

Guy Debord

## On Wild Architecture

It is known that initially the Situationists wanted at the very least to build cities, the environment suitable to the unlimited deployment of new passions. But of course this was not easy and so we found ourselves forced to do much more. And during the entire course of events various partial projects had to be abandoned and a good number of our excellent capacities were not employed, as is the case—but how much more absolutely and sadly—for hundreds of millions of our contemporaries.

On a hill overlooking the Ligurian coast, Asger Jorn has now slightly modified a few old houses and is building a garden to link all of them to each other. What more peaceful commentary could there be? We have become famous, we are told. But our time, which has not yet discovered all of its capacities, is also far from having granted recognition to all of our people. Asger Jorn has done so much, here and there, that many people do not know that above all he was a Situationist, the permanent heretic of a movement that cannot tolerate any orthodoxy. Nobody contributed as much as Jorn did to the origin of this adventure: he found people throughout Europe, he came up with so many ideas, and even in the most cheerful poverty he often found the means to pay off the most urgent debts that we had accumulated at the printers. The fifteen years that have passed since the meeting at Cosio d'Arroscia have indeed begun to change the world, but not our intentions.

Jorn is one of those people who is not changed by success but rather who continuously changes the stakes of success. He is the opposite of those who, at one time, built their careers on the repetition of a single, worn-out artistic gag; he is also the opposite of those who, more recently, claim to establish their generally imaginary quality by the mere affirmation of a revolutionary stance that is both total and totally unemployed. Instead, Asger Jorn did not hesitate to intervene, on even the most modest scale, on all terrains that were accessible to him. At one point he was one of the first to undertake a contemporary critique of that most recent form of repressive architecture, a form that to this day is like oil stains on "the frozen waters of egotistical calculation," and whose tenants and supporters can thus be judged everywhere case by case. And in this Italian dwelling complex, Jorn once again lends a hand and responds to even the concrete question of our appropriation of space, demonstrating that everyone could undertake to reconstruct around themselves the earth, which badly needs it. The painted and sculpted sections, the never-regular stairs between the different levels of ground, the trees, the added elements, a cistern, vines, the most varied sorts of always welcome debris, all thrown together in a perfect disorder, compose one of the most complicated and, ultimately, one of the best unified landscapes that one can traverse in the space of a fraction of a hectare. Everything finds its place there without difficulty.

For anyone who has not forgotten the conflicted and passionate relations and has necessarily remained quite distant from both Situationists and architecture, this must appear to be a sort of inverse Pompei: the relief of a city that was not built. Similarly Umberto Gambetta's collaboration on all aspects of the work gives it, if not the character of a collective game (whose capacities for the overcoming of the separation between culture and daily life were exposed by Jorn), then at least the bare minimum.<sup>1</sup>

The "Facteur Cheval," more of an artist, constructed a monumental architecture on his own;<sup>2</sup> the king of Bavaria had greater means. Among other things and in passing, Jorn sketched a type of village awkwardly confined to the surface of such a little "private property," a creation that bears witness to what one can begin to do "with a little time, luck, health, money, thought (and also) good mood . . .," as formulated by Ivan Chtcheglov, another one of those who laid down the foundations of the Situationist movement.

Good mood was, in any case, never missing from Situationist scandal even at the very center of so many ruptures and violent acts, of incredible claims and unstoppable strategies. Those who love to ponder in vain what history might have been—of the sort: "It would have been better for mankind if those people had never

existed"—will be wondering for quite a while about the following amusing problem: could one not have appeased the Situationists around 1960 by means of a few lucidly conceived recuperative reforms, that is, by giving them two or three cities to construct instead of pushing them to the edge and forcing them to unleash into the world the most dangerous subversion there ever was? But others will surely retort that the consequences would have been the same and that by conceding a little to the Situationists—who had even then never intended to be satisfied with just a little—one would have only increased their requirements and their demands and would have only arrived even faster at the same result.

September 1972

### Notes

1. Umberto Gambetta was the caretaker of Albisola.
2. Ferdinand Cheval (1836–1924), French amateur architect and rural mailman in Hauterives (Drôme), between 1879 and 1912 built single-handedly a strange palace whose delirious baroque character is reminiscent of both the "naive" painting of Henri Rousseau in its integration of the exotic, and of "art brut" in its symbolic and plastic inventiveness. A photograph of André Breton (for whom the Facteur Cheval was very important) in front of the Palais Idéal can be found in Breton's *Les vases communicants* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 163. And as Troels Andersen points out, in the archives of the Silkeborg Museum can be found a photograph of Guy Debord standing in front of the same edifice, under an inscription that reads "where the dream becomes reality."