

The Making of *Fin de Copenhague & Mémoires*;  
the tactic of *détournement* in the collaboration between Guy Debord and Asger Jorn.

**HURRY! HURRY! HURRY!**

**TELL US IN NOT MORE THAN**  
**250 WORDS WHY YOUR GIRL**  
**IS THE SWEETEST GIRL IN**  
**TOWN**

State in your letter her name, occupation and age (remember she must be single, and from sixteen to nineteen, inclusive), and pop a recent picture of her in the envelope. And please write her name and address clearly on the back of the picture as well.

Address your entry to:

Psychogeographical Comitee of London  
(especially Debord and Jorn)

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August 16, 2008

history paper

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cover image:

final page of: Asger Jorn, conseiller technique pour le détournement Guy-Ernest Debord, *Fin de Copenhague*.  
Copenhagen: Permild & Rosengreen, 1957. (first edition 191/200 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam)

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## Introduction

In the works of Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *détournement* played an essential role in the construction of art during the early stages of the SI (Situationist International). For the Situationists *détournement* was used to create political statements rather than art. In order to explain this topic I will start with a brief description of both Guy Debord's and Asger Jorn's histories prior to their union in the SI. The construction of a time line will help to illustrate the sequence of events that eventually lead up to the student revolts in 1968 in the streets of Paris and other parts of France. This thesis will be concerning the formation years of the SI, in particular the events surrounding Debord and Jorn from the late 1940's just after WWII, until about 1960 when the SI had been formed. The people they worked with prior to meeting each other very much defined the directions they were to take. Although their interests were very similar, the forms of expression that each of them gave to them were quite different. Debord's more theoretical and textual approach complemented Jorn's more artistic approach to finding a new form of expression and communication. Debord was a strategic man; he always thought everything through, theorizing before acting. Jorn was just the opposite and believed that the theory would get in the way of his artistic spirit; instead he would work in concentrated intervals on a project or series, only to try and understand it and theorize it afterwards. His written contribution to the art world and the SI is not to be neglected. Each of these men was in search of a world, they dreamt of it, and attempted to show what it could look like, in their joint work. More than art, their work became, or essentially was a political message. Against a changing society that induced passiveness, they attempted to stage a revolt from within. They were aware that the medium they needed to communicate their message was the same medium that was the cause of this state of mind. They experimented with new implementations for media. Jorn worked with painting and collages in search of meaning in primitive and folk-art together with numerous groups and movements, many of which he initiated. Debord investigated the textual and cognitive aspects of language, coming in contact with the Lettrists Movement early in his life. These events made their awareness of the medium all the greater, combined with their theories and conception of a new world they paired up (along with others) to form the SI, which built on concepts developed by the Lettrists as well as the many artists active in the Avant-garde at the time. This paper comments on and illustrates the use of media by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn during the founding period of the Lettrist International (LI) and the Situationist International (SI). The maps they made together based on their theories of the *dérive*, *détournement* and psychogeography, and in particular the way in which *Fin de Copenhague* (Copenhagen: 1957) and *Mémoires* (Copenhagen: 1959) have come into being. These techniques and concepts are crucial for their understanding of the critique of existing society at that time. Concerning the urbanism (and inherent to this architecture) it was their belief that fragments for a new society could already be found in the existing cities, but that Modernization was swiftly converting these places into monotonous, uneventful spaces. This dullness created a society that was no longer alive according to their standards. It created a passivity that they strongly opposed. Instead they wanted to inject life and energy into the people, to help them to see again, to bring them to life. By creating situations, people could again come into action, instead of only absorbing images. People could become aroused. This was crucial in the theories and the work of the SI. The two books *Fin de Copenhague* and *Mémoires* are precisely this. They are the creation of situations, developed to create action, to go beyond words and theory but to invoke emotion and reaction, to bring people to life through the experience of the utopia of the Situationists.



## CoBrA – Lettrist International – Situationist International: chronology

- 1946 Lettrist movement formed by Isidore Isou and Gabriel Pomerand in Paris.
- 1948 November, CoBrA is formed.
- 1950 April, Lettrists disrupt Easter Mass at Notre Dame in Paris.
- 1951 April 20, Guy Debord meets Isou and the Lettrists at the forth Cannes Film Festival.
- October, Debord moves to Paris. CoBrA dissolved.
- 1952 February 11: First projection of Gil J. Wolman's *L'Anticoncept* in Paris and banned April 2.
- April 23: *Ion no. 1*, Paris, Editor: Marc-Gilbert Guillaumin, contains the scripts for *L'Anticoncept* and an early version of Howls for Sade, as well as Guy-Ernest Debord's *Prologomènes à tout cinéma futur* (Prolegomena to Any Future Cinema).
- June: Serge Berna, Jean-Louis Brau, Guy-Ernest Debord and Gil J. Wolman secretly form the radical Lettrist International tendency within the Lettrist Movement.
- June 30: First projection of Guy Debord's film *Hurlements en Faveur de Sade* in Paris. 75 minutes, 35mm, black and white. Voice-over: Gil J. Wolman, Guy Debord, Serge Berna, Barbara Rosenthal, Jean-Isidore Isou.
- October 29: "No More Flat Feet", tract denouncing Charlie Chaplin signed by the Lettrist International (Berna, Brau, Debord and Wolman), is thrown into the crowd at a press conference for Chaplin's film *Limelight* at the Ritz Hotel, Paris.
- November: "Exclusion" of Isidore Isou, Maurice Lemaitre and Gabriel Pomerand for publicly disassociating themselves from the Chaplin scandal.
- December: *Internationale Lettriste no. 1*, Paris.
- December 7: Founding Conference of the Lettrist International at Aubervilliers, France. Participants: Serge Berna, Jean-Louis Brau, Guy-Ernest Debord, Gil J. Wolman.
- 1953 Guy Debord writes "Never Work!" on a wall along the rue de Seine.
- September: Under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain, Ivan Chtcheglov completes his "Formulary for a new Urbanism."
- December: Foundation of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus.
- 1954 June 22: *Potlatch no. 1*, internal bulletin of the French Lettrist International group, Paris. Editor-in-chief: André Frank Conord.
- 1954 December: Asger Jorn meets Guy Debord in Paris.
- December 22: "Architecture for Life" an excerpt from Asger Jorn's book *Image and Form*, is published in *Potlatch no. 15*.

1955 September: Publication in *Les Lèvres nues* no.6 of Guy Debord's article "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," the first of a series of important Lettrist articles to appear in the Belgian journal.

1956 July: *Eristica* no.1. Journal of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. Editor: Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio. Editorial Committee: Enrico Baj, Christian Dotremont, Walter Korun.

September 2-8: First World Congress of Free Artists at Alba, Italy. Participants are members of: Nuclear Art Movement, ex-Cobra, International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, Lettrist International.

Two exhibitions are held simultaneously: Futurist Ceramics 1925-33, organized by Jorn and Gallizio, at Alba town hall; and an exhibition by the experimental laboratory at Corino cinema, involving Constant, Gallizio, Garelli, Jorn, Kotik, Rada, Simondo and Wolman.

November 2: *Potlatch* no.27, information bulletin of the Lettrist International, Paris.

Publication in *Les Lèvres Nues* no.9 of Guy Debord's article, "Theory of the *dérive*," in which the word 'situationist' makes its first appearance.

1957 January 13: Wolman and Jacques Fillon are excluded from the Lettrist International.

February 2-26: First Exhibition of Psychogeography, presented by the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, the Lettrist International and the London Psychogeographical Committee at Taptoe Gallery in Brussels. The catalogue lists paintings and ceramics by Debord, Jorn, Yves Klein, Ralph Rumney, Bernstein, Mohamed Dahou and a "mad psychogeographer", but only Jorn, Klein and Rumney participate.

May: *Fin de Copenhague* is made by Asger Jorn and Guy Debord, Copenhagen.

May 22: *Potlatch* no.28, information bulletin of the Lettrist International, Paris.

Exhibition by Arnal and Jorn at the Galerie Rive gauche in Paris. Publication of Jacques Prévert's *Peintures de Jorn* (Jorn's Paintings).

July 27-28: Founding Conference of the Situationist International (SI) at Cosio d'Arroscia, Italy. Participants: Bernstein, Debord (LI).Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, Jorn, Walter Olmo, Piero Simondo, Elena Verrone (International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus), Ralph Rumney (London Psychogeographical Committee).

September: Guy Debord begins work on *Mémoires*, a book 'composed entirely of prefabricated elements.'

November 5: *Potlatch* no.29, information bulletin of the Lettrist International, Paris.



1958 January 25-26: second SI Conference in Paris. Participants: Bernstein, Debord, Jorn, Abdelhafid Khatib, Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio.

Exclusions of Walter Olmo, Piero Simondo and Elena Verrone of the Italian Section.

March 15-April 5: Exhibition by Jorn at Rive Gauche Gallery, Paris.

April 4: Exclusion of Ralph Rumney, Italian section.

April 12: Address by the Situationist International to the General Assembly of the International Association of Art Critics, Meeting on 14 April 1958 at the World's Fair in Brussels, signed by A. Khatib, W. Korun, G.-E. Debord, H. Platschek, G. Pinot Gallizio and A. Jorn on behalf of the Algerian, Belgian, French, German, Italian and Scandinavian sections of the Situationist International. On the back of the pamphlet: "The classless society has found its artists. Long live the Situationist International!"

April 24-May 31: Exhibition by Jorn at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London.

April 26: 'First Industrial Conference' in Alba, Italy. Lecture by tape recorder and in person by Debord and Pinot Gallizio from the Italian translation of Debord's Report on the Construction of Situations.

May: *Rapporto sulla costruzione delle situazioni*, Italian edition of Guy Debord's Report on the Construction of Situations, with an introduction by Pinot Gallizio, Turin.

May 30: First exhibition of industrial paintings by Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, assisted by Giors Melanotte, Notizie Gallery, Turin. *Elogio di Pinot Gallizio* (In Praise of Pinot Gallizio), by Michèle Bernstein.

June: Second edition of Debord's Report on the Construction of Situations, Brussels.

Guy Debord and Michèle Bernstein meet Henri Lefebvre in the street.

*Internationale Situationniste no. 1*. Central bulletin published by the sections of the Situationist International. Editor: G.-E. Debord. Editorial committee: Mahomed Dahou, Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, Maurice Wyckaert.

July 8: Second showing of Pinot-Gallizio's exhibition of industrial painting, Montenapoleone Gallery, Milan.

September 3: September-October Exhibition by Jorn at Van de Loo Gallery, Munich.

Constant initiates a debate on Jorn's ideas "On our means and perspectives," *I.S. no. 2*.

Publication of *Pour la Forme: Ébauche d'une méthodologie des arts* (In Favor of Form: Toward a Methodology of the Arts), a collection of texts by Asger Jorn written and published in several languages, Published by the Situationist International, Paris.

