Nathaniel Peterkin

Using Situationist Theory to Identify the Fantasy Trap of Dead Art (an Outdated Mode for an Outdated Age), How to Avoid It, and the Merger of Life and Art

Abstract

In this essay, I have researched the artistic and political philosophy of the Situationist International – a revolutionary movement that has made a great impact on contemporary culture. Using the foundation of this research, I have then built on it with my own hypotheses and speculations on the meaning of art as we know it – questioning what defines true creativity and "authentic experience". I then draw conclusions as to the successes and failures of the Situationist International, what we can learn from them, and, along with the concepts I developed during the essay, how we can use the positive aspects of their work to contribute to our own "self-theory" and artistic approach.

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Using Situationist Theory to Identify the Fantasy Trap of Dead Art (an Outdated Mode for an Outdated Age), How to Avoid It, and the Merger of Life and Art

Introduction

In this essay, I will examine the basics of situationist[*] theory – a combination of philosophy, politics and art. Using this theory as a foundation, I will go on to speculate on its relevance to the way we view creativity and its role in our lives.

In the first chapter I will look into the Situationist International's (SI) two most influential artistic concepts: détournement (the practice of appropriating images and text and combining them in a way that subverts their original meaning), and psychogeography (the practice of map making based on intellectual and emotional experience; the research for such pieces usually being gathered on dérives). Both of these concepts were groundbreaking, and encouraged artists to question the thought and purpose behind their practice. These techniques were intended to invoke a more personally, intelligently immersed frame of mind.

In the second chapter I will discuss their belief in art's necessity to be political statement, and reference the attempted French Revolution of May 1968 that they heavily influenced. I will consider the philosophy that led them to their revolutionary stance, and formulate my own theory – that of the Fantasy Trap – in relation to it. The Fantasy Trap will attempt to explain the need for creativity to find new articulations that ascend the traditional, stagnant conception of art as we know it today. I hope that my theory will both help to explain Situationist philosophy, and build on it from my own perspective.

In chapter three I will go on to look at the SI's proposed merger of life and art – the "death of art" (in a positive sense). I will reflect on whether it's a tangible

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[*] Please note that the word situationist is not supposed to be capitalised, except for when used in the title Situationist International. SI theory also referred to the Spectacle in lower case, but I have made the editorial decision to capitalise it so the reader can clearly understand when I am referring to *the* Spectacle (as an SI term), as opposed to *a* spectacle, as the word is usually understood.

goal in the current state of society, or whether it may still be too far ahead of its time to be considered immediately feasible. I will explain how bringing together all forms of creative practice is a step toward bringing artistry out of fantasy and into the realm of day-to-day life. Having discussed these issues and their as yet unresolved nature, I will talk about a few examples of the legacy of situationist theory, positive and negative. This will include artists and musicians who have followed related approaches in their attempts to blend various creative platforms, and artists that have acted on behalf of spectacular media to nullify situationist techniques, by turning them into intellectually emptied merchandise. These examples should help establish some perspective on what progress came out of Situationist theory, what went wrong, and how we can learn from, and continue building on it today. Were they successful in finding ways to bring us closer to true artistic realisation?

To conclude, I will evaluate my interpretations of the research I have collected, and the theories I have developed while reflecting on it. I will compare the various conclusions drawn throughout the essay and arrange them into what I hope to be a concise summary. This summary will also serve as a demonstration of my own philosophical development – highlighting what I believe to be useful points and strategies to keep in mind in the context of my own creative, and general, practical methodologies.

Chapter 1: Tools Against Trade

As a preliminary note to this chapter, I should mention that the SI were opposed to the concept of "situationist art" - a decision made at the fifth SI conference in Göteborg, 1962:

> While various confused artists nostalgic for a positive art call themselves situationist, *antisituationist* art will be the mark of the best artists, those of the SI, since genuinely situationist conditions have as yet not at all been created. Admitting this is the mark of a situationist. (Knabb, 2006, p.116)

However, for the sake of simplicity, I will refer to artworks made by SI members as situationist in this essay. The logic behind the incompatibili.ty of art with "situationist conditions" will be explored in the course of the text.

Part 1: détournement

The situationist phrase "détournement" diverts the original meaning of the French word (which itself translates roughly to "diversion" in English) to its own, more specific purpose: "The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu." (Knabb, 2006, p.52) Détournement of this kind was first announced in publication by its creator, Guy Debord, in *Les Lèvres Nues #8* in May 1956, while he was still part of the Letterist International (A movement which predated the SI; in 1957 the remaining Letterists fused with the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus and the London Psychogeographical Association, forming the SI). In the article *A User's Guide to Détournement*, Debord explains its different forms:

> Minor détournement is the détournement of an element which has no importance in itself and which thus draws all its meaning from the new context in which it has been placed. For example, a press clipping, a neutral phrase, a commonplace photograph.

> Deceptive détournement, also termed premonitory-proposition détournement, is in contrast the détournement of an intrinsically significant element, which derives a different scope from the new context. A slogan of Saint-Just, for example, or a film sequence from Eisenstein.

> Extensive detourned works will thus usually be composed of one or more series of deceptive and minor détournements. (Debord, 1956)

In this explanation it seems that "minor détournement" is essentially the same as basic collage; it aims to combine individually neutral elements in order to create a new, meaningful whole. "Deceptive détournement" is a more *subversive* idea, as it combines active elements (ones that already contain a message) in order to change/undermine their original meaning or usage. Deceptive détournement therefore lends itself very well to cultural critique and is naturally (perhaps unavoidably) a political praxis. For this reason – its potential to deliver powerful messages in a cunning way - deceptive détournement became a very alluring tool to conceptual artists the world over; some examples of whom will be mentioned in part 3 of this chapter.

<u>Part 2: psychogeography</u>

The term "psychogeography" was coined by Debord, but the concept was not of his own invention. The psychogeographical concept (as developed by the Letterists and the SI) was created by Ivan Chtcheglov in his essay *Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau* (which translates to *Formulary for a New Urbanism*), first published in 1953. The essay proposed the creation of an "experimental city", in which inhabitants would live by wandering through a series of districts, each of which were architecturally tailored to create specific moods and serve different purposes (e.g. Bizarre Quarter, Happy Quarter, Historical Quarter, Sinister Quarter). The proposal of this city was a creative criticism of the dehumanising 20th century urban sprawl, and a claim that social development had fallen behind that of technology – "Our imaginations, haunted by the old

archetypes, have remained far behind the sophistication of the machines."
(Chtcheglov, 1953)

Chtcheglov's hope for a New Urbanism brought together the artistic/political
slant of the Letterists with Charles Baudelaire's older idea of the flâneur: a
stroller who would wander randomly in order to observe the city around him
and experience the atmosphere of the journey – treating society as his own
personal theatre, so to speak. The letterist/situationist "dérive" was closely
based on the activities of the flâneur – as is evidenced by the article *Theory of the
Dérive* (published in *Internationale Situationniste #2*), that defines the dérive as:

> … a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiences. Dérives involve
> playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical
> effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or
> stroll. (Debord, 1958)

The birth of Chtcheglov's psychogeography was also influenced by art. Two
interesting examples mentioned in his *Formulary* were Claude Lorrain and
Giorgio de Chirico. Lorrain's paintings depicted imaginary scenes of
"unaccustomed architectural space" which aroused the feeling of a "perpetual
invitation to voyage" (Chtcheglov, 1953) being extended to the viewer. (see fig.1)

(fig. 1) Lorrain, Claude. (1637-39) *Embarkation of St. Paula Romana at Ostia*. [Painting]

Chtcheglov hailed De Chirico as an "architectural precursor", and believed that his paintings (which experimented with our perception of space and physical possibility) should have been used as "blueprints" for future architecture. (see fig. 2) Raoul Vaneigem (another SI member), too, hails the prophetic potential of de Chirico's paintings in his book *The Revolution of Everyday Life*:

> … Chirico gives us paintings in which absence is evoked solely as a means of intimating what lies beyond it – namely, the poetry of reality and the

realisation of art, of philosophy, of man. As the sign of a reified world, the blank space is incorporated into the canvas at the crucial spot; the implication is that the countenance is no longer part of the representational universe, but is about to become part of everyday praxis. (Vaneigem, 1967, p.146)


(fig. 2) De Chirico, Giorgio. (1914) *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street.* [Painting]

With the role art played in inspiring the development of psychogeography, it is not surprising that the natural progression of its theory led to the expansion into artwork on the part of the Letterists and SI, some examples of which will be examined in part 3.

