / Der Krieg):

STALINGRAD STALINGRAD

(...)

HITLER KAPOUTE HITLER KAPOUTE

(...)

CRIS POUR 5.000.000 DE JUIFS ÉGORGÉS

Oîveîguéivéinaî

(...)

(crescendo jusqu'au hurlement –)

ioudn VEÏNÏN boudn loudn KLEININ

(...)

IOUDN IOUDN schmish moundn meïnîn

Gouht HOUHT jelflouth

fouhflouht weltkick weltzouht

weltlaht

charf GOTT JAFF

MENTCH WARF SCHRTRAFF

OI Wei

OI (cri égorgé) ADONOÏ! ADONOI GUERINGUE! himler,guimlère,mèringue,

jimlère,jèringue.

HASS!

(...)

Auschwitz - schwitz - schwitz

Auschwitz - schwitz- schwitz

Buchenwald!

Bouhnwald!

ADONOOI ! ADONOI !

Belsen - bergen

BELSEN - BERGEN !

MATHAUSEN !

mathausenne .

MOGHILOW!

MOGHILOOW!

Galgal - Raiwensguergue

Ranne - Wilde Waibensguergue

WOI zennenne FANNY mîsché rachelle

OI! CHHEMA ISRAELLE!

élohénou lad !

élohénou

EHAD!

M

(s'étouffant vers la fin -)

(prière -)

chema israéle barouh adonâi

israelle Kidischanou

israelle barouh mitzwotaï

wetziwanou...wetziwanou...

wetziwanou....

52

"(...) and who does not wish to speak of capitalism should be silent about fascism."

(See: Max Horkheimer, "Die Juden und Europa." USA 1939)

53

Letter from New York, 5-8-1940: "Oftmals kommt es mir vor, als wäre all das, was wir unterm Aspekt des Proletariats zu sehen gewohnt waren, heute in furchtbarer Konzentration auf die Juden übergegangen. Ich frage mich, ob wir nicht (...) die Dinge, die wir eigentlich sagen wollen, im Zusammenhang mit den Juden sagen sollten, die den Gegenpunkt zur Konzentration der Macht darstellen."

(Th. W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer: Briefwechsel. Band II 1938-1944. Frankfurt a.M. 2004: S.84)

54

See: Neumann: Behemoth. New York 1963.

55

„Gleichgültig wie die Juden an sich selber beschaffen sein mögen, ihr Bild, als das des Überwundenen, trägt die Züge, denen die totalitär gewordene Herrschaft todesfeind sein muss: des Glückes ohne Macht, des Lohnes ohne Arbeit, der Heimat ohne Grenzstein, der Religion ohne Mythos. Verpönt sind diese Züge von der Herrschaft, weil die Beherrschten sie insgeheim ersehnen. Nur solange kann jene bestehen, wie die Beherrschten selber das Ersehnte zum Verhassten machen. Das gelingt ihnen mittels der pathischen Projektion (...)“.

(Adorno;Horkheimer: Dialektik der Aufklärung. Amsterdam1947,1968: S.234)

56

“Die Umwendung hängt davon ab, ob die Beherrschten im Angesicht des absoluten Wahnsinns ihrer selbst mächtig werden und ihm Einhalt gebieten. (...) *In der Befreiung des Gedankens von der Herrschaft (...) wäre der Schritt aus der antisemitischen Gesellschaft (...)* Mit der Überwindung der Krankheit des Geistes, die auf dem Nährboden der durch Reflexion ungebrochenen Selbstbehauptung wuchert, würde die Menschheit aus der allgemeinen Gegenrasse zu der Gattung, die als Natur doch mehr ist als bloße Natur, *indem sie ihres eigenen Bildes inne wird. Die individuelle und gesellschaftliche Emanzipation von Herrschaft* ist die Gegenbewegung zur falschen Projektion“.

