

Art or Architecture on the Street? Reading the Roots of Public Art Through the International Situationist Lenses

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Abstract

During the 1960s, a wave of avant-garde art movements emerged, pushing the limits of convention. The worlds of architecture and art started to blend, with artists transforming public spaces into the sites of exhibition and the very medium of their creations. A closer look at these movements may uncover some unapparent connections to the broader political dialogue of the post-war period, especially concerning groups such as the Situationists. The primary aim of this article is to explore the links between the postwar socio-political movements and the evolution of street art forms from the 60s to the present. This exploration revolves around crucial terms such as 'dérive,' 'détournement,' and 'constructed situations,' which are situationist artistic and socio-political concepts. Despite the absence of a direct historical link, these concepts share a discursive unity with post-war artistic events, indicating that contemporary art seeks to assume a more substantial socio-political role, without a distinct political stance. The article examines the work of pioneering artists like Christo, Arman, and Villeglé, who brought art into public spaces. Their work exemplifies how 'public art' emerged from the intersection of formalist approaches and the concepts of the Situationists. Notably, the investigation suggests a more nuanced relationship between using space as an artistic material and situationist theory than previously recognized. This article aims to expose the underlying psychological-political layers of modern and contemporary art, particularly emphasizing public art happenings and festivals like the 21st-century Nuit Blanche Parisienne and lately the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics 2024. By analyzing the early works of the artists discussed in this article, we conduct a 'comparative analysis' of their characteristics with the texts and manifestos of the Situationists on urban life and cities and investigate the similarities. This process extends to recent public art events that serve as urban interventions in the city, approaching 'architecture' as what was presumed by the Situationists.

Keywords: *Public Art, avant-garde, Transforming Architecture, International Situationists, Nuit Blanche, Constructed Situations, détournement, dérive,*

1. Introduction

The post-war artistic movements of the 1960s in Europe were not separate from the critical intellectual currents of that period. The European left-wing intellectuals criticized the cold post-war modernity, consumerism, and instrumentalization of humankind, trying to provide a new definition of human agency, society, and the 'urban question.' These left-wing critical approaches also impacted artists and architects, and avant-garde artistic currents declared their existence based on critical thinking and, at the same time, influenced by past critical artistic movements such as Dadaism.

From Adorno's 'The Culture Industry'¹ (1947) to Debord's 'The Society of Spectacle' (1967), there was intellectual criticism of the mass production of culture and spectacle as a new merchandise for capitalism. One of these groups was the 'International Situationist,' a group of artists, poets, and intellectuals –around Guy Debord– who saw art, architecture, the city, and everyday life in the public space as an intertwined whole matter and criticized the society of the time. As Philippe Simay described them as such: *There are few movements that, like the Situationists, have placed the urban question at the heart of their artistic and literary practices.* (Simay, 2009)²

1 - Laheurte, Baptiste. "L'industrie culturelle: La culture contre elle-même." LVSL, 20 March 2022 <https://lvsl.fr/lindustrie-culturelle-penser-la-culture-avec-theodor-adorno>

2 - Simay, Philippe. "Une Autre Ville Pour Une Autre Vie. Henri Lefebvre et Les Situationnistes." Rue Descartes, no. 63, 2009, pp. 17–26.

They also wanted to draw an ideal society. For them, criticism and project were in the same line, and the project was formed on the path of criticism of the 'here and now' space. Asger Jorn emphasizes that "*avant-garde art struggle [...] must be of essential importance for the forces in whose name it is fighting*" as Jorn clarifies the main goals of their version of avant-garde [Situationists] as "*the human society and artistic evolution*"³. Also, Gilles Ivain criticizes the abstraction in art and architecture:

*"Abstraction has invaded all the arts, contemporary architecture in particular. [...] Pure plasticity, inanimate, storyless, soothes the eye and makes it cold. Elsewhere, other fragmentary beauties can be found –while the promised land of syntheses continually recedes into the distance. Everyone waves between the emotionally still-alive past and the future already dead from the present."*⁴

This perspective challenges the avant-garde notion, influenced by abstract forms or the elitist 'art for art's sake' ideas prevalent in modern art. Instead, it advocates for societal engagement as the primary subject matter of artistic works.

This article explores the theoretical foundations of the artist's role in urban environments, examining the ideological aspects and origins that have led to the contemporary concept of Public Art. This late-modern art form –seemingly non-political– shatters traditional architectural boundaries through spatial modifications within urban landscapes. There are discursive similarities between public art and the avant-garde movements of post-war currents. We could describe today's public art as an intersection of *time, place, and design [spatial design]* that

has moved from the gallery spaces into the city. Perhaps this could be a distinctive description of contemporary art in the 21st century, a sentence that is very similar to another part of Gilles Ivain's text from the Lettrist movement, later published in the first International Situationist bulletin in 1958:

*"We have already pointed out the need to construct situations as one of the basic desires on which the next civilization would be based. This need for absolute creation has always been closely mixed with the need to play with architecture, time, and space."*⁵

This quote is not a casual statement. We would perceive some similarities between contemporary tendencies on public art and the words of situationists. Spirit of the times? Foresight? Self-criticism? Our task is to see what concepts these statements revolve around.

Considering Situationist principles, we presume that any artistic intervention to transform urban conditions in public spaces can be viewed as an architectural act. This perspective catalyzed the fusion of art and architecture in the early 1960s. Initially, it was a political statement by artists in public spaces. It later incorporated the abstract elements of 'Nouveau Realisme,' evolving into a non-political spatial expression of artists in public spaces. The social responsibility of the artist, as outlined by the Situationists in their manifestos, was to employ *time, space, and architecture* to transform urbanism in favor of *social activism*; as Constant mentioned in 1962: "*Our conception of urbanism is, therefore, social.*"⁶

JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41941046>. Accessed 12 June 2024.

3 - Jorn, Asger. "Opening Speech at the First World Congress of Free Artists 1956." In *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 35. La Villette, Paris: 2008.

4 - Ivain, Gilles. "Formulaire Pour Un Urbanisme Nouveau." *L'Internationale lettriste*, October 1953. Republished in *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1, June 1958. In *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 60–63. La Villette, Paris: 2008.

5 - Idem

6 - Nieuwenhuys, Constant. "Une autre ville pour une autre vie." *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3, 1959, pp. 37–41. Republished in *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 155–157. La Villette, Paris: 2008.

The Situationists, the radical movement of leftist artists from the 60s and 70s, who, as they say, were partisans in the field of culture, theorized about the tools of culture and art to free society from capitalist consumerism and change society in a new direction (Şerban, 2018)⁷. “[...] based around Debord in Paris, that art could not be recognized as a separate activity, with its own legitimate specificity, but must be dissolved into a unitary revolutionary praxis”⁸. After the dissolution in 1972, they joined history or somehow were dissolved. Although Guy Debord, the leading theoretician of the Situationists, was the central figure of the May 1968 movement in Paris, their radical ideas in those years did not lead to almost any outstanding works of art, architecture, or urbanism, except for some Constant’s utopian architectural models ‘*New Babylon*’ (which in the category of architectural utopists of those years, called Megastructure⁹) as well as some paintings by Asger Jorn, they had no other practical product. Like many radicals of the Golden Age of the radicals, the utopians between 1950 and 1970 joined history without delivering a specific product to society or assumably with no change. (Wollen, 1989)

However, we may trace here, a discursive unity between contemporary artistic events and the Situationists. With a comparative reading of contemporary artistic phenomena, including what is known as public art today and situationist ideas, we can reach shocking resemblances as if those ideas, after a distance of fifty years, at the beginning of the 21st century, have been heard again or spread in the artistic unconscious of the society. Situationists had a foresight and accurate reading of the social situation, which one could distinguish when formulating the current state of society. Public Art is one of the most critical areas in which Situationist ideas have played a role in its formation. The Situationist movement has significantly influenced the formation of public art, particularly at the intersection of art and architecture. According to Situationists, public art actively forces societal change and new urbanism. This

perspective emphasizes a new lifestyle and the active involvement of artists in public spaces and streets. In addition, the Situationist definition of new urbanism blurs the boundaries between art and architecture. Any urban intervention by artists can be seen as a form of *architecture*. This shift began a dynamic relationship between artistic and architectural interventions in public spaces.

