

the situationists
and the city

**The Situationists
and the City,**
edited by Tom
McDonough (Verso,
£14.99)

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As Rebecca Solnit has said, the great city of walkers and of revolution is Paris. Founded here in 1957, the Situationists combined both walking and revolution in a movement whose ideas continue to inspire urbanists such as Iain Sinclair and Will Self. The key figure in this movement, born among the ruins of Surrealism and Dadism, was Guy Debord, a man committed to “the fragmentary search for a new way of life”. He believed (pace André Breton) that the city was where the imaginary becomes real. Cities were historical and emotional landscapes to be explored by the “*dérive*” - an exercise in urban drifting or postmodern *flânerie* - and then described in “psychogeographic” maps that traced different “ambiances” and revealed buried historical strata. The Situationists wanted future cities to be designed for *dérive*, transformed into utopian environments where “the beauty of situation” would create an enlightened citizenry. Tom McDonough’s new translations of key urbanist texts show that the Situationists were radical, idealistic but above all delightfully Parisian.

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