(Adorno;Horkheimer: Dialektik der Aufklärung. Amsterdam1947,1968: S.234f – *emphas.* by BBZN)

57

„Die ihrer selbst mächtige, zur Gewalt werdende Aufklärung selbst vermöchte die Grenzen der Aufklärung zu durchbrechen.“

(ibid.: 244)

58

As far as we can see, Auschwitz is mentioned by the S.I. only once, and rather indirectly, in a quotation from *Le Monde* quoting Simon Wiesenthal; as an opener among miscellaneous news in the 1964 S.I.-Revue about the struggles for and against the religious ideologues and clerical institutions who were taking the offensive once again in the beginning of the 1960ies (“*The Last Show*”):

“According to Mr. Simon Wiesenthal (the former director of the Documentation Center of the Association of Jews Persecuted by the Nazis) currently attending the Auschwitz trial, ‘*the constructor of the cremation ovens in the camps is still alive in Austria and has recently built a church.*’ ” *Le Monde*, 7-3-64.

[“Le dernier show: les curés la ramènent” (...) “ Selon M.Simon Wiesenthal, ancien directeur du centre de documentation de la Fédération des Juifs persécutés par les Nazis, qui assiste actuellement au procès d’Auschwitz, ‘*le constructeur des fours crématoires du camp vit encore en Autriche, et dernièrement Il a bâti une église.*’ – *Le Monde*, 7-3-64.” (i.s.N°9/1964(1997:p.380):p.16)]

So, all in all, for the S.I. the “persecution” of the Jews “by the nazis” seems to have been an epiphenomenon of the true scandal of modern class-society: the existence of christianity, religious hypocrisy and the institutionalised power of the clerus; besides, of course, being a matter of interest for “la Fédération des Juifs ...” and the bourgeois jurisdiction. –

In “*The Totality for Kids*” (“*Banalités de base*”) we find a photograph of the “Arbeit macht frei”-gate to Auschwitz, without any legend; but in the text Vaneigem refers to it implicitly by equalizing the modern capitalist world with “the” concentration camp – for forced labour, against which he postulates a united front of all segments of the working class, work-resisters included. See: i.s. N°8/1963(1997:p.336):p.40. –

And “*The Society of the Spectacle*” does not even mention once “Auschwitz”, nor does it give any hint at what this cipher stands for in concrete historical reality.

(Compare this, for instance, to the characterisation of the Shoah that Victor Serge tries to give in his “*Memoirs of a Revolutionary*” – in a clear contrast to the taciturn situationist and leftwing-communist rest.)

59

MEW 25:838 “Religion des Alltagslebens”

60

“Die erfahrungsmäßigen ‘Elemente des Antisemitismus’, ausser Kraft gesetzt durch den Erfahrungsverlust, der im Ticketdenken sich anzeigt, werden vom Ticket nochmals mobilisiert. Als bereits zersetzte schaffen sie dem Antisemiten das schlechte Gewissen und damit die Unersättlichkeit des Bösen. Eben weil die Psychologie der Einzelnen sich selbst und ihre Inhalte nur noch durch die gesellschaftlich gelieferten synthetischen Schemata herstellen lässt, gewinnt der zeitgemäße Antisemitismus das nichtige, undurchdringliche Wesen.“ (Adorno;Horkheimer: *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Amsterdam 1947,1968: S.242)

61

see, f.i., Hardt&Negri’s “*Empire*” about “The 3 stages of the imperial power pyramid” which is “biopolitically” omnipresent: (German edition, Frankfurt/NewYork 2003:) 355; “Parasit”: S.367; for the anti-materialist recuperation of Debord’s theory of the spectacle, see 200f, 331ff.

62

“Since its origins the Zionist movement has been the contrary of the revolutionary solution to what used to be called the ‘Jewish question’. A direct product of European capitalism, it did not aim at the overthrow of a society that needed to persecute Jews, but at the creation of a Jewish national entity that would be protected from the anti-Semitic aberrations of decadent capitalism. It did not strive to abolish injustice, but to transfer it. The original sin of Zionism is that it has always acted as if Palestine were a desert island. The revolutionary workers movement saw the answer to the Jewish question in proletarian community, that is, in the destruction of capitalism and ‘its religion, Judaism’; the emancipation of the Jews could not take place apart from the emancipation of humanity. Zionism started from the opposite hypothesis. As a matter of fact, the counterrevolutionary development of the last half century proved it right, but in the same way as the development of European capitalism proved right the reformist theses of Bernstein. The success of Zionism and its corollary, the creation of the state of Israel, is merely a miserable by-product of the triumph of world counterrevolution. To ‘socialism in a single country’ came the echo ‘justice for a single people’ and ‘equality in a single kibbutz’. The colonization of Palestine was organized with Rothschild capital, and the first kibbutzim were set up with European surplus-value. The Jews recreated for themselves all the fanaticism and segregation they had been victims of. Those who had suffered mere toleration in their society were to struggle to become in another country owners disposing of the right to tolerate others. The kibbutz was not a revolutionary supersession of Palestinian ‘feudalism,’ but a mutualist formula for the self-defense of Jewish worker-settlers against the capitalist exploitive tendencies of the Jewish Agency. Because it was the main Jewish owner of Palestine, the Zionist Organization defined itself as the sole representative of the superior interests of the ‘Jewish Nation.’ If it eventually allowed a certain degree of self-management, it was because it was sure that this would be based on the systematic rejection of the Arab peasant.” (orig. in: i.s.N°11/1967 [1997:p.513]:p.17passim)