<div align="center">Part 3: examples</div>

Probably the earliest, and one of the most striking, works of minor détournement is the book (or "anti-book", as Debord labeled it; it was even bound with a sandpaper cover in order to destroy other books it was put on a shelf with) *Mémoires*: a collaboration between Debord and the painter Asger Jorn – a fellow member of the SI – in 1957. The entire textual body of the book is composed of "détourned" material from newspapers, books, magazines etc. Every page is a collage of Debord's clippings in conjunction with abstract shapes and textures painted by Jorn: an energetic visual combination that literally "maps out" an abstract, cryptic anti-narrative. *Mémoires* incorporates psychogeography along with détournement; the landscape presented to the viewer by each double-page spread draws them into a subconscious psychogeographical journey. (see fig. 3) Different colours, angles, counterbalances between text and image: every visual element of the page affects your instinctive emotional response as you follow the erratic lines of collage-script through their turbulent visual environments. "The combination of Jorn's lines and Debord's collages creates a kind of hybrid between the strategies of *détournement* and *dérive*, thus approaching culture as a *dérive* over the face of the spectacle itself." (Banash, 2000)
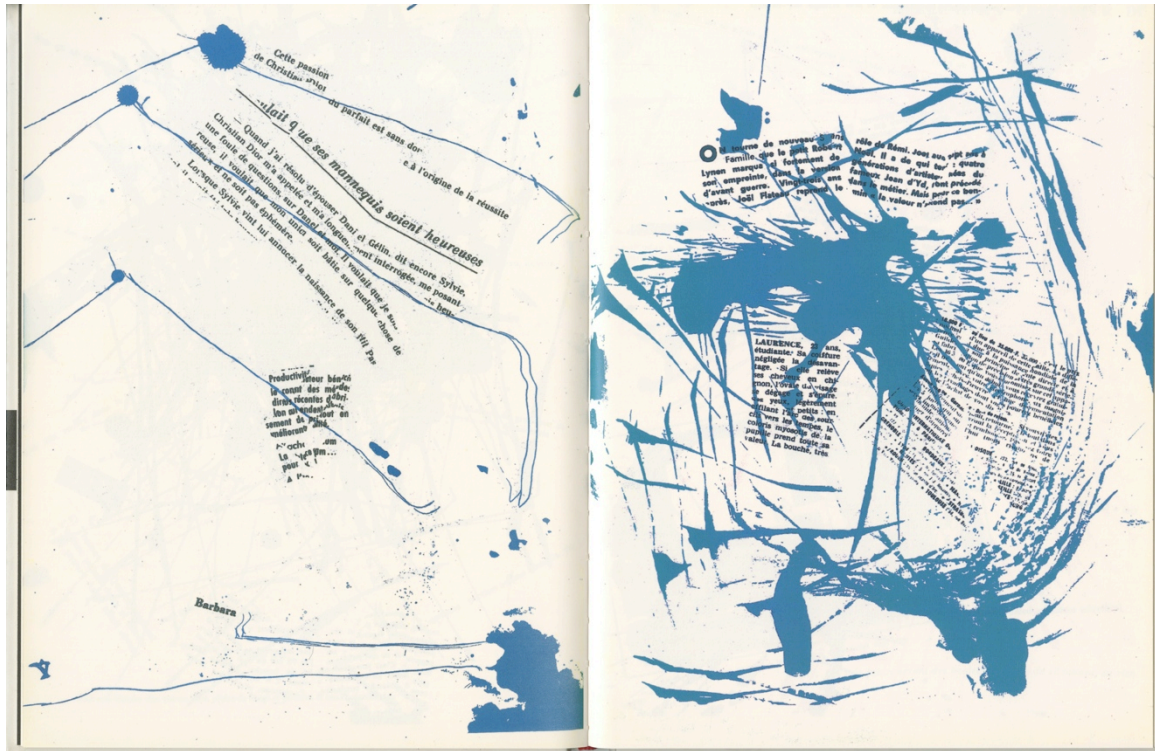
(fig. 3) Debord, Guy. (2004) *Mémoires.* France: Allia.

Mémoires is technically an illustrated book, but is also a unique artwork due to the thought behind its execution. Was Jorn acting as a book illustrator for this project, or was he a collaborating fine artist producing an "art object"? Or, perhaps he was both? This question makes *Mémoires* highly relevant to this essay's "illustration" roots, as it destabilises the strong stereotypical socioeconomic barrier between illustration and "fine" or "high" art in western culture: calling in to question whether illustration cannot also be "fine art" (or vice versa)?

Another work by Jorn, and one of my personal favourites, is *Le Canard Inquiétant* (English: *The Worrying Duck*). This painting is an example of deceptive détournement in that it utilises a purposeful clash of artistic disciplines. Jorn took a painting by an anonymous artist (a traditional, realistic landscape) and "modified" it, adding a huge and comical multi-coloured duck to the scene. (see fig. 4) The duck completely shatters any suspension of disbelief the original picturesque image may have conjured, but at the same time feels more "alive" than the attempted "realism" of its host scenery. The raw energy and sense of

play in Jorn's explosive approach to the canvas highlights the strength of artistry when free of stylistic self-consciousness. This unrestrained approach was greatly inspired by children's drawings; some of the reasoning behind which is explained in this passage by Karel Appel – one of the co-founders of the 1949 art movement "CoBrA" (which stands for Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam – the cities from which all the members were based) along with Jorn:

> The child in man is all that's strongest, most receptive, most open and most unpredictable. 'Adult' means 'controlled'. A child lives spontaneously; he's not aware of his talent; he looks at everything as though he were seeing it for the first time. (Appel, 1986, p.18)

To me, the duck exposes the stale, conservative nature of realist painting, and I believe this is exactly what Jorn intended.

(fig. 4) Jorn, Asger. (1959) *Le Canard Inquiétant*. [Painting]

The Worrying Duck was an attack on the values upheld by the elitist bourgeois art scene of the time, which valued only established visual styles and was resistant to "fresh" content. It was a statement that art should be practiced for enjoyment and freedom of expression rather than "cultural capital". For artists to work with the motivation of social/economic acceptance as a driving force as opposed to personal pleasure or self-realisation is effectively a poison for creative thought; or, as Raoul Vaneigem concisely phrases it: " The obligation to produce alienates the passion for creation". (Vaneigem, 1967, p.52)

This image, as did *Mémoires*, blurs the boundary between what is illustration and what is fine art: although it was presented in a purely fine art context (gallery exhibition), the piece is very literally an illustrative response/addition to a previous painting. The piece could be described as a one-sided collaboration, illustrating the original artist's work without their permission - a détournement of collaboration itself.

Probably the most iconic example of early psychogeographical artwork is *The Naked City* by Debord. (see fig. 5) In this reworking of a map of Paris, his intention was to depict the results of dérives he had taken around the city. The arrangement of arrows connecting specific areas in specific sequences represents the natural attractions and repulsions he experienced while walking, and illustrates the innate "flow" of the journeys (much like the way arrows are used to depict winds and oceanic currents on weather maps).

(fig. 5) Debord, Guy. (1957) *The Naked City.* [Collage]

Since *The Naked City* and other similarly détourned maps of around the same time, this aesthetic has become a widely recognised "trademark" of psychogeographical imagery. In an example of the work's lasting symbolic resonance, the 1997-2002 band Orchid (who I will mention again later in this essay) used The Naked City on the cover design of their album *Dance Tonight! Revolution Tomorrow!* (see fig. 6) as homage to situationist theory as one of their influences – over four decades after it was first exhibited.

(fig. 6) Orchid. (2000) *Dance Tonight! Revolution Tomorrow!* [CD album cover]

What is clearest to me, having examined just a few examples of situationist art, is its very *lack* of categorical clarity. These works all equally reject passive roles as commodities: they challenge subconscious ideological accession to systemic norms by proposing new meanings and contexts for creativity (and decrying what the SI believed to be "false" art due to its unwitting obeisance to the silent demands intrinsic to hierarchical culture – the painting that fell victim to Jorn's *Duck*, for example). "Propose and expose", is perhaps a fitting summary of this process.

The intellectual agenda of the SI was aggressive, but I believe it was, at least in part, a positive aggression. Its intention was not to undermine "society" as a concept, but rather to shake people out of their comatose state of unquestioning acceptance and remind them that all perceptions of social reality are just that – perceptions. Their artwork was part of the same dialectic as their theory; they

did not perceive either as separate entities, but as elements of the same, fluid whole.

Chapter 2: Art as Politics

In this chapter, I will touch on the SI's use of art as politics in order to preface the more comprehensive proposal of art as life/life as art, which will be explored in chapter 3. This should give the theory some foundation (e.g. historical context, and further information on situationist political philosophy) for me to subsequently build on with my own observations.

Part 1: Attacking the Lens of Ideology

One reason for the SI's revolutionary stance was the aforementioned belief that all forms of creativity should be one (interwoven) with everyday life. The very existence of capitalist society was therefore offensive to them on a moral level: as a breach of ethics in its obstruction of a fundamental human right. Their aggression was born of a passion for life; they saw "capitalist realism" as an affront to "truly lived" (or "authentic") experience - the Spectacle as a prison confining us to survival devoid of life. (The SI's definition of the Spectacle was, to put it briefly, a mediation of life through images and representations of life.)

A brief digression is necessary here: I'm aware that "capitalist realism" is a slippery term with myriad interpretations, so for the purpose of my writing I'll adhere to the definition formulated by modern philosopher Slavoj Žižek in his book *Violence*:

> … 'reality' is the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive process, while the Real is the inexorable 'abstract', spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social reality. (Žižek, 2009, p.11)
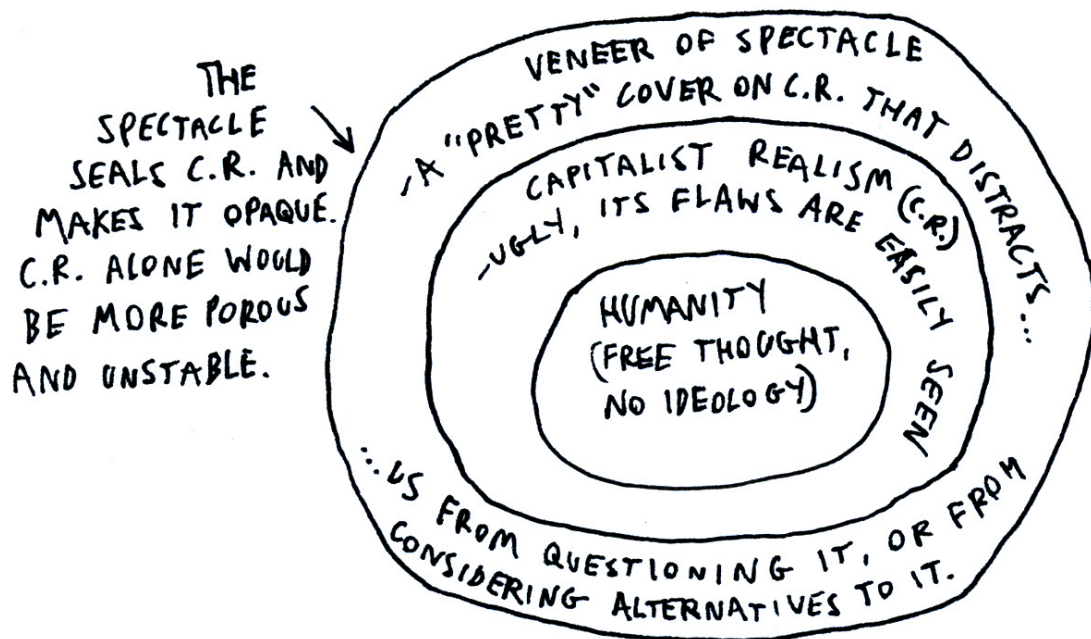
To clarify with a brief example, he notes that we can experience the gap between physical reality and capitalist realism by the way a "country where life is obviously in shambles" can simultaneously be "financially sound"; its economic welfare overriding that of its citizens - "reality doesn't matter, what matters is the situation of capital…" (Žižek, 2009, p.11) The book *Beyond Capitalism?* reinforces Žižek's definition - stating that "if a system can create the impression it is timeless, if it can appear as natural, then it can also appear to be indestructible." (Cooper & Hardy, 2012, p.25). This alludes to the fact that we have a *conditioned sense of time*; we learn everything we know of history on the terms of the current hegemony, and our predictions of the future are moulded by our social experiences and education within it. With this engrained bias, we feel it is *natural* to resign to the feeling that the current power structure is "just the way things are", despite the obvious incompatibility of economic with social wellbeing. The illusion that capitalism is natural shows that we are seeing the world through a lens of capitalist realism.

