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"The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," Internationale situationniste 10 (March 1966).
Buildings on Fire: The Situationist International and the Red Army Faction

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In Guy Debord's late film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978), a correspondence between the Situationist International (SI) and the Red Army Faction (RAF) comes into view. In the middle of the film, the camera rests on two photographs: the exterior of the Stuttgart-Stammheim maximum-security facility, where the RAF's first generation committed suicide in 1976 and 1977 and an earlier press shot of the leftist militants Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin on trial in 1968.1 “La plus belle jeunesse meurt en prison,” reads the narrator.2 The flower of youth dies in prison. From these two documents of the RAF, Debord looks back over the would-be revolution that rocked Europe in the late sixties and the consequences it produced. The sequence calculates a melancholy sum of what the situationists hoped to effect by “putting an end to art,” as Debord described it, by “announcing right in the middle of the cathedral that God was dead,” by “plotting to blow up the Eiffel Tower.”3 This recollection of 1968 prompts the narrator to ask a series of questions—why certain struggles failed, whether the proletariat still existed, and if so, what it might be. Images of a lost Paris flicker across the screen—girls at the thresholds of forgotten cafés, night shots of the Les Halles markets before their condemnation by Pompidou planners—while Debord reminds the viewer of the fate of the 1968-ers: “Suicide carried off many.”4 But then the voice translates the film’s obscure title: we turn in the night, consumed by fire. Debord awakens desire for a turning, a return—out of the ruins, back to the impulses that propelled the SI, the RAF, and other aesthetic and social movements of the time.

Debord wasn’t alone in linking the RAF to the situationists. Especially in recent years, several cultural historians and artists have associated Debord’s "situations" with Baader-Meinhof strikes, although no study has yet explored the relationship between the two groups. Thomas Elsaesser was one of the first scholars to align the movements. In an essay on the mediation of the RAF in television and film, he identifies the common ground occupied by artists and activists in postwar Europe and brings the SI into his analysis.5 Both the situa-
tionists and the RAF worked to disrupt the complacencies of liberal democracy, sometimes taking similar approaches. They drew from the arsenals of anarchism and Marxism and tested their powers in the modern cityscapes that post-war planners brought to life. The SI wanted to screen their aesthetic imagination onto modern Paris; the RAF took refuge in the high-rises of Frankfurt and Hamburg to plot their terror on the German public. Members of both groups were alert to the politics of the image. They worked both with and against the popular press and broadcast television. But whereas Debord critiqued the society of the spectacle—the condition in which capital accumulates and “becomes image”—the leaders of the RAF became fodder for the media machine, leaving a legacy heavy on style but light on political analysis.

An adequate comparison of the RAF and the SI must discern the correspondences between their conceptual and tactical programs; it must also establish the tension between militarization and the radical thought of “ethical militance” that Emily Apter has recently elaborated. To this end, this essay explores how the SI and the RAF’s different definitions of autonomy produced divergent modes of resistance. Debord articulated an institutional critique of the culture industry and reactivated the modernist critical impulse. The RAF, meanwhile, rejected theoretical reflection in favor of direct action; their intellectual backlash threatened to inflame fascism. The German militants took what they considered to be a concrete and practical approach to revolution, but their attempts to gain autonomy ended, paradoxically, in the spectacle that Debord had already analyzed.

The Situation
As Europe recovered from World War II, it encountered challenges to its imperial powers, altered its modes of statecraft, and rushed into technological modernization. The situationists and the RAF both responded to this historical moment, but their initial impulses and dispositions contrasted. Taking an early interest in the ideas of Henri Lefebvre, the SI used his analysis of alienation in everyday life to sharpen their critiques of the built environment. Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, in particular, saw the city as a prime locus of social transformation and envisioned alternative psychogeographies. Condemning the architecture of Le Corbusier and other modernists, they raged against the apartment blocks that were rapidly standardizing French cities and denounced the autoroutes that seemed engineered to level all cultural and historical difference. Debord pitched the program of détournement, or artful diversion, to skew both the Cartesian grids that formatted French cities and the lives that were led in them. Against the conventions of urban planning, the situationists sought to undo design with
the forces of desire.

Like the SI, who wanted to rework and subvert the prefab city and its expanding periphery, the RAF operated within the modern metropolis, calling themselves Stadtguerillas or “urban guerrillas.”9 Breaking away from the protests of the student movement, they moved stealthily between Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Hamburg, and Berlin, renting out high-rise flats and converting them into holding cells for their hostages, as if to détournel the logic of postwar planners. Both the SI and the RAF located the germ of fascism in the processes and products of modernization. As the RAF understood it, the regulation of German metropolises became a metaphor for the homogenization of life in factories and concentration camps. The shopping arcades and housing blocs of West Germany’s Wirtschaftswunder were an extension of this predicament. Exploiting this culture would disrupt authoritarian structures of politics and society. As the RAF leader Gudrun Ensslin saw it, well-executed acts of insurgency would provoke the German state to clamp down and thus betray its will toward domination. Beneath the tenuous institutions of postwar democracy, the RAF sensed the unquelled fervor that drove the Nazi military-industrial complex. RAF attacks would work a homeopathic effect on the body politic, they imagined, strategically conjuring the virus of fascism and inciting Germans to finally kill it off with their own hands.

