COURSE PROPOSAL FOR
THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF THEORY AND CRITICISM

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“THE ARTS AND POLITICS OF THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL (1957-1972)”

In 1967 a few western European avant-garde groups came together to form the Situationist International (or SI). Continuing where the Dadaists and surrealists had left off, the situationists challenged passive social conditioning with carefully-calculated artistic scandals and the playful tactics of dérive, psychogeography and détournement. Seeking a more extreme social revolution of ‘everyday life’ than was ever dreamed of before, the situationists developed a penetrating socio-political critique of the global spectacle-commodity system and of its incomplete, ‘leftist’ pseudo-opposition. Their diverse methods of agitation, including a sustained critique of work, came together and helped trigger the May 1968 student/labour revolt in France. Despite officially dissolving in 1972, cultural historians believe that situationist theories and tactics continue to inspire radical currents around the world (the Arab Spring of 2010, the Occupy movement of 2011, the Hong Kong protests of 2019, anti-Trump rallies, and so on).

This course, then, will examine the following aspects of the Situationist International.

1. the various social, political, cultural, artistic and intellectual currents that converge in the work of the SI,
2. in particular, a critical/dialectical trajectory that begins with Baudelaire’s desire to escape the ugliness of mid-nineteenth century modernity, through the transition of symbolist into surrealist poetry in France in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century, and ending up in a sustained Hegelian-Marxist critique of the ideologies of capitalism and urbanism, and
3. the continuing influence of the SI as an unnamed (or unconscious) practice that might help to bring about a new vision of society that is not antithetical to personal happiness.

Modules 1-2 Introduction and Overview of the Situationist International

Selected readings for research:


**Modules 3-4 Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and the French Revolts (1844-1866)**

Selected readings for research:


**Modules 5-6 The Influence of the French Symbolist Writers on the Situationists**

Selected readings for research:


**Modules 7-9 Surrealism and Critical Theory in the Political Theories of the Situationists**

Selected readings for research:


**Modules 10-11 Marx and Weber on the Social & Economic Theories of the Situationists**

Selected readings for research:


**Modules 12-13 Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem and Situationist Literature Today**

Selected readings for research:


