

Science Fiction and the Situationist International

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Abstract

IN an interview in the 1980s, Henri Lefebvre made the remarkable claim that his reading of some Anglo-American science fiction (SF) in the 1950s led him to a position similar to that of the Situationists, as pithily summarized in Guy Debord's 1954 graffito, "Ne travaillez jamais" ["Never work"]. Lefebvre further claimed that discussions of such SF played a role in his dealing with the Situationists. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of these discussions in the extant work of the Situationist International (SI). Certainly, the Situationists used images and occasionally text from contemporaneous SF comics and novels. But unlike many who followed and were influenced by them—notably Jean Baudrillard—, they never fully reckoned with the critical value of pulp SF. Indeed, the Situationists quickly came to consider SF as a peculiarly modern form of capitalist ideology, presenting a reductive caricature, and demonstrating their ignorance of more radical ideas and currents within the genre. Perhaps most unfortunately of all, the Situationists missed an opportunity to enrich their theories of cultural decomposition and the spectacle by way of an examination of SF as a cultural form which was itself undergoing decomposition in the Situationist sense of the term. It is on these bases—that is, disinterring what the SI thought of SF, alongside of speculatively developing a Situationist critique of the latter—that a more fruitful encounter between the SI and SF can be mounted.

*We might re-write reality if we could discover
a big enough pen.*

M. John Harrison, "To the Stars and Beyond
on the Fabulous Anti-Syntax Drive"

1

IN an interview conducted in the 1980s, Kristin Ross asked Henri Lefebvre if he situated his critique of work in the lineage of radical critics like Paul Lafargue (Ross 274–75). Surprisingly, Lefebvre answered that he took his inspiration from a work of Anglo-American science fiction (SF), namely Clifford Simak's 1952 novel

City.¹ He further added that the ideas of this novel, particularly those related to the end of work through automation, played a role in his discussions with members of the Situationist International (SI). However, despite the liberation from work being one of the key demands of the SI, including some discussion of the role that automation would play, these discussions left little obvious residue in their published works.

Aspects of SF nonetheless litter the pages of the Situationist journal. Frames from SF comics were often used in the journal, but only a single citation of an Anglo-American SF novel appears in the journal *Internationale situationniste* (no. 8, Jan. 1963), in the guise of a critical *détournement*.² Indeed, SF was ultimately found wanting in the pages of the Situationist journal. Yet arguably both the Situationists and at least some of the practitioners of SF were engaged in a similar project: how to think the future—even if the Situationists were perhaps more fixated on bringing this future into being.

In this article I propose to establish what exactly the relationship was between the SI and SF. I will do so, firstly, by an examination of what the SI did say about SF; secondly, through an assessment of the shortcomings of their criticism—particularly if we consider examples of contemporaneous SF like that of Philip K. Dick and J. G. Ballard—; and finally, by making some suggestions regarding how a more fruitful encounter could be conducted between the Situationists and SF.

2

IN December 1958, in the second issue of the journal *Internationale situationniste*, Abdelhafid Khatib noted that his fellow Situationist, Asger Jorn, defined *psychogéographie* as “la science-fiction de l’urbanisme” [“the science fiction of urbanism”] (*Internationale* 45). Jorn’s declaration predated the existence of the SI, having appeared as a slogan in the catalogue for the Première exposition de psychogéographie at the Taptoe Gallery in Brussels (2–26 February 1957) (Debord, *Œuvres* 283). The exhibition had been organized under the joint name of Jorn’s Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste, Ralph Rumney’s London Psychogeographical Committee, and the Letterist International, in part as a collaboration anticipating the later formation of the SI.³

¹ The first French translation of *City* appeared in 1952 as *Demain les chiens* [Tomorrow the Dogs].

² “Détournement [:] S’emploie par abréviation de la formule: détournement d’éléments esthétiques préfabriqués. Intégration de productions actuelles ou passées des arts dans une construction supérieure du milieu. Dans ce sens il ne peut y avoir de peinture ou de musique situationniste, mais un usage situationniste de ces moyens” (*Internationale* 13). Transl.: “Détournement[:] To be used to abbreviate the formula: détournement of prefabricated aesthetic elements. Integration of past or present artistic productions into a superior construction of the environment. In this sense there cannot be a Situationist painting or music, only a Situationist use of these means.” Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

³ On the first day of the exhibition, a missed rendezvous led to a dispute between Guy Debord, on the one hand, and Jorn and Rumney, on the other, briefly calling into question the cooperation of these groups and individuals. It was, however, overcome, paving the way for the formation of the

Jorn was familiar with contemporary Anglo-American SF. As early as 1941 he used a still image from the film *King Kong* (1933) in an article for the Danish avant-garde journal *Helhesten*. At his death, his library contained a wide range of SF books (Brøns 120, 193n514). Indeed, the influence of SF upon Jorn seems clear; something noted, for instance, by his Situationist comrade Michèle Bernstein, when she called him “le peintre de toute la science-fiction” [“the painter of all science fiction”]. However—and despite the profound influence that the SF genre had upon him—Jorn unfortunately never expanded upon his claim that psychogeography constituted the SF of urbanism. Nonetheless, we can find some hints of the influence of SF in the development of the psychogeographical project of the SI.

The SI inherited the psychogeographical project from the Letterist International. Indeed, the official Situationist definition of psychogeography was simply a slightly altered restatement of Debord’s from 1955: “Étude des effets précis du milieu géographique, consciemment aménagé ou non, agissant directement sur le comportement affectif des individus.”⁴ Debord remarked that the term had been suggested “par un Kabyle illettré” [“by an illiterate Kabyle”] (*Œuvres* 204) in 1953. However, like the discipline of “psychohistory” in Isaac Asimov’s novel *Foundation* (1951), one could imagine that it had arrived from an unwritten future. Psychogeography was itself an outgrowth of the Letterist International’s practice of the urban drift (*dérive*), just as psychogeography and the *dérives* were the basis for Debord’s formulation of the “hypothèse des constructions de situations” [“hypothesis of the construction of situations”] (*Œuvres* 325). Rather than simply enduring the situations of capitalist life, or finding freedom “en situation” (as Jean Paul Sartre argued), Debord suggested that both “le décor matériel de la vie [and] les comportements qu’il entraîne et qui le bouleversent” [“the material environments of life [and] the behaviours which that environment gives rise to and is overturned by”] could become the objects of conscious praxis (*Œuvres* 322).

Just as psychogeography had led to the Situationist hypothesis—“[n]otre idée centrale”, as Debord put it in 1957—, the “urbanisme nouveau” first outlined by Ivan Chatcheglov in 1953 transformed into the “urbanisme unitaire” of the SI. Whereas the hypothesis posed the possible organization of the situations of social life after capitalism, unitary urbanism was proposed as both an experimental activity in the capitalist present and, perforce, as a more focused critique of current practices of capitalist urbanism. It was unitary to the extent that it faced a capitalist urbanism in thrall to, and so fragmented by, the needs of capital: the flow of goods, workers, and consumers in an urban environment.

If there is a practice of the SI redolent of SF, it is, arguably, unitary urbanism—and, in particular, the “New-Babylone” (sic) project of Constant Nieuwenhuys (*Internationale* 134). Best known from the architectural models that he made and exhibited both during and after his passage through the SI, Constant’s *New Baby-*

Situationist International in July 1957 (Debord, *Œuvres* 281, 283).

