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Toward a Critical Art Theory

Gene Ray

Critical theory rejects the given world and looks beyond it. In reflection on art, too, we need to distinguish between uncritical, or affirmative, theory and a *critical* theory that rejects the *given* art and looks beyond it. Critical *art* theory cannot limit itself to the reception and interpretation of art, as that now exists under capitalism. Because it will recognize that art as it is currently institutionalized and practiced – business as usual in the current "art world" – is in the deepest and most unavoidable sense "art under capitalism," art under the domination of capitalism, critical art theory will rather be oriented toward a clear break or rupture with the art that capitalism has brought to dominance.

Critical art theory's first task is to understand how the given art supports the given order. It must expose and analyze art's actual social functions under capitalism. What is it *doing*, this whole sphere of activity called art? Any critical theory of art must begin by grasping that the activity of art in its current forms is contradictory. The "art world" is the site of an enormous mobilization of creativity and inventiveness, channeled into the production, reception, and circulation of artworks. The art institutions practice various kinds of direction over this production as a whole, but this direction is not usually *directly* coercive.

Certainly the art market exerts pressures of selection that no artist can ignore, if she or he hopes to make a career. But individual artists are *relatively* free to make the art they choose, according to their own conceptions. It may not sell or make them famous, but they are free to do their thing. Art, then, has not relinquished its historical claim to autonomy within capitalist society, and today the operations of this relative autonomy remain empirically observable.

On the other hand, a critical theorist is bound to see that art as whole is a stabilizing factor in social life. The existence of an art seemingly produced freely and in great abundance is a credit to the given order. Art remains a jewel in power's crown, and the richer, more splendid and exuberant art is, the more it affirms the social status quo. The material reality of capitalist society may be a war of all against all, but in art the utopian impulses that are blocked from actualization in everyday life find an orderly social outlet. The art institutions organize a great variety of activities and agents into a complex systemic unity; the capitalist art system functions as a sub-system of the capitalist world system. Without doubt, some of these activities and artistic products are openly critical and politically committed. But taken *as a whole*, the art system is affirmative[1], in the sense that it converts the totality of art works and artistic practices – the sum of what flows through these circuits of production and reception – into "symbolic legitimation" (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's apt expression for it[2]) of class society. It does so by *simultaneously* encouraging art's autonomous impulses and politically neutralizing what those impulses produce.

Frankfurt Modernism

The Frankfurt theorists pioneered and elaborated this dialectical understanding of art. Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have shown us how art under capitalism can, at the very same time, be both relatively autonomous and instrumentalized into a support for existing society. Every work of art, in Adorno's famous formulation, is both autonomous and a social fact.[3] In the autonomous aspect of art's "double character," the Frankfurt theorists saw an equivalent to the intransigence of critical theory.[4] Free autonomous creation is a form of that reach for an un-alienated humanity described luminously by the young Marx. As such, it always contains a force of resistance to the powers that be, albeit a very fragile one.

Their attempts to rescue and protect this autonomous aspect led the Frankfurt theorists to an absolute investment in the forms of artistic modernism. For them, and above all for Adorno, the modernist artwork or opus was a sensuous manifestation of truth as a social process straining toward human emancipation. The modernist work – and to be sure, what is meant here are the masterworks, the zenith of advanced formal experimentation – is an "enactment of antagonisms," an unreconciled synthesis of "un-unifiable, non-identical elements that grind away at each other."(AT, 262/176, 263/176) A force-field of elements that are both artistic and social, the artwork indirectly or even unconsciously reproduces the conflicts, blockages and revolutionary aspirations of alienated everyday life.[5] They saw this practice of autonomy threatened from two directions. First, from the increasing encroachments of capitalist rationality into the sphere of culture – processes to which Horkheimer and Adorno famously gave the name "culture industry."[6] Second, from political instrumentalization by the Communist Parties and other established powers claiming to be anti-capitalist.

