

THE ASSAULT ON CULTURE

*Utopian currents from Lettrisme
to Class War*

STEWART HOME

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“Our programme is a cultural revolution through a total assault on culture, which makes use of every tool, every energy and every media we can get our collective hands on... our culture, our art, the music, newspapers, books, posters, our clothing, our homes, the way we walk and talk, the way our hair grows, the way we smoke dope and fuck and eat and sleep – it’s all one message – and the message is FREEDOM.”

John Sinclair, Ministry Of Information, White Panthers.

“Frankly, all he asked for now was an opportunity to ingratiate himself with the Black Panthers and uncover the man behind the scenes. Hart had been right about this. There were whites actively engaged in supplying facilities, legal advice, aid for the ‘cell’. Liberals they were called. Some were honest citizens trying to carry through the mayor’s instructions that peace depended upon total, unbiased co-operation between New York’s polyglot millions. Others had a stake in anarchy – destruction being their aim, civil strife their immediate target. And, too, there were the Mafia with tentacles waving for a share of the lucrative drug traffic. Pot and acid were not enough for the pushers. They wanted ‘H’ and coke the mainstemming narcotic that every militant used.”

Richard Allen “Demo” (New English Library, London 1971).

“It should be re-affirmed that the creation of a counter-culture, in itself a haphazard, chancy and unpredictable affair, has profound political implications. For while the Establishment, with its flair for survival, can ultimately absorb *policies*, no matter how radical or anarchistic (abolition of censorship, withdrawal from Vietnam, Legalized Pot, etc), how long can it withstand the impact of an alien culture? – a culture that is destined to create a new kind of man?”

Richard Neville “Play Power” (Jonathan Cape, London 1970).

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Abbreviations

ADA	Auto-Destructive Art
APT	International Neoist Apartment Festival
CP	Communist Party
DIAS	Destruction In Art Symposium
IMIB	International Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus
IP	Industrial Painting
IS	Internationale Situationiste (journal)
LI	Lettriste International
LM	Lettriste Movement
LPA	London Psycheogeographical Association
MA	Mail Art
NYCS	New York Correspondence School
PP	Principle Player
SI	Situationist International (group)
S ou B	Socialisme ou Barbarie

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PREFACE

Those reading this text will better understand it if they bear in mind the audience for whom it was written. The primary audience was seen as those who were already engaged in activities relating to the tradition sketched out in the text. The secondary audience was seen as those who – for whatever reasons – were interested in the tradition described, but played no role in its contemporary manifestations.¹ The text is written so as to be clear to the secondary audience if it is understood that the author writes from a position of *engagement*. It should thus be borne in mind that although certain of the ideas described are relatively *obscure*, they have had considerable influence within the milieus from which they emerged.

The text contains large chunks of quotation, both to give a flavour of the material being discussed – and to save time and effort on the part of the author. It should be understood that these quotations are being used to illustrate a specific argument and that to keep the text as brief as possible the author does not fully explore the contradictions or assumptions that any given quotation may contain.² For example, the Introduction begins with a quotation from the American section of the (specto) Situationist International (SI). The quotation is used because it illustrates that a specto-situationist would dismiss as ridiculous the treatment *their movement* receives in this text (although such a reaction does not prove that this treatment is ridiculous). The

same quotation contains a number of very questionable assertions; for example, the phrase “competes with, and is thereby equal to”. To take a different example from the one used by the spectro-SI, Ghana competes with the USSR in the Olympic Games, but to deduce from this that the two states are equivalent is to succumb to a gross and ultimately meaningless form of generalisation.³

Where possible a date and a place of birth has been given for any individual mentioned in the text; the severe difficulty encountered in tracing biographical material on the *subjects* of this study has meant that the occurrence of such data is somewhat erratic.

1. The first paragraph of this preface is obviously an exception to this rule since it is written for the benefit of the secondary audience.

2. In particular the ideas of Henry Flynt, Gustav Metzger, COUM Transmissions, Pauline Smith, Vittore Baroni & Tony Lowes could very easily be *taken apart* and shown to be contradictory or ridiculous.

3. As will be demonstrated in the course of the text, the basic *theoretical* technique of the various situationist groups – and particularly the Debordist faction – was to present gross generalisation as incontestable fact. This produced effective propaganda and atrociously poor *theory*. For example, Debord writes in “The Society of the Spectacle”:

“Tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities, is fundamentally nothing more than the lesiure of going to see what has become banal. The economic organisation of visits to different places is already in itself the guarantee of their *equivalence*. The same modernisation that removed time from the voyage also removed it from the reality of space.”

INTRODUCTION

"This world tries to bring the most radical gestures under its wing: the avant-garde of its subculture serves to make it appear that the S.I. competes with, and is thereby equal to, Régis Debray who equals the Panthers who equal the Peace and Freedom Party which equals the Yippies who equal the Sexual Freedom League which equals the ads on the back which equal the price on the cover. The *Barb*, the *Rat*, *Good Times*, and so on – it makes no difference. Same old show, new markets."

"The Practice Of Theory" by the American section of the (specto) Situationist International (included in "Situationist International" 1, New York 1969).

If the term 'art' took on its modern meaning in the eighteenth century, then any tradition of opposition to it must date from this period – or later.

In ancient Greece and medieval Europe, the category 'art' covered a multitude of disciplines – many of which are now reduced to the status of 'craft'. Those activities which have retained the title of art are now pursued by men (sic) of 'genius'.

Art has taken over the function of religion, not simply as the ultimate – and ultimately unknowable – form of knowledge, but also as a legitimated form of male emotionality. The 'male' artist is treated as a 'genius' for expressing *feelings* that are 'traditionally' considered 'feminine'. 'He' constructs a world

in which the male is heroised by displaying 'female' traits; and the female is reduced to an insipid subordinate role.¹ 'Bohemia' is colonised by bourgeois men – a few of whom are 'possessed by genius', the majority of whom are 'eccentric'. Bourgeois wimmin whose behaviour resembles that of the 'male genius' are dismissed as being 'hysterical' – while proletarians of either sex who behave in such a manner are simply branded as 'mental'. Art, in both practice and content, is class and gender specific. Although its apologists claim 'art' is a 'universal category', this simply isn't true. Every survey of attendances at art galleries and museums demonstrates that an 'appreciation' of 'art' is something restricted almost exclusively to individuals belonging to higher income groups.²

Since 'art' as a category has been projected back onto the religious icons of the middle ages, it is not surprising that those who oppose it should situate themselves within a 'utopian current' that they, in turn, trace back to medieval heresies. After the event, it is easy enough to perceive a tradition running from the Free Spirit through the writings of Winstanley, Coppe, Sade, Fourier, Lautreamont, William Morris, Alfred Jarry, and on into Futurism and Dada – then via Surrealism into Lettrisme, the various Situationist movements, Fluxus, 'Mail Art', Punk Rock, Neoism and contemporary anarchist cults. Taking this as our hypothesis – we will not trouble ourselves over whether such a perspective is 'historically correct' – we will construct a 'meaningful' story from these fragments. Whether or not our 'fiction' is factually valid, it can assist our understanding of disparate phenomena.

Medieval expressions of this utopian current have usually been viewed as *essentially* 'religious' in content; whereas during the present century, this tradition has been seen as primarily *artistic* in nature. Such categorisation reflects the reductionist strategies of academics: the utopian tradition has always aimed at the integration of all human activities. The heretics of the middle ages sought to abolish the role of the church and realise heaven on earth, while their twentieth-century counterparts have sought the end of social separation by simultaneously confronting 'politics' and 'culture'.³

The discursive shift in this tradition, which occurred with Futurism, was necessitated by the development of modern technologies and systems of mass transportation. To satisfy the ideological demands of their paymasters, historians have usually treated Futurism as yet another turn-of-the-century art movement. But Futurism went beyond painting, poetry and music, to create 'futurist' clothes and architecture and, perhaps most importantly, a futurist 'politics' which fused with all other futurist activities in a rediscovered 'totality'. ("We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal omnipresent speed" – First Futurist Manifesto). To dismiss Futurist politics as fascist is as common as it is incorrect. At its inception Futurism was chiefly influenced by the writings of Proudhon, Bakunin, Nietzsche and, especially, Georges Sorel. ("So let them come, the gay incendiaries with charred fingers! Here they are! Here they are!... Come on! set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!... Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discoloured and shredded!... Take up

your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!" – First Futurist Manifesto).

Dada at its peak gave Utopians a more coherent theoretico-practice than Futurism. Dada began in Zurich but was realised in Berlin. In the manifesto "What Is Dadaism and What Does It Want in Germany?"⁴, Richard Huelsenbeck was demanding the "introduction of progressive unemployment through comprehensive mechanisation of every field of activity" and the establishment "of a Dadaist advisory council for the remodelling of life in every city of over 50,000 inhabitants". In his essay "En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism" (1920), Huelsenbeck further clarified the relation of his own 'brand' of Utopianism to 'art' by stating that: "The dadaist considers it necessary to come out against art because he has seen through its fraud as a moral safety valve". And further, that "Dada is German Bolshevism. The bourgeois must be deprived of the opportunity to 'buy up art for his justification'. Art should altogether get a sound thrashing, and Dada stands for that thrashing with all the vehemence of its limited nature."

In a later essay, "Dada Lives" (1936), Huelsenbeck provides the clue as to why it has been possible for historians to treat Dada as an art movement. He says: "Tzara, in Paris, eliminated from Dadaism its revolutionary and creative element and attempted to compete with other artistic movements... Dada is perpetual, revolutionary 'pathos' aimed at rationalistic bourgeois art. In itself it is not an artistic movement. To quote the German Chancellor, the revolutionary element in Dada was always greater than its constructive element. Tzara did not invent Dadaism, nor did he really understand it. Under Tzara in Paris Dada was deformed for the private use of a few persons so that its action was almost a snobbish one".

Paris Dada was later renamed Surrealism. Under this title it became the most degenerate expression of the Utopian tradition during the pre-war years. Whereas Berlin Dada rejected both art and work (themes that were later taken up by the Situationist International), the Surrealists embraced painting, occultism, Freudianism and numerous other bourgeois mystifications. Indeed, if Surrealism had been a movement in its own right, rather than a degeneration from Dada, any claim that it belongs within the Utopian tradition would be open to question.

From these pre-war movements the essential features of twentieth-century Utopianism become apparent. The partisans of this tradition aim not just at the integration of *art* and *life*, but of all human activities. They have a critique of social separation and a concept of totality. From the 1920s onwards Utopians were conscious of belonging to a tradition that stretched back at least as far as Dada and Futurism, and were aware that in previous centuries similar 'beliefs' had been manifested in certain 'religious' heresies. There is a samizdat (self-publishing) aspect to the tradition, that enables it to remain – at least partially – autonomous of the cultural and commercial institutions of the reigning society. For these reasons New York 'Neo-Dada' and European nouveaux realisme, which were organised around critics and galleries, cannot be considered a part of this tradition, despite the fact that art 'historians' often

treat them as being historically derived from Dada. Even Group Zero, who were involved in self-publishing and self-organised exhibitions, cannot be considered Utopians because they limited their activities to 'art'.

In the twentieth-century, those *adhering* to Utopian principles have worked between 'art', 'politics', 'architecture', 'urbanism' and all the other specialisms that arise from separation. Utopians aim to 'create' a 'new' world where these specialisations will no longer exist.

Throughout the text I assume that the reader understands that while the movements I am writing about situated themselves in opposition to consumer capitalism, they also emerged out of societies based on such a mode of organisation and thus *do not entirely* escape the *logic* of the market place. This is particularly obvious in relation to the obsession many of them display over the concept of innovation, which reflects perfectly the waste inherent in a society based on planned obsolescence. However, the movements with which I deal do not always *fail* to break with the *ideology* of the reigning society, and while they often deal with the same *problems* as *serious culture*, they tend to do so from a different perspective.⁵

As well as emerging from the dominant society, it should also be understood that these movements are, at least in part, a reaction to the long period of Bretonian glaciation, whose negative influence on the utopian tradition was not dissimilar to the effects of Stalinisation on the workers' movement.

I have not written at length about the relation between the utopian tradition and the dominant modes of organisation because I believe the contemporary reader is perfectly capable of making such a comparison without my *assistance*. I must, however, emphasise that just because I have isolated certain currents from the *totality* of social activity, this in no sense implies that these currents exist in isolation; my intention being to provide a *brief* history of a politico-cultural phenomenon whose *achievements* have – to date – remained either unknown, or completely mystified, in the English speaking *world* rather than a full description of the position they occupy within the dominant society.

1. See "Great Art and Great Culture" section in Valerie Solanas, "SCUM Manifesto" (Olympia Press, New York 1968). Jayne M. Taylor has elaborated the point made by Solanas in conversation with the author.

2. For a detailed statistical analysis of the relationship between art, social class and profession, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste" (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1984).

3. The term 'art' is used in a number of contradictory ways in this text. When used in its strict sense, it refers to the *high* culture of the ruling class. However, some of those who I write about use it to denote cultural productions which posit themselves in opposition to ruling class culture. While there is no fixed link between the signifier and signified, in its *current, popular*, usage, the term 'art' tends to denote *serious culture* (the high culture of the ruling class). This meaning is implicit – rather than explicit – in the *popular* perception of art as the expression of *individual genius* ("deep stuff"). I

deal with this argument in more depth in chapter 7.

4. This manifesto was co-signed by Raoul Hausmann.

5. Grant Kester, writing in the October 1987 issue of "New Art Examiner", had the following to say about one of the movements with which I deal: "Neoism is of particular importance because it engages many of the same issues treated by recent Postmodern work. The critique of "originality" or commodification taken up by artists like Sherrie Levine and Jeff Koons, however, is waged from within the art world itself, through the production of art objects. Neoism, coming out of Fluxus and Situationist roots which privilege non-objective activities, offers a valuable alternative model. Neoism manages to advance a convincing critique of commodified art productions, while at the same time sustaining a support system that allows for an ongoing process of theoretical and practical dialogue."

CHAPTER 1

COBRA

COBRA's origin is dialectical, lying as it does in surrealism, but more specifically in the rejection of surrealism's spurious doctrines. There was a 'surrealist' group in Belgium from 1926, but it developed in a different direction from those who fell under the influence of Breton in Paris. In Belgium, there was little interest in mysticism or automatism.

Christian Dotremont (1922-1981), a key figure in the COBRA movement,¹ became involved with the Belgian surrealists following the publication of his first pamphlet 'Ancienne Eternite', a long love poem. He established contact with Breton in Paris, but was eventually forced to break with him over the questions of mysticism and the Communist Party. On returning to Europe after World War II, Breton wanted nothing to do with the Communist Party and tried to make 'magic' the focal point of surrealist activity. In 1947, Dotremont responded by forming the 'Revolutionary Surrealist Group' to "renew surrealist experimentation, to affirm its independence and the simultaneous necessity for common action".

In his lectures and theoretical writings, Dotremont always stressed the need for collective activity. At the Revolutionary Surrealist Group's first meeting in October 1947, Dotremont made use of Henri Lefebvre's recently published "Critique Of Everyday Life", and emphasised that 'surrealist' experiment must take place within the context of everyday life.

The Danish painter Asger Jorn (1914-1973) was an immediate supporter of Dotremont's group. Jorn had already met Breton and dismissed the Parisian group of surrealists as 'reactionaries'. At this time, Jorn was a central figure in the Host group. This was a union of painters, writers, and architects, who had originally gathered around the magazine "Helhesten" ("House Of Hell"), which was published in Copenhagen between 1941 and 1944. Its members included the painters Jacobsen, Alfelt, and Bille; the writers Schade and Nash (Jorn's brother); and the architect Olsen. "Helhesten" contained an eclectic variety of material, ranging from imagery critical of consumer society to texts on jazz, from poetry to writings on *negro art*, from cinematic criticism to surveys of nordic culture.

Dotremont and Jorn had been introduced to each other by the Dutch painter Constant (born Amsterdam 1920).² Jorn first met Constant at a Miro exhibition in Paris in 1946, and again by chance in a cafe later the same day. Constant was to prove vital in the formation of COBRA. In 1948 he founded the Dutch group Reflex, whose membership included Appel and Corneille. In their magazine, also called *Reflex*, the group published literary texts, poetry, studies in popular culture, and theoretical elaborations of their experimental platform (which included opposition to the standardising influence of De Stijl). The first issue of *Reflex* contained two texts by Constant, one a manifesto, the other a Declaration of Freedom in which he states:

"In the unprecedented cultural emptiness that has followed the war... in which the reigning class increasingly pushes art into a position of dependence... We find established a culture of individualism which is condemned by the very culture that has produced it; because its conventionality prevents the exercise of imagination and desire, and impedes vital expression... There cannot be a popular art, even if concessions such as active participation are made to the public, while art forms are historically imposed. Popular art is characterised by vital expression, which is direct and collective.

A new freedom is about to be born, one which will allow people to satisfy their creative desires. As a result of this process, the profession of artist will cease to occupy a privileged position; which is why some contemporary artists are resistant to it. In the period of transition, artistic creation finds itself at war with the existing culture, while simultaneously announcing a future culture. With this dual aspect, art has a revolutionary role in society".

In this tract we can read what would, more or less, become the COBRA platform. The COBRA group was constituted in November 1948, after six delegates walked out of a conference at the "International Centre For The Documentation Of Avant-Garde Art" in Paris, protesting at the facile level of debate. The six met at a cafe on the Quai St. Michel, where they formed a dissident group. A short statement was drawn up by Dotremont ("the only reason to maintain international activity is experimental and organic collaboration, which avoids sterile theory and dogmatism") and signed by Constant, Appel and Corneille, on behalf of the Dutch group Reflex; by Jorn on behalf of the Danish group Host; and by Dotremont and Noiret on behalf of the (mainly Belgian) Revolutionary Surrealist Group. Dotremont invented

the name COBRA (made up from the first letters of the cities COPENHAGEN, BRUSSELS, AMSTERDAM) a week or two later. The first COBRA manifestation took place within weeks of the group being formed. This was as a part of the annual Host co-operative exhibition in Copenhagen. At this time the individual groups that made up COBRA had yet to amalgamate fully, and were thus semi-autonomous.

From its initial formation, COBRA grew to number about fifty painters, poets, architects, ethnologists and theorists, from ten different countries. The number might have been larger, if the Iron Curtain hadn't cut through the cultural and political life of Europe. In its early days COBRA was in contact with the Czech group Ra, and works sent from Prague by Josef Istler were shown as part of COBRA's 1949 exhibition in Amsterdam. Unfortunately repression in Czechoslovakia ended these contacts.

COBRA's activities covered meetings, exhibitions, exchanges, and the production of the magazine "COBRA". Most of this activity was directed by Constant, Dotremont and Jorn, although the magazine was to be published by different groups, using French as a common language.

Although COBRA worked as a collective, the group was not without tensions. Constant, Jorn, and their wives took a holiday on the island of Bornholm in summer of 1949. It was here that Jorn started an affair with Constant's wife Matie, whom he later married. This met with disapproval, particularly on the part of various Danish COBRA members, who felt that Jorn should not have taken up with another painter's wife while the painter was a guest in their country.

There were also political problems to be faced by the movement. Dotremont, Jacobsen, and a number of others were forced to break with the Communist Party over its support for social realism. This did not weaken the movement's political conviction ("He who has the experimental spirit must necessarily be a communist" – Dotremont). However, although it was glaringly obvious that the CP would never accept Dotremont's dictum that "the patch of colour is a scream in the hands of a painter... a scream of its very substance", the break was preceded by a good deal of soul searching.

The movement was, from its inception, critical of surrealism. In the text "Le Discours Aux Pingonins", published in "COBRA 1", Jorn analyses Breton's definition of surrealism as 'pure psychic automatism' using materialist dialectics. Here, by referring to his conscious experimental position, he demonstrates that individual creativity cannot be explained purely in terms of psychic phenomena. Explication is itself a physical act which materialises thought, and so psychic automatism is joined organically to physical automatism. In a letter to Jorn, Dotremont warned of the three dangers to the autonomous development of COBRA – surrealism, abstract art, and social realism.

One of the movement's major projects was the creation of a new urban environment – which would manifest itself in opposition to the rational architecture of Le Corbusier. Michel Colle, in an article in the first issue of "COBRA" writes:

“...buildings must not be squalid or anonymous, neither should they be show pieces from a museum; rather they must commune with each other, integrate with the environment to create synthesised ‘cities’ for a new socialist world.”

It was the painter Constant who was to develop the COBRA concept of *unitary urbanism*³ and take this conception with him into the Situationist International (SI). It was also Constant, in the 1949 editorial to the fourth issue of “COBRA”, who elaborated a number of theses concerning desire, the unknown, freedom and revolution, which would later become central to the SI:

“...to speak of desire means to speak of the unknown, of the desire for freedom... The freedom of our social life, which we propose as a first commitment, will open the door to a new world... It is impossible to know a desire without satisfying it, and the satisfaction of desire is revolution... Today’s culture, being individualistic, has replaced creation with ‘artistic production’, and has produced no more than signs of tragic impotence... To create is always to discover what one doesn’t know... It is our desire that makes revolution”.⁴

Internal and external pressures caused COBRA to disband in 1951. In “Ce Que Sont Les Amis De COBRA Et Ce Qu’ils Représentent”, published in the second issue of “Internationale Situationiste” (December 1958), Jorn and Constant sum up the legacy of COBRA with the following words:

“In ’51, the International of Experimental Artists broke up. The representatives of its most advanced tendency continued their pursuits in new forms; but others abandoned experimental activity, and now use their ‘talent’ to make the COBRA picture style, the only tangible result of the movement, fashionable”.

1. The terms ‘movement’, ‘ism’, ‘group’ and ‘tradition’ are generally employed in this text to provide a stylistic variation in syntax; while not necessarily interchangeable, the terms are not applied with any great rigour. A fuller discussion of their use is contained in the Afterword.
2. Constant used only this name for public purposes. His other, publically unused, name was Nieuwenhuis.
3. This term was actually coined by the Lettriste International in the summer of 1956.
4. A great deal of recent critical theory has dealt with desire as a social construct – while I recognise that arguments derived from post-structuralism could be used to invalidate the COBRA and situationist positions on the subject, they (un)fortunately lie beyond the scope of the present study.’

CHAPTER 2

THE LETTRISTE MOVEMENT

The Lettriste Movement was launched in post-war Paris by the Romanian Isidore Isou (born Jean-Isidore Goldstein, 1925) and the Frenchman Gabriel Pomerand (born Paris, 1926). From its inception the movement was associated with controversy. On the occasion of the first public presentation of Lettrisme (January 8th 1946), the Russian poet Iliazd organised a counter-event – at which he demonstrated that there were numerous precedents for what Isou termed Lettrisme. 1946 also saw Isou interrupting a lecture on Dada by Michel Leiris at the Vieux-Colombier Theatre,¹ so that he could read his own poetry; and the publication of the first (and only) issue of “The Lettriste Dictatorship”.

1947 saw the prestigious publishing house Gallimard issuing Isou’s Lettriste manifesto “Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et à une Nouvelle Musique”. This turgid tome is saved from complete unreadability by Isou’s megalomania. Typical of his pretensions are title headings such as “From Charles Baudelaire to Isidore Isou” and “From Claude Debussy to Isidore Isou”. A footnote tells the reader that Isou intends to play the role in poetry that was “played by Jesus in Judaism, that is, it is Isou’s intention to break a branch and make a tree of it”. Apart from acting as a piece of self-promotion, this volume outlined Isou’s belief that the development of poetry rested on words being deconstructed to their constituent parts. The word, as it existed at

the time, was to be abolished completely, and poetry was to be synthesised with music. The result would be “a single art”, which bore no trace of “any original difference”.

Isou claimed that the evolution of any *art* is characterised by two phases – amplic and chiseling. The amplic phase is a period of expansion. It is followed by the chiseling phase, when the achievements of the amplic period are refined and eventually destroyed. In poetry the amplic period lasted until 1857, when Baudelaire initiated the chiseling phase by reducing narrative to anecdote: Rimbaud abandoned anecdote for lines and words, words were reduced to space and sound by Mallarmé; and finally the Dadaists destroyed words altogether. Isou was to ‘complete’ this chiseling phase and, with his Lettriste ‘discoveries’, initiate a new amplic period.

Although Isou’s theories are not entirely without merit, the main point of interest in his book is the affirmation that “Surrealism is dead”. Isou and the Lettriste Movement were the first group to make this important break, and it was through this breach that other avant-garde heresies were able to break away from Breton’s malign and dictatorial influence.

If early Lettriste activity was centred on sound poetry, the emphasis soon shifted to visual production. Here, letters were seen to form the basic unit from which works should be created. The resulting forms, which resemble concrete poetry, typify lettriste literary endeavours. From these there grew a Lettriste ‘painting’, in which, once again, the letter would be the basic subject of aesthetic contemplation. The first Lettriste painters were Pomerand, Guy Vallot (real name Rodica Valeanu) and Roberdhay. Isou was never really satisfied with their results, and eventually took up painting himself in order to realise his Lettriste theories for the discipline.

The Lettriste Movement extended the breadth of its activities after Jean-Louis Brau (born Saint Owen, 1930), Gil J. Wolman (born Paris, 1929) and Maurice Lemaitre (born Paris, 1926), joined the group in 1950. Guy-Ernest Debord (born Paris, 1931) was recruited the following year. Lemaitre was destined to become a long lasting, and perhaps after Isou the best known, member of the Lettriste Movement. Brau, Wolman and Debord would all have broken with Isou by the end of 1952. However, before these breaks, 1951/2 were to prove vital years in the development of Lettriste ‘film’.

Jean Cocteau awarded Isou’s first ‘chiseling film’, “The Drivel and Eternity Treatise” (1951), the Avant-Garde Award at the Cannes Festival. The soundtrack to this film had neither a ‘specific’, nor an ‘a-specific’, relation to the picture, and could be treated as as ‘a product by itself’. The visuals included deliberately boring images, such as footage of still photographs which had been scratched and torn. 1951 also saw the production of Lemaitre’s “Has The Film Already Started?”. In this he extended Isou’s concept of chiseling, by drawing letters, numbers and other signs directly onto the processed stock. When the film was shown, the screen was draped with objects which were manipulated during its performance, while the movements and spoken thoughts of spectators were introduced into the soundtrack.

1952 saw the production of Wolman's "L'Anti-Concept", Dufrene's "Dawnsday Drums", Brau's "The Current Life's Boat", Isou's "Film Debate" (where the discussion of the film is the film), and Debord's "Screams In Favour Of de Sade". This last contained no images at all. At feature length, it consisted chiefly of blackened film stock with only the click of the projector for a soundtrack. To relieve this monotony, it featured occasional bursts of white light accompanied by 'random' dialogue. The final twenty-four minutes are entirely silent.

Isou often used his political and economic theories, which he'd been developing since 1948, as the subject matter of his films. According to Maurice Lemaitre, in "Les Idées Politiques du Mouvement Lettriste: L'union de La Jeunesse Dans L'enseignement, La Banque et La Planification" (first published in *Combat* 1/9/67), all political economy prior to Isou had concentrated on the working population:

"However, Isidore Isou has discovered that a large part of the other half of each country's population – and primarily the masses of millions of young people – is in a very different position, for it is situated outside the market, outside the relations and definitions considered by all the theoreticians of the science of goods and chattels.

Consequently, those individuals who accept their function in the system, who coincide with their position as producers and assume the problems of their "class", we call interns, adherents, or adjusteds, while the tens of millions of individuals who do not accept their function, who reject their position in the system, who expend their energy in climbing further up the social scale, in order to "arrive", we call externs, or non adjusteds.

(...) the externs, and above all the young, are slaves, over-exploited from the economic point of view."

