

A Few Propositions Concerning The Concepts 'Face Of The Earth,' 'Urban Development,' and 'Art' [Original in English. Summary notes of 'Le visage de la terre,'

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1 The change in the 'face of the earth' has historically been accompanied by conflict among men, the struggle for power between man and man, between group and group. Therefore the changes in the appearance of the earth, although brought by men, are almost always brought about at the expense of other men. Thus the urbanization of North America, for example, cannot be dissociated from the extermination of the Indians.

2 The historic moment when the face of the earth will be subject to a systematic change in accordance with the wishes and needs of humanity as a whole can only be realized by a world-wide revolution which will put an end to the situation where men have power over men. The condition for this, i.e. the main issue at stake, is the socialization of the earth's surface and all its means of production.

3 Without this prospect of revolution, it is impossible to arrive at a value-judgment of the numerous forms of construction and destruction that together bring about a change in the face of the earth. 'Change' in itself can be no criterion for the interests of humanity, not even a criterion for creativity, as long as the effect of the intervention does not come under human control. The impending atomic devastation, which would cause the greatest change in the face of the earth that we can imagine, would also signify the absolute zero of human creativity.

4 In looking at changes on a smaller scale – for example so-called 'town and country planning' within the area of a country like Holland – we see that neither the wishes or interests of the population, nor even the creativity of the planners, play a decisive role in the 'planning.' On the contrary, the redistribution of Dutch soil is determined by financial interests. Holland is, in terms of the relationship between its surface-area and size of population, the most densely populated country in the world. This has led, in a short span of years, to such a deterioration in environmental conditions that the population has taken up arms in protest. The pollution of air, water and soil has become of a direct threat to human life, both here and in other industrial countries. This threat can only be removed by removing its

cause, i.e. by an international rationalization of production, which is possible only if the means of production become common property.

5 The slum-clearance programs in town-centers in Holland and other industrial countries lead in effect to a deportation of the population to areas further away where land is for the time being cheaper, to an unrooting of the inhabitants and a conscious destruction of their traditional environment for the benefit of land speculators. This state of affairs is a direct consequence of the continued existence of land-ownership and of the fact that the development of the land is determined by the returns on the value of the property. If this tendency is allowed to continue indefinitely we shall be able to look forward to a future where Dutch soil has become too expensive for Dutchmen to live on it, and a forced emigration will take place to cheaper land elsewhere.

6 The withdrawal of land from man's use, the 'dehumanization' of the earth such as is happening at the moment in industrial countries, means, in effect, the absorbing of available living space, an appropriation similar to that which Marx, ridiculing Adam Smith, called 'the so-called original accumulation' in *Das Kapital*. Indeed, we can nowadays talk of an 'original accumulation' of space in the sense Marx meant it – the deprivation of the weak by the strong. For example, space originally collectively used, such as streets and squares in towns now overrun by motor-traffic, is now slowly becoming the exclusive domain of parked vehicles. This space is eventually annexed by municipal authorities and subsequently let out as parking space or turned over to car-parks.

7 The enlisting of the help of artists to design new urban development schemes may benefit the aesthetic quality of these areas, but cannot offer a substitute for a lost environment. An environmental atmosphere fit to live in is the result of the relation between material surroundings and the behavior pattern of the inhabitants, a relationship which can be frustrating as well as stimulating. It is conceivable that artists could have a stimulating role to play in close co-

operation with the population. The initiative would, however, have to come from the people themselves, and that implies a freedom that does not yet exist.

8 The traditional role of the artist as a specialist in creativity goes hand in hand with a social structure in which the creative urge of the majority of the people is thwarted by the struggle for existence. Automation offers material opportunities for the establishment of a society where man is free of this struggle, where he no longer needs to spend his energy on nothing more than keeping body and soul together. In such a society, creativity will no longer be the exception but common practice, which means that creative activity will no longer need to be directed at producing objects – 'works of art' – that stand outside daily life. Instead, daily life itself, including the environmental conditions of daily life, will become the object of creative change.

9 Although artistic experiments such as 'happening,' 'environment,' and 'land-art' indicate that artists are already feeling the need to collectivize the creative process, there is evidence that such experiments are doomed from the outset as long as they remain mere spectacle, i.e. as long as they are not the product of a real collective. Only then will we be able to talk in terms of a transformation of environment and not, as is now the case, of the transformation of a visual object brought about by one or more individuals for passive observers. Environmental change can only be brought about by the participation of all those concerned, as an essential part of every-day life.

However, collective creativity, like that of the individual, is dependent on freedom. Collective freedom can only be based on collective ownership, ownership of the means of production that make this freedom possible.

10 Post-revolutionary freedom, based on the full profit of an automated production apparatus for the whole of humanity, will allow a creative potential to develop which will defy comparison with any previous culture. The mass-culture of an era of leisure will be of a completely new type, compared with which earlier class-structured cultures will seem insignificant.