

# **Situationist International Bootleg**

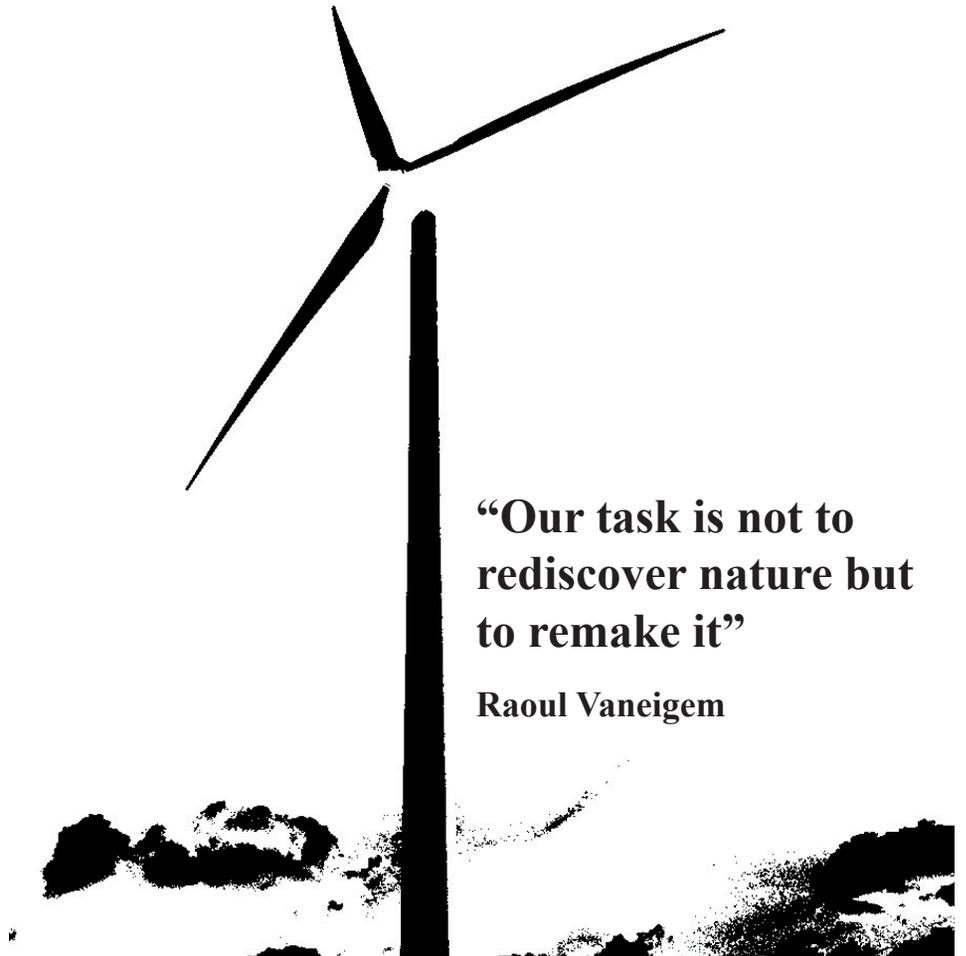
## **Issue #1**

Included this issue are:

On the Use of Free Time

Instructions for Insurrections

User's Guide to Détournement



**“Our task is not to  
rediscover nature but  
to remake it”**

**Raoul Vaneigem**

A Bootleg Compilation of SI Articles  
Edited by Lake County Anarchists  
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## The Use of Free Time

