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DISSERTATION SUMMARY

“ CATASTROPHIC IMAGINARIES

AND REVOLUTIONARY AESTHETICS:

THE SITUATIONIST AFTERMATH IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ART”

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ABSTRACT

The following dissertation addresses the impact of the Situationist International (SI) on contemporary cultural production, focusing on the ways in which catastrophic imaginaries and revolutionary aesthetics can redefine the relationship between individuals and their environment.

Informed by philosophers such as Hegel, Marx, Lukàcs, Lefebvre, Benjamin and Bataille, the SI sought to challenge capitalist power dynamics through their “use of art’ and common culture, aligning with Debord's theory of the spectacle. For Debord, “the spectacle” was a historical moment in which the commodity system dominates and separates individuals from their creations and the world.

Moreover, by accentuating the intersection of catastrophic imaginaries, revolutionary aesthetics and the Situationist International in contemporary cultural and political production, this study underlines the fundamental role of culture in initiating radical change and envisioning an alternative future that reshapes the political and social landscape.

The dissertation also explores the influence of Situationist ideas on contemporary art and culture, both in the digital (NFTs) and physical spheres. In the latter sphere, it focuses in particular on Banksy’s 2015 art installation 'Dismaland'. In this sense, the dissertation argues that Banksy's exhibition embodies Situationist principles and echoes Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality a subsequent phase following Debord's spectacle. It claims that 'Dismaland' additionally uses Jacques Rancière's "distribution of the sensible" (2004) as a political stance and framework for the organization of reality, providing the ground for individual and collective lived experience.

Rooted in Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach, the Situationists aimed to actualize the Marxist method through proposed tactics such as *détournement*, *dérive* and psychogeography. This dissertation delineates the traces of the Situationists' subversive techniques in contemporary art and explores novel foundations for their development, including in virtual space.

By proposing a genealogy of the kairotic desire for an imminent transformation of social structures through Situationist theories aimed at fostering creativity and destruction through a "reversal of perspective", this thesis argues that the works and theories of the Situationists thus offer a model for individual agency and a disalienated approach to shaping collective history and culture.

CONTENTS

0. Abstract.....	2
1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION.....	4
Main Thesis.....	4
Methodology of research.....	4
Objectives of the research	5
Questions addressed in the dissertation.....	6
- Why were “catastrophic imaginations” used as a framework for the dissertation.....	7
- What is meant by “revolutionary aesthetics?”.....	7
- Why does it matter to trace the legacy of the Situationist International to this day?	7
Some important aspects concerning the SI: timely action.....	8
2. OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION.....	11
Part I.....	11
Part II.....	13
Part III.....	15
Psychogeography as a synthesis of two dialectics.....	17
3. CONCLUSION.....	19
There is nothing catastrophic about a catastrophe.....	25
Dialectical point of rupture: an awakening through catastrophes.....	28
Revelation, self-realization and sublation.....	30
The aesthetic promise.....	32
Limitations and challenges of the dissertation.....	35
4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION.....	38
Bibliography to the dissertation.....	41
5. PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION THESIS	49

1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

Main Thesis

The following dissertation explores the interplay and collision between capitalist hegemony and catastrophic imaginaries as a form of “visual thinking” (Mirzoeff, 2015) and thus identifies the emergence of a revolutionary aesthetics – as a manifestation of the latter and the role of art and culture as a potential agent of change in the context of contemporary society. The dissertation argues that, following the Situationist theories, the dominance of late capitalism has created a totality in which the dominant economic system encompasses all aspects of reality, imagination and everyday life. In response to this hegemony, the Situationist International (SI) movement have employed catastrophic fantasizing as a means of imagining an alternative future and challenging the existing order. The study critically examines the historical context of the Situationist International and its attempt to disrupt “the spectacle” – which is to be understood as a historical period of production, dominated by the norms of the commodity system. The dissertation also examines the subtle relationship between art, political denunciation and the co-optation of cultural critique by capitalist dynamics.

Ultimately, it is here argued that artists and cultural producers applying Situationist theories ideally aim to promote transformative change by creating new forms of expression and discourse, coupled with a radical reevaluation of the role of art in society, in an era overshadowed by 'capitalist realism'.

Methodology of research

The research methodology applied in the dissertation is based on critical theory, cultural studies and textual and comparative analysis of primary sources. Moreover the interdisciplinarity of research spans from the field of philosophy, to anthropology, sociology, critical theory, contemporary and digital crypto art.

The study examines the dual role of art and cultural production in this context and shows how art can be used both as an instrument of social manipulation and as a political condemnation and revelation of the problems of contemporary society.

For this reason, my methodology is characterized by an interdisciplinary research that includes a textual analysis and a critical engagement with cultural, political and aesthetic discourses, aiming to explore and criticize the reality of contemporary social problems.

Objectives of the research

The dissertation aims to explore the role of art and cultural production used as tools both for social manipulation in ideology and decoding and indoctrination, but are also tools of political rebuke when used through a critical lens. Drawing on critical theory, cultural studies, and comparative analysis, the study examines the ways in which art can challenge dominant ideologies to create new social realities in the face of capitalist oppression. The methodology includes an in-depth analysis of the history of the Situationist International, textual analysis of primary sources and critical discourse analysis. An interdisciplinary approach explores the intersections of philosophy, sociology, art history, and cultural studies to provide a comprehensive understanding. By examining historical contexts, exploring conceptual frameworks such as that of the 'catastrophic imagination' and providing empirical examples, the article aims to address the problematics of igniting the desire for social change by disrupting accepted discourses and promoting transformative linguistic and cultural artifacts based on the pre-existing elements that define the reality on which society bases its practices and understandings. Ultimately, the thesis argues that language and discourse, in relation to art and culture, have the power to reshape reality and mobilize the individual in search of collective action to challenge the dominance of late capitalism, thus subverting the fabric of today's "capitalist realism".

Only in this way can the importance of continuing to pursue transformative linguistic and cultural artifacts following situationist theories become truly clear. These elements suggest that the desire for social change can be ignited when conventional narratives are disrupted and therefore encourage a "reversal of perspective," a concept developed by Raoul Vaneigem (1967) that is further explained in this work. While capitalism may seem all-encompassing—a totality that consumes life and lived experience—it is not immune to the power of imagination and creative resistance. In this connection, the thesis is also maintained that any ideology is dead-end and there is no way out of it or the limits of its language. On the other hand, what can be achieved is the awakening of society to this realization and experimentation oriented towards twisting the language of ideology (through the *détournement* tactic).

Thus, for the Situationists, challenging the hegemony of capitalism, a system that has become deeply rooted in everyday life, requires more than just critiquing it from an economic point of view, since capitalism, they argue, permeates every aspect of our existence, from the dominant economy to shared culture. Therefore, the following work considers language, discourse and art as powerful tools that can affect change, able to change the understanding of reality, to challenge dominant ideologies to radical change. On the other hand, the dissertation also notes how various theories note that dominant culture can co-opt subversive art. However, by tracing the dynamics of the manipulation of the collective imagination, one is reminded that language and discourse have the power to bend the mind and sensitize society to the urgency of solving the problems of the present.

As these themes are further explored in context, art and culture play an important role as they can be used both for political condemnation and for creating new foundations for social transformation. In this way, it becomes clear how in a time in which it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the collapse of late capitalism.¹ as the latter is said to completely colonize and absorb all that is conceivable and experienced.

Questions addressed in the dissertation

This dissertation outlines the historical and theoretical background of the Situationist International movement (1957-1972) and clarifies how elements of Situationist theory are employed today. Next, it closely examines the role of the organization of appearances in relation to the making of reality and manipulating its appearance. Finally, it focuses on the intersection between Situationist legacy, catastrophic imaginaries as a type of “visual thinking” (Mirzoeff, 2015) and the realization of aesthetics which can contribute to a rearrangement of the elements that define reality and how this affects the preestablished perspective on the world.

To understand the role of the Situationist International (SI) in contemporary art and culture and its influence on political change, this dissertation discusses the theories, techniques and strategies delineated by the movement, in order to improve society and the present conditions in which it is caught.

1 Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. xii.

In this way, the study aims to apply the Situationist theory in analyzing cultural expressions that influence perception and guide actions in the world.

The following, are thus the brief answers to the main questions addressed in the dissertation:

1. Why are 'catastrophic imaginaries' employed as a framework in this dissertation?

'Catastrophic imaginaries' in this dissertation are viewed as a means to disrupt the present and its conditions, influencing both individual and social aspects of life, evoking a kairotic sense of urgency to act in the present. The present and its spaces serve as the mainframe and context for presenting the denunciation and initiating action.

2. How is revolutionary aesthetics presented?

Here, 'revolutionary aesthetics' emerge as the renewed and inverted relationship of individuals with their surroundings and each other through cultural elements and tools—an attempt to reverse the usual perspective on the world. This is the case, for the analyzed and mentioned scholars (Jean Baudrillard, 1981/1987; Fredric Jameson, 1989; Marc Augé, 1995; McKenzie Wark, 2004), as by following Lukácsian insights on social consciousness, the dominant perspective of the world feels as “natural” as if it were a second nature when, in fact, it is the nature of ideology itself. For this reason, the terms 'catastrophic' and 'revolutionary' in their manifestation are complementary and may necessitate the same movement to their fulfillment. This movement involves an overturn, which implies a renovation of the habitual perspective. In this sense, the reference to politics in the following dissertation aligns with Jacques Rancière's analysis (2004) of the interrelation between art and politics and the organization of spaces and appearances.

3. Why does it matter to trace the legacy of the Situationist International?

The Situationist International has often been overlooked, as they are often perceived as an anarchic and radical movement, too prone to scandal and upheaval. However, those who have studied the SI corpus of work and theory can see Situationist influence in the language of contemporary engaged art and cultural production.

The dissertation proposes a method to detect traces in physical and virtual spaces where society operates and organizes itself.