Isou used the analogy of nuclear physics to explain this social division. The interns were fully-grown individuals – the old atoms or their molecular conglomeration – while the externs were electrons who were not yet 'established'. The externs, isolated from the manufacture of commodities, and with no position in society, use their energies to undermine the economic and political foundations of the existing system. In a Lettriste leaflet, issued when Lemaitre stood as a candidate in the 1967 French election, the platform of the 'nuclear economists' was elaborated as follows:

"...we will not be able to attain these new forms of organisation without a creative education based on the distinction between innovators and insignificant imitators.

The credit system of commodities, whether reckoned ultimately in monetary terms or not, must be seized from the sedentary interns, the bureaucratic directors of banks.

All the riches in the economic sphere can only be manufactured and distributed, in terms of permanent creative change, through nuclear planning (promoted by our movement).

To the nobility of labour which results from the multiplicative, permanent

creation of wealth, we must add the rotation of power, the rotation of positions of control.

Our aim is not to create simply a socialist or communist society, where men will work for pleasures both abundant and static. Our aim is to move toward an ideal society, in which men will live much more – having reduced the curse of work to a minimum – for an unbroken joy, for an ever-growing ecstasy.”

From Isou and Lemaitre’s political writings it can be seen that the Lettriste Movement fits within both the Utopian tradition and the twentieth-century avant-garde. Indeed, the desire to theorise all aspects of life typifies both the Utopian tradition in general, and the twentieth-century avant-garde in particular. As well as the aspects of Lettrisme dealt with here, there is also a Lettriste “theatre”, “psychotherapy” and “education” (in 1980 the Lettriste Movement founded the Leonardo da Vinci University).

In spite of Isou’s claims, his group lacked a materialist critique of the reigning society. Unlike other post-war utopian movements, Lettrisme was not opposed to *serious culture*.² Indeed, the programme notes to Lemaitre’s play “L’Ascension du Phenix” had the following to say about such opposition:

“Only crippled fanatics, deprived of certain psychic dimensions, can reject outright a domain that is necessary to the spirit.”

Isou’s Lettristes never understood that art, unlike expression, is a bourgeois construction. They prided themselves on having pushed the surrealists from their *throne*, but failed to build upon the discoveries of Berlin Dada. Indeed, Isou had an active hatred for these progressive elements; while his critique of the surrealists amounted to no more than the assertion that they had made their *contribution* to culture and had nothing more to offer the world! Fortunately Isou’s claim that creativity is the essential human urge – and that he personally has resystematised all the sciences of language and the sign into a new discipline which he has named ‘hypergraphology’ – has not yet been taken seriously outside the very limited domain of Lettriste circles.

1. Different sources give slight variations in their account of this event. Maurice Lemaitre in his lecture “The Creations of Letterism in Poetry and Music” given at the Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon, USA, on 24/5/76 claims that:

“In 1946, in the course of the first post-war performance of *La Fuite* (The Flight) by Tristan Tzara, uncontested head (sic) of the Dada movement, several unknown young men jumped up on stage of the Vieux-Colombier Theatre, shouting: “We know all of that, enough of that old stuff! We want something new, let’s hear about Letterism!” And one of them, with a Romanian accent, started reciting strange incomprehensible poems, which sounded like African chants.

The scandal was great, for it broke out among the very representatives of the poetic scandal: the dadaists and the surrealists themselves! The next day of

course, the newspapers were full of Letterism.

Thus the Letterist movement was born, the first literary avant-garde group that France had known since World War II.”

2. The term was coined by Henry Flynt in the early sixties.

CHAPTER 3

THE LETTRISTE INTERNATIONAL (1952-57)

The Lettriste International (LI) was the first breakaway group from Isou's Lettriste Movement (LM). They would be followed in turn by the Ultra-Lettristes. The LI was formed after the 'left-wing' of the Lettriste Movement disrupted a Charlie Chaplin press conference for 'Limelight' at the Ritz Hotel, Paris, in October 1952. Isou immediately denounced those responsible to the press, criticising the leaflet they had distributed and claiming that Chaplin's creativity rendered him unassailable. The young Lettristes who had engineered the intervention immediately responded with an open letter published in the newspaper "Combat" (2/11/52):

"We believe that the most urgent exercise of freedom is the destruction of idols, especially when they present themselves in the name of freedom. The provocative tone of our leaflet was an attack against a unanimous, servile, enthusiasm. The disavowal by certain lettristes, including Isou himself, only reveals the constantly reengendered incomprehension between extremists and those who are no longer so..."

This letter also announced the formation of the Lettriste International. The membership of this break-away group was extremely unstable – twelve members were excluded from it in the first two years of its existence – but at

its core were Michele Bernstein and her future husband Guy Debord, Gil J. Wolman, Mohamed Dahou, Andre-Frank Conord and Jacques Fillon.

Where the Lettriste Movement had created cultural works, the Lettriste International intended to 'live' the cultural revolution. The LI's activities were to be provisional, subject to 'experiment' and change. Thus while abandoning the literary endeavours of the LM, the LI proceeded to pursue certain architectural theories that had reached an embryonic formulation in the LM. By the time Isou came to write his "Manifeste pour le bouleversement de l'architecture" in 1966 (published 1968) there can be little doubt that he'd been influenced by the urban theory elaborated by the LI. In his manifesto Isou says that instead of building "palaces for kings, churches for gods, triumphal arches for heroes, we must build palaces to house vagabonds and prisoners serving life sentences, convert churches into lavatories, triumphal arches into bistros... we must build as if by chance, as we wish and with the materials we want".

The single most important piece of writing on architecture and urbanism for the LI was Ivan Chtcheglov's "Formula For A New City". Written in 1953, the essay remained unpublished until 1958, when it was featured in the first issue of "Internationale Situationiste". The nineteen-year old Chtcheglov, writing under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain, saw cities as the site of 'new visions of time and space'. The exact nature of these 'new visions' were to be established via experimentation with patterns of behaviour in urban environments. Architecture was to be a means of modifying life. Such modification was necessary because:

"A mental disease has swept the planet: banalisation. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences – sewage system, elevator, bathroom, washing machine.

This state of affairs, arising out of a struggle against poverty, has overshot its ultimate goal – the liberation of man from material cares – and become an obsessive image hanging over the present... It has become essential to bring about a complete spiritual transformation by bringing to light forgotten desires and by carrying out an intensive propaganda in favour of these desires."¹

Once the 'hacienda', the new experimental city, had been built, everyone would live in their own 'cathedral'. There would be different districts in the city which would correspond to the 'diverse feelings that one encounters by chance in everyday life'. The principle activity of the inhabitants was to be 'continuous derive'. That is to say, drifting through an urban environment following the solicitations of the architecture and one's desires.²

During the period following the production of this text, relations between Chtcheglov and the LI were far from cordial. In the second issue of the LI's information bulletin "Potlatch" (29/6/54), Chtcheglov is described as one of the band of 'old women' whose 'elimination' the Lettriste International had been 'pursuing' since November 1952. The rest of this band included Isou, Lemaitre, Pomerand, Berna and Brau. More specifically, Chtcheglov is described as a 'mythomaniac' whose crazed theorising lacks 'revolutionary

consciousness'. Almost a decade later, and after Chtcheglov had spent five years in a lunatic asylum, relations between him, Bernstein, and Debord, were patched up. Extracts from the letters Chtcheglov sent to the couple were later published in "Internationale Situationiste" number 9.

Taking their cue from Chtcheglov and 'an illiterate Kabyle' who – in the summer of '53 – suggested 'psychogeography' as a general term for the phenomena being investigated with drifts, the LI developed its theory of 'unitary urbanism'. According to Debord's "Introduction To A Critique Of Urban Geography" (published in the Belgian surrealist journal "Les Levres Nues" number 6, September 1955):

"Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. The adjective, psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery."

The LI's theories and results, including its much vaunted 'construction of situations', never advanced beyond the outline Chtcheglov elaborated in "Formula For A New City". In his "Introduction To A Critique Of Urban Geography" Debord writes of a friend who 'wandered through the Harz region of Germany while blindly following the directions of a map of London'. Similarly the various 'psychogeographical games' and 'exercises', although not lacking humour, did not produce the kind of data from which *serious scientific research* could progress – despite the *hue and cry* the LI raised over its 'experimental' results. These include the 'possible appointment'. Here, the subject is asked to find themselves alone, at a precise time, in a preordained place. No one is there to meet them. Other variations include arranging to meet an unknown person, which the LI claimed led to interesting interactions with strangers. Activities such as walking without rest or destination, hitch-hiking through Paris while public transport was on strike, and walking the catacombs while they were shut to the public, were also suggested. These highlight the LI's interest in games played on urban sites, and demonstrate the extent to which its concept of urbanism was as much psychological and physiological as geographical. However, the LI introduced no innovations into urbanism. The plan to use mobile and transformable structures had already been outlined by Chtcheglov: the idea of a nomadic existence is implicit in this.³

In its "Plan For Improving The Rationality Of The City Of Paris" (published in "Potlatch" 23, 13/10/55) the LI make, among others, the following suggestions: to open the metro at night, to open the roofs of Paris as pavements – escalators would give access to them; opening public gardens at night; placing switches on street lamps so that the public may decide the degree of lighting it desires at night; the transformation or demolition of churches – removing all trace of religion, the suppression of graveyards –

with the total destruction of corpses; the abolition of museums – with art being placed in bars; liberal admission in prisons – with the possibility of tourist visits; and that streets should not be named after saints or famous persons. These, and the LI's other urbanistic formulas, had been common-place since the early days of futurism. However, the central place they occupied in the LI's programme was in itself a novelty.

That the LI had few, if any, original ideas is hardly surprising when one considers that, other than unitary urbanism, their chief interest was *detournement*. This consisted of plagiarising preexisting aesthetic elements and then integrating them into a *superior* construction. According to Debord and Wolman in "Methods Of *Detournement*" (published in "Les Levres Neus" number 8, May 1956):

"The literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes... In fact, it is necessary to finish with any notion of personal property in this area. The appearance of new necessities outmodes previous "inspired" works. They become obstacles, dangerous habits. The point is not whether we like them or not. We have to go beyond them.

Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations... It goes without saying that... one can... alter the meaning of... fragments in any appropriate way, leaving the imbeciles to their slavish preservation of 'citations'."

What Debord and Wolman call 'detournement' is, on a grander scale, the system by which most human technology and thought develop – innovations are generally a synthesis of the already known and a very minor discovery. Giant leaps into the *unknown* seem to occur only by accident, and cannot be consciously worked at in the way that most human development occurs.

During its existence, the activities of the LI remained largely unknown. Despite the presence of a number of Algerians in its ranks (and after October 1955 the Scottish writer Alexander Trocchi), the LI remained a largely Parisian phenomenon. Its bulletin "Potlatch" (the title refers to pre-commercial societies which operate on the principle of 'the gift' rather than economic exchange) was given away. The first edition, dated 22/6/54, was produced in an edition of 50. By the end of the first series (the final issue was put out by the Situationist International rather than the LI on 5/11/57) four or five hundred copies of each issue were produced. There was only ever one issue of the second series.

The LI amalgamated with the International Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus on 28 July 1957, to form the Situationist International (SI). Although not initially visible, many of the faults of the LI would later resurface in this organisation – in particular its *aristocratic* attitude. The LI's *theoretical* writings are peppered with snobbery; for example in his "Critique Of Urban Geography", Debord describes tourism as "that popular drug as repugnant as sports or buying on credit". The LI often referred to its activities as 'presituationist', but the formation of the (specto) SI did not really mark any advance on *lettrisme* – in terms of theory, practice or organisation.

1. I use here, as in a number of other places, a translation from Ken Knabb's "Situationist International Anthology" (Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley 1981). Knabb's translations, in sharp contrast to his extremely partisan opinions about the LI and SI, are excellent.

2. Chtcheglov seems to be drawing on the legacy of the Romantics. Baudelaire immediately springs to mind as an example of a Romantic treatment of urbanism and the city which is conceptually close to Chtcheglov. A quotation from Walter Benjamin's *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet In The Era Of High Capitalism* (NLB, London 1973) will illustrate this. The section begins with a citation from Baudelaire's "Flowers of Evil":

"(Through the old suburb, where the persian blinds hang at the windows of tumbledown houses, hiding furtive pleasures; when the cruel sun strikes blow upon blow on the city and the cornfields, I go practising my fantastic fencing all alone, scenting a chance rhyme in every corner, stumbling against words as against cobble stones, sometimes striking on verses I had long dreamt of.)

To give these prosodic experiences their due in prose as well was one of the intentions which Baudelaire had pursued in the *Spleen de Paris*, his poems in prose. In his dedication of this collection to Arsene Houssage, the editor-in-chief of *La Presse*, Baudelaire exposes, in addition to this intention, what was really at the bottom of these experiences. 'Who amongst us has not dreamt, in moments of ambition, of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple and staccato enough to adapt to the lyrical stirrings of the soul, the undulations of dreams, and the sudden leaps of consciousness. This obsessive ideal is above all a child of the experiences of giant cities, of the intersecting of their myriad relations.'(...)

(...)The revealing presentations of the big city... are the work of those who have transversed the city absently, as it were, lost in thought or in worry. The image of *fantasque escrime* does justice to them; Baudelaire has in mind their condition which is anything but the condition of the observer. In his book on Dickens, Chesterton has masterfully captured the man who roams about the big city lost in thought. Charles Dickens's steady peregrinations had began in his childhood. 'Whenever he had done drudging, he had no other resource but drifting, and he drifted over half London. He was a dreamy child, thinking mostly of his dreary prospects... He walked in darkness under the lamps of Holborn and was crucified at Charing X... He did not go in for "observation", a priggish habit; he did not look at Charing X to improve his mind or count the lamp-posts in Holborn to practice his arithmetic... Dickens did not stamp these places on his mind; he stamped his mind on these places.' "

3. Although the LI, and later the situationists, planned a *total transformation* of the urban environment, they never advanced a workable plan of how to maintain a sense of human community during and after this transformation. Without such a plan the utopian dreams of the LI – had they been implemented – would have turned out to be as much of a nightmare as the New Towns that were being built at the time. Although both the LI and the Situationist International devoted much time to talking about community and communication, their sectarian inclinations demonstrate that they had no *real* understanding of such concepts.

CHAPTER 4

THE COLLEGE OF PATAPHYSICS, NUCLEAR ART AND THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT FOR AN IMAGINIST BAUHAUS

While the Lettriste Movement, and International, were undoubtedly ludicrous, most — if not all — their members, seem to have remained blissfully unaware of this. Isou, and later Bernstein, Conord, Dahou, Debord, Fillon and Wolman, treated their activities with a seriousness that the objective observer can only find comic. There were, however, other groups with Utopian leanings who actively cultivated an air of ridiculousness. Typical among these is the College Of Pataphysics, which, while rarely viewed as a 'fan club', is often seen as an over-extended joke. The 'College' was neither an organised 'art' movement, nor an 'alternative' education institute, and yet many of the avant-garde's leading figures came to join it. Its members have allegedly included Boris Vian, Juan Miro, Marcel Duchamp, Eugene Ionesco, Max Ernst, Jacques Prevert, Raymond Queneau, Jean Dubuffet, Stanley Chapman and Asger Jorn.

Pataphysics was the science of imaginary solutions, which the French 'utopian' Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) 'invented' at the end of the last century.

The spirit of this 'new science' was incarnated in Jarry's famous plays "Ubu Roi", "Ubu Coco" and "Ubu Enchained", and in other works such as the novel "The Exploits and Opinions Of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician".

The College Of Pataphysics was, according to Simon Watson Taylor's "Apodeitic Outline" of it in the "Evergreen Review" (May/June 1960), inaugurated at a meeting on 29/12/48. The highlight of its founding was a 'harangue' by His Magnificence Dr. I. C. Sandomir. However, not all observers take such claims at face value, as Watson Taylor explained:

"The Vice-Curator-Founder of the College passed away on 10 April 1956 (vulgar style)... The dignified aspect of his death was marred only by a scandalous statement in the "Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Francaise" by its editor M. Jean Paulhan. Commenting on "Cahiers" announcement of the death of Dr. Sandomir, M. Paulhan declared his sorrow at the death was tampered by the suspicion that probably Dr. Sandomir had never existed. The College was forced to act firmly against this provocative insinuation by declaring publicly that M. Paulhan was considered henceforth to be pataphysically non-existent. In furtherance of this just measure, the College printed post cards bearing the legend JEAN PAULHAN DOES NOT EXIST. These were bought eagerly by members of the college and thereafter arrived in ever increasing numbers at the address of the alleged Paulhan..."

Thus, while the College undoubtedly did exist, carrying on its *theoretical* activities principally through its journal the "Cahiers of the College of Pataphysics", the accounts it has given of its own *history* have been called into question by outside observers.

A more conventional group active during this period was the Nuclear Art Movement. It was founded in 1951 by the painters Enrico Baj (born Milan 1924) and Sergio Dangelo (born Milan 1932). On the occasion of the 2nd exhibition of Nuclear Art (Gallery Apollo, Brussels, February 1952), Baj and Dangelo issued the group's first manifesto in which they state that:

"The Nuclearists desire to demolish all the 'isms' of a painting that inevitably lapses into academicism, whatever its origins may be. They desire and have the power to recreate painting.

Forms disintegrate: man's new forms are those of the atomic universe; the forces are electrical charges. Ideal beauty is no longer the property of a stupid hero-caste, nor of the 'robot'. But it coincides with the representation of nuclear man and his space.

Our consciences charged with unforeseen explosions preclude a FACT. The Nuclearist lives in this situation, of which only men with eyesight spent can fail to be aware.

Truth is not yours, it lies in the ATOM.

Nuclear painting documents the search for this truth."

The Nuclearists were opposed to concrete and abstract art. They believed that through experimentation, they could bring about a renewal of painting. Although ambitious and competitive, they were open to collaboration with

other avant-garde movements. One of their earliest contacts outside Italy was with Shiryu Morita (born Kyoto, Japan, 1912) who had founded the calligraphic group Bokuzin-Kai. During the Nuclear Art exhibition in Brussels, Baj and Dangelo met several former members of the dissolved COBRA movement. Dangelo returned to Milan via Paris, where he visited Alechinsky and picked up a suitcase full of COBRA documents.

In November '53, Baj and Dangelo made contact with Asger Jorn by letter. Jorn had spent two years in hospital, along with Christian Dotremont, where they had both been suffering from tuberculosis. It was while recovering from this illness at Villais, that Jorn came into contact with Max Bill, head of the New Bauhaus at Ulm. Jorn wanted Bill to embark on a new communal collaboration between painters and architects. But Jorn's impulsiveness was diametrically opposed to Bill's rationalism. A series of letters resulted in each man declaring he was theoretically opposed to the other's opinions on *art* and culture.

In December '53 Jorn announced, in a letter to Baj, the formation of the International Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB):

"...a Swiss architect, Max Bill, has undertaken to restructure the Bauhaus where Klee and Kandinsky taught. He wishes to make an academy without painting, without research into the imagination, fantasy, signs, symbols – all he wants is technical instruction. In the name of all experimental artists I intend to create an International Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus..."

Jorn asked Baj to join his new movement. Baj accepted in a letter dated January '54, and brought Dangelo and two French art critics with him. In the same month as the letter announcing the formation of the IMIB was sent, Jorn 'presented' a Nuclear Art Exhibition in Turin. Although he exhibited alongside Baj and the other Nuclearists, Jorn never joined their movement or signed their manifestos. Jorn and Baj continued exchanging letters into 1954, and in one Baj included a copy of "Potlatch", the bulletin of the Lettriste International, which he had come across while in Paris. Jorn immediately decided to write to the LI, and urged Baj to do the same.

Jorn renewed contact with many leading figures of the European avant-garde after his long illness, and persuaded several ex-COBRAs to join the IMIB, among whom were Dotremont, Alechinsky and Appel. In June '54, thanks to Baj, Jorn settled in Abisola, an Italian seaside town. It was in Abisola, over the summer, that the "International Ceramics Meeting" took place. The participants were Appel, Baj, Corneille, Dangelo, Fontana, Giglière, Jaeger, Jorn, Koenig, Matta and Scanavino. The work they created became the first IMIB exhibition, and was shown at the 10th Triennial in Milan that October. Jorn also used this occasion to denounce Max Bill's theories of industrial design. According to Jorn, aesthetics were to be based on a communication that would arouse and surprise, rather than rationality or functionalism; they should be concerned with the immediate effect on the senses, without taking into account utility or structural value. It was also at this time that the first IMIB "Exercise Book" was issued, and that Jorn made

contact with Ettore Sottsass – who was soon persuaded to join the movement.

The following summer, Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio (1902-64) and Piero Simondo had an exhibition in Abisola, during which they met Jorn. Gallizio was a pharmacist and independent councillor of the left, who had recently taken to making experimental paintings, often drawing on his knowledge of chemistry to do so. Simondo was a philosophy student at Turin university, who shared the older man's passion for avant-garde experimentation. Jorn travelled to Alba in September '55 to spend time with the two men. Gallizio's studio, located in an old convent, became the Experimental Laboratory of the IMIB during Jorn's stay. Jorn's views were slightly at odds with Simondo's methodological rigor and interest in scientific problems, but he shared with Gallizio a vision of the *artist* as ethically committed to mankind and an interest in archaeology, nomadism, and popular culture.

The aim of the IMIB in setting up the Alba Laboratory was the liberation of experiment. Thus while Jorn was shuttling between Alba, Abisola, Paris and Silkeborg, Gallizio was experimenting with oils and alimentary assiline mixed with sand and carbon, Baj continued his research into automism, Sottsass investigated architecture, Walter Olmo pursued musical intervention, and Simondo and Elena Verrone undertook a methodological study of 'artistic problems'. Jorn used his trips to develop the many contacts he'd made. Those with the ex-COBRA man Constant and the Lettriste International numbered among the most important of these. The LI eventually joined the IMIB in May '56.

The first, and only, issue of the IMIB's journal "Eristica" was issued in July '56. It was edited by Gallizio, with an editorial committee that included Dotremont, Korun and Baj. It featured texts by Jorn, Simondo and Verrone, work by Baj, and photographic documentation of the International Ceramics Meeting of 1954.

The frantic activity of the IMIB was leading rapidly towards the "First World Congress Of Liberated Artists", and ultimately to the formation of the Situationist International.

CHAPTER 5

FROM THE “FIRST WORLD CONGRESS OF LIBERATED ARTISTS” TO THE FOUNDATION OF THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL

The “First World Congress Of Liberated Artists” took place in the town hall at Alba from 2nd to 8th September 1956. Organised by Gallizio and Jorn, the congress was attended by the Italians Simondo, Baj, Sottsass Jr, and Verrone; by the ex-COBRA musician Jaques Calonne from Belgium; the Dutchman Constant; and by Gil J. Wolman representing the (mainly French) Lettriste International. The Czechs Pravoslav Rada and Jan Kotik arrived too late to participate in discussions but put their names to a final resolution. The Turinese sculptors Sandro Cherchi and Franco Garelli were present as observers. Christian Dotremont, nominated chairperson for the congress, was unable to attend due to illness. In issue 27 of “Potlatch”, the LI offered the following as an assessment of this fact:

“Christian Dotremont, who had been announced as a member of the Belgian delegation in spite of the fact that he has for some time been a collaborator in the “Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Francaise”, refrained from appearing at the Congress, where his presence would have been unacceptable to the majority of

the participants.”

Whether or not Dotremont's illness was diplomatic, reports such as this demonstrate the fundamental dishonesty of the LI as an organisation. Dotremont would never have been chosen to chair the congress if the majority of those attending had actually had objections to his presence. The LI simply projected their own views onto others whose real opinions they had no intention of soliciting. Similarly, in the same report, the LI claimed the representatives of avant-garde groups from eight countries were present at the congress. While there were a few Algerian exiles and a Paris based British national holding membership of the LI, only a mythomaniac could deduce from this that Wolman was thus the 'representative' of British and Algerian 'avant-garde groups'. The LI's inflated claims bore little resemblance to the facts. The only avant-garde groups present were the IMIB, the LI, and the Nuclear Art Movement. Of these, on the insistence of Wolman, Enrico Baj – sole representative of the Nuclearists, as well as a member of the IMIB – was excluded on the first day, and – according to “Potlatch”:

“...the Congress affirmed its break with the Nuclearists by issuing the following statement: “Confronted with his conduct in certain previous affairs, Baj withdrew from the Congress. He did not make off with the cash-box.”

Differences between Baj and Jorn had surfaced at the end of the previous year. In a letter to Jorn dated December '55, Baj had complained that the names International Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus and “Eristica” ‘simply don't catch on!’ According to Baj, the names were too long and ‘mysteriosophic’ to interest journalists. He contrasted this to the Nuclear Art manifestoes which were ‘snapped up’. Upon his exclusion from the congress, Baj resigned from the IMIB.

The discussions at the congress concluded with ‘a substantial accord’ and a signed resolution declaring the “necessity of an integral construction of the environment by a unitary urbanism that must utilize all arts and modern techniques”; the “inevitable outmodedness of any renovation of an art within its traditional limits”; the “recognition of an essential interdependence between unitary urbanism and a future style of life” which must be situated “in the perspective of a greater real freedom and a greater domination of nature”; and “unity of action among the signers on the basis of this programme”. This was the first time that the term ‘unitary urbanism’, which the LI had coined during the summer, was used publically.

A retrospective exhibition of “Futurist Ceramics 1925-33” was organised to run simultaneously with the congress. Jorn and Gallizio had established friendships with a number of old futurists, in particular Farfa (born Trieste 1881). While the futurist exhibition, like the congress, was held in the town hall, a second exhibition of work from the Experimental Laboratory was held in a local cinema. The participants in this show were Constant, Gallizio, Garelli, Jorn, Kotik, Rada, Simondo and Wolman.

Constant had spent the early fifties in London, studying the city. When he

returned to Amsterdam, he abandoned painting for architecture and investigations into the problem of space. This, combined with his social commitment, gave the LI much to envy and admire in both him and his work. After the congress, Constant stayed on in Alba, where he worked on plans for the first mobile architecture of unitary urbanism. This would be for the use of gypsies who camped on a plot of land owned by Gallizio. It was to use a system of dividing walls placed under a single roof so that it could be continually modified to suit the needs of its inhabitants. The model Constant made of the encampment was a blueprint for a new urban civilisation based on common property, mobility, and the continual variability of unitary environments.

While Constant was working on plans for the Gypsy encampment, Gallizio was developing his 'Industrial Painting'. With the aid of his son, Giors Melanotte, Gallizio was making canvases 70 to 90 metres long, which were stored on rollers – and were to be sold by the metre in streets, markets, and department stores. Gallizio claimed that his painting could be used to dress in, sit on, and might even be employed in the construction of mobile architecture.

The IMIB held an exhibition entitled "Demonstrate In Favour Of Unitary Urbanism" at the Turin Cultural Union from 10 to 15 December 1956. The artists shown were Cherchi, Constant, Guy Debord, Jacques Fillon, Gallizio, Garelli, Jorn, Walter Olmo and Simondo.

In a letter dated January 1st 1957, signed by Bernstein, Constant, Dahou, Debord, Fillon, Gallizio, Jorn, Ralph Rumney, Simondo, Verrone and Wolman, the IMIB accused the Milan Triennial of having left their proposal for an experimental pavilion to gather dust. Its chief result was the resignation of Ettore Sottsass Jr, who found its tone unnecessarily insulting. On the 13 January '57, Wolman and Fillon were excluded from the Lettriste International, and thus also from the IMIB, because of their 'feeble minds'. The headline in *Pollatch* 28 that announces this describes them as being 'pensioned off'. In February Walter Korun, with the aid of Guy Debord, organised a psychogeographical exhibition in the Taptoe Gallery, Brussels. The previous year Korun had held the first post-COBRA exhibition of COBRA work in the same gallery.

