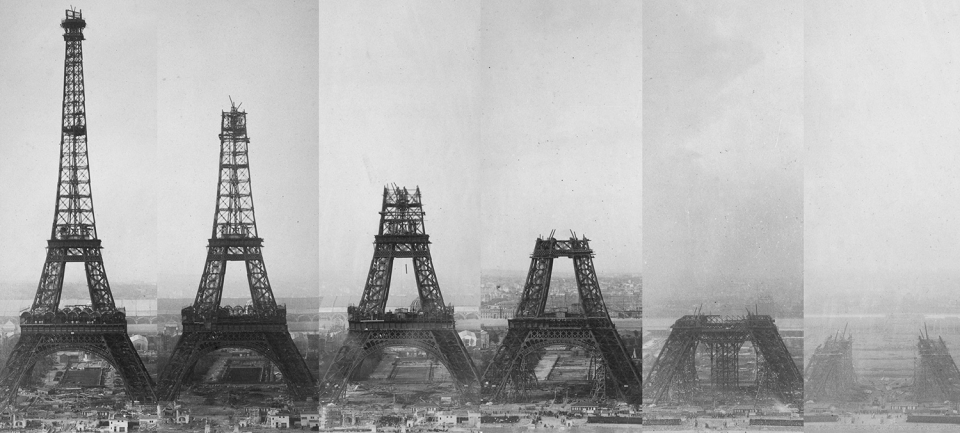


FORMULARY FOR  
A NEW URBANISM  
IVAN CHTCHEGLOV



# FORMULARY FOR A NEW URBANISM

IVAN CHTCHEGLOV

1953

Translation from the French by Ken Knabb.

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<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/Chtcheglov.htm>



## SIRE, I AM FROM THE OTHER 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 to still discover mysteries on the sidewalk billboards, the latest state of humor and poetry:

*Showerbath 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*

*Café 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.<sup>1</sup> The artificial flowers on Sun Street. The Castle Cellars Hotel, the Ocean Bar and the Coming and Going Café. The Hotel of the Epoch.

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.<sup>1</sup> The artificial flowers on Sun Street. The Castle Cellars Hotel, the Ocean Bar and the Coming and Going Café. The Hotel of the Epoch.

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

And you, forgotten, your memories ravaged by all 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*. That's all over. You'll never see the hacienda. It doesn't exist.

*The hacienda must be built.*

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1. The humor and/or poetry of some of the signs in this list is obvious, but in other cases it will be obscure for the non-French reader. Quai des Orfèvres, for example, is the headquarters of the Paris Police Department and placement means not only job placement but also arrest. Saint-Anne's is a street name but also a well-known mental asylum. Some of the other oddities stem from the Parisian habit of naming stores after their street names, which are often rather picturesque, in many cases dating back to the Middle Ages. "Alimentation des Martyrs," for example, was probably a grocery store located on Rue des Martyrs.

All cities are geological. You can't 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. There was a certain charm in horses born from the sea or magical dwarves dressed in gold, but they are in no way adapted to the demands of modern life. For we are in the twentieth century, even if few people are aware of it. Our imaginations, haunted by the 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 and storyless, soothes the eye. Elsewhere other fragmentary beauties can be found – while the promised land of new syntheses continually recedes into the distance. Everyone wavers between the emotionally still-alive past and the already dead future.

We don't intend to prolong the mechanistic civilizations and frigid architecture that ultimately lead to boring leisure.

We propose to invent new, changeable decors.

\* \* \*

We will leave Monsieur Le Corbusier's style to him, a style suitable for factories and hospitals, and no doubt eventually for prisons. (Doesn't he already build churches?) Some sort of psychological repression dominates this individual – whose face is as ugly as his conceptions of the world – such that he wants to squash people under ignoble masses of reinforced concrete, a noble material that should rather be used to enable an aerial articulation of space that could surpass the flamboyant Gothic style. His cretinizing influence is immense. A Le Corbusier model is the only image that arouses in me the idea of immediate suicide. He is destroying the last remnants of joy. And of love, passion, freedom.

\* \* \*

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 urban population think they have escaped from cosmic reality, but there is no corresponding expansion of their 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 and 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 fulfilling them.

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

Architectural complexes will be modifiable. Their appearance will change totally or partially in accordance with the will of their inhabitants.