October 10: Opening of *La Méthode*, a cabaret operated by Michèle Bernstein and Guy Debord on the Rue Descartes, Paris.

Walter Korun, of the Belgian section, is relieved of his functions.

November 10: Constant and Debord's "The Amsterdam declaration" (*I.S. no.2*).

Manifesto by the German Spur group (G. Britt, E. Eisch, L. Fischer, H. Prem, D. Rempt, G. Stadler, H. Sturm, H.P. Zimmer) and Jorn, Munich.

December: *Internationale Situationniste no.2*. Central bulletin published by the sections of the Situationist International. Editor: G.-E. Debord. Editorial Committee: Mohamed Dahou, Asger Jorn, Maurice Wyckaert.

1959 Release of *Mémoires* by Guy-Ernest Debord, with the help of Asger Jorn. Published by the Situationist International, Copenhagen. The cover is a sheet of raw number 2 sandpaper.

February: Exclusion of Hans Platschek, German section.

Debord is interviewed on Belgian radio, speaking at length on industrial painting.

April 6: Shooting begins for Guy Debord's film *On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Period of Time*.

15 April-8 May 'A meter of art for 40 to 70 marks,' slogan of Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio's first exhibition of industrial painting at Van de Loo Gallery, Munich.

April 17-20: third SI conference in Munich. Participants: Armando, Constant, G.-E. Debord, Erwin Eisch, Heinz Höfl, Asger Jorn, Giors Melanotte, Har Oudejans, Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, Heimrad Prem, Gretel Stadler, Helmut Sturm, Maurice Wyckaert, Hans-Peter Zimmer.

Foundation in Amsterdam of the Bureau for Investigation for Unitary Urbanism. Director: Constant.

*Potlatch* becomes a bulletin of internal liaison under the responsibility of the Dutch section.

Adoption of "The Amsterdam declaration."

May 4: Exhibition of around thirty maquettes for Constant's spatial constructions at the *Stedelijk Museum* in Amsterdam.

May 6-28: *Modifications*, an exhibition of 'some twenty pictures, partially repainted' by Jorn, at the Rive Gauche Gallery, Paris, and publishes "Detourned Painting."

May 13 Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio covers the walls, floor and ceiling of Drouin Gallery to create a 'cavern of anti-matter' out of 145 meters of rolls of industrial painting.

July 15: *Potlatch no.30*, internal newsletter of the Situationist International, new series no.1, Amsterdam.

Autum: Debord's First contact with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.

August: Article by Constant on the unification of the arts, their integration into everyday life and unitary urbanism in issue 6 of the journal *Forum*, Amsterdam.

September 18-October 25: Exhibition of collages, ceramics, drawings and graphic designs by Jorn, Van de Loo Gallery, Essen.

Editing of Debord's film *On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Period of Time*. One reel (20 mins.), 35mm, black and white. Produced by the Dansk-Fransk Experimentalfilms Kompagni and Laboratoire GTC.

November 5: Launch, at the Statsgymnasium in Aarhus, Denmark, of the Ceramic Mural (27 m long and 3 m high), produced by Jorn during the summer in Alba, Italy.

December: *Internationale Situationniste no.3*. Central bulletin published by the sections of the Situationist International. Editor: G.-E. Debord. Editorial committee: Constant, Asger Jorn, Helmut Sturm, Maurice Wyckaert (resignation of Mohamed Dahou, Algerian section).

The concept of the spectacle appears for the first time in the article "Cinema after Alain Resnais."

December 31: First projection of the film *On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Period of Time*, Paris.

This chronology has been adapted and expanded from Jean-Jacques Raspaud and Jean-Pierre Voyer, *L'Internationale Situationniste: Chronologie, bibliographie, protagonistes (avec un index des noms insulté)* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1972); Christophe Bourseiller, *Vie et mort de Guy Debord* (Paris: Plon, 1999); and Guy Debord, *Correspondance* (volumes 1, 2 & 3) (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1999 , 2001 & 2003).<sup>1</sup>

1. sources:  
Simon Ford, *The Situationist International; a User's Guide*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005.

Elisabeth Sussman, (ed.) *On the Passage of a few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: the Situationist International 1957-1972*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989.

<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/chronology>





## Use of (existing) media – definition – *dérive*, *détournement*, psychogeography, etc.

*Constructed situation*: a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events.

*Situationist*: relating to the theory or practical activity of constructing situations. One who engages in the construction of situations. A member of the Situationist International.

*Situationism*: a meaningless term improperly derived from the above. There is no such thing as situationism, which would mean a doctrine for interpreting existing conditions. The notion of situationism is obviously devised by anti-situationists.

*Psychogeography*: the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals.

*Psychogeographical*: relating to psychogeography. That which manifests the geographical environment's direct emotional effects.

*Psychogeographer*: one who explores and reports on psychogeographical phenomena.

*Dérive*: a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. The term also designates a specific uninterrupted period of *dériving*.

*Unitary urbanism*: the theory of the combined use of arts and techniques as means contributing to the construction of a unified milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior.

*Détournement*: short for “*détournement* of preexisting aesthetic elements.” The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no Situationist painting or music, but only a Situationist use of those means. In a more elementary sense, *détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres.

*Culture*: the reflection and prefiguration of the possibilities of organization of everyday life in a given historical moment; a complex of aesthetics, feelings and mores through which a collectivity reacts on the life that is objectively determined by its economy. (We are defining this term only in the perspective of creating values, not in that of teaching them.)

*Decomposition*: the process in which traditional cultural forms have destroyed themselves as a result of the emergence of superior means of dominating nature which make possible and necessary superior cultural constructions. We can distinguish between the active phase of the decomposition and effective demolition of the old superstructures — which came to an end around 1930 — and a phase of repetition that has prevailed since that time. The delay in the transition from decomposition to new constructions is linked to the delay in the revolutionary liquidation of capitalism.

These definitions are from the *Internationale Situationniste no.1* (June 1958), Translated by Ken Knabb.<sup>2</sup>

2. Ken Knabb (ed.), *Situationist International Anthology*, Berkely: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995.

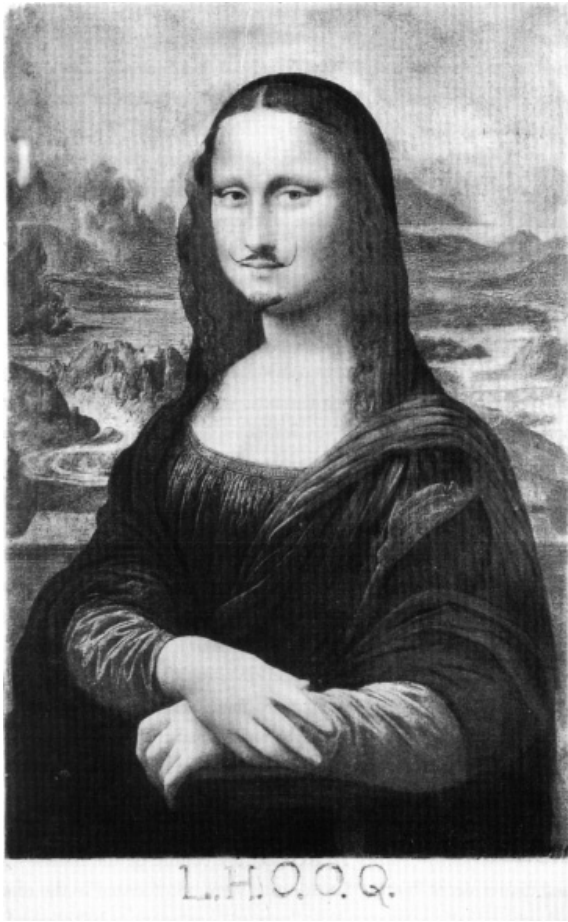


fig.1: Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919)



fig.2: Asger Jorn, *L'avant-garde se rend pas*,  
(The Avant-Garde Doesn't Give Up: 1962)

## De-representing information

*Détournement* can be defined as a technique of plagiarizing, and reversing the dominant meanings and usage of the discourse. The dominant discourse coming from: advertising, literature, visual arts, newspapers, and so on. “It was a reinvented conception of montage. It was a technique with its routes in the Surrealist and Dadaist methods of montage. *Mémoires*: “was a declaration that a critique of the world of spectacle could be articulated only through the components of spectacle itself, that there was no lofty height from which social analysis could be pursued, but that only by working through the surfaces of social life could a critical position be found.”<sup>3</sup> The recaptioning of works of art took place before the formation of the SI in Asger Jorn’s appropriated paintings of the late 1950’s, early 1960’s. A work of art could be converted from passive object of spectatorship to take part in the active struggle against the spectacle.<sup>4</sup> Asger Jorn’s *Grand baiser au cardinal d’amerique*, (A Big Kiss for the American Cardinal: 1962) (fig.3) and *L’avant-garde se rend pas*, (The Avant-garde Doesn’t Give Up: 1962) (fig.2) which has parallels with Marcel Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919)(fig.1) are examples of this. *L’avant-garde se rend pas*, is more than the reproduction of the Mona Lisa that Duchamp defaced, it is a sign for the negation of the negation; an act upon the painting that refers to one that has already been defaced, included with the text the “Avant-garde will never give up” or can be interpreted, as Tom McDonough points out in *The Beautiful Language of My Century*, the Avant-garde “as being unproductive.”<sup>5</sup> Meaning that this kind of action within art will yield no result and will eventually end up in the museum, treated as such, it no longer yields the message that the work contained. No longer an agent of protest, but as an object engulfed by the spectacle. Asger Jorn’s experimentation with *détournement* dealt mostly with the image and the icon. That of Guy Debord was more concerned with the textual variant of *détournement*. Coming from the Lettrists, he formed the LI (Lettrist International) prior to the formation of the SI, Debord’s influence can clearly be seen in his treatment of text beginning in the early collages and metagraphs of the Lettrists. (Guy Debord, “No Sequence” from *Critique of Separation*) Their concern (along with other writers; Sartre, Barthes, a.o.) was the meaning that is inscribed to a language, the duality that can be assigned to the words and how to implement this potential.

3. Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of my Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press: 2007. p6.

