

# With and Against Cinema

[EDITORS, *INTERNATIONALE SITUATIONNISTE* 1]

TRANSLATED BY JASON E. SMITH

*“Avec et contre le cinéma” is an unsigned “editorial note” published in the first issue of the journal Internationale situationniste in June 1958.<sup>1</sup>*

—Jason E. Smith

The cinema is the central art of our society, in particular in the way that its development is carried out through a continuous integration of new mechanical technologies. The cinema is therefore the best representation of our era of anarchic, juxtaposed (not articulated, merely added up) inventions, not only as an anecdotal or formal expression, but in its material infrastructure as well. After the wide screen, the beginnings of stereo sound, and various attempts at 3-D cinema, the United States presented a procedure called “Circarama” at the Brussels exposition, within which—as *Le Monde* on April 17 [1958] reported—“we find ourselves at the center of the spectacle and live it, since we are an integral part of it. When a car with a camera mounted on it charges through San Francisco’s Chinatown, we experience the same reflexes and sensations as the car’s passengers.”<sup>2</sup> Experiments have also been recently done with an aromatic cinema through the use of aerosols, and undeniably realistic effects are expected of them.

The cinema is in this way presented as a passive substitute for the unitary artistic activity that is now possible. It offers new, unheard-of powers for the worn-down reactionary force of the spectacle without participation. One is not afraid to say that we live in the world we know because we are without freedom at the center of the miserable spectacle, “because we are an integral part of it.” This is no life, and spectators are still not in the world. But those who want to build this world should combat the tendency in the cinema to constitute an anticonstruction of situations (the construction of a slave setting in the lineage of cathedrals) and recognize the interest and inherent value presented by new technical applications (stereo sound, smells).

The lag with which the modern symptoms of art have appeared in the cinema—for example, certain formally destructive works similar to what has been accepted for the last twenty or thirty years in visual art and writing are still rejected even in ciné-clubs—is due not only to either its directly economic fetters or those adorned with idealisms (moral censure), but to

the positive importance of the cinematographic art in modern society. This importance of the cinema stems from the superior means of influence it deploys, and this necessarily leads to increased control over it by the dominant classes. We therefore have to struggle to take hold of a truly experimental sector in the cinema.

We foresee two distinct uses for the cinema: first, its use as a form of propaganda in a presituationist transition period; then its direct use as a constitutive element of a realized situation.

The cinema is in this way comparable to architecture in its current importance in the life of all, by the limitations that close it off to innovation, and by the immense effect the freedom of such innovations cannot fail to have. We must therefore build on the progressive aspects of the industrial cinema, just as by finding an architecture organized around the psychological function of the ambiance we can retrieve the pearl hidden in the dunghill of absolute functionalism.

### Notes

1. “Avec et contre le cinéma” is republished in *Internationale situationniste* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1997), 8–9.

2. [The Brussels exposition referred to here is the 1958 World’s Fair in Brussels. The “Circarama” technology used eleven 16 mm projectors and screens that completely surrounded the viewer. The name is derived from the earlier “Cinerama” technology, which used three 35 mm projectors and a wide, curved screen. The film shown in Brussels was Disney’s *America the Beautiful*.—Trans.]