The most superficial and constantly reiterated platitude of leftist sociologists during recent years is that leisure has become a major factor in advanced capitalist society. This platitude is the basis of countless debates for or against the importance of a reformist rise in the standard of living, or of workers' participation in the prevailing values of the society into which they are becoming increasingly integrated. What is counterrevolutionary about all this verbiage is that it equates free time with passive consumption, as if the only use of free time was the opportunity to become an increasingly full-time spectator of the established absurdities. The illusions manifested in a particularly ponderous symposium of these sociologists (*Arguments* #12-13) were soundly refuted in two articles in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* #27. In the first, Canjuers wrote: "While modern capitalism constantly develops new needs in order to increase consumption, people's dissatisfaction remains the same as ever. Their lives no longer have any meaning beyond a rush to consume, and this consumption is used to justify the increasingly radical frustration of any creative activity or genuine human initiative — to the point that people no longer even see this lack of meaning as important." In the second article, Jean Delvaux noted that the issue of consumption has not superseded the qualitative distinction between the poor and the wealthy (four out of five wage workers still have to constantly struggle to make ends meet). More significantly, he pointed out that there is no reason to worry about whether or not the proletariat participates in the prevailing social or cultural values, because "*there no longer are any such values.*" And he added the essential point that the present culture, "increasingly separated from society and from people's lives (painters painting for other painters, novelists writing novels read only by other novelists about the impossibility of writing a novel) — this culture, insofar as it has any originality, is no longer anything but a constant self-denunciation: a denunciation of the society and a rage against culture itself."

The emptiness of leisure stems from the emptiness of life in present-day society, and it cannot be filled within the framework of that society. This emptiness is simultaneously expressed and concealed by the entire cultural spectacle, in three basic forms.

2.

The authors are detouring a sentence from the *Communist Manifesto*: "The cheapness of the bourgeoisie's commodities is the the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate."

3. In the first imagined scene a phrase from a Greek tragedy (Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*) is put in the mouth of French Revolution leader Maximilien Robespierre. In the second, a phrase from Robespierre is put in the mouth of a truck driver.

4. Beethoven originally named his third symphony after Napoleon (seen as the defender of the French Revolution), but when Napoleon crowned himself emperor he angrily tore up the dedication to him and renamed it "Eroica." The implied respect in this passage for Lenin (like the passing references to "workers states" in Debord's "Report on the Construction of Situations") is a vestige of the vague anarcho-Trotskyism of the lettrists' early, less politically sophisticated period.

All texts are graciously translated by Ken Knabb for free! Now that's fucking over the commodity system!

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everyday social life. Gestures and words can be given other meanings, and have been throughout history for various practical reasons. The secret societies of ancient China made use of quite subtle recognition signals encompassing the greater part of social behavior (the manner of arranging cups; of drinking; quotations of poems interrupted at agreed-on points). The need for a secret language, for passwords, is inseparable from a tendency toward play. Ultimately, any sign or word is susceptible to being converted into something else, even into its opposite. The royalist insurgents of the Vendée, because they bore the disgusting image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, were called the Red Army. In the limited domain of political war vocabulary this expression was completely detoured within a century.

Outside of language, it is possible to use the same methods to detour clothing, with all its strong emotional connotations. Here again we find the notion of disguise closely linked to play. Finally, when we have got to the stage of constructing situations — the ultimate goal of all our activity — everyone will be free to detour entire situations by deliberately changing this or that determinant condition of them.

The methods that we have briefly dealt with here are presented not as our own invention, but as a generally widespread practice which we propose to systematize.

In itself, the theory of *détournement* scarcely interests us. But we find it linked to almost all the constructive aspects of the presituationist period of transition. Thus its enrichment, through practice, seems necessary.

We will postpone the development of these theses until later.

GUY DEBORD, GIL J WOLMAN

### [TRANSLATOR'S NOTES]

1. The French word *détournement* means deflection, diversion, rerouting, distortion, misuse, misappropriation, hijacking, or otherwise turning aside from the normal course or purpose. It has sometimes been translated as “diversion,” but this word is confusing because of its more common meaning of idle entertainment. Like most other people who have actually practiced *détournement*, I have chosen simply to anglicize the French word.