4. Ibid. p15.

5. Ibid. p20.



fig.3: Asger Jorn, *Grand baiser au cardinal d’amerique*, (A Big Kiss for the American Cardinal: 1962)



fig.4: Guy Debord: “No Sequence” from *Critique of Separation* (date unknown)





## Guy Debord (December 28, 1931 - November 30, 1994)

### The life of Guy Debord

Guy Debord was born December 28, 1931 in the Mouzaïa quarter of Paris. His father died in 1936 when he was four years old. After his mother, Paulette, remarried he spent much of his childhood with his grandmother in a series of Mediterranean towns. The Family's fortunes declined steadily until Debord's mother met Charles Labaste, a notary first based in Pau and later in Cannes, where Debord would finish his schooling. Debord's reading was focused on peripheral writers and poets and it was during this time that the Surrealists were the Avant-garde, with André Breton as their leader. Debord's preference eventually went to the outsiders of the Surrealists. In April 1951 during the fourth Cannes Film Festival he met acquaintance with the Lettrists led by Isidore Isou, they had come to disrupt the proceedings and show a experimental film made by Isou, *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (Treatise on Slime and Eternity). The Lettrists were interested in the deconstruction of words into their components (letters) and their phonetics. Besides this interest they "also explored the visual dimension of language"<sup>6</sup> in the form of collage using words and painting, what became known as the technique of 'metagraphics', later to be called 'hypergraphics'. They were interested in these new forms of (poetic) communication and in transforming the urban landscape. Joining the Lettrist Movement, Debord met Isou frequently in Paris, during the summer of 1961 and moved there in the winter to study law at the Sorbonne, the university of Paris. Once there he met a small group of young people in the local bars that later would later become known as 'the tribe'. They drifted from one bar to the other, unemployed and committing small crimes. Debord's contributions to this attitude of non-activity of the group was a graffiti he inscribed on a wall at the corner of the Rue de Mazarine and Rue de Seine that said, "*Ne Travaillez Jamais!*" ("Never Work!") in 1953 (fig.5). Not long after joining, Debord secretly formed the Lettrist International tendency together with Serge Berna, Jean-Louis Brau and Gil J. Wolman in June 1952 due to Isou's hold on the past. Later that month (June 30) he screened his first film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (Howls for Sade), being influenced by his Lettrist colleagues' ideas on cinema. Wolman's film *L'Anticoncept* (The Anticoncept: 1952) having made the most influence on him. The first few screenings of the film caused several riots. When Berna, Brau, Debord and Wolman disrupted a Charlie Chaplin press conference on October 29, 1952, crashing the event and distributing a pamphlet "*Finis les pieds plats*" ("No More Flat Feet!") that explained their disgust and called Chaplin an "emotional blackmailer" and proclaimed that "the most urgent exercise of liberty is the destruction of idols," (*Internationale lettriste, no. 1*) they were denounced by Isou and expelled from his Lettrist Movement. It was then that Debord officially formed the new movement *Lettriste Internationale* (LI), they formally convened at the Auberville Conference on December 7, 1952 where Berna, Brau, Debord and Wolman signed the constitution (Chaplin tract). They published their ideas and theories in their journal *Potlatch* and met in cafés, at a particular moment frequenting in *Chez Moineau*, where they sang songs, played games and discussed.<sup>7</sup>

6. Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A Users Guide*.

7. Ibid. p15-32.



fig.5: Guy-Ernest Debord, "*Ne Travaillez Jamais!*" ("Never Work!": 1953)

“The LI published four issues of the *Internationale Lettriste* bulletin between 1952 and 1954, followed by twenty-eight issues of *Potlatch* from 1954 to 1957. A further two issues of *Potlatch* appeared in November 1957 and July 1959, now with the revised subtitle ‘Information bulletin of the Situationist International’. Each issue comprised between one and four mimeographed sheets. *Les Lèvres Nues*, though not an LI publication, published some of their most important articles.”<sup>8</sup> During the LI period, Debord’s publications generally used the name ‘Guy-Ernest’.

8. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lettrist\\_International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lettrist_International); last viewed August 12, 2008.

Many woman were also included in the group (Tribe Moineau) including Barbera Rosenthal, Sarah Abouaf, Vali Myers, Paulette Vielhomme, Éliane Papaï (first the girlfriend of Debord, later married Mension and finally Brau), and Michèle Bernstein. Bernstein also came to study at Sorbonne but soon left the university to join the group. She met Debord in 1952, they fell in love and married without either of their parents’ knowledge in August 1954. She would finance Debord’s existence and their escapades. ‘Working’ (they were against work) a job as a horse horoscope writer she sold her predictions to racing magazines. She also held jobs as a publisher’s assistant and as a advertising director. In addition to this she wrote two novels, *Tous les chevaux du roi* (All the King’s Horses: 1960) and *La Nuit* (The Night: 1961). They documented their many dérives often taking random rides in taxi’s, which allowed “true freedom of movement.”<sup>9</sup> She was Debord’s first wife, they divorced on January 5, 1972.

9. Guy Debord, “Détournement as negation and prelude.” 1959.

According to an extract from a letter of Wolman to Jean-Louis Brau, of 20 July 1953, Debord had been in a nursing home after he had tried to commit suicide by gassing himself.<sup>10</sup>

10. Jean-Michel Mension, *The Tribe*. 2001. p63.

During this time, the photographer, Ed van der Elsken met the group by chance and documented the members’ escapades. In this period they developed the technique of the *dérive*, drifting through the city for hours or days. They also coined the terms psychogeography and unitary urbanism. It was in this time that Debord’s “Theory of the Dérive”<sup>11</sup> was published along with Ivan Chtcheglov’s “Formulary for a New Urbanism”<sup>12</sup> to designate what they saw as a pattern of emotive force-fields that would permeate a city.

11. in *Les Lèvres Nues no.9*, November 1956.

12. it was written in October 1953, but did not get published until June 1958 in the *Internationale Situationniste*, no.1.

Developing on the idea of the metagraphs (hypergraphs), the technique of *détournement* used plagiarized material (texts, advertisements, art etc) to create new compositions and new meanings in the reorganizing of these materials. In the article “A User’s Guide To Détournement” (*Les Lèvres Nues*, no.8, May 1956), Debord and Wolman explained, “in truth, it is necessary to do away with the whole notion of personal property in this area. The emergence of new demands renders earlier ‘great works’ obsolete. They become obstacles, bad habits. It is not a question of whether we like them or not. We must pass them by.”<sup>13</sup> The idea of the construction of situations started to develop in this period.

13. Debord and Wolman, “A User’s Guide To Détournement”, *Les Lèvres Nues* no.8, May 1956.

For the Lettrists the concept of play was very important. It was as necessary an element in life as it was in art. Unless vitalized by play, ritual becomes empty. Just as art will become formalistic if it is not brought to life by the creative figure. They were clearly influenced by Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* (man as player) as addition to man as worker and thinker.

In September 1956 a representative of the Lettrists was invited to the World Congress of Artists in Alba, Italy. Wolman went to the conference that was organized by Asger Jorn and Pinot-Gallizio of the International Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus (MIBI). During this meeting, important links were made between the two parties that would soon fuse into a new movement.

Invited by Jorn, Debord and Bernstein traveled to Denmark in May of 1957. They first stayed in Silkeborg and later went to Copenhagen. During their stay in Copenhagen Jorn and Debord made *Fin de Copenhague* an early example of a book made entirely by *détournement*.

In July 1957 Debord and Bernstein, visited Cosio d'Arroscia in Italy where, on July 28, the LI officially merged with the MIBI and the London Psychogeographical Association to form the Situationist International (SI) other members of the SI included Constant, Pinot-Gallizio, Jorn, and Alexander Trocchi. The group's journal, *Internationale Situationniste*, was edited by Debord.

Debord had started on his first (semi-) autobiographical work in 1957 after the making of *Fin de Copenhague* with Jorn. *Mémoires* as it was called, wasn't published until 1959 after one year of editing. It directly concerned the break from the Lettrist Movement and the establishment of the LI. The idea of the construction of situations was something they discussed frequently with Henri Lefebvre who had his own term from his writings which he coined as 'moments'. In an interview with Kristin Ross he talks about his meetings with the SI (from 1957 until a dispute in 1962) and his affiliation with the Dutch artist/architect Constant who was simultaneously developing his theory of situations.<sup>14</sup>

14. Kristin Ross, "Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview," in: Tom McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002. p267-283.

In 1964 Debord moves in with Alice Becker-Ho, his wife for the rest of his life. Alice Becker-Ho became involved in the Situationist International in 1963. They lived together since 1964 but they did not get married until August 5, 1972 (after Debord divorced Bernstein January 5, 1972). After Debord's death Becker-Ho took up assembling and publishing his letters.

In 1967 he published his most famous book *Société du spectacle* (Society of the Spectacle). In it, he takes the position that the spectacle, which he describes as "a social relation among people, mediated by images,"<sup>15</sup> has subsumed all other forms of domination. He attacks wage labor and commodity production, in short all forms of hierarchy, in an elaboration of Situationist theory, but claiming that they continue to wield power only in their subsumption into the spectacle. He writes that the spectacle is "capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image"<sup>16</sup>

15. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black & Red, 1983. paragraph 4.

16. Ibid. paragraph 34.

In the "May 1968 revolt. Agitation by SI-influenced *Enragés* group triggers street fighting and occupation of universities, which in turn inspires a nationwide wildcat strike: within two weeks virtually all the factories of France are occupied by over ten million workers. Situationists and *Enragés* push for extension and radicalization of this movement, against the Communist Party and labor union bureaucrats trying to stop it. Following its defeat they escape to Belgium to avoid the temporary repression and write *Enragés* and Situationists in the Occupations Movement."<sup>17</sup>

17. Guy Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents*. (translated by Ken Knabb) Oakland: AK Press, 2003. p244.

Between 1969 and 1970, "while post-May notoriety inspires the formation of numerous "pro-situationist" groups around the world, the SI itself goes through various internal crises." (Guy Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents*.<sup>18</sup>

18. Ibid. p244.

In 1972 the SI dissolved and Debord resumed film making with support of his film producer and publisher Gerard Lebovici, who he had met in '71 just prior to the dissolution of the SI. Two films from this period are, a film version of *Société du spectacle* (Society of the Spectacle: 1973) and the autobiographical *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (palindrome meaning: We Spin Around the Night Consumed by the Fire: 1978). Debord spent most of his time

reading, and sporadically writing, all in relative isolation, although he continued to correspond with Lebovici and the Italian situationist Gianfranco Sanguinetti, on political and other issues.

In 1984 Lebovici was assassinated and Debord was somehow incriminated as having some link to his murder. He was interrogated by the police, and the press wrongfully ruined his reputation. As a consequence of the accusations, Debord withdrew all his films from circulation and prohibited their screening in France during his lifetime. After these events, in 1985, he published *Considération sur l'assassinat de Gérard Lebovici* (Considerations on the Assassination of Gérard Lebovici).

Having always been fascinated with military tactics, Debord published *Jue de la Guerre* (The Game of War: 1987) with his second wife, Alice Becker-Ho. Included was a war game that he designed. (fig.6) In 1988 he published his *Commentaire sur la société du spectacle* (Comments on the Society of the Spectacle), expanding on the earlier text by writing of the “integrated” spectacle, the new, more insidious form of the spectacle.

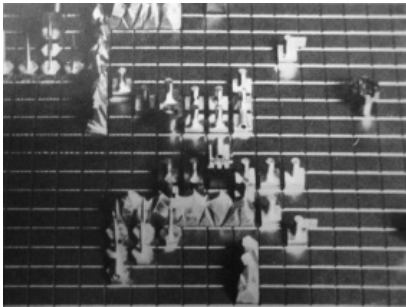


fig.6: Debord's war game, from a film still in:  
*In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978)

Debord's autobiography, *Panegyric* was finished in 1989. At the end, his lifelong excessive consumption of alcohol began to take a toll on his health. He suffered from a form of polyneuritis, an inflammation of the nerves. When the pain became unbearable, he committed suicide, with a shot through the heart at his cottage in Champot on November 30, 1994.