\* \* \*

A new architecture can express nothing less than a new civilization (it is clear that there has been neither civilization nor architecture for centuries, but only experiments, most of which were failures; we can speak of Gothic architecture, but there is no Marxist or capitalist architecture, though these two systems are revealing similar tendencies and goals).

Anyone thus has the right to ask us on what vision of civilization we are going to found an architecture. I



briefly sketch the points of departure for a civilization:

A new conception of space (a religious or non-religious cosmogony).

A new conception of time (counting from zero, various *modes* of temporal development).

A new conception of behaviors (moral, sociological, political, legal; economy is only a part of the laws of behavior accepted by a civilization).

Past collectivities 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; I mean that it will be more flexible, more "playful"). (For a long time it was believed that the Marxist countries were on this path. We now know that this endeavor followed the old normal evolution, arriving in record time at a rigidification of its doctrines and at forms that have become ossified in their decadence. A renewal is perhaps possible, but I will not examine this question here.)

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 an ultimate mythic synthesis.

A mental disease has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences – sewage systems, elevators, bathrooms, washing machines.

This state of affairs, arising out of a struggle against poverty, has overshot its ultimate goal – the liberation of humanity from material cares – and become an omnipresent obsessive image. 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 provoke 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.

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Guy Debord has already pointed out the construction of situations as being one of the fundamental desires on which the next civilization will be founded. This need for total creation has always been intimately associated with the need to play with architecture, time and space. One example will suffice to demonstrate this – a leaflet distributed in the street by the Palais de Paris (manifestations of the collective unconscious always correspond to the affirmations of creators):

BYGONE NEIGHBORHOODS  
Grand Events  
PERIOD MUSIC  
LUMINOUS EFFECTS

## PARIS BY NIGHT

### C O M P L E T E L Y   A N I M A T E D

*The Court of Miracles*: an impressive 300-square-meter reconstruction of a Medieval neighborhood, with rundown houses inhabited by robbers, beggars, bawdy wenches, all subjects of the frightful KING OF THIEVES, who renders justice from his lair.

*The Tower of Nesle*: The sinister Tower profiles its imposing mass against the somber, dark-clouded sky. The Seine laps softly. A boat approaches. Two assassins await their victim...<sup>2</sup>

Other examples of this desire to construct situations can be found in the past. Edgar Allan Poe and his story of the man who devoted his wealth to the construction of landscapes ["The Domain of Arnheim"]. Or the paintings of Claude Lorrain. Many of the latter's admirers are not quite sure to what to attribute the charm of his canvases. They talk about his portrayal of light. It does indeed have a rather mysterious quality, but that does not suffice to explain these paintings' ambience of *perpetual* invitation to voyage. This ambience is provoked by an *unaccustomed architectural space*. The palaces are situated right on the edge of the sea, and

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2. *The Court of Miracles* and *The Tower of Nesle*: allusions to two Medieval tales dramatized, respectively, by Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas.

they have “pointless” hanging gardens whose vegetation appears in the most unexpected places. The incitement to drifting is provoked by the palace doors’ proximity to the ships.

De 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 the 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 De Chirico’s paintings (during his Arcade period) an *empty space* creates a *richly filled time*. It is easy to imagine the fantastic future possibilities of such architecture and its influence on the masses. We can have nothing but contempt for a century that relegates such blueprints to its so-called museums. De Chirico could have been given free reign over Place de la Concorde and its Obelisk, or at least commissioned to design the gardens that “adorn” several entrances to the capital.

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 bringing together – in addition to the facilities necessary for basic comfort and security – buildings charged with evocative power, symbolic edifices representing desires, forces and 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, so to speak, live in their own personal “cathedrals.” 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 that create optical illusions – with the difference that those gardens are not designed to be lived in all the time – or with the ridiculous labyrinth in the Jardin des Plantes, at the entry to which (height of absurdity, Ariadne<sup>3</sup> unemployed) is the sign: *No playing in the labyrinth.*

This city could be envisaged in the form of an arbitrary assemblage of castles, grottos, lakes, etc. It

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3. *Ariadne*: woman in Greek mythology who gave Theseus the thread enabling him to find his way out of the Minotaur's labyrinth.