⁴ Transl.: “The study of the precise effects of the geographical environment, [whether] consciously organized or not, acting upon the emotional behaviour of individuals.”

lon is strikingly futuristic. Unashamedly an experiment in the utopian imaginary, *New Babylon* was an attempt to conjure the possible with an eye to both the Situationist hypothesis and what was immediately realizable given modern architectural and industrial technique. As a work of fiction, Constant's *New Babylon* could arguably be conceived of as SF. Indeed, and considering the influence that genre SF exerted over the imaginary of the burgeoning "space age" that was a backdrop to the SI's existence (Sputnik having been launched in 1957), a case could be made for the influence of SF upon *New Babylon*. Nonetheless, there remains little evidence of the SI's directed engagement with SF vis-à-vis *New Babylon*, or unitary urbanism. Which is not to say that the SI did not engage with SF, as we will see below. And even if we can arguably consider *New Babylon* retrospectively as an unwitting contribution to SF, it makes more sense to understand its elaboration under the rubric of historical utopianism. Nonetheless, one can perhaps explain Jorn's use of the term "science fiction" in preference to "utopian" if we consider the ambiguities of the latter term in Situationist practice.

3

By the time Debord published *La société du spectacle* in 1967, "utopian" was largely reserved as a critical term akin to Karl Marx's critique of the utopian socialist:

Les courants utopiques du socialisme, quoique fondés eux-mêmes historiquement dans la critique de l'organisation sociale existante, peuvent être justement qualifiés d'utopiques dans la mesure où ils refusent l'histoire – c'est-à-dire la lutte réelle en cours, aussi bien que le mouvement du temps au-delà de la perfection immuable de leur image de société heureuse[.]⁵
(*Œuvres* 796)

The core of Marx's critique of the historical utopians—people like Charles Fourier, Henri de Saint-Simon, and Robert Owen—was aimed at their misapprehension of the social antagonism created by capitalism. Instead of seeing this as the lever by which the proletariat would transform itself and, so too, the world, the utopians cast the proletariat merely as victim of the new social relations. Their visions of a utopian world without class antagonism tended to practically manifest as the desire to do away with this antagonism in the present, whereas Marx saw the intensification of the antagonism as the key to its revolutionary transformation and supersession. Thus, such visions in and of themselves were not what was considered "utopian" in Marx's reckoning, but rather the means—or lack thereof—the utopians proposed to attain such social harmony. Indeed, Marx considered such visions as themselves a necessary part of the present dream of the future, "of

⁵ Transl.: "The utopian currents of socialism, although they are historically founded in the criticism of the existing social organization, can rightly be considered utopian insofar as they ignore history—that is to say, actual struggles underway and the movement of time beyond the immutable perfection of their image of a happy society."

which [the world] needs only to become conscious for it to possess it in reality” (209). Consequently, and in contrast to the utopians, according to Marx, “our task is not to draw a sharp mental line between past and future, but to *complete* the thought of the past” (209). It is the manifest nature of this “completion” that is or is not utopian for Marx.

Nonetheless, “utopian” became one of the chief insults of Marxist orthodoxy, the equivalent of “idealist” or “dreamer”, and largely shorn of the ambiguities we can detect in Marx’s critical appropriation of the utopian socialists.⁶ It is this background that helps to explain a certain hesitance on the part of the Situationists in the early years of their project, when using the terms “utopia” and “utopian”. For instance, by way of the *dérive*, psychogeography, unitary urbanism and the overarching “hypothèse des constructions de situations” [“hypothesis of the construction of situations”], the Situationists seemed keen to rehabilitate “utopia” and the “utopian” from the neglect of Marxism. The question, however, was not one of recovering the worst aspects of the utopian, but rather that critical core that Marx himself recognized. Thus, Debord would early on distinguish the aim of the Situationist project from its present means in the following terms: “le saut d’un art révolutionnaire utopique à un art révolutionnaire expérimental” [“the leap from a utopian revolutionary art to an experimental revolutionary art”] (*Internationale* 21). In this sense, the “utopian” is congruent with the dream of the future in the present, a moment of the critique of the present and an expression of the desire for things to be otherwise.

The Situationists were, however, equally hesitant to describe their project as “utopian”, and rarely used the word “utopia” in an unambiguously positive sense.⁷ This was in marked contrast to some of those influenced by the group, most notably Henri Lefebvre. For instance, Lefebvre enthusiastically described the Situationists as exploring “une sorte d’utopie vécue” [“a type of lived utopia”] (*Introduction* 336). Their influence upon him was so profound in this regard, that he wholeheartedly and demonstrably embraced the idea of the utopian as necessarily a moment of revolutionary practice in the present. Indeed, Lefebvre would defend such utopianism as an example of “utopie concrète” or “utopie expérimentale”,

⁶ This was perhaps, in part, a result of Friedrich Engels’s later opposition of “utopian” and “scientific” socialism, to the detriment of the former.

⁷ For instance, in the second issue of their journal (December 1958), they both admitted to and cautioned their readers regarding this: “Si nos idées mêmes ont un côté utopique et vague, ceci provient moins, à ce stade primitif, de l’impossibilité de vérifier par la pratique une première partie de nos hypothèses, que de notre incapacité de les penser assez rigoureusement en commun” [“Even if our ideas have vague and utopian aspects at this primitive stage, this is less the result of the impossibility of verifying our hypotheses in practice than it is of our incapacity to rigorously think them [our ideas] together”] (“Tournant” 11). Raoul Vaneigem would later contrast “l’ancien utopisme, où des théories entachées d’arbitraire avançaient au-delà de toute pratique possible” [“the old utopianism, in which theories ruined by arbitrariness developed beyond any possible practice”] with the burgeoning revolutionary movements of the 1960s that possessed a frankly utopian side: “il y a maintenant, dans l’ensemble de la problématique de la modernité, une foule de pratiques nouvelles qui cherchent leur théorie” [“there is now, across the entire problematic of modernity, masses of new practices that are seeking their theory”] (*Internationale* 305–06).

contrasting the latter with an “*utopie abstraite*” (“*Utopie*” 192) akin to what Marx and the Situationists rejected by way of the more conventionally Marxist use of the term “*utopian*”.⁸

The unease the Situationists felt with regard to the use of the term *utopia* is clearly spelt out in a paper written collaboratively by Debord and Daniel Blanchard in 1960. Intended for a hoped-for discussion between the SI and Blanchard’s organization, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the care with which the authors teased out the somewhat ambiguous term is understandable if we take into consideration the latter’s more orthodox take on Marxism.⁹ The authors rejected, for instance, the idea that the Situationist demand for the construction of situations constituted “*une utopie quelconque*” [“some sort of *utopia*”] in the pejorative, abstract sense (Debord, *Œuvres* 517). On the contrary, they posed that such “*utopie momentanée, historique, est légitime ; et elle est nécessaire car c’est en elle que s’amorce la projection de désirs sans laquelle la vie libre serait vide de contenu*” (Debord, *Œuvres* 517–18).¹⁰ This sense of *utopia* encompassed not only the negative moment of revolutionary desire and contestation vis-à-vis really existing capitalism, but the necessity of the positive moment, that is, the dream of what would replace the hated world of capital and labour.