NB: Marx analysed christianity, not Jewish monotheism, to be “the” religion most adequate for bourgeois-capitalist formation of society. Khayati’s unconscious insinuation here is typical of leftist anti-Semitism: a

“marxist” equalisation of “Jewish” = “capitalist”: taken for reality, not – as in Marx’ famous critique of Bauer’s “Jewish Question” – as a “chimera” of “the moneyman”!

63

„Cette période (...) devait être celle de la formulation générale du programme révolutionnaire le plus total. La révolution, don’t nous annonçons le retour et les nouvelles exigences, était alors totalement absente, aussi bien en tant que théorie vraiment moderne qu’en tant qu’individus et groupes luttant concrètement dans le prolétariat, par des actions radicales nouvelles et pour des objectifs nouveaux. Une certaine généralité, une certaine abstraction, l’usage même parfois du ton de l’outrance lyrique étaient les inévitables produits de ces conditions précises (...) Nous avons bien fait. Fort heureusement la marche de la société moderne n’a pas manqué de suivre, de plus en plus visiblement, le chemin où nous l’avons vue s’engager (...) Il nous a fallu faire des *analyses* plus précises et aussi expérimenter diverses formes d’action devenues possibles. Les situationnistes sont entrés, avec leur époque, dans ces luttes de plus en plus concrètes qui se sont approfondies jusqu’en 1968, et encore davantage de puis.” (LVS1972, in: Guy Debord OEuvres [2006]:p.1176) “L’impuissance historique des situationnistes contemplatifs, placée sous la meilleure lumière expérimentale, avait à l’automne de 1970 parfaitement rejoint son concept. Ils devaient convenir qu’on ne peut faire de la théorie révolutionnaire en négligeant les fondations matérielles des rapports sociaux existants. C’est cette critique du réel capitalisme moderne qui sépare l’I.S. de tout le gauchisme (...) Il nous avait fallu reprendre la critique de l’économie politique en comprenant précisément et en combattant ‘la société du spectacle’. Et il fallait assurément continuer ceci parce que cette société, depuis 1967, a poursuivi son mouvement du décadence d’une manière accélérée.” (ibid.: 1141)

64

See the “Minimal Definition of Revolutionary Organisations” by the S.I., July 1966, in: i.s.N°11/1967 (under the title: “The praxis of theory”)

65

Here we point to F.Pollock’s and M.Horkheimer’s theory of “state capitalism” and “integral etatism” within the I.S. analyses, whereas the S.I. resumed its own assessment in 1967 as following: “Since the great crisis of 1929, state intervention has been more and more conspicuous in market mechanisms; the economy can no longer function steadily without massive expenditures by the state, the main ‘consumer’ of all noncommercial production (especially that of the armament industries). This does not save it from remaining in a state of permanent crisis and in constant need of expanding its public sector at the expense of its private sector. A relentless logic pushes the system toward increasingly state-controlled capitalism, generating severe social conflicts.”

Such was the situationist analysis of the USA during the Vietnam war, showing the contradictory nature of this etatist logic:

“The class of private ownership that is, more or less, in possession of the state as well, relies upon its imperialist interventions (...). For this class, pseudocommunist state capitalism means death just as much as does authentic communism; that is why it is essentially incapable of seeing any difference between them.”