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 could nevertheless preserve and enhance a "Castle" type of 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 *Astrolarium* which would group plant species in accordance with the relations they manifest with the stellar rhythm, a Planetary Garden along the lines 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* – I'm thinking 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 ill-reputed neighborhoods full of sordid dives and unsavory characters that many peoples 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 was 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, children would learn not to fear the anguishing occasions of life, but to be amused by them.

The main activity of the inhabitants will be CONTINUOUS DRIFTING.<sup>4</sup> The changing of landscapes from one hour to the next will result in total disorientation.

Couples will no longer pass their nights in the home where they live and receive guests, which is nothing but a banal social custom. The chamber of love will be more distant from the center of the city: it will naturally recreate for the partners a sense of *exoticism*<sup>5</sup> in a locale less open to light, more hidden, so as to recover the atmosphere of secrecy. The opposite tendency, seeking a center of thought, will proceed through the same technique.

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4. *DRIFTING*: Elsewhere at this site, the original French term *dérive* is used. See Debord's *Theory of the Dérive*. <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm>

5. *exoticism*: literally *excentricité*, which in French can mean either eccentricity or outlying location.

Later, as the activities inevitably grow stale, this drifting will partially leave the realm of direct experience for that of representation.

Note: A certain Saint-Germain-des Prés,<sup>6</sup> about which no one has yet written, has been the first group functioning on a historical scale within this ethic of drifting. This magical group spirit, which has remained underground up till now, is the only explanation for the enormous influence that a mere *three city blocks* have had on the world, an influence that others have inadequately attempted to explain on the basis of styles of clothing and song, or even more stupidly by the neighborhood's supposedly freer access to prostitution (and Pigalle?).<sup>7</sup>

In forthcoming books we will elucidate the coincidence and *incidences* of the Saint-Germain days (Henry de

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6. *Saint-Germain-des-Prés*: Parisian neighborhood frequented by the lettrists in the early 1950s. It was famous as the scene of postwar bohemianism and existentialism (Camus, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, etc.), but less visibly, in less trendy cafés and less reputable bars, Chtcheglov, Debord and their friends pursued their own adventures, evoked in Debord's *Mémoires* and in two of his films (*On the Passage* and *In girum*) and recounted in detail in Jean-Michel Mension's *The Tribe*

7. *Pigalle*: Parisian red light district. Chtcheglov's point is that the supposed presence of prostitution had nothing to do with Saint-Germain-des-Prés's cultural impact since Pigalle had far more prostitution yet exerted no particular influence.



Béarn's *The New Nomadism*, Guy Debord's *Beautiful Youth*, etc.).<sup>8</sup> This should serve to clarify not only an "aesthetic of behaviors" but practical means for forming new groups, and above all a complete *phenomenology* of couples, encounters and duration which mathematicians and poets will study with profit.

Finally, to those who object that a people cannot live by drifting, it is useful to recall that in every group certain characters (priests or heroes) are charged with representing various tendencies as specialists, in accordance with the dual mechanism of projection and identification. Experience demonstrates that a *dérive* is a good replacement for a Mass: it is more effective in making people enter into communication with the ensemble of energies, seducing them for the benefit of the collectivity.

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 of Reno, that caricature of free love – though 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.

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8. Neither of these books were written. Henry de Béarn, another Lettrist International member, was a close friend of Chtcheglov's.

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“Ivan Chtcheglov participated in the ventures that were at the origin of the situationist movement, and his role in it has been irreplaceable, both in its theoretical endeavors and in its practical activity (the *dérive* experiments). In 1953, at the age of 19, he had already drafted – under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain – the text entitled *Formulary for a New Urbanism*, which was later published in the first issue of *Internationale Situationniste*. Having passed the last five years in a psychiatric clinic, where he still is, he reestablished contact with us only long after the formation of the SI. He is currently working on a revised edition of his 1953 writing on architecture and urbanism. The letters from which the following lines have been excerpted were addressed to Michèle Bernstein and Guy Debord over the last year. The plight to which Ivan Chtcheglov is being subjected can be considered as one of modern society’s increasingly sophisticated methods of control over people’s lives, a control that in previous times was reflected in atheists being condemned to the Bastille, for example, or political opponents to exile.”

Introductory note to Chtcheglov’s *Letters from Afar*, *Internationale Situationniste* #9 (1964).

Ivan Chtcheglov (1933–1998) was a French poet, theorist, and member of Situationist International.