However, an additional and subtle transformation of their use of the term “*utopia*” is also contained in the paper by Debord and Blanchard. In part, it foreshadowed not only the way the SI would come to call SF a “*religion*,” but equally the way in which Debord would later take up Marx’s Feuerbachian moment in order to describe the commodity-spectacle as “*la reconstruction matérielle de l’illusion religieuse*” [“the material reconstruction of the religious illusion”] (Debord, *Œuvres* 771). In their collaborative paper of 1960, Debord and Blanchard wrote:

L’ensemble de la culture actuelle peut être qualifiée d’aliénée en ce sens que toute activité, tout instant de la vie, toute idée, tout comportement n’a de sens qu’en dehors de soi, dans un ailleurs qui, pour n’être plus le ciel, n’en est que plus affolant à localiser : une utopie, au sens propre du mot, domine en fait la vie du monde moderne.¹¹ (Debord, *Œuvres* 513)

Debord would later call this *non-place* made manifest “the society of the spectacle”; a *utopia* revealed, in part, by “la contradiction éclatante de la publicité, dans le spectacle social, qui *parle de ce qu’elle ne vend pas*, et qui *ne vend pas ce dont elle*

⁸ For more on “concrete *utopia*”, see Stanek; Lefebvre, *Toward an Architecture*. Stanek’s essay introduces Lefebvre’s previously unpublished manuscript.

⁹ “Orthodoxy” here relative to the Situationists, considering that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was then in the process of moving rapidly away from what remained of their orthodoxy.

¹⁰ Transl.: “This fleeting, historical *utopia* is legitimate; and it is necessary because it serves to nurture the projection of desires without which free life would be empty of content.”

¹¹ Transl.: “The entirety of present-day culture can be considered as alienated in the sense that every activity, every moment of life, every idea, every [kind of] behavior, only has a meaning outside itself, in a somewhere-else, which, no longer being in heaven, is only the more maddening [in attempting] to locate: a *utopia*, in the proper sense of the word, in fact dominates the life of the modern world.”

parle" (*Internationale* 491).¹² This paradoxical sense that utopia had been realized in the modern commodity-spectacle would be taken up more explicitly in the seventh issue of *Internationale situationniste* (April 1962), the pivotal issue that marked the SI's turn away from its more artistically flavoured exploration of unitary urbanism. Evoking an early conception of the SI's project as being "une course de vitesse entre les artistes libres et la police pour expérimenter et développer l'emploi des nouvelles techniques de conditionnement" (*Internationale* 8),¹³ the group would come to speak of the impossibility of realizing utopia, not because it was utopian in the merely abstract sense, but rather,

parce que toutes les conditions de sa réalisation existent déjà. On les détourne pour servir au maintien de l'ordre actuel, dont l'absurdité est si terrible *qu'on la réalise d'abord*, quel que soit son prix, sans que *personne n'ose en formuler la théorie, même après*. C'est *l'utopie inverse* de la répression : elle dispose de tous les pouvoirs, et personne ne la veut.¹⁴ (*Internationale* 258)

As mentioned above, the idea of a realized utopia (albeit inverted), a non-place made manifest, draws upon the critique of religious ideology to be found in Feuerbach, and Marx's critical appropriation of the former. Indeed, it anticipates Debord's argument that the commodity-spectacle is a moment of the strange victory of philosophy and theology against the project of their supersession, insofar as the commodity-spectacle is the *philosophization* of reality.¹⁵

4

WE find a parallel between the SI's problematization of utopia and their rejection of SF. This is clearly drawn out in the second part of Vaneigem's "Banalités de base" (1963), in an argument that anticipates Debord's comments about the "exil des pouvoirs humains dans un au-delà" ["exile of human power into a beyond"]. Noting, like Debord, the paradox of a technology that promises

¹² Transl.: "the dazzling contradiction of *advertising* in the social spectacle, which *speaks of what it does not sell* and *does not sell that which it speaks of*".

¹³ Transl.: "A race between free artists and the police to experiment with and develop the use of the new techniques of conditioning."

¹⁴ Transl.: "Because all the conditions for its realization already exist. They are diverted [*on les détourne détourne*] in order to serve in the maintenance of the current order, whose absurdity is so terrible *that it [utopia] was first realized*, no matter the cost, without *anyone daring to formulate the theory, even afterwards*. It is the *inverted utopia* of repression: it has [*dispose*] all the powers, and nobody wants it."

¹⁵ Debord would make this relation explicit in *La société du spectacle* when he described the modern commodity-spectacle as "la reconstruction matérielle de l'illusion religieuse" ["the material reconstruction of the religious illusion"], by which "la technique spectaculaire n'a pas dissipé les nuages religieux où les hommes avaient placé leurs propres pouvoirs détachés d'eux: elle les a seulement reliés à une base terrestre" ["spectacular technology did not dissipate the religious clouds in which men [dis]placed their own powers, [as if] detached from themselves: it only gave them an earthly basis"], realizing after a fashion, the older religious illusion as secular technological dystopia (*Œuvres* 771).

liberation but in truth is little more than a “caricature” of such in the hands of the commodity-spectacle, Vaneigem draws attention to the way modern capitalism attempts to materialize such a beyond by locating it in an anticipated future, albeit no less idealized than the divine beyond:

Ce que la vision unitaire du monde rejetait dans l'au-delà (l'image de l'élévation), le pouvoir parcellaire l'inscrit dans un mieux-être futur (l'image du projet) des lendemains qui chantent sur le fumier du présent, et qui ne sont que le présent multiplié par le nombre de gadgets à produire.¹⁶ (*Internationale* 332–33)

Arguably, Vaneigem is only referring to the ideology of the coming technological utopia of the future, which was a widespread feature of the capitalist mass culture of the 1960s and of the short lived space-age. However, there is additional evidence that the SI did not differentiate between such visions and those promulgated by SF. For instance, in 1960 the Situationist Michèle Bernstein had written of science fiction that “l'esprit général de ce genre, [...] est la transposition inquiète d'une domination agressive de classe et de race.”¹⁷ However, she had made these comments in a brief introduction written for the unveiling of Asger Jorn's and Pierre Wemaëre's tapestry *Le long voyage*, in which she also favourably described Jorn as “le peintre de toute la science-fiction”. This raises two possibilities: either SF is not reducible to its “general spirit”, or Bernstein was attempting to accommodate Jorn's attempt to speak of aspects of the Situationist project with reference to SF.

By the following year, however, such ambiguity was dispensed with. In an address delivered to Henri Lefebvre's Groupe de Recherche sur la vie quotidienne (Research Group on Everyday Life), Debord explicitly used the example of SF as a cautionary tale regarding an abstract understanding of the “emploi des moyens techniques”:

Quand on envisage l'hypothèse d'un avenir, tel qu'il est admis par la littérature de science-fiction, ou des aventures interstellaires coexisteraient avec une vie quotidienne gardée sur cette terre dans la même indigence matérielle et le même moralisme archaïque, ceci veut dire, exactement, qu'il y aurait encore une classe de dirigeants spécialisés, qui maintiendrait à son service les foules prolétaires des usines et des bureaux; et que les aventures interstellaires seraient uniquement l'entreprise choisie par ces dirigeants, la manière qu'ils auraient trouvée de développer leur économie irrationnelle, le comble de l'activité spécialisée.¹⁸ (*Internationale* 222)

¹⁶ Transl.: “What the unitary vision of the world displaced [*rejetait*] into the beyond (the elevated image), fragmented power inscribes in a future well-being (the projected image) of better tomorrows that sing upon the dunghills of the present-day, and which are only this present multiplied by the number of gadgets to be produced.”

¹⁷ Transl.: “the general spirit of this genre, [...] is the worrying transposition of aggressive class and racial domination.”