The “classic” form of culture continues to exist, whether reproduced in its pure form or in latter-day imitations (tragic theater, for example, or bourgeois politeness). Secondly, there are the countless degraded spectacular representations through which the prevailing society presents itself to the exploited in order to mystify them (televised sports, virtually all films and novels, advertising, the automobile as status symbol). Finally, there is an avant-garde negation of the spectacle, a negation which is often unconscious of its basis but which is the only “original” aspect of present-day culture. The “rage against culture” expressed within this latter form ends up arriving at the same *indifference* that proletarians as a class have toward all the forms of spectacular culture. Until the spectacle itself has been negated, any audience watching the negation of the spectacle can no longer be distinguished from that suspect and unhappy audience consisting of *isolated* artists and intellectuals. When the revolutionary proletariat manifests itself as such, it will not be as a new audience for some new spectacle, but as people actively participating in every aspect of their lives.

There is no revolutionary problem of leisure — of an emptiness to be filled — but a problem of free time. As we have already said: “There can be no free use of time until we possess the modern tools for the construction of everyday life. The use of such tools will mark the leap from a utopian revolutionary art to an experimental revolutionary art” (Debord, “Theses on Cultural Revolution,” *Internationale Situationniste* #1). The supersession of leisure through the development of an activity of free creation-consumption can only be understood in relation with the dissolution of the traditional arts — with their transformation into superior modes of action which do not refuse or abolish art, but *fulfill* it. In this way art will be superseded, conserved and surmounted within a more complex activity. Its traditional elements may still be partially present, but transformed, integrated and modified by the totality.

Previous avant-garde movements presented themselves by declaring the excellence of their methods and principles, which were to be immediately judged on the basis of their *works*. The SI is the first artistic organization to base itself on the radical inadequacy of all permissible works; and whose significance, and whose success or failure, will be able to be judged only with the revolutionary praxis of its time.

## Instructions for an Insurrection

If it seems somewhat absurd to talk of revolution, this is obviously because the organized revolutionary movement has long since disappeared from the modern countries where the possibilities of a decisive social transformation are concentrated. But *all the alternatives* are even more absurd, since they imply accepting the existing order in one way or another. If the word “revolutionary” has been neutralized to the point of being used in advertising to describe the slightest change in an ever-changing commodity production, this is because the possibilities of a central *desirable* change are no longer expressed anywhere. Today the revolutionary project stands accused before the tribunal of history — accused of having failed, of having simply engendered a new form of alienation. This amounts to recognizing that the ruling society has proved capable of defending itself, on all levels of reality, much better than revolutionaries expected. Not that it has become more tolerable. The point is simply that revolution has to be reinvented.

This poses a number of problems that will have to be theoretically and practically overcome in the next few years. We can briefly mention a few points that it is urgent to understand and resolve.

Of the tendencies toward regroupment that have appeared over the last few years among various minorities of the workers movement in Europe, only the most radical current is worth preserving: that centered on the program of workers councils. Nor should we overlook the fact that a number of confusionist elements are seeking to insinuate themselves into this debate (see the recent accord among “leftist” philosophico-sociological journals of different countries).

The greatest difficulty confronting groups that seek to create a new type of revolutionary organization is that of establishing new types of human relationships within the organization itself. The forces of the society exert an omnipresent pressure against such an effort. But unless this is accomplished, by methods yet to be experimented with, we will never be able to escape from specialized politics. The demand for participation on the part of everyone often degenerates into a mere abstract ideal, when in fact it is an absolute practical necessity for a really new organization and for the organization of a really new society. Even if militants are

can see that this juxtaposition illuminates Maximilien’s idea, the idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>(3)</sup>

The light of *détournement* is propagated in a straight line. To the extent that new architecture seems to have to begin with an experimental baroque stage, the *architectural complex* — which we conceive as the construction of a dynamic environment related to styles of behavior — will probably detourn existing architectural forms, and in any case will make plastic and emotional use of all sorts of detourned objects: careful arrangements of such things as cranes or metal scaffolding replacing a defunct sculptural tradition. This is shocking only to the most fanatical admirers of French-style gardens. It is said that in his old age D’Annunzio, that pro-fascist swine, had the prow of a torpedo boat in his park. Leaving aside his patriotic motives, the idea of such a monument is not without a certain charm.

