

# Architecture Culture 1943-1968

**A Documentary Anthology**

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with the collaboration of Edward Eigen

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Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

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# 1953

By the late 1920s the "heroic" period of the avant-garde had ended with a return to order in most countries. The war and its aftermath had had a further chilling effect on radical aesthetics. In this climate the International Situationist movement was something of an exception. Founded in Italy in 1957 by Guy Debord, Asger Jorn, Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, and five others, it was collaged out of a handful of experimental groups alive in the late 1940s and 1950s, notably the Lettrist International and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. For a little more than a decade, in the course of internal transformations, the small cadre of artists and intellectuals who made up the group succeeded in producing a prophetic critique of art and society couched in terms of the city, the mass media, and the relations of everyday life. They augured the resurgence of an oppositional culture that would come to fruition in the student strikes of 1968.

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The following writing by **Ivan Chtcheglov** represents the original expression of the idea of unitary urbanism, a concept central to the Situationist movement in the late 1950s. It was published in the first issue of the *Internationale situationniste* bulletin in June 1958 under Chtcheglov's pseudonym, Gilles Ivain, with the following note: "The International Lettrist had adopted this report on urbanism by Gilles Ivain in October 1953; it constitutes a decisive element of the new orientation then taken by the experimental avant-garde." A fantasy evoking the oneiric flâneurism of Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* and reminiscent of the "transrational" architectural poetics of Velimir Khlebnikov, Chtcheglov-Ivain's text focuses programmatically on the city as a field of social and artistic action. He envisions the urban milieu as a site for the construction of ludic and performative situation-spaces or events. The "first experimental city" would contain rooms "more conducive to dreams than any drug" and a Disneyland of districts where every fantasy could be enacted through "controlled tourism." Through play "the baroque stage of urbanism" could become "a means of knowledge."

The inaugural issue of the *Internationale situationniste* also included the following definitions of concepts central to the Situationist program:

*Constructed situation*: a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events;

*Psychogeography*: the study of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on individuals' emotions and behavior;

*Dérive*: a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. Also used to designate a specific period of continuous deriving;

*Unitary urbanism*: the theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior.

Chtcheglov himself remains an obscure figure. A nineteen-year-old Czech emigré at the time of this writing, he was destined to become a Situationist "from afar," having in 1954 been "demitted" from the Lettrist movement for "mythomania, delirium of interpretation, and lack of revolutionary consciousness." Plans conceived with a roommate that year to blow up the Eiffel Tower landed him first in jail, and then, after subsequent bad behavior, in a mental institution, where he remained in Situationist martyrdom.

*Published as "Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau" in Internationale situationniste 1 (June 1958), p. 15. In English in Ken Knabb, ed. and trans., Situationist International Anthology (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 19. The Internationale situationniste bears this notice: "All the texts published in the Internationale situationniste may be freely reproduced, translated, or adapted, even without indication of source." Translation courtesy of Ken Knabb.*

**Formulary for a New Urbanism**  
**Gilles Ivain [Ivan Chtcheglov]**

*Sire, I am from another country.*

We are bored in the city, there is no longer any temple of the sun. Between the legs of the women walking by, the dadaists imagined a monkey wrench and the surrealists a crystal cup. That's lost. We know how to read every promise in faces—the latest stage of morphology. The poetry of the billboards lasted twenty years. We are bored in the city, we really have to strain still to discover mysteries on the sidewalk billboards, the latest state of humor and poetry:

*Shower-Bath of the Patriarchs*  
*Meat Cutting Machines*  
*Notre-Dame Zoo*  
*Sports Pharmacy*  
*Martyrs Provisions*  
*Translucent Concrete*  
*Golden Touch Sawmill*  
*Center for Functional Recuperation*  
*Saint Anne Ambulance*  
*Cafe Fifth Avenue*  
*Prolonged Volunteers Street*  
*Family Boarding House in the Garden*  
*Hotel of Strangers*  
*Wild Street*

And the swimming pool on the Street of Little Girls. And the police station on Rendezvous Street. The medical-surgical clinic and the free placement center on the Quai des Orfèvres. The artificial flowers on Sun Street. The Castle Cellars Hotel, the Ocean Bar, and the Coming and Going Cafe. The Hotel of the Epoch.