However, it needs to be clarified that in this academic text, I have not focused on the strict analysis of too many, or even too specific artworks, as much as I have put importance on the "use of art" in transforming life and culture, following the Situationist imperative,² and to put it metaphorically, on the way these can be employed in order to change the established axis around which the perspective of the world is fixated. The Situationist catastrophic thinking created a sense of urgency with the incessant kairotic stances of their theories which claim that revolution can occur when the material conditions allow it (analyzed in the third section of the dissertation).

Some important aspects concerning the SI: timely action

The Situationists, known for their emphasis on the concept of "détournement" and the transformation of everyday life, could be described as kairotic. The Situationist International sought to intervene in the present moment and achieve a radical transformation of society. Its emphasis on creating situations and moments of disruption, such as *dérives* (drifts), can be seen as an attempt to exploit favorable moments for social change.

The element of *time* has thus become a medium with which many artists nowadays works to create a social awareness of present conditions.

From the Situationist perspective, the emphasis was on the immediate, lived experience and the potential for transformative action in the present. Their philosophy and actions were in line with the idea of acting at opportune moments to challenge the prevailing social order and promote new ways of living.

Theorists such as Claire Bishop see time as a tool for shaping the world, an intervention that goes back to the historical avant-gardes. At the heart of their approach is the crucial element of timing – choosing the right moment to achieve their goals. Indeed, the aspect of the kairotic dimension, of timely action in the present, can be found in many texts and theories of the Situationist International.³

2 As the Situationist definition of "détournement" specifies, there is no Situationist art, but rather a "Situationist use" of the preexisting artistic expedients. See, Guy Debord (1958), "Internationale Situationniste, 1: Definitions" in *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb Ed. and Trans., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 52.

3 Note that kairotic rhetoric is also closely associated with the apocalyptic genre. For example, in his *Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy* (1984), Derrida refers to the impossibility of visualizing the apocalypse or its

In this field, time, place and individuals sharing a common destiny are the crucial components of the rubric. Consequently, an urgent tone indicates an imminent problem that needs a solution. The aim is to steer the current historical landscape, shaped by its economic timeline, towards progress, fulfillment and ultimately its conclusion – an end brought about by its own end. This idea might resonate with the Accelerationists, such as Benjamin Noys, who coined the term (*The Persistence of the Negative*, 2010), and Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek (*Accelerate Manifesto*, 2013), who proposed to continue the capitalist project by amplifying its methods and processes, accelerating its pace to collapse, and creating a new foundation – a new world for a new society.⁴ Similarly, the SI have always proposed to “push” the current conditions to their limits, in order to make its structure collapse on itself.⁵

In this sense, I connect to a last point I would like to clarify that in the following dissertation, acts of protests and the so-called “strike art” will not be analyzed, or considered in their specificity. Indeed, there exists a connection between Situationist theories and the contemporary trend of utilizing art as a form of environmentalism. This alignment with the Situationist perspective arises from a shared protest against the perpetuation of false values associated with timeless art, values that emanate from a distant horizon, diverting attention from the pressing issues of the present. The Situationists, with their foresight, also tapped into this notion, drawing inspiration from Bakunin's idea during the Dresden insurrection of 1849, to use oil paintings stolen from museums, as barricades in local upheavals.⁶ This strategy aimed to exploit the army's indoctrination to withhold fire against an artwork, serving as a tactical and symbolic maneuver during protests. Although scholars such as Claire Bishop have pointed out that the legacy of the historical avant-gardes and the Situationist International (1957-1972) has left art with two methods to criticize and work with the world, namely: activist art and research art.⁷ The first dealing with the creation of manifestations and reclaiming public space and time through occupations, and the second focusing on the critical analysis of theories that could support and reinforce the critical, theoretical development of art and its potential to consciously inform the public and even “suggest new ways of thinking”.⁸

catastrophic effects. Instead, Derrida refers to its tone, while the visualization of apocalypse and catastrophe depends on the ability to imagine them in this tone. Such an insight raises questions: Is the apocalypse, as Derrida claims, merely a tone or does it represent a language?

4 Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek,

5 See, Guy Debord, “A User Guide to Détournement”, *Situationist International Anthology*, Ed. Ken Knabb (1981) Revised and expanded edition, Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 15.

6 Guy Debord, “The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art”, *Ibidem*, p. 404.

7 See, Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso Books, 2012.

8 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Gabriel Rockhill trans., London: Continuum Press, 2004, p. 38.

This second approach and analysis of art is also pursued in the following dissertation. On the thin and always contested line between representation and reality lies the avant-gardists' ever-active attempt to sublimate art into life. Indeed, the Situationist aimed to fulfill the revolutionary project of the historical avant-gardes. More precisely, as Guy Debord also states, explaining the intentions of the Situationist International: "Dadaism sought to abolish art without realizing it, and Surrealism sought to realize art without abolishing it."⁹

Debord claims that the Situationists' project was to therefore abolish art and realize life – the tactic to be chosen was "the construction of situations" and, as will be analyzed in the historical part of the following dissertation, corresponds directly to the act of consciously creating one's own life and environment at the same time. In this sense, it is worth noting that the construction of situations has nothing to do with the artistic happening theorized by Alan Kaprow in 1961 and influenced by the Situationists.¹⁰ For Debord, the *happening* was seen as a frozen situation leading to forced participation – as opposed to the spontaneity and chance of the constructed situation, was merely the maintenance of a commodity system to institutionalize the artistic act. Moreover, as Agamben points out,¹¹ Debord's constructed situation is an act that can be repeated *ad infinitum*, much like Kaprow's *happening*, but the inherent uniqueness of the 'constructed situation', even when repeated, consists in the difference of experience in each repeated situation. Something that, in the case of the happening, always tends to dwell in sameness in order to institutionalize the format of the event.¹² The theories and tactics of the Situationists, aimed at undermining the dominant ideology and its practices, culminated in the student and worker riots of May 1968 in Paris. As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello note (1990), the student and worker riots of May 1968 in Paris marked the climax and culmination of Situationist theories and their spirit, which capitulated to and were completely appropriated by the thus newly formed "spirit of capitalism". Contrary to what the Situationists had always hoped, capitalism embodied the most subversive theories put forward against it. As will be shown in the following dissertation, the theme of reappropriation and co-optation is in direct opposition to the Situationist technique of *détournement* and *dérive*.

9 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle: Annotated Edition*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014, thesis 191.

10 Guy Debord, "The Avant-Garde of Presence", *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, Tom McDonough Ed., The MIT Press, 2002, p. 147.

11 Giorgio Agamben, "Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Film", *Ibidem*, p. 318.

12 Think about Marina Abramovich's *Imponderabilia* (1977), for instance, which is always the same, even if the time and place of the performance are different.

However, another angle of this debate shows that the Situationist call to action and activation of the subject's agency was merely a "fantasy of participation,"¹³ that did not clearly lead to the materialization of SI theories, changing the world rather than merely interpreting it, as stated in Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach. Gavin Grindon, for example, has argued this point, claiming that the SI has always maintained a highly contested identity, particularly in relation to the art object and its production. For Grindon, the SI, could not fully transcend the realm of art, but limited itself instead to radical statements and a catastrophic tone.

Nonetheless, the following dissertation shows that despite their disappearance as a group, the Situationists still left concrete traces of their theories that are visible in contemporary art.

OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

Part I

The first section of the dissertation deals with the analysis of the contemporary cultural language and shows that it is a direct reflection of the infrastructure of a capitalist society, which is in line with the theories of the SI. For the SI capitalism always demands that the world be made in its image, focusing exclusively on the circular but accumulative movement of its elements.¹⁴

Such a view opens up a debate on whether the creation of alternative, decentralized and virtual spaces can embrace a new society on a different basis and detached from the dominant economic system.

For this reason, the first part of the dissertation explores the relationship between capitalist language and the artists of deconstruction, the cultural workers who appropriate their situation and the current uncontested conditions within a capitalist framework – including artists who act as manipulators of signs rather than mere producers of objects, such as Jenny Holzer. The reference to Hal Foster's *Subversive Signs* (1982) and Vilém Flusser's *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985) brings into focus the power dynamics inherent in the manipulation of signs and images.

13 Gavin Grindon, "Fantasies of Participation: The Situationist Imaginary of New Forms of Labourin Art and Politics", In: *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 24 (49), 2015.

14 See, for instance, Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle: Annotated Edition*, Ken Knabb translation, Bureau of Public Secrets Publication, 2014, thesis 2.

In the field of art, I also emphasize and address the central importance of language and signs as elements that realize and implement the organization of reality – and thus maintain the prevailing reality. Language, in particular for the SI, is anchored in the capitalist world and must be subverted. This developed perspective emphasizes the need for techniques that alienate communication and create distance in order to counteract the hypnotic effect associated with it. This theme is also explored further in the third and final section of the dissertation, where attention is drawn to a 2015 installation by British anonymous artist Banksy. The artwork was sublated into life for refugees stranded in the Calais camp in France.

Language not only represents reality, but also influences our thoughts and the functions and performances of space. This contrasts with the practice of *détournement*, which questions the inherent regulation of space. Here, Rancière (2004, 2008) extends these views through his theory of the aesthetic regime and the distribution of the sensible as ways of arranging and rearranging the elements already present in a space – to create new ways of interacting and relating to reality. For Rancière, space has a political meaning because “artists fill the spaces that power leaves blank”.¹⁵ In this sense, artists must use every space available to them without negotiating with the power that dictates the meaning and use of space.

