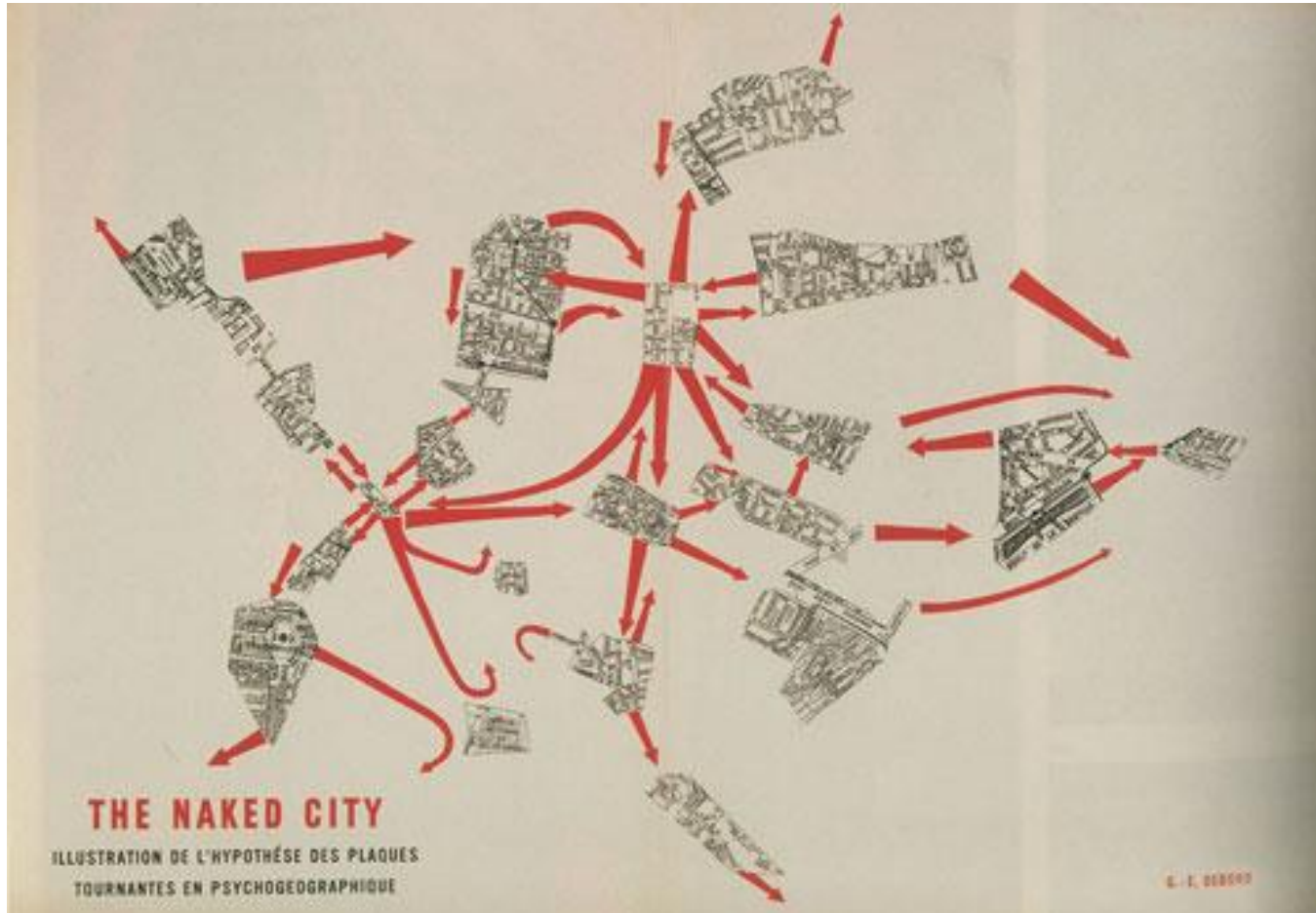


Situationism



Situationism

Key Dates: 1957-1972

They originated in a small band of avante-garde artists and intellectuals influenced by Dada, Surrealism and Lettrism. The post-war Lettrist International, which sought to fuse poetry and music and transform the urban landscape, was a direct forerunner of the group who founded the magazine 'Situationiste Internationale' in 1957. At first, they were principally concerned with the "suppression of art", that is to say, they wished like the Dadaists and the Surrealists before them to supersede the categorization of art and culture as separate activities and to transform them into part of everyday life.