And the strange statue of Dr. Philippe Pinel, benefactor of the insane, in the last evenings of summer. To explore Paris.

And you, forgotten, your memories ravaged by the consternations of two hemispheres, stranded in the Red Cellars of Pali-Kao, without music and without geography, no longer setting out for the hacienda *where the roots think of the child and where the wine is finished off with fables from an old almanac*. Now that's finished. You'll never see the hacienda. It doesn't exist.

*The hacienda must be built.*

All cities are geological; you cannot take three steps without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a *closed* landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain *shifting angles*, certain *receding* perspectives, allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, little forgotten bars, mammoth caverns, casino mirrors.

These dated images retain a small catalyzing power, but it is almost impossible to use them in a *symbolic urbanism* without rejuvenating them by giving them a new

meaning. Our imaginations, haunted by old archetypes, have remained far behind the sophistication of the machines. The various attempts to integrate modern science into new myths remain inadequate. Meanwhile abstraction has invaded all the arts, contemporary architecture in particular. Pure plasticity, inanimate, storyless, soothes the eye. Elsewhere other fragmentary beauties can be found—while the promised land of syntheses continually recedes into the distance. Everyone wavers between the emotionally still-alive past and the already dead future.

We will not work to prolong the mechanical civilizations and frigid architecture that ultimately lead to boring leisure.

We propose to invent new, changeable decors.( . . . )

Darkness and obscurity are banished by artificial lighting, and the seasons by air conditioning; night and summer are losing their charm and dawn is disappearing. The man of the cities thinks he has escaped from cosmic reality, but there is no corresponding expansion of his dream life. The reason is clear: dreams spring from reality and are realized in it.

The latest technological developments would make possible the individual's unbroken contact with cosmic reality while eliminating its disagreeable aspects. Stars and rain can be seen through glass ceilings. The mobile house turns with the sun. Its sliding walls enable vegetation to invade life. Mounted on tracks, it can go down to the sea in the morning and return to the forest in the evening.

Architecture is the simplest means of *articulating* time and space, of *modulating* reality, of engendering dreams. It is a matter not only of plastic articulation and modulation expressing an ephemeral beauty, but of a modulation producing influences in accordance with the eternal spectrum of human desires and the progress in realizing them.

The architecture of tomorrow will be a means of modifying present conceptions of time and space. It will be a means of *knowledge* and a *means of action*.

The architectural complex will be modifiable. Its aspect will change totally or partially in accordance with the will of its inhabitants.( . . . )

Past collectives offered the masses an absolute truth and incontrovertible mythical exemplars. The appearance of the notion of *relativity* in the modern mind allows one to surmise the *experimental* aspect of the next civilization (although I'm not satisfied with that word; say, more supple, more "fun"). On the bases of this mobile civilization, architecture will, at least initially, be a means of experimenting with a thousand ways of modifying life, with a view to a mythic synthesis.

A mental disease has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences—sewage system, elevator, bathroom, washing machine.

This state of affairs, arising out of a struggle against poverty, has overshot its ultimate goal—the liberation of man from material cares—and become an obsessive image hanging over the present. Presented with the alternative of love or a garbage disposal unit, young people of all countries have chosen the garbage disposal unit. It has become essential to bring about a complete spiritual transformation by bringing to light forgotten desires and by creating entirely new ones. And by carrying out an *intensive propaganda* in favor of these desires.

We have already pointed out the need of constructing situations as being one of the fundamental desires on which the next civilization will be founded. This need for absolute creation has always been intimately associated with the need to play with architecture, time, and space. ( . . . )

Chirico remains one of the most remarkable architectural precursors. He was grappling with the problems of absences and presences in time and space.

We know that an object that is not consciously noticed at the time of a first visit can, by its absence during subsequent visits, provoke an indefinable impression: as a result of this sighting backward in time, *the absence of the object becomes a presence one can feel*. More precisely: although the quality of the impression generally remains indefinite, it nevertheless varies with the nature of the removed object and importance accorded it by the visitor, ranging from serene joy to terror. (It is of no particular significance that in this specific case memory is the vehicle of these feelings. I only selected this example for its convenience.)