In this sense, digital spaces, are also subjected to a similar analysis, where repurposing through hacker attacks, virtual infiltration and the negation of access is part of this Situationist *détournement*, as also proposed in McKenzie Wark’s “A Hacker Manifesto” (2004) and analyzed here. I need to clarify that, this research topic is still developing and offers the potential for an in-depth analysis of the justification and assertion of relational spaces in the digital world. It explores the potential for new social relations and cultural development to be erected on “the ruins of capitalism.”¹⁶

I have developed these possibilities through my participation in a series of conferences where I have developed the idea of a digital space that does not add another dimension to reality, but returns to reality from a position of digital alienation through digital mediation, and be it as a “necessary alienation” that aims to achieve a self-consciousness that leads to a direct and unmediated reality. Some tools and art devices that I have analyzed in this context are the NFT (Non-Fungible Tokens), which just like internet memes play with taking control of the means of cultural production (and as analyzed

15 Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, L. Heron, Trans., New York: Verso, p. 60.

16 Guy Debord, “Questionnaire: Situationniste Internationale no. 9 (1964)”, *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets; Revised & Expanded edition, 2006, p. 179.

in the first section of the following dissertation), NFT play, interact and manage to change the way we perceive the usual concepts of object, space and social relations and seize the means of cultural production by generating new and provocative thoughts.¹⁷

Part II

As Alastair Hemmens notes, “we have learned more about the SI in the first two decades of this century than we ever did in the latter half of the twentieth.”¹⁸ For this reason, it is a deliberate choice for the structure of the following dissertation to place the historical and theoretical analysis of SI here. The decision to begin with an analysis of contemporary culture and language before delving into the historical and theoretical framework of the Situationist International movement could perhaps offer a new perspective that anchors the research in the present before examining the origins and ideas of the SI. The contemporary use of Situationist techniques, as demonstrated here, is often unrecognized or unconscious. A retrospective section in the second part of the dissertation is therefore aimed at tracing the legacy of the SI to which we owe today’s subversive cultural language.

Thus, by starting with the contemporary context, I provide a relatable entry point for setting the ground for a deeper understanding of how the Situationists' theories still resonate today. Furthermore, examining the current cultural landscape allows me to emphasize the relevance and applicability of the SI's ideas in today's world -- which is close to the scope of the dissertation.

Moving from the analysis of contemporary culture to the historical and theoretical exploration of the SI movement, in my opinion, allows for a seamless transition of ideas that leads back to the origins of the movement and its very *raison d'être* in today's cultural framework. The decision to address the original theories and intentions of the Situationists in the second part of the dissertation and only after examining the current situation thus ensures a solid foundation on which to contextualize and understand the meaning of the SI's contributions.

Furthermore, the exploration of the main concepts of the SI movement and comparing them with other cultural forms adds more depth to the analysis and helps to clarify any misunderstandings or

17 The latter research was developed and discussed at a conference at the University of Malta in November 2023, which was not included in the following thesis. However, it will be analyzed in my work in the future, as it has an authentic potential to sublimate art to life and can easily be linked to the Situationist theories of *dérive* and psychogeography on virtual locales.

18 Alastair Hemmens, *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook*, A. Hemmens and G. Zacarias eds., London: Pluto Press, 2020, p. 2.

misinterpretations that may exist in the literature that still deals with them today. For example, I have explained how the “creation of situations”, as conceived by the SI in 1957, differs from Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept of “relational art” (1998) – insofar as the former concept was never intended to be part of an institutionalized process of art production and presentation. In this second part, following the theoretical and historical framework of Situationism, I have also focused on Debord’s concept of the “spectacle” as a *second alienation* – one that takes place not only at work but also at home – through the leisure of immersing oneself in the hegemonic monologue of the spectacle. But here too I have distinguished Debord’s spectacle from Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality and simulacra. These forms of representation are thus complementary and not synonymous, as they refer to different periods of the capitalist order.¹⁹

In the second part of my work, I also examine the anti-artistic decision of the SI, its split into another (the Scandinavian) section and argue that today’s Situationist art is influenced by this Second Situationist International, founded in 1962.

Furthermore, I argue that Debord’s anti-artistic decision has an aesthetic meaning – the reconfiguration of the present and the individual’s relationship to it. Indeed, Debord’s theory refers to the present, particularly on the basis of the “theory of moments” (Henri Lefebvre,²⁰ 1947). As Marc Augé points out, there is a certain sense of advantage when working on the present.²¹

This is also because, as Debord observes, the future is entrusted to commodities,²² which at least promises fulfillment. Commodities promise fulfillment, but it is only a fleeting moment before they are replaced. The spectacle, characterized by the movement of inanimate objects – commodities circulating on the basis of people’s perceived value – and the montage, an alteration of images, uproot the creativity that resembles Benjamin’s “destructive character” (1931). If the spectacle is the accumulation of images reflecting bourgeois values of accumulation, the everyday, characterized by its poverty, represents the proletariat (Lefebvre, 1949:XVII). In this sense, the appropriation of all means of

19 This is an aspect that was also analyzed in the first part of the dissertation, in the subchapter entitled “Holding and reversing the Camera Obscura”, which identifies situationist problematics located in the present and its cultural language.

20 Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) was a French philosopher at the University of Nanterre, Paris. His assistant was Jean Baudrillard. Lefebvre was a member of the SI movement and influenced the group with many philosophical theories that were important for the theoretical corpus of the SI, such as the theory of moments, which laid the foundation for the Situationist theory of the “construction of situations”. Lefebvre was later expelled from the movement because he was accused of plagiarism by Guy Debord.

21 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso Books, London, 1995, p. 13.

22 See, Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 154.

production can create new possibilities for self-management and social transformation. With precision and awareness of the consequences, these actions can exert great power for change. Situationist theories, which resemble apocalyptic narratives, propagate the construction of a new world after the demise of the old. They propose a "revolution of everyday life" that requires imaginative thinking and the construction of an alternative lifestyle. Overcoming the logic of capital and overcoming its limits is the key to this. Ultimately, the Situationists strove to change all aspects of life so that individuals could lead autonomous, meaningful lives free from the oppressive conditions of capitalism. This included a shift from passive consumption, which was equated with the act of contemplation, to active engagement with culture and society in order to reclaim public space and abolish the idea of the "spectacle" as synonymous with the commodity system that perpetuates the alienation and "false consciousness" imposed on the working class. The Situationists believed that radical, creative and experimental actions were necessary to create a better world that would adapt to the current reality. In this way, they sought to foster a revolutionary consciousness in order to bring about social change. With their methods of resistance such as *détournement*, *dérive* and *Unitary Urbanism*, they sought to subvert traditional forms of representation and create alternative spaces for political expression. In this sense, the Situationist' theories remain essential resources for critical thinking in relation to contemporary art and social practice, always in search of alternative spaces that offer a way to shape the world according to one's own values and desires.

Part III

In the third part, I explain how the chiasmic structure can be seen as a means of interpreting the balancing of an unresolved tension that is resolved within the overall appearance structure of the chiasmus itself. Furthermore, the chiasmic structure in the last part of the dissertation illustrates the connection between catastrophic imaginaries and revolutionary aesthetics. This also bears similarities to the concept of "heterotopia" introduced by Michel Foucault in 1967, which is implemented by Miglena Nikolchina's notion of "heterotopian homonymy"²³ (2014), which in turn is analyzed in relation to Marc Auge's "non-places" (1995).

23 See, Miglena Nikolchina, "Inverted Forms and Heterotopian Homonymy: Althusser, Mamardashvili, and the Problem of "Man", in *Boundary 2* (2014) 41 (1), Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 79–100.

In the third and final part of the dissertation, for example, *Dismaland*, an art installation by the anonymous British artist Banksy, proposes a place of destruction and catastrophic reality where an Augean non-place, a Foucauldian heterotopia and a virtual liminal space intersect, as a consequence of a “destructive character”, as Walter Benjamin (1931) puts it in his homonymous essay. Furthermore, such a space overlaps with Frederic Jameson’s insight into the “waning of affect” within a postmodern culture in the presence of the apathetic cultural workers in the installation.

Especially in this section, the connection between Baudrillard's examination of Disneyland and Banksy's *Dismaland* reveals that they represent a mixture of reality and catastrophe that can potentially aid in coping with a *rupture*. *Dismaland* is thus Disneyland’s inverted analogous. Imagining catastrophic scenarios is a means of decisively disengaging from the present and its social conditions. In this last section, I consider space and place as symbols in their liminality. As Nicolas Bourriaud states,²⁴ they are interstices of new relations that contribute to new forms of cultural and social production – a concept that Vitalik Buterin also echoes in the first section of this dissertation. Contemporary art eliminates the art object from art production, where artwork and labor are dependent on the same laws of capitalist production, and instead of an object, the artwork places the subject at the center. Through Bourriaud’s “relational aesthetics” practices (1998), explicitly inspired by the Situationists' theories on the construction of situations, Bourriaud identifies a lack of development in the sociability and collaboration between subjects aimed at forming a meaningful and co-dependent relationship.

In this sense, however, the question also arises of a paradigm shift, as analyzed by Jameson (1991) through the comparison between Van Gogh’s series of *Pair of Shoes* and Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes* as the epitome of modernism, the former, and postmodernism, the latter. Here, both NFT and Banksy’s *Dismaland*, in their representation and manipulation of reality, through imagination, potentiality, irony and naivety, can perhaps refer to the metamodernity that Vermeulen and Van Den Akker (2010) and discussed in contrast to Nicolas Bourriaud’s “Altermodern” era which is nothing other than another layer of hypostasis of fetishized objects, but which with Bourriaud these become social relations. But if postmodernism, also according to Frederic Jameson, was characterized by its tendency to deconstruct the given forms of dwelling and living together, in metamodernism this becomes an attempt to reconstruction of these previously dissolved components regarding one’s own perspective and spontaneous desires.

24 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods Trans., Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 16.