So (in return), it was an essential goal of the SI to firstly expose, and subsequently supersede capitalist realism in their own minds and the minds of those around them before it was possible to make any practical change to civilisation (an inversion of the "expose and propose" order in chapter 1 - perhaps the cycle is something like: pre-situationist perceives capitalist realism; analyses and internally supersedes it, becoming a situationist; creates artwork externalising their findings and new proposals; artwork acts to expose capitalist realism to new observers who then follow the same path, perpetuating the cycle. Thus, the order of proposal and exposure becomes a "chicken or egg?" question). Capitalist realism was (and is) an ideology that the majority of people in Western culture possess – and the fact that we don't consciously acknowledge it is a testament to how deeply engraved upon our worldview it is (a topic discussed at length in Žižek's *Violence*). The SI recognised this entrenched subconscious ideology, and so their initiative was to make it conscious. Once extracted from subjectivity (like a tinted lens from a camera), it can be viewed with rational objectivity as a convoluted, amoral and outdated ideology.

With this ideological transcendence in mind, the SI committed itself to abrade the varnish of Spectacle, which seals away the true humanity lying dormant within the capitalist realist surface of culture. "Varnish", here, is not another synonym for subjectivity/lens: the Spectacle and capitalist realism are not exactly the same thing. The Spectacle is a modern layer of capitalist realism; the polish on the lens that complements and completes it as a whole ideology. I have sketched a diagram to help illustrate this dynamic (see fig. 7):

THE SPECTACLE SEALS C.R. AND MAKES IT OPAQUE. C.R. ALONE WOULD BE MORE POROUS AND UNSTABLE.

VENEER OF SPECTACLE

A "PRETTY" COVER ON C.R. THAT DISTRACTS...

CAPITALIST REALISM (C.R.)

UGLY, ITS FLAWS ARE EASILY SEEN

HUMANITY (FREE THOUGHT, NO IDEOLOGY)

...US FROM QUESTIONING IT, OR FROM CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVES TO IT.

(fig. 7)

The sandpaper cover of *Mémoires* was a literal metaphor for theoretical abrasion: its intent to destroy older books symbolising the need for a reevaluation of thought. The slogan "Beneath the paving stones, the beach!" (Viénet, 1992, p.80) spray-painted around Paris in May 1968 (the time of civil unrest) was a similar metaphor, calling for this Spectacle-varnish to be cracked open to reveal the authenticity beneath.

May 1968 was a key time for the SI – the moment in history that brought them the majority of their fame/infamy. I will only skim over these events, however, as they are a large and complex area to cover; my focus is on the SI's role as opposed to historical documentation (I recommend René Viénet's *Enragés and*

Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May '68 for a detailed history). In short, the Events were a rapid series of mass student-led occupations and workers' strikes across France, initiated by the wide dissemination of situationist theory in a 1966 pamphlet the SI (mainly member Mustapha Khayati) collaboratively published with students of the Strasbourg University called *On the Poverty of Student Life*[*]*.* The pamphlet brought situationist cultural criticism the level of publicity it needed to ignite national opposition to spectacular capitalist society.

The SI encouraged the protests in the way they knew best: the publication of as much writing as possible, and also participated in occupations. An occupied art school, naming itself "Atelier Populaire" (Popular Workshop), produced large numbers of silkscreened posters that visually articulated SI ideas. One striking design (see fig. 8) depicted a flock of sheep following the command "Retour a la Normale…" ("Return to Normal…") – implying that the desire for normality is born of cultural conditioning; to follow it is to obey self-appointed shepherds (e.g. media, governments, cliques) as opposed to your own *actual* desire. What we mistake for the *desire* to "fit in" is actually our *fear* of ostracism; if you don't follow the flock, you will be left behind, alone. It is therefore a negative desire; which infers that "normality" is a negative state - of intellectual apathy, and of forgoing self-realisation. In reference to the beginning of this subchapter: "Learning to live is not the same thing as learning to survive" (Vaneigem, 1967, p.7) – normality being survival, and self-realisation, life.

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[*] The pamphlet's full title was *On the Poverty of Student Life:*
Considered in Its Economic, Political, Psychological, Sexual, and Especially Intellectual Aspects, With a Modest Proposal for Doing Away With It. It can also be read in Ken Knabb's *Situationist International Anthology.*
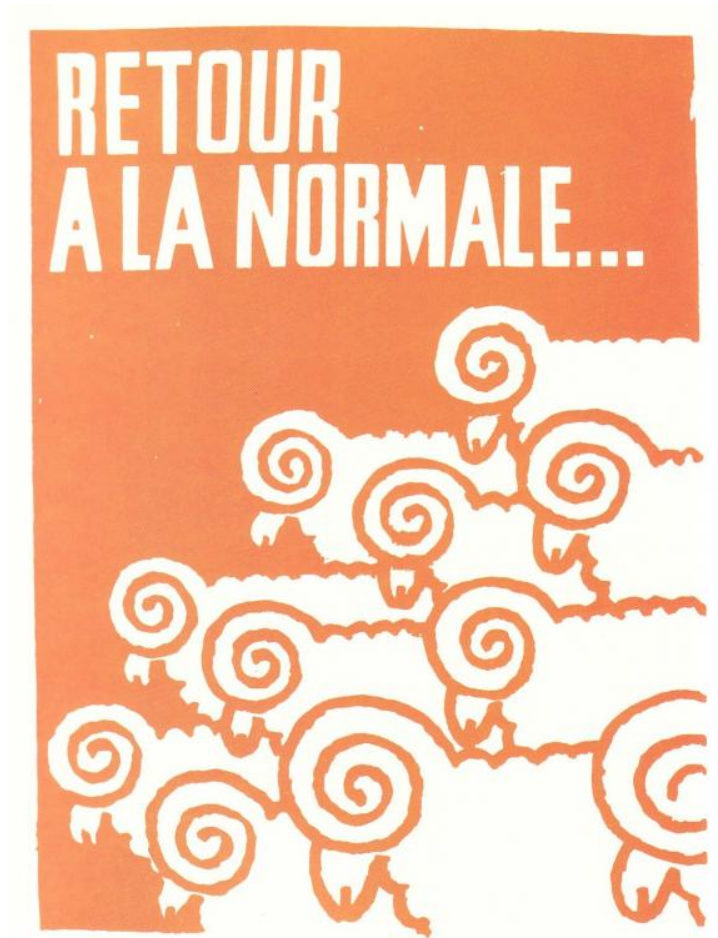
(fig. 8) Atelier Populaire (no author). (1968) *Retour a la Normale…* [Silkscreened poster]

Another powerful poster (see fig. 9) showed a city of TV aerials with the message "L'intox Vient a Domicile." ("Poison Coming to your Home"). The aerials were all in the shape of the Lorraine Cross: symbolising Charles De Gaulle's (President of the French Republic, 1958-1969) government, due to his founding the Free French Forces in WWII that used the cross on their flag. Using this imagery, the poster not only implies that television is poison, but explains this by further implying it is a tool of government propaganda. It can also be read that the government's control of TV is militaristic, judging by the Cross's association with war. The poster's general implication, then, was that TV (as a token of media in general) is simply a tool of oppressive state control.
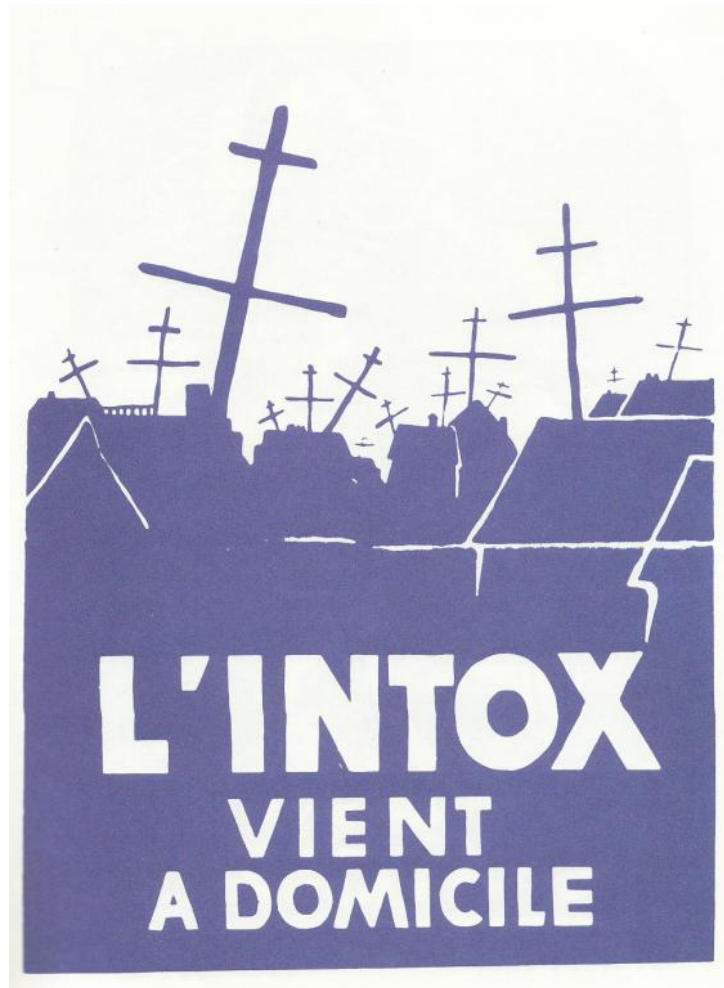
(fig. 9) Atelier Populaire (no author). (1968) *L'intox Vient a Domicile.* [Silkscreened poster]

The purpose of both these posters (and most others by Atelier Populaire) was to bring the Spectacle under public scrutiny: to prise capitalist realism (raw and vulnerable without its veil/sealant) out of the subconscious and hence open the floodgates of public imagination. Simply by becoming aware of the ideology, a person takes the biggest step necessary toward losing it – when it is no longer subconscious, they are aware of its presence and therefore able to question its compulsions as opposed to heedlessly abiding by them.