The Situationist definition of new urbanism blurs the boundaries between art and architecture. Any urban modification by artists can be seen as a form of architecture. This shift began a dynamic relationship between art and architectural interventions in public spaces. The collision of avant-garde theories, including those of the Situationists, and the practices of other avant-garde movements contributed to the emergence of public art as a distinct architectural form. This transformation aligns with the Situationists’ vision of Unitary Urbanism.

While some might consider Diego Rivera’s bold murals in Mexico an early spark, the presumed origins of public art lie within the post-war European avant-garde movements, here, amidst the social and cultural upheaval following the World Wars, artistic movements like the Surrealists, the Internationale Lettriste, and most significantly, the Situationists clashed with New Realism, sowing the seeds for what we now understand as public art.

There are developments in contemporary art that have new characteristics: entering the collective space and breaking the boundary between architecture and art, as well as social issues. We shall see a kind of social activism here. Considering the similarities of these events with the attractive ideas that the Situationists proposed about the city and urbanism with the tools of art and architecture in the sixties, we believe that reading these events under the shadow of those concepts will help us describe the contemporary situation better. Monumental art, public art, environmental art, etc., which

7 - Şerban, Oana. (2018). Political and Artistic Radicalism in the 20th Century: A Situationist Solution for an International Value Conflict. 67. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326690235_Political_and_Artistic_Radicalism_in_the_20th_Century_A_Situationist_Solution_for_an_International_Value_Conflict

8 - Wollen, Peter. “The Situationist International.” NLR (New Left Review), 1/174, March–April 1989. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii8/articles/peter-wollen-situationists-and-architecture>

9 - Megastructure is a title by Reyner Banham, given to radical utopist architects from 1950 to 1970

title would fit the specific artists exhibiting their large-scale artworks in public Space? While Jane Rendell, in her book 'Art & Architecture: A Place Between,'¹⁰ mentions the term 'public art,' a BBC Four documentary, 'Christo & Jeanne Claude Monumental Art' (2018) brings up the title: 'monumental art.' Also, some use the word 'environmental art' for the description above, with this definition: "According to some, public art is all the works produced on commission from a public, state, or local community, placed in an urban space. Some authors include theatrical performances and ephemeral actions."¹¹ (Chaudoir 2008). For others, public art is a generic term describing works of art designed and executed for placement in a public space, outside of spaces explicitly dedicated to the exhibition of works of art such as museums, galleries, etc.¹² A third category of authors designates public art as the desire of artists to put themselves at the service of the public, outside, or even against, the institutional framework.¹³ (Störm, 1980) and (Ardenne, 2010).

In the post-war art world of the 1960s, many artistic movements emerged, ranging from the Bauhaus to the Situationists, leading to the formation of two predominant branches, igniting an avant-garde battle. On one front, the Bauhaus artists championed formalist and abstract art, becoming the leading current in art, architecture, and the performative arts, with notable proponents like Le Corbusier and Yves Klein. Conversely, there existed a faction of artists and thinkers who challenged the conventional norms of post-war society, the capitalist culture of consumption, and the critique of Spectacle¹⁴ as a capitalist merchandise

and the art-as-commodity¹⁵. Thus, the mainstream faced opposition. The avant-garde was, therefore, divided into two major narratives: one that was formalist and mainstream and the other that was social and oppositional. As a result, the avant-garde narratives coalesced artists into two camps, each developing distinct tendencies: one formalist and the other social. The core group of opposition movements temporarily set aside the practice of art to craft theoretical critiques and manifestos.

The essential elements, coupled with constructive and actionable terms introduced by the situationists—who have been the leading coalition of the opposition since 1957—convinced the independent artists to take their expressions to the streets. These concepts included notions like 'dérive,' 'détournement,' and 'constructed situations.' Identifying themselves as 'liberated' or 'free artists,' they convened in Alba in September 1956 for the First World Congress of Free Artists. This event marked the inception of Situationist International, laying its foundational stone before 1957.¹⁶

10 - Rendell, Jane. (2012). *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*. 10.5040/9780755695812.

11 - Chaudoir, Philippe. "Art public, arts de la rue, art urbain." *Études théâtrales*, nos. 41-42, 2008, pp. 183-191 <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-theatrales-2008-1-page-183.htm>

12 - Art Public Montréal. "Qu'est-ce que l'art public?" <https://www.ulaval.ca/lart-public/quest-ce-que-lart-public/lart-public/definition>

13 - Ström, Marianne-U. *L'Art public: Intégration des arts plastiques à l'espace public*. Paris: Éditions Dunod, coll. "Aspects de l'urbanisme," 1980, pp. 16-17 (cited in Chaudoir 2018) See also: Ardenne, Paul. "L'implication de l'artiste dans l'espace public." *L'Observatoire*, no. 36, 2010, pp. 3-10, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-l-observatoire-2010-1-page-3.htm>

14 - Notably by Guy Debord, the prominent intellectual figure of the leftists, in his essay *The Society of Spectacle*, 1967

15 - art-as-commodity, a notion suggested by Theodor Adorno in 1975 on *Culture industry reconsidered*

16 - e-flux Announcements For an Imaginist Renewal of the World. *The Alba Congress: 1956-2019*

<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/280674/for-an-imaginist-renewal-of-the-world-the-alba-congress-1956-2019/>

2. The battle for avant-garde; The birth of public art

"Public art is the child of postmodern condition."

(Duque, 2014)¹⁷

Cité Radieuse, Marseille, by Le Corbusier, four years after its completion, hosted the 1st avant-garde Art Festival in 1956. Also, the 2nd edition of the festival was held in another residential project of Le Corbusier in Rezé from July 4 to 12, 1957. Some famous artists have participated in the Marseille art festival. Michel Ragon led events for the visual arts, Maurice Béjart for choreography, Charles Ford for cinema, André Hodeir for music, and Jacques Polieri for theater. Beautiful programming includes conferences from collaborators on their subject, Wogenscky on architecture, and Edmond Humeau on theater. The Plastic Arts section offers an exhibition lasting until August 31 of works by Arnal, Atlan, Barré, Corneille, Degottex, Fautrier, Guittet, Hantai, Karskaya, Lansky, Manessier, Poliakoff, Pichette, Serpan, Schneider, Soulages, Tal Coat, Yves Klein, César, Gilioli, Etienne-Martin.¹⁸

Some days later, somewhere a bit further south, in northern Italy, the opposition artists attempted to present their version of Avant-garde art: The 1st Congress of Liberated Artists, September 1956, in Alba, with Guy Debord, Asger Jorn, Giuseppe Gallizio, and many others, to claim avant-garde for themselves.¹⁹

The ideological divergence between the two principal avant-

garde movements led to distinct artistic practices: On one side, there was an emphasis on formalism, functionalism, and abstraction, led by the new generation of Bauhaus and the New Realism movement. Conversely, on the other side, in Alba, focusing on social commentary within art practice gave rise to conceptual, content-driven, and revolutionary theories and artworks. Among these developments was the emergence of street artists as a form of critical activism, challenging the commodification of art and engaging in experimental art practices aimed at the general public — the everyday spectators— rather than an elite audience, which aligns with Asger Jorn's definition of the avant-garde, an opposition of Bauhaus, and a member of International Situationists, alongside Guy Debord, Wolman, and Constant. The post-war artistic community encountered a surge of creativity influenced by various avant-garde movements, including those derived from Surrealism, such as the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (MIBI)²⁰ led by Danish artist Asger Jorn, who sought to compose the principles of Bauhaus design with Surrealistic potentiality and imagination, emphasizing the liberation of creativity from traditional constraints. And by 'traditional,' Jorn meant the modern functional formal principles, to more realistic popular ones. On the other hand, International Lettrist, with Guy Debord as the mastermind, focused on exploring language and communication through radical means. Lettrists experimented with textual and visual forms, often employing techniques like *détournement*, which

17 - Duque, Félix. "Public art and the making of urban space." *City, Territory and Architecture*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2014 [Public art and the making of urban space | City, Territory and Architecture \(springer.com\)](#)

18 - Polieri, Jacques. *Festival de l'art d'avant-garde 1956 & 1957*. 3 volumes. Marseille, Nantes, 1956.