Vaneigem believes that the revolutionary mission consists of repurposing history²⁵ and crafting the present. This involves correcting the past, reshaping the symbols that surround us, cutting our unfulfilled dreams and desires out of the unyielding material in which they are trapped, and allowing individual passions to coalesce into a collective reality. As “the last avant-garde of the 20th century,”²⁶ the Situationists saw the merging of art and life as the fulfillment of their plan. As a matter of fact, it might be useful to note here that, the term avant-garde, originally coined by the Saint-Simonian movement, refers to an artist who plans and programs society through their art. The role of the avant-garde is to program the bourgeoisie and to be programmed by it, which is consistent with Vaneigem's concept of the cybernetic class. Artists become an integral part of a new political design that describes and represents novel forms of power.²⁷

Psychogeography as a synthesis of two dialectics

As outlined in the following dissertation, catastrophic fantasies are mainly linked to the desire to create a new political order that introduces devastation and the abolition of previous values. Thus, catastrophic thinking evolves into an authentic "artistic regime" with distinct and destructive "modes of doing and making."²⁸

In this sense, in the following dissertation, “catastrophic imaginaries” and “revolutionary aesthetics” refer to one’s relationship with their surroundings, which is always a consequence “of” the present. The transformation of space can therefore be seen as a change of perspective on one’s own place in reality.

The interdisciplinary character of the Situationist project, which adopted dialectical materialism, aims to destroy the supporting structure of the commodity system by uniting against itself all possible instruments that the dominant order uses for social conditioning. Interdisciplinarity also means and facilitates taking control of the means of production and reusing them in the service of humanity by expanding the boundaries of meaning, language, thought and action.

25 Raoul Vaneigem, “Mediated Abstraction and Abstract Mediation”, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Donald Nicholson-Smith Trans., London, Rebel Press, 2001, p. 85.

26 Now the SI, *Christopher, Gray (Ed.), Leaving the 20th Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*, Rebel Press, 1998, p. 1.

27 On the matter, see also the last paragraph on page 139 of this dissertation.

28 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Gabriel Rockhill trans., London: Continuum Press, 2004, p. 39.

However, the theories of Situationism also contain elements of dialectical idealism, which envisioned a sudden break with the current situation and the pursuit of a better future (via psychogeographical *dérive*). Thus, in the context of Situationism, the concept of “catastrophe” (as necessary rupture with the present) can be seen as a necessary component of the revolutionary process that breaks up the existing social and political structures and creates the conditions for change.

In this sense, there is indeed an intersection between revolution, catastrophe and Situationism. The intersection between revolution, catastrophe and Situationism, lies in the idea that art and cultural practices can be used to trigger moments of radical change and to imagine an alternative spaces that challenge the prevailing power structures, through inverting their original functionality. In this sense, the juxtaposition of these concepts underscores the role of cultural and artistic practices in shaping the political and social landscape.

Similarly, catastrophic imaginaries being the forceful rupture with the present, are also deployed to combat the system of alienation and adopt the perspective that would replace the commodified reality. The revolutionary act consists thus in seizing the opportunity both to dismantle the "organization of appearances" and to create the desired world. The Situationists strive to increase the value of life and accelerate the decomposition of what is considered harmful.²⁹

The Situationists influenced the philosophy of scholars such as Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Rancière, Marc Augé, Fredric Jameson, Hal Foster and Mark Fisher, to name but a few, but were primarily influenced by philosophers and theorists such as Hegel and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, György Lukàcs to their contemporary Jacques Lacan, Walter Benjamin and Georges Bataille, as well as the philosophy of the historical avant-gardes such as Dadaism and Surrealism. In the contemporary art world, however, they contributed to the emergence of Bourraud’s “relational art”. This dissertation explores the significant role of Banksy as an artist influenced by the Situationists and Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. For instance, Banksy's work blurs the line between fiction and reality and embodies the Situationist' aim to go beyond art and embrace life. The theory of the spectacle thus refers to a temporal and spatial framework for the socialization of the commodity system. To say it anthropologically and semiotically, Debord and Vaneigem consider communication and exchange as the Logos, of Myth. Similarly to Lyotard, Vaneigem locates myth as a unifying ideology in archaic unitary societies defined by a totem of belonging, in stark contrast to the fragmented society of the

29 Guy Debord, “One More Try If You Want to Be Situationists: The SI in and against Decomposition,” *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, Tom McDonough Ed., The MIT Press, 2002, p. 52.

isolated individual in today's capitalist dynamics. For this reason, the following paper also attempts to establish a link between memes, contemporary digital culture and art by presenting it as an open and ongoing dialog rather than being an incessant one-sided monolog as Debord sees “the spectacle”.

3. CONCLUSION

At this point, I think it is fair to say that the present work argues for the use and creation of revolutionary aesthetic practices as a model aimed at achieving an alternative, liberating life praxis, as opposed to the mere aestheticization of everyday life, through a proliferation and maintenance of commodities and reified relations.

This is particularly the case in the final section of the dissertation, which presents a critical analysis of Banksy's *Dismaland* installation – the visual reiteration of a hyperreal-spectacle of decaying culture.

As a matter of fact, for the Situationists the starting point of their critique was their denunciation of a culture in decay.

Vaneigem has observed that, “[d]ocility no longer emanates from priestly magic, it results from a mass of minor hypnoses: news, culture, town-planning, publicity, mechanisms of conditioning and suggestion in the service of any order, established or to come.”³⁰ Similarly, Henri Lefebvre points out how the social aspect in the individual always manifests itself through rituals, especially through certain words or expressions.³¹ As a matter of fact, Marx's concept of 'alienation' and Lukàcs' equivalent notion of 'reification' emphasize the detachment of capital and the State from human intention and production. These entities become autonomous and separate from the human sphere, transforming themselves into alien products that nonetheless shape in their resemblance the individual's perception of the world.

In this sense, both catastrophic imaginaries and revolutionary aesthetics as practices aim to disclose a certain kind of relationship of the individual to one's environment, which always comes in response to the current living conditions and the arrangement of the visible and livable elements of reality, which today does not exclude the environment created by new technologies and online digital spaces.

30 Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, The Anarchist Library, 2009, p.9.

31 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol.1, USA: Verso Books, 2008, p. 72.

Catastrophic imaginaries are therefore sudden and decisive ruptures with the present and all the elements that define it.

Former Situationist, Asger Jorn, argued that with his film *Hurlement en Faveur de Sade* (1952), Debord destroyed Cinema, as an instrument for reinforcing docility, by transforming it in one of reaction, rebellion and rage.³² This decision from Debord's side, however, did not contest, but paradoxically confirmed the conditioning power of the *spectacle*, which in Debord's view moulds consciousness and the collective imaginary as such. Debord's *Hurlements* was recuperated by the cinematic language and employed in 1959, with *Hiroshima Mon Amour* – one of the most critically acclaimed films of the period. Nonetheless, this dissertation holds that, the legacy of the SI and the critique of the 'spectacle' is identical with a critique of the commodity system, which is the main element of the spectacle's language and its soothing tone.³³ Today, the collective imaginary is not only reflected in the spectacle, but *is* a spectacle itself. In this sense, it is worth mentioning, as Mario Perniola states, to claim freedom, forgetting that what one thinks and does *belong* to the world is a great error.³⁴

The following dissertation undoubtedly takes as its starting point the claim, informed by situationist theory, that mediated reality, as exemplified by the movement itself through its notion of "spectacle", – has replaced any understanding of reality and created a reified social world dominated by commodities that reinforce dominant ideologies and determine subjective perception. Therefore, this thesis explores the critical interdependence and interplay between ideology as mediated reality and false consciousness, and the fundamental role that individuals' perceptions, beliefs and actions play in this dialectical process. The dissertation argues the importance of cultivating novel perspectives in order to engage with the world and make it a better reflection of one's identity and desires in the Hegelian sense. The Situationist project, which aims to give reality back its authenticity by reconnecting it with the individual, emphasizes precisely this idea – the idea that individuals are the creators of the world and its reality. Furthermore, this position reveals the assertion that individuals have to some extent

32 Asger Jorn, "Guy Debord and the Problem of the Accursed," In *SubStance*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Issue 90: Special Issue: *Guy Debord* (1999), pp. 157-163, p. 159.

33 Logos is used by Vaneigem as signifying ideology, it is "the organization of intelligible appearance". See, Raoul Vaneigem (1963), *Basic Banalities*, The Anarchist Library, 2009, pp. 16-19; 22; 28.

34 Mario Perniola, *Art and Its Shadows*, London: Continuum Press, 2004, p. 59.

overlooked the idea that "the world" is in fact their own creation, which springs from their conscious intentions.

Scholars who were influenced by the Situationist theory, such as Marc Augé and Jean Baudrillard, have adopted similar views, as it resulted in Augé's notion of 'non-places' (1995), a concept based on the claim that "information molds consciousness," in the same way in which, in a Marxist perspective, one's environment makes one's consciousness. Baudrillard instead détourns the word 'spectacle', substituting it with the notion of 'communication', as was the case with his *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1987) – which was identified here, as a subsequent stage to that of the spectacle, and following the phase of the "simulacrum", where for the philosopher claimed that the Postmodern era was characterized by a "proliferation of signs" and a sense of "obscenity", where there is no *spectacle* any longer – and everything is completely visible and transparent – with non concealment of truth, as there is none. In this sense, the Situationist heritage is that of a critique of the conditioning of the subject by a total and incorporating language of the *spectacle*. As was argued in this thesis, the critique of the spectacle, advanced by the Situationists is a critique against the 'official language' of the commodity system, the spectacle, as the container of the dominant ideology and the anticipation of its every manifestation (Section 1 of this paper). This also explains, the reason for which the category of *art* has also been rejected (especially after 1962) by the Situationists in their theories and subversive tactics, and instead they put major emphasis on the research of strategies aimed to incite immediate action from side of the individual. As artists have always tried to find new ways in order to make what is veiled or covered, or not available to all, visible in a similar way, the Situationists have tried to show the status quo without the necessity of the art object. But after Baudrillard, who claimed that there is nothing to be shown as it is, and no different angle of the situation is useful to adopt when there is nothing beneath the surface, the problem still consists in finding ways to seize the means of manipulation and creation of lived experience (as claimed is the case of digital cultures, memes and crypto or cypherpunk microsocieties).

