Situationist Theses on Traffic

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1959

1
A mistake made by all the city planners is to consider the private automobile (and its by-products, such as the motorcycle) as essentially a means of transportation. In reality, it is the most notable material symbol of the notion of happiness that developed capitalism tends to spread throughout the society. The automobile is at the center of this general propaganda, both as supreme good of an alienated life and as essential product of the capitalist market: It is generally being said this year that American economic prosperity is soon going to depend on the success of the slogan “Two cars per family.”

2
Commuting time, as Le Corbusier rightly noted, is a surplus labor which correspondingly reduces the amount of “free” time.

3
We must replace travel as an adjunct to work with travel as a pleasure.

4
To want to redesign architecture to accord with the needs of the present massive and parasitical existence of private automobiles re-
flects the most unrealistic misapprehension of where the real prob-
lems lie. Instead, architecture must be transformed to accord with
the whole development of the society, criticizing all the transitory
values linked to obsolete forms of social relationships (in the first
rank of which is the family).

Even if, during a transitional period, we temporarily accept a
rigid division between work zones and residence zones, we must
at least envisage a third sphere: that of life itself (the sphere of free-
dom and leisure — the essence of life). Unitary urbanism acknowled-
ges no boundaries; it aims to form an integrated human milieu
in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will fi-
nally be dissolved. But before this is possible, the minimum action
of unitary urbanism is to extend the terrain of play to all desirable
constructions. This terrain will be at the level of complexity of an
old city.

It is not a matter of opposing the automobile as an evil in itself. It
is its extreme concentration in the cities that has led to the negation
of its function. Urbanism should certainly not ignore the automo-
bile, but even less should it accept it as its central theme. It should
reckon on gradually phasing it out. In any case, we can envision
the banning of auto traffic from the central areas of certain new
complexes, as well as from a few old cities.

Those who believe that the automobile is eternal are not think-
ing, even from a strictly technological standpoint, of other future
forms of transportation. For example, certain models of one-man
helicopters currently being tested by the US Army will probably
have spread to the general public within twenty years.

The breaking up of the dialectic of the human milieu in favor of
automobiles (the projected freeways in Paris will entail the demol-
tion of thousands of houses and apartments although the housing

Revolutionary urbanists will not limit their concern to the cir-
culation of things, or to the circulation of human beings trapped
in a world of things. They will try to break these topological
chains, paving the way with their experiments for a human journey
through authentic life.