It was in response to his perceptions of this second threat that Adorno issued his notorious condemnation of politicized art.[7] Ostensibly responding to Jean-Paul Sartre's 1948 call for a *littérature engagée*, Adorno's position in fact had already been formed by the interwar context: the liquidation of the artistic avant-gardes in the USSR under Stalin and the Comintern's adoption of socialist realism as the official and only acceptable form of anti-capitalist art.[8] Art that subordinates itself to the direction of a Party was for Adorno a betrayal of art's force of resistance. He took the position that art cannot instrumentalize itself on the basis of political commitments without undermining the autonomy on which it depends and thereby undoing itself as art. Autonomous (modernist) art is political, but only indirectly and only by restricting itself to the practice of its proper autonomy. In short, art must bear its contradiction and not attempt to overcome it. As the culture industry expanded and consolidated its hold over everyday consciousness and, indeed, as struggles of national liberation and urban uprisings politicized campuses over the course of the 1960s, Adorno responded by hardening his position.

There can be little doubt that the given artistic autonomy is threatened by the two tendencies Adorno pointed to. But there is little doubt either that his conception of the problem forecloses its possible solution. Culture industry and official socialist realism were not the only alternatives to the production of autonomist artworks. But Adorno in effect couldn't see these other alternatives because he had no category for them. The most convincing of these alternatives constituted itself by terminating its ties of dependency on the art institutions, abandoning the production of traditional art objects, and relocating its practices to the streets and public spaces. The formation of the Situationist

International (SI) in 1957 was an announcement that this alternative had reached a basic theoretical and practical coherence. [9] Adorno remained blind to it as he continued to polish the *Aesthetic Theory* until his death in 1969. So did his heir, Peter Bürger, who would publish *Theory of the Avant-Garde* in 1974.

Toward a Different Autonomy

With both Adorno and Bürger, the problem can be traced to a theoretically unjustified overinvestment in the work-form of modernist art. Bürger basically rewrites the history of the artistic avant-gardes as the development of the work-as-force-field so dear to Adorno. For Adorno the avant-garde *is* modernist art, identity pure and simple. Bürger makes an important advance beyond this identification by grasping that the "historical" avant-gardes had repudiated artistic autonomy in their efforts to re-link art and life – and that their specificity is to be located in this repudiation. But although Bürger works hard to differentiate his analysis from Adorno's, he returns to the fold, so to speak, by judging this avant-garde attack on the institution of autonomous art to be failure, a "false supersession" (*falsche Aufhebung*) of art into life.[10] The only successful result was an unintended one: after the historical avant-gardes, the organic, harmonized work of traditional art gives way to the (non-organic, allegorical) work as a fragmented unity of disarticulated elements that refuses the semblance of reconciliation. In other words, art cannot repudiate its autonomy, but it can go on endlessly repudiating its own traditions, so long as it does so in the form of modernist works.

This pronouncement of failure and "false supersession" is far too hasty. I will return to this point later. Here I want to question this investment in the institutionalized autonomy of art by

contrasting it to the autonomy constituted through a conscious break with institutionalized art. The Situationist alternative to art under capitalism was a more advanced and theoretically conscious breakout than the often partial and hesitant revolts of the early avant-gardes. (It's true that the rupture with institutionalized art was not accomplished as a single, sudden *coupure*; it was rather a critical process of progressive detachment carried out over the course of the late 1950s and early 1960s and which culminated in the SI's internal prohibition on the pursuit of an art career by any of its members.) Situationist practice was radically politicized, but is not reducible to a simple or total instrumentalization. We can agree with Adorno that artists who paint what the Party says to paint have given up their autonomy; as apologists for the Central Committee's monopoly on autonomy, they are no more than instruments for producing compromised works. But the SI was a group founded on the principle of autonomy – an autonomy not restricted as privilege or specialization, but one that is radicalized through a revolutionary process openly aiming to extend autonomy to all.[11] In its own group process, the SI accepted nothing less than a continuous demonstration of autonomy by its members, who were expected to contribute as full participants in a collective practice.[12] This process didn't always unfold smoothly (what process does?). But the much-criticized exclusions carried out by the group by and large reflect the painful attainment of theoretical coherence and are hardly proof of a lack of autonomy. "Instrumentalization" is the wrong category for a conscious and freely self-generating (ie, autonomous) practice.

