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The Theory of Moments and the Construction of Situations

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SITUATIONISTISCHE INTERNATIONALE

At the level of everyday life, this intervention would be translated as a better allocation of its elements and its instants as “moments,” so as to intensify the vital productivity of everydayness, its capacity for communication, for information, and also and above all for pleasure in natural and social life. The theory of moments, then, is not situated outside of everydayness, but would be articulated along with it, by uniting with critique to introduce therein what its richness lacks. It would thus tend, at the core of pleasure linked to the totality, to go beyond the old oppositions of lightness and heaviness, of seriousness and the lack of seriousness.

Henri Lefebvre, *La Somme et le Reste*

In the *programmatic* thinking outlined above by Henri Lefebvre, the problems of the creation of everyday life are directly affected by the theory of moments, which defines as “modalities of presence” a “plurality of relatively privileged moments.” What relation do these “moments” have with the situations the SI has set out to define and construct? What use can be made of the relationship between these concepts to realize the common possibilities that are now emerging?

The situation, as a created, organized moment — Lefebvre expresses this desire as “the free act defined as the capacity ... to change a ‘moment’ in metamorphosis, and perhaps to create one” — includes perishable instants, ephemeral and unique. It is a totalizing or-

ganization that controls and favors such chance instants. From the perspective of the Lefebvrian moment, the constructed situation, then, is pitted against the instant, but at an *intermediary* stage between instant and moment. And so, while it is repeatable to a certain degree (as direction or “way”), the constructed situation is not in itself repeatable as the “moment.”

Like the moment, the situation “can be extended in time or be condensed.” But it seeks to found itself on the objectivity of artistic production. Such production breaks radically with durable works. It is inseparable from its immediate consumption as a use value essentially foreign to conservation as a commodity.

The difficulty for Henri Lefebvre is to draw up a *list* of his moments (why cite ten of these and not fifteen, or twenty-five, etc?). The difficulty with the “situationist moment” is, on the contrary, marking its precise end, its transformation into a different term within a series of situations (the latter perhaps constituting a Lefebvrian moment), or even into dead time. In effect, the “moment” posited as a rediscoverable general category involves, in the long term, the establishment of an increasingly complex list. Less differentiated, the situation lends itself to an infinite number of combinations. A situation, and its cut-off point, cannot be so precisely defined. What will characterize the situation is its very praxis, its intentional formation.

For example, Lefebvre speaks of the

“moment of love.” From the point of view of the creation of moments, from the situationist point of view, one must envisage the moment of a particular love, of the love of a particular person. Which means: of a particular person in particular circumstances.



The maximum “constructed moment” is the *series of situations* attached to a single theme — that love for a particular person — a “situationist theme” is a *realized* desire. In comparison to Henri Lefebvre’s moment, this series of situations is particularized and unrepeatable, yet greatly extended and relatively durable in comparison to the unique-ephemeral instant.

In analyzing the “moment,” Lefebvre has revealed many of the fundamental conditions of the new field of action

across which a revolutionary culture may now proceed: as when he remarks that the moment tends toward the absolute and departs from it. The moment, like the situation, is *simultaneously* proclamation of the absolute and awareness of passing through it. It is, in actual fact, on the path toward a unity of the structural and the conjectural; and the project for a constructed situation could also be defined as an attempt at structuring the conjunction between the two.

The “moment” is mainly temporal, forming part of a zone of temporality, not pure but dominant. Articulated in relation to a given place, the situation is completely spatio-temporal (cf. A. Jorn on the space-time of life, and A. Franklin on the plane-ification of individual existence.) Moments constructed into “situations” might be thought of as moments of rupture, of acceleration,

revolutions in individual everyday life. On a more extended — more social — spatial level, an urbanism that almost exactly corresponds to Lefebvre’s moments, and to his idea of choosing these and leaving them behind at will, has been proposed in the “states-of-the-soul quarters” (cf. *Formulary for a New Urbanism* By G. Ivain, *Internationale Situationniste* #1) — disalienation being the explicit goal behind the arrangement of the “Sinister Quarter.”

Lastly, the problem of the encounter in the theory of moments, and of an operational formulation of the construction of situations, suggests the following question. What admixture, what interactions ought to occur between the flux (and resurgence) of the “natural moment,” in Henri Lefebvre’s sense, and certain artificially *constructed* elements, introduced into this flux, perturbing it, quantitatively and, above all, qualita-

tively?

Situationist International: Situationistisch / Situationist: All das, was sich auf die Theorie oder auf die praktische Tätigkeit von Situationen bezieht. Derjenige, der sich damit beschäftigt, Situationen zu konstruieren. Mitglied der situationistischen Internationale.

Situationismus: Sinnloses Wort, missbräuchlich durch Ableitung des vorigen gebildet. Einen Situationismus gibt es nicht — was eine Doktrin zur Interpretation der vorhandenen Tatsachen bedeuten würde. Selbstverständlich haben sich die Anti-Situationisten den Begriff „Situationismus“ ausgedacht.

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