¹⁸ Transl.: “The use of technological means [...] When one imagines a hypothetical future such as that presented in science-fiction, in which interstellar adventures coexist with a terrestrial everyday life kept in the same old material poverty and archaic morality, this implies precisely that there is

It is possible that SF came more clearly into the sights of the SI as the result of the appearance of the magazine *Planète* in France in 1961. One of the chief platforms for a self-consciously futurist, if nebulous, science “fact” and fiction in the France of the 1960s, *Planète* was, according to the SI, emblematic of precisely such a technological optimism abstracted from a more profound philosophical and political critique:

Jouant en même temps sur cette évidence que la science et la technologie avancent de plus en plus vite, sans que l’on sache vers où, *Planète* harangue les braves gens pour leur faire savoir qu’il faut désormais tout changer; et en même temps admet comme donnée immuable les 99/100 de la vie réellement vécue par notre époque.¹⁹ (*Internationale* 303)

The stage was already set for the SI’s rejection of SF. In the same issue of *Internationale situationniste* that published Debord’s address to Henri Lefebvre’s Research Group cited above, the Situationists made this declaration: “L’I.S. estime que toute religion est aussi risible qu’une autre ; et garantit une hostilité équivalente à toutes les religions, même de *science-fiction*” (*Internationale* 230).²⁰ Indeed, such a declaration is in keeping with Vaneigem’s later description of the projected image of a future well-being as being, in effect, the secularized version of the ancient religious world beyond this one.

5

THE argument that the general spirit of SF is the projection of the present class and social hierarchies into space and the future is well made. Nonetheless, it is too reductive and sweeping in its conclusions. Certainly, SF often unthinkingly projects the capitalist present into the near and far future, much as Adam Smith projected capitalist social relations into the dim past. Yet, being a form of literature peculiarly obsessed with the possibilities that lie ahead, it has also been the forum for works of a strikingly critical bent. For instance, H. G. Wells’s foundational *The*

still a class of specialized rulers [*dirigeants*] maintaining the proletarian masses of the factories and offices in their service; and that the interstellar adventures are nothing but the particular enterprise chosen by those rulers [*dirigeants*], the way they have found to develop their irrational economy, the pinnacle of specialized activity.”

¹⁹ Transl.: “At the same time, playing on the evidence that science and technology are advancing faster and faster without anyone knowing where they are going, [the editors of the journal] *Planète* harangue good people [*braves gens*] to let them know that henceforth everything must be changed, while at the same time assuming that 99/100ths of the life really lived in our era is immutable.”

²⁰ Transl.: “The SI reckons that all religions are as risible as each other; and guarantees an equivalent hostility to all religions, even that of *science fiction*.” This editorial note was appended to the end of an article written by Asger Jorn, “La pataphysique: Une religion en formation”, in which Jorn posed the possibility of Pataphysics becoming a new secular religion ideally suited to modern capitalism, and so the need to force a split within the College of Pataphysics “des pataphysiciens les moins ecclésiastiques” [“of the least ecclesiastical pataphysicians”] (*Internationale* 230). The note reported Jorn’s recent resignation from the SI and made clear that the remaining editors of the Situationist journal did not have Jorn’s faith in the possibility or desirability of such a split.

Time Machine (1895) can be interpreted simply as the projection of late Victorian class relations into the far future of Eloi and Morlocks. However, Wells's intention is central to understanding such projection; a projection, moreover, that has a critical thrust. *The Time Machine* plays the role of cautionary tale admirably. It is hard to imagine that the world presented, in which the social division of class has become a natural division of species, is merely the affirmative projection of that which it criticizes. Along the way, Wells also has something interesting to say about the present conceits of Victorian civilization, and its pretensions to perfection and longevity.

The Situationists had claimed that their “théorie [...] est dans le peuple comme le poisson dans l'eau.”²¹ The intent is clear: the radical critique the SI were developing was by no means their private property, and even more so was necessarily being generated on that grander canvas of the everyday life of capitalist alienation. As such, we should not be surprised if we find such Situationist theory being expressed in SF—and elsewhere for that matter.

Before the Second World War, France had a relatively long tradition of writers working within the genre of the “roman scientifique”, stretching back to Jules Verne. However, by the 1940s writers of the generation that included J.-H. Rosny aîné, Maurice Renard, and Albert Robida had passed, and the Second World War and the aftermath of the Liberation brought a new invasion: Anglo-American SF. The latter came to dominate the SF field in France in the 1950s, particularly through two magazines that were extensions of US ones: *Fiction* and *Galaxie*. Both were dominated by translations from the English.

Slightly in advance of these magazines (both began in 1953), critical interest in SF began to flourish in France, in large part initiated by an ex-Surrealist, Raymond Queneau, in an article of 1951 (Parkinson 108).²² Some of the Parisian Surrealist group around André Breton also took an interest in Anglo-American SF and produced a series of articles through the 1950s in their attempt to shoehorn SF into relationship with Surrealism (in particular, the work of H. P. Lovecraft). However, it would be an article by a non-Surrealist that would prove to be particularly redolent of what would become Situationist concerns.

In “La crise de croissance de la Science-Fiction” (1953), Michel Butor suggested that SF was in the process of becoming something akin to a new mythology, one suited to the rapid technological developments of its time. However, its growth had reached a crisis point, in part the result of the tension between its pre-modern, fantastical roots and its aspirations to evoke the coming worlds of utopian technology and space exploration. In order to become a mythos suitable to unifying the modern world, Butor suggested a collective and collaborative focus:

Imaginons maintenant qu'un certain nombre d'auteurs, au lieu de décrire au hasard et très vite des villes plus ou moins interchangeables, se mettent à prendre pour décor de leurs histoires une seule ville [...]. La S.-F., si elle

²¹ Transl.: “theory [...] is in people like fish are in water.”

²² The rest of this paragraph draws upon Parkinson's 2015 chapter.

pouvait se limiter et s'unifier, serait susceptible d'acquérir sur l'imagination individuelle un pouvoir contraignant, comparable à celui de n'importe quelle mythologique classique. Bientôt, tous les auteurs seraient obligés de tenir compte de cette ville prédite, les lecteurs organiseraient leurs actes par rapport à son existence prochaine, à la limite ils se trouveraient obligés de la construire. Alors la S.-F. serait véridique, dans la mesure même ou elle se réaliserait.²³ (Butor, "Crise" 193–94)

Butor's call was made the same year Ivan Chtcheglov, member of the Letterist International, wrote "Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau", which proposes a collaborative project whose aim was also to "realize" such a "utopian" city as Butor envisages. Like Butor, Chtcheglov invoked the catalysing power of a mythology adequate to the present in which, sadly, "[n]otre mental hanté par de vieilles images-clefs est resté très en arrière des machines perfectionnées" (*Internationale* 15).²⁴ Whereas Butor's inspiration was SF, Chtcheglov drew explicitly upon the earlier avant-gardes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and bemoans that paintings like those of Giorgio De Chirico and Claude Lorrain are consigned to museums rather than being used as blueprints. One can imagine that it is Butor's proposal that Jorn had in mind when he proclaimed psychogeography the science fiction of urbanism. Unfortunately, there is no indication that Butor or Chtcheglov (or Jorn for that matter) knew of each other's plans, despite their proximity. It is evidence, at least, that similar concerns were in the air.