Moreover, the Situationists were even more hostile than Adorno to official Communist parties and would-be vanguards.[13] Their experiments in collective autonomy were far removed – and openly critical of – the servility of party militants.[14] Alienation can't be

overcome, as they put it, "by means of alienated forms of struggle."[15] Their critical processing of revolutionary theory and practice was plainly much deeper than Adorno's – and was lived, as it must be, as a real urgency.[16] They carried out an autonomous appropriation of critical theory, developed in a close dialectic with their own radical cultural practices and innovations. As a result, true enough, they ceased to produce modernist artworks. But they never claimed to have gone on with modernism; they claimed rather to have surpassed this dominant conception of art.[17] My point is that Situationist practice – however you categorize or evaluate it – was certainly no less autonomous than the institutionalized production of modernist artworks favored by Adorno. If anything, it was far more autonomous and intransigently critical. In comparison to Situationist practice, which continues to function as a real factor of resistance and emancipation, Adorno's claims for Kafka and Beckett seem laughably inflated.

On the Supersession[18] of Art

Situationist art theory, then, does not suffer from the categorical and conceptual impasses that led Frankfurt art theory to draw the wagons around the modernist artwork. For the Situationists, art could no longer be about the production of objects for exhibition and passive spectatorship. Given the decomposition of contemporary culture – and in passing let's at least note that there is much overlap in the analyses of culture industry and the theory of spectacular society – attempts to maintain or rejuvenate modernism are a losing and illusory enterprise. With regard to the content and meaning of early avant-garde practice, the critical art theory developed by the SI in the late 1950s and early 60s and concisely summarized by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*

in 1967 is basically consistent with Bürger's later theorization. But the two theories diverge irreconcilably in their interpretation of the consequences.

The defect of Bürger's theorization can be located in his historical judgment on the early avant-gardes, because this judgment becomes a categorical foreclosure or blindness. For Bürger, the conclusion that the early avant-gardes failed in their attempts to supersede art follows necessarily from the obvious fact that the institution of art continues: there can be no dialectical overcoming without the negating moment of an abolition. Art is not abolished; therefore, no supersession. This leads Bürger to declare that the early avant-gardes are now to be seen as "historical." Henceforth, attempts to repeat the project of overcoming art can only be *repetitions of failure*; such attempts by the "neo-avant-garde," as Bürger now names it, only serve to consolidate the institutionalization of the historical avant-gardes *as art*. Marcel Duchamp's gesture of signing a urinal or bottle drier was a failed attack on the category of individual production, but repetitions of this gesture merely institutionalized the ready-made as a legitimate art object.(TAG, 71-8/52-7)

The problem here is that Bürger restricts his analysis to *artworks* and to gestures that conform to this category. That he comes close to perceiving that this may be a problem is hinted in those places where he uses the term "manifestation" to refer to avant-garde practice. But soon it is clear that all forms of practice will in the end either be reduced to that category or else not recognized at all: "The efforts to supersede art become artistic manifestations (*Veranstaltungen*) that, independently of their producers' intentions, take on the character of works."(TAG, 80/58) Bürger's limited examples show that what he has in mind by "manifestation" are gestures that already fit the work-form, such as Duchamp's ready-

mades or Surrealist automatic poems – or at most provocations performed before an audience at organized artistic events (*Veranstaltungen*).