Vaneigem plotted the main points of the situationist critique of postwar European cities, identifying a concentrationary order in everyday life. In his “Comments against Urbanism,” he surmised that “if the Nazis had known contemporary urbanists, they would have transformed their concentration camps into low-income housing.”9 The SI’s perspective on Auschwitz exemplifies their analysis of the spectacle. Vaneigem saw urban planning, advertising, and ideology as interlinked cogs in an “immense conditioning machine.”10 Debord’s Society of the Spectacle illustrates this with cinematic means, focusing on the “mass character” and “formal poverty” of the new city.11 A key sequence of the film illuminates the situationist concern with German cultural politics, juxtaposing images of Hitler’s concentration camps with several shots of Paris, including one of the barricades of 1968. Edited into this progression are lines that present situationism as a response to the traumas of European totalitarianism: “Social peace, reestablished with such great difficulty, had only lasted a few years when, to herald its end, there appeared those who will enter the annals of crime under the name ‘situationists.’”12 Of the images that appear in this montage, two come forth with particular intensity. Marking the flashpoints of situationist history, they show buildings on fire: the Reichstag in 1933 and the Watts district of Los Angeles in 1965.
Incendiary Logic

The trajectories of the SI and the RAF parted and converged at several points, but they both accelerated around the Watts riots. Followed on television around the world, the insurgence started in a central district of Los Angeles, where wide streets and low-slung buildings defined a neighborhood that was predominantly inhabited by working-class African Americans. Raging against police brutality and failed infrastructure, young people set parked cars on fire, smashed storefronts, and looted from the wrecked shops. Officials needed six days to control the unrest. For decades to come, local activists and social scientists would investigate and rethink the causes and effects of the Watts uprising.14 The situationists, however, were quick to offer an analysis. In a 1966 issue of the SI, they published a commentary on the riots, “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy.”15 The accompanying illustration, which they captioned “Critique of Urbanism,” shows a large shop on fire. White-hot flames burst out of the display windows and consume the upper floors.

At the time, many leftists were obsessed with the idea of riotous explosion. As Gerd Koenen argues in his study of the “red decade” that spanned from the mid-sixties into the seventies, the image of buildings on fire became a radical zeitgeist that traveled from Los Angeles to Paris, then alighted again and headed westward to Germany. Dieter Kunzelmann, a former German member of the SI (by then excommunicated), was one of those who took note of the Watts uprising.16 Like Debord, Kunzelmann fixed on the picture of the flaming storefront window and incorporated it into a subversive leaflet he published with Kommune 1 (K1), a “free love” commune in Berlin.17 The leaflet carried a situationist trace: before Kunzelmann’s expulsion from the SI, he edited the situationist journal Spur.18 Together with his housemates Rainer Langhans and Fritz Teufel, Kunzelmann used the Voltaire flyers as a medium to import situationist détournement into the German alternative scene. Within a few weeks, their avant-garde strategies would combust with the most volatile strains of left-wing extremism in Germany.

On its way from Los Angeles to Berlin, the spark of anarchy touched down in Brussels, where arson in a department store killed 253 people in 1967. When newspapers across the continent covered the fire, Langhans and Teufel diverted the media surge toward their own interests. Belgian investigators never established any political motivation for the event, but the communards reframed it as a protest against the U.S.-led war in Vietnam. The arson was intended, they argued, to bring the war home, to lift the spell of apathy that had settled on post-war Europe. Under the rubric, “When Will Berlin’s Department Stores Burn?” Langhans and Teufel encouraged the K1 audience to at least imagine anarchy in the Federal Republic, if not necessarily to unleash it: “For the first time in a
European metropolis, a burning department store with burning people inside is giving us that crackling Vietnam feeling... that feeling that we in Berlin have missed up to now... Now Brussels has given us the only answer: burn, department store, burn!"\(^9\)

Kommune 1 circulated the leaflet, but none of the members felt moved to act, choosing instead to return to the concerns of the cooperative. However, Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, who had close contacts with K1, were turned on by the incendiary rhetoric. Less than two weeks after the leaflet's publication, they traveled from Frankfurt to Berlin and told the commune of their plans to "play with fire" in German department stores.\(^9\) On the way back, they equipped themselves with homemade explosives and detonators. Baader and Ensslin cruised the Zeil, Frankfurt's high street, and finally entered the Kaufhaus Schneider. Near closing time, when the crowds had thinned, they lodged bombs in the showrooms—a display case in ladies' apparel, a reproduction Biedermeier cabinet in home furnishings. More bombs were then deposited in the nearby Kaufhof department store. At midnight, as planned, the bombs detonated, engulfing the shop floors in flames and sounding alarms across the city. The next day, the fire headlined local papers. Although the arson endangered several individuals in the vicinity of the stores, no one, in the end, sustained injury. Insurance companies bore the costs of repair: DM 282,339 for the Kaufhaus Schneider; DM 390,865 for the Kaufhof.