If *détournement* were extended to urbanistic realizations, not many people would remain unaffected by an exact reconstruction in one city of an entire neighborhood of another. Life can never be too disorienting: *détournement* on this level would really make it beautiful.

Titles themselves, as we have already seen, are a basic element of *détournement*. This follows from two general observations: that all titles are interchangeable and that they have a decisive importance in several genres. All the detective stories in the “*Série Noir*” are extremely similar, yet merely continually changing the titles suffices to hold a considerable audience. In music a title always exerts a great influence, yet the choice of one is quite arbitrary. Thus it wouldn’t be a bad idea to make a final correction to the title of the “*Eroica Symphony*” by changing it, for example, to “*Lenin Symphony*.”<sup>(4)</sup>

The title contributes strongly to the *détournement* of a work, but there is an inevitable counteraction of the work on the title. Thus one can make extensive use of specific titles taken from scientific publications (“*Coastal Biology of Temperate Seas*”) or military ones (“*Night Combat of Small Infantry Units*”), or even of many phrases found in illustrated children’s books (“*Marvelous Landscapes Greet the Voyagers*”).

In closing, we should briefly mention some aspects of what we call *ultradétournement*, that is, the tendencies for *détournement* to operate in

*Cluny Museum Around an Hour after Sunset in November*. We have since come to realize that a situationist-analytic enterprise cannot scientifically advance by way of such works. The means nevertheless remain suitable for less ambitious goals.

It is obviously in the realm of the cinema that *détournement* can attain its greatest effectiveness and, for those concerned with this aspect, its greatest beauty.

The powers of film are so extensive, and the absence of coordination of those powers is so glaring, that virtually any film that is above the miserable average can provide matter for endless polemics among spectators or professional critics. Only the conformism of those people prevents them from discovering equally appealing charms and equally glaring faults even in the worst films. To cut through this absurd confusion of values, we can observe that Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* is one of the most important films in the history of the cinema because of its wealth of innovations. On the other hand, it is a racist film and therefore absolutely does not merit being shown in its present form. But its total prohibition could be seen as regrettable from the point of view of the secondary, but potentially worthier, domain of the cinema. It would be better to detourn it as a whole, without necessarily even altering the montage, by adding a soundtrack that made a powerful denunciation of the horrors of imperialist war and of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, which are continuing in the United States even now.

Such a *détournement* — a very moderate one — is in the final analysis nothing more than the moral equivalent of the restoration of old paintings in museums. But most films only merit being cut up to compose other works. This reconversion of preexisting sequences will obviously be accompanied by other elements, musical or pictorial as well as historical. While the cinematic rewriting of history has until now been largely along the lines of Sacha Guitry's burlesque re-creations, one could have Robespierre say, before his execution: "In spite of so many trials, my experience and the grandeur of my task convinces me that all is well." If in this case an appropriate reuse of a Greek tragedy enables us to exalt Robespierre, we can conversely imagine a neorealist-type sequence, at the counter of a truck stop bar, for example, with one of the truck drivers saying seriously to another: "Ethics was formerly confined to the books of the philosophers; we have introduced it into the governing of nations." One

no longer mere underlings carrying out the decisions made by masters of the organization, they still risk being reduced to the role of spectators of those among them who are the most qualified in politics conceived as a specialization; and in this way the passivity relation of the old world is reproduced.