With all the sharpening contradictions, the S.I. emphasized the global convergence of diverse political systems towards some sort of state capitalism, not alone the „bureaucratic capitalism“ in the USSR, China etc.:

“State capitalism is the natural tendency of colonized societies, where the state is generally formed before the historical classes. The total elimination of its capital and its commodities from the world market is the deadly threat that haunts the American propertied class and its free-enterprise economy — this is the key to its aggressive rage.”

“The aggressiveness of American imperialism is thus in no way the aberration of a bad administration, but a necessity for the class relations of private capitalism, which, if not overthrown by a revolutionary movement, unrelentingly evolves toward a technocratic state capitalism. The history of the alienated struggles of our time can only be understood in this context of a still undominated global economy.”

(All quotations from: “Two Local Wars”, orig. in: i.s.N°11/1967)

66

NB: not just any “tenured thinkers” whatsoever, but precisely those at the universities: “*dans des chaires inamovibles*”. Here the English translation mutilates a decisive (anti-state and anti-academical) situationist determination! – BBZN

67

“The S.I. now”

“(…) toutes les spécialisations de l’illusion peuvent être enseignées et discutées dans des chaires inamovibles. Mais les situationnistes s’établissent dans la connaissance qui est au dehors de ce spectacle: nous ne sommes pas des penseurs garantis par l’État.” (i.s.N°9/1964[1997:p.369]:p.5: “Maintenant, l’I.S.”)

68

„The whole talk about the state should be dropped, especially since the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word.” (orig. see: MEW 34: S.128f, and MEW 19: S.6)

This illuminative passage in a letter by Engels to Bebel has usually been hidden from publication by social-democrat, “real-socialist” including trotskyite, as well as anarchist theoreticians, both academical and non-academical. The first mention of this ‘anarchist’-materialist characterisation of the Commune is in Lenin’s ‘State and the Revolution’ 1917, only to be ‘forgotten’ by himself later on when he openly proclaimed state capitalism + subbotniks (“working for the state, without pay”) after the bolsheviks’ final crushing of the last autonomous workers- and peasants’ soviets by 1921.

69

„The same history that threatens this twilight world is capable of subjecting space to a directly experienced time. The proletarian revolution is that critique of human geography whereby individuals and communities must construct places and events commensurate with the appropriation, no longer just of their labor, but of their total history. By virtue of the resulting mobile space of play, and by virtue of freely chosen variations in the rules of the game, the independence of places will be rediscovered without any new exclusive tie to the soil, and thus too the authentic journey will be restored to us, along with authentic life understood as a journey containing its whole meaning within itself.” (TSS: § 178)

70

N.B.: Marx’ statement that in a communist society non-alienated labour will become the first human need itself: see “Critique of the Gotha Program”.

71

According to LEO.ORG, “Himmelsstürmer” is to be translated: “romantic idealists”!

72

“Marx hat in der Vorstellung der klassenlosen Gesellschaft die Vorstellung der messianischen Zeit säkularisiert. Und das war gut so. Das Unheil setzt damit ein, dass die Sozialdemokratie diese Vorstellung zum ‚Ideal‘ erhob. (...) In Wirklichkeit gibt es nicht einen Augenblick, der seine revolutionäre Chance nicht mit sich führte – sie will nur als eine spezifische definiert sein, nämlich als Chance einer ganz neuen Lösung im Angesicht einer ganz neuen Aufgabe. Dem revolutionären Denker bestätigt sich die eigentümliche revolutionäre Chance jedes geschichtlichen Augenblicks aus der politischen Situation heraus. Aber sie bestätigt sich ihm nicht minder durch die Schlüsselgewalt dieses Augenblicks über ein ganz bestimmtes, bis dahin verschlossenes Gemach der Vergangenheit. Der Eintritt in dieses Gemach fällt mit der politischen Aktion strikt zusammen; und er ist es, durch den sie sich, wie vernichtend immer, zu erkennen gibt. (Die klassenlose Gesellschaft ist nicht das Endziel des Fortschritts in der Geschichte, sondern dessen so oft missglückte, endlich bewerkstelligte Unterbrechung.) (...) Dem Begriff der klassenlosen Gesellschaft muss sein echtes messianisches Gesicht wiedergegeben werden, und zwar im Interesse der revolutionären Politik des Proletariats selbst.“