6

IF we turn to Anglo-American SF from the late 1940s through the 1950s, one is struck by expressions of what are undoubtedly critical perspectives vis-à-vis contemporary capitalism. I would go further and call them Situationist in anticipation. A striking example is Philip K. Dick's short story "Foster, You're Dead" (1955). Dick paints a mordant picture of a near future in which the purchase and sale of nuclear shelters is driven by planned obsolescence and conspicuous consumption. New models appear every year, and the advertising encourages people to compete in the zero-sum game of who has the latest gadget. And given the ever-present threat of atomic destruction, the nuclear shelter appears to be the perfect commodity: "You know, this game has one real advantage over selling people cars and TV sets. [...] If you don't buy, *they'll kill you*. The perfect sales

²³ Transl.: "Now imagine that a certain number of authors, instead of describing at random and quite rapidly more or less interchangeable cities, were to take as the setting of their stories a single city [...]. SF, if it could limit and unify itself [thus], would be capable of acquiring over the individual imagination a constraining power comparable to that of any classical mythology. Soon all authors would be obliged to take this predicted city into account, readers would organize their actions in relation to its imminent existence, [and] ultimately they would find themselves obliged to build it. Then SF would be veracious, to the very degree that it realized itself."

²⁴ Transl.: "Our minds, haunted by the old archetypes, have remained far behind the sophistication of the machines."

pitch. [...] Have a shiny new General Electronics H-bomb shelter in your back yard or be slaughtered" (Dick 279; emphasis in the original).

Seven years later, in 1962, the Situationists would present an almost identical argument in their article "Géopolitique de l'hibernation". There they mercilessly exposed the absurdity of the sale of nuclear shelters in the US and drew attention to how the offered protection was only a pretext for the sale. Even their point regarding "la saturation relative de la demande de 'biens durables'" ["the relative saturation of the demand for 'durable goods'"] (*Internationale* 245) being partly a cause of the expansion of marketing into nuclear shelters was made by Dick ("Foster" 279). Certainly, the Situationist argument is more systematic and not subservient to the fictional narrative. Yet the resonances are palpable.

Dick was peculiarly adept at channelling the alienated zeitgeist of the 1950s and 60s. In "The Mold of Yancy" (1955), he told the tale of a fake leader, Yancy, concocted by the State and mass media to shape the populace—a mould that moulds. The story also gives expression to an argument similar to the Situationist critique of the integrative and recuperative potential of mass politics and consumption. In another story, "Autofac" (1955), Dick imagines a world recovering from nuclear war. The automated factories, "autofacs", that once provided the war materials for the respective powers have been turned to the task of providing goods for the survivors. Unfortunately, the "autofacs" know of no other end than potentially endless production, and so they produce no matter what the survivors want. As an allegory for what Debord later described as the "artificiel illimité" ["unlimited artificial"] nature of the spectacle's "accumulation mécanique" ["mechanical accumulation"] (*Euvres* 789–90), Dick's "Autofac" is remarkable.²⁵

Dick was by no means alone in Anglo-American SF in the 1950s. That decade was a particularly fertile time for such tales. Perhaps the most infamous within and without the SF ghetto is the 1953 novel by C. M. Kornbluth and Frederick Pohl, *The Space Merchants*. Kornbluth and Pohl imagined a future world run by advertising agencies, in which appearance and the lie prove far more profitable than the grim truth of mass production and consumption. Pohl, a one-time member of a Communist organization in his 1930s youth, was also responsible for some of the most acerbic SF stories aimed at the burgeoning commodity-spectacle. One of them, "The Midas Plague" (1954), chisels away at a similar theme to Dick's "Autofac"—the perils of mass production and consumption—, except that in Pohl's future the mark of success is ironically inverted. There, the wealthy are those that escape the surfeit of consumer durables. In another story, "The Tunnel Under the World" (1955), Pohl imagines a grim world in which people are reanimated to become the living-dead pawns of market research.

There is no indication that any Situationists were reading these stories—not Dick's, Pohl's, or the others'. In part, this can be explained by the paucity of available translations. Some of the stories mentioned above were available in French

²⁵ For a recent discussion of Dick's "Autofac" with an eye to the Situationist critique of work, see Keaney.

translation, for instance “The Tunnel Under the World” in 1955, and “Autofac” and *The Space Merchants* in 1958. However, the vast majority of them—and crucially, more obviously Situationist adjacent works like “The Defenders”, “The Mold of Yancy”, “The Midas Plague”, and Dick’s *The Penultimate Truth*—did not begin to appear in French translation until the late 1960s. Add to this the possible ignorance of the SI regarding the breadth of the genre—van Vogt’s novel *The World of Null-A* is the only SF work ever mentioned in the pages of *Internationale situationniste*—and a picture begins to emerge that may indicate a cursory or limited knowledge of Anglo-American SF.

Perhaps more pointedly, the SI were simply uninterested in many of the uses, if any, such mass culture could be put to. Indeed, Situationists tended to envisage cultural products in the raw, so to speak, as mostly lacking any intrinsic value under modern conditions, insofar as their formal existence as commodities dominated their explicit content; or, as we might say in the Marxian register of the SI, their exchange value dominated and even shaped their use value. Additionally, they saw in many of the products of cultural mass production merely commodities that integrated proletarians into the broader spectacle, insofar as they offered illusory forms of escape from modern alienation. Thus, if any critical or creative value was to be found in commodified culture, it must be explicitly stated—for example, in a work of theory, or avant-garde art. Or, more likely per Situationist needs, by way of the decontextualization and recontextualization of these products—, that is, by way of *détournement*.

7

IN 1981, in his book *Simulacres et simulation*, Jean Baudrillard attempted something I suggest the Situationists could have done: he drew upon near contemporary Anglo-American SF as an expression and reflection of his theory of the “orders of simulacra”. Briefly, Baudrillard argued that capitalist modernity was marked by three phases or “orders” of simulacra. In the first order, mimesis rules, and naturalistic representations are the order of the day. In the second order, coincident with the rise of industrial mass production, the mimetic relationship becomes somewhat obscured with the flood of produced things. In the third order, this relationship breaks down even further, leading to a convergence and even an inversion of the real and its copy. It is this order, the third, that is purportedly the order that now prevails, in which simulations and virtual realities have no “original”, and are, after a fashion, as “original” as the objects they purport to represent.

There are certain thematic affinities between Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra and Debord’s theory of spectacle. Anselm Jappe, for one, has argued that Baudrillard simply ripped off and repackaged Debord’s theory—*détournement par excès*—under the flimsy guise of “radicalizing” it. What is most surprising regarding Baudrillard’s claims, particularly as they pertain to SF, is that they go no further than the SI’s error regarding the “general spirit” of the genre. Where he does apparently improve upon the Situationists, he in effect restates an argument

made by one of the authors under discussion, without acknowledging him: J. G. Ballard.

Baudrillard considered Ballard the exemplary writer of the third order of simulacra, particularly his novel *Crash* (1973): “*Crash*, c’est *notre* monde, rien n’y est ‘inventé’ [...] tout y est comme une grande machine synchrone, simulée [...]. Dans *Crash*, plus de fiction ni de réalité, c’est l’hyperréalité qui abolit les deux” (*Simulacres* 183–84).²⁶ In contrast to Philip K. Dick, who Baudrillard considers a transitional figure, the poet caught between the spectacle and the simulacra, Ballard—at least in *Crash*—dispenses with the trappings of SF. This is not the future; it is, rather, the interminable now that stretches off to the horizon and beyond.

However, Ballard had already arrived at a similar conclusion. In 1967, the same year that Debord had written “[l]e spectacle [...] n’est pas un supplément au monde réel, sa décoration surajoutée. Il est le coeur de l’irréalisme de la société réelle” (*Œuvres* 767),²⁷ Ballard had spoken of “the fictional elements in experience [that] are now multiplying to such a point that it is almost impossible to distinguish between the real and the false” (Ballard and MacBeth 54). In an interview in 1971, he spoke of an ever narrowing gap between the prognostications of SF and the present, such that SF was “a better key to the present [...] than the best conventional fiction” (“Fictions” 99). The point at issue is not the derivative nature of Baudrillard’s comments, but rather that they go no further than what Ballard or the Situationists had already attempted.