In May '57 Debord published his "Report On The Construction Of Situations And On The International Situationist Tendency's Conditions Of Organisation And Action". This text was the preparatory document for the unification conference of the IMIB and LI. In it Debord lays out, from his own perspective, the theses that he, Jorn, Constant, Gallizio and many others had been developing over the years:

"What is termed culture reflects, but also prefigures, the possibilities of the organization of life in a given society. Our era is fundamentally characterised by the lagging of revolutionary political action behind the development of modern possibilities of production which call for a superior organisation of the world."

Debord sees a revolutionary programme in culture as being necessarily linked to revolutionary politics. Here he sees a 'notable progression from

futurism through dadaism and surrealism to the movements formed after 1945'. Dada had 'delivered a mortal blow to the traditional conceptions of culture', while surrealism provided 'an effective means of struggle against the confusionist mechanisms of the bourgeoisie':

"The surrealist programme, asserting the sovereignty of desire and surprise, proposing a new use of life, is much richer in constructive possibilities than is generally thought... But the devolution of its original proponents into spiritualism... obliges us to search for the negation of the development of surrealist theory in the very origin of this theory... The error is... the idea of the infinite richness of the unconscious imagination... its belief that the unconscious was the finally discovered force of life, and its having revised the history of ideas accordingly and stopped it there... the discovery of the role of the unconscious was a surprise, an innovation, not a law of future surprises and innovations. Freud had also ended up discovering this when he wrote, "Everything conscious wears out. What is unconscious remains unaltered. But once it is set loose, does it not fall into ruins in its turn?"

Thus, rather than rejecting surrealism as a degeneration from the dadaist refusal of *serious culture*, Debord declares that it is necessary to take up the *original* surrealist programme and carry it through to its *logical* conclusion. He then goes on to link the decline of surrealism to the decline of the first workers' movement, saying that this, combined with a lack of theoretical renewal, caused it to decay. According to Debord, the COBRA group understood the necessity for an organised international of artists but lacked the 'intellectual rigour' of Lettrisme – and particularly the Lettriste International. He then places the LI and its allies in a vanguard position, stating that:

"As for the productions of peoples who are still subject to cultural colonialism (often caused by political oppression), even though they may be progressive in their own countries, they play a reactionary role in advanced cultural centres."

The text betrays the influence of Isou on Debord during the latter's formative period in the Lettriste Movement:

"It must be understood once and for all that something that is only a personal expression within a framework created by others cannot be termed a creation. Creation is not the arrangement of objects and forms, it is the invention of new laws on that arrangement."

Debord implies, rather than states as Isou would, that he intends to be the person of 'genius' who produces these new laws of creation. The new (anti) aesthetic terrain that Debord has 'discovered' is 'the creation of situations, that is to say the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality'. Debord will use a variety of arts and techniques 'as means contributing to an integral

composition of the milieu'. It will 'include the creation of new forms and the detournement of previous forms of architecture, urbanism, poetry and cinema'. Debord will invent 'games of an essentially new type', with a 'radical negation of the element of competition and separation from everyday life'.

According to Debord:

"The construction of situations begins on the ruins of the modern spectacle. It is easy to see to what extent the very principle of the spectacle – nonintervention – is linked to the alienation of the old world. Conversely, the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectator's psychological identification with the hero so as to draw him into activity by provoking his capacities to revolutionise his own life."

Here, again, we find that Debord conceives of himself, and 'his followers', as a vanguard. He insultingly assumes that *the masses* require him and his cronies to 'provoke' them into changing the terms of their own existence. Debord sees but one danger to the realisation of his plans – sectarianism:

"...we have to eliminate the sectarianism among us that opposes unity of action with possible allies for specific goals and prevents our infiltration of parallel organisations."

The unification conference of the IMIB and the LI took place on the outskirts of the Italian mountain village of Cosio d'Arroscia, in a bar owned by relatives of Simondo. Ralph Rumney (born Newcastle Upon Tyne, 1934) supposedly represented a third avant-garde group — the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA). The name was invented during the course of the conference to 'increase' the internationalism of the event. Rumney had lived in Italy since the early fifties. As he'd moved around European *art circles*, he'd come into contact with various *lettristes*, nuclear artists, members of the IMIB, and future *nouveaux realistes*.

Apart from Rumney, those present were Bernstein and Debord from the LI; and Gallizio, Jorn, Olmo, Simondo and Verrone from the IMIB. The conference lasted about a week, and for much of it the participants were in a state of semi-drunkenness. Among the things discussed was a plan by Rumney to dye the Venice Lagoon a bright colour. This had two apparently quite different purposes: to see how the population reacted, and as a means of studying the flows and stagnations of the water.

The actual 'unification' of the IMIB, LI and non-existent LPA, took place on 28th July 1957. After a vote of five in favour of unification, two against and one abstention, a fusion of groups and the founding of the SI was proclaimed.

CHAPTER 6

THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL IN ITS 'HEROIC' PHASE (1957-62)

During the academic year '57-8, Henri Lefebvre held a sociology course at Nanterre which attracted the attendance, amongst others, of Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem (who would join the SI in '61). Debord and Lefebvre developed a friendship which the latter would later describe as 'a communion', but which soon ended in rupture with the SI claiming Lefebvre had stolen 'its' ideas. Lefebvre's theory of 'everyday life', which already held a certain sway within the SI via the influence and input of COBRA and the IMIB, was to have a profound influence on Debord's intellectual development. The theories of Jean Baudrillard, who participated in the presentation of the course, also appear to have made a certain impact on the SI's thinking.

The revision of marxian thought undertaken in France during the 1950's, in which Lefebvre played a leading role, created an 'intellectual' climate which was conducive to the development of the SI as a 'political', and not 'just' a 'cultural', organisation. The journal "Arguments", which is closely identified with revisionism, was founded just before the SI, at the beginning of 1957. In France, Marxist thought had been dominated by the Communist Party, and it was not until after the liberation that there was any attempt at philosophic revision. In many ways the debate was similar to that carried out in Germany

during the twenties, although commentators (i.e. Richard Gombin) say French revisionism lacked the vigour found in the thought of Lukacs, Adorno &c. Although Lefebvre's theory of 'everyday life' was of central importance to the SI, it was the group Socialisme ou Barbarie (founded 1949) who would provide the political theory upon which Debord and Vaneigem's *thought* would draw most heavily. Indeed, Debord would join S ou B briefly in 1960. The SI adopted S ou B's ideas wholesale, from the analysis of the USSR as a bureaucratic capitalist state, to the advocacy of Workers' Councils as the means of communist organisation. Although the SI later 'broke off' fraternal relations with S ou B, it was never able to break with the political conceptions of the latter group.¹

Walter Olmo, with the endorsement of Elena Verrone and her husband Piero Simondo, presented a text – "For A Concept Of Experimental Music" – to the SI at the end of September '57. In the essay, Olmo gave an account of his sound researches, and linked them to the construction of ambiance. Debord responded with a text issued on 15th October '57, in which he denounced Olmo, and his two supporters, for approaching the problem of experimentation from the 'idealist attitude' of 'right-wing thought'. Olmo, Verrone and Simondo, having refused to retract the text, were formally expelled from the SI at its second conference, held in Paris on 25/26 January '58. In March '58 Ralph Rumney, an English member of the Italian section, was expelled. According to Rumney,² the exclusion was the result of his failure to complete a psychogeographical report on time. Ironically, he mailed off a finished version of this photo-essay a day or two before he received a letter from Paris notifying him of his expulsion. His marital commitments, centred around the recent birth of a son, were not considered suitable reasons for the exclusion being recinded. According to the SI the Venetian jungle had 'closed in on the young man' (IS 1, June '58).

The 1st January '58 saw the founding of the German 'section' of the SI, which consisted solely of Hans Platschek until his expulsion in February the following year. The 'section' was launched with the manifesto "Nervenruh! Keine Experimente!" signed by Platschek and Jorn.

In the early months of '58, the French section issued two tracts: "Nouveaux theatre d'operation dans le culture" and "Aux producteurs de l'art moderne". The former schematised the programme of the SI, while the latter invited artists, "tired of repeating outmoded ideas", to organise new modes for the transformation of the environment. As a first step towards this they were to contact the SI.

In April '58 the SI launched its action against the "International Assembly Of Art Critics" in Belgium. A tract was issued, denouncing art critics for defending the old world against the subversion of a new experimental movement. An account of how this message was broadcast is given in "Internationale Situationiste" 1 (June '58):

"Our Belgian section carried out the necessary direct attack. Beginning 13 April, on the eve of the opening of the proceedings, when the art critics from

two hemispheres, led by the American Sweeney, were being welcomed to Brussels, the text of the situationist proclamation was brought to their attention in several ways. Copies were mailed to a large number of critics or given to them personally. Others were personally telephoned and read all or part of the text. A group forced its way into the Press Club where the critics were being received and threw leaflets among the audience. Others were tossed onto the pavements from upstairs windows or from a car."

Walter Korun, who was prosecuted for his leading role in this incident, was expelled from the SI in October '58.

The first public exhibition of Gallizio's 'Industrial Painting' opened at the Notizie Gallery, Turin, on 30th May '58. Three rolls of canvas (70, 14 and 12 metres in length) were displayed. The painting was partially unrolled and pinned to the walls. Fashion models paraded up and down the gallery dressed in cuts of the canvas, which was being sold by the metre. A device emitted notes which varied in accordance with the movements of those present in the gallery. This 'musical' use of this 'tereminofono' had originally been developed by Walter Olmo and Cocito de Torino.

Gallizio's 'work' was created with simple tools. His production process required the pressing and painting of oil and resin onto canvas. This technique was very much in keeping with the traditional craft methods of fine art. The resulting rolls of canvas were described as 'industrial' because of the scale, rather than the process, of production. Gallizio had taken up painting in 1953, at first imitating the then current mode of abstract expressionism. The 'Industrial Painting' which he and Giors Melanotte (his son) created in the late fifties, was developed as much from this previous interest in action painting as from certain 'technical' innovations. The canvases were produced without design or formulation, and were 'the concrete expression of the painterly gesture'. The SI viewed such 'painting' as 'anti-painting' because, by producing such a volume of work, Gallizio intended to detourne the structure of the art market. According to the SI, Gallizio was not to be looked upon as an 'isolated artist', but rather as the constructor of 'unitary ambiances'.

As a result of the publication in Paris of the first issue of "Internationale Situationiste" (June '58), Debord was subjected to a police interview. The French police, who were empowered to disband subversive and criminal associations, were informed by Debord that the SI was an artistic tendency – which, since it had never been constituted, could not be disbanded. In a letter to Gallizio (dated 17th July '58), Debord complains that the police, having mistaken the SI for 'gangsters', were trying hard to intimidate them.

In a tract entitled "Defend Liberty Everywhere" (dated 4th July '58), Gallizio – in the name of the Italian section of the SI – launched a campaign to have the Milanese painter Nunzio Van Guglielmi released from a lunatic asylum. Guglielmi had been interned after breaking a window of Raphael's "The Wedding Of The Virgin" and pasting up a tract praising the revolution against the clerical government. In Paris, on the 7th July '58, Jorm issued the tract "Au secours de van Guglielmi". In this he denounced the imprisonment

of Guglielmi as 'an attack against the modern spirit', and praised the Milanese painter for assailing 'the false artistic ideals of the past'. The following year Guglielmi was declared sound of mind and released from the asylum.

During the summer of '58, the SI ordered Abdelhafid Khatib to make a psychogeographical report on the Les Halles region of Paris. Among other things, this necessitated the exploration of the district at night. Such an undertaking was fraught with difficulties for Khatib who, as an Algerian resident in France at the height of the nationalist bomb scare, was subject to a police curfew which required all Algerians to remain indoors after 7.30pm. Having been arrested twice, Khatib decided enough was enough and submitted an incomplete report which the SI accepted.

On the 8th July '58, the second exhibition of Gallizio and Melanotte's Industrial Painting was opened at the Montnapoleone Gallery, Milan. In October '58, IP recieved its Parisian premier during a 'night exercise' by the SI; a long roll of canvas, folowing the lines of ambience, was pinned up in a street. In the second issue of "Internationale Situationiste" (Paris, December '58), the 'unexpected' commercial success of IP was explained as a defensive action on the part of the commercial art world, who were 'pretending' to accomodate IP into their scale of values by considering each role as one large picture. The situationists responded to this by increasing the price from L10,000 to L40,000 per metre, and through the production of longer rolls.

If 1958 had been an active year for the SI as an organisation, it had been particularly busy for Jorn as an individual. The SI had edited and published "Pour la forme – Ebauche d'une methodologie des Arts", a collection of Jorn's writings from the period '53 to '57. Jorn, along with Constant, Gallizio, Bernstein and her husband Debord, was one of the group of five who formed the theoretical and organisational core of the situationist movement. In April, while the SI was launching its attack against the art critics assembled in Belgium, Jorn's work was being shown at the Brussels 'Expo' as part of "50 dans d'art moderne". Jorn's reputation as a major figure in European art dates from this exhibition. His increasing success as an artist was to have major repercussions for the SI. Until Jorn broke into the super-league of the art market, Gallizio – as the situationist with the largest private income – had provided most of the movement's funds. But from '58 onwards it was Jorn, with the fortune he made from the sale of his paintings, who would finance the SI. Some projects such as the German "Spur" magazine he financed directly, others he paid for indirectly. Whenever a situationist – or the movement in general – was short of money, Jorn would give them a painting, knowing full well it would be sold. It was with the money raised from the sale of Jorn's paintings, presented to Debord as presents, that the SI was able to finance its publications. Jorn continued to give his paintings to members – and former members – of the SI until his death, twelve years after he had officially resigned from the movement.³

Jorn had met the members of Gruppe Spur in '58, during his first one man show in Munich. Spur (meaning trace or trail) had been founded the previous year by Lothar Fischer, Heimrad Prem, Josef Senft (pseudonym of J. K. S.

Hohburg), Helmut Sturm and Hans-Peter Zimmer. By the time Spur joined the SI at the third situationist conference in Munich (17 – 20 April '59), Ervin Eisch, Heinz Hofl, and Gretel Stadler had become members of the group, while Josef Senft had left. During the period it constituted the German section of the SI, Dieter Kunzelmann, Renee Nele and Uwe Lausen, would join Spur's ranks.

Spur had much in common with both Jorn, who had 'discovered' them, and Constant. They had a shared belief in the collective, and non-competitive, production of *art*.⁴ This was in stark contrast to the supersession of *art* proposed by Bernstein and Debord. Like Constant, Spur were developing concepts of play and of (wo)man as 'homo ludens', which had previously been outlined in a 1938 essay by the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga. These ideas were to become central to the SI's programme and were often utilised, if not developed, by Raoul Vaneigem.

An exhibition of Gallizio and Melanotte's Industrial Painting was held at the Van De Loo Gallery to coincide with the Munich conference of the SI. During the congress itself, there emerged ideological differences between the Dutch section and Debord. Debord envisaged a *revolutionary creativity totally separated from existing culture*; whereas the Dutch delegates insisted on the centrality of unitary urbanism as an alternative means of *liberated creation* and sustained *cultural revolution*. This difference was not resolved. The report Constant presented on the foundation of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism in Amsterdam underlined the extent to which the situationist movement was diverging from Bernstein and Debord's plans. Utilising a team of *artists*, architects and sociologists, the 'bureau' was dedicated to the construction of unitary ambiances. Debord chose to bide his time. It would be several years before he could assume leadership of the movement and enforce his own opinions on those who were left once he had purged all 'opportunistic tendencies'. On the night the Munich conference closed, the SI fly posted the city with leaflets proclaiming "A Cultural Putsch While You Sleep!"

In May '59 members of the SI held exhibitions in three of Europe's most prestigious art galleries. Gallizio and Melanotte presented their "Anti-Material Cave" at the René Drouin Gallery, Paris. This was another unitary environment created from rolls of their industrial painting. Jorn showed his "Modified Pictures" at the Rive Gauche Gallery, Paris. These consisted of 20 'kitsch' paintings which Jorn had 'detourned' with stains of colour and alteration to figures. Constant exhibited spatial constructions at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. These were models for the buildings of unitary urbanism, which were to be suspended from frames, making them more flexible than traditional architecture. Research into unitary urbanism proved to be the central activity of the SI during the summer and autumn of '59; but while the Dutch and Italian sections carried on an animated debate over technical and social problems to be tackled, others withdrew to the sidelines: Jorn because he was suspicious of functional technology, Bernstein and Debord because they wished to pursue an essentially 'political' line. The third issue of "Internationale Situationiste" (Paris, December '59) features

documents from the congress in Munich, articles on unitary urbanism, and an essay on Industrial Painting.

At the end of '59, the SI began negotiations with Wilhem Sandberg to hold an exhibition in and around the Stedelijk Museum the following May. The SI planned to turn the exhibition rooms into a labyrinth, exhibit documents, have pre-recorded lectures playing continually, and organise a systematic derive – conducted by three situationist groups. The exhibition was not held because, among other things, the SI refused to make modifications to the labyrinth so that it would meet security and safety requirements. After the museum was forced to cancel the project in March '60, due to the SI's intransigence, the space was offered to Gallizio – who accepted it.

In April '60, Armando, Alberts and Oudejans were expelled from the movement, the latter two for having accepted a contract to construct a church. In June, Gallizio and Melanotte exhibited Industrial Painting at both the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Notizie Gallery, Turin. Simultaneously, they were expelled from the SI for collaborating with 'ideologically unacceptable' forces. Glauco Wuerich, another member of the Italian section, was purged at the same time. In the same month Constant – tired of being criticised for 'privileging' a technical architectural form, instead of 'seeking' a global culture – resigned.

On the 20th July '60, the SI published Debord and Canjuers's "Preliminaries Toward Defining A Unitary Revolutionary Programme". Pierre Canjuers was a theoretician of the Socialisme ou Barbarie group. The text was described by the situationists as "a platform for discussion within the SI, and for its link-up with revolutionary militants of the workers movement" (IS 5, Paris December 1960). The SI was too sectarian for this to amount to much. For a time Debord held dual membership of the SI and S ou B, and was one of a team the latter group sent to Belgium during the General Strike of 1960. But Debord resigned from S ou B after only a few months of active membership. Contact between the SI and S ou B diminished, and ended with a final rupture in '66.

In August 1960, the first issue of the German "Spur" magazine was published in Munich. It highlighted the different ways in which various factions within the SI approached the 'social question'. The differences were underlined by the reprinting in the journal of the May 1960 manifesto of the SI, with the November '58 manifesto of SPUR. Unlike the faction centred around Bernstein and Debord in Paris, Spur had no interest in the 'realisation and suppression' of art. This is how the Germans stated their position in the year following the founding of their group:

"...We oppose the logical way of mind which has led to cultural devastation. The automatic, functional attitude has led to stubborn mindlessness, to academicism, to the atom bomb... In order to be created, culture must be destroyed. Such terms as culture, truth, eternity, do not interest us artists. We have to be able to survive. The material and spiritual position of art is so desperate that a painter should not be expected to be obliging when he paints. Let the established do the obligatory... Art is a resounding stroke of the gong, its

lingering sound the raised voices of the imitators fading into thin air... Art has nothing to do with truth. Truth lies between entities. To want to be objective is one-sided. To be one-sided is pedantic and boring... WE DEMAND KITSCH, DIRT, PRIMEVAL SLIME, THE DESERT. Art is the dung-heap upon which kitsch grows... Instead of abstract idealism we call for honest nihilism. The greatest crimes of man are committed in the names of Truth, Honesty, Progress, for a better future. Abstract painting has become empty aestheticism, a playground for the lazy-minded who seek an easy pretext for the chewing-over once again of long outdated truths. Abstract painting is a HUNDREDFOLD MASTICATED PIECE OF CHEWING GUM stuck underneath the edge of the table. Today the Constructivists and the structuralist painters are trying to lick off this long-dried-up piece of chewing gum once again... WE SHALL SET AGAINST THIS OBJECTIVE NON-COMMITALISM A MILITANT DICTATORSHIP OF THE SPIRIT."

The "Spur" magazine, in contrast to "Internationale Situationiste", was largely graphic. Both visually and in terms of content, the two journals show the situationist movement as being ideologically divided at every level.

These differences were much in evidence at the Fourth Congress of the SI, held at a 'secret' location in East London, September 24-28th '60. Upon their arrival in the English capital, delegates were set the 'psychogeographical' task of locating the British Sailors Society, where the conference was to be held. On the 26th September, Heimrad Prem read a long declaration on behalf of the Spur group attacking the tendency amongst the French and Belgian delegates 'to count on the existence of a revolutionary proletariat'. Kotanyi replied to this by 'reminding' the Germans that in many 'advanced' capitalist countries wildcat strikes had 'multiplied'. This difference was not resolved, the Spur group simply agreed to retract its statement so as not 'to impede present situationist activity'.

On the last day of the conference, the SI held a 'public' meeting at the Institute Of Contemporary Arts in London's West End. Guy Atkins includes the following eye-witness report of it in his book "Asger Jorn – The Crucial Years 1954-1964" (Lund Humphries, 1977):

"The meeting, from beginning to end, was a parody of a normal ICA evening. Toni del Renzio was the ICA's chairman that night. He opened the meeting by giving some of the historical background of the Situationist movement. When he mentioned the conference in Alba there was loud applause from the Situationists. At the mention of the 'unification conference' at Cosio d'Arroscia the clapping was terrific, accompanied by loud footstamping. The ICA audience was clearly baffled by this senseless display of euphoria. Del Renzio then introduced the S.I. spokesman Maurice Wyckaert.

Instead of beginning with the usual compliments, Wyckaert scolded the ICA for using the word 'Situationism' in its Bulletin. 'Situationism', Wyckaert explained, 'doesn't exist. There is no doctrine of this name.' He went on to tell the audience, 'If you've now understood that there is no such thing as 'Situationism' you've not wasted your evening.'

After a tribute to Alexander Trocchi, who had recently been arrested for drug trafficking in the United States, Wyckaert launched into a criticism of

UNESCO. We were told that UNESCO had failed in its cultural mission. Therefore the Situationist International would seize the UNESCO building by 'the hammer blow of a *putsch*'. This remark was greeted with a few polite murmurs of approval.

Wyckaert ended as he had begun, with a gibe at the ICA. 'The Situationists, whose judges you perhaps imagine yourselves to be, will one day judge you. We are waiting for you at the turning.' There was a moment's silence before people realized that the speaker had finished. The first and only question came from a man who asked 'Can you explain what exactly Situationism is all about?' Wyckaert gave the questioner a severe look. Guy Debord stood up and said in French 'We're not here to answer cuntish questions'. At this he and the other Situationists walked out."

At this time *Spur* were the most active section of the SI: between August '60 and January '61 they published seven issues of their journal, the fifth (June '61) of which was an all text issue on unitary urbanism, featuring reprints of old Lettriste Internationale writings on this subject.

The split between the 'cultural' and 'political' factions within the SI widened with the resignation of Jorn in April 1961. This was compounded by Raoul Vaneigem (born Lessines in the Hainaut, 1934) assuming membership the same year. The division of opinion reached explosive proportions at the Fifth Conference of the SI in Goteborg, Sweden, 28-30th August '61. Vaneigem's report demonstrated the intransigence of the 'political' faction:

"...It is a question not of elaborating the spectacle of refusal, but rather of refusing the spectacle. In order for their elaboration to be *artistic* in the new and authentic sense defined by the SI, the elements of the destruction of the spectacle must precisely cease to be works of art. There is no such thing as *situationism* or a situationist work of art or a spectacular situationist... Our position is that of combatants between two worlds – one that we don't acknowledge, the other that does not yet exist."

Kunzelmann immediately expressed 'a strong scepticism' as to the powers the SI could 'bring together in order to act on the level envisaged by Vaneigem' (IS 7, Paris '62). Prem reiterated the position of the *Spur* group on *revolutionary* tactics – more or less repeating what the Germans had said at the 4th Congress of the SI. Although there was much talk of dissatisfaction and revolt, *Spur* noted that: 'Most people are still primarily concerned with comfort and conveniences'. Thus the third session of the Fifth Congress ended in 'uproar', with shouts of 'Your theory is going to fly right back in your faces!' from one faction and 'Cultural pimps!' from the other.

The conference decided to add Kotanyi and de Jong to the editorial board of the 'Spur' journal; and with the consultation of these two extra editors, the sixth issue was published in November '61. However, in January '62 Kunzelmann, Prem, Sturm, Zimmer, Eisch, Nele, Fischer and Stadler published issue 7 of the magazine without informing Kotanyi or de Jong. As a result they were expelled from the SI the following month. Simultaneously the *Spur* group was subjected to a series of police harassments and

prosecutions for immorality, pornography, blasphemy and incitement to riot. These eventually resulted in Uwe Lausen serving a three week jail sentence, while other members of the Spur group were fined and given suspended sentences.

After their exclusion, Spur continued to exist as a group, and were later involved with the 2nd Situationist International. This new grouping arose in March '62 when Nash, Elde, de Jong, Lindell, Larsson and Strid broke with the faction centred around Bernstein, Debord and Vaneigem. They immediately announced the formation of the 2nd International, centred on Drakabygget (the Situationist Bauhaus), a farmhouse in Southern Sweden. Those they broke with responded by 'excluding' the 'Nashists', a term adopted at the Sixth Congress of the 'SI' at Anvers (12-16th November '62).

Nash outlined the theories of the 2nd International in "Who Are The Situationists?" (Times Literary Supplement, London, 14/9/64):

"...The point of departure is the dechristianisation of Kierkegaard's philosophy of situations. This must be combined with British economic doctrines, German dialectic and French social action programmes. It involves a profound revision of Marx's doctrine and a complete revolution whose growth is rooted in the Scandinavian concept of culture. This new ideology and philosophical theory we have called situology. It is based on the principles of social democracy in as much as it excludes all forms of artificial privilege."

From Sweden, Nash published booklets, issued the magazine "Drakabygget" (named after his farmhouse) and organised other propaganda including exhibitions and demonstrations. Among the publicity stunts orchestrated by the Situationist Bauhaus were the painting of 'Co-ritus' slogans all over Copenhagen and the decapitation of a statue in Copenhagen harbour.

Jorn, although he denounced the graffiti actions to the press, remained on friendly terms with members of the two rival 'internationals'. Both groups were financially dependent on him and thus his collusion with what each side perceived as the 'enemy' was, if not accepted, ignored. There was certainly no question of Bernstein and Debord sticking to their usually rigorous criteria for splits and breaks. Without Jorn's support, of both money and gifts, neither de Jong's "Situationist Times", nor its rival "Internationale Situationiste", could have been published. After Jorn's death from cancer in 1973, Debord described him as 'the permanent heretic of a movement which cannot admit orthodoxy' (cited in "COBRA" by Jean-Clarence Lambert {Sotherby Publications, 1983} as a quotation from "Le Jardin de Abisola" {Turin 1974}).

1. In his translator's introduction to Jean Barrot's "Critique Of The Situationist International" (Red Eye 1, Berkeley 1979 – reprinted as "What Is Situationism?", Unpopular Books, London 1987) L.M. gives the following – extremely lucid – description of Socialisme ou Barbarie:

"Socialisme ou Barbarie" was a journal started by a small group of militants who broke with mainstream Trotskyism shortly after World War II. The grounds for this break were several. Firstly, there was the fact that the post-war economic crisis, and the war itself, had failed to provoke the revolutionary upheaval predicted by Trotsky. Secondly, there was the situation of the Soviet Union, where the bureaucracy had survived and had consolidated itself without the country having reverted to private capitalism. This also ran counter to Trotsky's predictions – as did the extension of Soviet-style bureaucratic rule to the rest of Eastern Europe. Thirdly, there was the miserable internal life of the so-called "Fourth International" which by now constituted a mini-bureaucracy of its own, torn by sectarian rivalry and also thoroughly repressive.