(Walter Benjamin, Notizen zu: Über den Begriff der Geschichte (Aus den Paralipomena) in: GS [Frankfurt am Main 1980] I,3: S.1231, Archiv-Nr.: MS 1098v)

73

In the original: “les compromissions du réformisme ou de l’action commune de *débris* pseudo-révolutionnaires”, that is: not “actions” as such, but already those of “collective *ruins*” [! – *emphas.* by BBZN] (TSS: § 220)

74

“The fact is that a critique capable of surpassing the spectacle must know how to bide its time.” (TSS: §220) [“Au contraire, la critique qui va au-delà du spectacle doit *savoir attendre.*” (*emphas.* by BBZN)]

75

“The self-emancipation of our time is an emancipation from the material bases of inverted truth. This “historic mission of establishing truth in the world” can be carried out neither by the isolated individual nor by atomized and manipulated masses, but only and always by the class that is able to dissolve all classes by reducing all power to the de-alienating form of realized democracy — to councils in which practical theory verifies itself and surveys its own actions. This is possible only when individuals are “directly linked to universal history” and dialogue arms itself to impose its own conditions.”

(TSS: § 221, concluding “The Society of the Spectacle”) [“(…) Là seulement où les individus sont ‘directement liés à l’histoire universelle’; là seulement où le dialogue s’est armé pour faire vaincre ses propres conditions.”]

76

One of the most tenacious legends and falsifications around the S.I. is the attribution of the slogan “Power to Imagination!” to have been of situationist origin. Right from the start, the Situationists denied every responsibility for that silly slogan, as did the Enragés:

"But in attacking this ugly cohort of state-appointed subversive thinkers, the Enragés were doing more than settling an old quarrel: they already spoke as an occupations movement struggling for everyone’s real occupation of all the sectors of a social life governed by lies. And by writing ‘Take your desires for reality’ on the concrete walls, they were already destroying the cooptive ideology of the ‘Power to the imagination’ slogan that was pretentiously launched by the March 22nd Movement. Because they had desires, while the latter had no imagination.“ (i.s.N°12/1969)

Most of all then, the situationist desires were openheartedly concentrated in the wish for the total proletarian empowerment against the state (including its universities) and for the emancipation of non-alienated *travail attractif*, the realisation of which was the seizable aim of the factory occupations at that historical moment: to create a situation without return, in order to make the communist dreams and radical needs of revolutionary desire true by the workers' councils themselves. This trajectory – far beyond the movement of the occupations in May 1968 – is neither economist nor political nor cultural – and not phantastic for an instant – but a historical expression of the “revolutionary project of a classless society, of a generalised historical life / life in history (...) in favour of a ludistic model of irreversible time of the individuals and the communes / associations, (...) this is the program of total realisation of communism, doing away with ‘everything independent of the individuals’ in the sphere of time.” (TSS: §163)

77

See: i.s.N°11/1967: “The Situationists and the new forms of action against politics and art.”

See further: chapter 8 of “The Society of the Spectacle”:

“Culture grew out of a history that dissolved the previous way of life, but as a separate sphere within a partially historical society its understanding and sensory communication inevitably remain partial. It is the meaning of an insufficiently meaningful world.

When art (...) develops into independent art in the modern sense, emerging from its original religious universe and becoming individual production of separate works, it too becomes subject to the movement governing the history of all separate culture. Its declaration of independence is the beginning of its end.

(...) The end of the history of culture manifests itself in two opposing forms: the project of culture's self-transcendence [*Selbstaufhebung*] within total history, and its preservation as a dead object for spectacular contemplation. The first tendency has linked its fate to social critique, the second to the defense of class power.

(...) The positive significance of the modern decomposition and destruction of all art is that the language of communication has been lost. The negative implication of this development is that a common language can no longer take the form of the unilateral conclusions that characterized the art of historical societies (...) but must now be found in a praxis that unifies direct activity with its own appropriate language. The point is to actually participate in the community of dialogue and the game with time that up till now have merely been represented by poetic and artistic works.

(...) For the first time in history the arts of all ages and civilizations can be known and accepted together, and the fact that it has become possible to collect and recollect all these art-historical memories marks the end of the world of art.