See also Yves Klein website [Resources - Yves Klein](#)

19 - e-flux Announcements For an Imaginist Renewal of the World. The Alba Congress: 1956-2019 <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/280674/for-an-imaginist-renewal-of-the-world-the-alba-congress-1956-2019>

20 - Mouvement international pour un Bauhaus imaginiste (MIBI)

During the fall of 1953, two years after the dissolution of the CoBrA group, Asger Jorn, then in Switzerland, contacted the architect Max Bill with the aim of (re)founding "the imaginary Bauhaus". In a letter dated December 1953, he contacted the painter Enrico Baj, and decided to launch a movement bringing together experimental artists. The following year, Jorn and Baj organized the first official event of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus in Albisola in August, as part of the International Ceramic Meetings. In December, during the 10th Triennale of Industrial Art in Milan, the MIBI exhibited for the first time, at the initiative of Max Bill, and alongside Lucio Fontana, among others.

See also: Apostolidès, Jean-Marie. (2015), *Debord. Le naufrageur*, Paris, Flammarion, collection Grandes biographies, p. 178-183, also : Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. 1988, MIT Press. P. 2-5

involved subverting existing cultural artifacts to transmit and communicate alternative messages and critique societal norms. Both movements challenged conventional notions of art and society, advocating for greater freedom of expression and a more active role for art in shaping cultural and political discourse. Their influences extended beyond the visual arts, impacting literature, cinema, and philosophy. They laid the ground for later movements such as International Situationist, founded in 1957 with a fusion of MIBI and International Lettrist.

The mainstream modern artists, New Realism²¹ movement, represented by figures like Yves Klein, Jacques Villeglé, and Arman Fernandez, are aligned with Bauhaus and backed by modernist architects of CIAM such as Le Corbusier, labeling themselves as the *'avant-garde.'* This label faced immediate backlash from opposing artists led by *Cobra* (later Bauhaus imaginiste) and the Lettrists (later the Situationists). The *Alba Congress of Liberated Artists* emerged as a prominent voice within this opposition. While the avant-garde prioritized form, abstraction, and function, the liberated artists focused on social issues, often citing the *'social cause'* as their primary inspiration for artistic creation. As Asger Jorn describes: *"Artistic research is identical to human science, which for us is interested science."*²²

Also, during Alba congress, Jorn launched the *'experimental laboratory'* with Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio and Piero Simondo. They began to create artworks spontaneously, improvised, collectively, and *on-site*²³, somehow like our day's concept of *'Art Residency.'*

With this background, Asger Jorn commences his speech in Alba by defining the controversial word *'avant-garde.'* He denounces its undue appropriation by the Marseille manifestation and claims that this word would be *"the only*

term that could be applied to our movement." Denouncing the established forces, Jorn described the avant-garde artists as someone rejecting the capitalist relations of art and being in the middle of a fight, both for society and for artistic evolution:

*"There are two conditions that we shall call a movement, an avant-garde one. First, this group movement must be isolated and, without direct support from established forces, abandoned to an apparently impossible and useless struggle. Secondly, the struggle of this group must be of essential importance for the forces in whose name it is fighting (in our case, the human society and artistic evolution) and that the position gained is later confirmed by a general evolution."*²⁴

The other speaker of the congress (1st World Congress of Liberated Artists) in Alba was Gil J. Wolman, who talked on behalf of *Internationale Lettriste* (IL) and drew the outline of what would become the spearhead of the new formation. He takes note of the irreversibility of what he calls the process of negation and destruction, which accelerates its manifesto concerning all the traditional conditions of artistic creation. Wolman calls for researching an idea or a form of life that would correspond to all the actual possibilities, targeting the integral construction of the environment and the lifestyle. (Andreotti, 2008)²⁵

*"Everything that can be undertaken now in the field of urban planning, architecture, or elsewhere can only have value insofar as we will have previously found an answer to this question of lifestyle."*²⁶

In opposition to Le Corbusier, who made for his works an illustration and an instrumental power of action for the worst repression forces, Wolman recommends an experimental urbanism and a baroque one, *'turned completely toward the life,'* capable of *'discovering the new and chaotic jungles,*

21 - Nouveau Réalisme

22 - Jorn, Asger. "Contre le fonctionnalisme." In *Pour la forme, Internationale Situationniste*, Paris, 1957. Edited by Libero Andreotti, 69-71. La Villette, Paris: 2008.

23 - Sur place

24 - Jorn, Asger. "Opening Speech at the First World Congress of Free Artists 1956." In *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 35. La Villette, Paris: 2008.

25 - Andreotti, Libero, ed. *Le Grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*. La Villette, 35, Paris: 2008.

26 - Wolman, Gil. "Intervention de Wolman, délégué de l'Internationale lettriste au congrès d'Alba en septembre 1956." In *Documents relatifs à la fondation de l'Internationale Situationniste: 1948-1957*, edited by Gérard Berréby, 596. Paris: Allia, 1985.

by useless doings²⁷ and meaningless experiments', a lifestyle that "will be determined by 'liberty' (freedom) and 'leisure.' By all means, Unitary Urbanism must become the framework and occasion for exciting plays (games)." ²⁸

As for Philippe Simay, few movements, like the Situationists, have placed the urban question at the heart of their artistic and literary practices. Conceived as the space of production of the society of spectacle, consumption, and social control then, on the contrary, as a "new theater of operation in culture," that is to say, as a terrain of struggle and experimentation, the city represented for the situationists the very place of a revolutionary transformation of existence, through the participation of city dwellers and the reintegration of the poetic into the ordinary. (Simay, 2009)²⁹ Hence, as cultural partisans, the situationists considered art a tool for urban intervention to change lifestyles.

3. The Political Struggle of International Situationist and May 68

The nature of the presence of artists in the street is an avant-garde act by itself. Being "isolated and without direct support" of the capitalists supporting formal artists of the mainstream, and "the struggle" for the "human society" and "artistic evolution" made the artists create and exhibit artworks for ordinary people in public space, rather than for privileged people in the galleries.³⁰

Art moved into public spaces during the 1960s, particularly in France, mirroring the era's social and political changes. Notable artworks exhibited in French streets between 1960 and 1967 included Jean Tinguely's Kinetic Sculptures, Arman's Accumulations, and Niki de Saint Phalle's statues. Often displayed in front of audiences or public view, some

these works blurred the lines between private creation and public exhibition, some of them in total abstraction, in some other cases, critique of consumer culture. This vibrant period of artistic expression in public spaces reflected the spirit of the times and a desire for social and/or political engagement through art. However, while the traditional venue for art exhibitions in this category has shifted from the 'white cube' of galleries to outdoor spaces, the scale of artwork by selected artists has become proportionally large with ordinary and daily materials rather than classic materials for artistic activities. Fueled by opposition avant-garde manifests and discourses, this resulted in some radical urban interventions in the 60s, where the artwork became substantial and tangible to public space, as some partisan cultural struggle and indication of opposition against institutional frameworks. It resembles social or political activism, which is the primary motivation for artists to take their work to the streets.