From this practical and historical experience, S ou B commenced a profound questioning of "marxism" – that is, of the ideology which runs through the works of Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky, appears as a caricature in the writings of Stalin and his hacks, and has part of its origin in the late work of Engels. Out of this questioning, S ou B's leading theoretician, Cornelius Castoriadis, writing under the pseudonyms first of Pierre Chaulieu and later of Paul Cardan, derived the following general conclusions:

(i) that the Soviet Union must now be regarded as a form of exploitative society called state – or bureaucratic – capitalist;

(ii) that in this the Soviet Union was only a more complete variant of a process that was common to the whole of capitalism, that of bureaucratization;

(iii) that because of this the contradiction between propertyless and property-owners was being replaced by the contradiction between "order-givers and order-takers" and that the private bourgeoisie was itself evolving via concentration and centralization of capital into a bureaucratic class;

(iv) that the advanced stage this process had reached in the Soviet Union was largely the result of the Leninist-Bolshevik conception of the Party, which seizes State power from the bourgeoisie on behalf of the workers and thence necessarily evolves into a new ruling class;

(v) that capitalism as a whole had overcome its economic contradictions based on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and that therefore the contradictions between order-givers and order-takers had become the sole mainspring of revolution, whereby the workers would be driven to revolt and achieve self-management only by the intolerable boredom and powerlessness of their lives, and not by material deprivation.

2. The author interviewed Rumney at his home in Putney (South West London) in Autumn '87.

3. See the section on the SI in "Asger Jorn – The Crucial Years 1954-64" by Guy Atkins (Lund Humphreys 1977). Atkins elaborated on the funding of the SI in a 1987 letter to the author. Rumney also proffered further information on this point.

4. Although, as we will see later, there is a *real* difference of opinion here over the status of culture, there is also a problem over the use of the term 'art'. Overt and conscious use of collective practices to make 'cultural artifacts' (for want of a better term) do not really fit the description 'art' – at least if one is using the term to describe the *high culture* of the ruling class in capitalist societies.

CHAPTER 7

ON THE THEORETICAL POVERTY OF THE SPECTO-SITUATIONISTS AND THE LEGITIMATE STATUS OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

The idea of Eurocentrism needs a further refinement if we are to understand why the Specto-Situationist International, led by Bernstein, Debord and Vaneigem, is far better known in Britain, France and North America than the 2nd Situationist International of de Jong and Nash. Not only has Europe traditionally seen itself as the centre of the world, but Britain, France and Germany, tend to view themselves as the hub of this centre. Thus, when the SI split in two, from a French or Anglo-American perspective, the specto-situationists based in Paris were seen as the *real* SI, while the 2nd International centred on Scandinavia could be dismissed as 'foreign to the SI; much more sociable, certainly, but much less intelligent' (IS 8, Paris 1963).

The specto-situationists claimed in "Internationale Situationiste 8" that Nash's new Swedish "Bauhaus" had assembled 'two or three former Scandinavian situationists plus a mass of unknowns'. The inference is clear, these people are *former* situationists, and the specto-situationists are sole holders of the SI title. This is typical of the dishonesty the specto-situationists

had inherited from the Lettriste International. Apart from deliberate misrepresentation, the only other explanation for such a claim is innumeracy or a complete failure of memory – both of which seem highly unlikely. The list of former comrades of Bernstein and Debord who participated in activities at the Situationist Bauhaus, or had material published in the 2nd International's "Situationist Times", includes Nash, Elde, de Jong, Lindell, Larsson, Strid, Kunzelmann, Prem, Sturm, Zimmer, Eisch, Nele, Fisher, Stadler, Jorn and Simondo. Since the average membership of the SI at any time before the schism had been between 10 and 15 persons, the claims of the 2nd International to the SI's title carry as much weight as those of the specto-situationists.

The most fundamental difference between the specto-situationists and the 2nd International was on the question of *art*. The specto-situationists wanted to 'realise and suppress' *art* – this desire is repeated throughout their literature. The following is an example authored by Martin, Strijbosch, Vaneigem and Vienet included in "Internationale Situationiste 9" (Paris 1964):

"It is now a matter of *realising* art, of really building on every level of life everything that hitherto could only be an artistic memory or an illusion, dreamed and preserved unilaterally. Art can be realized *only by being suppressed*. However, as opposed to the present society, which suppresses it by replacing it with the automatism of an even more passive and hierarchical spectacle, we maintain that art can really be suppressed *only by being realized*."

The 2nd International, like the specto-situationists, failed to make a proper distinction between the concepts of art and culture (i.e. Jorn's "Mind and Sense" in "Situationist Times 5" Paris 1964). But from an identical error the two Internationals reached very different conclusions about 'what was to be done'.

The specto-situationists – always extremely self-conscious about their public image – prided themselves on the promotion of their *theory* as materialist; but by examining a materialist treatment of art it can be demonstrated that the ambitions and attitudes of the specto-situationists are *actually* idealist.

Roger L. Taylor in his book "Art, An Enemy Of The People" (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1978) demonstrates that there have been very few genuinely materialist treatments of art. He does this by examining art as a social practice and then comparing the resulting materialist description to Marxist treatments of the subject. He begins by showing that art, as a category, must be distinguished from music, painting, writing &c. Current usage of the term art treats it as a sub-category of these disciplines; one which differentiates between parts of them on the basis of *perceived values*. Thus, the music of Mozart is considered art, while that of Slaughter and the Dogs is not. This use of the term art, which distinguishes between different musics, literatures, &c, emerged in the seventeenth-century at the same time as the concept of science. Before this, the term artist was used to describe cooks, shoe-makers,

students of the liberal arts &c.

When the term art emerged with its modern usage, it was an attempt on the part of the aristocracy to hold up the values of their *class* as objects of 'irrational reverence'. Thus art was equated with *truth*, and this *truth* was the world view of the aristocracy, a world view which would shortly be overthrown by the rising bourgeois class. As a revolutionary class, the bourgeoisie wished to assimilate the 'life' of the declining aristocracy. However, since the activities of the bourgeoisie served largely to abolish the previous modes of life, when it appropriated the concept of art it simultaneously transformed it. Thus beauty more or less ceased to be equated with truth, and became associated with individual taste. As art developed, 'the insistence on form and knowledge of form' and 'individualism' (basically romanticism) were added to lend 'authority' to the concept as a 'particular, evolving, mental set of the new ruling class'.

Thus, rather than having universal validity, art is a process that occurs within bourgeois society and which leads to an 'irrational reverence for activities which suit bourgeois needs'. This process posits 'the objective superiority of those things singled out as art, and, thereby, the superiority of the form of life which celebrates them, and the social group which is implicated'. This boils down to an assertion that bourgeois society, and the ruling class within it, is 'somehow committed to a superior form of knowledge'. From this we can deduce that art will continue to exist as a specialised category until capitalism itself has been abolished. This is a conclusion very different to that reached by the spectro-situationists. In "Internationale Situationiste 10", Khayati asserts:

"...Dada realized all the possibilities of language and forever closed the door on art as a speciality... The realization of art – poetry in the situationist sense – means that one cannot realize oneself in a "work", but rather realizes oneself period."

If art, from a materialist perspective, is a process which occurs in bourgeois society, there can be no question of its *realisation*. Such an idea is mystical since it implies not only that art has an essence, but that as a category it is autonomous of social structures. To undertake its *realisation* and *suppression* is an attempt to *save* this mental set at the very moment the category is *abolished*. Art disappears from the museums *only* to reappear *everywhere*! So much for the *autonomous* practice of the *proletariat*, this is actually the old bourgeois dream of a *universal* category which will propagandise for social cohesion.

Apart from its *treatment* of art, the other *theoretical* device which distinguishes the spectro-situationists from the 2nd International is the concept of the spectacle. This gains its most elaborated *theorisation* in Guy Debord's "La société du spectacle" (Buchet-Chastel, Paris, 1967 – English translation Black & Red, Detroit, 1970). In this, paraphrasing Marx, Debord announces:

"The entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign

announces itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”

From this point on, Debord proceeds to treat the *spectacle* as a generalised, and simultaneously a localised, phenomenon. And by treating it in this way – offering a series of overlapping but hardly regimented descriptions – he is unable to arrive at a uniform notion of the concept. Debord only appraises its various movements without demonstrating any real relation between them.²

The specto-situationist conception of both capitalist and communist society is as mystical as its conception of art. Debord announces that the “spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images”, as though human relations hadn’t always been conducted via sense impressions (which in terms of sight have always been images). Vaneigem in his “*Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations*” (Gallimard, Paris, 1967) talks of communist society as being a world of ‘masters without slaves’; when it is actually a society in which metaphors of class domination will be rendered meaningless.

Rather than attempting to develop *rigorous* theories, and failing miserably, the 2nd International pursued a more open policy. In the “Situationist Times” de Jong would draw together photographs, diagrams and odd pieces of writing on a specific theme (for example labyrinths in issue 4, Paris 1963) and leave her *readers* to draw their own conclusions. In many ways issues of the “Situationist Times” resemble contemporary printed editions by Fluxus. Both represent a non-art approach to what can only very loosely be termed *artistic activity*.

Thus while the specto-situationists were doubly ideological in their dogmatic assertion of the *theoretical* nature of their *speculations*, the 2nd International – which was happy to have its thought described as an ideology – proved more open minded in its approach to *philosophical enquiry*.

1. The faction I describe as the ‘specto-Situationist International’, always referred to itself simply as the ‘Situationist International’. However, since two factions existed, both claiming the title Situationist International – the *Nashist* group at least had the decency to place the word ‘Second’ in front of the name – I used the term ‘specto’ to differentiate the Debordist faction from the *original* SI, which existed before the split of ‘62. The term ‘specto’ refers to the *theory* of the ‘spectacle’, in which the Debordist faction believed.

2. For an earlier and more elaborate version of this argument see David Jacobs & Christopher Winks “AT DUSK – The Situationist Movement In Historical Perspective” (Perspectives, Berkeley 1975). See also Mark Shipway’s essay “Situationism” in Rubel & Crump (eds) “Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” (MacMillan, Basingstoke & London 1987) for a less ‘theoretical’ explanation of how the specto-SI projected trends occurring within a specific stratum of French society across class and national boundaries and into a universal ‘theory’.

CHAPTER 8

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE SPECTO-SITUATIONIST CRITIQUE

During the early sixties both the specto-situationists and the 2nd International were largely unknown beyond fringe groups of artists, students and political activists. Both Internationals managed to spread their fame a little through the use of scandal. The specto-situationist Jeppesen Victor Martin was the most accomplished practitioner of this tactic. After several incidents which reached the press, he was prosecuted for producing a cartoon on the occasion of a Danish royal wedding which depicted Christine Keeler with a speech bubble stating that it was better to be a prostitute than marry a fascist.

When *fans* of the journal “Internationale Situationiste” gained control of the student union at Strasbourg University, the specto-situationists seized their chance for an *intervention* with maximum publicity. In its text “Our Goals And Methods In The Strasbourg Scandal” (“Internationale Situationiste 11”, Paris, October ’67), the specto-situationists claim they initially suggested that the students themselves write a critique of the university and society in general; and then publish it with student union funds. In the end, the text was written by a card carrying specto-situationist, Mustapha Khayati – with a few *corrections* made by the organisational hierarchy in Paris. Ten thousand copies of “On The Poverty Of Student Life – considered in its economic,

political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy" (AFGES, Strasbourg, 1966) were printed, and many were handed out at the official opening of the university's academic year in November '66. Soon afterwards, the student union was closed by court order and the specto-situationists received international publicity. In the court case that resulted from the text's publication, the summation of the judge is now better remembered and publicised than the text itself:

"The accused have never denied the charge of misusing the funds of the student union. Indeed, they openly admit to having made the union pay some \$1500 for the printing and distribution of 10,000 pamphlets, not to mention the cost of other literature inspired by "Internationale Situationiste". These publications express ideas and aspirations which, to put it mildly, have nothing to do with the aims of a student union. One has only to read what the accused have written, for it is obvious that these five students, scarcely more than adolescents, lacking all experience of real life, their minds confused by ill-digested philosophical, social, political and economic theories, and perplexed by the drab monotony of their everyday life, make the empty, arrogant, and pathetic claim to pass definitive judgements, sinking to outright abuse, on their fellow-students, their teachers, God, religion, the clergy, the governments and political systems of the whole world. Rejecting all morality and restraint, these cynics do not hesitate to commend theft, the destruction of scholarship, the abolition of work, total subversion, and a world-wide proletarian revolution with "unlicensed pleasure" as its only aim.

In view of their basically anarchist character, these theories and propaganda are eminently noxious. Their wide diffusion in both student circles and among the general public, by local, national and foreign press, are a threat to the morality, the studies, the reputation and thus the very future of the students of the University of Strasbourg."

The reaction of the judge delighted lumpen intellectuals across the world, and many of the subsequent reprints of the text have included this extract of the judge's summation. According to Ken Knabb ("Situationist Anthology", Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, 1981):

"*On The Poverty of Student life* is in fact the most widely circulated situationist text. It has been translated into Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish, and its total printing so far is in the neighborhood of half a million."

The text itself begins with a critique of students, 'the most universally despised creature in France', and continues by declaring that there are only two possible futures for delinquents, 'the awakening of revolutionary consciousness or blind obedience in the factories'. This is followed by a *critique* of the Dutch Provos, in which Constant is personally insulted: the fact that he was once a member of the Situationist International is conveniently ignored. Khayati proclaims that to 'arrive at a revolutionary critique, the rebellious Provo base has to begin by revolting against its own

leaders’.

It is presumably idealist induction which enables Khayati to declare that by ‘revolting against their studies, the American students have automatically called into question a society that needs such studies’. This revolt (at Berkeley and elsewhere) has ‘from the start asserted itself as a revolt against the whole social system based on hierarchy and the dictatorship of the economy and the state’. This no doubt came as a surprise to the majority of those who had participated in the disturbances, but since they presumably lacked the *theoretical clarity* of *specto-situationist analysis*, Khayati felt free to state it anyway.

Similarly the struggles in Eastern Europe (East Berlin 1953, Budapest 1956, &c) are without illusion, and the protagonists – although they don’t know it themselves – are in complete accord with the theoretical thesis of the *specto-situationists*. In England, the youth involved with the antibomb movement lack radical perspectives, but this can be remedied if they link up with the shop steward movement! According to Khayati, the fusion of student youth and radical workers that has already taken place shows how this is to be done. One wonders where the majority of youth, who in England at least lacked the ‘benefits’ of higher education, were meant to fit in. Khayati ignored such questions because his text – despite the abuse at the beginning – was intended to recruit students as cadre for the *specto-situationist* movement; and to have launched a genuine attack on student privileges would have doomed such a project to failure.¹

It is precisely because Khayati’s stale ideology is aimed at students that he presents his *ideas* as a series of shop-worn paradoxes:

“...the first great “defeat” of the proletarian power, the Paris Commune, is in reality its first great victory in that for the first time the early proletariat demonstrated its historical capacity to organize all aspects of social life *freely*. Whereas its first great “victory”, the Bolshevik revolution, ultimately turned out to be its most disastrous defeat... The results of the Russian counterrevolution were, internally, the establishment and development of a new mode of exploitation, *bureaucratic state-capitalism*, and externally, the growth of a “Communist” International whose spreading branches served the sole purpose of defending and reproducing their Russian model... in spite of apparent variations and oppositions, a single social form dominates the world, and the principles of the *old world* continue to govern our *modern world*. The tradition of the dead generations still haunts the minds of the living... there can be no revolution outside the modern, nor any modern thought outside the reinvention of the revolutionary critique... As Lukàcs correctly showed, revolutionary organisation is this necessary mediation between theory and practice, between man and history, between the mass of workers and the proletariat *constituted as a class*... Everything ultimately depends on how the new revolutionary movement resolves the organisation question... the critique of ideology must in the final analysis be the central problem of revolutionary organisation.”

Khayati’s style is that of a pompous academic. It makes one think of those imbecilic professors of philosophy who welcome new students with the hope

that at the end of their course these acolytes will emerge knowing less than when they began. No doubt Khayati's paradoxes were familiar and reassuring to his student readers.

Like all specto-situationist texts, when the concepts contained in "On The Poverty Of Student Life" are analysed they are soon seen to be incoherent. Khayati, in concluding, talks about 'the actual realisation of real desires'. The *critical* reader does not infer from this an intended distinction from the 'non-realisation of false desires'.² Only the semi-literate would mock the hapless *theorist*; Khayati's references to the *concrete* serve a *real* function – with them he hopes to mask the fact that his theory is no more than an abstraction.

The scandal surrounding "On The Poverty Of Student Life" marked a high point of publicity for the specto-SI. A year and a half later, during the occupations movement of May '68, the specto-situationists believed they were seeing the *revolution* they'd *predicted*. Unfortunately this was not the case, and the rapid decomposition of the group, started by the resignation of Michele Bernstein in December 1967, accelerated. The specto-situationists claimed they played a major role in the May events, a view not shared by disinterested *observers*.³ During May, the specto SI, and its supporters, formed themselves into the Committee For The Maintenance Of The Occupations – a group numbering approximately 40 persons.⁴ When it's considered that millions of workers and students participated in the May events, such a miniscule grouping cannot be deemed of much significance. With reality having failed to live up to the specto-situationists' expectations, many of the *movement's* 18 members proceeded to resign from the *International*. The majority of those that didn't were excluded. Finally, when there were just three members left, Debord and Sanguietti announced their *victory over history* in "La Veritable Scission dans L'Internationale" (Champ Libre, Paris, 1972). In this they claimed that the specto-SI was about to be reborn everywhere. Nothing of the kind occurred. However, the recessions of the seventies did demonstrate that specto-situationist 'analysis' – based as it was on the belief that capitalism had overcome its economic contradictions – was incorrect.

1. It was left to proletarians to make a *genuine* critique of the student movement. For example, during the 1968 Vietnam Solidarity demonstration in London's Grosvenor Square, a phalanx of 200 fanatical Millwall Football Club supporting 'skins' chanted "Students, Students, Ha Ha Ha", in reply to the shouts of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh" being made from the disorganised ranks of the New Left *radicals*.

2. I have not been able to locate a French edition of "On The Poverty Of Student Life" and so I use here Ken Knabb's translation from his "Situationist International Anthology". If Knabb's translation is *faulty*, the point still holds: – the (specto) SI continually refer to the *concrete* and the *total* in their texts, in a vain attempt to mask the essential vapidity of their *theorising*.

3. It was in the interests of the right vastly to over-emphasise the role of the SI in the Occupations Movement. It suited conservative politicians to place the *blame* for the May events on a small group of 'fanatics' *who led the majority of the population astray*. Such distorted *interpretations* of the May movement were made from de Gaulle downwards.

4. Steef Davidson in "The Penguin Book of Political Comics" (Penguin, Harmondsworth 1982) describes the Council For The Maintenance Of The Occupations as "a group of forty to fifty Situationists and 'enragés' who had broken away from the M22M (March 22nd Movement)". René Viénet in his book "The Enragés and the Situationists in the Occupation Movement France, May-June" (Tiger Papers, Healington, York, undated) says: "About 40 people made up the permanent base of the CMDO and they were joined for a while by other revolutionaries and strikers from various industries, from the provinces or from abroad and returning there. The CMDO was more or less constantly made up of about ten situationists and Enragés (among them Debord, Khayati, Riesel and Vaneigem) and as many from the workers, the high school students or "students", and other councillors without specific functions."

CHAPTER 9

THE ORIGINS OF FLUXUS AND THE MOVEMENT IN ITS 'HEROIC' PERIOD

In the summer of 1958 John Cage (born Los Angeles, 1912) began teaching a course in musical composition at the New School For Social Research, New York. This course brought together, as guest lecturers and pupils, a number of personalities who would be crucial to the development of what would later become known as Fluxus. Apart from Cage, those in attendance included George Brecht (born Halfway, Oregon, 1925), Jackson Mac Low (born Chicago, 1922), Dick Higgins (born 1938), Allan Kaprow and Toshi Ichijanagi (Yoko Ono's first husband).

A couple of years later, George Maciunas (born Kaunas, Lithuania, 1931) attended classes in electronic music run by Richard Maxfield at the same venue. La Monte Young also attended these classes. Young was simultaneously organising a series of performances and concerts in Yoko Ono's New York studio (December '60 to June '61) which featured a number of the future 'fluxus' personalities. Meanwhile, Maciunas held three lecture/demonstrations, entitled 'Musica Antiqua et Nova', at his own AG Gallery between March and June '61. On the invitation card to these conferences appeared the message "a 3-dollar contribution will help to publish Fluxus magazine". This is the first recorded appearance of the name.

Sometime before this, the poet Chester Anderson had asked La Monte

Young to edit an issue of "Beatitude East". Various documents which were to have gone into "Beatitude East" disappeared, along with Anderson. When they eventually reappeared, Young got Jackson Mac Low to assist him in assembling a selection of material representing the new trends in musical and poetic composition. As well as those connected with the group which had met at the New School For Social Research (Henry Flynt and Ray Johnson are among those not already mentioned), works by *composers* living in Europe (such as Nam June Paik, Dieter Rot and Emmett Williams) were collected. Maciunas did the layout and design for what had by this time been retitled "An Anthology". The paste-up was completed by October '61, but due to delays and financial difficulties the book didn't actually appear for another two years.

Debt forced Maciunas to take a graphic artists job with the US Air Force, and so, in November '61, the government sent him to West Germany to design lettering for military aircraft. The work was not only highly paid, it also enabled Maciunas to use the government resources placed at his disposal to promote fluxus. He became particularly adept at abusing the subsidised postal system which was intended to keep up morale among military personnel by minimising the cost of communication between them and their *loved ones*. Once in Europe, Maciunas made contact with Nam June Paik (born Seoul, Korea, 1932, and already *infamous* for cutting John Cage's necktie in two). Paik, in his turn, introduced Maciunas to a number of other *avant-gardists* resident in Europe, most notable among whom was Wolf Vostell (born Leverkusen, Germany, 1932).

Maciunas was still planning Fluxus magazine, but by this time he was also working on a series of concerts to promote it. Because he believed the avant-garde should present the public with a *unified front*, Maciunas asked Paik to delay his event "Neo-Dada in der Musik", and Vostell to put off publication of his "De-coll/age" magazine, until plans for all Fluxus events and publications were finalised. Paik and Vostell ignored this request; "Neo-Dada in der Musik" took place in Dusseldorf in June 1962, and the first issue of "De-coll/age" was published to co-incide with this event.

Maciunas's plan was for a world tour of fluxus concerts taking in one large city a month. These were to have begun in June '62 in Berlin and ended in New York in December '63. The scheme was only very partially realised. Initially scheduled as the fourth festival in the series, "The Fluxus International Festival Of Very New Music" at the Horsaal des Stadtischen Museums, Wiesbaden, West Germany (fourteen concerts staged over the four weekends of September 1962), turned out to be the first and most ambitious of a series of performances that later became known as the "Festum Fluxorum". During the course of organising the Wiesbaden event, Maciunas fell out with a number of those billed as taking part (most notably the composers grouped together under the New Stylists label); and as a result, this and future fluxus manifestations would consist chiefly of action music – verbally scripted *compositions* which tended to receive attention from those interested in performance *art*, rather than music critics.

The *composers* present at Wiesbaden (including Alison Knowles and her *artist* husband Dick Higgins, Nam June Paik, Robert Filliou, Arthur Koepcke, Wolf Vostell, Emmett Williams, Thomas Schmit, Ben Patterson and George Maciunas) performed not only their own works, but also many pieces by the likes of Yoko Ono, John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, Robert Watts and La Monte Young. Sometimes the audience became the performers, as with Terry Riley's "Ear Piece For Audience":

"The performer takes any object(s) such as a piece of paper, cardboard, plastic etc. and places it on his ear(s). He then produces the sound by rubbing, scratching, tapping or tearing it or simply dragging it across his ear, he also may just hold it there, it may be placed in counterpoint with any other piece of sound source."

This, like many other pieces performed during the festival, was included in the – at that time – unpublished "An Anthology", the paste-up of which Maciunas had brought with him to Europe.

The *bizarre* and destructive nature of some performances – which included the destruction of musical instruments, shaving exercises, and a leap into a bathtub filled with water – attracted a certain amount of media coverage. The festival as a whole highlighted the difference between what Maciunas would later label the 'monomorphic neo-haiku flux-event' and the 'mixed media neo-baroque happening'. That is to say that although the fluxus performances were intermedial, in the sense that they fell between various disciplines such as music and visual arts, each *composition* focused on a single *event* isolated from any other action and was presented as an iconoclastic insight into the *nature* of *reality* itself. Thus the emphasis in flux-work was on structural simplicity, and its protagonists placed it in the tradition of the *natural event*, Marcel Duchamp, jokes, gags, Dada, John Cage and Bauhaus Functionalism. The scores on which performances were based were invariably short, even if the actual pieces were often indeterminate in duration. For example, Maciunas's "In Memoriam To Adriano Olivetti":

"Each performer chooses any number from a used adding machine paper roll. Performer performs whenever his number appears in a row. Each row indicates the beat of metronome. Possible actions to perform on each appearance of the number:

- 1) bowler hats lifted or lowered.
- 2) mouth, lip, tongue sounds.
- 3) opening, closing umbrellas etc."

Theoretically, by using these scores anyone was able to perform fluxus works with little need for practice, skill, or preparation.¹ Chieko Shiomi's "Disappearing Music For Face" is one of the best known and most popular examples of this:

"Change gradually from smile to no smile."

Maciunas was unable to attend the 'Festival Of Misfits' in London (Gallery One and Institute of Contemporary Arts, 23rd October to 8th November '62) and *critics* are divided over whether it should count as an *official* fluxus event. The participants were Arthur Koepcke, Gustav Metzger, Robin Page, Ben Patterson, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier and Emmett Williams. Ben Vautier (born Naples, Italy, 1935) lived in the window of Gallery One for much of the festival. Many considered Robin Page's "Guitar Piece" to be the highlight at the evening of *action music* held at the ICA. Victor Musgrave describes the performance in "The Unknown Art Movement" (Art and Artists, October '72):

"Wearing a shining silver crash helmet and holding his guitar ready to play, Robin waited a few moments before flinging it onto the stage and kicking it into the audience, along the aisle and down the steps into Dover Street. The effect was dramatic, the spectators arose and rushed after him as he ran round the block aiming frenetic kicks at the disintegrating guitar. The night sky was lurid with flashes of lightning; it was also the very day when the world stood poised in trepidation at the crucial point of the Kennedy-Kruschev confrontation over Cuba."

The "Festival of Misfits" was followed by concerts in Copenhagen (November '62), Paris (December '62), Dusseldorf (February '63), Amsterdam (June '63), the Hague (June '63) and Nice (August '63). It was at the Dusseldorf event that Joseph Beuys (born Cleve, Germany 1921) first involved himself with the fluxus *movement*. After the "Fluxus Festival Of Total Art" organised by Ben Vautier, Maciunas returned to New York where he concentrated on publishing activities rather than the organisation of concerts and other performances.

This first period of Fluxus activity co-incided with a split within the movement over the question of disrupting *high* cultural activities and plans to harrass middle class commuters as they travelled to and from work. In the "Fluxus New-Policy Letter No. 6" (dated 6/4/63) Maciunas outlined his 'proposed propaganda action' for Fluxus in New York. The use of propaganda was broken down into four main areas:

- a) Pickets and demonstrations.
- b) Sabotage and disruption.
- c) Compositions.
- d) Sale of Fluxus publications.