(...) Art in its period of dissolution — a movement of negation striving for its own transcendence [*dépassement / Aufhebung*] within a historical society where history is not yet directly lived — is at once an art of change and the purest expression of the impossibility of change. The more grandiose its pretensions, the further from its grasp is its true fulfillment. This art is necessarily avant-garde, and at the same time it does not really exist. Its vanguard is its own disappearance.

(...) Dadaism sought to abolish art without realizing it; surrealism sought to realize art without abolishing it. The critical position since developed by the situationists has shown that the abolition and realization of art are inseparable aspects of a single transcendence of art.

(...) The spectacular consumption that preserves past culture in congealed form (...), the spectacle, whose function is to use culture to bury all historical memory, applies its own essential strategy in its promotion of modernistic pseudoinnovations. Thus (...), alongside the simple claim that the death of communication has a sufficient beauty of its own, the most modern tendency of spectacular culture — which is also the one most closely linked to the repressive practice of the general organization of society — seeks by means of “collective projects” to construct complex neoartistic environments out of decomposed elements, as can be seen in urbanism's attempts to incorporate scraps of art or hybrid aesthetico-technical forms. This is an expression, in the domain of spectacular pseudoculture, of advanced capitalism's general project of remolding the fragmented worker into a ‘socially integrated personality’.

(...) As culture becomes completely commodified it tends to become the star commodity of spectacular society.” (Guy Debord: *The Society of the Spectacle*. §§183-193)

“The prevailing society always advances and reaches new heights in the escalation of repression and alienation. By combining the fetishism of the commodity with the fetishism of the work of art, the “cybernated state” has summoned a fetishism at its own level: the commodity spectacle which is a projection of all life into a hypostasized and crystallized essence, ghost and scaled-down model of life itself.” (i.s.N°10/1966 “Root Structures of Reification” / Orig.titel: “Les Structures élémentaires de la réification” by Jean Garnault.) See also: Simon Ford, p.103, 155passim

78

See also: *The Society of the Spectacle* [=TSS]: §26–33; §114

79

“Labour begins with a certain foundation - naturally arisen, spontaneous, at first - then historic

presupposition. Then, however, this foundation or presupposition is itself suspended [*aufgehoben*], or posited as a vanishing presupposition which has become too confining for the unfolding of the progressing human pack.” Karl Marx: “Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy”, edited by Ben Fowkes, London 1973: p.496passim. Orig.: “*Entfaltung des progressiven Menschenpacks*” (MEW42: 404)

80

At the culmination of his critique of “the fetish ‘capital’”, Marx analysed the “trinitary form” of labour (wage-) /, capital (interest) / real estate (ground rent), and its state as “this religion of everyday life” to be a general historical “reification” and “personalisation” (“Capital” Vol.3 [MEW 25: S.838f]); and since “The Dialectics of Enlightenment” and, f.i., at the 1944 Los Angeles conference about anti-Semitism and Psychoanalysis in cooperation with the communist psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel e.a., Adorno and Horkheimer analysed the rising tendency of modern “religion of everyday life” to become “pathic projection” based on what they call “ticket mentality”. For all of them, this diagnosis of the most dangerous epidemic social “psychosis on a mass-scale” within modern capitalist normality does not mean any resignation or surrender facing it as a fatal disaster, so far: “Dass, der Tendenz nach, Antisemitismus nur noch als Posten im auswechselbaren Ticket vorkommt, begründet unwiderlegbar die Hoffnung auf sein Ende. (...) Die Basis der Entwicklung, die zum Ticketdenken führt, ist ohnehin die universale Reaktion aller spezifischen Energie auf die eine, gleiche abstrakte Arbeitsform vom Schlachtfeld bis zum Studio. (...) Nicht erst das antisemitische Ticket ist antisemitisch, sondern die Ticketmentalität überhaupt.“ (Dialektik der Aufklärung: S.243 = Chapter, „Elemente des Antisemitismus“: last paragraph.)