Constant described an ideal urban space, with artists' interventions, to create constructed situations in a playful city: "[...] animation of a random street, the psychological effect, the ordinary and daily surfaces and constructions, the rapid change of the aspect of a space by ephemeral elements, the rapidity with which the ambience of the places change, and the possible variations in general ambiances of the neighborhood" ³¹

Gabriel Zacarias describes the situation: "The situation, as an active influence on daily life, appears to be the antidote to the spectacular passivity so criticized by the situationists." ³²

Gabriel Zacarias describes the situation: "The situation, as an active influence on daily life, appears to be the antidote to the spectacular passivity so criticized by the situationists." ³³ "The situationists are indebted to the historical avant-garde

27 - en faisant inutile

28 - Idem

29 - Simay, Philippe. "Une Autre Ville Pour Une Autre Vie. Henri Lefebvre et Les Situationnistes." Rue Descartes, no. 63, 2009, pp. 17–26. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41941046>. Accessed 12 June 2024.

30 - Keywords from Asger Jorn's speech on avant-garde art, Alba Congress 1956

31 - Nieuwenhuys, Constant. "Le grand jeu à venir." in Potlatch, n° 30, 15 July 1959, pp. 3-5. Republished in Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville, edited by Libero Andreotti, 80–81. La Villette, Paris: 2008.

32 - Hemmens, Alastair, and Gabriel Zacarias. "L'Internationale situationniste est devenu un objet de recherche universitaire." Interview by Galaad Wilgos. Published on November 28, 2020. Available at: [Marxiste.org](https://www.marxiste.org) - Entretien Alastair Hemmens et Gabriel Zacarias, also: <https://www.marianne.net/agora/entretiens-et-debats/alastair-hemmens-et-gabriel-zacarias-linternationale-situationniste-est-devenu-un-objet-de-recherche-universitaire>

33 - Hemmens, Alastair, and Gabriel Zacarias. "L'Internationale situationniste est devenu un objet de recherche universitaire." Interview

(Dada, surrealism), and like them, wanted to use art to transform life, [...] that its goal is to enrich daily life, and, finally, that we can act consciously to achieve this goal (life ceasing to be a series of chance situations to become a series of constructed situations).”³⁴

International Situationists proposed some key definitions, describing their forms and concepts for any artistic intervention and the transformation of the existing urbanism to a new one, persuading the artists, architects, agitators, and other actors for activism, as Guy Debord proposed “constructed situation” as *Moment of life, concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a set of events.*³⁵ “Dérive” is an experimental mode of behavior linked to the conditions of the technical urban society of hasty passage through varied ambiances. Also said, more particularly, to designate the duration of a continuous exercise of this experience.³⁶

Dérive is an unplanned journey through a landscape, usually urban, where participants stop focusing on their everyday relations to their social environment. Debord defines the dérive as “a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances.”³⁷ By presenting the dérive, Debord suggests his readers reconsider how they experience

urban space. Rather than remaining trapped in their daily routine and making the same journey every day without paying the slightest attention to their living environment, the dérive urges city dwellers to follow their emotions to look at urban situations from a radically new angle.³⁸

“Détournement” is another keyword of the situationists, as an abbreviation of the formula: “*diversion of prefabricated aesthetic elements. Integrating current or past productions of the arts into a higher construction of the environment.*”³⁹

Debord clarifies their immediate task: “*We must support the workers’ parties [...] destroy, by all hyper-political means, the bourgeois idea of happiness. We must present a revolutionary alternative to the dominant culture everywhere. [...] We must put forward the slogans*⁴⁰ *of unitary urbanism, experimental behavior, hyper-political propaganda, and the construction of ambiances.*”⁴¹

“*Construction of ambiances in public space*”⁴² plays a crucial role in Guy Debord’s doctrine for a new urbanism. He was a pivotal figure from 1957 to 1968, playing a significant role in the May 1968 movement in Paris. His influence extended to a wide range of individuals, including students, professors in art schools, and intellectuals, who were all partisans of the movement. Debord’s most renowned work, *The Society of the Spectacle*,⁴³ –considered by some, a renewed version of

by Galaad Wilgos. Published on November 28, 2020. Available at: [Marxiste.org](https://www.marxiste.org) - Entretien Alastair Hemmens et Gabriel Zacarias, also: <https://www.marianne.net/agora/entretiens-et-debats/alastair-hemmens-et-gabriel-zacarias-linternationale-situationniste-est-devenu-un-objet-de-recherche-universitaire>

34 - Idem

35 - Debord, Guy-Ernest. “Définitions.” *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (1957). Republished in *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 137-138. Paris: La Villette, 2008.

36 - Idem

37 - McDonough, Tom, ed. *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. Boston: October Press, 2004.

38 - Debord, Guy-Ernest. “Théorie de la dérive.” *Les Lèvres nues*, no. 9 (December 1956). Republished in *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 88-90. Paris: La Villette, 2008.

39 - Debord, Guy-Ernest. “Définitions.” *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (1957). Republished in *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 137-138. Paris: La Villette, 2008

40 - les mots d’ordre

41 - Debord, Guy-Ernest. “Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l’organisation et de l’action de la tendance situationniste internationale.” *Inter*, no. 44, supplément, été 1989, 1-11. Les Éditions Intervention, 1989

42 - Debord, Guy-Ernest. “Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l’organisation et de l’action de la tendance situationniste internationale.” *Inter*, no. 44, supplément, été 1989, 1-11. Les Éditions Intervention, 1989

43 - Debord, Guy-Ernest. *La Société du Spectacle*. Paris: Editions Buchet-Chastel, 1967.

Marx's 'The Capital'— was a cornerstone of the movement. The text is significant in Marxist literature, exerting a profound influence. His ideas, particularly his critique of the spectacle of modern society, resonated deeply with the era's sentiments. As recently revealed in their interviews, the philosopher Henri Lefebvre and the artist Jacques Villeglé have interacted with Guy Debord. Their communications with Debord have probably influenced their work and perspectives.^{44 45}

4. A Dance Between Form and Ideology; Artists in the Street: non-ideological public art "à la mode".

The second wave of avant-garde artists, such as Christo, Matta-Clark, Brancusi, Niki de Saint Phalle, Calder, Serra, etc., exhibited their artworks in public space, a new place of exhibition, somehow experienced and theorized by the Situationists. The opposition group even influenced some artists from the New Realism, such as Villeglé and Arman. The second generation of post-68 artists, who have been exhibiting their works in open spaces, streets, plazas, public spaces, and the like since the early 1970s, have distanced themselves from protest, political, leftist, and critical art. In terms of *Form*, they farmed on land cultivated before by the Situationists.

In his speech at the Alba Congress, Asger Jorn proposed to the artists, "Create! Artists. Don't talk!" Therefore, artists in the 1960s had radical avant-garde tendencies in practice but not necessarily in theory. But they were trapped in the two blades of the scissors of avant-garde movements. Christo and his artwork *The Wall of Oil Barrels* and, later, the wrapping monuments could be examples of these artists, somehow inclined toward the opposition avant-garde movements led by Asger Jorn and the situationists.

a. Villeglé and Arman: situationist idea, abstract form.