So, the SI fought against *systemic violence* (indirect violence that is allowed and intrinsic in our culture: unfair and cruel conditions that generate negative energy, which inevitably vents itself in crimes etc. Systemic violence can be observed everywhere, even in language itself – take the word branding for example: a literal metaphor for cattle branding – having companies' ideologies forcefully

burnt into your subconscious) as opposed to subjective (subjective violence is a scandalous taboo, and is sensationalised by the media in order to distract consumers from the entirely legal systemic violence that generated it); unlike the fruitless riots that we see most commonly.

A demonstration of which was London 2011 (borrowing an example used in *The Perverts' Guide to Ideology*). The London pseudo-dissidents' discontent-fuelled rampage (though triggered by an incident of police brutality) was undirected because they didn't understand the underling source of their own anger; it was a reaction to their subjective problems (e.g. poverty) within the capitalist realist ideology. The worst crimes they could conceive were taking or breaking objects without paying for them. This made them *perpetrators* (as they understood their own acts as crimes) rather than participants (challenging crime's definition). As a result, all their actions achieved was to give the government and the press a new excuse to scapegoat the working class further.

This goes to show that the real power lies with intellect – "revolution" is simply empty violence-within-violence if those involved are starved of meaning. The act of subjective civil disobedience is desperate catharsis – a loss of composure in the face of a system that is seemingly insurmountable. In this context, rebellion is actually a sign of the rebels' resignation to oppression – they have already decided that there is no way out, so they turn to self-destruction and self-alienation in their despair because they see no alternative. They no longer care about personal consequences because they no longer value life.

Still, despite May 1968's incisive effects, in the end the protesters were quashed by military force, the bribe of pay rises and ultimately a lack of organisation. It seems that the Spectacle's roots were too firm to be ousted by this first attempt to raise awareness. Conditioning's hold is great, and it's hard to dive headfirst into a new life with no certain future when there's a functioning system already in place (knowing it works encourages us to overlook whether or not it works *well*, for the sake of comfort/security).

But, importantly, we can learn from 1968 that the SI was most effective not by fighting, but by inspiring - with new ideas and dialectics that helped people think independently of their cultural context. Furthermore, we can conclude that the combination art, philosophy and action raised their work to its most potent, consolidated level. The SI ultimately decided that in a non-situationist world, their strongest weapon was theory in this amalgamated form - lateral thinking to find subversive outlets for their still-repressed creativity, that would serve to continue undermining capitalism in the struggle toward realisation of a world in which they felt they could *truly* participate. (This explains the quote about "antisituationist art" at the beginning of chapter 1)

Before ending this chapter, I will present a theory I have developed in support of this proposed necessity for the transcendence of art (in its current form), which should reinforce the conclusion that closing the gap between praxes is a necessary step on the way to closing the gap between art and life.

Part 2: The Fantasy Trap

In *The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art*, Debord advocated the necessity for a confluence of the two:

> For us, and for anyone who has begun to see this era in a disabused manner, there is no longer any modern art, just as there has been no constituted revolutionary politics anywhere in the world since the end of the 1930s. They can now be revived only by being *superseded,* that is to say, through the fulfillment of their most profound objectives. (Debord, 1963)

He then describes the form these "actions" will take: "They can be recognized by the fact that they concentrate in themselves new forms of struggle and a new content (whether latent or explicit): the critique of the existing world." (Debord, 1963). From this we can read the argument that in order to be of any validity, an artists' aim should be to combine theory with practice in order to give their work

a real-world application. An argument which, when phrased this way, may sound obvious – but was nevertheless an integral aspect of all the pieces mentioned in chapter 1; none of these images would have had any lasting impact were it not for their constitutive political substance. Theory was taken to an "abnormal" (in terms of stereotypical expectations of conceptual art) extreme in these works, in that it attempted to imply the very essence of the practitioners' values - as opposed to using (as does traditional art) elaborately ambiguous explanation and suggestion, which subtly disassociates artist from work. It could be construed as simple heart-on-the-sleeve, but its deeper importance was that it bypassed this "normality". "Normal" conceptual art being a kind of socioeconomic safety barrier - ensuring that artwork was observed only as a commodity due to its being a product (as opposed to a part) of its creator, and therefore not being traceable directly to the maker as a part of their true self, but only as an inert, externalised speculation (however political the subject matter/content may appear) - situationist art was different in that it put itself directly in the realm of the real as opposed to the realm of fantasy.

I would like to term this self-defeating mechanism of traditional art as the "Fantasy Trap"*. Put simply: art lures us with the insipid promise that it can fulfill the desires we can't realise in the everyday. What it actually gives us is a platform upon which to create an escapist fantasy; by making art we can vent our frustrated desires, yearning emotions and sufferings *without acting on them*. "Expressing" our feelings through art is a way of expelling/disassociating them from ourselves: creating "dead art". It's dead because it is disassociated from its creator: the intellectual/emotional version of a severed and preserved body part (or, to be more accurately unpleasant, a fetus whose chord is prematurely cut – it grows inside the artist's head/heart, but is removed before it has the strength to survive in the outside world, withering and dying on the canvas). Once expelled

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* I'd like to point out that my Fantasy Trap is titled in reference to Vincent Larkin's Trap of Cynical Reason, proposed in his essay *The Trap of Cynical Reason; what is it, why is it and imaginable escapes…* Here is a brief summary of this theory: "Put simply the trap is opened by the acknowledgment that the fantasy is unreal then later closed in the denial that any acknowledgement has taken place. No alterative fantasies can be proposed because that would undermine the original position from which any work or theory is produced." (Larkin)
My Fantasy Trap is a comparable process of self-denial, but isn't necessarily compatible with Larkin's theory, as it is a separately developed concept with a different context.

into art, our desires are displaced and we are placated, going on to create more artworks whenever they reappear. The longer this continues, the more engrossed in escapism we become until we completely encapsulate ourselves – ignoring reality and *living inside our fantasy.** (See fig. 10)
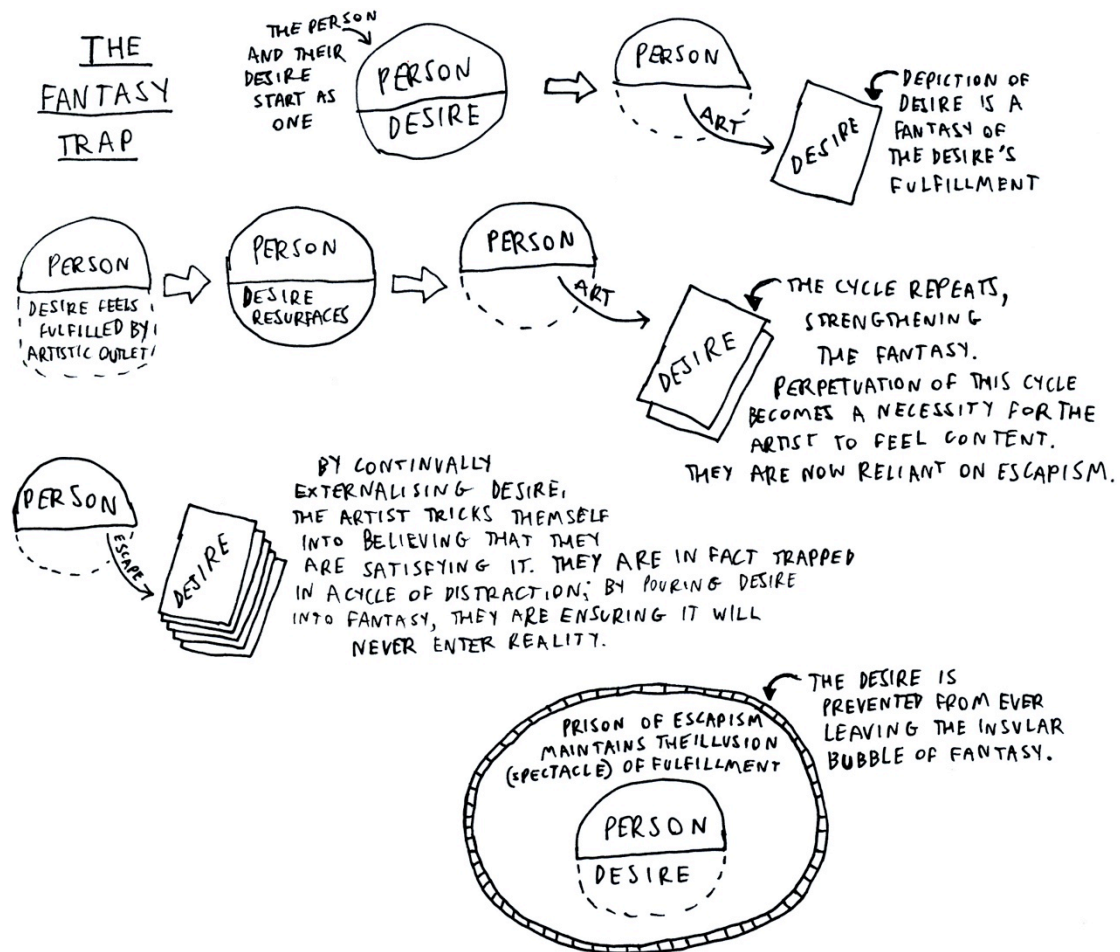
(fig. 10)