At the end of the first section of this dissertation, having established that Baudrillard's concept of simulacra is not to be considered synonymous with Debord's concept of the spectacle, but rather represents a later historical and social stage of the spectacle (defined in the years 1967-1984). The simulacrum and then obscenity are distinct historical moments that follow the Debordian spectacle –

which itself was identified with the false appearance and false consciousness of the world, with a present possibility of truth to be discovered. It was not yet the time of a total absence of reality and truth about it. Debord's theory of the spectacle and the later Baudrillardian notion of hyperreality and the orders of simulacra thus complement each other insofar as they describe two successive phases in the development of capitalist realism. The first was the inversion of truth as false consciousness turned upside down, the second was the theft and hiding of truth under a "magic veil", only to make it disappear completely later in Baudrillard's analyzes (1981/1987).

However, since for Debord the *spectacle* is to be considered as a historical moment in which society dwells, destruction within the field of the arts refers thus to the destruction of the *historical element in art* and such an element is always inherent to the artistic product. The artwork can be compared to any other object of production, since art is undeniably also the result of its culture and history. Given that art is not entirely capable of transcending its historicity, the problem is that art itself also alienates the contemplating subject, as much as a capitalist commodity does. In his *Marginal Notes on The Society of the Spectacle*, Agamben observes how still, while giving lectures and explaining Marx's *Capital*, Althusser has warned his audience to overlook the parts of the volume concerning the topic of Commodity Fetishism, regarded by Louis Althusser himself as an "extremely harmful" trace of Hegelian philosophy."³⁵ However, it is such mysticism and phantasmagoria of the commodity, the product of its own times and needs, that is also reflected in the aura of an artwork, in its uniqueness and unquestionable historical authority. In this sense, it is useful to reiterate that for this reason, there is no Situationist art in the sense that, art is considered an ideology which directly mirrors the bourgeois consciousness and organization, as considered also by Marxist aesthetics. Consequently, the Situationists have always intended to distance themselves from a condition of a pure reflection of an illusion, unreachable by the majority, and decided to focus their theories on the incitation for direct action on what is being experienced. Instead for the SI art meant ideological domination, and a subjugation to a bourgeois consciousness – influencing and corrupting the spirit, into an illusion, or a "bad dream" (thesis 18, SoS). Taking a stance against art, as in the case of the Situationists means that the "materialization of an ideology" does not have the conditions to develop, or be perpetuated in reality.

35 Giorgio Agamben, (1990), "Marginal Notes on Comments on the Society of the Spectacle", *Addendum: Letters to Giorgio Agamben, 1989-1990*, Available at: https://files.libcom.org/files/agambenmarginal_notes_on_comments.pdf

But the Situationists, in the end, result more guided by a dialectical idealism than by a materialist approach, as various theorists have pointed out. This is the case, when considering the act of “construction of situations” which did not go further than being a mere theory and a desire. The Situationists explicitly stated that at the time of their work on the theory of the construction of situations, they have not reached the point to its actual realization at that time. However, the admission that there is no Situationist art, rather there is “a Situationist *use* of art” translates in the fact that art in its materiality has been employed to revert the conditioning – manipulated precisely as a tool for social propaganda. As Emily Braun asserts, myth (or ideology) and its manifestation through masspolitics consists of a “‘system of images’ used by the elite to motivate action and determine history.”³⁶ And since art is not only the display, but the imposition of a dominant perspective of the world and a perfect model of the world, the classical conception of art has always required a contemplating spectator.³⁷

For this reason, Dadaism and Surrealism, as well as what occurred with Alan Kaprow’s *Happenings*,³⁸ in the sixties, adopted the approach of dissolving the spectator and deepen the consequent transition from such a figure – and social position – to that of a *participant*.³⁹ In this respect, the recurring attitude of art production was preoccupied with finding methods to make viewers active participants – which for most artists meant putting control of their own lives back into their hands – an approach that is now particularly typical of digital micro-societies. Similarly, for the SI, *détournement* not only meant ceizing control of socially created products back into the hands of those who produced them – disalienating society – but *détournement* was also an attempt to remove the social products from their time of creation – to play with their historicity as if they were a tangible material to be molded and

36 Emily Braun, “Mario Sironi's Urban Landscapes: The Futurist/Fascist Nexus”, in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, edited by Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 101.

37 Ibidem.

38 Debord himself declared that “happenings” were not to be considered at the same level as situations. Happenings for Debord was forcing the individual into participating in a “frozen” situation – akin to the character of the spectacle. See, Guy Debord, “The Avant-Garde of Presence”, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, The MIT Press, 2002, p. 147. Moreover, In his own artistic works, however, one can recognize elements that resemble Debord's view of art, especially in his films such as “Hurlements en Favour de Sade”, “In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni” and “The Society of the Spectacle” These films embody Debord's preference for montage as a form of artistic expression, characterized by the technique of a continuous *détournement*. Furthermore, Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio is credited for undermining the market values associated with the uniqueness, originality and aura of the artist's works. Gallizio questioned the conventional market cycle and the artist's obligation to create without motivation just to sustain their livelihood. See, Guy Debord and the Si, “The Avant-Gardes of Presence” in *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 143.

39 Which for the Situationists was to be viewed as the transition from a “voyeur” [looker] to a “viveur” [liver]. This concept was explained in the first section and further reiterated throughout this paper. See, Guy Debord, (1957) “Report on the Construction of Situations”, in *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 41 – where Debord states that the role played by “livers,” must steadily increase.”

adapted to the new forms (needs) of relationship and communication in society. Indeed, the Situationists believed that the built environment could be reshaped to create new forms of social interaction and liberate the individual from the constraints of the spectacle. As Hal Foster asserts, “there is no privileged realm of aesthetics such as taking the stance of anti-aesthetics” and revolutionary aesthetics, as is the case here, for both are “critiques of the world as it is and as it appears, and “the notion of the aesthetic as an in-between space⁴⁰— an *insterstice* which is a site of alternative practices and social relations.

As a matter of fact, the SI strove for a passionate life worth living and considered art and life as inseparable categories through which the individual can change the world via direct action and individual creativity. Thus, informed by a variety of philosophical and intellectual currents, including Hegelian-Marxism and architectural theory, the SI believed that the earlier cultural avant-gardes had failed to realize their revolutionary program which consisted in superseding art into life. The failure to realize this project was, in their view, the reason for the founding of the Situationist International. They believed that the creation of a "lived experience" was the ultimate goal, and this was achieved through tactics such as 'creating situations', drifting in the city and intervening in already given contexts and acting spontaneously and unconstrained from the place's intended functionality. The Situationists saw the *use* of art as a means to directly change life through their *psychogeography*, they were concerned precisely with developing the methods for changing the effects of the built environment on the subject, and thus on their perception of reality. Furthermore, through promotions of acts of spontaneity, the SI countered the predictable nature and essence of the spectacle, with the technique of *détournement* in order to subvert existing cultural norms and forms to give the world its new meaning.

As this dissertation wonders about the consequences of the Situationists, it considers *space*, whether virtual/digital or physical, as a means for forming and transforming a political thought in its corresponding action.

In this sense, as was discussed in the previous and last section of the dissertation, Dismaland, as an art installation in which the Logos, or the elements of the spectacle, that is, news, culture, publicity are at their most exaggerated stated, were *pastiched all* together in the premises of an abandoned place – the

40 Hal Foster, “Postmodernism: A Preface”, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Ed. Hal Foster, Washington: Bay Press, 1983, p. xv.

monument of leisure and consumption, repurposed in its decadence and futility. At the end, this installation, in its repurposed form was sublated form as a refugee shelter, for the homeless, blocked in Calais. And here the Baudrillardian “remainder”⁴¹ is reflected as it is seen in the remains, the residue of the superficial, of what remains on the surface and is present in excess, and what he means in relation to the non-socialized groups – the ostracized and the marginal – the excluded. As the SI point out, *détournement* has indeed two key laws: there is “the loss of importance of each *détourned* autonomous element – which may go as far as to lose its original sense completely – and at the same time, there is the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect.”⁴² Since *détournement* is “the negation of the value of the previous organization of expression,”⁴³ *Dismaland* is then a *twice-détourned* cultural object: Firstly as the *détournement* of Disneyland and secondly, it is its own *détournement* when it is recycled for the refugee camps in Calais. Hence, *Dismaland* is an example of an anti-theme park, that critiques the commercialization of leisure spaces and the commodification of cultural representations of utopia, instead presenting a bleak, dystopian vision of the present and its elements. In Banksy's *Dismaland*, ordinary components of collective reality are transformed into symbolic representations of a collectively experienced state of decay, serving as a metaphor for the present. I have posited that this locale provides a venue for “mourning” intended to facilitate the process of overcoming and progressing beyond the prevailing conditions of decay. Thus, as articulated throughout this dissertation, catastrophic imaginaries inherently recognize an existing problem in need of correction. The desire to overturn the world through a catastrophic imaginary essentially stems from an understanding of the imaginary as a form of “visual thinking” (Mirzoeff, 2015) as defined in the first chapter.