François Dufrêne⁴⁶, a French artist known for his *décollage* technique, once said, "I am a painter of the street." This sentiment resonated with Jacques Villeglé, another prominent figure in the New Realism movement. Villeglé's work, characterized by torn posters and urban fragments, intersected with the revolutionary ideas of Situationist International. However, Villeglé maintained a delicate balance—a dance—between *form and ideology*. As Laurence Pythoud described the atmosphere of those years:

*"Art is on the streets; you must pick it up. Art is for everyone; everyone has their mark. In 1959, with his comrades Hains and François Dufrêne, Villeglé created the concept of "anonymous lacerated." The poster is made with the paper of the moment. It's a scripture. [...] The poster is a mirror."*⁴⁷

His *décollage* technique consisted of tearing up advertising posters and re-collaging them as new works of art to create new abstract posters. This technique resonated with the Situationist concept of *détournement*, as it involved repurposing found materials from the urban environment to develop new artistic statements. Although it was abstract in the content of the works, this destruction and reconstruction of one thing and turning it into another can be considered a realization of the *détournement* concept. Villeglé admits that his works had a political and economic orientation:

- *Is it a political bias?*

- *Politically and economically. After the [Nazi] Occupation [of Paris], there was a shortage of paper. Publishers, writers, and journalists complained that the paper was going to advertising and commerce to the detriment of information. By looking for work in advertising, I brought back to culture what was taken up by commerce and political propaganda.*⁴⁸

However, Villeglé denied that his artwork was situationist. But he already knew Debord and the others, as well as the situationist concepts such as the *dérive* and *détournement*:

44 - Ross, Kristin. "Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International." Interview conducted and translated in 1983. October, no. 79 (Winter 1997). *Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview* (notbored.org). *Sur les situationnistes. Entretien inédit d'Henri Lefebvre avec Kristin Ross - Période* (revueperiode.net)

45 - Douaire, Pierre-Évariste. "Interview avec Jacques Villeglé." ParisArt, 2005. <https://www.paris-art.com/jacques-villegle-5>

46 - François Dufrêne was born in Paris in 1930. He joined the Lettrist Movement in 1946. He became friends with Yves Klein in 1950, then with Hains and Villeglé in 1954. See biography: [François Dufrêne \(dufrene.net\)](http://dufrene.net)

47 - Pythoud, Laurence. "Interview avec Jacques Villeglé: «L'affiche c'est comme une jungle»." *Le Temps*, Publié le 22 juin 1999. <https://www.letemps.ch/culture/jacques-villegle-laffiche-cest-une-jungle>

"Nicolas Bourriaud invited me to speak at a conference about the *dérive*, but I did not want to push too far because it seemed too Situationist. [...] To respond to Nicolas Bourriaud, the search for posters is not done by the '*dérive*.' The search for the poster involves 'walking.'" ⁴⁹

In a way, Villeglé preserved the concept—the visual language—of Situationist art while emptying it of explicit political ideology. His *décollage*, composed of torn posters, abstracted the urban landscape into visual poetry. These works were simultaneously accessible and elusive, inviting viewers to interpret them freely. Was it simplicity or complexity? A straightforward abstraction or a nuanced *détournement* of the form? Or both?

With a soft denial, Villeglé's art embodied the spirit of the 1960s—a time of upheaval, questioning, and experimentation. His *décollages*, like fragments of collective memory, whispered secrets of the streets. They were both a celebration of the materiality of urban existence and an unconscious, subtle nod to the Situationist concepts. In this delicate dance between form and ideology, Villeglé left room for interpretation, allowing the streets themselves to speak. However, the spirit of the time and the inflammation of society have had such an effect on the artist. So, one shall argue that Villeglé's work was a form of *détournement* where the streets, the posters, and the torn layers became the canvas for a silent rebellion, a fusion of the banal and the poetic, a celebration of the accidental beauty found in degradation. His method of destroying and creating something new echoed the Situationist *détournement*, even if he chose not to wear its ideological mantle overtly.

Villeglé's *décollage* invited people to wander the streets, to *dérive*, to discover hidden narratives within the torn fragments. And perhaps, just like the Situationists, Villeglé

understood that the 'streets' themselves could be a radical manifesto—a silent manifesto of *form* and *freedom*, but with some indirect abstract statements.

Revisiting François Dufrêne, a *décollage* artist with this specific technique the same as Villeglé, and a friend of his, who was a young member of the Lettriste movement alongside Isidore Isou⁵⁰. However, his circle expanded to include Yves Klein and other artists of New Realism later. This trajectory positioned Dufrêne as a unique artist who straddled two opposing avant-garde movements, creating a resonance between the contrasting art discourses. And he exhibited in the street, as he claimed to.

Arman Fernandez, another contemporary artist whose professional life started with avant-garde trends after the Second World War, also joined the circle of New Realism artists. He is best known for his *Accumulation*, also *destruction and recomposition* of objects.⁵¹ His technique consisted of a cycle of production, consumption, and destruction.⁵² So, the *trash accumulation* became the accumulation of objects, and from 1971 to 2000, he started to take over the public spaces of nearly a hundred cities worldwide by carrying out public commissions in the form of monumental works.⁵³ In 1997, in an interview, Arman mentioned consumption as the opposite of art. According to Arman, art (sculpture) becomes the object of consumption. So, he began to accumulate objects in a three-dimensional way with a critique of consumption. However, he also implied that his three-dimensional artworks of objects happened accidentally:

"The goal of a sculptor is to define a space around a volume or a volume in a space. By accident, I make three-dimensional things using objects, so I'm a kind of *para-sculptor*."⁵⁴

Arman, between these two edges of the scissors, and with his relationships with both spectrums, enters the concept

49 - Douaire, Pierre-Évariste. "Interview avec Jacques Villeglé." ParisArt, 2005. <https://www.paris-art.com/jacques-villegle-5>

50 - Romanian-born French poet, dramaturge, novelist, film director, economist, and visual artist. He was the founder of Lettrism, an art and literary movement which owed inspiration to Dada and Surrealism. An important figure in the mid-20th Century avant-garde, while his political writings are seen as foreshadowing the May 1968 movements.

See Acquaviva, Frédéric. *Isidore Isou*. Neuchâtel: Éditions du Griffon, 2019.

51 - Arman Chronology [Welcome to Arman the historical site - CHRONOLOGIE - \(arman-studio.com\)](http://www.arman-studio.com)

52 - Rimbault, Dominik. *Arman, portrait d'un sculpteur*. France, 1998. 75 min.

53 - Idem

54 - Idem



Photo 1: Arman, Long-term Parking, 1982, Château de Montcel, Jouy-en-Josas, France

of 'trash accumulation,' a kind of criticism of consumerism. But his works take an abstract content. Although he takes the idea and form, from the critical view of the left artistic currents. Criticizing consumerism and collecting and transforming trash into new three-dimensional works could be read as a *détournement*.

As an example, Arman's large-scale installation *Long-term parking* in 1982 in Château de Montcel in Jouy-en-Josas, France, consists of sixty mostly French cars set in 18,000 kg of concrete, exhibited the spirit of New Realism's "new, sensitive, perceptive approaches to the real" by "accumulation" of the objects. Still, the critique of the society of consumption

was somehow the situationist concept in art, and how he transformed the cars into something else inside the concrete recalls the *détournement* concept.

However, Conservatively, Arman never came to the street or high-traffic public places to exhibit his outdoor artworks, and he displayed his works in open spaces that people less frequently frequented. Of course, except for "Everyone's Time"⁵⁵, where the square is in front of the Paris Saint-Lazare train station, which the French government ordered in 1985. So, his artistic manifesto didn't directly interact with people, which differs from Villoglé, Christo, and Matta-Clark's approach.