Happenings and Situations

Bürger is aware of the "happening" form developed by Allan Kaprow and his collaborators beginning in 1958. But he classes happenings as no more than a neo-avant-garde repetition of Dadaist manifestations, evidence that repeating historical provocations no longer has protest value. He concludes that art today

> "can either resign itself to its autonomy status or organize events (*Veranstaltungen*) to break through that status; however, it cannot simply deny its autonomy status or suppose it has the possibility of direct effectiveness without at the same time betraying art's claim to truth (*Wahrheitsanspruch*)." (TAG, 78/57, translation modified)

Art's "claim to truth," however, turns out to be a normative description of autonomy status itself. Following Adorno, Bürger accepts that it is only art's limited exemption from the instrumental reason dominating everyday life that enables it to recognize and articulate the truth – "truth" here being understood not as a correspondence between reality and its representation but as an implicit critico-utopian evaluation *of reality*. Truth is not conformity to the given, but is rather the negative force of resistance generated by the mere existence of artworks that, obeying no logic but their own, refuse integration. Bürger's argument here merely endorses Adorno's. What it really says is: art can't give up its autonomy status without ceasing to be art.

And the implication is that if art does manage to directly produce political and social effects, it thereby ceases to be art and is no longer his – Bürger's – concern.

But Bürger cannot escape the problem in this way. He has already argued that the aim to produce direct effects (ie, the transformation of art into a practice of life, a *Lebenspraxis*) is precisely what constitutes the avant-garde. So he cannot now give his theorization of the avant-garde permission to ignore the avant-gardes when they do attain their aim. He also attempts to elude the same problem with a variation on the argument. Pulp fiction – in other words, the non-autonomous products of the culture industry – are what you get when you aim at a supersession of art into life.(TAG 73/54) By 1974, there were serious counterexamples for Bürger's argument; the SI even went so far as to spell everything out for him in its own books and theorizations. In this case the blindness is devastating, for the gap between contemporary avant-garde practice and the theory that purports to explain why it is no longer possible invalidates Bürger's work.

This would be the case only if the SI accomplished successful supersessions of art without collapsing into culture industry. The collapse hypothesis is easily dispensed with, since the SI did not indulge in commodity production.[19] But putting Bürger's theory to the test at least helps us to see that any evaluation of Situationist supersessions must take into account the fact that the SI cut its ties to the art institutions and repudiated the work-form of modernist art. For the same cannot be said of Bürger's "neo-avant-garde." Bürger's examples – he briefly discusses Andy Warhol and reproduces images of works by Warhol and Daniel Spoerri (TAG 85/61, 83/62 and 79/58) – are artists who submit *artworks to the institutions for reception*. Even the case of Kaprow, who is not named but can be inferred from Bürger's use of the

term “happening,” doesn’t disturb this commitment to the institutions. Kaprow wanted to investigate or blur the borders between art and life, but he did so under the gaze, as it were, of the institutions, to which he remained dependent.[20] It is in this sense that every happening does indeed, as Bürger claims, take on the character of a work. At most, the happening-form achieved an expansion of the dominant concept of art, but not its negation. The subsequent appearance of the new medium or genre of “performance art” confirms the institutional acceptance (and neutralization) of this direction.

The differences between the happening and the situation are decisive here. As an experimental event that never seriously put its autonomy status in question, the happening staged interactions or exchanges of roles between artist and audience – but in safe, more or less controlled conditions, and ultimately for institutional reception. Only when, as in Jean-Jacques Lebel’s notorious “Festivals of Free Expression” in the mid-1960s, happening-like events sacrificed the element of institutional reception and its implicit appeal for institutional approval did they become something more threatening to the institution of art. On the other hand, the staging of personal risk or even physical danger through the elimination of the conventions that put limits on audience participation, as in Yoko Ono’s *Cut Pieces* of 1964-5 or Marina Abramovic’s *Rhythm 0* (1974), are extremes of performance art that are indeed subject to the dialectic of repetition and the recuperation of protest pointed to by Bürger.