These were to serve a dual purpose, "action against what H. Flynt describes as 'serious culture' & action for fluxus". Flynt, despite his bizarre and unorthodox Leninist leanings (for an example of these see the pamphlet "Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership In Culture" – World View Publishers, New York, 1965), had already exemplified himself as the most politically committed of the Fluxus circle. In February '63, under the auspices of 'Action Against Cultural Imperialism', he'd held public

demonstrations outside the Lincoln Centre and the Museum Of Modern Art, New York, to protest against *serious culture*. Flynt (born Greensboro, North Carolina, USA, 1940) was one of the first white political activists to perceive that American high culture – due to its bourgeois European ancestry – was both racist and classist, and that its falsely assumed superiority was simply one aspect of its imperialistic nature.

The Fluxus aesthetic of unpretentious simplicity was by implication an assault on *serious culture*. It is therefore not surprising that Maciunas believed those adhering to *his* ‘movement’ would welcome some no less bizarre, but somewhat more practical, attacks on class society. In “News-Policy Letter No. 6”, Maciunas uses Flynt’s example as a role model for organising pickets and demonstrations.

The next set of suggestions dealt with ideas for ‘propaganda through sabotage and disruption’. These were divided into nine sections, with three main headings. The transportation system was to be disrupted with pre-arranged break-downs at strategic points on the city road system during the rush hour. The communication system was to be disrupted by the dissemination of false information and, most ingeniously of all, “stuffing postal boxes with thousands of packages (containing heavy bricks etc) addressed to various newspapers, galleries, artists etc, bearing no stamps & bearing as return address various galleries, concert halls, museums”. Although Maciunas was being over optimistic in assuming that either the ‘sender’ or ‘receiver’ would be bound to pay for these, there is no doubt that the plan could have caused a good deal of disruption. Since any given postal worker can only carry a limited weight when delivering mail, if enough *packages* had been sent simultaneously to a single district this could have caused considerable delay in the distribution of mail. If the district selected was a business district the tactic would have been particularly effective with virtually no adverse effect on ordinary workers. Finally, there were plans to disrupt cultural life through the use of stink and sneeze bombs, the mailing of fake announcements, and using telephones to direct emergency and delivery services to museums (&c) on opening nights.

In a letter to Maciunas dated 25th April ’63, Jackson Mac Low describes these tactics as approaching the “unprincipled, unethical and immoral”. Mac Low, who had edited the anarcho-pacifist magazine “Resistance” from 1945-54, came out on the side of reaction by declaring that he was not concerned with demolishing the edifices of his enjoyment of the past. For similar reasons Brecht, Knowles (born New York, 1933) and Higgins sided with Mac Low, – while Flynt criticised Maciunas’s plan as being over artistic.

The dichotomy between those with a pan-disciplinary perspective and those who were unable to perceive anything beyond minor aesthetic *concerns* reached a head in August ’64. Allan Kaprow (who had already disassociated himself from fluxus) organised and directed a performance of Stockhausen’s “Originale” at the Judson Hall, as a part of the 2nd Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival. Maciunas and other fluxists (A-Yo, Takako Saito and Ben Vautier) who agreed with Flynt and Tony Conrad’s condemnation of

Stockhausen as an active supporter of Amerika's white racist elite, picketed the concert under the auspices of Action Against Cultural Imperialism. Other members of the fluxus *movement* decided to cross the picket line. Dick Higgins angered both pickets and scabs by joining the protest before going into the concert hall.

After this incident, Maciunas eventually gave way to the demands of the scabs and removed political issues from the fluxus agenda. Flynt distanced and disassociated himself from the movement. Fluxus, like the Situationist International before it, proved incapable of sustaining itself as simultaneously a political and cultural movement. The *heroic* period was over, fluxus could do no more than slowly degenerate.

1. Fluxus never dealt with the problem of exactly who the audience should be for these performances. Perhaps the performer acted out the script for their own, rather than anyone else's, amusement. However, the fact that Fluxus staged public performances of these events would indicate that the intended audience was wider than the individual performer(s).

CHAPTER 10

THE RISE OF THE DEPOLITICISED FLUXUS AESTHETIC

“Fluxus goals are social (not aesthetic). They (ideologically) can be related to those of the 1929 L.E.F. Group in the Soviet Union and are set up like this: step by step elimination of the Fine Arts (music, drama, poetry, painting, sculpture etc etc). This motivates the desire to direct wasted material and human capabilities towards constructive goals such as the Applied Arts: industrial design, journalism, architecture, engineering, graphic and hypographic arts, printing etc, which are all areas that are closely related to the fine arts and offer the artist better career opportunities.”

George Maciunas addressed these words to Thomas Schmit in a letter of January '64. At this time, despite the arguments over the 'News Policy Letter' of the previous April, it was still possible for Maciunas to view Fluxus as spearheading a radical new functionalist approach in the arts. Like Isou's Lettrisme of a decade and a half before, Fluxus was launched as an assault on all the separate categories of art, with the intention of fusing them into a single practice. Thus when successive keys on a piano were nailed down to create 'very new music', the act was not simply an iconoclastic attack on the idea of music as an artistic category – it was seen as a practical (functional) way of fusing the disciplines of music, theatre and poetry.

With similar intentions, Wolf Vostell had been blurring and distorting television pictures since 1959. In March '63, Nam June Paik presented an exhibition of television pictures which had been manipulated using magnets and other distorting effects at the Gallerie Parnass in Wuppertal. In May of the same year Vostell buried a television tuned into a live broadcast as part of a Yam Festival *happening* on George Segal's farm, South Brunswick, New Jersey. In September '63, Vostell led the visitors who'd come for the opening of his "Television De-coll/ages" in Wuppertal, to a quarry where he destroyed an operating television with a rifle shot.

The more aestheticised Americans, such as Brecht, Knowles and Higgins, were disturbed by the violence in the work of Paik and Vostell. This violent trend was continued in Europe – for instance Serge III would play a Nam June Paik "Violin Solo" using an instrument filled with concrete, thus when the violin was brought smashing down onto a table, it was the table, and not the instrument, that broke. However, Fluxus activity at this time is now seen by *art historians* as being centred on New York and the more hard edged actions of the Europeans tend to be given a lower 'status' than the mysticism of the North Americans.

When Maciunas returned to the States, he'd moved into 359 Canal Street, where Dick Higgins had a studio/loft. From here nearly twenty fluxus multiples were issued in 1964 alone. The multiples consisted of *found objects* purchased in the junk shops that lined Canal Street at that time. They were housed in a variety of boxes, the most uniform thing about them being the labels which Maciunas designed and had printed in some quantity. 1964 also saw the publication of the first Fluxus Yearbox – which consisted of approximately twenty envelopes bolted together, each containing work by a different fluxus *artist*. Although ostensibly a multiple, each copy varied slightly in content.

The number of live flux events continued to decline throughout the mid and late sixties. Initially this was compensated for by an increase in the number of fluxus publications, which included the *house* magazine "V TRE", as well as multiples by a variety of *artists*. The publications tended to be *poetic* in character, and reflect the success with which the aesthetic tendency toned down Maciunas's political stridency. However, in 1968 the Fluxpress partially redeemed itself by publishing Henry Flynt's pamphlet "Down With Art". In this text, Flynt discredited "scientific" justifications of art. He went on to demonstrate that it was subjectivity which distinguished art and entertainment from other activities. According to Flynt, there was an insurmountable contradiction in the fact that art objects existed independently of any subjective *enjoyment* of them; that art was produced independently of "people's" liking of it, and yet artists still expected their products "to find their value in people's liking of them". Because of this separation between production and enjoyment, the consumption of art is essentially alienated. Rather than accepting the alienated category of art, Flynt suggests that individuals can *satisfy their subjective needs* in *spontaneous* self-amusement and play. Flynt terms what he describes as 'experiences prior to art'

“just-likings” or “brend”.

One of the reasons for the decrease in fluxus activity during the late sixties was that from 1966 onwards Maciunas spent much of his time planning a fluxus co-operative building. After a couple of buildings fell through, Maciunas acquired 80 Wooster Street at the beginning of 1967. Like the Fluxhall and former Maciunas residence at 359 Canal Street, this building was located in the heart of New York's SoHo. Robert Watts was the first fluxist to move into the building, and was followed by Maciunas himself. At the end of '67, the Filmmakers' Cinematheque installed itself on the ground floor, where it remained for two years. Maciunas went on to establish a series of other co-operative buildings in the area, and his example was soon imitated by others.

Like other utopian movements, fluxus engaged in speculation about possible improvements to the immediate environment. Maciunas's practical interest in *real estate*, found its *theoretical* reflection in “Fantastic Architecture” edited by Wolf Vostell and Dick Higgins (Something Else Press, New York, 1969). Vostell sets the tone of the book in his introduction:

“This documentation of ideas and concepts of a new polymorphous reality is offered as evidence of the new methods and processes that were introduced by *Fluxus*, *Happening*, and *Pop*. A demand for new patterns of behaviour – new unconsumed *environments*.

The accent in all the works in this book lies in *change*, ie expansion of physical surroundings, sensibilities, media, through disturbance of the familiar.

Action is architecture!

Everything is architecture!

A new life. Ruhm's Wien built of the letters in the German name for Vienna – Hollein's aircraft carrier as a city for 30,000 inhabitants – Oldenburg's alteration of the Thames – my super highway as a cathedral environment – are all utopias containing more breadth and visualisation of present-day thought than the repressive architecture of bureaucracy and luxury that imposes restrictions on people. Everything is forbidden.

Don't Touch!

No spitting! No Smoking!

No thinking!

No living!

Our projects – our environments are meant to free men – *only the realisation of utopias will make man happy and release him from his frustrations!* Use your imagination! Join in... share the power! Share property!”

Such conceptions of urbanism and freedom are very close to those of COBRA twenty years earlier and to the thinking of the Situationist International of a decade before. Similarly, the Flux-labyrinth exhibited at the Berlin Akademie der Kunst (5 September – 17 October 1976) is conceptually close to the aborted Situationist plan of '59-60 for building a labyrinth in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

In the late sixties Fluxus activities merged, to an extent, with those of hippies, freaks, and other drop outs. SoHo, the centre of fluxus activity in North America, was geographically situated at the heart of the East Coast

hippie scene; and while fluxus undoubtedly exerted an *often unperceived* influence on the *flower children*, the freak life-style also left its mark on fluxus. The hippie influence appears to be the cause of the move away from concerts and other formal public presentations at the end of the sixties. The only *live* fluxus events in New York during '68 and '69 were New Years Eve fluxfeasts. The sensual and indulgent nature of the feasts place them in diametrical opposition to the severity of early fluxus manifestations. Similarly, the fluxshow, fluxsports, and fluxmass, which took place at Douglas College, New Brunswick, New Jersey, in February 1970 were very different to early fluxus events and contrasted sharply with the fluxus activities still being carried out in Europe. For the fluxmass, the priests' assistants wore gorilla costumes, the sacramental wine was stored in a plasma tank and dished out through a hose, the wafers were blue cookies laced with laxative, the bread was *consecrated* by a mechanical dove *shitting* into it, smoke bombs were used as candles, and an inflatable superman filled with wine was bled. This was accompanied by sounds varying from recordings of barking dogs and locomotives to bird calls and gun shots.

The fluxmass was followed by similar events such as the fluxdivorce of June 1971, the fluxhalloween of autumn 1977, the fluxwedding of February 1978, and after Maciunas's death from cancer in Boston on 9th May 1978 – the fluxfuneral. It hardly needs stating that these *bizarre* variations on traditional rites bear little resemblance to fluxus activities during the *movement's* 'heroic' phase. In an undated manifesto composed during this 'heroic' period, Maciunas had written:

"PURGE the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual", professional & commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art, –

PURGE THE WORLD OF "EUROPEANISM"!...

(...)PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART,

Promote living art, anti-art, promote *NONART REALITY* to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals...

(...)FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action."

Measured against these laudable aims, the later activities of fluxus can only be viewed as a degeneration from the *movement's* original intentions. However, despite this, fluxus never lost its utopian edge: in the mid-seventies a plan of Maciunas's to set up a Utopian colony on Ginger Island, in the Virginia Islands, was foiled when the owner died on the day the sale agreement was to be signed. Similarly, at the time of his death, Maciunas was planning to set up a utopian community on a farm in New Marlborough.

CHAPTER 11

GUSTAV METZGER AND AUTO-DESTRUCTIVE ART

Gustav Metzger (born 1926, Nurnberg, Germany) identified destruction as one of the crucial elements in twentieth-century *art*, and on the basis of this observation became a *one person art movement*. He gives a description of his *artistic* development in “Auto-Destructive Art – Metzger at the AA” (an expanded version of the lecture notes for a talk given at the Architectural Association 24/2/65, published by A.C.C., London 1965):

“In 1957 I had reached a strong dissatisfaction with the materials of painting. I needed something tougher to work against than board. The following year I did a series of paintings on mild steel. I used a palette knife which in the course of paint application scraped and incised the steel, giving reflections. This did not satisfy either. I wanted to use some of the machinery I had been reading about in the “Financial Times”. Presses of tremendous power that respond to a minute fraction of an inch. I wanted to make sculptures with these machines, controlling them rather like an organist does his instrument. It was months after I had given up these plans, partly because of the extreme difficulty of realising them, that I hit on the idea of auto-destructive art.

Looking back on my development, I see that I had exhausted the medium of paint on canvas as far as the expression of a fast, intense vision was concerned. In 1960, with the acid on nylon technique, I had found it.”

The first manifesto of the *new art form*, entitled simply “Auto-Destructive Art”, was issued in November 1959. This proclaimed:

“Auto-destructive art is primarily a form of public art for industrial societies. Self-destructive painting, sculpture and construction is a total unity of idea, site, form, colour, method and timing of the disintegrative process.

Auto-destructive art can be created with natural forces, traditional art techniques and technological techniques.

The amplified sound of the auto-destructive process can be an element of the total conception.

The artist may collaborate with scientists, engineers.

Self-destructive art can be machine produced and factory assembled.

Auto-destructive paintings, sculptures and constructions have a life time varying from a few moments to twenty years. When the disintegrative process is complete the work is to be removed from the site and scrapped.”

In this short statement Metzger set out the platform of ADA (auto-destructive art). It was the founding manifesto of a movement which never came into existence, and was followed by four more manifestos which failed to find adherents. Metzger was influential, but most of those who sympathised with him preferred to join the *nouveaux realiste* and *fluxus* groups. ADA should thus be seen as a tendency typified in particular by Metzger and the early work of Jean Tinguely.

Metzger offered the following description of his techniques in a broadsheet that accompanied his demonstration of ADA at the South Bank, London, 3rd July 1961:

“Acid action painting. Height 7 ft. Length 12’ 6”. Depth 6ft. Materials: nylon, hydrochloric acid, metal. Technique. 3 nylon canvases coloured white black red are arranged behind each other, in this order. Acid is painted, flung and sprayed onto the nylon which corrodes at point of contact within 15 seconds.

Construction with glass. Height 13 ft. Width 9’ 6”. Materials. Glass, metal, adhesive tape. Technique. The glass sheets suspended by adhesive tape fall on to the concrete ground in a pre-arranged sequence.”

The pieces, such as these, which Metzger actually realised, fall a long way short of his ambitions for ADA. In his 1965 lecture at the Architectural Association, he described plans for pieces which would have taken years to complete and required public funding on a massive scale:

“The... construction is to be about 18 feet high with a base about 24 ft, by 18 ft... It consists of mild steel 1/8 inch thick. The structure consists of three slabs. These highly polished forms exposed to an industrial atmosphere would start to corrode. The process continues until the structure gets weakened by the loss of material. In about ten years time most of the construction will have disintegrated. The remaining girder will then be removed and the site cleared. This is a fairly simple form of auto-destructive art and not expensive compared with the next project.

This sculpture consists of five walls or screens, each about 30 feet in height and 40 feet long and 2 feet deep. They are arranged about 25 feet apart and staggered in plan. I envisage these in a central area between a group of three very large densely populated blocks of flats in a country setting.

Each wall is composed of 10,000 uniform elements. These could be made of stainless steel, glass or plastics. The elements in one of the walls could be square or rectangular and in another wall they could be hexagonal.

The principle of the action of this work is that each element is ejected until finally after a period of ten years, the wall ceases to exist. I propose the use of a digital computer that will control the movement of this work. This would be housed underground in the centre of the sculpture complex...

... The third project I would like you to consider is in the shape of a 30 ft. cube. The shell of the cube is in steel with a non-reflective surface. The interior of the cube is completely packed with complex, rather expensive, electronic equipment. This equipment is programmed to undergo a series of breakdowns and self-devouring activities. This goes on for a number of years – but there is no visible trace of this activity. It is only when the entire interior has been wrecked that the steel shell is pierced from within. Gradually, layer after layer of the steel structure is disintegrated by complex electrical, chemical and mechanical forces. The shell bursts open in different parts revealing the wreckage of the internal structure through the ever changing forms of the cube. Finally, all that remains is a pile of rubble. This sculpture should be at a site around which there is considerable traffic."

These unrealised projects of Metzger's bear a conceptual affinity to the Unitary Urbanism of the early Situationist International; like the SI's conceptions, if implemented, they would have increased the visibility of the dynamic of change already implicit in any urban environment. And like the SI's conception of urbanism they would have altered the individual's psychological relationship to the urban environment.

Metzger developed his "aesthetic of revulsion" (auto-destructive art) as a therapy against the irrationality of the capitalist system and its war machine. In many ways it represents a form of institutionalised waste with fewer anti-social consequences than those generally employed by capitalist states. In his talk at the Architectural Association, Metzger emphasised that the ADA was:

"not limited to theor(ies) of art and the production of art works. It includes social action. Auto-destructive art is committed to a left-wing revolutionary position in politics, and to struggles against future wars."

Metzger, and thus ADA, was also opposed to the art dealer system. He believed that ADA should be publically funded because art dealers were not interested in 'fundamental technical change' where no profit was to be made from it. According to Metzger, ADA was socially necessary as the only possible substitute for war, and thus nuclear annihilation, in a society peopled by individuals who were psychologically warped from an entire lifetime of sexual repression.

However, ADA failed to attract any kind of government funding, and when

Metzger and the poet John Sharkey organised the “Destruction In Art Symposium” (DIAS), London, September 1966, the event “was run on a voluntary basis and the artists paid their own expenses”. It was the month long series of events around the three day symposium held at the Africa Centre (September 9/10/11 ’66), and not the discussions themselves, that attracted the attention of the media. These events included “Explosive Art Demonstrations” by Ivor Davies in Edinburgh and London, which featured among other things mannequins and an enormously enlarged photograph of Robert Mitchum being, literally, blown apart. Perhaps the most powerful piece performed during the DIAS events was Yoko Ono’s “Cut” (Africa Centre, 29 September ’66). Members of the audience were simply invited to get up onto the stage and remove Ono’s clothing using a pair of tailor’s scissors, while she knelt motionless for the hour the action took to complete. The strength of Ono’s piece lay in the way it attacked traditional assumptions about the relationship between audience and performer; despite its apparent simplicity it *effectively* revealed a complex web of social relations which under *normal* circumstances remain unchallenged and undiscussed. Herman Nitsch’s “5th Abreaktionsspiel of OM Theatre” was the event which captured the most attention. It consisted of the ritual mutilation of a lamb carcass over which images of male genitalia were projected. Two journalists, *shocked* by the *obscenity* of the action, complained to the police, and as a result Metzger and Sharkey were each fined one hundred pounds for having presented an “indecent exhibition contrary to common law”. This was Metzger’s second brush with British law; in 1961 he’d been imprisoned for a month as a result of his anti-bomb activities with the Committee of 100.

After DIAS, Metzger maintained his interest in ADA, but alongside this his distaste for the exploitative aspect of the art world grew. In his 1962 “Manifesto World”, Metzger had described gallery owners as “stinking fucking cigar smoking bastards”. By 1970, Metzger was London organiser of the “International Coalition For The Liquidation Of Art”.¹ In the catalogue accompanying “Art Into Society, Society Into Art” (ICA London, October/November 1974), Metzger called for a three year *art strike* between 1977 and 1980.² During this period *artists* would ‘not produce work, sell work, permit work to go on exhibition, and refuse collaboration with any part of the publicity machinery of the art world’. The protest itself was a failure: Metzger was the only *artist* to *strike* and the art world, contrary to Metzger’s wishes, did not collapse. However, the exercise bore more than a bitter fruit, because by refusing to produce *art*, Metzger was refusing the role of an *artist*. This single gesture demonstrated the fallacy of *popular* ideas about *artists* as *individuals* possessed by an *uncontrollable creative urge*. It also showed that it was possible to break with the privileged positions certain militants had come to *occupy* within capitalist society. Metzger realised what Vaneigem and various other specto-situationists could only partially theorise – the rejection of roles – and for this alone he will not be forgotten.

1. The fact that Metzger vacillated between calling for a totally institutionalised *art* system which would provide the necessary funding for ADA and the abolition of the existing art system, is not as contradictory as it may at first appear. His disappointment at not being funded by the existing institutionalised art system (which in my opinion is because his *work* has nothing to do with the dominant definitions of *art*) led him to call for its abolition.

2. The earliest recorded use I've found of the term 'art strike' is in "What's To Be Done About Art?" by Alain Jouffroy (included in "Art and Confrontation: France and the arts in an age of change" edited by Jean Cassou, Studio Vista, London 1970). However, as the following quote will demonstrate, Jouffroy's conception of an 'art strike' is very different from Metzger's:

"Let us have no illusions about it: most "art critics" are going to carry on as if art were not abolished, as if art couldn't be abolished; most "artists" are going to continue to believe in the "artistic" character of their production; most gallery-goers, art lovers and, of course, buyers are going to *ignore* the fact that the abolition of art can really occur in the actual time and space of a pre-revolutionary situation like that of May '68. It is essential that the minority advocate the necessity of going on an *active art strike*, using the "machines" of the cultural industry so that we can more effectively set it in *total* contradiction with itself. The intention is not to end the role of production, but to change the most adventurous part of "artistic" production into the production of revolutionary ideas, forms and techniques. Thus it is not a question of revolting against the art and artists of the immediate past – that would be a waste of time and energy – but, as I have said, of imagining something that could penetrate all social classes and organising a total, creative reappraisal of our society. The revolution no longer has any frontiers; it must be thought out, it must be prepared *everywhere* – in all the sectors where man expends passion and energy to do what he does, else it will *never* triumph *anywhere*."

CHAPTER 12

DUTCH PROVOS, KOMMUNE 1, MOTHERFUCKERS, YIPPIES AND WHITE PANTHERS

In the early summer of 1965 a leaflet appeared in the city of Amsterdam appealing for large sums of money to be sent to the editorial address of a new magazine called PROVO. The leaflet stated that the new magazine was needed:

“because this *capitalist* society is poisoning itself with a morbid thirst for money. Its members are brought up to worship Having and despise Being.

– because this *bureaucratic* society is choking itself with officialdom and suppressing any form of spontaneity. Its members can only become creative, individual people through anti-social conduct.

– because this *militaristic* society is digging its own grave by a paranoid atomic arms build-up, its members now have nothing to look forward to but certain death by atomic radiation.”

The first issue of PROVO appeared shortly afterwards and was immediately impounded by the authorities because it contained a diagram reprinted from “The Practical Anarchist” of 1910, which supposedly instructed the reader on how to produce explosives. The technique was

actually useless. This scandal, and others, helped the circulation of PROVO rise from 500 to 20,000 within a year.

The early PROVO activists – including Roal Van Duyn (born 1942), Rob Stoik, Robert Jasper Grootveld (born 1932), Simon Vinkenoog, Bart Huges and the former situationist Constant – came chiefly from anarcho-communist and *creative* backgrounds. However, the PROVO's satirical politico-cultural actions soon brought much of Amsterdam's disaffected youth into the ranks of what quickly became a movement.

Amsterdam was considered a *magic centre*, and at its heart was the Spui, where – beneath a statue of a small boy called Lieverdja and referred to by the PROVOS as the addicted consumer – Grootveld had been organising weekly happenings since 1964.

The PROVOS hatched a series of 'white plans', as solutions to ecological and social problems facing the city, and which simultaneously acted as 'provocations' to the Dutch authorities. Among the more famous of these was the 'White Bicycle Plan'. The PROVOS announced in a leaflet that white bicycles would be left unlocked throughout the city for use by the general population. The prototype of this 'free communal transport' was presented to the press and public on 28th July 1965 near the statue of Lieverdja. The plan proved an enormous success as a 'provocation against capitalist private property' and 'the car monster', but failed as a social experiment. The police, horrified at the implications of communal property being left on the streets, impounded any bicycle that they found left unattended and unlocked.

The PROVOS became notorious with the Dutch medical community after Bart Huges – one of the PROVO leaders – drilled a hole into his cranium (skull trepanation). Huges believed that the membranes inside his head could expand as a result of the extra space he had created, thus increasing the volume of blood – and in turn oxygen – that his brain could contain at any given time. The result, Huges claimed, was similar to the expanded consciousness achieved during yoga exercises, or an LSD trip, but in his case the *benefits* were permanent.

The PROVOS' international reputation dates from their March 1966 smoke bomb attack on the wedding procession of Princess Beatrix and Prince Claus von Amsburg. The cops immediately retaliated by inflicting savage beatings on anti-royalist protestors. However, the people of Amsterdam demonstrated their support for the PROVO cause by voting a representative of the movement onto the city council in local elections three weeks later. After this it became apparent that it was only a matter of time before PROVO's radical activities were recuperated by the Dutch authorities, and so in the spring of 1967 the movement was dissolved.

At the same time, in Berlin, the ex-Situationist and Gruppe Spur member, Dieter Kunzelmann, was assisting in the formation of Kommune 1. The commune came together in March '67, and its members introduced freak actions and political happenings to the conservative German environment. For their trouble they were expelled from the German Socialist Student Association. But the rage with which their activities were met, by

traditionalists of both left and right, only increased their standing in the eyes of many of the younger kids. They soon became the heroes of school students on both sides of the Berlin Wall. The 'horror commune' (as it was called by the German press) was a hot bed of political and cultural agitation. It was in the commune and through meetings with its members and supporters that future *terrorists* such as Bommi Baumann of the June 2nd Movement were *radicalised*. One of the Commune's most famous interventions came after a fire in a Brussels department store. A leaflet was issued entitled "When Will The Berlin Department Stores Burn":

"...Our Belgian friends have finally caught on to how they can really draw the public into the lustful activities in Vietnam. They set fire to a department store, 300 satiated citizens and their fascinating lives and Brussels becomes Hanoi. No one reading his paper at an opulent breakfast table need shed any more tears for the poor Vietnamese people, for today he has only to go to the clothing department of Ka De We, Hertie, Woolworths, Bika or Neckerman and discreetly light a cigarette in a changing room..."

Although the leaflet – and the suggestion that the Brussels fire was started by anti-Vietnam protestors – was clearly a hoax, the press was outraged. Once again Kommune 1 was the focus of public attention which made it difficult for the bourgeoisie to sleep soundly in their beds.

Meanwhile, in New York some former *cultural workers* were about to be reborn as the street fighting Motherfuckers. The Motherfuckers (or 'Up Against The Wall Motherfucker' accompanied by a graphic showing a freak being shaken down by the cops) formed out of the Lower East Side branch of Students For A Democratic Society, but prior to this brief flirtation with New Left politics they had been grouped around the Dada inspired magazine "Black Mask". As the Black Mask collective, their chief public activity had been attacking gallery openings, museum lectures and rock concerts. As the Motherfuckers, and later the Werewolves, their activity was focused on two fronts – breaking up leftist meetings and carrying out a bombing campaign – under the slogan of 'Armed Love' – against banks and other symbolic targets.