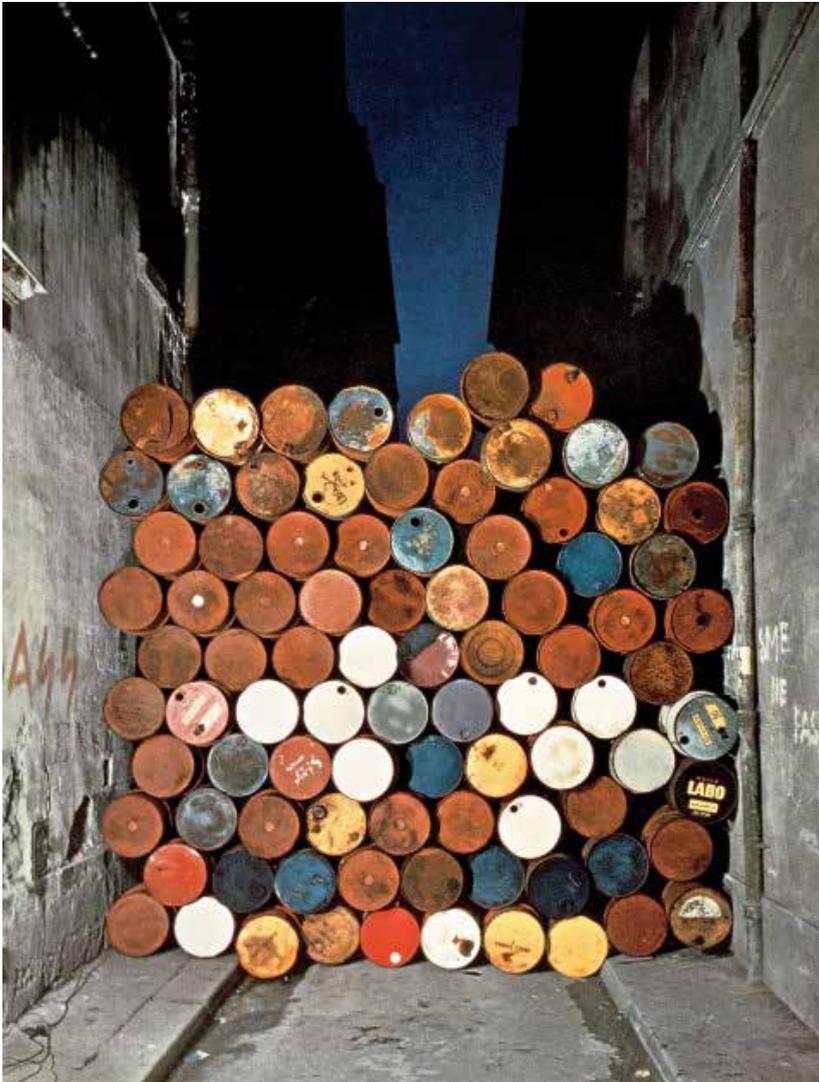


Photo 2: Christo, Wall of Oil Barrels, 1962, Paris, France

b. Christo and Matta-Clark

Some other distinguished artists came outside to it with some unconventional materials and themes, such as 'dirty ordinary objects in the street' like Christo's Wall of Oil Barrels and 'destruction theme' as a critique of 'construction' by Gordon Matta Clark.

Christo's artwork, 'Wall of Oil Barrels - The Iron Curtain' (Paris), was created in 1962 (with the collaboration of his wife Jeanne-Claude) on Visconti Street in Paris and is an early example of this artwork. This ephemeral installation

consisted of 89 oil barrels turned onto their sides, creating an obstacle on a narrow street in Paris's Quartier Latin. It stretched from one end of the street to the other, completely blocking the thoroughfare to pedestrian and vehicle traffic for the eight hours it stood in place. This installation caused a commotion and almost led to the artists' arrest, as they had failed to get permission from the police. Inspired by the Berlin Wall, the artists aimed to convey their emotions about division through this artwork. Art historian Cécile Debray identifies this piece as emblematic of a new current in art, which she describes as a form of New Realism.⁵⁶ A

⁵⁶ - Debray, Cécile. *Le Nouveau Réalisme*. Paris: Éditions RMN, 2007.

statement against the Berlin Wall, or as Christo says, «a poetical statement»⁵⁷ –at the same time, political– against the Wall, built the year before (1961). Hence, he made an ephemeral wall, a spatial intervention in public space, and, in situationists' words, a constructed situation. Illegal artwork? Christo describes it as such:

*"I did illegal things, you know, something illegal, you know, I escaped illegally from a communist country."*⁵⁸

The installation in question embodied the spirit of gorilla art, aligning closely with the situationists' concept of "avant-garde liberated artists." While Christo was not officially part of the party, he was deeply plunged in Parisian intellectual and avant-garde artistic circles in the 60s, rubbing shoulders with those instrumental in leading society toward the events of May '68.

Also, Christo's wrapping projects, embodying the Situationist notion of *détournement*, challenged traditional perceptions of urban art. The significant time lapse between conceptualization (around 70s and 80s) and realization of the wrapping projects (from 2018) revealed society's hesitance towards avant-garde monumental artworks within urban spaces. However, as contemporary urban ideologies evolved to embrace inclusivity and pedestrian-friendly environments, inspired by concepts like the Archigram's 'walking city' and the 'playful city' by the Situationists, public appreciation for Christo's monumental art gradually flourished, resulting in wrapping Arc de Triomphe in 2021, with almost 40 years apart from initial concept.

Le Corbusier's modernist urbanism, focusing on functional efficiency and rational urbanism, often neglected the importance of playful engagement within urban environments. However, as cities evolve, integrating playful elements into urban design enhances their livability and fosters a sense of community and creativity. This shift from rigid modernist principles towards a more dynamic and interactive approach reflects changing societal values and

aspirations for urban living. The International Situationist movement has presumably influenced Christo and Jeanne-Claude's monumental artworks, particularly their conceptual approach and engagement with urban spaces. Their work resonates with the Situationists' emphasis on *détournement*, critique of spectacle, and advocacy for reclaiming urban spaces.

Gordon Matta-Clark, a revolutionary artist known for his "*anarchitecture*" practice, which involved transforming abandoned buildings into temporary works of art, is another example. This concept reminds us of '*anti-art*,' a critical concept from Dada to Marcel Duchamp, and, consequently, post-war artists of the 60s such as *Isidor Isou* and *Guy Debord*. His interventions, such as the one at the Centre Pompidou construction site, were not acts of vandalism but deliberate artistic statements that questioned the permanence of architectural structures. His work carried profound conceptual implications, highlighting the cyclical nature of creation and destruction. His artwork '*Conical Intersect*' (1975) disrupted the conventional use of an abandoned building in Paris, challenging viewers to reconsider their perceptions of urban space and architecture. So, his concept in a phrase would be constructing a situation by '*destruction*.' Matta-Clark's political engagement was evident in his early works, such as *Graffiti Truck* in 1973, which were pure political activism artwork. He was deeply influenced by a political event by communist youths in Italy. Art historian Pamela M. Lee describes Matta-Clark's work as a politics of things approaching their social exhaustion and the potential of their reclamation.⁵⁹ Despite Christo, Matta Clark claimed himself as a gorilla artist, using words instead of bullets to express his belief in the vulnerability of the system.⁶⁰

I FEEL MORE LIKE

GORILLA

A URBAN GARILLA ONLY USING

*WORDS INSTEAD OF BULLETS—*⁶¹

57 - BBC Four. "Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Monumental Art." Documentary film, 2018.

58 - Idem

59 - Lee, Pamela M. *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

Lee also cites Henri Lefebvre's text "Right to the City," which is reprinted in *Writings on Cities*, edited and translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 66-70.

60 - Wall, Donald. "Gordon Matta-Clark's Building Dissections." *Arts magazine* (May 1976), 79.

