

COURSE INFORMATION:

The Arts and Politics of the Situationist International (1957-1972), THEOCRIT 9460B.
 Online every Thursday, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (a 45-minute video documentary/lecture
 will be posted every Monday)

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The Arts and Politics of the Situationist International ‘situates’ the SI within a comprehensive social, political and cultural framework that restores its theoretical concepts and practical activities to their rightful origins, and aligns its work with previous critical thinkers, political activists and poets. Despite efforts to disavow its own intellectual and artistic roots, the SI still belongs to a larger history of radical gestures and cultural practices concerned with re-imagining everyday life. The course views the theoretical work of the SI as a multidisciplinary stage in the history of critical consciousness, in particular, as a moment in an ongoing western-European trajectory of aesthetic negation dating back to the early nineteenth century. The course revisits French Symbolist poetry, Dada and Surrealism, Hegelian-Marxism and Marxist social theory in an effort to provide a clearly-defined ‘something’ out of which the SI developed as an increasingly-radical collective of artists, writers and theorists.

COURSE MATERIALS:

Debord, Guy (1967/2014). *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Ken Knabb. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets.
 Debord, Guy (1972/2003). *The Real Split in the International*. Translated by John McHale. London: Pluto Press.
 Knabb, Ken (ed.) (2006). *Situationist International Anthology*. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets.
 McDonough, Tom (ed.). (2004). *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
 Vaneigem, Raoul. (1967/2012). *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

NOTE: Many of the articles contained in books edited by Ken Knabb or Tom McDonough are available online. Those links will be posted online and available through the Western portal.

METHOD OF EVALUATION:

Short Paper (5-8 pages) 25%
 Seminar Presentation (15-20 mins + 10 min question period) 30%
 Research paper (15-20 pages) 35%
 Attendance and Participation 10%

Students will submit a “Short Paper” around Module 4. The Short Paper should be considered an initial draft of what will become the major “Research Paper.” The “Seminar presentations,” which will begin around Module 5, will allow students to present initial ideas, concepts, and/or preliminary conclusions. The 10-minute question period that follows the presentations will allow myself and the rest of the students to ask questions regarding the research that has been presented. The degree to which students “participate” in the discussion will impact their “Attendance and Participation.” The goal is to combine the short paper with the seminar presentation in order to generate new ideas that can be further developed in the major Research Paper. Essentially, the three interdependent sections are scaffolded together and will culminate in a final research paper.

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC OFFENCES:

Members of the University Community accept a commitment to maintain and uphold the purposes of the University and, in particular, its standards of scholarship. It follows, therefore, that acts of a nature that prejudice the academic standards of the University are offences subject to discipline. Any form of academic dishonesty that undermines the evaluation process, also undermines the integrity of the University’s degrees. The University will take all appropriate measures to promote academic integrity and deal appropriately with scholastic offences.

For further information, please click on the link below.

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

BREAKDOWN OF WEEKLY MODULES:

Module 1 Course Introduction and Overview

Course introduction and discussion of academic requirements.

Module 2 Introduction to the SI

Introduction to the Situationist International giving students a general understanding of the SI in terms of its affiliations with previous artistic collectives in France, as well as its utopian vision of a social and cultural revolt against capitalism.

Module 3 The Situationists’ Utopian Impulse to ‘Change Life’

Identifying key terms needed to discuss the SI’s theoretical and practical activities: *urbanisme*, differences between ideological and utopian thinking, and clearer distinctions regarding the terms modern, modernism and modernity.

Modules 4-5 French Symbolist Strategies in SI Practices (Parts One & Two)

The Situationist International was part of a continuum of aesthetic, or artistic, negation that began in western Europe in the twilight of the eighteenth century; this continuum started with Romanticism and continued in the *demi-monde* of Symbolist poetry during the mid-nineteenth century. As we will see in Modules 6 and 7, aesthetic negation was further sustained throughout the twentieth century in the avant-garde artistic strategies of Dada, Surrealism, the SI and, most recently, British punk rock of the nineteen-seventies.

Modules 6-7 Dada and Surrealist Strategies in SI Practices

Dada and Surrealist avant-garde strategies influenced the SI, namely, a critique against excessive bourgeois reification and rationality. For its part, the SI shared similar avant-garde roots; yet, it also had a contentious relationship with both movements because it sought to combine artistic production with a critical and dialectical form of social revolution that would actualize and transcend both art and philosophy.

Modules 8-9 Hegelian-Marxism in SI Political Theory

The Situationists developed an integrated critique regarding reification, alienation and the relentless spectacular-commodification of post-World War II capitalist society. The SI not only appropriated and revitalized these earlier strategies but radically politicized them under the larger rubric of ‘revolutionary’ *praxis*. In particular, it shifted its perspective from that of applying *praxis* as the concrete application of revolutionary theory to that of elaborating an historically-grounded theory of praxis.

Modules 10-11 Social Theory and ‘Unitary Urbanism’

The SI’s multifaceted critique of alienation of post-World War II capitalist society is placed into a wider sociological and cultural context: (1) into the general rubric of “unitary urbanism” and how it relates partly to urban architecture and ‘play,’ and partly to the possibilities of experiencing new instances of *dérive* and psychogeography; (2) into a revised notion of ‘everyday life’ and identify how this social grouping evolves and changes over the duration of the SI’s existence; and (3) into the concepts of anarchism and utopianism and how these two political philosophies might have been used to help accelerate the advent of automation, technology, and technological communication.

Module 12 Conclusions and Visions of the SI in the Twenty-first Century

Here, we revisit the goals articulated in this course, namely, the SI’s main concepts (unitary urbanism, *dérive*, *détournement*, psychogeography, anti-art, the society of the spectacle, workers’ councils and anarchic self-management, and so on), and the contextualization of the SI’s work. Most important, for our purposes, is an understanding of how the SI *détourned* these ideas and concepts to their own ends.