Another group active at the same time, but more concerned with theatrical stunts than direct action, were the Yippies (Youth International Party). While the Motherfuckers had entered the freak milieu via the left wing of cultural agitation, the Yippies emerged straight out of the hippy subculture. In New York the Yippies held a Human Be-In at Grand Central Station during the rush hour – to the great inconvenience of the commuters trying to make their way home – and caused pandemonium in the stock exchange by throwing hundreds of dollar bills from a balcony onto marketeers who promptly left off their business and fought over the money. In Britain they caused national outrage when they invaded the "David Frost Show". The Yippie nomination of a pig called Pigasus for president was part of the movement's intervention in Chicago during the August 1968 Democratic Convention. This piece of guerilla theatre turned into riots and in September 1969 eight left-wing radicals, including the Yippies Abbe Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, found

themselves brought before Judge Julius Hoffman in what became known as the Chicago Conspiracy Trials. In the course of court proceedings, the judge got into numerous arguments with the defendants and their council. When the jury retired to consider its verdict, the judge sentenced all the defendants, and their council, to periods of imprisonment for contempt of court during the trial. The obvious bias of the judge in conducting the trial and his sentencing was widely criticised; the Chicago Conspiracy Trials became the most famous in American history. The resulting prison sentences showed American capitalism as being more oppressive than the Yippies had imagined. The Yippie movement underwent a slow disintegration as its supporters discovered that the capitalist system really was as evil as their rhetoric implied.

The White Panther Party, inspired by the Black Panthers, emerged out of the Detroit Artists' Workshop in 1968 – showing once again that it was former *cultural workers* who were leading the radicalisation of American youth with the newly developed freak style of political agitation. The main aim of the White Panthers was to carry agitation into high schools, and the movement's rock and roll band – the MC5 – was their most potent weapon for achieving this aim. However by 1970, John Sinclair (leader of the White Panthers) had denounced the group for selling out. By this time Sinclair was in jail on a ten year prison sentence for passing two marijuana *joints* to an undercover drugs detective. Another White Panther, Pun Plamondon, joined the FBI's most wanted list after he allegedly bombed a CIA building in Ann Arbor.

The freak style of agitation, when employed by those who could withstand the onslaught of oppression such action would bring down upon them, was particularly effective because it presented both cultural and political alternatives to capitalist domination. The establishment, threatened by the influence of this violent vanguard, reacted by greatly over-emphasising the 'peace and love' aspect of hippie culture in the media. However, the militants didn't disappear because the media chose to misrepresent *the movement*: instead they returned in the guise of the urban guerilla.¹

1. Obviously the sheer volume of *movement* activism during the sixties makes it impossible to cover even a fraction of it in the space available here. Among the more interesting groups I've omitted to mention are Emmett Grogan's latter-day Diggers who spent the late sixties providing free food, free clothes, free shelter &c., for the people of San Francisco's Haight Ashbury. Digger groups inspired by Grogan's activities later spread across America and into Europe. These groups represent an eminently practical side to a movement which the establishment often condemned for being impractical idealists.

CHAPTER 13

MAIL ART

During the sixties, while many *cultural workers* were moving away from the production of *art* objects towards violent political agitation, others were moving into the realms of non-art. Fluxus is the best known and most typical example of this trend. From the liberating climate created by the *fluxworkers'* assault on the dominant culture, mail *art* was able to develop. Indeed, the mail *art* network counts many fluxus members among its earliest participants. Although Ray Johnson (born 1927), considered by many as the founding *father* of mail *art*, never joined fluxus, his *work* is *aesthetically* close to that of the fluxus group. Indeed, Johnson often exchanged work and ideas with the *guiding lights* of the fluxus movement. Some of the correspondence he sent Dick Higgins was eventually published as a book, "The Paper Snake" (1965), by Higgins's Something Else Press.

Johnson's work consists primarily of letters, often with the addition of doodles, drawings and rubber stamped messages. The work is lightweight and humorous; rather than being sold as a commodity it is usually mailed to friends and acquaintances. Although much of Johnson's work is given away, this hasn't prevented it attaining a market value. The late Andy Warhol is quoted as saying he would pay ten dollars for anything by Johnson (presumably meaning his letters, since Johnson is also known in the *straight* art world as a moderately successful pop artist).

In the early sixties Johnson adopted the name "The New York Correspondence School" (NYCS) as an umbrella term for his mailings. He'd already spent some years building up a list of people with whom he could exchange letters and other oddities. This network, with Johnson at its centre, was the NYCS. The name was a parody of other more formal organisations. In 1973, the New York Times received a 'dead letter' from Johnson, which killed off the NYCS. However there was an 'instant rebirth and metamorphosis' as the Buddha University.

Johnson was not the only *aesthetic* contact fluxus had with the mail system, the *fluxworkers* themselves used the postal system for *aesthetic* purposes. The fact that the movement was spread between North America, Japan and Europe, forced its members to use the mail to exchange scores and ideas. But fluxus turned necessity into advantage and were soon churning out rubber stamps and *artist's* stamp sheets with which to adorn their letters and envelopes. The *artist's* stamp sheets were gummed and perforated like ordinary postal stamps, but their use was entirely decorative. They couldn't be used in place of any official postal issue. Individual Fluxists also dreamed up methods of subverting the postal system and increasing the involvement of postal workers in their mailings. The best known example of this is the Ben Vautier postcard "The Postman's Choice" (1965). This was printed identically on both sides with lines ruled out for different addresses and space for a stamp. It was left to chance and the postal authorities to decide which of the two possible addresses it should be delivered to.

Throughout the sixties the number of *cultural workers* exchanging ideas and small oddities through the post – and to a lesser extent the number creating works that took their meaning from being mailed – increased. This trend was fueled by the growth of conceptual and performance *art*, the main public residues of which were documentation in the form of notes and photographs. Using the postal system, such works could be sent around the world at very low costs. By the early seventies various groups were publishing lists of contact addresses for people interested in exchanging such ideas and works. The best known of these lists were those compiled by Image Bank, International Artists Cooperation and Ken Friedman (the latter published the "International Contact List Of The Arts" in 1972). What had been a few hundred people mailing each other slightly crazy messages suddenly mushroomed into several thousand individuals engaged in a *new cultural form*. The mail *art* network was born.

As the network grew, so various sub-genres developed within it. However, it never created a unique style of its own. Most of those participating used the new 'hot medium' of xerox alongside old fashioned rubber stamps. Certificates were produced in great number, which, like the rubber stamps, were used to parody officialdom. Typical among these certificates is Anna Banana's "Master Of Bananology" award. Banana herself typifies the fun side of the mail *art* network. Much of what she does – and this varies from post card collages to events like the 'Banana Olympics' – is based on the humorous connotations of her *assumed* name. She has also produced vast

quantities of printed matter, varying from the ephemeral “Banana Rag” to the more substantial “Vile”, one of the network’s better known magazines. However, although she has not lost her sense of humour, Banana’s performance work has recently taken on a much more serious tone – she’s ceased her well received recreations of futurist and dadaist theatre; her live work is now primarily concerned with the global ecology crisis.

Whereas Banana’s activities would be suitable as family entertainment, Pauline Smith’s “Adolf Hitler Fan Club” resulted in police raids on her home. In her 1983 CV, deposited in the Tate Gallery Library, Smith describes the reasons for her interest in Hitler and how she launched the ‘Fan Club’:

“The ADOLF HITLER FAN CLUB was intended to be an analogy for the week-kneed (sic) British Governments since 1945 and was stimulated by local Chelsea politics regarding landlords/tenants/development/tourism, in which I was interested in the early seventies. Of course, this was not the only factor involved but it was the most pressing. The country is a mess and nothing gets any better. What I feel about the current situation will take several years more to express through my art. For the immediate present I am preoccupied with Adolf Hitler’s involvement in the occult, the mediumistic nature of his public speaking and the mystery of his charismatic appeal to the multitudes. He may have been a bad man but he knew very well that people do not live by bread alone – a fact our leaders seem to have forgotten, and probably forgotten precisely because Adolf Hitler thought so deeply about meeting a people’s need for inspiration... Adolf Hitler remained the subject of my painting as he had been of my Mailart and I continue to paint about him because everything that has happened in this country since his death has been a reaction against him. He is the biggest influence on this country this century.”

Because most of those participating in the mail *art* network held liberal to left views, Pauline Smith was not only tolerated but defended by many.

While much mail *art* was *inconsequential*, the network – or at least parts of it – has conducted numerous campaigns for the freeing of political prisoners, and several against nuclear weapons. The flip-side of this is that, since the early seventies, there has been a sub-genre of mail *art* concerned with extremism, sado-masochism and pornography. The work of Cosey Fanni Tutti and Genesis P-Orridge has provided some of the best known examples of this. In 1976 P-Orridge was convicted of sending obscene collages thrown the post, and much of Fanni Tutti’s *cultural work* has centred around her activities as a stripper and model.

Another sexual *extremist* working within the mail *art* network during the seventies was Jerry Dreva (born 1945, Milwaukee, Wisconsin). Dreva is best known for his *artist’s book* “Wanks For The Memories: The Seminal Work/Books of Jerry Dreva”. Dreva created these books by masturbating until his semen stained the pages. The completed works were mailed to friends. As a result of these activities, Dreva has been dubbed ‘the man who had a thousand orgasms for art’.

Dreva is also well known for his *manipulation* of the mass media. One of his earliest media escapades was *Les Petites Bonbons In Hollywood*, created

in collaboration with Bob Lambert, Chuck Bitz and others. The Bonbons went to all the *right* places and thus became a famous *rock group* without needing to bother about music. The Bonbons received coverage in People, Newsweek, Photographic Record and Record World, on the basis of wearing the *right* clothes and knowing the *right* people. Dreva became 'so fascinated with the power of the media to create and define' that he took a job on a Wisconsin paper to 'research the entire phenomenon'. As Dreva explains in a feature in "High Performance 9" (Spring 1980):

"Eventually I began to document my own life/art performances (many of them illegal) anonymously on the pages of the newspaper I worked for."

So, for example, Dreva would graffiti the outside of a Milwaukee High School – just before its Festival of Arts – with the slogans "Art Only Exists Beyond The Confines Of Accepted Behaviour" and "Death To Romance", and then in his role as a journalist caption a photo-story about the graffiti for the local press. He would then send copies of the story to his contacts in the mail *art* network.

In his "High Performance" feature, Dreva is quite clear about his intentions:

"...what I'm trying to do is point to a future when art will no longer exist as a category separate from life."

Dreva's lucidity is unusual among mail *artists*. Although most of them perceive Dada and Fluxus as their precursors, they are on the whole unaware of the critique of separation than runs as a common thread through these two, and all other, utopian currents. Mail *art's* popular success was achieved at the cost of abandoning any theoretical rigor. The mail *art* network continues to attract the involvement of a growing proportion of the lumpen-intelligentsia from all parts of the Americas and Europe, and participants in lesser numbers from Africa, Australia, Japan and South East Asia. These networkers are – on the whole – looking for an activity which will reinforce their perception of themselves as *creative* and tend not to be particularly critical about their pursuits.

The phenomenal growth of mail *art* is partially tied to the expansion of higher education during the fifties and sixties. For those who perceive it as "art" it serves as a simulacra and substitute for the *rewards* higher education promised but failed to deliver. Of the millions of students processed by the art schools, only a very few actually pursue a career as a practising fine artist.

From a materialist perspective mail *art* is not *art*, despite the insistence of many of its practitioners. The *democratic* nature of the mail *art* network clearly situates it in opposition to the elitism of art (if art is defined as the culture of the ruling class). The sheer numbers of people involved in mail *art* preclude the movement from being 'officially' recognised as a manifestation of high culture for at least as long as it continues to be practised on such a wide scale. Most *art movements* (Pre-Raphaelites, Impressionists, Cubists

&c.) would seem to number between five and fifty members; mail *art* by comparison numbers thousands. For a formal and organised art movement to number even a hundred members would pose a threat to its elite status – art *critics* would resist elevating such a *mass* of *individuals* to the *pantheon* of *genius* simply because such an elevation would bring the category 'genius' into question. Such numbers can only be dealt with by art *critics* under broader umbrella terms such as Romanticism, Modernism and Post-Modernism.

As an open network the mail *art* system has enormous possibilities, but for these to be realised the majority of participants have to become fully conscious of the subversive current of which their mailings form an incoherent part.

CHAPTER 14

BEYOND MAIL ART

The conceptual similarity of Mail Art (MA) to aspects of Dada and Fluxus has led certain members of the MA Network to take up and develop ideas that had made appearances within the framework of these earlier movements.¹ It would be fruitless to try and make an inventory of all such *historical* developments, the sheer volume of material passing through the MA Network makes this an impossibility. Instead, I propose to look at two specific examples: first, multiple names and second, agitation against art as a bourgeois paradigm.

Multiple name concepts – the idea that a single name should be used by a group of *individuals*, several magazines or music groups – did not play a starring role in the history of Dada. But Hausmann, Grosz, Baader, Herzfelde and Herzfelde's 'Christ & Co. Ltd' achieved more than footnote status in the standard histories of the Berlin *avant-garde*. Hausmann recollects the founding of this society in "Courier Dada" (Paris 1958):

"I took Baader to the fields of Sudende (where Jung then lived), and said to him: 'All this is yours if you do as I tell you. The Bishop of Brunswick has failed to recognize you as Jesus Christ, and you have retaliated by defiling the altar in his church. This is no compensation. From today, you will be President of The Christ Society, Ltd, and recruit members. You must convince everyone that he too can be Christ, if he wants to, on payment of fifty marks to your

society. Members of our society will no longer be subject to temporal authority and will automatically be unfit for military service. You will wear a purple robe and we shall organise an Echternach procession in the Potsdamer Platz. I shall previously have submerged Berlin in biblical texts. All the poster columns will bear the words "He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword"."

The idea re-emerged, in a very modified form, more than fifty years after Hausmann made his suggestions to Baader. In the mid-seventies, the British correspondence project Blitzinformation (Stefan Kukowski and Adam Czarnowski) circulated a leaflet on 'Klaos Oldanburgship':

"Since the discovery that Oslo Kalundburg, the radio station, is an anagram of Klaos Oldanburg (sic), it has become one of BLITZINFORMATION's foremost projects to change everyone's name to Klaos Oldanburg.

WE THEREFORE INVITE YOU TO BECOME KLAOS OLDANBURG. The advantages of such an action are too numerous to go into here. IF YOU WISH TO BECOME PART OF THIS INTERNATIONAL PROJECT, PLEASE FILL IN THE FORM BELOW... Please note: SIMPLE KLAOS OLDANBURGSHIP IS ENTIRELY FREE (+ S.A.E.) FILL IN FORM."

Those who filled in the form were given a number of descent to use with the name – i.e. Klaos Oldanburg XXI (prev. Derek Hart). The use of numbers and indication of a previous name weakens the concept if it is viewed as a means of attacking *traditional* beliefs about identity. However, both the term *multiple names* – and their use for *political subversion* – didn't occur until a group of anarcho-art punks from the London suburbs launched a 'movement' called the Generation Positive in October 1982, with a call for all rock bands to use the name White Colours. In February 1984 the *movement* launched its magazine Smile, and by the second issue (April '84) were calling for all magazines to use this name. In the fifth issue (October '84) the term *multiple names* was coined as a description of the concept and launched in a manifesto entitled "The Generation Positive Presents The Multiple Name Aesthetic".

In 1977, a multiple name concept had emerged among a group of mail *artists* gathered around what was known as the PORTLAND ACADEMY (Oregon, USA). At the centre of this group were the founder of the Academy, Dr. Al 'Blaster' Ackerman and his drinking buddy David 'Oz' Zack. In the Autumn of 1977 Zack announced his plan for an 'open pop-star' called Monty Cantsin. The idea was that anyone could use the name for a concert and that if enough people did so, Cantsin would become famous – and then unknown performers could take on the identity and be guaranteed an audience. Through the haze of alcohol and dope that permeated the Academy, Zack won *converts* to his plan to democratise the star system. The first person to perform under the Monty Cantsin banner was the latvian *acoustic punk* Maris Kundzin. After Kundzin had done a few concerts as Cantsin, the idea caught on and while the Academy continued to exist many of those associated with it used the name for performances. Zack and Kundzin mailed post cards to cultural workers around the world inviting them to become Monty Cantsin; Ackerman kept the 'Fourteen Secret Masters of the World' (his prioritised

contacts in the MA Network) in touch with what was going on.

As more people got involved, the project took off. It is now impossible to say who contributed what. Indeed, to attempt to do so would be misleading, since – despite Zack taking credit for making up the Cantsin name – the development of the idea was practically, theoretically and organisationally collective. By the summer of 1978 the concept of ISM was added to that of Cantsin. ISM stood for an incorporation of all the previous movements (isms) of the avant-garde. However, fluxus seem to have been the influence that predominated. In the excitement generated by these projects, songs were written, concerts performed, exhibitions held, with no attempt to document what was going on.

While Monty Cantsin didn't put numbers after *his* name, it was not unusual for a *legal name* to be placed in brackets beneath the 'open pop-star' identity (for an example of this see the printed matter which accompanies the 1978 Monty Cantsin EP on Syphon Records). Through the interventions of Blitzinformation and Zack, we can see multiple names beginning to take on the form they would assume during the eighties.

In a letter to the author, dated 7/5/87, the Italian mail *artist* Vittore Baroni explained the genesis of his own multiple name project:

"... My Lt. Murnau project (1980-1984) was an attempt to study how... musical myths are built... today, all these cult-underground bands, how far you can push an Image without a Sound. I started with spreading a lot of leaflets and announcements using the image of film-maker W.F. Murnau in his army uniform and the name Lieutenant Murnau that I found mysterious and evocative enough. I did the first cassette for VEC-Holland "Meet Lt. Murnau" just mixing, breaking, manipulating all the Beatles and Residents records. The idea is that Lt. Murnau uses existing music without having to use instruments or compose notes. Then I tried to confuse... the audience having Murnau cassettes and records released in different countries by different people: Jacques Juin in Germany... the 7" EP "Janus Head", with Grafike Airlines in Belgium the cassette package "The Lt. Murnau Maxi-single" (C30). Then there were several more cassettes, contributions to compilations, graphic works in magazines, etc... A lot of texts etc are enclosed with the various packages... I also did a concert-performance as Lt. Murnau, with mask, cutting and playing different records + crucifying a Beatles record etc. And I did in 1980 a programme... "La Testa di Giano" for national Radio One in Italy, using Murnau materials. I printed and circulated hundreds of life-size cardboard masks of Lt. Murnau, that people could wear. Anybody could do Murnau music and become Lt. Murnau, and a few people did it. At the concert I distributed masks to the audience and then filmed them... as they "become" Lt. Murnau as well. The main problem I found is that very few people were interested in working for a project that they felt belonged to myself, even if I tried to keep it mysterious in its origins. So in the end I always did 99% of the work, even if Jacques Juin did a lot of Murnau work in 1980-81 and a few others contributed nice work (Michael Vanherwegen, Roger Radio, among others). The whole project was focussed on a very limited area, that of underground music, so it did not have the more varied overtones of the Monty Cantsin philosophy. Yet, I think the problems are the same... The fact is that to participate you had to really work collectively, and

this is something few in the art circles like to do without having their name in big letters..."

During the 80's, Baroni was not the only person to initiate a multiple name project: by 1985 the names 'Karen Eliot', 'Mario Rossi' and 'Bob Jones' had also been put forward for multiple use. They were seen as means of subverting the star-system and questioning bourgeois notions of identity.² Two distinct camps emerged about how they should be used. One faction insisted that there should be a complete identification with the name used, while the other asserted that this would lead to the names being over identified with specific individuals, and so there should be a clear *separation* between personal identity and use of the concept. This argument has yet to be resolved and has led to hostilities between individuals 'sharing' a multiple identity.

If multiple names are an assault on art by inference, via their attack on the star system which sustains the notion of *genius*, there are other more direct attacks being made on art from within the MA Network. Tony Lowes's "Give Up Art/Save The Starving" campaign represents the more *extreme* wing of this tendency:

"Seeing and creating an image are the same activity. Those who create art are also creating the starving. Our world is a collective illusion.

It is a great irony that the myth of the artist celebrates suffering, while it is those who have never heard of art, those enduring famine and drought and endemic diseases, who are the true poor and wretched of our world. And in this perversion of once a religious quest, today's artists deny that they are more than labourers, deny art itself, and so move to close off to man the light inside him.

Art is now defined by a self-perpetuating elite to be marketed as an international commodity, a safe investment for the rich who have everything. But to call one man an artist is to deny another the equal gift of vision; – and to deny all men equality is to enforce inequality, repression, and famine.

Everything that is learned is alien. Our histories are built on the heritage left by men who learned only to replace one concept with another. We strive to grasp what we do not know when our problems will be solved not by new information, but by the understanding of what man already knows. It is time to re-examine the nature of thought.

Fictions occupy our minds and art has become a product because we believe ourselves and our world to be impervious to fundamental change. So we escape into art. It is our ability to transform this world, to control our consciousness, that withers on the vine.

We need to control our own minds, to behave as if the revolution has already taken place. Paint all the paintings black and celebrate the dead art. We have been living at a masqued ball: what we think of as our identity is a schooled set of notions, preconceptions that are imprisoning us in history. From our own belief in our own identity flows ceaseless misery – our isolation, our alienation, and our belief that another man's life is more interesting than our own.

It is only through valuing all the world equally that any of us will find liberation. An end to history is our rightful demand. To continue to produce art is to addict ourselves to our own repression. The refusal to create is the only

alternative left to those who wish to change the world. Give up art. Save the starving."

From his farmhouse in Eire, Lowes (born New York, 1944) mails out manifestoes, badges, stickers, and balloons bearing his slogans. They receive a mixed reaction in the MA Network, some people agree with him, others see his *work* as a joke, a few get upset. This reaction cannot be dissimilar to the way in which Richard Hulsenbeck's attacks on art were received by his Dadaist colleagues. Mail *artists*, like the dadaists and fluxists before them, are divided over the status of their *work*. Some see what they do as art, others don't. From a materialist perspective, *mail art* is not art because it is not commoditised by the bourgeoisie. On the whole, it remains outside the social process that gives an activity the status of *art*. It is possible that the activity might be elevated to the status of art at a future date, but even if this were to happen, only a very limited number of mail art products would actually be granted such a standing. And such an elevation in status seems unlikely while mail *art* continues to be practised.

At first sight this makes Lowes's *propaganda* efforts within the MA Network appear misdirected. But if his campaign is viewed as an attack on individualised creativity ('that unique place inside us where we possess art'), his *work* effectively addresses those in the network most given to such tendencies. He is using a language which is accessible to those who *might not be* artists, but *perceive* themselves as such. Lowes's activities highlight the contradictions of mail art. Obviously, those who coined the term did so because they identified their activities as being art based. Starting from an idealist perspective they presumably concluded that *real* art (*universal* human expression?) should not be sold but must be given as a Gift. As the network developed, a second group of individuals with a materialist perspective were attracted to it. This second group participated precisely because they saw MA as a support system within which they could engage in cultural exchange free of the essentialist conceptions of gallery art. Such individuals can use the network while ignoring its name. What confuses the issue is that Lowes uses the mail *art* network as a distribution system for an idealist attack on art. Reappearing here are all the contradictions of *anti-art*, unresolved since Pere Ubu made his stage debut.

1. Since the origin of their *network* in the sixties, most mail *artists* have viewed mail *art* as a direct development from dada and fluxus, and thus have always exhibited a deep interest in these previous movements. For examples of this see "Correspondence Art" edited by Michael Crane & Mary Stofflet (Contemporary Arts Press, San Francisco 1984); in particular see "Thoughts On Dada" & "Mail Art & Dada" both by Klaus Groh.

2. Most critics of multiple names have, to date, taken the claims made for them over literally. For example, Waldemar Jyroczech in "Re.Distribution" (included in "Plagiarism: art as commodity and strategies for its negation" edited by Stewart Home,

Aporia Press, London 1987) has the following to say:

“No one nowadays need rely on, say, the use of multiple names ‘to create a situation for which on one in particular is responsible’. The very existence of the law implies a generalised absence of responsibility, one reinforced in the realm of ‘the arts’ by the ‘death of the author’ (cf. Barthes) and the ‘liquidation of originality’ (cf. Warhol). Indeed part of the problem is that this state of affairs seems to belong to the past, to an accepted but not understood history; a plagiaristic repetition of the issues will tend to result in the erection of a facade of ahistoricity; a kind of fetishisation.”

Jyroczech assumes that those who “*rely on...* the use of multiple names ‘to create a situation for which no one in particular is responsible’” are unaware that such a situation already exists. I would suggest that those involved in such activities are aware of this fact and use the conscious creation of similar situations to bring this state of affairs to the attention of those who do not wish to perceive it. If Jyroczech understood such *intentions*, he would see that what is in dispute is his assertion that such problems ‘belong to... an *accepted* but not understood history’.

CHAPTER 15

PUNK

Like mail *art*, punk was a movement in which the majority of the participants were only semi-conscious of its origins. Some *critics* have made much of punk's recycling of spectro-situationist *theory*. A typical example of this is Dave W.'s "The End Of Music" (Box V2, Glasgow 1978):

"A musical situationism was born in the dressed up rebel imagery of punk and New Wave. While, the situationist influence can only be thoroughly credited in the one specific instance of the 'Sex Pistols', the rebellion of modern art forms, first expressed pictorially and in literature, though now recuperated, have increasingly been applied to the production of music through intermediaries like 'The Velvet Underground' and Lou Reed. Antecedents from the old cultural avant garde run into and feed the musical new... Part of the genesis of punk goes back 16 years to the English section of the Situationists and the subsequent, King Mob... Malcolm McLaren, manager of 'The Sex Pistols' had been friendly with individuals versed in the Situationist critique in England and had picked up some of the slogans and attitudes of that milieu... The E.P. (sic) 'Pretty Vacant' was promoted through a poster campaign displaying cut out photos of two long distance coaches heading for 'BOREDOM' and 'NOWHERE' – lifted straight from the pages of 'Point Blank'..."

Unfortunately, Dave W. completely overestimates the influence and importance of spectro-situationist theory, both on punk and in general. This is

perhaps not surprising, since at the time the text was produced he was part of the miserable milieu centred on Guy Debord and the Champ Libre publishers in Paris. Although W. sneers at the *negative* influence of the Motherfuckers on King Mob, he ignores the fact that this influence was actually more determinate than that of the specto-SI.¹ Indeed, the English section of the specto-SI were expelled from the *International* because they refused to *break* with the individuals who went on to found the Motherfuckers. King Mob were one result of this expulsion. W. chides the *plagiarism* of graphics from Point Blank but conveniently forgets that Jamie Reid, the Pistols' art director, had contributed visuals for a number of Point Blank productions and was merely re-using work he had been involved in producing!²

Although specto-situationist *theory* was known by some of those at the centre of the original punk movement, the influence of futurism, dada, the motherfuckers, fluxus and mail *art* is more *obvious* and *important*. Mail artists such as Irene Dogmatic in the States and Genesis P-Orridge in England became involved with punk music during its early stages. It was through these mail *artists* that the influence of fluxus was spread. The influence of mail *art* was most strongly felt in the choice of *bizarre* stage names. The iconoclastic nature of punk *identities* (ie Johnny Rotten, Sid Vicious, Siouxsie Sioux, Dee Generate and Captain Sensible) echo the assumed names of mail artists such as Cosey Fanni Tutti, Pat Fish and Anna Banana. Through art school training, members of bands like the Clash and Adam and the Ants had been exposed to the influence of Futurism and Dada.³ The backwardness of British art schools, the environment from which much of the *original* punk milieu emerged, resulted in a familiarity with early manifestations of the utopian *avant-garde* combined with an ignorance of its post-war developments. However, the *rank and file* of the punk movement remained ignorant even of these *classical* influences.

But this *ignorance* didn't prevent *kids on the street* from understanding punk as an expression simultaneously of frustration and a desire for change. Punk was a politics of energy with a bias towards expressing itself in the rhetoric of the left, but which more than occasionally assumed the voice of the right. Lumpen-intellectuals who have attempted an *analysis* of punk have usually understood far less than the punks they criticise for lacking a perspective. Dave W. states in "The End Of Music":

"Punk is the admission that music has got nothing left to say but money can still be made out of total artistic bankruptcy with all its surrogate substitute for creative self-expression in our daily lives. Punk music, like all art, is the denial of the revolutionary becoming of the proletariat."

Such a position is clearly ridiculous since only an imbecile could confuse punk with art. Besides which, punk very clearly did have something to say, and the fact that this was effectively communicated is demonstrated to this day by widespread teenage identification with it.⁴ W. goes on to repeat the specto-situationist fallacy that art is dead, when from a *genuinely* materialist perspective there will always be art as long as there is a bourgeois class. Art

cannot *die*, because it is a social process, capitalist societies produce art while non-capitalist societies don't. As we have already seen, to impute an *essence* to art is mysticism. W. compounds this idealism with another abstraction – 'the revolutionary becoming of the proletariat'. Although, as a lumpen-intellectual, W. might find solace in such a concept, the *proletariat* which he mythologises would find such ideas completely meaningless, if by some freak of fate they should ever come into contact with them.

W.'s confusion of punk and art is used as a partial screen against his ignorance of punk's non-intellectual origins in British street culture. It is therefore not suprising that both he and the *semiologist* Dick Hebdige in his book "Subculture: The Meaning Of Style" (Meuthen, London 1979) ignore the influence of Richard Allen on the *blank generation* during their pubesence. Allen (psuedonym of James Moffatt) authored a series of *skinhead* novels for New English Library during the early seventies. His books, which chronicled the violent activities of white working class youths, circulated widely under school desks and the belligerent attitude they expoused was a central element in the punk sensibility. Allen's books are ignored in academic *analyses* of punk, precisely because his writing lacks an intellectual pedigree. Lumpen-intellectuals prefer to compare punk with avant-garde artistic and political tendencies, because at least in this field they have the opportunity to demonstrate a conceptual acquisition of *high culture*. *Dada might have shocked the bourgeoisie but at least its products were more than hurriedly written hack work glorifying football hooliganism*. One need only compare the cover of the first Clash album, or almost any posed publicity shot of a punk band, to the covers of Allen's books to see the extent of their influence.⁵ Whereas only a tiny minority of the punk milieu had heard of Futurism or Dadaism, and even fewer of the Motherfuckers or spectro-situationist theory, the vast majority would have encountered Richard Allen's work in one form or another – and were just as likely to have experienced the culture he depicted directly on the football terrace. The fanatical Stretford End of Manchester United's 'red army' were chanting "We Hate Humans" in the early seventies, years before the *blank generation* appropriated *hate* and *misanthropy* as themes of their own.⁶

However, despite widespread *ignorance* of punk's relation to other utopian currents, the movement successfully propogated the essential tenets of the tradition. The division between audience and performer was questioned, if not overcome. Although a few groups attained *superstar* status, the vast majority remained accessible to the *fans*. Kids who had never played an instrument in their life formed bands and within a few months would be making public performances. A Do-It-Yourself ethic prevailed, with independent record labels issuing releases by *unknown* bands, a vast proliferation of the independent press in the form of punk fanzines (usually xeroxed in editions of a few hundred), and almost every punk making *designer* alterations to their clothes in the form of rips and tears.

As the first wave of punk groups – the Sex Pistols, Clash, Damned, Stranglers, Buzzcocks – made the pop charts and assumed star status, the

hardcore of their following would switch loyalties and become supporters of bands who could still be seen on the club circuit. *Real* punks followed bands like the Adverts, Sham 69 and the Members in '77, by '78 Adam and the Ants were followed by what would become the gothic faction, the UK Subs by the future hardcore section, and Crass by the anarcho-punks. '78 also saw an increased stereotyping in dress.

The first wave of punk groups flirted with politics, the majority like the Clash and Pistols from a left perspective, others like the Banshees and Chelsea from the right. A few, such as Subway Sect, were genuinely committed to communism; at least during their early days. 1977 saw the emergence of groups like Crisis, who took the left rhetoric of the Clash seriously and whose members belonged to organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party and the International Marxist Group. Playing benefit gigs for organisations such as "Rock Against Racism" and the "Right To Work Campaign", often from the back of trucks leading columns of marchers, Crisis spearheaded the new ground-swell of committed punk groups. Songs like "Militant", "Take A Stand" and "Alienation" won the group a loyal following.

If Crisis were seen as extremists by many (their song "Kill" in particular was singled out for criticism⁷), better was yet to come. During the early eighties anarcho-punk fanzines such as "Pigs For Slaughter" and bands like the Apostles blazed a trail that would be mined for its black humour and media potential by the Class War movement. The track "Pigs For Slaughter" on the second Apostles EP (Scum Records 1983) defined what would become the platform of anarchist regroument a year or so later:

"Glue the locks of all the banks and butchers or kick them in,
Spray a message of hate across a Bentley or smash it up,
Sabotage the meat in supermarkets poison them all,
Go to Kensington and mug a rich bastard of all his cash.

We're knocking on your door,
We're taking no more,
For this is Class War.

Put sugar in the petrol tank,
Deflate the tires with six inch nails,
That's the way to wreck a rolls,
So get stuck in it never fails.

We'll smash it up and we'll burn it all down."

Lumpen-intellectuals like Dave W. had, a few years earlier, been accusing punk of *stealing* its ideas from the *revolutionary theorists*. By the mid-eighties events had come full circle, Class War – a group of anarchoid ultra-leftists – would find their inspiration in punk.

Although I don't have the time or space to go into it here, the musical origins of punk – in sixties groups such as The Who, Small Faces, Velvet

Underground and Stooges – should not be forgotten; even if in the course of my argument it has been largely overlooked.

The *youth underground* of the late seventies – centred on punk – was far weaker (in terms of the broadness of its social base) ⁸ than that of the sixties, in that its existence was dependent on rock music in a way that the more *heavily politicised* underground of a decade earlier was not. In retrospect, punk also appears as a very straightforward progression from the sixties, whereas at the time it was perceived as a break. The entourage around the Sex Pistols – in particular – appears to be little more than a copy of the milieu attracted to Warhol's factory. ⁹ One of the problems faced by the *blank generation* – that sixties youth did not have to overcome – was an institutionalised youth, and 'post-youth', culture. During the sixties magazines such as "Oz" and "International Times" didn't have to compete with the likes of "Time Out" or *liberated* teenage magazines, which took away a general youth audience for 'zines such as "Sniffin' Glue" and "Ripped & Torn". ¹⁰ It was this situation which forced the underground press of the late seventies to provide specialised music coverage. It was a weakness created by the *success* of the previous generation. Punk had a music, fashion and politics – but socio-economic factors caused an increasing specialisation in (and separation between) the various disciplines united under its banner. Thus the broad social base that might have developed was, instead, weakened and destroyed. Many laudable strands emerged, but as a movement punk was finished very soon after it began.

1. But W. should have been well aware of this since according to Nick Brandt's "Refuse" (BM Combustion, London 1978) he was a member of King Mob during the late '60s.

2. See page 68 of "Up They Rise – The Incomplete Works of Jamie Reid" by Jamie Reid and Jon Savage (Faber & Faber, London 1987). It is worth noting that when spec to and pro-situationists 'plagiarise' other people's work, they call it 'detournement'; but when other people are perceived as 'detourning' *situationist property* they are accused of 'plagiarism'. Such double standards are endemic within the spec to-situationist milieu, and are usually justified on the grounds that – with the exception of the proletariat considered as an abstract category – *no one outside this milieu has any credibility as a 'radical'*. Everyone from Debord, to Knabb, to W., to Brandt, employs such hypocrisy. It should, however, be noted that "The End Of Music" was published without W.'s consent, after it had been circulated in typescript form. This said, W.'s *servile enthusiasm* for the Debordist faction of the SI is evident in several texts he has played an active role in publishing; consequently it is not unreasonable to see "The End Of Music" as typifying his *thought*.

2. See for example the lyrics of "Animals & Men" on Adam and the Ants first lp "Dirk Wears White Sox" (Do It Records, London 1979).

4. At its most basic punk was saying I'm young, angry, pissed off and I want change and/or excitement. Above all else it was a statement of identity. Even the media

understood punk at this level.

5. a) Allen didn't design his own book covers; however the books themselves were consumed as a single package. The 'authorship' of the constituent parts was irrelevant to the readership.

b) Slaughter and the Dogs second single "Where Have All The Boot Boys Gone?" (Decca Records, London 1977) in particular echoes the Allen oeuvre. The opening lines run: "Wearing boots and short hair cuts, we will kick you in the guts...". Allen had written a novel entitled "Boot Boys" (New English Library, London 1972) and most of his heroes had short hair and wore boots, although – ironically – the characters in "Boot Boys" did not have cropped hair.

6. And like football, punk emphasised a territorialism which the Super Groups of the seventies had largely eliminated from the rock music scene. In its negative sense this meant many punks saw themselves as opposed to 'teds' and 'hippies'. More positively, it meant that the movement viewed itself as being geographically specific. Thus the Clash were 'the sound of the Westway' (the motorway system that passes through West London); while the Sex Pistols were 'teenagers from London's Finsbury Park and Shepherd's Bush' (according to some of their early publicity material). Outside London, Manchester had the earliest developed punk scene and boasted among its *top* acts bands like the Buzzcocks, Slaughter & the Dogs, & the Drones. Very quickly punk scenes developed in all the large urban centres in the British Isles. Punk was consciously urban, despising the country and the suburbs, and yet because it was also about displacement it eventually found its greatest support among suburban kids. When the 'hippies' who'd started the Stone Henge festival formed their own *punk* band – Crass – as a means of disseminating anarchist propaganda, they eventually succeeded in injecting an element of *ruralism* into the movement. However, suburbia remained as despised as ever.

7. A sample of the lyrics to this song run as follows:

"Sack the teachers, standards fall,
You send your kids to a private school.
Close the wards, the poor drop dead,
You're alright Jack, you've got a private bed.

You're making me sick,
You're making me ill,
If you don't fuck off I'm gonna Kill, Kill, Kill!"

8. But its impact (in Britain at least) was as great, if not greater, due to the strength of its *image*. By exaggerating media stereotypes of working class belligerence, punk touched a raw nerve with the British establishment. If sixties *rebels* had been inspired by the *esoteric* theories of 'Che' and 'Uncle Ho', bands like the Clash appeared to have more in common with dockers leader Jack Dash; a *threat* that was much closer to home.

9. The role of the Sex Pistols in the punk movement has been completely *mystified*. They may have *stolen* the *show*, but even so punk would have happened without them – while they wouldn't have achieved fame without punk. What was important about

punk was the Do It Yourself attitude, not the few *stars* who *swindled* their way to the top.

10. Nigel Fountain in "Do Anything Beautiful" (1968 supplement, New Statesman, London 18/12/87) has the following to say about the *alternative* press and specialisation:

"Al is one fat man... who did well out of the wars of those times. In 1968 he noticed that many of the people who bought the then flourishing American underground press – the *Berkeley Barb*, the *East Village Other*, the *Los Angeles Free Press*, *et al* were not doing so for their imaginative accounts of the occupation of Columbia University, the exploits of the Yippies, or the battles at the Chicago Democratic Party convention. They were the real army of the night, the dirty raincoat detachment, in search of sexual contact ads. Goldstein acutely perceived as he launched *Screw* that autumn that 'I am the man in the dirty raincoat.'... Goldstein's trick was to identify one of the crucial undercurrents, sex. Attention to the other two hedonistic ripples paid off as well. The drugs obsession produced the briefly successful *High Times*; rock 'n' roll generated Jann Wenner's *Rolling Stone*, still coining it 21 years after its launch. Both *Screw* and *Rolling Stone* helped drain the sea on which America's 1960s radical press sailed. One took the sex ads and thus the sex-orientated sales, while the other sucked in the music ads and the non-activist segment of the underground press market... It is a cautionary tale..."

CHAPTER 16

NEOISM

The date on which Neoism was *founded* varies from account to account. As time progresses the date gets put back. Writing in the sole issue of “Immortal Lies” (Montreal 1985), Istvan Kantor (born Budapest 1949) claims that *his* “Post-Concerto” performed at Vehicule Art, Montreal, on February 14th 1979, is ‘considered as the opening piece of Neoist Conspiracy’. Whereas in the 1982 text “WHAT IS A uh uh APARTMENT FESTIVAL???” Kantor had claimed that the ‘neoist movement was launched on may 22, 1979, in Montreal’, when he and Lion Lazer distributed leaflets on the corner of Sherbrooke and McGill.

What can be ascertained with certainty is that Kantor had spent some time at the *PORTLAND ACADEMY* in 1978 and returned to Montreal with the concepts of Monty Cantsin and ISM which Zack, Ackerman and their group had been developing. Back in Montreal, Kantor found himself in the company of several young *cultural workers* who had been profoundly influenced by the punk phenomena. In the hands of this group, ISM was transformed into Neoism and by the summer of ’79 a graffiti campaign was being waged on the walls of Montreal. According to R. U. Sevol (born Michael Ferrara, London) in “Miles 2” and “Miles 2 Supplement” (Paris 1985), the slogans used included “Everything Before The 90’s”, “Liberate Imagination”, “Seek

Beauty, Desire Passion", "Never Work", "Hunger Is The Mother Of Beauty" and "Convulsion, Subversion, Defection". The graffiti draws heavily on the legacy of the french avant-garde: these are the slogans of surrealism, situationism and the occupations movement of May '68, with some late romanticism thrown in for good measure.

However, as the group developed, it became apparent that it had more in common with futurism than french avant-garde traditions. Indeed, the very word Neoism is striking as a *cheapening* through realisation of Marinetti's project. A *heroic* vision of the future reduced to the novelty of *the new*. In technological terms, video was to the Neoists what the motor car was to Marinetti. This became apparent during the Neoists' 'occupation' of Motivation 5, Montreal, in October 1980. A video *communication link* was set up between the two floors of the gallery. According to Kantor's "Video After Death" leaflet (Montreal, undated) 'video conversations eventually developed into an automatic exchange of conceptual ideas, video became reality and reality became video'. Kantor's description is typical of the myth making in which he indulges: phrases such as 'conceptual ideas' sound very grand but are ultimately tautological (all *ideas* are *conceptual*), while 'automatic exchange' implies a totalitarian system of language (an impossibility since the split between signifiers and signifieds prevents *meanings* from becoming transparent¹). The tedious nature of the gallery *occupation* is revealed by the fragments from R. U. Sevol's notes published in "Organ Centre de Recherche Neoiste vol. 3 no. 1" (previously "The Neo"):

"... Lazer is bored so he and Yana leave... Frater Neo appears and asks questions about photography. No one is interested... I was too tired to move... Kiki left to wash his socks... I didn't seem to care, I just did it..."

Video did not '*become reality*'. The altered mental states were, at least partially, due to sleep deprivation and boredom. The Neoists took the slogan they'd adopted from Niels Lomholt ("Bread Feeds The Hungry, Video Feeds The Full") too seriously. In their eagerness to indulge in futurist *heroics*, they didn't bother to examine the consequences of what they were doing. These *avatars of 'the' new sensibility* hadn't even learnt the most basic lesson of industrialisation; that although technological innovations may alter our mode of *being*, the way in which they do this is not always desirable.

In Kantor's hands, the Monty Cantsin concept regressed rather than developed. During the course of what were often violent performances, he would offer 'his' neoist chair to anyone who wanted to take on the 'open pop-star' identity. The aggressive way in which this was done intimidated those who might have taken up the offer. When, in the mid-eighties – due to the intervention of a number of European neoists – the Cantsin identity was taken up widely for the first time since Zack left Portland in '79, Kantor circulated letters claiming to be the 'real' Monty Cantsin.

In 1980, the Neoists – taking their cue from the use to which New York *cultural workers* had been putting their lofts for more than twenty years – developed the concept of Apartment Festivals. These were week-long events

held in the homes of *conspirators*. The first "International Neoist Apartment Festival" (APT) took place in No Galero (a Montreal apartment) from September 17th to 21st 1980. The participants were Kiki Bonbon (psuedonym of Jean-Luc Bonspeil), Istvan Kantor, Lion Lazer, Niels Lomholt, Napoleon Moffatt, Reinhart Underwood Sevol and Alain Snyers. The event consisted of concerts, performance *art*, installations and the screening of films and video.

The "Second International Apartment Festival", February 16th-21st 1981, was organised by Kiki Bonbon at the 'Peking Pool Room', again in Montreal. Among the participants were several members of the Krononauts² from Baltimore, USA (tENTATIVELY a cONVENIENCE, Richard X, Ruth Turner and Sumu Pretzler). This second APT was similar in content to the first one, although the element of communal lifestyle and *friendship* played an increased role. On the personal relations front, Bonbon simulated temper tantrums, while tENTATIVELY, who had arrived before Richard X, pretended on X's arrival to be X, while X pretended to be tENTATIVELY. The resulting farce typified the head games which fast became an essential feature of APT Festivals. In his essay on the events at the Peking Pool Room, "Tim(nn) Laps(nn) M(nn)mory Kronology" (sic), tENTATIVELY concludes by summing up the APT concept:

"APT like NEOISM as minus t he (sic) superfluous middle which would disgustingly make it ART. APT as APT. APT as apartment: a space again skipping t he (sic) ART intermediate of performance spaces as buffer b tween (sic) public & performers private life. t he (sic) PEKING POOLROOM as KIKI BONBON's APT."

The text was written in tENTATIVELY's usual brain frying style. Throughout its first half, '(nn)' is substituted for the letter 'e'. Not content with this, tENTATIVELY introduces other idiosyncracies to ensure the essay is only comprehensible to a persistent reader, such as the use of the number '2' in place of the word 'to' and the use of a space between the 't' and 'h' of the word 'the'.

The "Third International Neoist Apartment Festival" was organised by the Krononauts, in Baltimore, between May 29th and June 7th 1981. This APT featured the Neoists' first nature walk, plus numerous film screenings and performances. Among the participants were Richard X, David Zack, Richard Hambleton, Kirby Malone, tENTATIVELY a cONVENIENCE, Marshall Reese, Bonnie Bonnell, Sumu Pretzler, Ruth Turner, Dava Presslor, Lisa Mandle, Tom Konyves, Michael Gentile and Tom Diventi.

APT 4 was a 'two-city-event'. The first half was organised by Gordon W. Zealot, Kent Tate and Gary Shilling, at "Public Works", Toronto, running from 9th to 11th October 1981. Perhaps the highlight of the event was when tENTATIVELY a cONVENIENCE and Eugenie Vincent were stopped by the cops for violating seat belt laws. They were strapped to the roof of a rented car which was touring the city as an advertisement for the event. The festival continued at the Low Theatre, Montreal, from the 13th to the 18th October '81. Here tENTATIVELY was confronted with the problem of finding

himself billed to appear at an event with an admission charge. Rather than cancel his performance, he waited for the paying audience to go into the theatre and then instructed them to watch his 'street guerilla act' from a window, while those who had not gone into the theatre could view his performance free of charge from the street.

APT 5 took place at des REFUSE, New York, from March 15th to 21st 1982. During the festival, Gordon W. Zealot 'set up his mobile kitchen on W-Broadway, and fed neoists with greens and windbread', as 'a life-style demonstration of primitive subsistence'. Napoleon Moffatt gave an *important* 'pre-war' conference entitled "The Legitimacy Of Akademgorod":

"I'm in search of AKADEMGOROD. I'm still searching for AKADEMGOROD. AKADEMGOROD is the city of scientists in Russia, in Siberia. It is a city built for destruction. It is also a city where all the brains of Russia think and create the END.

Neoists should be in search of the city of scientists, in search of AKADEMGOROD.

The project is to find the city of AKADEMGOROD and, by being there, justify the city. Neoists are living, are surviving by eating high technology.

I'm ephemerally here, in this city, to ask you to join the crusade for AKADEMGOROD.

The goals of the crusade are to find the city and then establish the reality of Neoism into the reality of AKADEMGOROD.

BE A PART OF AKADEMGOROD."

At this time, Moffatt was considered the *theorist* of the movement, and his suggestions were usually taken up by the Montreal group, if not always the wider Neoist Network. Akademgorod quickly became the *promised land* of Neoism.

The "Neoist Network's First European Training Camp" took place at Peter Below's Studio '58, in Wurzburg, West Germany, from 21st to 27th June 1982.³ Here the Neoist practice of offering free hair cuts to the public was continued. The performances on the whole saw a shift away from futurist influences and towards a fluxus aesthetic. This trend is typified by Pete Horobin's 'Principle Player' (PP) scripts performed at the festival. The 'Principle Player' was an identity anyone could take on by performing the scripts Horobin wrote for the PP, or even by writing new PP scripts and then performing them. Horobin (born London 1949) had been developing this concept since 1980, well before he came into contact with Neoism and the Monty Cantsin 'open pop-star' scenario. An example of PP performance, "Seven Scripts For One Week Of Neoist Activity" (written August 1982) is included in "Neoism Now", edited by *Monty Cantsin* (Artcore Editions, Berlin 1987):

"NEODAY ONE

The principle player does not think about art for twentyfour hours.

NEODAY TWO

The principle player does not eat for twentyfour hours.

NEODAY THREE

The principle player makes a pot of tea in the traditional manner. A sufficient amount of water for the persons present is boiled in the kettle. Just before this water boils some is poured into a teapot and swirled around its interior. Thereby heating the teapot. A teaspoonful of tealeaves per person plus one for the pot is put into the hot teapot. Enough boiling water for the persons present is poured into the teapot. The lid is put on the teapot. The teapot is allowed to stand for five minutes. For the tea to fuse. It is then served to the persons present. With milk and sugar if preferred. Timing is critical.

NEODAY FOUR

The principle player does not sleep for twentyfour hours.

NEODAY FIVE

The principle player does not communicate for twentyfour hours.

NEODAY SIX

The principle player cuts his finger nails and his toe nails. The clippings are put into a suitable receptacle. Later during this day the persons present take their nail clippings to a mutually agreed site. Possibly the site of the Neofire. These clippings are scattered onto the ground.

NEODAY SEVEN

The principle player sifts the ashes of the dead Neofire. Taking out the lumps of charcoal. The fire ash is put into a container. Samples from this container are put into plastic bags which are sealed. Labelled. Stamped. Dated. And mailed to known Neoist sympathisers."

At this time, the European Neoists were far more influenced by sixties anti- and non-art movements than their North American counterparts, but this would change after 1984 when several members of the punk and post-punk generation were recruited.

APT 6 was held at the 'Neoist Embassy', Montreal, from February 21st to 27th 1983; APT 7 at tENTATIVELY's apartment in Baltimore from September 20th to 25th 1983. APT 8 was organised by Pete Horobin at 13 Aulton Place, London SE11, and took place from May 21st to 26th 1984. tENTATIVELY and Litvinov flew in from Baltimore, the model Eugenie Vincent had already moved to Europe and was present, Carlo Pittore was passing through London anyway, and Istvan Kantor had been wired money by his family – rich members of the Hungarian Communist Party – to come to

Europe for his grandmother's birthday.⁴ The presence of these North American *die-hards* made the London Festival a more traditional event than the Wurzburg manifestation. This naturally included rivalry between tENTATIVELY, Pittore and Kantor. Kantor left London before the APT had even finished, sulking because no one turned up to see his performance at the London Musicians Collective. When tENTATIVELY first performed his 'Neoist Guidedog' – during which he crawled on all fours and obtained a free bus ride because a blindwoman held him on a leash – there was a mix-up over buses and only a few neoists witnessed the act. Unperturbed, he persisted and managed successfully to document the performance on Super 8 a few days after the festival finished.

The 9th Neoist Festival was organised by Pete Horobin at Emilio Morandi's Arte Studio, Ponte Nossia, Italy, between June 1st and 7th 1985. It marked a sharp departure from previous Neoist Festivals. It took place in a small village, whose council considered it an *honour* to be hosting an International Arts Event. A major road ran through the village, and Neoist banners were strung over this to advertise the arrival of *artists* from all over Europe. The opening was a civic occasion with the presentation of a plaque. In the week that followed, the residents of Ponte Nossia were bemused to find body outlines chalked on their streets, hundreds of different portraits – all bearing the name Monty Cantsin – fly-posted to their walls, clothes being burnt in front of their homes, the appearance of a large 'chronogramme' by the side of a local river, and numerous other signs that the world had – to all intents and purposes – been over-run by lunatics. The villagers were further horrified by the appearance of Graf Haufen's mother, who turned up in a camper van with a hippy boyfriend half her age, keen to see some of her son's performances. On top of this, local youths – noting that the carabinieri had orders not to arrest anyone for bizarre behaviour – used the festival as a backdrop against which they were allowed to indulge in mildly anti-social behaviour. Their parents wondered what they'd done to deserve the festival, the teenagers held the *artists* in contempt – but had a gas anyway.

In October '85, R. U. Sevol – by this time resident in Paris – circulated an open letter proposing that the next APT should be spread over several locations, so that greater numbers of neoists could participate with ease. As a result, in the summer of '86, meetings of two or three neoists took place in Paris, Amsterdam and Tepoztlan (Mexico). The short notice at which these events were arranged resulted in low attendances – and whether taken singly or together, they cannot in any way be viewed as an Apartment Festival. tENTATIVELY wrote to Sevol asking for his summer '86 tour of North East America to be considered part of the festival. Since it was the only substantial event to emerge, this tour must be considered the 10th Apartment Festival.

The 64th (sic) Internationale Konspirative Neoistische Apartment Festival was held at Artcore Gallery and Stiletto Studios (Berlin) from December 1st to 7th 1986. Like the Ponte Nossia festival its central feature was an exploration of the Monty Cantsin concept. Documentation was produced listing the addresses of 99 Monty Cantsin's who participated either by post or in

person. However, it was also marked by the absence of Pete Horobin and other key figures in European Neoism. It was the final fling of a movement overtaken by dissension and apathy. A few minor Neoist manifestations have taken place since – including the so called Millionth Apartment Festival in New York (23rd to 27th November 1988) – but they are of no consequence⁵.

1. However, the speed with which electronic *communications systems* operate does serve to pressurise those using them into reducing the time they take to reach any given decision, thus lowering the overall quality of human thought and the rationality of individual choice making.

2. The Krononauts were also closely linked to other groups such as the Dallas (Texas) based Church of the SubGenius, which was founded in the spring of 1978 by the Rev Ivan Stang. Taking a graphic from a 1940's book on advertising said to *represent* success, Stang added the name J.R. "Bob" Dobbs and founded a *religion*. Dobbs, a pipe smoking salesman, was promoted by Stang as the figurehead of Amerika's *weirdest* cult. According to SubGenius lore, the world as we know it is due to end on July 5th 1998. But anyone who pays a membership and *ordainment* fee to the Church will be saved. "Bob" – who 'is a basically a pretty regular guy, just very rich and possessed by forces greater than man' – has his followers names placed in the 'Book of Humans', so that the aliens from Planet X will take them onto their space craft at the appointed time. The SubGenius will be saved, while all the other 'assholes fry'.