61 - Gordon Matta-Clark, written card note, published in Frances Richard, *Spacism, Gordon Matta-Clark and the Politics of Shared Space, Places*, March 2019 <https://placesjournal.org/article/gordon-matta-clark-spacism>



Photo 3: Gordon Matta-Clark, Graffiti Truck, 1973. [Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark]

5. Nuit Blanche: Large-scale détournement of public art

Peter Wollen believes that the Situationists' wilder projects for *détournement* never took off. In *Potlatch* (International Situationist magazine), there had been many visionary proposals: "The Metro should be running all night. Notable aerial runways should be constructed to facilitate journeys across the rooftops. Churches should be turned into children's playgrounds (or Chambers of Horror). Railway stations should be left exactly as they are –except that all timetables and travel information should be removed from them. [...] Street names should be changed. All museums should be closed, and the artworks should be distributed and hung in bars and Arab cafés." ⁶²

Even though the grand vision of the situationists to rebuild the entire city, filled with "*constructed situations*," has not been fully realized, nevertheless, in the early 21st century, some of their ideas came to life for instance during the *Nuit Blanche* event in Paris in 2002. The entire city center is transformed – "*détournée*"– into something else, with art exhibitions, installations, and performances scattered throughout. There is also a map of events resonating with the situationists' interest in cartography, such as The Naked City map by Debord in 1959.

62 - Wollen, Peter. "Situationists and Architecture." *NLR* (New Left Review), no. 8, March–April 2001.

<https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii8/articles/peter-wollen-situationists-and-architecture>

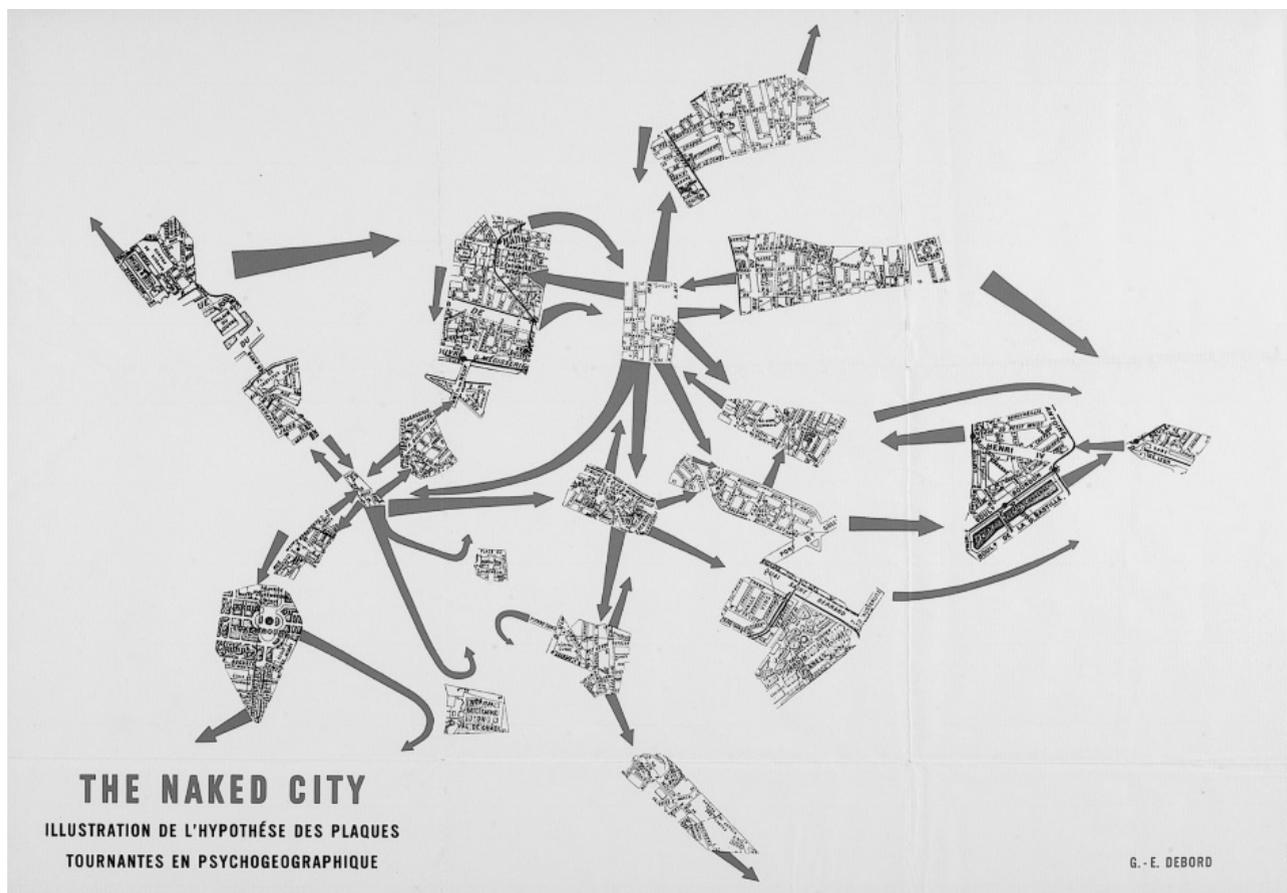


Photo 4 : Guy Debord, The Naked City: Illustration de l'hypothèse des plaques tournantes en psychogéographique (1957), originally by Asger Jorn, in Pour la Forme (Paris: Internationale situationniste, 1958)

These “*constructed situations*” create ephemeral ambiances, and spectators are encouraged to “*dérive*” —to wander and explore these ambiances in the city. The event lasts from dusk till dawn, aligning with Guy Debord’s proposed duration for a *dérive*. Despite Debord’s suggestion,⁶³ *Nuit Blanche* occurs late at night, reflecting modern “city nightlife.” This list of connections between these two separate worlds is more than coincident.

During *Nuit Blanche*, infrastructures such as the metro, streets, public spaces, churches, government buildings, courtyards, quays, squares, boulevards, gardens, etc., transformed – “*détournée*.” A specific part of the city is transformed into an open-air exhibition of art and performance. The city is not an amphoteric stance but part of a grand artistic performance. Interactive artistic installations engage the audience as active participants.

63 - The average duration of a *dérive* is the day, considered as the time interval between two periods of sleep. The starting and ending points, in time, in relation to the duration of solar day drift, are indifferent, but it should be noted however that the last hours of the night are generally unsuitable for *dérive*.

Debord, Guy-Ernest. “Théorie de la *dérive*.” *Les Lèvres nues*, no. 9 (December 1956). Republished in *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 88-90. Paris: La Villette, 2008.

Nuit Blanche is considered a large-scale, ephemeral public art event in the city, lasting just one night. This event bears striking similarities to the situationists' concept of unitary urbanism, or a brief snapshot of it, filled with "constructed situations" for the public to discover and experience while transforming the ordinary daily public space into something different, realizing Lefebvre and Debord's concept of a "city for all." As Simon Sadler suggests in his book 'The Situationist City,' 'constructed situations' are "ephemeral, without a future, passageways," the synthesis of those sublime moments when a combination of environment and people produce a transcendent and revolutionary consciousness.⁶⁴

The *ephemerality* of constructed situations made artists use public spaces and some ordinary materials to create situations in the city. Another aspect of these artworks was that they were just for exhibition, with artistic expressional value but without any price. That was another socio-political activism of the artists to struggle against "art as merchandise" and a part of the more significant battle against capitalism of the leftist artists.

Guy Debord has always considered art an experience. He opposed any art form based on contemplation, the separation between the public and the artwork.