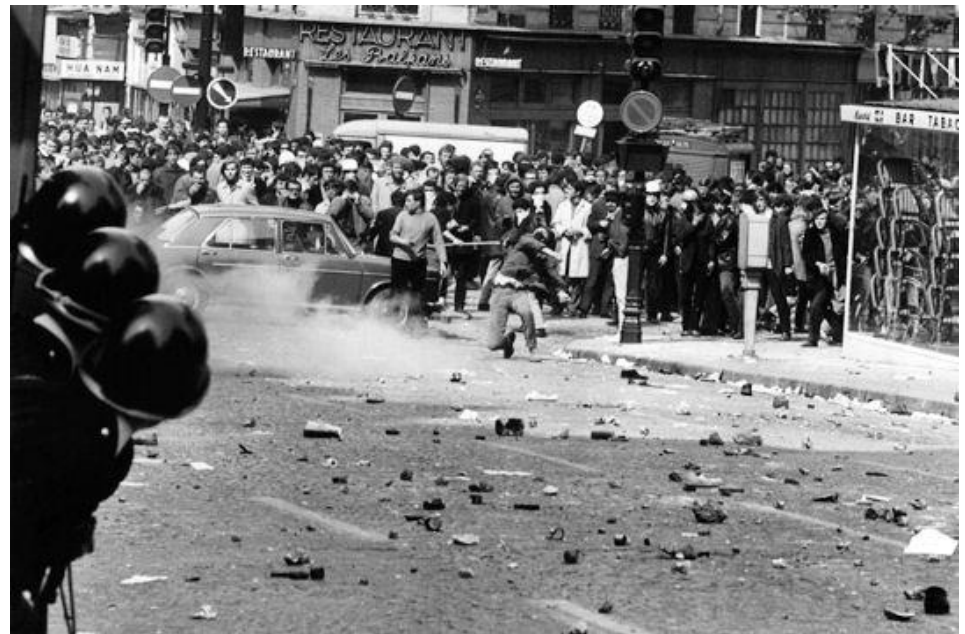
At first, the movement was mainly made up of artists, of whom Asger Jorn was the most prominent. From 1962, the Situationists increasingly applied their critique not only in culture but to all aspects of capitalist society. Guy Debord emerged as the most important figure.

The Situationists rediscovered the history of the anarchist movement, particularly during the period of the First International, and drew inspiration from Spain, Kronstadt, and the Makhnovists. They described the USSR as a capitalist bureaucracy, and advocated workers' councils. But they were not entirely anarchist in orientation and retained elements of Marxism, especially through Henri Lefebvre's critique of the alienation of everyday life. They believed that the revolutionary movement in advanced capitalist countries should be led by an "enlarged proletariat" which would include the majority of waged laborers. In addition, although they claimed to want neither disciples nor a leadership, they remained an elitist vanguard group who dealt with differences by expelling the dissenting minority. They looked to a world-wide proletarian revolution to bring about the maximum pleasure.



The Situationists: Guy Debord, Michèle Bernstein and Asger Jorn

Situationism and the Occupation Movement. They also contributed to student protests in Paris 1968



Main Concepts...The Spectacle and Détournement

The Spectacle and its society

The Spectacle is a central notion in the situationist theory, developed by Guy Debord in his 1967 book, *The Society of the Spectacle*. In its limited sense, spectacle means the mass media, which are "its most glaring superficial manifestation." Debord said that the society of the spectacle came to existence in the late 1920s.

The critique of the spectacle is a development and application of Karl Marx's concept of fetishism of commodities, reification and alienation, and the way it was reprised by György Lukács in 1923. In the society of the spectacle, the commodities rule the workers and the consumers instead of being ruled by them. The consumers are passive subjects that contemplate the reified spectacle.

Détournement (rerouting or hijacking)

A détournement is a technique developed in the 1950s by the Letterist International and consist in "turning expressions of the capitalist system against itself," like turning slogans and logos against the advertisers or the political status quo. Détournement was prominently used to set up subversive political pranks, an influential tactic called situationist prank that was reprised by the punk movement in the late 1970s and inspired the culture jamming movement in the late 1980s.