#### The work of Guy Debord

Debord's work is mostly theoretical although during his (pre-) Situationist years he produced some works of art, maps, collages, metagraphs and shifted his focus to filmmaking later on. Most of his commentary was in written form, critiquing existing society. In his work he developed the technique of *détournement* and practiced the *dérive*. He wrote articles for *Les Lèvres Nues*, *Potlatch* and the *Internationale Situationniste* also editing the latter two. Having had an early interest in film and film making his visual work besides his films has parallels with film making, he made use of the technique of montage and his works called metagraphs or hypergraphs closely resemble storyboards made to create films.

Debord was influenced by Gil J. Wolman's film *L'Anticoncept* (The Anticoncept: 1952), which during its premiere on February 11, 1952 was banned after its screening. It was composed of two parts; a non-narrative sound track, containing an internal monologue including physiological sounds and visually, the irregular changing of a circle from white to black projected on a large weather balloon (fig. 7). It remains one of the most radical films of all time.



Debord made the (anti-) film *Hurlements en Faveur de Sade* (Howls for Sade: 1952). In it all one sees is an alternating white and black screen. Only during the white projections is there a voice-over of different people (Debord, Wolman, Berna, Isou, and Barbara Rosenthal) the film originally involved different scenes of rioting and paratroopers, but these were taken out during the completion of the film.<sup>19</sup> It has been described as “truly original work”<sup>20</sup>

19. Simon Ford, *The Situationist International; a User's Guide*. London: 2005. p25.

20. Jorn, “Debord and the problem of the accursed”, 1964.

In early work such as the collage *Le Temps passé, en effet, et nous passons avec lui* (Time Indeed Passes, and we Pass With it: 1954) Debord's collage seems void of any aesthetic arrangement of the six images that are split into three rows in a simple rhythm of 3:2:1. It very much resembles a the original storyboard for *Hurlements en Faveur de Sade*.<sup>21</sup> (fig. 8)

21. McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of my Century*, p39-41.

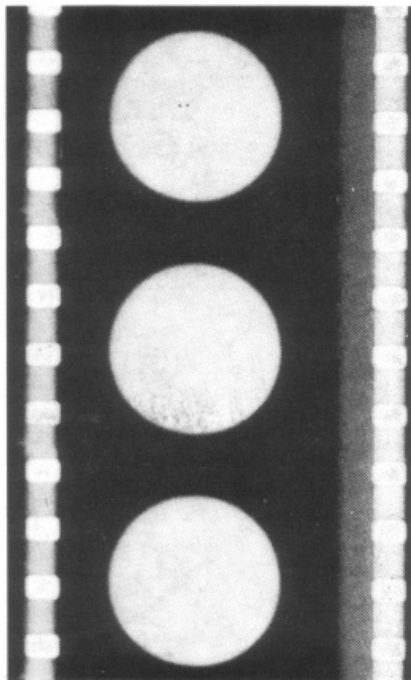


fig.7: Gil J. Wolman, frames from *L'Anticoncept*: 1952.



fig.8: Guy Debord: *Le temps passé, en effet, et nous passons avec lui* (Time Indeed Passes, and We Pass With it: 1954)

One of the first collaborations between Debord and Jorn is their screen printed *Guide Psychogéographique de Paris: discours sur les passions de l'armour* (Psychogeographic Guide of Paris: 1957) and later *The Naked City* (psychogeographic map of Paris: 1958) they cut apart a typical map of Paris and repositioned the pieces of the map that corresponded with parts of Paris that were ‘stimulating’ parts of the city and “worthy of study and preservation”<sup>22</sup> they then drew red arrows between these parts of the city to represent the fastest and most direct connections from one place to another preferably made by taxi, as it was seen as the most independent and free way to travel through the city as opposed to busses.<sup>23</sup> The arrows also showed the points of great attraction or places that had a strong negative charge.<sup>24</sup> These maps “were illustrating the notion of psychogeography. Each preserved part of the city had some sort of sentimental value attached to them. The maps also worked as a guide to the forgotten or overlooked parts of Paris, that were yet awaiting to be hit by the forces of capitalism.”<sup>25</sup> In a

22. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1994, from Christian Nolle, “Books on Warfare.” February 2002.

23. Guy Debord, “Détournement as negation and prelude.”

24. Catherine de Zegher and Mark Wigley (ed.) *The Activist Drawing*, p95-96.

25. Christian Nolle, “Books of Warfare.” February 2002.

26. Mark Wigley, "Paper Scissors, Blur" *The Activist Drawing*, P48

similar fashion Constant made a series of new maps for his *New Babylon* one of which depicts the connection of fragments of maps from different cities joined into one map, creating a single new city, connected with a "high-speed transportation system that allows people to move from any point in the global labyrinth to any other."<sup>26</sup> the transportation system replacing the red arrows in the maps of Debord and Jorn. (fig. 9 and 10)



fig.9: Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *The Naked City*: 1958.



fig.10: Constant, *Symbolische voorstelling van New Babylon*: 1969.

It was in 1957 that Debord was inspired by Jorn when they collaborated on *Fin de Copenhague*, in which Debord used his collage technique and *détournement* together with the spontaneity of Jorn's painting technique. Debord arranged his collages on top of Jorn's defining structures. This led him to develop a second book in similar fashion, but more by his own hand. It would describe the formation years of the Lettrist International, and contained some of the most important techniques for the Situationists. Debord would finish *Mémoires* in 1959, much thicker than *Fin de Copenhague*, it used more or less the same techniques, but this time the detoured images, text, plans, and drawing formed the structure, which was strengthened by Jorn's "structures portantes" that connected the fragments visually. The pages were more directed and less fluid than in *Fin de Copenhague*.

Debord made six films during his life. *Hurllements en Faveur de Sade* (Howls for Sade: 1952), *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Unity of Time: 1959), *Critique de la separation* (Critique of Separation: 1961), *La Société du spectacle* (The Society of the Spectacle: 1973), *Réfutation de tous les jugements, tant élogieux qu'hostiles, qui ont été jusqu'ici portés sur le film La Société du Spectacle* (Refutation of all Judgments, Laudatory as Well as Hostile, Passed up to Now on the Film. The Society of the Spectacle: 1975), and finally *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (We Spin Around the Night Consumed by the Fire: 1978).

Debord's interest in film was in "the dissolution of all communicative forms indebted to consumer capitalist accumulation and the fundamental reinvention of social reality and human life."<sup>27</sup> Basically meaning that he was very much interested in cinema with the eventual goal of destroying it. In cinema too Debord experimented with existing film fragments. He used montage to create new meaning in cinema.

27. R.D. Crano, Guy Debord, <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/07/debord.html#film>

## Asger Jorn (March 3, 1914 - May 1, 1973)

### The life of Asger Jorn

Asger Jorn was born Asger Oluf Jørgensen on March 3, 1914, in Verjum, Denmark. Both of his parents were teachers and deeply religious. This caused him to be suspicious of, and rebel against religion and in extension other forms of authority. He started his artistic career as a painter of portraits and landscapes. Influenced by Cubism and abstract painting in the 1930's he changed his style. In 1935 he was introduced to the group *Linien* (the Line), a Danish art group and a periodical. It was founded by the Danish artists Ejler Bille and Vilhelm Bjerke Petersen. The group existed from 1934 until 1939 and primarily focused on Surrealism. They admired artists such as Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Joan Miró. During this period (1934), together with Robert Dahlmann Olsen, he also founded the underground art group, *Høst* (Harvest) and was a contributor of its journal *Helhesten* (Hell-horse). "Intimate Banalities," one of Jorn's important theoretical essays was published in the journal in 1941. In it he proclaimed that kitsch was the future of art and said that amateur landscape paintings was "the best art today."<sup>28</sup> The artists developed a mythical expression from which multiple fantasy forms arose. They were inspired by primitive folk-art which would eventually develop into the so-called CoBrA-language. *Høst* would exist until 1950, among its members were; Else Alfelt, Ejler Bille, Henry Heerup, Jorn, Carl-Henning Pedersen and Sonja Ferlov. These artists would eventually also take part in CoBrA and had a great influence on the movement.

28. Asger Jorn, "Intimate Banalities." 1941.

In 1936 Jorn moved to Paris and became a student of Kandinsky. Once there he discovered that Kandinsky was not making any profit from his art, so he decided to join Fernand Léger's *Académie Contemporaine*. Here he traded in his figurative painting style for abstract art. In 1937 Jorn worked for Le Corbusier on the *Palais des Temps Nouveaux* for the International Exhibition of 1937 in Paris. In the summer of 1937 he went to Denmark and returned to Paris a year later. From 1937 to 1942 he studied at the Art Academy in Copenhagen.

During World War II and the occupation of Denmark by Nazi Germany Jorn fell into a depression. Initially a pacifist, he eventually became an active communist resistant. After the war and Denmark's occupation, he found the atmosphere for free and critical thought concerning the development of communist ideas too limited due to "centralized bourgeois political control."<sup>29</sup> In 1946 he changed his name into Asger Oluf Jorn.

29. wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asger\\_Jorn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asger_Jorn); last visited July 16, 2008.

An example for *Høst* became the Dutch group *de Experimentele Groep Holland* (the Dutch Experimental Group) founded in 1948 by Constant Nieuwenhuys, Karel Appel, Corneille, Anton Rooskens, Theo Wolvecamp and Jan Nieuwenhuys. In 1948 he traveled to France where he founded CoBrA (short for the home cities of the participating Artists; Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam) together with Karel Appel, Constant, Corneille, Christian Dotremont and Joseph Noiret on the 8th of November in Paris. CoBrA was formed from the Dutch *Experimentele Groep Holland*, the Danish *Høst* and the Belgian Revolutionary Surrealist Group. Disenchanted by Surrealist ideas, they used experimental tactics, to search for new methods of creative expression. They aspired complete freedom of color and form, were interested in abstract painting and supernaturalism in ideology.<sup>30</sup> They dismissed Surrealism and had an interest in Marxism as well as Modernism. Their inspiration came from children's drawings, primitive art forms, folk-art and from the work of Paul Klee and Joan Miró.<sup>31</sup>

30. Peter Wollen, "Bitter Victory: the Art and Politics of the Situationist International." p20-61.

31. [http://moma.org/collection/details.php?theme\\_id=10954&displayall=1](http://moma.org/collection/details.php?theme_id=10954&displayall=1); last visited July 16, 2008.