81

“Aber die gemütlichen delusions und der fast kindliche Enthusiasmus, mit dem wir (...) die Revolutionsära begrüßten, sind zum Teufel. (...) Zudem wissen wir jetzt, welche Rolle die Dummheit in Revolutionen spielt und wie sie von Lumpen exploitiert werden.” (Marx to Engels 13.2.1863, in: MEW 30:324)

82

Every revolutionary situation in the modern epoch of gigantic powers of destruction – which have been accumulated in their material as well as psycho-mental, mass-neurotic or even mass-psychotic forms – is in danger to become a “final solution”, something like the “German revolution” of national socialism – in the sense of ‘conformist revolt’, as it has first been characterised in its full significance by Adorno and Horkheimer in “Dialectics of Enlightenment”:

“Die antisemitische Verhaltensweise wird in den Situationen ausgelöst, in denen verblendete, der Subjektivität beraubte Menschen als Subjekte losgelassen werden.”

And every seizure for power of the totality can - in a modern or “postmodern” world with its antiintellectualist and antitheoreticist common-sense-affects – very easily lead to a final hermetic-paranoid world-image (“*Weltanschauung*”: a closed ideological world-contemplation or even a holistic creed) which drives at its hyposthesis by practical subjectivist perfection, always without active reflection of objective reality:

“Immer ruft der Antisemitismus erst noch zu ganzer Arbeit auf. Zwischen Antisemitismus und Totalität bestand von Anbeginn der innigste Zusammenhang. Blindheit erfasst alles, weil sie nichts begreift.“

(Dialektik der Aufklärung: S.202passim)

83

Karl Marx, Einleitung zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie:

“Allein auch die Theorie ist fähig, die Massen zu ergreifen, sobald sie ad hominem demonstriert, und sie demonstriert ad hominem, sobald sie radikal wird. Radikal sein ist die Sache an der Wurzel fassen.” (MEW1:385)

84

“But theory itself becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates ad hominem, and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp things by the root.”

85

Referring to classical psychoanalysis just as did – but much more concretely so – the “Frankfurt School” critical theoreticians and the circle of communist psychoanalysts around Otto Fenichel, the latter before and the I.S. also for some time after 1946.

86

The last document of the S.I. reveals the sudden and vastly overrated assessment of the real subversive achievements of the post-’68-mass-movements in the western world in this respect, to the same extent to which the S.I. had underestimated the issue continually *in its time*:

“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.” (TVS1972: § 12)

“Capitalist communist” structures of cooperation such as teamwork and soft-skills etc. have been enforced, since

the recuperation of the nineteensixties and -seventies' movements for "autogestion" and "participatory democracy" etc. in the spheres of economy and politics, and also throughout the modernised structure of everyday life, in order to make – among others – "female qualities" a well-functioning component of capitalist self-exploitation and -design (team spirit and lifestyle "habitus"), but also learning to handle the "active/passive"-polarity vice versa, with a tendency to even "doing gender" more and more flexibly *within* heterosexualist matrix. As for the immanent limits of this social form of emancipation from the sexual and gender-hierarchies under the conditions of enduring class-separations and alienations, the late situationist "theory of the wage-labouring managerial strata" or "cadres" already stated:

"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. (...) 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 (...) " (TVS1972: § 36) – and, so we may add today, to the point of "doing gender" in a spectacular "queerist" way of lifestyle-performativity within the boundaries of "conformist nonconformism" (Lukács).

To a certain degree indeed, a trendy play with ideas of radical chic „utopia“, pop-“communism“ or even "Situationism" *with a scent of de-constructivist genderism* is a trade mark of the cultural-studies and gender-studies' output of up-to-date careerists in the expanding branches of cultural industry and of "dissatisfaction as a commodity" (TSS: § 59).

Nevertheless, this (above quoted) late and rare situationist approach to the analytical mediation of class- and gender-separations seems to be tossed between an overestimation and an underestimation of spontaneous emancipatory movements since about 1970, rather giving an impression of a certain unconscious "male conservative" scepticism facing "the real movement which does away with the existing state-of-things" in this dimension.

87

For Marx' category of (capital-productive) "*Gesamtarbeiter*", see: MEGA II.4.1 (Berlin 1988):109ff. – Engl. in: Karl Marx: "Results of the Immediate Process of Production" (in: Capital I (Penguin Edition 1976): p.1039

88

"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 (...) Revolutionary theory is the domain of danger and uncertainty: (...) 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. The revolutionary organisation 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 individuals 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.

When they organise 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.” (from: The Veritable Split of the Situationist International. Paris 1972: §§ 46, 47)