In contrast, a situation – a constructed moment of de-alienated life that activates the social question – does not depend on the dominant conception of art or its institutions to generate its meaning and effects. The Situationists themselves, who continued to criticize contemporary art in the pages of their journal, in 1963

published an incisive discussion of the happening-form and differentiated it from the practice of the SI:

> "The happening is an isolated attempt to construct a situation *on the basis of poverty* (material poverty, poverty of human contact, poverty inherited from the artistic spectacle, poverty of the specific philosophy driven to "ideologize" the reality of these moments). The situations that the SI has defined, on the other hand, can only be constructed on the basis of material and spiritual richness. Which is another way of saying that an outline for the construction of situations must be the game, the serious game, of the revolutionary avant-garde, and cannot exist for those who resign themselves on certain points to political passivity, metaphysical despair, or even the pure and experienced absence of artistic creativity."[21]

Situations activate a revolutionary process, then, but do so by developing social and political efficacy within the found context of material everyday life, rather than through a displacement of everyday elements and encounters into the context of institutionalized art. In this sense, situations are indeed "direct" by Bürger's criteria.[22] The so-called "Strasbourg Scandal" of 1966 is an example of a successful situation that contributed directly to a process of radicalization culminating, in May and June of 1968, in a wildcat general strike of nine million workers throughout France. There moreover is little danger of mistaking or perversely misrecognizing this kind of event with an artwork or happening. The conclusion seems inescapable that the SI renewed – and not merely repeated to no effect – the avant-garde project of overcoming art by turning it into a revolutionary practice of life.

It follows that what Bürger has named the "neo-avant-garde" in order to dismiss it is not avant-garde at all. Those who, like the SI, renewed the avant-garde project were categorically excluded from the analysis. When the repudiation of institutionalized art and the work-form are given their due weight as criteria, then it becomes clear that the avant-garde project of radicalizing artistic autonomy by generalizing it into a social principle is a logic inherent or latent in the capitalist art system. It will be valid to activate this logic – and to actualize it by developing it in the form of practices – just as long as the capitalist art system continues to be organized around an operative principle of relative autonomy. In other words, it will always be valid for artistic agents to reconstitute the avant-garde project through a politicized break with the dominant institutionalized art. True, actualizations of the avant-garde logic cannot be mere repetitions. Each time, they must invent practical forms grounded in and appropriate to the contemporary social reality that is their context. But because this logic amounts to a radical and irreparable break with institutionalized art, there is little risk that such a protest will be reabsorbed through yet another expansion of the dominant concept of art. The SI showed that art could be surpassed in this way in the very period in which, according to Bürger, only impotent repetitions are possible.

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[1] The usage of "affirmative" in this context was established by Herbert Marcuse's classic 1937 critique of bourgeois cultural autonomy,
"Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur" [1937], in *Schriften 3: Aufsätze aus der Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 1934-1941* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1979); in English as "The Affirmative

Character of Culture," in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 128.

[3] Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* [1970] in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), p. 16; in English as *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 5. This work will hereafter be cited as AT.

[4] As Susan Buck-Morss points out, in the case of Adorno, it seems to have been the other way around: his conception of critical theory was shaped *by* his experience of modernist art and music. Buck-Morss, *The origins of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

[5] See AT, 262-96/176-99, 334-87/225-61.

[6] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* [1947] (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1969), pp. 128-76; in English as *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Scmid Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 94-136.

[7] "Commitment" in Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, volume 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). See also AT, 365-8/246-8.

[8] See the debates and exchanges collected in Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1977).

[9] See Guy Debord, "Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale" [1957], in the facsimile reprint of all twelve issues of the SI journal, *Internationale situationniste*, ed. Patrick Mosconi (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1997); in English as "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency," trans. Tom McDonough, in McDonough, ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT press, 2002), p. 29-50. Translations of this and most other Situationist texts can be found online at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/index.html>.