There is nothing catastrophic in a catastrophe

As Baudrillard states, there is nothing catastrophic about a catastrophe. A catastrophe, the scholar has explained, is only about the curvature it implies.⁴⁴ Metaphorically speaking, an annihilation and uprooting of the status quo liberate space for a possible change and reconstruction ex-novo, of the

41 Jean Baudrillard, “The Remainder”, Chapter 15, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981.

42 Guy Debord, “Detournement as Negation and Prelude” (1959), *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 67.

43 Ibidem.

44 Jean Baudrillard, “The Implosion of Meaning in the Media”, Chapter 8, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981, p. 83

world.⁴⁵ As Frederic Jameson notes echoing Heidegger, the world is human made up of social relations, while the earth is only the physical space that, when inhabited by interacting humans, becomes a world. Similarly, the end of the world is always the end of the world “of”, which, following Benjamin’s notion of the destructive character, is always oriented towards “making space” for something new to be erected on the ruins of what has been destroyed. As the situationists say, it is possible to build anew “only on the ruins of the spectacle,” when the spectacle is the hypostasized social relations that are replaced by everything perceptible, according to which the arrangement of the world is organized. Virtually annihilating such a world is to desire to rebuild it, to reorganize its spaces to contain novel kinds of relations. In fact, the SI and Debord have been truly informed by Norman Cohn’s “The Pursuit of the Millennium,”⁴⁶ published in 1957 – the year of the movement’s foundation. Cohn’s book offers an analysis of the way societies over the centuries have *imagined* the end of the world in order to escape political or social crises – or as a way to create “heaven on earth.”⁴⁷ Thus, from here it is clear that catastrophic discourses are forms of discourses that, through their grave kairotic tone, urge into building communities concerned with the same desire for a reordering and a new rearrangement of the world. If language and the way it is used is the only way to bend the thinkable of a reality – catastrophic discourse is a way to experiment with a different way of thinking in which one is confronted with the possibility of putting an end to the world (*of*) and its current conditions that despair.

As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, the words "revolution" and "catastrophe" both stem from the same meaning. In Greek, the word "kátastrōphē," composed by “kata” and “strophein” assembled together construte a “down-turn”, thus meaning a "turning point" or "sudden turn." Same for the Latin word “revolution” – to re-volve.

The correlation between catastrophe (down-turn) and revolution (re/back-turn; reversal) reveals a common trajectory and *curvature*, as proposed by Baudrillard (1981). Both the catastrophic and revolutionary scenarios require a central turning point in their nature and movement – a movement towards the restoration of the totality of their components and a *synthesis* that resembles the resolute

45 Cf. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

46 Andrew Hussey, “Fanatics of the Apocalypse: Traces of the End in Bataille and Debord”, In: *Space and Culture*, 1(2), 85–94, 1997, p. 85.

47 See, Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 138.

movement of a chiasmic structure. This inherent oscillation maintains a balance and reflects a rhizomatic logic of arrangement, as was argued in the last chapter.

In line with the previously stated viewpoint on the chiasmic structure as a logic of order, this dissertation proposes an alternative interpretation of this turning point that echoes Vaneigem's concept of the "step back preparatory to the leap of transcendence."⁴⁸ Also here, catastrophe is not perceived as fetishistically retrospective, but is reflective and restorative, akin to Walter Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, who is simultaneously propelled forward into a progressive movement, leaving disaster behind oneself, while being also revolted to the past, turning its back to the future.⁴⁹ However, the concept of catastrophic imaginaries, in connection to the SI, in no way implies elements of *nostalgia* – on the contrary, it represents a counter-nostalgic vision that dialectically juxtaposes decay and its transcendence. This is because nostalgia, always imposes the past on the present without correcting it,⁵⁰ but instead adding a hue of a romantically imagined, but un-lived experience of the world. Similarly, in contrast to a nostalgic preservation of the past and its un-lived experiences, the SI advocates for destruction, through *détournement*, when the past no longer serves, or reflects the present.

Catastrophe, is thus also characterized as retrospective, reflective and restorative, features manifested in its curvature – a bending which tends towards its transformation that echoes Baudrillard's insights of the curvature of a catastrophe. Similarly, revolutions embody a force of tension which leads to a forward movement that corresponds to Vaneigem's notion of the "reversal of perspective" necessary for the transformation of the world, which resembles the individual, who resembles the world. For this reason, this dissertation holds that a catastrophic imaginary is a voluntary and forceful rupture with the elements of the present and the conditions which the present offers. Metaphorical dynamics involving catastrophic imaginaries always signify a desire to overcome the current situation forced upon those who experience it – it is the imagination of a radical change, the undoing of a life and an imaginable whole totally colonized by capital. Catastrophism is an invitation to imagine the end of capitalist

48 Raoul Vaneigem, "Separation", *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, The Anarchist Library, 2009, p. 62.

49 See, Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt ed. New York: Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 257-258.

50 See, Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 156 and also echoed by Raoul Vaneigem, "The Space-Time of Lived Experience and the Rectification of the Past", in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Donald Nicholson-Smith Ed., PM Press, 2012, p. 194. The absence of the past in the present matters, because, as also noted by Ken Knabb, in the second part of the Communist Manifesto, Marx states that "in communist society, the present dominates the past": See, Ken Knabb, *Guy Debord: The Society of the Spectacle, Annotated Edition*, Ken Knabb ed., BOP Press 2012, p. 140.

organization of appearances – the only world we can imagine – returning to Fredric Jameson’s words, later détourned by Mark Fisher: “It is easier to imagine the end of the world, than the end of capitalism.”⁵¹

Dialectical point of rupture: an awakening through catastrophes

According to Raoul Vaneigem, becoming conscious is paramount to the creation of life.⁵² But can really art challenge the dominant culture, by reinventing its foundations? In fact, in their first bulletin the Situationists stated that awareness is not enough. In this sense, palindromic as the Debordian title of his film, catastrophic imaginaries might be the revolutionary aesthetics for the hope to overturn the current society and rupture with the current conditions, regarded as being oppressive to the individual and his or her creativity in making reality. Then again, hope on the other hand, is not a strategy for change, but agency and praxis are. Catastrophic fantasizing could be imagined as the way in which Debord describes what the effect from reading Lautréamont’s *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869) might be: “despair and revolt are the very substance of the Chants – by reading them, one should start desiring the good as if it were medicine.”⁵³ Hence, the extreme wish for a change of scenery, a rearrangement of the elements of the present, or visions of extreme sceneries, narratives in the social imaginary should serve to wish for the opposite, because of the negative semantic satiation. One should therefore consciously choose the opposite, by viewing the consequences of the imaginaries of the present.

As once André Breton stated, “art reveals the obscure consciousness of the possible.” However, as it was argued in the last section of this dissertation, through the analysis of the Vaneigemian concept of passive and active nihilism, where the latter coincides with the Situationist strategy of “constructed situations”, it is clear that mere consciousness of the possible is not enough.⁵⁴ As also Benjamin has observed in his visionary and incomplete Arcades project, which also informed the Situationists, his dedication to convolute *N*, derives directly from Marx, stating that: “The reform of consciousness consists solely in... the awakening of the world from its dream about itself.”⁵⁵

51 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books, 2009.

52 Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Donald Nicholson-Smith Trans., London, Rebel Press, 2001, p. 246.

53 See also Raoul Vaneigem, “despair and its supersession”, “Suffering”, *Ibidem*.

54 Guy Debord, “Theses on Cultural Revolution: Internationale Situationniste no. 1, 1958”, *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 54.

55 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Karl Marx, *Der historische Materialismus: Die Frühschriften* (Leipzig <1932>), vol. 1, p. 226 (letter from Marx to Ruge; Kreuznach, September 1843), as quoted by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades*

So if consciousness is shaped by the environment, how can one build a self-consciousness that escapes the limitation of consciousness by the given structure of the environment and its strict functionality? By breaking through catastrophic imaginings, or by developing a revolutionary aesthetics that rearranges the elements of the present to serve it. Becoming aware of this is indeed fundamental, but even more important is becoming aware of one's potential as an agent of change. The aesthetic experience becomes a revelation, not necessarily linked to a vision of decay, but through emphasized elements of discontent. For this reason, the revelation as “the moment of awakening would be identical with the “now of knowability”⁵⁶ – the present to which one is accustomed – where, finally things put on their true face.

Similarly, the Situationists wanted to give reality back its authenticity – that is, to give it back to the individual – the one who makes reality tangible. Vaneigem calls the individual acts of creativity, imagination and inventiveness – one's own raw material, because it is in everyone, even if only a few are aware of it (radical subject) and even fewer have the courage to use it. The raw material with which one can decorate the canvas of the world and transform its appearance into something pleasant to be lived and experienced. The raw material, the stone that is molded, the paint that is poured and takes the form of what one desires and imagines.⁵⁷

For the Situationist International, the individual is indeed the soil – the fertile ground on which the realization of revolutionary potential can be carried out.

For the SI, the individual was not comparable to a passive and static recipient of ideology, unless the individual was given no opportunity to change one's reality. In this sense, the survival of the individual was dependent on the processes of capitalism, as opposed to the free and unfettered shaping of one's own life. In this sense, the SI was always keen to make clear the difference between survival and life. The latter was only possible with the end of capitalism, while mere survival was the only possible life under capitalism, according to them.

In fact, the Situationists advocated the abolition of work and the creation of a society in which individuals could freely pursue their desires.

Project: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London; England, 1999.

56 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Translated and Edited by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, 199, pp. 463-464.

57 Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Donald Nicholson-Smith Trans., London, Rebel Press, 2001, p. 166.

Revelation, self-realization and supersession

At a crucial and indeed a catastrophic moment for French politics and history, the Situationist International reached the peak of its notoriety, during the revolutionary events of May 1968 in Paris. More than eighty thousand people, deeply dissatisfied with their current living conditions, took part in the student and worker riots. The "Strasbourg Scandal" served as a catalyst inspiring the gathering of people on the streets and fueling a desire for catastrophic change to the existing situation. The Situationists saw this moment, the "ripe moment", as an opportunity to dismantle the entire structure of capitalism. They envisioned its collapse when thousands took to the streets instead of contributing to the maintenance and survival of economy, at the work place.

However, it is important to reiterate that since the Situationists did not see themselves as artists, nor exclusively as "Situationists" as was here explained, their aim was to create a passage of transition to a different society. Driven by their kairotic sense of urgency, they saw the upheavals of May '68 as an opportunity to transform life. Their aspirations were clearly visible in the form of graffiti, on the street walls and building facades, during this period. Unfortunately, when the enthusiasm in the media evaporated, the planned revolution did not materialize. De Gaulle's government regained strength, the students went on summer vacation, the workers received symbolic wage increases and the Situationists disbanded shortly after the unsuccessful revolution.