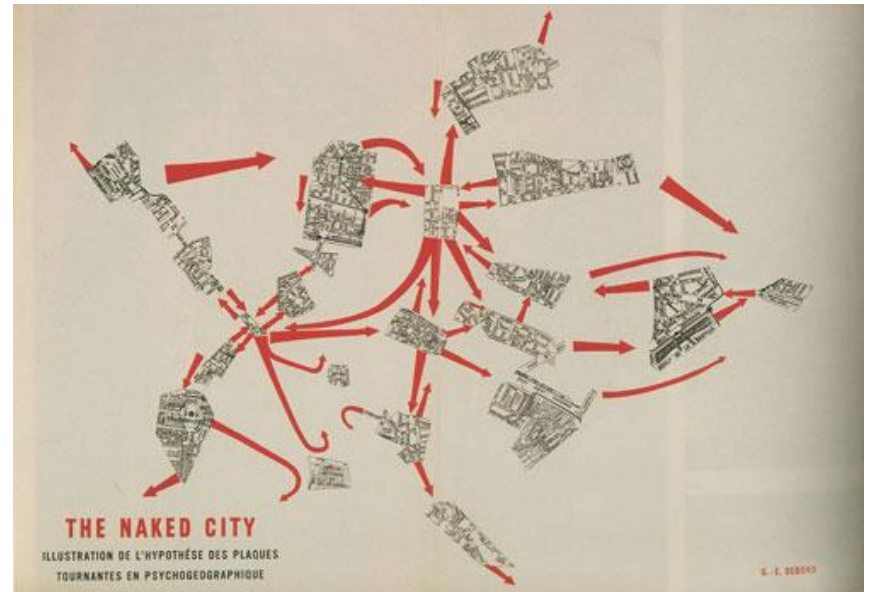
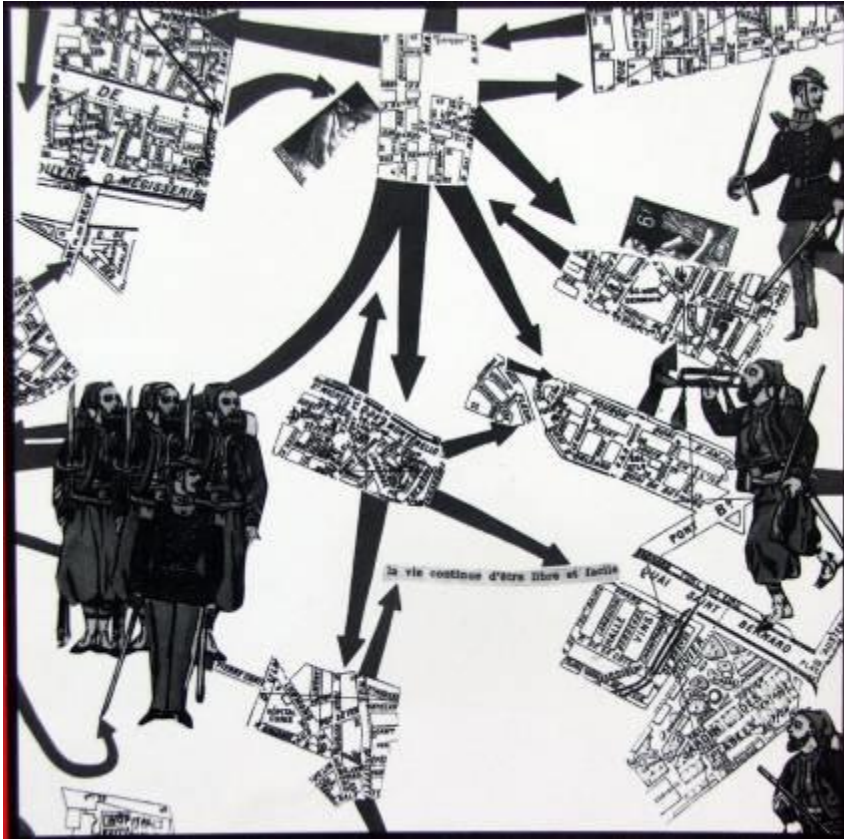
Main Concepts...Psychogeography

Psychogeography

The first edition of Internationale Situationniste defined psychogeography as "the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals." The term was first recognized in 1955 by Guy Debord while still with the Letterist International:

The word psychogeography, suggested by an illiterate Kabyle as a general term for the phenomena a few of us were investigating around the summer of 1953, is not too inappropriate. It does not contradict the materialist perspective of the conditioning of life and thought by objective nature. Geography, for example, deals with the determinant action of general natural forces, such as soil composition or climatic conditions, on the economic structures of a society, and thus on the corresponding conception that such a society can have of the world. Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The charmingly vague adjective psychogeographical can be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery.

—Guy Debord, Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography



Situationist International, *Life continues to be free and easy*, ca 1957, collage by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn

Main Concepts...Dérive

Dérive (drifting)

By definition, psychogeography combines subjective and objective knowledge and studies. Debord struggled to stipulate the finer points of this theoretical paradox, ultimately producing "Theory of the Dérive" in 1958, a document which essentially serves as an instruction manual for the psychogeographic procedure, executed through the act of dérive ("drift").

In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there... But the dérive includes both this letting go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities.

—Ken Knabb