[10] Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, 2nd edition (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 72-3; in English as *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 53-4. Hereafter TAG.

[11] In this the SI is clearly looking back to the early writings of Karl Marx, to the vision of "true communism" as the free development of human possibilities sketched in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and to the dissolution of the division of labor indicated in *The German Ideology*. In the autonomist tradition of critical theory, the notion of a generalized or socialized autonomy is grounded in various ways. See, for example, the section "Autonomy and Alienation" in Cornelius Castoriadis, "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory," a five-part essay published in 1964-5 in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* with which the members of the SI would have been familiar. *The Castoriadis*

Reader, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 177-95.

[12] This becomes clear to anyone who takes the time to work through the many texts on group practice and organizational form published in the twelve issues of the SI's journal. These articles document the process and the critical processing of a collective reach for autonomy. See, for example, the notice to those wanting to join the SI, "Situationist International: Anti-Public Relations Service," *Internationale situationniste* 8 (January 1963), p. 59.

[13] I distinguish, as the SI did, between political vanguards on the Leninist model and artistic avant-gardes.

[14] This hostility to vanguardism as an attempt to monopolize the right to autonomy is legible across the whole body of Situationist writing. For a critique of the militant, see Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Rebel Press, 2003), pp. 107-16, 131-50.

[15] Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* [1967] (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), §122, p. 120; in English as *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994), p. 89. Hereafter cited as SoS.

[16] This processing is summarized in SoS, part IV, "The Proletariat as Subject and Representation."

[17] See SoS, part VIII, "Negation and Consumption in the Cultural Sphere."

[18] In general, I have chosen to translate Hegel's *Aufhebung* (and its cognates) with the term "supersession." I sometimes substitute the terms "overcoming" or "surpassing." But all three terms will

always, and only, be used as renderings or invocations of *Aufhebung*. All three imply a dialectical movement of transformation that both negates some aspects and preserves other aspects of the thing in question; the movement can thus be said to have "negative" and "positive" moments. In the first, the thing is submitted to an encounter with otherness (*Anderssein*) that dissolves its self-unity; in the second, it "returns to itself" enriched, transformed, superseded. My understanding of the *form* of this process comes from its unfolding in *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* especially Hegel's distinction between abstract and dialectical negation at the end of §188 of the famous Master-Slave dialectic. My understanding of Marx's materialist dialectic and Adorno's "negative dialectic" are also grounded in the baseline of these passages from the *Phenomenology*.

[19] It is true that in the early 1960s Situationist Michèle Bernstein wrote two "potboilers," reportedly to raise money for the group. If so, these expedients, which were never claimed as products of the SI, tell us nothing about the status of the SI project itself – nothing more in any case than that in capitalist society the bills must be paid one way or another. More interestingly, these two novels seem to have been sophisticated in ways that surpass the genre of pulp fiction. Both were *romans à clef* based on the radical adventures of Bernstein, Guy Debord, and their lovers and comrades. According to Greil Marcus, *Tous les chevaux du roi* (1960) was a *détournement* (or politicized alteration) of Cholderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses;* according to Debord's biographer, Andrew Hussey, it was a *détournement* of Marcel Carnet's 1942 film *Les Visiteurs*. The second, *La Nuit* (1961), was a parody of the *Nouveau Roman*. In any case, the false supersession thesis can't be established on this basis. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*

(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 422-4; Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 182-2.

[20] See Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life,* ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

[21] Situationist International, "L'Avant-Garde de la Presence," *Internationale situationniste* 8 (January 1963), p. 20; "Editorial Notes: The Avant-Garde of Presence," trans. John Shepley, in McDonough, ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International,* op cit., p. 147.

[22] Of course nothing is purely spontaneous or unmediated, even in everyday life. All meaning is mediated by language, history, and social categories, but this is a different issue. Here, we are concerned with the decisive mediating presence or absence of the institution of art.