Contrary to the view that the beginning of participatory and politicized art was solely due to the Situationist International, it is important to reiterate that they employed tactics linked to the legacy of the historical avant-garde — Dada, Futurism and Surrealism. These movements had already theorized and challenged the influence of art on the political sphere, by trying to subvert and provoke established ideologies.

Similarly, the Situationists' struggle for social change functioned through their proposed project of the "construction of situations" as a social practice aimed at disalienating the masses from their existing living conditions. Political art, according to this perspective, requires active participants [viveurs], not mere observers [voyeurs], and seeks to create awareness by addressing social issues that everyone can identify with. The SI's engaged *use of art* often focused on common struggles related to survival and promoted awareness of one's own present.

Despite their goal of suppressing traditional art, which they saw as an obstacle on the path to achieving social consciousness, the Situationists openly recognized and criticized the commodification of art in a capitalist society. Rejecting traditional art production, they sought to break the cycle and replace life with the conscious construction of situations — a continuous process akin to creating one's own passionate life. Although he never mentioned the Situationist International in his analysis of the avant-gardes,⁵⁸ Peter Burger has noted that a complete sublation of art and life makes a critique or correction of current conditions impossible, hinders confrontation with discontent and leaves no means of denouncing or correcting troubling aspects.⁵⁹

Moreover, while the Situationists presented an original and influential perspective on society and culture, their ideas and practices had contradictions that prevented the full realization of their vision. Accused of an elitist approach, the Situationists seemed to prioritize intellectual and cultural experimentation over concrete political engagement. This contradiction is evident in their manifesto, in which they emphasize the need to criticize and question social structures, but at the same time exclude those who do not have the same intellectual background as them. The Situationists' legacy is therefore not only complex, but also characterized by controversy over contradictory aspects of their theory and activities.

The Situationists emphasized the imperative of consciousness and employed a Benjaminian dialectical montage to trigger "sparks of realization" through art and resistance. Détourning a Marxian demand echoed by Benjamin in his *Arcades* project, Debord focused on techniques of awakening from a commodified dream that impedes authentic living, while Vaneigem aimed to heighten the consciousness of the individual as a potential agent of change and encourage collaboration in shaping the world. Such awareness should be geared towards making the individual an active agent of history who undertakes collective efforts.

The traces of Situationism are still present today, even if they are often not consciously referenced. Anyone who has access to virtual peer-to-peer-sharing tools can, as McKenzie Wark notes, be

58 See, Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "The Situationist International, Surrealism, and the Difficult Fusion of Art and Politics," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2004, pp. 365–87.

59 Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Michael Shaw, Trans., Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 54.

considered part of Situationist values.⁶⁰ The legacy is to bridge the gap between critical theory and a popular movement's awareness of its own power. Thus, virtual open-source spaces based on collaboration reflect the Situationist practice of merging art and life. Although this idea has not been extended to totality, collective action aims to sensitize others to the truth of our lives as subjects. In doing so, cultural artifacts can simultaneously serve as a conscious reminder of potential and a burden to be overcome and transformed into life.

However, as analyzed in the section concerning the case of *Dismaland*, there is always a danger of semantic oversaturation in the consciousness of the individual, where the perpetuated message loses its meaning because of its ubiquity. While “nonintervention” is an essential feature of the Spectacle which also implies subjective alienation⁶¹ – revolt erupts when the subject consciously seeks to usurp the means of social and cultural production, actively upsetting previously established orders and *reprogramming space* to suit their own most intimate desires for life. Through a subversive approach, then, in Mallarmé's sense, “nothing will have taken place but the place” and the use of art, especially *détournement*, must then reverse the habitual perspective to create a new life, just as in a consumer society art is manipulated to alter perception and support the continuity of the world, this time by subverting this order.

The aesthetic promise

Aesthetics requires a delicate balance that aims to reconcile reason with perceptions to fulfill the “aesthetic promise,” as Lutticken emphasizes.⁶² In the context of this dissertation, such promise envisions a research path that intertwines aesthetics with the perception of decay. In my contribution, I have argued that the visualization of the catastrophic as a means of accelerating decay is essential to lay the groundwork for new constructions to be built “on the ruins”⁶³ of the previous order.

60 McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street: The everyday life and glorious times of the Situationist International*, London: Verso, 2011, p. 42.

61 Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations”, *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 40.

62 Sven Lutticken, “Autonomy as Aesthetic Practice”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, Sage Publications, 2014, pp. 1-14, p. 2.

63 Internationale Situationniste, Questionnaire SI, n.9, 1964, Available online at: <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/questionnaire.html>

In this sense, the link between contemporary art and the norms of Situationism is marked more by traces and tendencies than by a strict adherence to the radical theories of Situationism which aim to completely overturn the prevailing order. Indeed, in their blending with Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism and Action Painting, the Situationists did not prescribe any specific aesthetic requirements or appearance. However, as Claire Bishop and McKenzie Wark have noticed, the SI disseminated the practice of protest as a method of deconstructing and reconstructing what was being denounced. The language of contemporary art is increasingly aligned with social and political language, even extends into cyberspace, as noted in this dissertation.

But as mentioned in the second part of this dissertation, to speak of an aftermath or of consequences in relation to the Situationists implies a return to their heritage, which is ironic in the case of the SI, since they rejected ownership and authorship. This rejection was aimed at preventing stagnation and preserving the collective ownership of culture and knowledge. For the Situationists, on the other hand, it meant being the last avant-garde, leaving the 20th century behind, and promoting the fusion of art and life on the road to the 21st century.⁶⁴

This raises the fundamental question: How can the SI still be relevant today? The unconscious détournement and return to the SI has left traces in various cultural fields. As Jorn suggests, the memories should be preserved but reshaped according to the times. Ironically and coincidentally, the language of contemporary art does not refer to an art historical tradition, but to a social and political language and the reality it implies.

Claire Bishop connects the remnants of the SI project with contemporary art between Research Art and Activist Art. The Situationists mastered the art of interruption, intervention and graffiti art, techniques that find resonance in web hacking and Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) – as the main spaces of production relations and the production of certain kinds of relations. Indeed, interruptionism, exemplified by Debord's 1952 action against Charlie Chaplin's fame and iconification, led to the founding of the SI.⁶⁵ However, the SI was inspired by the transience of things that do not have the possibility of stagnating with time or crystallizing into an ideology, by elevated immortal values that do not correspond to the present time and its living conditions. The SI's favorite example of the perfect artwork, in line with Situationist tendencies, was Jean Tinguely's "Homage to New York"

64 Christopher Gray, "Now the SI", IS no. 9, 1964", *Leaving the 20th Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*, Rebel Press, 1998, p. 1.

65 See, Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 55.

(1960)⁶⁶ – a self-destructing work of art that was thrown away after its performance – a reference to ephemeral art, which as an artifact has left no lasting trace in history nor has been crystallized into a fetish.

For this reason, I think it is important to examine the interconnection between the Situationist International, its critique of capitalist hegemony, catastrophic imaginaries, revolutionary aesthetics and the role of art and the language of culture as a potential agent of change in the context of contemporary society. The Situationists claim that the dominance of late capitalism has created a totality in which capitalist realism encompasses all aspects of reality, imagination and everyday life. In response to this hegemony, individuals and movements have employed catastrophic imaginaries as a means of envisioning an alternative future and challenging the existing and prearranged order of things. In this sense, it is perhaps clear why it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (F. Jameson, 1995) and M. Fisher, 2009), as capitalism is seen as an omnipresent, inescapable totality. In this sense, a catastrophic imaginary towards such a state necessarily anticipates the end of the world [of]– the end of a globalizing culture that colonizes everyday life. As explained in the first section of this dissertation, the 'colonization of everyday life' is a description of the alienating processes of capitalist mechanisms and its inherent ideology, first theorized by Henri Lefebvre (*The Critique of Everyday Life*, 1947). This concept was later adopted as one of the most challenging insights of the Situationists and formed the basis for the perspectives set out in two seminal works: '*The Society of the Spectacle*' by Guy Debord and '*The Revolution of Everyday Life*' by Raoul Vaneigem, both published in 1967.

For this reason, the critical analysis and comparative study of the historical context of the Situationist International movement and its attempt to disrupt the Spectacle of capitalism reveals the interdependence between art, political denunciation and the contemporary co-optation of cultural critique by the capitalist mechanism to neutralize the negative through the aforementioned “false sublation” and assimilation back into the capitalist profit dynamic.

Therefore, the repurposing [détournement] of the "common language" and various forms of discourse in conjunction with a reevaluation of the role of art in society is seen here as crucial to promoting a positive change in dominant ideologies that is occurring on a daily basis.

66 Guy Debord, “Editorial Notes: Absence and Its Costumers”, John Shepley Trans., McDonough, Tom (Ed.), *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, The MIT Press, 2002, p. 79.

In this sense, as the Situationists teach, construction and destruction are two aspects of the same process of undermining the habitual appearance of reality. The SI have always advocated a reorganization of culture that corresponds to one's own society, without retreating into the distant confines of the past.

Limitations and challenges of the dissertation

This dissertation faces several limitations, which are primarily rooted in the overall scarcity of research and analysis on the Situationist International. The SI, usually regarded as a radical niche movement, has often been dismissed in the broader context of art as too anarchistic or too small to have a significant impact on art history and culture. Only recently have some studies and books recognized the relevance of the SI to art history and culture, focusing on Guy Debord's concept of the "spectacle" and overlooking, for example, the texts of Raoul Vaneigem.

Moreover, due to its often obscure, cryptic and at times violent language, usually characterized by catastrophic assertions, and its brief and imperative theses, the SI has often been misinterpreted and treated superficially in contemporary critical theory – the Situationist critique of the spectacle has long been understood only as a critique of visual culture and the purely visual components of society, whereas the critique of the spectacle is in fact a critique of an entire historical period, considered in its totality and coinciding with the time of the SI's emergence as a movement. The *spectacle* should thus be seen as the totality of the commodity-driven system of production, or the sole language of capitalism and its practices.