It was in this period that he developed the style with which he became famous. He painted vague beings, spirits or hazy visions.<sup>32</sup>

32. <http://www.jaski.nl/CoBrAKunstenaars/AsgerJorn/tabid/192/Default.aspx>



33. Peter Wollen, "Bitter Victory: the Art and Politics of the Situationist International," p40.

34. Ibid. p.41.

They were fascinated by the dualities: "materialism in relation to nature."<sup>33</sup> "Jorn believed that the intensively local and the extensively cosmopolitan should mutually reinforce each other." and that the combining of opposites could lead to a unity.<sup>34</sup> During their short existence until 1951, they managed to produce the journal *Cobra*, there were a series of collaborations between group members, called *Peintures-Mot*, and they put together an exhibition in Amsterdam at the Stedelijk Museum in November of 1949 and another one in Liège at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in 1951. The movement was officially disbanded in 1951, but many of its members remained close. Especially Constant and Jorn were to become important members of the SI later on. They viewed their art as a continuous process, an investigation that never concerned the finished object. They were interested in the creative impulse that was dynamic and disordered like life. In order for art to remain dialectical, Jorn thought that it should include both social and realistic (political) extremes. After the movement dissolved, Jorn returned to Silkeborg.



fig.11: Asger Jorn, *Le lune et le animaux* (The Moon and the Animals: 1950)



fig.12: Asger Jorn, *Guillaume Apollinaire* (1962)

35. Ibid. p.45

Around 1953 Jorn was approached by the Swiss architect, artist and designer Max Bill who was "setting up the new *Hochschule für Gestaltung* in Ulm."<sup>35</sup> It did not take long for them to disagree on Bill's technological approach to art. Instead Jorn favored a Bauhaus that would bring artists together in a collective project, opposing Functionalism. Following these events, during his visit to Albisola, Italy a year later, he met up with Enrico Baj and together with Sergio Dangelo, initiated the ideas for the *Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste* (an International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus: MIBI), in the name of experimental artists and as a reaction to Bill's technical approach. During this visit Jorn found a copy of *Potlatch*, the information bulletin of the Lettrist International, at Baj's house. This leads to the first contact with Guy Debord and Michèle Bernstein. It wasn't until September 29, 1955: that the MIBI was founded in Alba, Piedmont, Italy by Jorn, Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio and Piero Simondo.

In September of 1956 the first MIBI-conference took place in Alba. Those present were: Gil J. Wolman, (Lettrist International); Jorn, Pinot-Gallizio, Simondo, Verrone, (Imaganiste Bauhaus); Baj (Nuclear Art Movement, Milan); Constant (ex-CoBrA); Ettore Sottsass Jr. (no specific affiliation) after which Baj was excluded upon insistence from the Lettrist delegate, Wolman.<sup>36</sup>

36. Elisabeth Sussman, (ed.) *On the Passage of a few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: the Situationist International 1957-1972*. Cambridge: 1989. p.176.

On July 28, 1957 MIBI fused with the Lettrist International and the London Psychogeographical Association to form the SI. Jorn and Debord collaborated on two artist's books, *Fin de Copenhague* (1957) and *Mémoires* (1959), along with prints, and forewords to each other's work. In 1961 Jorn voluntarily resigned from the SI due to the recognition he was receiving as an artist. He felt that this did not go in line with the ideas of the Situationists. Apart from his departure he still remained in close contact with Debord and continued to write for the Situationist publications in addition to help fund them.

He went on to found the Scandinavian Institute of Comparative Vandalism, "whose stated purpose of the institute was to throw new light upon the Scandinavian culture in the age of migrations and Vikings. For several years, Jorn toured around Scandinavia and Europe with photographer Gérard Franceschi, former photographer for French writer and onetime culture minister André Malraux on his *Musée imaginaire* project, photographing ancient, Romanesque, Scandinavian, and Gothic figurative and decorative motifs in order to trace the connections between Scandinavian and European motifs."<sup>37</sup>

37. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scandinavian\\_Institute\\_of\\_Comparative\\_Vandalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scandinavian_Institute_of_Comparative_Vandalism); last visited August 13, 2008.

Jorn experimented with all sorts of techniques, besides painting, he also took his hand to ceramics. During the course of his artistic career he produced over 2500 paintings, prints, drawings, ceramics, sculptures, artist's books, collages, décollages, and collaborative tapestries. Jorn passed away on May 1, 1973 in Aarhus, Denmark.

#### The work of Asger Jorn

Besides having made over 2500 paintings, prints, drawings, ceramics, sculptures, artist's books, collages, décollages, and collaborative tapestries. He was also a autodidact who read extensively and wrote many articles for *Potlatch* and the *Internationale Situationniste*, commenting on a broad collection of topics including architecture, automation, socialism, communism, economy, art, painting, religion, measurement, perspective, and creativity. Among other things, Jorn was the first person to translate Franz Kafka into Danish.

Jorn was the catalyst for the IS. Especially during the formation of the SI, he, together with Debord managed to bring together those who would be involved with the SI over the years. His international connections plus his good communication skills (Debord could only speak French) is what gave the SI its international character. With his position in CoBrA he introduced several influential artists to the SI. Because he was more persuasive than Debord and he had a warmer personality he proved to be the perfect match and made it possible to develop and sustain relationships with these artists that were productive in terms of their writing and their art.<sup>38</sup> Jorn's allegiance to any particular movement usually lasted no longer than one or two years, his four year active role in the SI and his continued contact with Debord shows their shared interest in the role of art in an age of mechanical reproduction.

38. Guy Atkins, *The Crucial Years*, 1977. p63.

In different phases of Jorn's work one can see his preoccupation with the role of art in modern society. In his *Modifications* (Modifications: 1959), he 'sacrifices' paintings of no or very little value he purchased at flea markets or elsewhere and modified the canvases. The invading transformation avoids conflict with existing and isolates the contents without interfering in their actions (fig.13). These paintings "were some kind of artistic spin-off... from the Situationist ideology." "These canvases were also of course an escape from orthodox, commercially viable picture production."<sup>39</sup> Tom McDonough writes, "the Modifications

39. Guy Atkins, *The Crucial Years*, 1977. p67.

40. Tom McDonough, "The many lives of Asger Jorn" July 2002.

countered the organic unity of Jorn's expressionistic canvases with a production process based on heterogeneity, on the very disparity between found painting and overlaid gesture."<sup>40</sup>

The exhibition *Nouvelles défigurations* (New Disfigurations: 1962) had a more serious subject than the earlier *Modifications*: portraits of battle scenes replaced the landscapes. Divided in three groups; the first, Beauty and the Human Beast, the second group included battle scenes, scenes of combat and romance, and the third group is titled Anecdotal Imagery from Daily Life. Examples are *La Dolca Vita*; (The Sweet Life: 1962) a full length portrait of a human freak (fig.14) and *Sugar Tart*, (1962) a young woman who's face has been transformed into that of a pig, remaining unaware of her situation. Jorn's over painted pictures have not been widely understood. They are about the impact through double layers of imagery, which may be in harmony or coexist in a state of tension. "Jorn's own interest lay precisely in this complex courtship between old and new."<sup>41</sup> and in his interest in kitsch and "bad painting" which he preferred to "good painting."<sup>42</sup>

41. Guy Atkins, *The Crucial Years*: p70.

42. Asger Jorn, "Détourned Painting."



fig.13: Asger Jorn, 'Modifications', *The Disquing Duck* (1959)

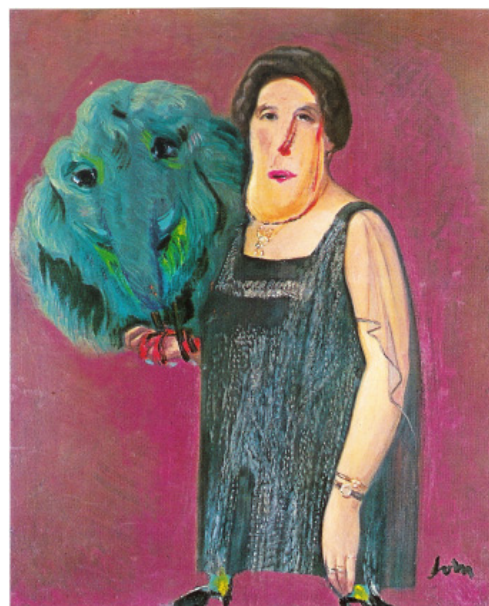


fig.14: Asger Jorn, 'Nouvelles défigurations', *La Dolca Vita* (The Sweet Life: 1962)

Jean Dubuffet over Jorn: "During our early relationship I suspected that his mind was confused and incoherent. I was quite wrong. He had the art of controlling disorder and mastering it." "In all his activities, the same principle as in his work: thought sprang out of action, not the other way around."<sup>43</sup>

43. Guy Atkins, *Supplement: Paintings*: p15.

A technique that Jorn practiced several short and isolated periods during his artistic searches was that of the collage. He would take scraps of colored paper, torn newspaper or other shreds and would work on a unity that pleased him. He would add pen-drawn lines or paint to finish the pictures. Jorn showed clear influences from Max Ernst, although where Ernst's collages are more seamlessly connected and evoke dreamlike images, Jorn's collages are more playful, they allow for a disconnection of the elements and have a more intellectual appeal. (fig.15) The technique for making the *décollages* Jorn made in 1967-68, was subtractive instead of additive, as in the collage, here Jorn peeled at the many layers of advertising cakes, to uncover the colored layers behind each new shred. The resulting work would be led by the contents of the many layers of the billboard cut-outs. (fig.16)





fig.15: Asger Jorn, *Untitled* (1956, collage)

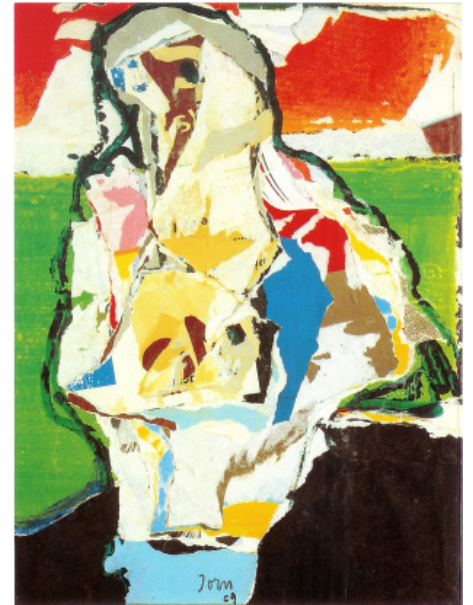


fig.16: Asger Jorn, *Pourvoyeuse* (Purveyoress: 1969, décollage)

Jorn experimented with all kinds of techniques including ceramics. In 1959 he made a huge ten tons weighing mural decoration in ceramics for the State High School in Aarhus, Denmark. During his CoBrA period he developed the use of this material, and near the end of his life he produced many of his ceramic figures, pots, plates and other objects.