Inadvertently, perhaps, Baudrillard restates aspects of Debord’s theory of “cultural decomposition” through the optic of his concept of simulacra. Whereas Debord spoke of the implosion of the forms of expression in the avant-garde art of the twentieth century as a *ne plus ultra* for bourgeois culture, Baudrillard writes of the exhaustion of SF in the collapse of its utopian projections. In a world in which SF is no different from the present in which it is composed and consumed, fiction itself is no longer possible. Indeed, I would describe both the exhaustion that Baudrillard speaks of and the closing gap of Ballard’s an aspect of SF’s *differentia specifica* under conditions of cultural decomposition.

This is not, however, merely a question of unstated influence or plagiarism. As simulacra, Baudrillard reduces Debord’s concept of spectacle to one structure among a potential infinity, all equally “fictional”. The unfortunate result being that one cannot return to the world in the way the SI argued was possible, that is, as the recovery of lived experience beyond its spectacular alienation.

²⁶ Transl.: “*Crash* is *our* world, nothing in it is ‘invented’ [...], everything in it is like a giant, synchronous, simulated machine [...]. In *Crash*, there is neither fiction nor reality anymore—hyperreality abolishes both.”

²⁷ Transl.: “The spectacle [...] is not a mere supplement or decoration added to the real world. It is the heart of this real society’s unreality.”

8

IN *Internationale situationniste* no. 8 (January 1963), we come across the first and only *détournement* of written Anglo-American SF to grace the pages of the SI's work. Beneath a photo of Caroline Rittener is the title "Critique de la Séparation", followed by a quote from A. E. van Vogt's SF novel *The World of Null-A* (aka *The World of Ā*): "Don't be silly,' she said, 'and try to save the world. You can't do anything. This plot is bigger than Earth, bigger than the solar system. We're pawns in a game being played by men from the stars'" (Van Vogt, ch. 5).²⁸

Caroline Rittener had appeared in Guy Debord's 1961 film *Critique de La Séparation*. In the journal, in what seems to be an extension of her role in the film, it is as if van Vogt's words are put into her mouth, to further express the Situationist critique of separation—modern, spectacular alienation. In van Vogt's novel, the protagonist, Gilbert Gosseyn, discovers himself to be at the centre of a struggle to prevent the Earth's takeover by shadowy forces from without the solar system. As a parable of the struggle the Situationists propose against the colonization of everyday life by the commodity-spectacle, the tale is compelling. Indeed, *The World of Null-A* was far from unique in this regard. Stories of alien invasion made up a large subsection of SF, at least since H. G. Wells had established the model in *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

However, what may have appealed to the Situationists, despite the novel's "transposition inquiète d'une domination agressive de classe et de race" ["worrying transposition of aggressive class and racial domination"] (as Bernstein had noted of SF in general), was the way it nonetheless undercut the often racist assumptions of the SF tale of alien invasion. In *The World of Null-A* the aliens are revealed to be another faction of humans. Indeed, van Vogt anticipates Philip K. Dick's dizzying fictional evocations of the loss of sense and identity in a world grown overfull with things and their prices. Debord may have even *détourné* one of his more suggestive metaphors for the commodity-spectacle from van Vogt, who had in turn taken it from Alfred Korzybski: "The map is not the territory. . . The word is not the thing itself. . ." (Van Vogt, ch. 2).²⁹

By the time the SI published their *détournement* of van Vogt, the work itself was somewhat archaic in relation to the rapidly developing SF scene. By 1963 van Vogt's erstwhile student, Philip K. Dick, had profoundly refined van Vogt's relatively crude tales of cosmic conspiracies and ambiguous identity. Similarly, across the pond, simmering experiments in form and content were beginning to coalesce

²⁸ French translation found in *Internationale*: "N'ayez pas l'idiotie, dit-elle, de vouloir sauver le monde, vous ne pouvez rien faire. Cette conspiration n'est pas à l'échelle terrestre, pas même à celle du système solaire. Nous sommes des pions dans un jeu que jouent les gens des étoiles" (316).

²⁹ Compare with Debord: "Le spectacle est la carte de ce nouveau monde, carte qui recouvre exactement son territoire" ["The spectacle is the map of this new world, [a] map that covers exactly its territory"] (*Œuvres* 774). However, here Debord appears to be more clearly in debt to Borges than Korzybski. What is perhaps more striking is that Baudrillard's famous use of Borges in *Simulacres et simulation* (1981) has its source in Debord's 1967 *détournement*.

into the New Wave in SF, and, in particular, the work of one writer who came to exemplify this movement: J. G. Ballard.

Ballard's influence on the New Wave in SF was profound. From the mid-1950s he had turned to the elaboration of an SF that departed markedly from the central tropes of the genre. In two key short stories, "The Concentration City" (aka "Build-Up") and "Manhole 69", both published in 1957—coincidentally the year the SI was formed—, Ballard presented a vision of the future that differed markedly from the technological optimism or uncomplicated horror that SF had become known for. In the former, his nightmare vision of a future world become entirely urbanized resonated with the contemporaneous Situationist critique of capitalist urbanism. In the former story, a tale of the dire consequences of meddling with the deep unconscious nature of the human, could be found an early expression of the psychoanalytic themes that would come to dominate Ballard's later fiction. By the early 1960s Ballard was calling upon fellow writers to eschew the mostly banal elaborations of the exploration of "outer space" that were, in any case, being overtaken by the burgeoning space programs of the US and USSR, and instead focus upon a more profoundly unknown and alien place closer to hand: the "inner space" of the unconscious (Ballard, "Which Way" 117).

With Michael Moorcock's accession to the editorship of the UK SF magazine *New Worlds* in 1964, Ballard found both an editor and writer more open to his vision of what SF could become. Indeed, it is from this point that the New Wave starts to become more of a movement than an idea whose time had come. Ballard was not only the exemplar of the New Wave author, he was also its chief propagandist. For instance, his 1966 review of Patrick Waldberg's *Surrealism* and Marcel Jean's *The History of Surrealist Painting* reads more like a manifesto, albeit in a gentle, suburban English register. However, it was in his fiction that one found the disquieting images of a barely repressed violence brought on by the anxieties on modern life. He rewrote SF as an exercise in psychoanalytics; fiction as a type of therapy amidst the trauma. By the mid-1960s he relished the fact that his inspiration was increasingly drawn from the artistic avant-gardes that littered Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in preference to its ambiguous cousin, science fiction (Ballard, "Coming"). In this, Ballard drew closer to the Situationists in a shared lineage, if not in some of his chilly meditations upon urban alienation and despair. Indeed, in the same year the SI had belatedly *détourné* van Vogt, Ballard published his short story "The Subliminal Man" (1963), a modern parable of the spectacle's colonization of the entirety of everyday life, up to and including our dreams. It is arguably Situationist in all but name.³⁰

It is among the New Wave that we can find the first signs of the SI itself entering into the serried ranks of SF. In M. John Harrison's early science fiction novel *The Committed Men* (1971), bands of roving "situationalists" (sic) occasionally

³⁰ A later, more orthodox Marxist critic of SF, H. Bruce Franklin, considered "The Subliminal Man" as a pinnacle of Ballard's criticism of modern society, in which the author "subjected this future automobilized monopoly capitalist society to a rigorous analysis, showing how the psychology of the people within it is determined by the political economy." However, Franklin seems oblivious to its resonance with the story's Situationist contemporaries.

appear as semi-mythical figures in a world fallen to ruin. This novel finds Harrison in Ballard mode, charting a near future of European capitalism in collapse akin to the latter's early disaster novels. It is unclear if Harrison intentionally or accidentally misspells "situationist". The association is clear nonetheless. Harrison's "situationalists" are suitably enigmatic; rebels at the cutting edge of rebellion. In the aftermath of a nuclear disaster, they form guerrilla bands alongside other less fancifully named anarchists, to fight against those that absurdly and violently cling to the appearance of order and normality in a world destroyed by the self-same order and normality. Gaudily dressed latter-day *flâneurs* that drive around in bright pink tanks with strange, cubist insignia—that sounds like a Situationist, surely? If one needs a model, such a psychedelic figure seems more like Michael Moorcock's fictional Jerry Cornelius than Guy Debord.