Another problem, as Ken Knabb noted in his annotated version of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, is that the Situationists' theories and theses are themselves the *détournement* of other theories, philosophers and propositions.⁶⁷ Therefore, it is both difficult and very time-consuming to understand the essence of their works without carefully looking up, studying and comparing the often obscure and cryptic sources of the Situationists' quotations, citations and philosophy. As mentioned earlier and also noted by Hal Foster, many artists have unconsciously used Situationist methods and techniques in the realization of their art. The SI methods, which sought not to contribute to art

⁶⁷ See, Ken Knabb, "Notes", *Guy Debord's The Society of the Spectacle: Annotated Edition*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014, p. 119.

production, which was seen as another object of a capitalist nature, extended their theories to a very broad and expanded concept of culture that really went beyond art and touched on aspects of today's formation and philosophy of digital and especially hacker culture – hacker activism (hacktivism) -- which was evident in the 1964 SI exhibition in Odense, *The Destruction of RSG-6* (see also McKenzie Wark's *A Hacker Manifesto*, 2004).

Another factor in this sense is the task of distinguishing their subversive theories against art production from their deployment within art production, such as the comparison between the relational aesthetics of Nicolas Bourriaud or his notion of the artist as cultural disk jockey (*Postproduction*, 2002). In fact, Bourriaud is considered to have misinterpreted the SI's main aims and intentions by adapting their theories to the art world, which is the exact opposite of what the Situationists intended.

A limitation of this dissertation is also evident in an overly extensive section devoted to Banksy's installation "Dismaland". Although other artworks and artists have also been analyzed in this dissertation, I feel that Dismaland really needs all the pages I have devoted to it here, given the fact that the installation is not just an artwork, but an exhibition and installation curated by Banksy and involving many other artworks and artists, as has already been reported – comparable in nature and in some ways the opposite of Crystal Palace, as has also been claimed. Moreover, Dismaland can offer this necessary "awareness of the possibility of supersession,"⁶⁸ which for the SI is mediated by "any sort of form within the framework of cultural decomposition,"⁶⁹ quite literally in this case.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Dismaland is a strong trace of Situationist philosophy, revealing not only Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, but also tying in with social theories of the "new Spirit of capitalism" – of an "improved consumerism", more affectionate consumer relations and affective labor, as well as the "art of protest" and activism as labor. Dismaland also shows aspects of postmodernism and has traces of current theories of "metamodernism" (2013) – which I think can be seen as a different kind of society that has already adapted to the language of the spectacle and uses it against the spectacle. But to reiterate, the SI was never overtly apocalyptic or catastrophic, though they do cite a millenarian book by Norman Cohn on apocalypses, nonetheless they have an explicit kairotic sense of

68 Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Donald Nicholson-Smith Trans., London, Rebel Press, 2001, p. 152.

69 Guy Debord, "Theses on Cultural Revolution: Internationale Situationniste no. 1 (1958)", *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb Ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p.54.

urgency and immediate action in the present, typical of apocalyptic and catastrophic discourses, waiting to act when the moment is ripe – which for them coincided with their own present.

A limitation of this dissertation could be seen in the lack of comparison between the Situationist and classical concepts of aesthetics, such as Kant's and Schiller's aesthetics understood as the harmony of reason with the senses. In this context, however, I would like to clarify that aesthetics in my present work is actually understood in the sense of Marxist aesthetics, as the cultivation of the individual into a worldview, aesthetics as a *Bildung* (although this is indeed reminiscent of Schiller's notion of *Ästhetische Erziehung*), as the formation of one's own relationship to the world. Furthermore, such a process of cultivation into culture, is also the individual's "thrownness" in a ready-made *Weltanschauung* that reiterates and perpetuates the world and its understanding in a cycle. On the other hand, the dissertation's stance on aesthetics is also informed by Rancière's notions of the connection between aesthetic regimes and politics, which are always interdependent and always mutually revelatory. I have focused on contemporary social and cultural theory, following Hal Foster's approach set out in his foreword to *The Anti-Aesthetic* (1983), a study of contemporary culture informed by its own condition and philosophy, since the study of SI and its consequences undeniably requires a multidisciplinary approach. And since the collective social imagination is always connected to its present and to its inherent possibilities, the anti-aesthetics of a catastrophic imaginary can postulate a way out of the dominant ideology of the present, which is seen here as all-encompassing and inescapable.

However, the above limitations undoubtedly also serve as possibilities for further research and offer potential avenues for expanding the hitherto very scarce and limited understanding of the influence and relevance of the Situationist International in contemporary culture and the potential for the formation of alternative visions of the world based on the inescapability of ideology.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Rejection of ideology by the Situationist International (SI):

The dissertation helps to form a coherent understanding the anti-ideological stance of the Situationist International (SI). It emphasizes its refusal to subscribe to or form an ideology, including Marxism,⁷⁰ or into forming one, such as Situationism itself. This refusal is analyzed as a critique of ‘false consciousness’, marking a significant aspect of the SI's worldview and methods. As explained in the first pages of this dissertation, the SI declared themselves to be anti-Situationists — linkage to an ideology and regarded any ideology as false consciousness, an inverted, inauthentic world, hypostatized into a unique perspective.

2. Raoul Vaneigem's Active Nihilism and its alignment with revolutionary Situationist strategies:

The work sheds light on Raoul Vaneigem's idea of “active nihilism”, emphasizing its radical rejection of the prevailing social order and its use of creativity to rearrange subjective reality. The dissertation draws parallels between active nihilism and revolutionary techniques such as *détournement* and the creation of situations, revealing that "active nihilism" is synonymous with the "construction of situations". To my knowledge this is new in the field of the previous studies concerning the SI movement and their theories. For Vaneigem, active nihilism means the rejection of the existing social order and values and the active creation of new forms of life and its meaning. Affinities with techniques such as *détournement* and the creation of situations are explored, all of which aim to shatter established structures for critical reflection, personal liberation from ideological constraints and the formation of new social relations with a collective desire to build a better society.

3. Catastrophic imaginaries as revolutionary aesthetics:

The concept of catastrophic imaginaries as revolutionary aesthetics is here seen as a metaphor for positive change. The dissertation explores how these imaginaries, at once despairing and comforting, serve as visions for betterment. Furthermore, the reorganization of the visible and sensible is proposed

⁷⁰ See, Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 38, thesis 84 where Debord critically asserts that Marx's theory has been transmuted into ‘Marxism’ – a precise science, rather than the manual to instruct on the ways to achieve and fulfill an actual revolution.

as a means of liberating spaces for a new beginning by reconciling catastrophic imaginaries with a revolutionary aesthetics. This can be imagined as a harmonious, chiasmic structure in which the elements are in constant tension with each other, but this is resolved in the overall appearance and nature of the harmonious and unifying structure. Catastrophic imaginaries and revolutionary aesthetics occur simultaneously in "other spaces" of arrangement - in *heterotopias* - as asserted in the last section of this dissertation.

4. Orders of simulacra and lived-experience

In the dissertation, I referred to Baudrillard's theories dealing with the second and third order of representation, namely the simulacrum and the hyperreal, as a subsequent phase of the spectacle as advanced by the Situationists. The concepts of Debord and Baudrillard are therefore not, as is often the case, to be understood as similar or synonymous, but as complementary in describing the symptoms and character of a historical period of late capitalism.

5. Intersection between Situationist catastrophism and digital activism

I have explored the interrelation between the concepts of Situationist International (SI), revolutionary aesthetics, catastrophic imagery in contemporary political art and the influence of digital culture and memes/NFTs. This convergence in the field of digital activism is elucidated as a strategic means of subverting prevailing systems of domination. The analysis offered reveals the connections embedded in contemporary cultural and political expressions

6. Psychogeography as a Hegelo-Marxian synthesis in the dialectical movement between consciousness and environment

As already mentioned in the last section and chapters of this paper, I have proposed that Situationist psychogeography be viewed as the synthesis between two opposite stances in the formation of consciousness in a dialogue or depending on the environment/conditions/life of the individual and its creation. In this sense, psychogeography is the chiasmic structure which balances the two stances – these dichotomies are finally in harmony through Situationist techniques – balanced through a continuous

oscillation in-between the mind forming the world and the world forming the mind. Only in this way could agency be achieved for the subject, who then is the conscious creator of history.

7. Intersecting crises of representation and aesthetic ruptures:

Having established that apocalyptic imaginaries and revolutionary aesthetics share a common ground – the desire to transform the cultural object and its context through the necessary reversal of perspective – in order to revitalize the subject and its environment – this claim is also about a crisis of representation and an aesthetic rupture.⁷¹ It becomes a critique of representation and a critique of the world because they so coincidentally overlap. This assertion is found not only in postmodern critique, but also in Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*. In Debord's seminal text, the world and its representation are not yet identical: the world, according to Debord and the SI, is represented in the spectacle, as the spectacle – the commodity system, as an inverted world. It must be put on its feet. Here, at this stage, the world and its reality are not yet completely transformed into a simulacrum, as is the case with Baudrillard. In this sense, the dissertation establishes a critical overlap between the crisis of representation and the concept of aesthetic rupture, emphasizing its importance for postmodern critique and Debord's "spectacle". This Baudrillardian theory is often referred to as post-Situationist and marks a dynamic development in cultural and aesthetic thought.

The contributions listed above aim to enrich the understanding and exploration of the Situationist legacy and its often overlooked influence on contemporary revolutionary thought and expression of the desire for social change, as well as the transfigurative potential of collective catastrophic imaginaries in relation to the contemporary conditions and revolutionary aesthetics that also shape the landscape of digital activism, along with the evolving nature of the representation of contemporary conditions and corresponding lived experience.

71 See, Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface", *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Ed. Hal Foster, Washington: Bay Press, 1983, pp. xii-xiii.

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