“One must not introduce reformist illusions about the spectacle, as if it could be eventually improved from within, ameliorated by its own specialists under the supposed control of a better-informed public opinion. To do so would be tantamount to giving revolutionaries’ approval to a tendency, or an appearance of a tendency, in a game that we absolutely must not play; a game that we must reject in its entirety in the name of the fundamental requirements of the revolutionary project, which can in no case produce an aesthetics because it is already entirely beyond the domain of aesthetics. The point is not to engage in some sort of revolutionary art-criticism, but to make a revolutionary critique of all art.”

Guy Debord, “For a Revolutionary Judgment of Art.” February 1961.



fig.17: Asger Jorn, *Untitled* (1961)



fig.18: Asger Jorn, one side of the carrying structure for *Fin de Copenhague* (1957)

## *Fin de Copenhague*

In May of 1957 Jorn had invited Debord and Bernstein to Denmark in order to resolve a personal dispute they had concerning an exhibition earlier that year in February where Debord's psychogeographic maps were to be displayed, but never were, apparently due to Jorn.<sup>44</sup> Both Debord and Bernstein visited Silkeborg to see Jorn and the small collection in his Museum. In Copenhagen Jorn and Debord created the book *Fin de Copenhague* after an afternoon raid at a newspaper-stand and a visit to Jorn's lithographer and printer V.O. Permild of Permild & Rosengreen. According to Jorn's claim, from conception to finished product, the book took twenty-four hours to make.<sup>45</sup> At the printer Jorn sat on top of a ladder from which he splashed paint on the large sheets for the printing plates. These random splashes formed the structure for the book's détourned advertisements, text fragments, and images. The large sheets that were action-painted contained large swirls on one side and dripped shapes on the other. It was a style that he was becoming interested in (fig.17). These were printed in a gradient across the large page so that different colors could be used. "the first run through the press, for the color work, resulted in what are virtually monotypes, the color being applied by Jorn himself and somewhat different on every sheet."<sup>46</sup> The second time through the press the large sheets were printed with black, showing the collages made from the clippings. The large sheet of paper roughly 100 by 70 centimeters was printed on both sides and cut up into eight pieces (fig.18, 22 and 23). These eight pieces formed the content of the book, in total consisting of thirty-six pages, thirty-two are composed of the double sided sheet arranged and composed by Jorn and Debord using the technique of *détournement* which the Lettrists were developing in these years. The other sheet contained the title page of the book naming Debord *conseiller technique pour le détournement* and in the back there was the colophon which stated the number of copies made; two-hundred, the printer; Permild & Rosengreen, the place of printing; Copenhagen, Denmark, the date of print; May 1957 and each was signed and numbered by Jorn.<sup>47</sup> This "edition-de-luxe limited to 200 copies"<sup>48</sup> was bound in flong, a compressed mass of paper sheets, that was pressed with newspaper ads, giving the cover the texture of embedded newspaper articles (fig.19 and 20) It was Jorn's way of reacting to the strict Bauhaus approach to typography and page layout. Here randomness gave the book its structure, and going against all logic in the printed world making the printed word into something that needed to be seen instead of read. This allowed the book to become an experience<sup>49</sup> the book itself became a situation.

44. Troels Anderson, "Jorn and International Situationism," in: Ronny van de Velde, *Asger Jorn: Modifications*. Antwerpen: 1998.

45. forty-eight according to Greil Marcus, in: "Guy Debord's Mémoires: A Situationist Primer." 1989, p128.

46. spelling changed to American English, from "Jorn's Copenhagen." *Architectural Review* vol.122 no.729 October 1957: p223.

47. Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam has number 191/200.

48. "Jorn's Copenhagen." *Architectural Review* vol.122 no.729 October 1957: p223.

49. Christian Nolle, "Books of Warfare." February 2002.



fig.19: cover of *Fin de Copenhague* (2008)



fig.20: cover of *Fin de Copenhague* (2008)

The making of the book, much like the work of Jorn was a spontaneous work in the making. Trusting intuition, the product is finished only to evaluate the finished product and formulate possible meaning afterwards. This was closely tied to the working method of Jorn, who always worked in intensive sets to allow his creative spirit to develop something without wanting to theorize or understand it in the moment of becoming.





cover



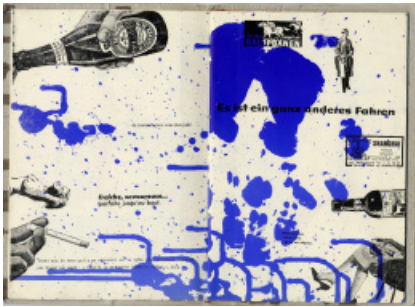
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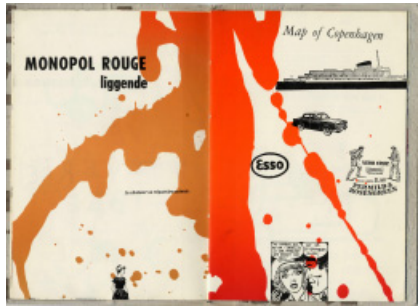
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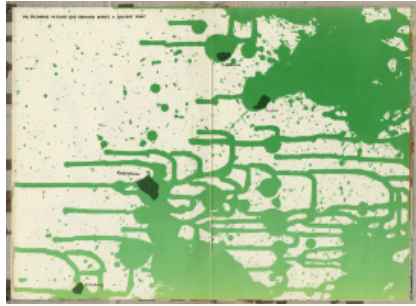


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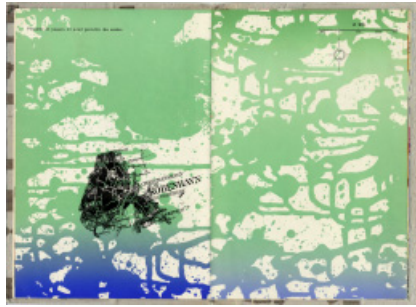
fig.21a: Asger Jorn, conseiller technique pour le détournement Guy-Ernest Debord, *Fin de Copenhague*. Copenhagen: Permild & Rosengreen, 1957. (first edition 191/200 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam)



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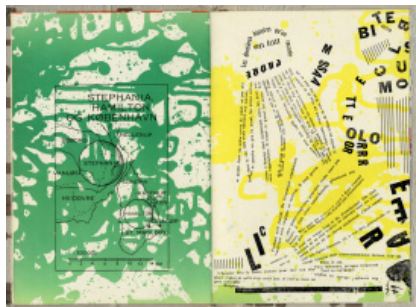
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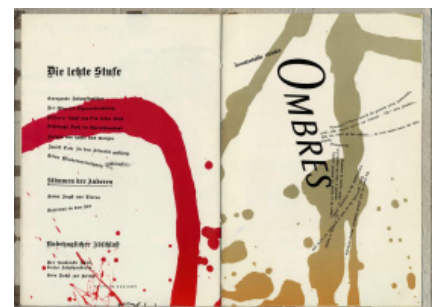
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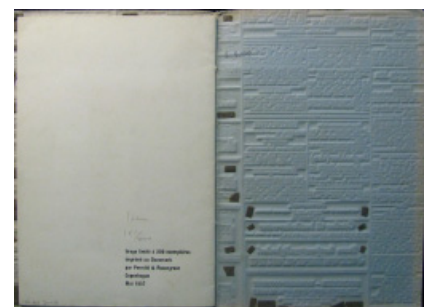
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fig.21b: Asger Jorn, conseiller technique pour le détournement Guy-Ernest Debord, *Fin de Copenhague*. Copenhagen: Permild & Rosengreen, 1957. (first edition 191/200 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam)





fig.22: Asger Jorn, conseiller technique pour le détournement Guy-Ernest Debord, *Fin de Copenhague*. Copenhagen: Permild & Rosengreen, 1957.  
(first edition 191/200 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, reconstruction print Bart Lans)





fig.23: Asger Jorn, conseiller technique pour le détournement Guy-Ernest Debord, *Fin de Copenhague*. Copenhagen: Permild & Rosengreen, 1957.  
(first edition 191/200 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, reconstruction print Bart Lans)



*Fin de Copenhague* also reflected the international character of Jorn's life, the way he brought noted international artists and theorists into contact with the SI.

The book was a vibrant, highly animate satire of a society extremely preoccupied with consumerism and a attack against Modernism's continuous attempts to standardize life. Not only the message, but also the process of making the book was a revolt against this way of life. Publishing the book in just twenty-four hours is a feat that is never done in the publishing world, where it takes a much longer period, usually spanning more than a year, to publish a book.

"Debord and Jorn intended the book to be a satirical attack on consumer and technological society, using elements from commercial culture to critique itself."<sup>50</sup> quoting a text promising that, thanks to electronics, automation and nuclear energy "we are entering the new Industrial Revolution which will supply our every need, easily... quickly... cheaply... abundantly" (fig.24) the images flowed off the pages, showing their abundance and their being part of a larger whole. The whole is a "satire of advertising and city planning, free of mystery and ambiguity." According to Greil Marcus, "there is no project, only a funny lively nay-saying and the book tells no story,"<sup>51</sup> it is non-narrative. The book is much less talked about than the second book, *Mémoires*, made by Debord with the help of Jorn.

50. Simon Ford, *The Situationist International; a User's Guide*. London: 2005. p60.

51. Greil Marcus, "Guy Debord's *Mémoires*: a Situationist Primer" p128.



fig.24: detail from *Fin de Copenhague*.

## Mémoires

“Thus the moment was ripe for our hero (Debord) to write his *Mémoires*, which was done with the grating effect of broken glass -- a book of love bound in sandpaper, which destroys your pocket as well as entire shelves in your library, a nice reminder of time past that refuses to end and distresses everyone with its obstinate presence. And yet these *Mémoires* were more a work of relaxation, a temporary retreat, apparently, than a ‘serious’ effort.”<sup>52</sup>

52. Asger Jorn, “Debord and the Problem of the Accursed.” 1964.

The second collaboration between Debord and Jorn on a book was for *Mémoires*. In this case it was Debord who was the main instigator of the work, with Jorn who made the *structures portantes*, or carrying structure. The time lapse was quite different from *Fin de Copenhague’s* twenty-four hour project, instead Debord started working on it some months after finishing their first book, but it wasn’t published more than a year later in early 1959. (It was printed in December 1958) unlike the international character of *Fin de Copenhague*, the book is all in French and in addition to newspaper clippings, cartoons, old illustrations and photographs, it also contained appropriated passages from “travel brochures, novels and political tracts.”<sup>53</sup> It was twenty-eight by twenty-one centimeters and consisted of sixty-four pages. Its sandpaper wrapper is perhaps what’s most famous about the book, a cover that was meant to destroy the books it would stand next to and hurt the reader. An idea from the printer V.O. Permild. It seemed to speak a new, unknown language, that refused “the valorization of original speech”<sup>54</sup> The book was again made entirely of fragments and assumed that everything that needed to be said already existed but that the re-assembling of parts reconstructed meaning. It defines the project of the SI and it defines a new world, a utopian world, overthrown from conditions then existing, a new social life.<sup>55</sup> “It was a prelude to the founding of the SI.”<sup>56</sup> Debord searched for a new communication and discourse, something temporary or even nonexistent. “In the end it is a sense of an absolute that winds its way out of the pages of *Mémoires*.”<sup>57</sup> The book shows the belief that this new world can be constructed from the old, that there are pieces of it existing in life.