*"The concept of the spectacle, which he would later expand on, originates in this typically avant-garde critique of the autonomy of art. The non-intervention is the very principle of the spectacle, and consequently, the spectacle is everywhere where passivity reigns, both in art and daily life."*⁶⁵

The fact that the situationists considered art in the city as a kind of play⁶⁶ with active spectators, experimental (both for artists and the spectators), free and accessible for all,

in addition to their main keyword, "constructed situations," fits with the contemporary art festivals in the city, mainly the Nuit Blanche in Paris. In Nuit Blanche, there is the map, not an ordinary one but a map of constructed situations and ambiances, "like the psychogeographical maps of Debord and Asger Jorn," exhibited temporarily from dusk to dawn, so there would be strolling⁶⁷ by spectators, a kind of "dérive." There are public artworks, interactive ones, to be experienced by the people. An ideal "unitary urbanism" of the situationists, described by Constant and Debord, radically and ideologically but formally achieved in the 21st century, however, without political intentions.

6. Urbanism as a condition; Architecture as an action. Public space as an art gallery

What I want to do is work at the intersection of sculpture and architecture, bringing architecture alive and making you see it with a new eye.

– Richard Serra, 1983

In 1983, Clara Clara, the artwork of American artist Richard Serra, was temporarily installed in the Tuileries Garden in Paris. "It is made up of long curves of a special steel, and here you see Richard Serra, who is watering them to cause rust on it." As the TV reportage in France Television described it.⁶⁸

What made Serra as an artist claim to be playing a role in the field of architecture? How and why the boundaries of art and architecture faded away in his artwork? These are the questions which initiated this article, transforming the art spatially, 3-dimensional, outside the galleries, large-scale with different materials, not-for-sale, free-to-visit artworks, and, more importantly, as an intervention in public space.

64 - Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. 1988, p. 105. MIT Press.

65 - Zacarias, Gabriel Ferreira. "Le paradoxe situationniste : la fonction de la théorie dans l'art de Guy Debord." *Marges*, 22 (2016): 10-22. Référence électronique. Zacarias, Gabriel Ferreira. "Le paradoxe situationniste : la fonction de la théorie dans l'art de Guy Debord." *Marges*, [En ligne], 22 | 2016, mis en ligne le 22 avril 2018, consulté le 26 avril 2024. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/marges/1066> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/marges.1066>

66 - jeu

67 - déambulations

68 - ina.fr Archive de l'institut nationale de l'audiovisuel, France

When art is located outside the gallery, the parameters that define it are called into question and all sorts of new possibilities for thinking about the relationship between art and architecture are opened up. (Rendell, 2012)

In the words of the Situationists, urbanism is a condition, while architecture is an action. "Architecture will no longer be a builder of forms alone but a builder of complete ambiances."

The Situationists were very cautious with their words. For example, Debord rejected the word "situationism" as a description of their group used by some. He believed the "-ism" suffix implied a fixed, static ideology, contradicting their revolutionary praxis's fluid and dynamic nature. "*The notion of situationism is obviously devised by anti-situationists.*"⁶⁹ For them, '-ism' represents something like an existing condition or a becoming condition in a passive form. Hence, -ism remains a condition, while '-ist' is an activist, an active player, who imposes some actions to change or interfere with existing conditions.

That's why they didn't use the term 'urbanist' at all. They used only 'architects, agitators, actors,' or 'situationists' for the players based on existing conditions. Similarly, Le Corbusier avoided using 'urbanist' as he considered the architect (or ultimately himself) the principal actor of urban planning. So, for him, an architect is indeed an urbanist, and there is no need to use another word for this architect role.

The criticism of urbanism by Guy Debord and the Situationists was now the criticism of an existing condition. At the beginning of the '*Form for a New Urbanism*,' it is said that "*architecture is the simplest way to articulate time and space, to modulate reality, to make people dream.*" It is not just a question of plastic articulation and modulation, an expression of a passing joy, but of an influential modulation, which is part of the eternal curve of human desires and progress in realizing them.

*Based on this mobile civilization, architecture will be –at least in its beginnings– a means of experimenting with the thousand ways of modifying life, with a view to a synthesis that can only be legendary.*⁷⁰

Simay writes that architecture and urbanism will have to play a significant role in transforming lifestyles in the future. [...] Therefore, Architecture as a practice and realization must be reconsidered: sensitive, fluid, and playful architecture. (Simay, 2009)

So, the situationists introduced '*Unitary Urbanism*' as a counter-model stemming from the Amsterdam Declaration, written in 1958 by Debord and Constant. The term unitary is essential because situationist urbanism wants to bring together all the arts and techniques to build a city that will be unified by abolishing the separation between artists and population and thus putting an end to the figure of the specialized urban planner. So, they criticize existing urban planning; they reject the "specialized urban planner" in favor of situationist unitary urban planning, which all artists, architects, agitators, and citizens are designing. The situationist international will propose to retrieve the sociable species by reactivating the link between the city, desire, and life through a space appropriate for all. (Simay, 2008)

The situationists traced a whole new urbanism by critical observation of the society and dreaming of a romantic utopian future, such as '*The Great Game is Coming*' manifesto by Constant in 1959. Gilles Ivain also criticizes the "*cold architecture*" of the city while describing the characteristics of the future ideal architecture:

*"We will not prolong the mechanical civilizations and cold architecture that ultimately led to boring leisure. We propose to invent new changeable [moving] decor. [...] Tomorrow's architecture will, therefore, be a means of altering contemporary notions of time and space"*⁷¹

69 - Debord, Guy-Ernest. "Définitions." *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (1957). Republished in *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 137-138. Paris: La Villette, 2008

70 - Ivain, Gilles. "Formulaire Pour Un Urbanisme Nouveau." *L'Internationale lettriste*, October 1953. Republished in *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1, June 1958. In *Le grand jeu à venir; textes situationnistes sur la ville*, edited by Libero Andreotti, 60–63. La Villette, Paris: 2008.

71- Idem

Situationists consider urbanism as a condition that can be shaped and fixed. So, they would instead call the action of shaping urbanism architecture. Any intervention in public space to shape urbanism would be considered an action of architecture. This history of situationist ideas could resonate with Richard Serra's claim about his intervention in public space, to do architecture with sculpture, and to present a new form of transformed architecture in public space. The need to play with architecture, time, and space means constructing situations in specific places in public space and for a limited duration, and the action is the architecture. So, in contemporary words, we could call it "*architecture of the ephemeral in public space.*"

In conclusion, we would say that artistic intervention in the public space to change or affect urbanism is presumably a form of "*transforming architecture*" that comes from the Situationists' intellectual legacy. Alain Guiheux developed the concept of transforming architecture, believing it "*would be a history of architecture that articulates itself.*"⁷² Some kind of self-articulation in the late-modern era has been done through the artists and public art, as Serra claims.

Consequently, according to the situationist definition of new urbanism, any urban intervention or modification by artists could be perceived as architecture, as Richard Serra unconsciously claimed. Architecture here is not a discipline but a political action with a broad meaning of space-making. This fact marked the onset of the blurred boundaries between art and architecture in public spaces. This article tried to argue how the two cutting edges of the opposite avant-gardes, that is, the theories of the Situationists in the illustration of new urbanism, along with the practices of other avant-gardes, mainly formal in appearance, led to the formation of public art as an architectural form of spatial intervention in public space, as the situationists formulated for Unitary Urbanism.

Finally, it is appropriate and relevant to mention the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics 2024. Contrary to the previous routine and tradition, this one was held not in the sports stadium but in the context of the city and among the people. On the streets, on the banks of the Seine, in the parks, on bridges, and on a six-kilometer *route in public space*. Paris, the city that initiated *Les Nuits Blanches*, has experienced such urban *détournements* for a one-day festival (*dérive*) since the beginning of the third millennium. From the dream of *Situationists* to the Paris Olympics 2024.

72 - Guiheux, Alain. *Le grand espace commun: L'architecture transforme*. 12, Métis Presses, 2017.

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