People's creativity and participation can only be awakened by a collective project explicitly concerned with all aspects of lived experience. The only way to "arouse the masses" is to expose the appalling contrast between the potential constructions of life and the present poverty of life. Without a critique of everyday life, a revolutionary organization is a separated milieu, as conventional and ultimately as passive as those holiday camps that are the specialized terrain of modern leisure. Sociologists, such as Henri Raymond in his study of Palinuro, have shown how in such places the spectacular mechanism recreates, on the level of play, the dominant relations of the society as a whole. But then they go on naïvely to commend the "multiplicity of human contacts," for example, without seeing that the mere quantitative increase of these contacts leaves them just as insipid and inauthentic as they are everywhere else. Even in the most libertarian and antihierarchical revolutionary group, communication between people is in no way guaranteed by a shared political program. The sociologists naturally support efforts to reform everyday life, to organize compensation for it in vacation time. But the revolutionary project cannot accept the traditional notion of play, of a game limited in space, in time and in qualitative depth. The revolutionary game — the creation of life — is opposed to all memories of past games. To provide a three-week break from the kind of life led during forty-nine weeks of work, the holiday villages of Club Med draw on a shoddy Polynesian ideology — a bit like the French Revolution presenting itself in the guise of republican Rome, or like the revolutionaries of today who define themselves principally in accordance with how well they fit the Bolshevik or some other style of *militant role*. The revolution of everyday life cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future.

The experience of the empty leisure produced by modern capitalism has provided a critical correction to the Marxian notion of the *extension of leisure time*: It is now clear that full freedom of time requires first of all a transformation of work and the appropriation of this work in view of goals, and under conditions, that are utterly different from those of the forced labor that has prevailed until now (see the activity of the groups that

publish *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France, *Solidarity* in England<sup>(1)</sup> and *Alternative* in Belgium). But those who put all the stress on the necessity of changing work itself, of rationalizing it and of interesting people in it, and who pay no attention to the free content of life (i.e. the development of a materially equipped creative power beyond the traditional categories of work time and rest-and-recreation time) run the risk of providing an ideological cover for a harmonization of the present production system in the direction of *greater efficiency and profitability* without at all having called in question the experience of this production or the necessity of this kind of life. The free construction of the entire space-time of individual life is a demand that will have to be defended against all sorts of dreams of harmony in the minds of aspiring managers of social reorganization.

The different moments of situationist activity until now can only be understood in the perspective of a reappearance of revolution, a revolution that will be social as well as cultural and whose field of action will right from the start have to be broader than during any of its previous endeavors. The SI does not want to recruit disciples or partisans, but to bring together people capable of applying themselves to this task in the years to come, by every means and without worrying about labels. This means that we must reject not only the vestiges of specialized artistic activity, but also those of specialized politics; and particularly the post-Christian masochism characteristic of so many intellectuals in this area. We don't claim to be developing a new revolutionary program all by ourselves. We say that this program in the process of formation will one day practically oppose the ruling reality, and that we will participate in that opposition. Whatever may become of us individually, the new revolutionary movement will not be formed without taking into account what we have sought together; which could be summed up as the passage from the old theory of limited permanent revolution to a theory of generalized permanent revolution.

## **A User's Guide to Détournement**

Every reasonably aware person of our time is aware of the obvious fact that art can no longer be justified as a superior activity, or even as a compensatory activity to which one might honorably devote oneself.

in addition, clashing head-on with all social and legal conventions, it cannot fail to be a powerful cultural weapon in the service of a real class struggle. The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of understanding.<sup>(2)</sup> It is a real means of proletarian artistic education, the first step toward a *literary communism*.

Ideas and creations in the realm of détournement can be multiplied at will. For the moment we will limit ourselves to showing a few concrete possibilities in various current sectors of communication — it being understood that these separate sectors are significant only in relation to present-day technologies, and are all tending to merge into superior syntheses with the advance of these technologies.

Apart from the various direct uses of detoured phrases in posters, records and radio broadcasts, the two main applications of detoured prose are metagraphic writings and, to a lesser degree, the adroit perversion of the classical novel form.