The New Wave in SF was in large part a reaction to a growing crisis in Anglo-American SF. Having been clearly established as a distinct genre from the late 1920s, SF was further codified in the 1930s and 40s. In particular, the "fandom" established concurrent with the first self-consciously science fictional magazine, *Amazing Stories*, became a crucial factor in its growth and development. Additionally, it is impossible to ignore the role John W. Campbell played in establishing the form and content of "hard" SF as the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* from 1938. However, by the late 1950s, SF entered into the first of several crises on the back of a collapse in the magazine market in the US. Alongside of a rapid expansion of SF publishing in the late 1940s and 50s, and the entry into its ranks of more writers and fans, fictional tropes and techniques that had once been fresh and invigorating now seemed tired and somewhat shop-worn. In particular, the technological optimism that marked the early years of SF had become increasingly discordant in the wake of Hiroshima and the Cold War.

What is striking about the movement in Anglo-American SF during this period—roughly from its emergence around Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* magazine in 1926 up through the 1950s and on into the New Wave of the 1960s—is that it broadly replicates the movement of decomposition that Debord identified to be a feature of cultural production under conditions of capitalist modernity. For instance, alongside the emergence of critical ideas among some of the practitioners of SF in the 1950s—Philip K. Dick, Frederick Pohl, etc.—we can also find the first flowerings of formal experiments that were effectively harbingers of the New Wave in SF.

In the 1950s, Debord developed a critique of "cultural decomposition" that was a precursor of his later theory of the spectacle. The gist of Debord's criticism is this: given a degree of absolute freedom in artistic expression, all the arts tend to develop their means of expression "et justement jusqu'à la destruction de l'expression elle-même" ["right up to and including the destruction of expression itself"] (*Internationale* 74). For Debord, the classic example of the emergence of such freedom in the arts—if the term "classic" can have any meaning in this regard—was to be found in the movements inaugurated in French poetry and painting in the 1860s by the poet Charles Baudelaire, and the painters Édouard Manet and Claude Monet (Debord, "Surréalisme"). Such freedom of expression

was not merely expressed in the flowering of technique, often alongside of a more penetrating examination of the everyday life of the new industrial modernity. Above all it was expressed by way of a more self-conscious focus upon the role of art and the artist in this *everyday*.

Barely sixty years lie between Baudelaire's sickly flowers and the Dadaist proclamation that "art is dead". Retrospectively, what is striking is how quickly the "dissolution" progressed. Perhaps even more striking is the fact that, barring various technological developments since the 1920s, there has been no equivalent progression in the arts over the last century. Contemporary art appears to be caught between, on the one hand, variations on the themes of this artistic dissolution, and on the other, a rejection of such in favour of traditional forms.

However, this movement towards "la destruction de l'expression elle-même" ["the destruction of expression itself"] was no mere caprice of the most extreme or marginal iterations of the artistic avant-garde—even if it was here that one would find such self-destruction in a raw, unadorned state (consider Kurt Schwitters "Ur Sonata" or Malevich's "White Square on White"). Debord's wager was that such a movement was *immanent* not only in the "freedom of the word" initiated by Baudelaire, among others, but even more distantly in the emergence of an intellectual division of labour in the ancient world. Following Marx, in part, Debord argues that "la culture", which is to say "la sphère générale de la connaissance, et des représentations du vécu", only becomes "ce pouvoir de généralisation existant à part",³¹ within broader everyday life to the extent that it comes to exist as the practice of a distinct and increasingly specialized body of intellectual labourers in ancient societies in which class hierarchy first emerged (*Euvres* 180). However, it was only with the onset of modern, fully capitalist societies that the "arts" become posed as one disenchanted industry among many within broader culture. By virtue of this double independence, the "arts" are characterized by a negative historical movement.

This negativity only becomes explicit with the emergence of a project aimed at art's supersession and realization in everyday life. The contours of such a project can be seen to fitfully emerge among the Romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, it becomes more self-consciously explicit in the European heartlands of capitalism in the mid and late nineteenth century with an accelerating artistic experimentalism that called into question both the history and place of art in broader society. By Debord's reckoning it reaches an apotheosis of sorts with the Dadas and Surrealists at the end of the First World War—not uncoincidentally related to the explosion of proletarian revolution that swept through Russia, Germany, China, and Spain over the following two decades.

Per Debord's argument, the appearance of such modernist destruction and experimental decomposition of literary texts was a moment of the growing self-consciousness of the artistic avant-garde—not simply in terms of the possibilities for experiment, but even more pointedly regarding the limitations of such exper-

³¹ Transl.: "culture, [which is to say] the general sphere of knowledge and of representations of lived experiences, [only becomes] this generalizing power which exists as a *separate entity* [...]".

imentation. Such a self-consciousness appears in SF almost from the outset (for instance, in works of H. P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith). However, it is only in the 1950s that it begins to be expressed more systematically with an eye to the recent experiments in other literary and artistic avant-gardes. For instance, I have outlined some of the critical themes that appeared in SF in the 1950s—themes that not only targeted the myths of technological society, but even more so the increasingly familiar tropes of SF as well. It should be no surprise then that we also find the emergence of formal experiments amidst the growing self-consciousness of SF as a genre. For instance, James Blish's short story "Testament of Andros" (1953) and C. M. Kornbluth's "The Last Man in the Bar" (1957) are markers of the appearance of formal experiments akin to the fractured narratives and stream of consciousness found in works like James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* (1890).

Contrary to contemporaneous theories of decadence and postmodern exhaustion, Debord believed that this immanent negativity carried an import that opened upon two possibilities: either a revolution beyond artistic experimentation, in which we turn to the more rewarding task of creating and constructing the situations of life; or the collapse and recuperation of artistic experiment within the bounds of the expanding markets for cultural commodities. Such a dilemma was reached in Anglo-American SF in the early 1970s—which is to say in the wake of and as a direct result of the so-called New Wave in SF. One can see a similar fate faced by the New Wave in SF as was previously met by the Dadas and Surrealists. The case of Robert Silverberg is particularly illuminating in this regard, as he was by no means the most radical of proponents of the New Wave (see Silverberg). Silverberg was a commercially successful SF writer who briefly embraced the ethos of experimentation and self-conscious literary decadence under the impact of the New Wave in SF. Between 1966 and 1975 Silverberg came to embody the movement of artistic decomposition, producing works that were progressively less successful in commercial terms, and which culminated in two stories that were thinly disguised critiques of SF: "The Science Fiction Hall of Fame" (1973) and "Schwartz Between the Galaxies" (1974). Both of these stories stand as remarkable testaments to the exhaustion brought on by the freedom of the word taken up by the New Wave in SF—and so, in part, as confirmation of Debord's theory of cultural decomposition.

With the passing of this moment, which is to say the hoped-for anti-capitalist revolution that haunted the imaginary in the decade after 1968, SF—as a collection of people and practices—recomposed itself, shook off the most outrageous of its negative tropes and manifestations, and returned to the business of gaining market shares and servicing a vast audience hungry for vicarious escapes from the work-a-day worlds of mundane alienation. Let it be said, much like the rest of the arts, as it slipped into the ever-broadening streams of full spectrum tele-visual and literary commodity production in the 1980s and 90s.

Coda: The Happening World of Which We Speak

THE SI's encounter with SF anticipated the more general critical interest that the genre enjoyed after 1968. At best, Situationists recognized in aspects of SF, particularly *détourné* comics, expressions of the criticism of the colonizing, alien world of the commodity-spectacle, whether intentional or otherwise. Intrigued at first, the SI ultimately rejected SF as a potential source of criticism because of what it saw as the genre's worst and dominant aspect: the tendency to project contemporary bourgeois relations into an eternal future beyond the travails of history. SF as religion, ideology. This is perhaps the chief danger of attempting to reconstruct a mythos adequate to the contemporary technological age, the dream of capitalist modernity itself: the refoundation of a religious dream upon an apparently secular basis. But even if we accept a continuity of sorts that connects the heaven of the commodity-spectacle with the medieval vision of the afterlife, and the apposite remarks upon the religious and ideological nature of much of what passes for SF, surely the SI ultimately condemning the entirety of SF is itself somewhat fantastical.

However, the work of using the Situationist theory of cultural decomposition to examine SF is also somewhat redundant. The SI never claimed that their critique of the contemporary spectacle was simply their own. Thus, the understanding of SF as both a cultural genre that shares much of the trajectory of literary modernism, and as an expression of this trajectory, no matter if we understand this as "decomposition" or "postmodernity", has been carried out by "autres horribles travailleurs" ["other horrible workers"] (Rimbaud 306) over the last fifty years. My fantasy of using the SI to critique SF, outlined above, is just that: a fantasy that never happened amidst the historical SI. Or if it did, it was never set down on paper or published under the Situationist banner (an imaginary *Thèses de Science-Fiction*...). Nonetheless, and as noted at the beginning of this article, Lefebvre reported that he had discussed SF with the SI, particularly as it pertained to technological automation and the end of work. Lefebvre is, himself, more forthcoming regarding the influence and intertext in SF at the same time as the SI are rejecting it.

In two works profoundly influenced by the Situationists, the *Critique de la vie quotidienne II* (1961) and *Introduction à la modernité* (1962), Lefebvre sketched a criticism of the emergent cybernetic capitalism. He later developed these passing comments into an exploration of the philosophical roots of cybernetics in *Métaphilosophie* (1965). In the latter work, Lefebvre argued that before Norbert Wiener vulgarized such ideas, and even "[a]vant que la philosophie ne s'en empire, les romanciers de science-fiction sont allés, parfois avec génie, jusqu'au bout des hypothèses" (*Métaphilosophie* 173).³² Scattered across Lefebvre's works from the 1960s, particularly with regard to his criticism of cybernetics, are references to various Anglo-American SF authors of the day: for example, Isaac Asimov, Clifford

³² Transl.: "Before philosophy seized on them, science fiction novelists had followed these hypotheses to their conclusion, sometimes ingeniously."

Simak, A. E. van Vogt, and Edmund Cooper. Unfortunately, his fugitive references to SF remained just that—striking observations with which he did little.

The SI took over Lefebvre's criticism of cybernetics entire, though stripped of his occasional mentions of SF. While there is a certain science fictional resonance to some of the Situationist discussion of a "welfare-state cybernétique" (*Internationale* 273), no explicit relationship is drawn with SF—as Lefebvre did in *Métaphilosophie*. Perhaps if one were to take up Lefebvre's suggestive remarks regarding SF and cybernetics, alongside of my sketch of SF as an artistic genre undergoing decomposition in Debord's sense, an encounter between SF and the SI could be speculatively staged—even if only to better understand the applicability and ongoing relevance of the Situationist theory of cultural decomposition. We could, however, follow another speculative route.

The ninth issue of *Internationale situationniste* (August 1964) is largely devoted to an article entitled "Le monde dont nous parlons" ["The World of Which We Speak"]. Made up of a number of sub-sections, mostly composed of citations and images from newspapers and magazines, and with each section headed by an introductory paragraph written by the SI, the article endeavoured to provide "une radiographie quotidienne a la réalité situationniste" ["a mundane X-ray of situationist reality"] (*Internationale* 370). In part, the article reads like a fragmentary modernist text, through which the Situationists attempt to unveil a critical thread hidden in plain sight, amidst the noise of news and information.

Four years later, in the SF novel *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968), John Brunner drew upon the experimental techniques John Dos Passos employed in his *USA* trilogy (1930–1936). Accompanying an otherwise conventional narrative, Brunner used extensive fragments and quotes from fictional books, magazines, TV, cinema, and other "contemporary" documents, that conspire to overwhelm the reader with the detail of the future world of 2010. That Brunner evokes the *ambience* of the early twenty-first century is without question, at least to this reader, even if much of the detail misses the mark. His vision of a world awash with commodity wealth and electronic spectacle, all the better to obscure the immense spiritual and material poverty, is ours by extrapolation—the 1960s society of the spectacle metastasized.

Throughout the novel Brunner provides snapshots of his global setting under the title of "The Happening World." With appropriate alterations, one could adapt the introductory paragraphs from the SI's "Le monde dont nous parlons" in order to provide a Situationist X-ray of Brunner's imaginary 2010. In a way, this is what I want to do with SF, at least the SF of the 1950s and 60s: extracting its most prescient moments, to compose an X-ray of the contemporary mundane and its dreams of the future, for better or worse, in which one can find Situationist theory much like the proverbial fish in water, eager to re-write reality for want of a big enough pen.

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SF Mentioned in the Article (in Chronological Order)

Short Stories

- James Blish, "Testament of Andros", 1953.
Philip K. Dick, "The Defenders", 1953.
Frederick Pohl, "The Midas Plague", 1954.
Frederick Pohl, "The Tunnel Under the World", 1954.
Philip K. Dick, "The Mold of Yancy", 1955.
Philip K. Dick, "Foster, You're Dead", 1955.
Philip K. Dick, "Autofac", 1955.
J. G. Ballard, "The Concentration City", 1957.
J. G. Ballard, "Manhole 69", 1957.
C. M. Kornbluth, "The Last Man Left in the Bar", 1957.
J. G. Ballard, "The Subliminal Man", 1963.
Robert Silverberg, "The Science Fiction Hall of Fame", 1973.
Robert Silverberg, "Schwartz Between the Galaxies", 1974.

Novels

- H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, 1895.
A. E. van Vogt, *The World of Null-A*, 1948.
Isaac Asimov, *Foundation*, 1951.
Clifford D. Simak, *City*, 1952.
C. M. Kornbluth and Frederick Pohl, *The Space Merchants*, 1953.
Philip K. Dick, *The Penultimate Truth*, 1964.
John Brunner, *Stand on Zanzibar*, 1968.
M. John Harrison, *The Committed Men*, 1971.
J. G. Ballard, *Crash*, 1973.

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