53. Simon Ford, *The Situationist International; a User’s Guide*. London: 2005. p63.

54. Greil Marcus, “Guy Debord’s *Mémoires*: a Situationist Primer” p.126.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid. p130.

57. Ibid. p131.

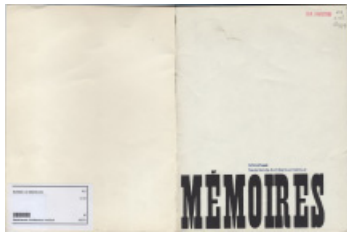
In order to decipher the book, *détournement* and *dérive* need to be explained as techniques to breakdown and revolt against the existing order. *Détournement* was meant to replace art<sup>58</sup> as a critical art until it was to ultimately “destroy [the] entire artistic framework”<sup>59</sup> *Mémoires*, as an account of both *détournement* and *dérive*, becomes a psychogeographic map of time and moments.

58. Ibid. p127.

59. “The Situationists and the new forms of action in Art and Politics.” June 1963.

The book was chronological and was divided into three parts. June 1952, the split from the Lettrist Movement and the creation of the LI. December 1952, the statutes of the LI. and September 1953, the first split of the LI. It covers the year when Debord and his friends left the Lettrist Movement to found the LI and later merge with the Bauhaus Imaginiste (Jorn) and the Psychogeographical Society of London. It talks about the release of *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*. It is a autobiography of Debord describing the occurrences from LI to SI. Where *Fin de Copenhague* is more spacious, “*Mémoires* is a book that is more rigorously structured”<sup>60</sup> Jorn’s *structures portantes* are more directed and have come into direct contact with the artist, they show more direct relationships between the fragments.

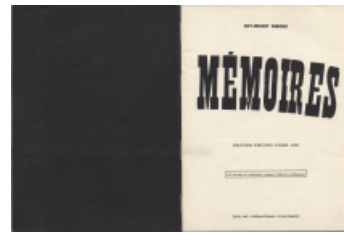
60. Christian Nolle, “Books of Warfare.” February 2002.



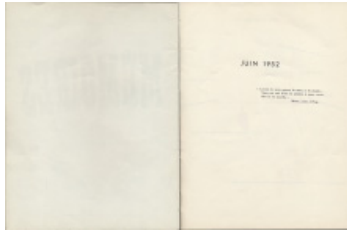
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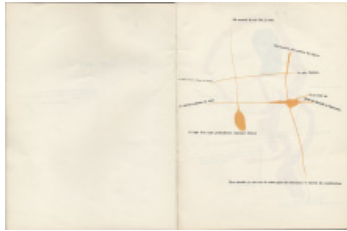
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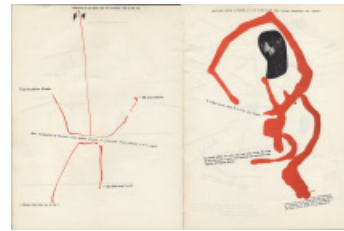
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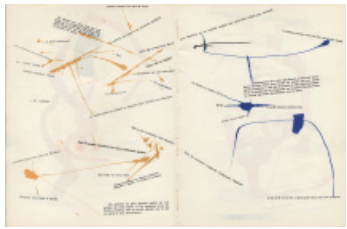
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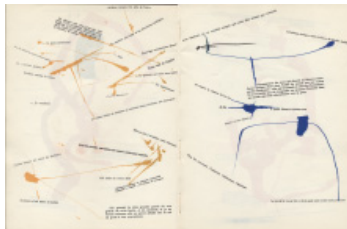
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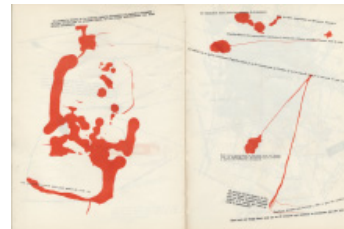
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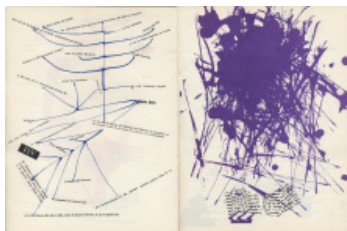
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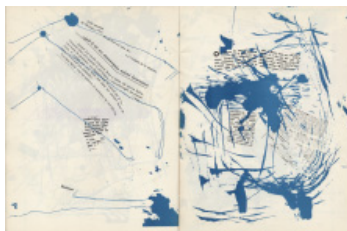
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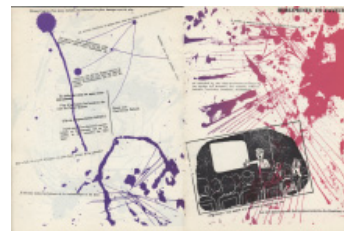
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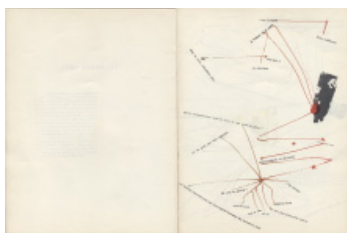
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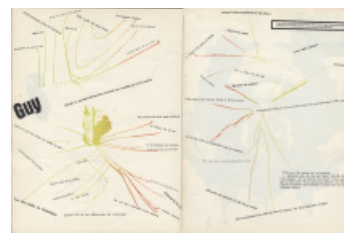
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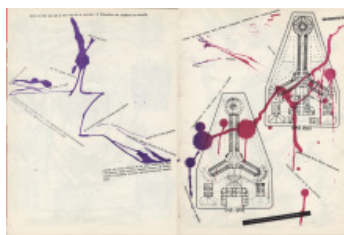
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fig.25a: Guy-Ernest Debord, structures portantes Asger Jorn, *Mémoires*. Copenhagen: Permild & Rosengreen, 1959.

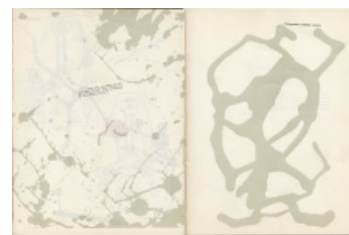




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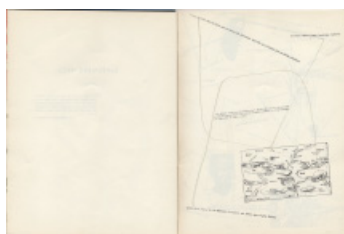
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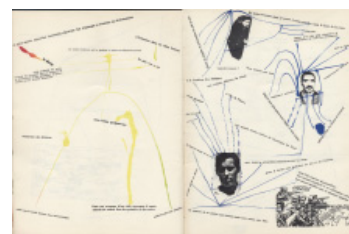
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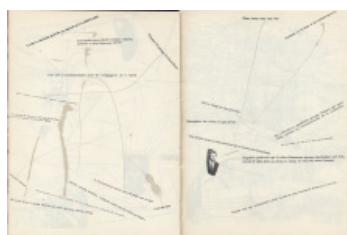
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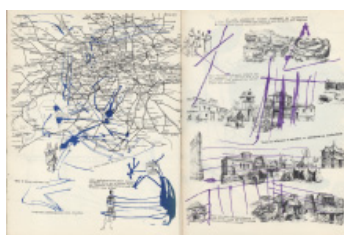
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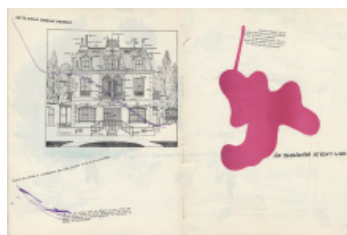
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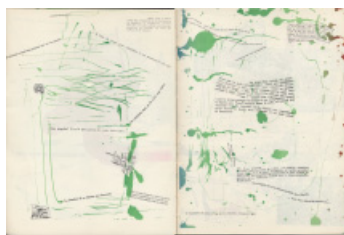
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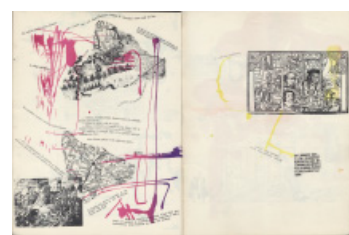
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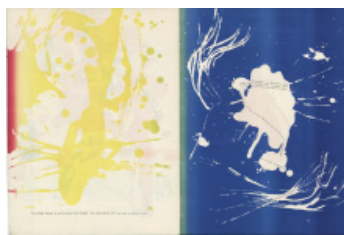
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fig.25b: Guy-Ernest Debord, structures portantes Asger Jorn, *Mémoires*. Copenhagen: Permild & Rosengreen, 1959.

The following are some excerpts from *Mémoires*.

61. the translation is from: Greil Marcus, "Guy Debord's 'Mémoires: a Situationist Primer'" p128-129.

"Lights, shadows, figures," "Do I remember you? Yes, I want," "Our talk is full of booze"<sup>61</sup> (fig.26)

"The first screening of *Hurlements en Faveur de Sade* and reactions to the film. ("who has made, in so few images, a more beautiful poem of silence?" - *Hurlements* contains no images, only a white screen when the soundtrack carried dialogue and a black screen when the sound track was dead, which was more than sixty minutes out of the film's total of eighty; "one hears the shrill cries of decent women and the slanders of the men," the orchestration went on, "'bastards,' 'shits,' 'tricksters,' 'assasins,' 'butchers' resonate")<sup>62</sup> (fig.27)

62. Ibid. p128-129.

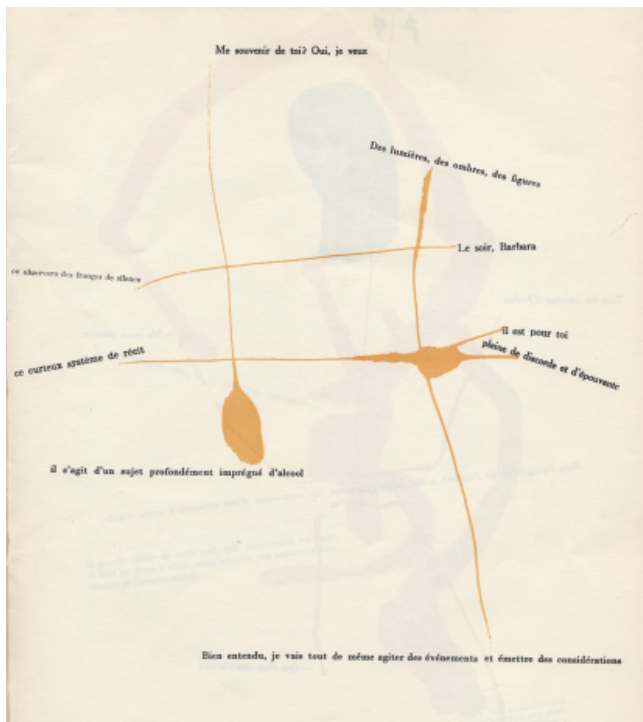


fig.26: detail from *Mémoires*.



fig.27: detail from *Mémoires*.