Dead art is the perfect example of a commodity: "a commodity is never just a simple object that we buy and consume. A commodity is an object full of ideological even metaphysical niceties." (*The Pervert's Guide to Ideology,* 2012) That passage was written, ironically, in relation to Coca-Cola – which goes to show that all commodities are equally meaningful/less. "Coca-Cola: though coated with ideology, it is a real production, falsely satisfying a falsified need. ... pure spectacular ideology." (Kotányi and Vaneigem, 1961)" – dead art is false in

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* This dynamic not only applies to the creators, but also the consumers of fantasy – take Japanese Otaku culture, for instance.

exactly the same way – a misconception of fantasy as reality. And in this way all commodities are dead. The best way for a creative to survive is by dismembering and selling their intellect/emotion piece by piece (the same as for a manual labourer apart from one step removed – they divide and sell their time, whereas creatives divide and sell *representations* of their time in the form of artworks).

I will use Canadian band A Silver Mt Zion's lines "When the world is sick, can't no-one be well? But I dreamt we was all beautiful and strong…" to demonstrate the Fantasy Trap. Singer Efrim Menuck laments from the perspective of the trap's prisoner – having been attracted (by sociopolitical discontent) to the fantasy of art, he has mistaken this fantasy as a "way out" of an unfulfilled life; subsequently entering the world of escapism. Enshrouded by the fantastical belief that art either provides or works towards real freedom, he believes that that people can be "beautiful and strong" within the spectacle – art being their (imagined) salvation. When he wakes from this delusion, he is confused, feeling betrayed by his false perceptions. The line "But I dreamt we was all beautiful and strong…" shows a half-hearted reluctance to accept that his beliefs were a dream - trailing off with a telling lack of conviction. Now he is awake and back to where he started, his epiphany is that in a "sick" world no one can be truly "well". They can only feign health by becoming part of the sickness itself (as he had done when falling for the Trap), or reject the sick world altogether. (A similar but subtly different analysis of his shattered dream-state is that because he had inadvertently bought into the Spectacle with his mistaken faith in art, he had seen people as "beautiful and strong" because he was only seeing their Spectacle-shells – they were "beautiful" because they were acting out life as he was, as functioning parts of a machine. Either way, the fantasy trap still applies).

This is an alienating conclusion to reach, and Guy Debord felt this – seeing that he could no longer hope to achieve the birth of a new world, he eventually chose the last resort in his rejection of the Spectacle, committing suicide in 1994. Or, as perhaps he would have seen it, he was the one rejected by the Spectacle: his agitation provoking reflexive retaliation. Being a virus in its body, he was psychologically crushed by its social immune system. (It is possible, of course,

that he simply wanted to end his suffering from polyneuritis – but if so then the former theory may be root of the alcoholism that induced it. It is quite possible that he was fleeing, via intoxication, the overwhelming weight of his awareness of the integrated* Spectacle.)

However, despite Debord's bleak denouement, there's still hope. Being a configuration of Spectacle, the Fantasy Trap can be superseded in the same way – with awareness. Having awareness, we can quickly identify equivalents of the Trap everywhere† and evade them – working around Spectacle with fresh articulations of creativity. The Fantasy Trap theory doesn't intend to discount all art – it's intended as a tool of critical thinking for *escaping escapism*. It can be used to hone inventive implementation to its most acute state of independence within an imperfect framework. So doing, (anti)-art will *upstage its context*, illuminating said framework's imperfection by the nature of its proto-transcendence‡; resultantly destabilising it with this implicit castigation. "Whatever is not transcended rots, and whatever is rotten cries out for transcendence" (Vaneigem, 1967, p.157)

Now I have examined the need for theory and art to coincide, I have also concluded that (at least in situationist terms) *this is not enough.* Once our minds are open and our praxis honed, the next step is to remodel our environment – we need a "new urbanism" to realise the vision of "authentic experience". Art§ itself is an outdated mode – only useful inside an outdated system.

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* In his 1988 book *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle,* Debord concluded that since he wrote *Society of the Spectacle*, the Spectacle had become fully integrated in global civilisation – that it had reached strongest, most complete state. Hence the new term "integrated Spectacle".
† For example, the title of *Dance Tonight! Revolution Tomorrow!* (mentioned in chapter 1) can be taken as an ironic situationist joke indicating a temporal fantasy trap: by telling ourselves we will make a change tomorrow, we feel that our responsibility for today is lifted, and we use this self-deception as a way to perpetuate distraction. Postponing things/procrastinating is a temporal fantasy trap in that we allow ourselves to waste time on the condition that we won't be wasting time later; denying the raw truth that *there is only now.* Putting things off like this is escapism in the same way as subscribing to the fantasy of action with art (resulting in dead time in place of dead art); but escaping into the fantasy of potential action with intentions themselves is a way of burying you head even deeper in the sand than with art.
‡ by "proto-transcendence" I mean that the artwork does not literally transcendent in its context, but plants the seed of future transcendence with its radical critique. It *calls for* transcendence.
§ At least as we know it.

Chapter 3: What Next?

<u>Part 1: Life as Art</u>

Having developed *spectacular* praxis, the next step is to use this to eliminate the spectacular context from the inside out: to attack the bridge between life and art by dissolving the society that built it. This could be described as a radical advancement of Hegel's End-of-art Thesis – in which he proposed that thought has progressed beyond art's reach; that "We have outgrown art" (Danto, 1999, p.2). So, if this is the case, we must step beyond the visual to articulate the "Absolute Spirit" (as Hegel termed it) of our philosophy/selves. "Dead art" must die a second death, along with its context, so that new creative conditions can be born.

The SI yearned for the freedom to *construct our own lives*. The name "Situationist" itself denoted their central goal: for the construction of situations to supplant static art - for creativity to be *lived* in fluid continuity with everyday life*.* They claimed that constant creative engagement could allow us to authentically experience all aspects of life with inspiration - that we could enjoy the whole of life as a constant work of art. It would be to bring together our inner and outer worlds – eliminating internal desires and fantasies by actualising them. We would essentially *be our own art*.

This explains why they believed that "situationist conditions" would erase any need for art (in Fantasy Trap form). We are our own doppelgangers within the Trap – no one would want the spectacle of life once they had been offered the reality of it instead (what's the point in acting as yourself when you can *be* yourself?). Art would no longer act as an abstracted outlet for unfulfilled desire - a defeatist pining for "what could have been", but which the artist never really believed was possible (apart from in the realm of fantasy; hence their turning to art). It would instead become integrated with everything we do, because we would be "living unconditionally" without the weight of injustice or repression

weighing on our shoulders. We would be able to feel directly, without the mediation of Spectacle.*

Their rejection of current society was due to their conclusion that it is impossible to "construct" your own life within hierarchical culture: dependence on money and subordination to authorities make it impossible - as does, debatably, the very concept of ownership.† But it seems humanity is still far from attaining the level of mutual understanding, empathy and trust required for a fully egalitarian community to function. It's unclear to me whether the SI acknowledged this or were dazzled by utopian fervour – or perhaps this problem became clearer after their activity as a movement: an effective demonstration being in the late 1960s. A movement of Americans attempted to establish self-sufficient micro-communities outside of capitalism that would be horizontally self-governed - inspired by Ray Forrester's "system dynamics" idea that ecosystems naturally revert to and sustain balance‡. Any "balance of nature" was later proven to be imaginary - the cyclic pattern of Forrester's "feedback loops" only worked because he vastly simplified all the input factors; when the theory was tested with realistically comprehensive information and simulated on computers, the result was always change. Forrester and Fuller had believed that nature worked like a machine, but it is actually entirely unpredictable. Resultantly, the experimental communities all failed – the logic that communal equality arose subconsciously was too simplistic, and underhanded hierarchy materialised, causing manipulation and bullying. As Vincent Larkin summarises: "In the worst cases, if you are a leader and your leadership is denied then there are no limits on your power because discourse is denied." (Larkin, 2014, Appendix A) - an

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* Have you noticed it in yourself – the way that as we "grow up" by fully integrating with society, we grow numb, we sense a loss of innocence and grow nostalgic for our youthful ignorance and/or passion? This could be linked to why so many artists strive to recapture the playfulness of children's drawings in their work?

† It could be argued that the concept of private appropriation is inextricably entwined with hierarchical power; for one person to claim exclusive access to something is for them to revoke that right for others. To assert rights from which you forbid others is the birth of oppression and sparks a fire of competitive paranoia that seems inevitably to spread and multiply beyond anyone's (individual, of course) control. However, a world without ownership would undoubtedly create a new set of problems (such as the abuse of others' goodwill; an equal community would rely on a delicate equilibrium that could be very easily upset) – so it is morally a very grey area as to whether there's a "right answer" on the topic.

‡ A theory popularised by Buckminster Fuller's book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth.*

extreme example being "The Family", brainwashed into homicide by Charles Manson. When hierarchy manifests itself unofficially, its power is unlimited because it claims not to exist – those who acknowledge it are victimised by its supporters. Communities can't be run mechanically because humans/organisms are not machines; they are defined by change.