In Chirico's paintings (during his Arcade period) an *empty space* creates a *full-filled time*. It is easy to imagine the fantastic future possibilities of such architecture and its influence on the masses. Today we can have nothing but contempt for a century that relegates such *blueprints* to its so-called museums.

This new vision of time and space, which will be the theoretical basis of future constructions, is still imprecise and will remain so until experimentation with patterns of behavior has taken place in cities specifically established for this purpose, cities assembling—in addition to the facilities necessary for a minimum of comfort and security—buildings charged with evocative power, symbolic edifices representing desires, forces, events past, present, and to come. A rational extension of the old religious systems, of old tales, and above all of psychoanalysis, into architectural expression becomes more and more urgent as all the reasons for becoming impassioned disappear.

Everyone will live in his own personal "cathedral," so to speak. There will be rooms more conducive to dreams than any drug, and houses where one cannot help but love. Others will be irresistibly alluring to travelers . . .

This project could be compared with the Chinese and Japanese gardens in *trompe l'oeil*—with the difference that those gardens are not designed to be lived in at all times—or with the ridiculous labyrinth in the Jardin des Plantes, at the entry to which is written (height of absurdity, Ariadne unemployed): *Games are forbidden in the labyrinth*.

This city could be envisaged in the form of an arbitrary assemblage of castles, grottos, lakes, etc. It would be the baroque stage of urbanism considered as a means of knowledge. But this theoretical phase is already outdated. We know that a modern building could be constructed which would have no resemblance to a medieval castle but which would preserve and enhance the *Castle* poetic power (by the conservation of a strict minimum of lines, the transposition of certain others, the positioning of openings, the topographical location, etc.).

The districts of this city could correspond to the whole spectrum of diverse feelings that one encounters *by chance* in everyday life.

Bizarre Quarter—Happy Quarter (specially reserved for habitation)—Noble and Tragic Quarter (for good children)—Historical Quarter (museums, schools)—Useful Quarter (hospital, tool shops)—Sinister Quarter, etc. And an *Astrolaire* which would group plant species in accordance with the relations they manifest with the stellar rhythm, a planetary garden comparable to that which the astronomer Thomas wants to establish at Laaer Berg in Vienna. Indispensable for giving the inhabitants a consciousness of the cosmic. Perhaps also a Death Quarter, not for dying in but so as to have somewhere to live in peace, and I think here of Mexico and of a principle of

cruelty in innocence that appeals more to me every day.

The Sinister Quarter, for example, would be a good replacement for those hell holes that many people once possessed in their capitals: they symbolized all the evil forces of life. The Sinister Quarter would have no need to harbor real dangers, such as traps, dungeons, or mines. It would be difficult to get into, with a hideous decor (piercing whistles, alarm bells, sirens wailing intermittently, grotesque sculptures, power-driven mobiles, called *Auto-Mobiles*), and as poorly lit at night as it is blindingly lit during the day by an intensive use of reflection. At the center, the "Square of the Appalling Mobile." Saturation of the market with a product causes the product's market value to fall: thus, as they explored the Sinister Quarter, the child and the adult would learn not to fear the anguishing occasions of life, but to be amused by them.

The principal activity of the inhabitants will be the *Continuous Dérive*. The changing of landscapes from one hour to the next will result in complete disorientation. ( . . . )

Later, as the gestures inevitably grow stale, this *dérive* will partially leave the realm of direct experience for that of representation. ( . . . )

The economic obstacles are only apparent. We know that the more a place is *set apart for free play*, the more it influences people's behavior and the greater is its force of attraction. This is demonstrated by the immense prestige of Monaco and Las Vegas—and Reno, that caricature of free love—although they are mere gambling places. Our first experimental city would live largely off tolerated and controlled tourism. Future avant-garde activities and productions would naturally tend to gravitate there. In a few years it would become the intellectual capital of the world and would be universally recognized as such.