Denunciation of Charlie Chaplin press conference and the laying down of the statutes. (taking goals for granted and, like the authors of the Constitution of the United States, concentrating on prohibitions and penalties.)<sup>63</sup> (fig.28)

63. Ibid. p.128-129.

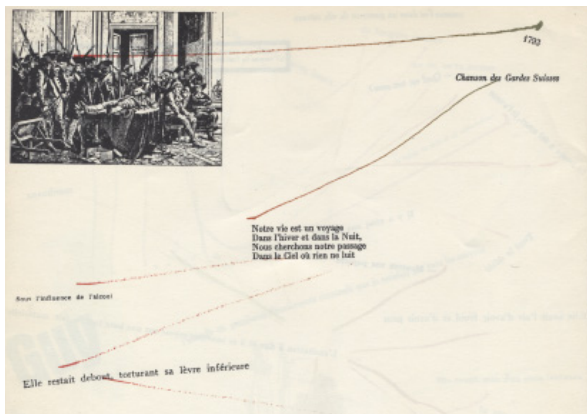


fig.28: detail from *Mémoires*.



The dirt is gone! Refers to the split of the LI from the Lettrist Movement.<sup>64</sup> (fig.29)

64. Ibid. p128-129.



fig.29: detail from *Mémoires*.



“New forms of behavior,” “what are they going to find?” “still far away,” “we were not many,” “new ambiance,” “portraits of an intense life, were truly” combined from references to the Aztecs, “the great Indian totems of North America,” Easter Island, “the delirious temples of India,” “without doubt the greatest architects of all time,” pictures of Debord and two other members of the LI, and a comic strip panel in the bottom right corner. Soldier fire rifles and a machine gun: “BANG! RAT-TA-TA-TA.” Clouds of dust rise. “It’s the new mood of today,” runs the caption Debord gives the picture, “a certain simplicity, a certain refinement...” “In every way,” runs a line on the next page, “it seemed unlikely that this delirious story will ever end,” but what follows is dissolution and disappearance, elegy and too many tangled roots to follow.<sup>65</sup> (fig.30)

65. Ibid. p128-129.

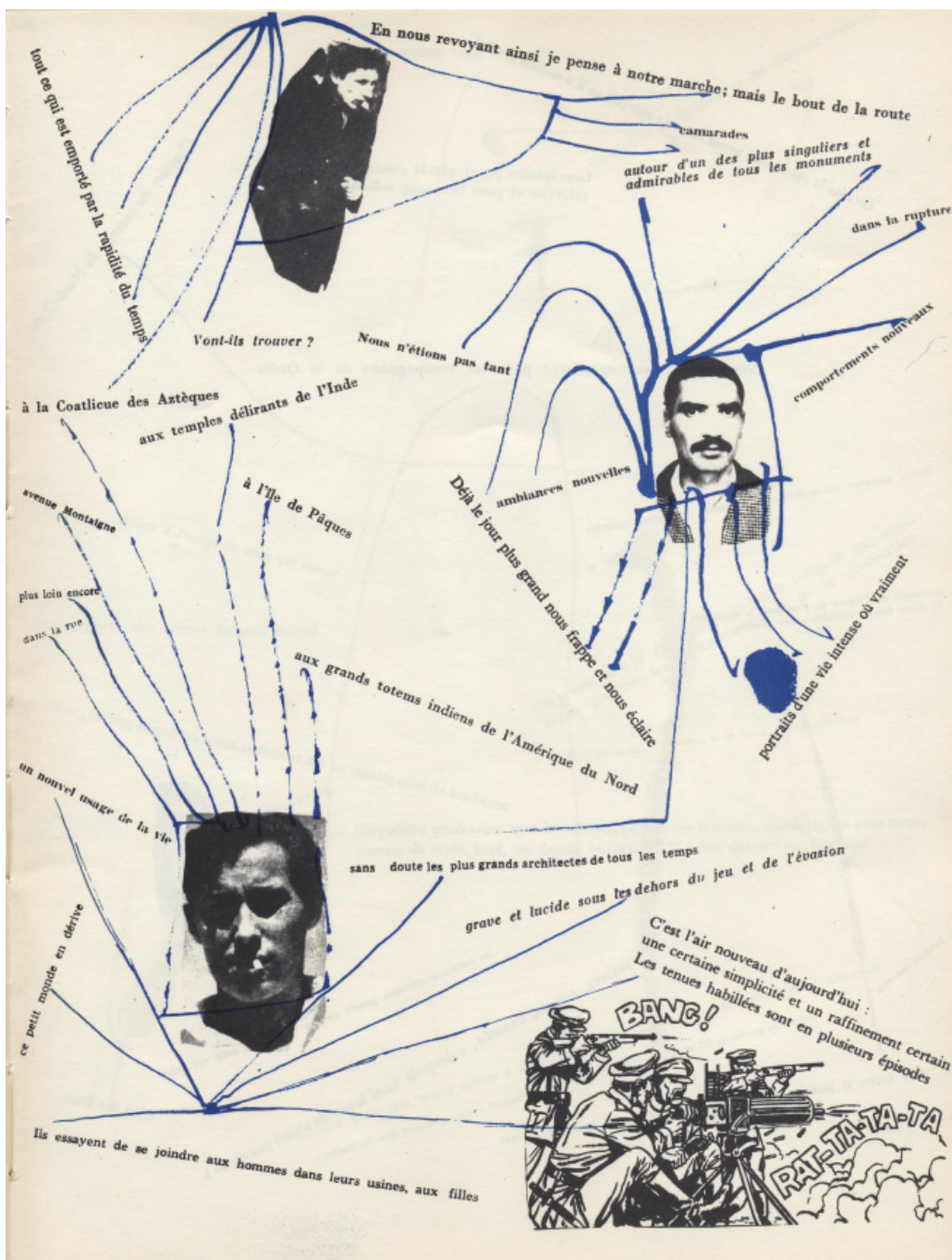


fig.30: detail from *Mémoires*.

On the last page of *Mémoires* is a single line from a poem by Baudilaire. “*je voulais parler la belle langue de mon siècle,*” (“I wanted to speak the beautiful language of my century.”) a final declaration that the critique towards the spectacle could only be developed and come from the fragments of the social layers within society.<sup>66</sup> (fig.31)

66. Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of my Century*. 2007. p6-8.



fig.31: last page of *Mémoires*.

The book talks about *dérives*, but in itself allows the possibility to make one. Going through the pages one is in search for meaning, for a message, but it can be found everywhere and nowhere. It all on the relationship between its fragments. It tells a story of a future that does not exist and that might never exist. Debord is aware of the impossibilities of the realization of this world, but the thing that is important is that one does not forget the reason for the journey, to create a different world, to break away from the spectacle.<sup>67</sup>

67. David Banash, “Activist Desire, Cultural Criticism, and the Situationist International.” *Reconstruction* volume 2, number1, winter 2002.



## Conclusion

Debord and Jorn, both consciously used existing media to devalorize its existence. Debord appropriated text fragments to proclaim the opposite of what they intended and in doing so silenced his critics. Jorn utilized painting to modify worthless, kitsch paintings and devalued them even more (which in the end did go to museums and art collectors.) Both of them had devoted their life to critiquing society that accepted politics and art unquestionably. The Avant-garde was looking for an art form that could give an answer and start to describe a world in which they believed. The Surrealists, the Lettrists, CoBrA and the Situationists, all looked for answers. In the end the Situationists were involved in a movement that did bring about change in a society. Although the revolution of 1968 did bring about many changes, it was not the change that they were hoping for. Their dreams were utopian and therefore unattainable. They experienced their world in parts of the existing city; in dense labyrinthine districts they could get a taste of how it could be. It was a world that sparked interest and curiosity. They were looking for an answer to Modernism and developed the concept of 'Unitary Urbanism.' It was one of the many ideas that they wanted to share and bring upon the world. They were ideals for everyone to strive for instead of passively watching the spectacle that only talked of materialistic 'needs' that could only be acquired through consumerism. It was this they were opposed and it was that message that the Situationists *détourned*. By creating contra-messages using the same visual language they tried to understand the spectacle and turn it against itself. Starting with Lettrist metagraphs, modifications in art, the Situationist psychogeographic maps and eventually *Fin de Copenhague* and *Mémoires*, there are numerous examples of *détournement* that the movement(s) utilized. The importance of these two books is that they summed up many of the theories that the Lettrists, CoBrA and others at the time had been developing. They also marked the turning point in these movements and the formation of the SI. Art was closer to propaganda; it was all about the message, devoid of (monetary) value. This all had as goal the creation of situations. Moments in time that could be organized by anyone anywhere. It was an activity that was all about play, which allowed people to step out of a routine and enliven ritual, to experience the surroundings in a new way and with different eyes. It became a re-reading of the surroundings and a new encounter with the existing. Not only in urban and architectural ways, but it was just as much, (if not more) about mass communication and consumerism. About much of the changes that were brought about after the industrial revolution when we entered an age of mechanical reproduction. This period of surpluses and excesses was thought to be the cause of this state of mind. And the only way for the Situationists to break with this passiveness was to bring people back to life; to free them.

The Situationists experimented with this in mind. They searched for places in the city where they could find this potential. They documented their derives; the psychogeographic maps were the first attempts to re-draw the city with existing elements but to elaborate and to map the "environment's direct emotional effects."<sup>68</sup> Debord's experimentation with texts, collage, metagraphs and film complemented Jorn's view on and experience of modified paintings, action-painting, collage and printing. Together they were able to develop their ideas and create art that formed the foundation for the Situationists. The two books gathered all previous theories and ideas and bundled them into two books; theory brought into action. The first was from Jorn's hand, and made it possible to create something driven by the creative spirit; this was the impulse though which they created *Fin de Copenhague*. In every aspect of the book, from conception to realization, including the time span in which the book is made, it is evident that the driving force behind it was the union of their ideas led by Jorn. The second book was the result of a pensive period and thorough theorization of the first book and the events that had occurred in the previous years in the life of Debord. It resulted in a less spontaneous, but much more political work than the first. The relationship between the fragments of text was much more direct, and from many more sources. It told about the history of the Lettrist Movement and the development of the LI, and at the same time dreamt of a new society, one which did not yet exist but of which traces could be found in everyday life.

68. Definitions from *Internationale Situationniste no. 1*, June 1958.  
(Translated by Ken Knabb)





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The Making of *Fin de Copenhague & Mémoires*;  
the tactic of *détournement* in the collaboration between Guy Debord and Asger Jorn.

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August 16, 2008  
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