Stang's parody of revivalist religion – utilising slogans such as 'Repent! Quit Your Job! Slack Off!', 'Pull the wool over your own eyes' and 'You'd pay to know what you really think' – proved a success with the American *underground*. By the early eighties, hundreds of 'abnormals' had flocked to join his 'spazz-church of macho irony'. With the money that *poured* in, the Church was able to finance its newsletter "The Stark Fist Of Removal", badges, audio tapes, stickers, t-shirts, video and other paraphernalia. The increased size of the Church not only provided Stang with an income, but also enabled it to hold conventions.

The most notorious stunt in the Church's history was the climax of its 1983 Congress in Baltimore. On the 18th of September, tENTATIVELY a cONVENIENCE (psuedonym of Michael Tolson) made national news when he performed his "Pee Dog/Poop Dog Copright Violation Ritual". tENTATIVELY, naked and covered in white greasepaint, was arrested by more than twenty armed cops, while beating the decomposing carcasses of two dead dogs strung from the ceiling of a railway tunnel. He was accompanied by thirty-five SubGeni, who danced to the rhythmic pulse of a thunder sheet. Two police officers who'd been sent to investigate reports of trespassers were so frightened by their discoveries that they called up reinforcements. The action resulted in tENTATIVELY receiving a probation order. tENTATIVELY – also notorious for his films, such as "Peeing On Bob's Head" (which after an extremely tedious single shot opening, finishes with a woman pissing into his mouth) – is now considered a Saint by the Church.

The Church, with its cult of weirdness, ultimately becomes a one line joke. It bears a certain conceptual similarity to The College du Pataphysics, but with a populist – rather than *intellectual* – approach. It is this lowest common denominator attitude that accounts for its success. Similar cults, such as the Krononauts – who among other things have held a 'Party For The People Of The Future' with the intention of attracting time travellers – are too *rigorously intellectual* to appeal to the average male

college student.

As well as participation in the Krononauts, Neoists and Church of the SubGenius, tENTATIVELY simultaneously pursued his individual interests as a 'mad scientist/d composer/sound thinker/t ho ught collector/as been & not an artist'). Without these other *diversions*, it seems unlikely that someone as *hip* as tENTATIVELY could sustain an interest in the *church*.

3. European *recruits* to the movement had initially been contacted via the mail *art* network.

4. Kantor informed the author of this during the course of APT 8. The author was also present at The Ninth Neoist Festival, and picked up additional information through correspondence with individual neoists – tENTATIVELY a cONVENIENCE and Pete Horobin were particularly helpful about supplying information.

5. There is much that I've overlooked in this brief treatment of Neoism. Many 'neoists' were deeply involved in making music and/or 'audio works'. The music made by the Montreal group tended to be extremely dull post new wave rock; it was left to 'neoists' from other parts of the world to make more substantial audio contributions – John Berndt and Graf Haufen (both of whom worked as Monty Cantsin) were among those who produced the most consistently strong work in this area. The "Neoism Now" compilation cassette by 'White Colours' (Artcore, Berlin 1987) offers a good introduction to neoist audio.

In the area of neoist film, tENTATIVELY a cONVENIENCE made the most conceptually interesting work. Members of the Montreal group made some technically very proficient videos but these were often no more than promotional backdrops for their tedious music – and ultimately aren't of much interest. Pete Horobin, working principally out of Dundee, Scotland, shot a massive amount of video as part of his 10 year 'data project'; but has yet to find the money that will enable him to hire enough time on a video suite for this work to be edited down into a publicly presentable format. The most *notorious* Neoist film is Kiki Bonbon's "Flying Cats". I have not seen this *work*, but it allegedly features two men, dressed in white coats, standing on top of a tower block. The men have with them a selection of cats. One at a time the cats are picked up and thrown to their death. Throughout the film the protagonists repeat the phrase 'the cat has no choice'.

CHAPTER 17

CLASS WAR

To many observers Class War appeared as if from nowhere. In the two years between the appearance of the first “Class War” newspaper in 1983 and the ‘hot autumn’ of ’85, the British media began to write of an ‘anarchist menace’ which was the equal of any ‘red scare’. For the first time since the Angry Brigade bombings of the early seventies, anarchism was perceived as a threat to the British establishment.

Class War very quickly became news,¹ and as usual journalistic investigation served to mystify – rather than shed light on – the social, cultural, and political origins of the group. This was not simply a case of deliberate misrepresentation on the part of Fleet Street; despite the booze-hound image of cynicism they like to project, most journalists are actually extremely naive and ignorant.

The first issue of the Class War paper featured a couple of ‘toffs’ on the cover, and beneath them the slogan: “Now is the time for every dirty lousy tramp to arm himself with a revolver or a knife and lie in wait outside the palaces of the rich and shoot or stab them to death as they come out”. This is a paraphrase from part of a speech given by the nineteenth-century anarchist Lucy Parsons to the poor of Chicago. The Class War collective was made up of long-time anarchists who, being versed in the movement’s history, were able to apply this knowledge to the production of propaganda.

Ian Bone, destined to become the movement's 'leader', had previously been lead singer for the punk band Living Legends, as well as *the brains* behind "The Scorcher", a South Wales agitational paper. Assorted *headbangers* from South Wales and London made up the rest of the Class War collective. They were later joined by a group of *nutters* who lived together in a large house in Islington (North London). The latter faction's involvement in the anarchist movement stretched back more than a decade and spanned numerous projects. A number of them had been involved with the satirical magazine "Authority", two issues of which had appeared in the late seventies. The back cover of the first issue featured a picture of a fascist rally and the words "The National Front love Britain... almost as much as the anarchists love Spain". With Class War this brand of black humour would reach *new heights*.

In its early days, Class War did not seek a base in the traditional workers' movement, rather it saw disaffected youth as its most likely recruits; and its propaganda was designed to attract the *extreme* fringe of the punk movement. A feature entitled "Never Mind The... BOLLOCKS TO THAT!" from an early issue of the group's paper, will serve to illustrate this tendency:

"Dylan got rich on the fuck-ups and misery of sixties middle class youth. MacLaren and Punk got rich on the fuck-ups and misery of working class youth. Punk saved the record industry and the music hacks... Emphasising energy and aggression punk kicked the arse of the flabby supergroups of the '70's. But for the working class the laughs at the expense of boring old farts and the British establishment must be put in focus. God Save The Queen, Anarchy In The U.K. at No. 1 – rock industry moguls getting knighted for their services to profit – it's a joke and a revelation of the sickness of the rich bastards who run the show. But the joke's on us... Music trends and the music papers and industry are just the raciest example of how the modern market works according to the principle of 'if it moves sell it'. Working class anger, via MacLaren's rehash of old 60's politics... is good for business.

Old punks say that the Clash, Stranglers etc 'sold out' to the Big Record companies like the Lefties say that the trade unions sell out strikes... but they would, 'cos making it as anti-heroes or heroes don't matter as long as you keep the industry ticking over. Oi rejected this by getting back to the roots but it got lost.

Though founded on a real element of class culture Oi has lapsed into adoration of the armed forces and voting Labour.

The only band (sic) to carry the musical-politics line forward was Crass. They have done more to spread anarchist ideas than Kropotkin, but like him their politics are up shit creek. Putting the stress on pacifism and rural escapism they refuse the truth that in the cities opposition means confrontation and violence if it were to get anywhere.

At last bands are emerging that reject the rock music/celebrity/wealth escape route from working class boredom as much as they do the normal political escape route of the Trade Union/Labour party. Not interested in making it without smashing up the show and those who run it they mark a real departure from Oi that has declined into glassing each other (rather than the rich) pledging support to our boys in the S. Atlantic and voting Labour. The Apostles and the

Anti-Social Workers link with the war against the rich and make for the real possibility of taking the anger and frustration away from the gig and out onto the streets and once and for all saying 'Fuck that' to the shitty rituals that pass for pleasure."

The article ends by quoting a song lyric by the Apostles. This feature reads like something from a punk fanzine, except that its political analysis – and the residues of specto-situationist theory – mark it out as 'over sussed'. Its polemical style clearly indicates that it was written by someone who has more experience of agitating against *authority* than the average street punk.

In 1984, Class War launched their "Spring Offensive" against the rich. The cover of the paper that announced this project featured a picture of a fox hunter and the caption: "You Rich Fucking Scumbage... We're Gonna Get You". Class War had jumped on the Animal Liberation bandwagon, popular among anarcho-punks, and the ploy resulted in a circulation boost for their paper. As well as 'tail-ending' left-wing demonstrations and anarchist inspired actions such as Stop The City, Class War were now initiating campaigns of their own. In an article entitled "Advance To Mayfair", the group reports on the progression of this campaign:

"The first action of the CLASS WAR spring offensive took place on March 1st at the Grosvenor House hotel. The occasion was the Horse and Hound Ball... a must for all budding debutantes and local squire or huntmaster. Well, as it was the place to be seen, us intrepid bunch of anarchists decided to be there as well... Some friendly faces began appearing and our numbers swelled to around forty people. We considered this a large enough group to make a loud noise. This was only intended as a demonstration and not a fight, so it was on with the balaclavas and outside the main entrance. As the scum stepped from their limos they realised the antis had turned up in force. Our protest began in earnest when we unfurled a large banner reading *BEHOLD YOUR FUTURE EXECUTIONERS*. We're not people who play about with words. Soon the rich filth began arriving in droves with their top hats and their 'pinks' with their high society cinderellas on their arms. Jostling, well placed kicks, spitting and an outstandingly well placed smack in the gob contrived to ruin many an evening... The CLASS WAR spring offensive had got off to a flying start."

Despite the sloganeering – inciting readers to "Join The Anarchist Mob" – the actions of '84 were all low-key events. Nevertheless, sales of the Class War paper climbed as high as ten thousand on some issues, and the group's reputation grew out of all proportion to this. The back cover of 'Angry 1', a magazine produced by a school-aged Class War supporter in Scotland, reproduced some of the media coverage:

"...a group of political nutters who preach a dangerous new creed of anarchist violence.

And they are trying to spread their evil message among striking miners, peace marchers – even school kids. They can be seen on picket lines, at CND demos and at animal rights rallies peddling a foul mouthed propaganda sheet called Class War.

It is a publication whose symbol is a skull and crossbones and whose message is murderous... it boasts "We've blocked motorways, smashed up scabs's houses and beaten up press reporters..." Class War's favourite hate targets are the meeting places of "rich scumbags".

It urges supporters to attend events like Henley Regatta and polo matches dressed in balaclavas and Doc Marten bovver boots and "make the bastards choke on their picnic hampers".

The group has already alarmed Labour supporters at a meeting addressed by Tony Benn... Last week the Labour journal Tribune appealed for information about Class War"

– From the Sunday People, cutting not dated. And:

"...Class War... Under a headline "Rich Bastards Beware", it advised readers, next time they saw a rich bastard to jostle them, gob at them, spray paint on their walls, and hang around in large enough numbers to make them feel uneasy.

"Fuck getting 250,000 people to tramp like sheep through London to listen to middle-class CND wankers like Joan Ruddock and Bruce Kent telling them to go home and do nothing. Lets just get 5,000 to turn up at Ascot... and turn our class anger loose on them... Make them afraid to go out on the streets alone, too scared to show off any signs of their wealth, make them live under siege conditions behind locked doors in their own areas and homes."

And so on, four pages of it. A clever parody? I have no idea..."

– From the Guardian, cutting not dated.

In 1985, Class War launched its "Bash The Rich" campaign. The back-page feature they devoted to promoting the first March in London also informed readers of where the idea had come from:

"The idea of bash the rich marches is nothing new. Exactly 100 years ago on April 28th 1885 they were doing exactly the same thing in Chicago... The anarchist Lucy Parsons told people who were on the verge of killing themselves to "take a few rich people with you", let their eyes be opened to what was going on "by the red glare of destruction". Anarchists would hold huge meetings attended by up to 20,000 people... The anarchists led huge marches from the working class ghettos into the rich neighbourhoods. They would gather in thousands outside restaurants or the homes of the wealthy displaying a huge banner on which was written "Behold your future executioners", the terrified rich would summon the police and huge riots would take place. The working class of Chicago were determined to take their struggle into the heart of the enemies territory – so are we, a hundred years later."

The "Bash The Rich" march of May 11th '85 was guerilla theatre worthy of the Berlin dadaists. It received a full report in the Class War paper:

"The police threatened to arrest us all under the public order act for marching in para-military uniform (balaclavas and DMs!). The police and Westminster council got Meanwhile Gardens Community Association to take out a court

injunction against us to stop us having the rally. The police did everything possible to stop the march taking place at all. But despite all this intimidation we had the biggest anarchist march for years. Over 500 of us marched to swanky Kensington chanting "rich scum" and "We'll be back" as they peered bewildered at us from behind drawn curtains. We were at last bringing the reality of rising class anger into their cosy, protected lives. It was fucking great to be on an anarchist march for once instead of tail ending along on a leftie demonstration listening to labour party speakers. As we turned into Holland Park Avenue all you could see down Ladbroke Grove were black flags. The police were gutted that they had to escort us into one of the plushiest parts of London hurling abuse at its rich inhabitants and there was fuck all that they could do about it. There was not one arrest despite the fact that the police were frothing at the mouth as we chanted "rich bastard" at another bloated example of the local vermin... Now we must prepare for the next Henley Regatta on July 6th. If we work hard we can get over a thousand people at Henley that day to make the rich bastards choke over their picnic hampers on the banks of the Thames.

FORWARD TO HENLEY."

As well as providing one of the most ludicrous sights in London for many years, the march revealed the social composition of the Class War movement. At its head were the ten or so anarchist militants – dressed in standard street clothes and with a late twenties to mid-thirties age range – who produced the Class War paper, while behind them were several hundred teenage punks.

Due to a massive police presence very little disruption was caused at Henley Regatta, but the media coverage was sufficient that Class War could hail it as a *victory* in their paper. The same could not be said of the "March On Hampstead" held on 21st September '85. The demonstrators, again consisting of approximately 500 punks and the Class War leadership, were utterly humiliated by the cops. The police, who outnumbered demonstrators by more than two to one, forced the marchers off their route and onto back streets. The march was completely halted for more than an hour, while the cops created a bottle neck at its head and forced the demonstrators closer and closer together. As a final humiliation the marchers were made to run – in single file – down two rows of uniformed cops (who taunted them with chants of "We've arrested your leaders") before being dispersed.

This failure led to considerable discussion within the group about how the campaign should be continued. The more extreme element suggested a "Bash The Rich" march through West Belfast and a "Harry Roberts Memorial March" in West London. Both proposals would have entailed serious risk. A Belfast action would have infuriated all sides participating in the civil war, and participation would have carried with it a very real threat of a serious beating, if not death. While to march in celebration of a cop-killer was an open invitation for police repression. Both options were rejected. The "Bash The Rich" campaign came to an inglorious end after a march in Bristol on November 30th '85.

As a group posing a *serious political threat*, Class War's credibility was on the point of collapse. However, *as luck would have it*, the media credited the

group with a major role in the Brixton and Tottenham riots that Autumn. In fact, the group had less than twenty London based members at this time and exerted absolutely no influence on these events – although a handful of their supporters did make it into the riot zones once the trouble had started. Despite this boost to Class War's flagging credibility, the *Islington crew* left soon afterward, leaving Ian Bone free to take charge as undisputed leader.

After this Class War lost their edge and were soon indistinguishable from any other anarchist group. Despite the media coverage, their anti-gentrification campaign in London's East End was completely ineffectual. The group tried to broaden its appeal from punks to *ordinary working class people*. The revamped "Class War" paper lacked the style of earlier issues and failed miserably in its attempts to gain a broader audience. The new look paper, with special sections devoted to 'Scandal', 'Pop', 'Sex', 'Sport', &c., came across as patronising. Meanwhile, the media ignored Class War's change of direction and continued to feature shock features about its *terrorist tactics* (see for example the article in the "News Of The World Sunday Magazine" July 5th 1987).

After the first flush of success with its agitational campaign, Class War lapsed into all the traditional errors of the anarchist milieu. Those who remained in the group had beaten themselves at their own game. Class War had manipulated the media and got the most extreme anarchist ideas across to the general public, but having done so the group rejected proposals which would present the public with something even more *disturbing*. Having found itself unwilling to organise marches in Belfast and in celebration of a cop killer, the group should have disbanded. Instead it unsuccessfully attempted to broaden its appeal – something the media was bound to inhibit, even if the group had been capable of carrying out such a project. At this point Class War abandoned the tradition I've been attempting to chronicle. The satirical rage which had animated the dadaist, situationist and punk movements, at their peak, was dropped. The *populist* approach with which it was *replaced* was often so sentimental that it made soap operas look tasteful.

1. As a tiny group, Class War realised that the best way of getting its views across to the general public was by drawing on cultural stereo-types and – once they'd been suitably altered – feeding them back into the media. For these reasons, Class War was as concerned with culture (in its broad sense) as much as politics. Inspiration was drawn chiefly from three sources – British working class culture, punk and the anarchist/left-communist tradition. Class War was designed to wind up journalists – and succeeded admirably! The tactics used were copied from punk and anarchist history. Basically, whatever the media said was evil, Class War glorified. The media portrayed the working class as violent, and so Class War – following in the footsteps of punk – exaggerated this image (albeit with the qualification that this violence was always directed against the cops or the rich). Media coverage of both punk and Class War focused on their abusive attitude towards the rich and the establishment (particularly the royal family). When Class War issued their "Better Dead Than Wed" EP (Mortarhate Records, London 1986) to mark the wedding of Prince Andrew, it was like the Sex Pistols anti-Jubilee record all over again (except of course that Class

War's brand of proletarian entertainment wasn't as popular as punk). It's also interesting to note that the Dutch Provo action which received the most media coverage was their 1966 smoke bomb attack on a Dutch royal wedding procession.

Both punk and Class War emphasised energy and aggression as virtues of *straight-forward* working class culture. This was contrasted to the polite backstabbing of the middle and upper classes, who said one thing and invariably meant another. Of all the tendencies dealt with in this text, punk and Class War made the broadest assault on culture. Other movements have tended to aim their invective against high culture (art), or put their energy into the creation of *alternative* (often meaning parallel) – and hence less directly threatening – lifestyles (communes &c.). Very few movements have had a (*working class*) culture as fully articulated and consciously oppositional as that of punk and Class War.

CONCLUSION

Lacking the patience, time and a suitable temperament to do more than offer a summary of what an orthodox *scholar* could spend a lifetime researching, I cannot pretend to have produced a definitive history. However, the sketch I have presented should prove sufficient to convince even the most cynical observer that there is a tradition that runs from futurism to Class War, and that from Lettrisme onwards it has – to date – remained (in English at least) largely unwritten. This *discourse* is a form of politico-cultural agitation and protest – and if a term is required to describe it, the word samizdat is more suitable than any of the *conventional* names. It is a dissident tradition, concerned with self-organisation, its adherents often carrying out actions and simultaneously documenting them. The vast majority of its texts are self-published, as are many of the commentaries on the individual movements that make up this lineage.

However, Samizdat – when one applies the term in a context wider than the *original* Russian *meaning* – is far more than self-publishing. As a tradition it is by necessity collective. Politically, it usually takes the guise of anti-bolshevik communism – although a minority of its partisans have adhered to Trotskyism, fascism, and even Stalinism. Since it is not – strictly speaking – a *political* tradition, its *ideological* base is not always explicit. However, since in most manifestations it emphasises collective action, there is

an implicit socialism.

Virtually all those involved with samizdat since 1945 have been aware of futurism and dada as precursors to their own activities. For example, Gordon W. Zealot in "Neoism Om Taka Taka" (Computer Graphic Conspiracy, Montreal 1986) wrote the following:

"I was a pilgrim in the parched bleakness of official culture, the bankrupt paucity, the de-colapso (sic) of organized art. I was kicked out of school at 15 yrs for reciting Tristan Tzara's poetry at the parent-teacher night at our art school. My assistant threw buckets of wet cooked spaghetti on the guests and teachers and we chopped up the stage with axes."

While Guy Debord wrote in "Society Of The Spectacle":

"Dadaism and surrealism are the two currents which could mark the end of modern art. Though only in a relatively conscious manner, they are contemporaries of the last great assault of the revolutionary proletarian movement; and the defeat of this movement, which left them imprisoned in the same artistic field whose decay they had announced, is the basic reason for their immobilization. Dadaism and surrealism are at once historically related and opposed. This opposition, which constitutes the most important and radical part of the contribution of each, reveals the internal inadequacy of their critique, developed one-sidedly by each. Dadaism wanted to *suppress art without realizing it*; surrealism wanted to *realize art without suppressing it*. The critical position later elaborated by the *situationists* has shown that the suppression and the realization of art are inseparable aspects of the same *overcoming of art*."

While all the samizdat traditions from Lettrisme onwards recognise the importance of futurism, dadaism and – to a far lesser extent – surrealism, the use each of these later tendencies make of *their* precursors vary; although all ultimately use such history as a justification of their own position. While these *early* developments have been subject to varied interpretations and their historicisation has tended to take the form of blatant misrepresentation, at least the lies and distortions made about them are not as great as those made about the tendencies that emerged after 1945. *Spectro-situationism*, in particular, has been subject to distortion by its participants and followers. In the English speaking world, only the *political* texts of the situationist movement have been translated and published by the movement's followers. Thus it is possible for a *pro-situ* such as Larry Law to make the following claims in his pamphlet "Buffo!" (Spectacular Times, London 1984):

"In 1958 in Italy, Situationist International member Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio exhibited the first examples of 'industrial painting'. A machine spoldged paint as the canvas was fed through from a large roll. A leaflet by Michele Bernstein read: "Among the advantages... no more problems with format, the canvas being cut under the eyes of the satisfied customer; no more uncreative periods, the inspiration behind industrial painting, thanks to a well contrived balance of chance and machinery, never drying up, no more metaphysical themes, machines aren't up to them; no more dubious reproductions of the Masters; no

more vernissages. And naturally, very soon, no more painters, not even in Italy”.

Despite their great difficulty in keeping a straight face, the perpetrators exhibited and sold ‘industrial painting’ in Turin, Milan and Venice.”

As we have seen, Gallizio and the SI were serious about industrial painting (IP) as a subversive force; and the term was used to describe the volume in which it was produced rather than the method of production. IP was created using traditional craft methods, and there were never any machines that splodged paint onto canvas – despite Law’s fantasies.

Samizdat movements, being Utopian, seek to intervene in all areas of life. However, the anti-professionalism of samizdat biases it in favour of cultural and political activities and away from *serious* scientific investigation. Since western society encourages specialisation, once any given samizdat movement loses its dynamism it tends to be pushed into a single arena of contestation. Thus when the Situationist International split into two rival factions in 1962, one faction became known as *artists* and the other as political *theorists*.

Although in most cases samizdat movements tend to be most dynamic in their early period, this is not always the case. Neoism, for example, consisted of little more than juvenile pranks until the Montreal group was augmented by groups and individuals in other parts of North America – and later Europe. However, this is an exception, and it is unfortunate that many samizdat movements did not call it a day long before their final disintegration.

Samizdat adherents find a sense of *identity* in their *opposition* to what is considered conventional by Western society. Shock tactics are often employed to help maintain a sense of differentiation. If similar tactics are repeated too often they soon lose their impact. Iconoclasm has, by its very nature, a limited life-span. A movement such as fluxus would be far more *satisfactory* if it had disbanded in 1966.

Samizdat is *riddled* with contradictions. However, this does not prevent the listing (as has been done in the introduction) of certain key characteristics. Despite being a sensibility, it is possible to give a *meaningful* description of samizdat to *sympathetic observers* who have had no *personal* involvement with the tradition. Even those who place themselves in opposition to the samizdat tradition are made aware – usually to their distaste – of certain cognitive and physical possibilities, upon coming into contact (either first-hand or through media reports) with the actions of those who adhere to this *brand of madness*.

To make the task of documenting a part of its history easier, I have not dealt with the relationship of *terrorist* groups (such as the Angry Brigade) to the samizdat tradition.⁽¹⁾ I have also *failed* to deal with certain seminal contributions (such as Valerie Solanas’s “S.C.U.M. Manifesto”)⁽²⁾, or to resolve all the contradictions regarding the treatment of *art* and *politics* as *discourses* that samizdat *opposes*. These *omissions* can be dealt with at a later date.

Samizdat is a living tradition. As long as the present society persists there

will be opposition to it. Any *individual* movement that attempts to locate itself *a priori* at the beginning or end of this tradition is not worthy of a place within it. The *construction* of this particular *history* does not mark the end of samizdat as a tradition. New movements will emerge and obviously I am – as yet – in no position to document them.

I hope the *successes* of *samizdat* are more than sufficient proof that cultural, as well as *political*, agitation is required if *radical* ideas are to have any impact on the repulsive society in which we live. This cultural agitation does not attempt to hide its propagandist purposes behind a charade of *universal meanings*. As a result, I don't expect single strands of it to *speak* to even a majority of the population at any given time. Everyone likes entertainment that *panders* to their own particular ideological beliefs, samizdat speaks to those who want it – and negatively to those who don't. Considering that the mental sets of the ruling class are imposed on the general population through the education system and the mass media, samizdat is remarkably successful.

1. I have also tended to ignore geographical differences and have over-emphasised the various movements' similarities. For example, Lettrisme and specto-situationist *theory* are very obviously a product of french culture (in the broadest sense of the term), whereas punk and Class War are just as obviously British in origin. Similarly, specto-situationist *theory*, with its implicit belief that capitalism has overcome its economic contradictions, is clearly a product of the fifties and sixties – when the world economy was expanding rather than depressed. I have not dealt with the geographical and time specificity of these movements to any great degree, so that I could shorten and *simplify* my argument.

2. Ignorance of ultra-feminism forces me to refrain from speculating about the place of Solanas's text within the *samizdat* tradition. It seems wrong to divorce it from the milieu within which it emerged, and then simply slot it in with other material to which I feel it has a *conceptual affinity*. Similarly, I have not written about Japanese phenomena such as Gutai, because I simply don't have enough information with which to judge whether they form a part of the tradition I am writing about.

AFTERWORD

Although this text has been an attempt to take an *objective* view of a *dissident tradition*, the author has not entirely shed his subjective biases. He has failed to make any proper distinction between an 'ism', a 'movement', a 'sensitivity' and a 'tradition'. In this Afterword, he will attempt to define these terms. He has chosen not to apply the resulting definitions back onto the main body of the text; preferring to view it as a record of a specific stage in the development of his thought, rather than something which can be definitively completed.

"Movement" has military connotations and implies a mass of *adherents*. For something to merit the title 'movement' it would seem to require several thousand *participants* at the very least. The majority of the *dissident clusters* described in this text can more accurately be labelled 'groups' than 'movements'. Among the *tendencies* described, only the Sixties Underground taken as a *whole*, Mail Art and Punk, can *objectively* be viewed as constituting 'movements' in their own right. The appellation of the term 'movement' to what – *in reality* – are only 'groups', serves to lend them an appearance of importance which they do not actually possess.

An 'ism' is an *indistinct* body of beliefs which are consciously ascribed as belonging to a particular *group of individuals*, by *persons* who may or may not belong to the group in question. Whether or not the *individuals* identified as being clustered around an 'ism' *like* their *belief systems* being categorised in such a manner is irrelevant. 'Isms' are *emotional categorisations* and close

examination often reveals them to be *intellectually incoherent*.

A 'sensitivity' is the conscious attribution of an open and indefinable set of beliefs to an *individual* or *group of individuals*. It is an emotional categorisation, in some ways similar to an 'ism', but with far more positive connotations.

A 'tradition' is a set of beliefs or customs handed down from generation to generation, usually in the form of specific practices and/or an oral discourse. The set of beliefs dealt with in this text are on the borderline between being a contemporary practice and emerging as a newly founded tradition. The practices labelled as Samizdat in this text are no more than a hundred years old and so to describe them as a 'tradition' is to fall prey to *romanticism*, if not inaccuracy.

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