Nevertheless, being *immediately* unrealistic did not necessarily delegitimise the SI's proposals, for, as Banash speculates: "…sometimes theory is the only practice possible … the sense it creates can overreach the limits of given material possibilities." (Banash, 2000) If humanity is too primitive now, surely pinpointing and challenging its flaws was/is the first step towards cultivating a future where utopian visions may become a tangible possibility? In this sense, SI philosophy was both ahead of *and* appropriate to its time: its visionary nature engendered a significant change in contemporary thought, coaxing the world a step closer toward its ideals that may not have been taken had the content been less revolutionary (e.g. appearing a few decades later). Sometimes putting philosophy into action on a theoretical level may be the most progressive practical action available.

Part 2: Successes and Failures – the legacy of situationist theory

With the hypothesis that theoretical change is still the most attainable focus for radical philosophy – to empathically permeate popular attitudes deeply enough to enable the *sustainable* birth of a unitary urbanism (a community with enough solidarity to avoid self-destruction) - I will observe the lasting influence of situationist philosophy on modern practitioners.

Firstly, contemporary musicians have been prevalent in upholding SI (and similar, compatible) values[*]. As well as the two bands mentioned earlier – Orchid (who candidly regurgitated SI content) and A Silver Mt Zion (who never explicitly reference the SI but have a very similar philosophical stance) – I will use a couple more examples.

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[*] It was through music that I first learnt about them myself.

Ampere, a spiritual successor to Orchid (having the same guitarist), greatly incorporate situationist philosophy into their lyrics, and directly reference their concepts in song titles such as "Remain Unadapted", "New Urbanism" and "Against Automation".
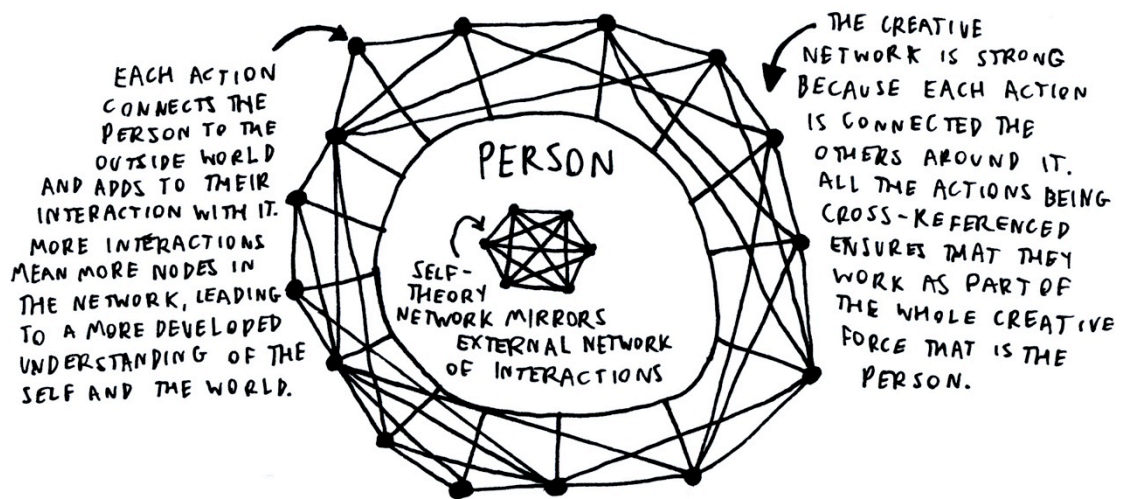
English band Human Hands allude to the nature of integrated Spectacle in their recent song Dust: "Condemn yourself to a context that isn't real. It guides and leads, hidden in repetition." (Human Hands, 2014) It explains, in the words of singer Chaz Hewitt "the way in which capitalism bleeds the life out of you. Same shit over and over, given different names. And the guilt for playing my own part in such a culture." (Hewitt, 2014, Appendix B) In the same song the line "All dreams are turning to dust, sifting through timers." (Human Hands, 2014) could be interpreted to represent filtering your time/output through temporal Fantasy Traps (timers) – turning all inner dreams to dust.

These bands' harsh musical effluences may sound self-loathing, but I believe they are less shallow than that - the violent energy in this music is a display of desperation to break out of an artistically/socially/ethically bleak society in a non-destructive way. Détournement of the musicians' own emotions, in that they redirect negativity into an eloquent critique.

There is the danger, of course, that these bands have fallen into the Fantasy Trap, as do conceptual artists; sedating themselves with crafted catharsis. However, I feel the musical outlet is comparatively more effective in present-day circumstances - because it directly conveys critique in the context of an active situation. The nature of live music performances is more conducive to dialectics than an artwork that exists separately to its maker. That's not to say I'm devaluing art - I believe if artwork and writing are brought into contiguous play with events, a network of flowing temporal creativity will develop and result in the strengthening and progression of each ingredient-praxis.

It is connectivity to your work that keeps it alive; which means that the more connections between different areas of your work you can make, the more alive the whole will be – each connection a capillary through which the blood of self flows. As such, you could even say that proper engagement can be visualised in a similar way to the Fantasy Trap it avoids – as an interlinked sphere of actions with the individual connected to all of them at the centre. This visualisation simultaneously represents the cross-referenced self-theory[*] within the person and their creative endeavours in the physical world – the patterns are synchornised because the fully engaged person is in synchronicity with their environment. (see fig. 11)

EACH ACTION CONNECTS THE PERSON TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND ADDS TO THEIR INTERACTION WITH IT. MORE INTERACTIONS MEAN MORE NODES IN THE NETWORK, LEADING TO A MORE DEVELOPED UNDERSTANDING OF THE SELF AND THE WORLD.

PERSON

SELF-THEORY NETWORK MIRRORS EXTERNAL NETWORK OF INTERACTIONS

THE CREATIVE NETWORK IS STRONG BECAUSE EACH ACTION IS CONNECTED THE OTHERS AROUND IT. ALL THE ACTIONS BEING CROSS-REFERENCED ENSURES THAT THEY WORK AS PART OF THE WHOLE CREATIVE FORCE THAT IS THE PERSON.

(fig. 11)

Expanding interconnectivity is arguably the key to an effective communal self-evaluation and consequent improvement of modern culture. Exhaustive, impartial dialectics, (more than isolated polemics), lead to philosophical breakthrough; and a web of interwoven creative praxes is surely an apt (and aptly beautiful) medium for this humanitarian undertaking.

Returning to Ampere – I chose this band as an example not only for lyrical content; they also approach creativity in this "network" form. They illustrate their own albums (see fig. 12), record and mix their own music, and sometimes

[*] Larry Law's term for the formulation of a person's own philosophy using relevant parts of all the other philosophy they've learned – I will return to this in the conclusion.

self-release records (in fact, all the bands mentioned in the essay work in this way to varying degrees – especially that of making their own artwork). This DIY approach to music, although difficult and not always affordable*, enables a great measure of creative freedom and engages the artists on a deep and down-to-earth level, by bringing together different areas of creativity and, what would be, in a different context, work. The "work" stops feeling so much like work when it's part of a larger, yet still personal, creative effort. This is a discipline approaching the type the SI aspired to; the combination of expressive mediums simulates on a miniature scale the kind of integration a unitary urbanism would have across the whole of society – the art of the everyday.
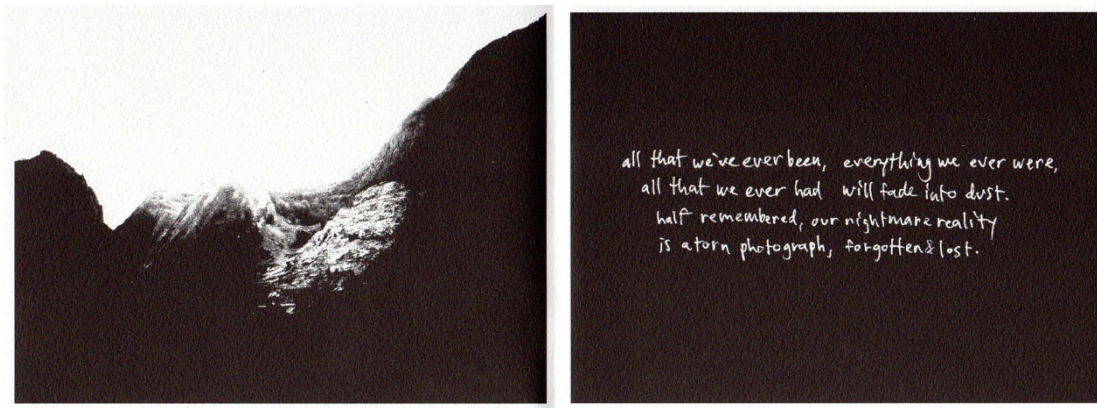
(fig. 12) Ampere. (2011) *Like Shadows.* [Lyric booklet]

Individual artists with a similar approach could include people such as David Shrigley – with his consciously "naïve" or "bad" art (see fig. 13). Its message is that the craft doesn't matter – what really matters is the Absolute Spirit of the work: the content of its philosophy and its message, which are, cyclically, partially delivered by this visual approach in its implication of said values (before you even notice the content of the image in question). This method returns us to Hegel's prognosis: "Thought and reflection have spread their wings above fine arts" (Hegel, 1886) – resulting in the renewed value of *crude art*. The finesse of an image's rationale in communicating its spirit (its intellectual and emotional essence) defines, in the modern age, how "fine" art truly is. No longer

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* Although perhaps no less affordable that working with a commercial record label, as the modern music industry is extremely unfair on musicians, sometimes leaving them in debt even for a financially successful album. See Steve Albini's essay *The Problem With Music* for an explanation of this con.

is it connected to traditional skill-derived standards of aesthetic beauty. It is arguable, in fact, that *this* is the new beauty - that of expression uninhibited by the self-consciousness of style. In the same interview I quoted earlier, Larkin positively encourages this carefully carefree mode as that of "a true amateur" (Larkin, 2014, appendix A). Its communication-based mindset facilitates quality in creative networks – maintaining its "purity" of expression ensures that products are only possible as *part of* the artist (as well as offering freedom of play, which is important for intelligent development).