There is not much future in the détournement of complete novels, but during the transitional phase there might be a certain number of undertakings of this sort. Such a détournement gains by being accompanied by illustrations whose relationships to the text are not immediately obvious. In spite of undeniable difficulties, we believe it would be possible to produce an instructive psychogeographical détournement of George Sand's *Consuelo*, which thus decked out could be relaunched on the literary market disguised under some innocuous title like "Life in the Suburbs," or even under a title itself detoured, such as "The Lost Patrol." (It would be a good idea to reuse in this way many titles of deteriorated old films of which nothing else remains, or of films which continue to deaden the minds of young people in the cinema clubs.)

Metagraphic writing, no matter how outdated its plastic framework may be, presents far richer opportunities for detouring prose, as well as other appropriate objects or images. One can get some idea of this from the project, conceived in 1951 but eventually abandoned for lack of sufficient financial means, which envisaged a pinball machine arranged in such a way that the play of the lights and the more or less predictable trajectories of the balls would form a metagraphic-spatial composition entitled *Thermal Sensations and Desires of People Passing by the Gates of the*

*original contexts of the elements.* This is well known. Let us simply note that if this dependence on memory implies that one must determine one's public before devising a détournement, this is only a particular case of a general law that governs not only détournement but also any other form of action on the world. The idea of pure, absolute expression is dead; it only temporarily survives in parodic form as long as our other enemies survive.

*Détournement is less effective the more it approaches a rational reply.*

This is the case with a rather large number of Lautréamont's altered maxims. The more the rational character of the reply is apparent, the more indistinguishable it becomes from the ordinary spirit of repartee, which similarly uses the opponent's words against him. This is naturally not limited to spoken language. It was in this connection that we objected to the project of some of our comrades who proposed to detourn an anti-Soviet poster of the fascist organization "Peace and Liberty" — which proclaimed, amid images of overlapping flags of the Western powers, "Union makes strength" — by adding onto it a smaller sheet with the phrase "and coalitions make war."

*Détournement by simple reversal is always the most direct and the least effective.* Thus, the Black Mass reacts against the construction of an ambiance based on a given metaphysics by constructing an ambiance in the same framework that merely reverses — and thus simultaneously conserves — the values of that metaphysics. Such reversals may nevertheless have a certain progressive aspect. For example, Clemenceau [called "The Tiger"] could be referred to as "The Tiger called Clemenceau."

Of the four laws that have just been set forth, the first is essential and applies universally. The other three are practically applicable only to deceptive detourned elements.

The first visible consequences of a widespread use of détournement, apart from its intrinsic propaganda powers, will be the revival of a multitude of bad books, and thus the extensive (unintended) participation of their unknown authors; an increasingly extensive transformation of phrases or plastic works that happen to be in fashion; and above all an ease of production far surpassing in quantity, variety and quality the automatic writing that has bored us for so long.

Détournement not only leads to the discovery of new aspects of talent;

The reason for this deterioration is clearly the emergence of productive forces that necessitate other production relations and a new practice of life. In the civil-war phase we are engaged in, and in close connection with the orientation we are discovering for certain superior activities to come, we believe that all known means of expression are going to converge in a general movement of propaganda that must encompass all the perpetually interacting aspects of social reality.

There are several conflicting opinions about the forms and even the very nature of educative propaganda, opinions that generally reflect one or another currently fashionable variety of reformist politics. Suffice it to say that in our view the premises for revolution, on the cultural as well as the strictly political level, are not only ripe, they have begun to rot. It is not just returning to the past which is reactionary; even "modern" cultural objectives are ultimately reactionary since they depend on ideological formulations of a past society that has prolonged its death agony to the present. The only historically justified tactic is extremist innovation.

The literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes. It is, of course, necessary to go beyond any idea of mere scandal. Since opposition to the bourgeois notion of art and artistic genius has become pretty much old hat, Duchamp's drawing of a mustache on the *Mona Lisa* is no more interesting than the original version of that painting. We must now push this process to the point of negating the negation. Bertolt Brecht, revealing in a recent interview in *France-Observateur* that he makes cuts in the classics of the theater in order to make the performances more educative, is much closer than Duchamp to the revolutionary orientation we are calling for. We must note, however, that in Brecht's case these salutary alterations are narrowly limited by his unfortunate respect for culture as defined by the ruling class — that same respect, taught in the newspapers of the workers parties as well as in the primary schools of the bourgeoisie, which leads even the reddest worker districts of Paris always to prefer *The Cid* over [Brecht's] *Mother Courage*.

It is in fact necessary to eliminate all remnants of the notion of personal property in this area. The appearance of new necessities outmodes previous "inspired" works. They become obstacles, dangerous habits. The point is not whether we like them or not. We have to go beyond them.

Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can be used to make

new combinations. The discoveries of modern poetry regarding the analogical structure of images demonstrate that when two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed. Restricting oneself to a personal arrangement of words is mere convention. The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy. Anything can be used.

It goes without saying that one is not limited to correcting a work or to integrating diverse fragments of out-of-date works into a new one; one can also alter the meaning of those fragments in any appropriate way, leaving the imbeciles to their slavish reference to “citations.”

Such parodistic methods have often been used to obtain comical effects. But such humor is the result of contradictions within a condition whose existence is taken for granted. Since the world of literature seems to us almost as distant as the Stone Age, such contradictions don't make us laugh. It is therefore necessary to conceive of a parodic-serious stage where the accumulation of detoured elements, far from aiming to arouse indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity.

Lautréamont advanced so far in this direction that he is still partially misunderstood even by his most ostentatious admirers. In spite of his obvious application of this method to theoretical language in *Poésies* — where Lautréamont (drawing particularly on the maxims of Pascal and Vauvenargues) strives to reduce the argument, through successive concentrations, to maxims alone — a certain Viroux caused considerable astonishment three or four years ago by conclusively demonstrating that *Maldoror* is one vast détournement of Buffon and other works of natural history, among other things. The fact that the prosaists of *Figaro*, like Viroux himself, were able to see this as a justification for disparaging Lautréamont, and that others believed they had to defend him by praising his insolence, only testifies to the senility of these two camps of dotards in courtly combat with each other. A slogan like “Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it” is still as poorly understood, and for the same reasons, as the famous phrase about the poetry that “must be made by

all.”

Apart from Lautréamont's work — whose appearance so far ahead of its time has to a great extent preserved it from a precise critique — the tendencies toward détournement that can be observed in contemporary expression are for the most part unconscious or accidental. It is in the advertising industry, more than in a decaying aesthetic production, that one can find the best examples.

We can first of all define two main categories of detoured elements, without considering whether or not their being brought together is accompanied by corrections introduced in the originals. These are *minor détournements* and *deceptive détournements*.

Minor détournement is the détournement of an element which has no importance in itself and which thus draws all its meaning from the new context in which it has been placed. For example, a press clipping, a neutral phrase, a commonplace photograph.

Deceptive détournement, also termed premonitory-proposition détournement, is in contrast the détournement of an intrinsically significant element, which derives a different scope from the new context. A slogan of Saint-Just, for example, or a film sequence from Eisenstein.

Extensive detoured works will thus usually be composed of one or more series of deceptive and minor détournements.

Several laws on the use of détournement can now be formulated.

*It is the most distant detoured element which contributes most sharply to the overall impression, and not the elements that directly determine the nature of this impression.* For example, in a metagraph [poem-collage] relating to the Spanish Civil War the phrase with the most distinctly revolutionary sense is a fragment from a lipstick ad: “Pretty lips are red.” In another metagraph (“The Death of J.H.”) 125 classified ads of bars for sale express a suicide more strikingly than the newspaper articles that recount it.

*The distortions introduced in the detoured elements must be as simplified as possible, since the main impact of a détournement is directly related to the conscious or semiconscious recollection of the*