(fig. 13) Shrigley, David. (2011) *Untitled (Fuck You and Fuck Teatime).* [Ink on paper]

I'm not saying, though, that Shrigley's philosophy is necessarily compatible with the theory I'm handling – despite showing hints that it may be, his work is quite ambiguous. I've mentioned him because his method of delivery is the most famous example its type. A more fitting proponent may be Chris Johanson, a musician and artist whose imagery is more overtly provocative. For example, his image below (see fig. 14) states that within capitalism, identity is judged by financial value – reducing humanity to commodity; and with the words "you're not worth much", points out that seen through this lens, life has no value.
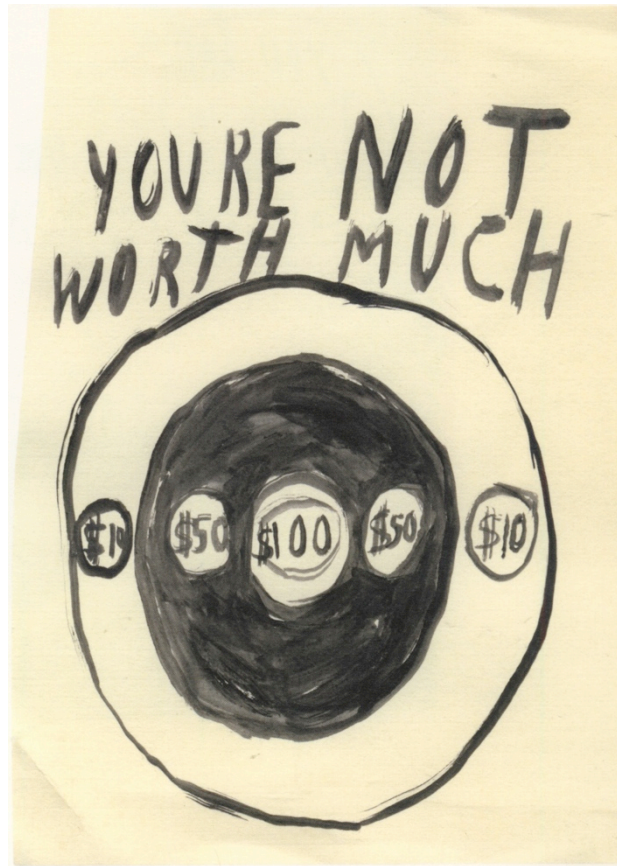
(fig. 14) Johanson, Chris. (2007) Utitled (You're Not Worth Much). [Ink on paper]

Crude art is comparable to the intentionally frantic sound of bands like Ampere, in that it attempts to hold on to the Absolute Spirit of creation. In its vigorous pace, the energy of passion is clearly visible/audible, and its quality is of-the-moment – as that of an event. The condensed creative output presents a distilled culmination of the artist's philosophy – a concise access point to initiate a response in the observer that will potentially expand once the connection has been made (once the initial encounter has made its mark, the observer can go on to unpack the work in greater depth).

SI theory has also had, unsurprisingly, a degenerative legacy – that of co-option by the Spectacle. I say unsurprisingly because the Spectacle's natural defence mechanism to any antagonism is to appropriate their superficial aesthetics and reproduce them – nullifying them by commodification. Whitewashing over the original message of opposition with meaning-stripped reproductions, the

Spectacle's "immune system" ensures that any undesirable element is quickly forgotten.

Tino Sehgal's performance art installation *These Associations* in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, 2012, demonstrated this process. It was a constructed situation that encouraged observers to become participants – based directly on the situationist idea of actively manifesting artistic energy in the everyday setting. However – this was a commissioned project, funded by multinational corporation Unilever – the epitome of globalised capitalism: anathema to SI values. *These Associations* appropriated situationist concepts and turned them into a hollow display of consumer entertainment.

Concept artists such as the Chapman brothers, too, have adopted détournement in their work; a plain specimen being the book *Bedtime Tales for Sleepless Nights* (see fig. 15). This book subverts the children's book format by using the traditional page layout of the genre, but containing grotesque, unsuitable images and adult language.
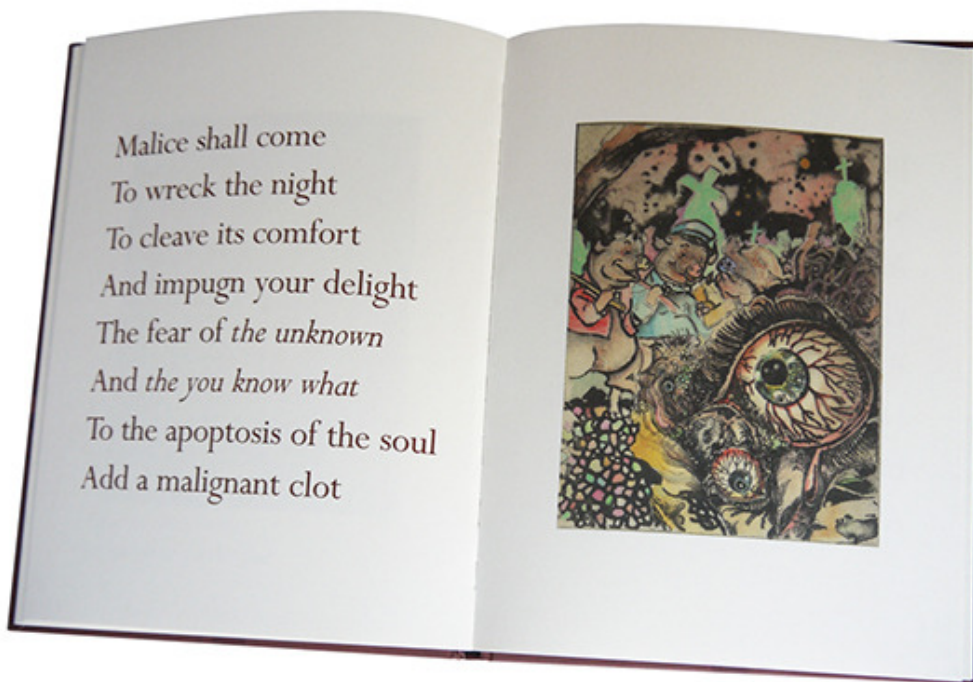
(fig. 15) Chapman, Dinos. and Chapman, Jake. (2012) *Bedtime Tales for Sleepless Nights.*

By doing this, the book appears to be subversive due to its initial shock value, but it doesn't actually serve any further purpose than this – appearance. The Chapman brothers simply used détournement to create an interesting object they could market. The semblance of meaning in the work that attracts consumers is derived from its borrowed technique - in reality there is none. It is a spectacle of meaning itself. Similarly, détournement is now commonly used in in commercial advertising – pasteurised by extraction from its politically charged context, it is now regarded as a simple visual approach. After enough neutral replications of a technique are presented by mass media, the public's association with its original context inevitably fades to indifference.

Still, aside from this negative element, the predominant repercussions of the SI have been constructive – inspiring new generations of people to reject intellectual apathy and reminding them to question the world around them. These people working to become more mature and compassionate individuals are also fighting for the refinement of humanity - toward the eventual possibility of a higher civilization. For said people ready and waiting for such an environment, it is their task to equip people around them with equal readiness – what else can be done when corruption, sedation and barbarity still have free reign? To *fight* such antediluvian tendencies would be to negate your own morality – and in fact to even consider the issue on such individualistic terms would prove that you yourself were regressing; as defensive egotism is an affectation of hierarchy. You cannot *combat* violence without using some form of violence – you can only transcend it and attempt to share that transcendence.

Conclusion

The creative network discussed in chapter 3 is, I believe, a hypothesis that can help us to shorten the art-to-life bridge – even if we can't yet cross it. It's a device that can bring us closer to *being our own art*, by bridging the gaps between as many mediums as possible – maximising creativity, open-mindedness and communication with those around us. All creative forms will feed into each other and our place in a community: distributing our philosophical messages and giving us more chances to encounter and learn from those of other people. The more gaps are bridged, the more cogent and less compartmentalised a person becomes; the more consolidated the network, the more the very concept of "bridges" is weakened. (I will return to the weakening of bridges at the end of the conclusion)

I can apply these dialectics to the foundation of theory researched for this essay. I have adopted the parts I agree with into my ever-adapting self-theory. Larry Law's phrase "self-theory", proposing that we adopt parts we agree with from all the theory we read in order to distil our own unique synthesis, is a good summary of the internal aspect of the creative network - "Every individual is constantly building an ideal world within himself." (Vaneigem, 1967, p.191) While writing this essay I have seen the truth of self-theory evidenced - in the course of evaluating various research sources, I discovered new connections between them and inadvertently conceived my own theories as a result of it: the Fantasy Trap and creative networks.

I have concluded (as a hypothesis – my views will almost certainly continue to change after writing this) that to keep my art alive as part of myself, as opposed to letting it fall away as a dead commodity, I must protect it from pigeonholing. I should make it as challenging to preconceptions, as versatile and dynamic as possible in order to actively avoid stagnation and blundering into the apathetic quagmire of Fantasy Traps.

Unfortunately, it seems the difficulty in avoiding Fantasy Traps is being ever renewed in modern life. New technological fields have been opened up in which mass media have set new Traps. For example, phenomenally popular "open world" videogames (such as The Elder Scrolls and Grand Theft Auto franchises) allow players to entertain all their anarchic, inappropriate and playful fantasies - and by falsely fulfilling them, act to keep such thoughts disassociated from their "real" selves (and resultantly the outside world). They are addictive because they provide the same kind of drug-like escape as all fantasy traps; one that needs constant renewal to avoid an unpleasant come-down to reality. Players come to prefer the game-world to reality because they feel freer within its fantasy than they do in their own lives. This is a third breed of Fantasy Trap – passive. Where the active creation of one's own artwork can be called the active Fantasy Trap, the passive Fantasy Trap is the act of escaping into other people's fantasies – a good example of the general dynamic of consumerism. Video games are not the ultimate form of passive Trap though - as they involve a semblance of interactivity by offering players "free choice" within the parameters of the game-world. The fully passive Trap is TV, where the person consumes the output of others without any pretence of interaction. (The second example was the temporal trap; in which the fantasy involves the total avoidance of activity on the pretext of future reconciliation)

Another danger my research has highlighted is that of co-option – the fact that challenging ideas are instinctively rejected by assimilation. Their surface "value" is quickly mimicked in bulk by the system in order to drown out the original, unacceptable idea – vaccinating itself against the idea's revolutionary aspect. This danger is a signal that to stay truly creative we must always be actively rethinking our outlooks so that we are never co-opted by retrogressive conservatism. Our thought must always be active and aware of its context in order to remain functionally connected.

Which brings us back to the importance of constant learning and communication between people to keep theory alive. It is equally important to bridge the gaps

between each other in order to develop the philosophy of authentic experience in our lives. The next step is then to remove the need for these bridges altogether. By continually shortening the bridges between areas of thought and action, we are also undermining the old ideologies that separate them (capitalist realism, consumerism, hierarchy). As the life-to-art bridge becomes liminal with this cultural evolution, it may even disintegrate of its own accord: fading quietly and permanently from the popular subconscious. The wireframe sphere of the creative network tightens as each element draws closer to the others, until it becomes a single, comprehensive mass. This metaphorical mass would be the full realisation of artistic energy – the revolution of everyday life.

Word count without footnotes: 9,117

Word count with footnotes: 9,865

Line spacing: 1.5

Appendices

Appendix A (An interview conducted with Vincent Larkin via email):

Questions:
Has the theory/philosophy of the Situationist International been relevant to the development of your creative process? (if not applicable, skip this and the next question)

> Maybe I would have to say no.

If so, do still feel their arguments and artistic beliefs hold firm in the modern day? Or perhaps evolved forms of them?

> I think quite broadly a lot of what they say is still relevant, and a lot of what they say is extremely mistaken and contradictory, it could be called wrong, I don't think necessarily there is any problem with being wrong, although I'm not sure they ever saw themselves like that, which is good. If your going to be wrong you have to believe wholeheartedly that you're right then it's okay to be wrong. However all this talk about 'men' putting force into action, it is of its time, I would say that is just wrong, wrong if you get what I mean.

> Also 'the hollow reacquisition of the rhetoric of the spectacle' the thing that Guy Debord predicted could be used as a tool against his project, I think there is a legacy of that in the worlds of marketing, and politics. The thing is I'm still not sure if this happened because he predicted it or if it happened despite his prediction.

I'm interested in the idea of "the merger of life and art". The idea that the more you bring together and interconnect all elements in life and art (eg writing, music, image making, performances, producing physical objects, and your day-to-day lifestyle), the more intensely focussed and enjoyable your creativity/life will be. Do you maintain your approach to creativity following a similar ethos?

> Yes I would say that I do. It's the approach of the true amateur, which is the title I would like to reclaim as a positive.   An illustrator who would subscribe to this view would be Peter Blegvad, who was also a musisan in slapp happy, (you should have a look at him for your essay, maybe he is the missing link?)

Do you believe it's possible to be self-sufficient with a lifestyle of full time creativity without having to compromise your artistic values in order to make financial ends meet? Is this something you aim for or have achieved?

> I've rarely been in the position where I have to compromise values because I have not lived a lifestyle of full-time creativity. In fact I wonder if there is anybody in the world who does.

> Maybe people like Laurie Anderson or Gilbert and George, maybe they live this type of idyllic creative lifestyle, although I can't be sure.

> Werner Hertzog, the film director, is constantly playing with the appearance of compromising his artistic values. I'm not sure if he's actually doing that, or if he thinks he's doing it, but sometimes it appears he's doing it, and it makes his films even more fascinating.

Thinking about it now, the creative people I most admire produce their best work while not pursuing their creative thing full-time. I think Mark E Smith was a part time librarian when he wrote 'I am curious orange'. That might be a myth.

In a kind of extension of the previous question: Do you believe it is possible to make a living as an illustrator without compromising to "spectatular" society and advocating capitalism?

It would depend how you define Illustrator, what role do you give the illustrator. And captitalism, how you define that. The thing about capitalism is even if some sort of new society is built, some principles of this thing we call capitalism will still be in there somewhere. The basis of capitalism is ever present in our history. It is the interpretation of that basis which is the problem. For example the neoliberal project that sort of thing. That for me would be the problem. I think sometimes a lot of people who would see themselves as creative liberal types, even socialists, do find themselves promoting quite straight down the line neo-liberal values without even being aware of it. This is sad.

On the subject of capitalism, last May I was in Lebanon. A country that despite all the divisions, and maybe because of them, has wholeheartedly signed up to a project of neoliberal free market capitalism. It's done really weird things to Lebanon that my yet prove to be its downfall (the privatisation of public places for one thing) but it can be argued that since the early 90's it has supplied the country with on-going stability, that against all predictions has protected the country from the destabilising influences of its neighbours, and now from the conflict in Syria. This I should say is the story so far, of course.

As to the 'spectacle' there might be a lot of stuff in the essay I say about that, that you could use, maybe.

Are your political and personal values integral to your artistic expression? Do you see yourself and your work as one in this sense, or separate?

I hope there is some sort of synthesis going on, but I can't be sure.

Is the DIY music community you are involved with important to you on a political and/or ethical level?

In the past when I was younger and I first became aware of it, I was cynical about it. I saw as quite ego driven, hypocritical, contradictory. As I got older and began to understand that despite any flaws this self-supporting community of people was one of the most noticeable practical outlets for people who expounds a type of politics where you value the creative output of the group of people, above all else. Then I realised how important it was.

If so, do you feel that this community has the potential to make or contribute to a positive change in future society?

I feel these communities are greatly diminished, perhaps because of their unwillingness to work with people and places which are not 100% committed to the project or perhaps because of the people and places that were not 100% committed the project became about 20% committed to the project I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because the vegans can't eat honey. I don't understand veganism I think its a type of new puritanism.

Anyway, groups and individuals who value cultural creative output above, and in spite of, commercial commodity driven concerns, I think this can only be a good thing.

Do you believe capitalism is compatible with a fully creative lifestyle?

> Yes I do, I love Motown, Motown was fully creative, fully capital. I think it depends on what type of capitalism, the way that we do it, what that then allows us as a culture.

Do you think that a post-capitalist Society (provided it was an ethical and functional one) would be a better environment for creative growth and freedom, or worse?

> I feel our current capitalist society, was once a better environment for creating growth and freedom. In fact from my reading of history I would say that from the mid-20th century onwards our Western civilisation reached a peak of creative growth and freedom, coinciding with the rise of democratic liberal capitalist societies. Now those same societies are rapidly curtailing and discouraging creative growth and freedom, not necessarily through authoritarian rule, although there is a slight aspect of authoritarianism creeping back in, but by other liminal almost automatic means.

> I cannot yet imagine post-capitalist society so I don't know the answer. I think that, because an optimist, if there is one it will be a better environment.

Do you feel that art is at its strongest when a larger body of an individual's (or collaborating group's) work functions as an organic network/web? A kind of "creative landscape" in which all the separate pieces are strengthened (and potentially referenced, either directly or indirectly) by the others? (eg, the overriding tone, aesthetics and messages spanning the creative whole being "more than the sum of its parts"?)

> I think if we look at the membership of the situationist international as an example of this type of collaborative group, then we can say that it was a failed example. Guy Debord was an alcoholic tyrannical bully and he was a visionary of great scope who set the agenda for the SI.

> The SI is not however is not a failed group, it set the agenda that defined an entire generation of resistance which changed the political outlook of France, the legacies of which can still be seen today (In an increasingly diminished form).

> Interestingly the organisation's denial of leaders and the importance of authors led many to believe that Debord wrote everything anyway which of course in many cases he did not, in fact Nietzsche wrote some of society of the spectacle. (btw steeling text and not attributing it is something I think is great) So when the sum of the parts involves stolen extracts from Nietzsche you can't really go wrong? Well yes you can without some sort of leadership. Obviously in the context of stealing nietzche, fascism also did this, but with less style, intellect and understanding.

> Organic networks/webs do not work, they are a myth of the left, I have increasingly thought. I have watched them breakdown groups of friends, very sad. The problem is when you deny leadership yet clearly there are leaders; a type of unbound powerplay begins. In the worst cases, if you are a leader and your leadership is denied then there is no limits on your power because discourse is denied.

> Adam Curtis I think in the series 'all watched over by machines of Loving Grace' or whatever it was called makes some amazing points about this. Or maybe it was the 'Century of the self' I can't remember. Groups of people do not work like cells they work like people. We should be happy about that, people are good.

> Anyway you might not of been getting at that type of group, I think if you remove the word organic, network and web and only refer to an individual then it sounds like a great thing, like the practice of an enthusiast, a true amateur.

Appendix B (A conversation conducted with Chaz Hewitt via Facebook message):

22/03/2014 15:32**Natty Peterkin**

Hello again! I've been writing a dissertation on the Situationist International and their philosophy/artistic theory lately, and I'm tempted to reference your song Dust... Can I ask you a bit about the meaning behind your lyrics? I thought the section "condemn yourself to a context that isn't real, it guides and leads, hidden in repetition" sounded like a reference to Capitalist Realism/spectacular culture – and I wanted to see if I was along the right lines?

20:06**Chaz Hewitt**

hi man,sounds like a cool dissertation, send it over when you're done please.

that lyric and song is written about the way in which capitalism bleeds the life out of you. same shit over and over, given different names. and the guilt for playing my own part in such a culture.

if you need anything more let me know

chaz

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