Within days, Ensslin and Baader were tracked down and arrested, their hearing set for October 1968. Before their trial, however, a Frankfurt court would deliberate the cases of Langhans and Teufel, who were suspected of provoking criminal activity. The jury had to decide whether the K1 leaflet was an expression of artistic freedom or a blueprint for terrorism. Their findings would set an important precedent for Ensslin and Baader's first trial, as well as for the subsequent hearings of other RAF members that would dominate the German public sphere for much of the seventies. The investigators touched upon a central question. How, the courts asked, do we distinguish between aesthetic performance and acts of terror? Their response traced out a genealogy that links the historical avant-garde with later vanguard movements of postwar Europe.

To deliberate the Langhans-Teufel case, the judge convened a board of professors of philosophy, literature, religion, and sociology, and asked them to analyze the K1 publications, paying special attention to "When Will Berlin's Department Stores Burn?" The panel's assessment placed the text within an intellectual field that encompassed Germany's great thinkers as well as some of the most advanced tendencies in continental philosophy. The experts began by engaging two discourses: Schiller's and Kant's classical definitions of beauty, on
one side, and Sartre's arguments for critical engagement, on the other. They surveyed Kant's Critique of Judgment, presenting his concept of art as "purposive without purpose," and contrasted it to Sartre's existentialist insistence on the fundamentally social and political nature of all cultural production.21

Having established this distinction, the experts tried to measure the aesthetic merit of the K1 articles and determine the extent to which they might have provoked Baader and Ensslin. They prefaced their excursus with a pointed question about the text's seriousness or "Ernsthaftigkeit."22 Taking the panel's query as their cue, Langhans and Teufel interrupted the proceedings with an outcry. "Anyone who feels he's been provoked to arson is a fool," the communards quipped. "And certainly this court has distinguished itself in that regard."23 The parodic interjection prodded the experts' testimony toward the most telling moment of the trial, shifting their reflections from the broader frame of aesthetic theory to the legacy of surrealism. For the duration of their testimony, the expert panel endeavored to delineate the filiations between the article and Europe's historical avant-garde. This move would eventually exculpate Langhans and Teufel.

The experts designated the K1 leaflet as a "surrealist document"—a call for literary imitation, not a terrorist instruction manual. When the judge asked them to substantiate their claim, the panelists offered a definition of surrealism—in their words, an influential, Paris-based movement with unique stylistic devices ("Stilmitteln")—and explained that, among other rhetorical instruments, the surrealists' primary strategy was "the provocative call for acts of violence."24 To distinguish provocation from prescription, Jacob Taubes, the professor of hermeneutics and Judaic studies, paraphrased Raymond Queneau's conceptual program for surrealism: "Among all conditions, the surrealist revolution does not want to change material, visible relations. Much more than this, it wants to set into play the thinking of every single individual."25 Ultimately, the panel convinced the judge that "When Will Berlin's Department Stores Burn?" posed no material threat to the German public. Langhans and Teufel were dismissed, but their case was nonetheless inscribed with a subversive signature. Before the conclusion of the trial, the experts read out a passage from the "Second Surrealist Manifesto" (1930), emphasizing what is perhaps André Breton's most infamous mandate:

The simplest surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd. Anyone who, at least once in his life, has not dreamed of thus putting an end to the petty system of debasement and cretinization in effect has a
well-defined place in that crowd, with his belly at barrel level.\textsuperscript{26}

The citation of the manifesto in the austere quarters of the Frankfurt court triggered a minor convulsion of surrealist energies, as the captive audience heard Breton’s challenge and gasped. There, if nowhere else, art had been forced into life. Kommune 1 had channeled the surrealist impulse. Soon, the RAF would recharge it as political violence.

**Aesthetics and (Internal) Politics**

Baader and Ensslin’s case would also turn on the axis of aesthetics and politics. Their hearing illuminated the points of rupture that distinguished the Zeil fires from the situationist project. It also disclosed the correspondences that linked the arson to the subsequent escalation of RAF violence. When Baader and Ensslin appeared before the court, echoes of the K1 leaflet case reverberated in the chamber. The defendants seemed to enjoy their spot in the limelight, wearing hip leather outfits and playing schoolroom games when the proceedings dragged. In her testimony, Ensslin explained that she and Baader hadn’t intended to endanger human life, only to damage property in protest against the Vietnam War. The two had pursued other channels of political dissent, but as the violence increased in Southeast Asia they had to resort to more radical means. “We have found that words are useless without action,” Ensslin argued.\textsuperscript{27} Putting their wager in these terms, Ensslin marked a fundamental departure from the situationist interventions of Kommune 1. Whereas the RAF turned to armed struggle, K1 kept to a more aesthetic practice. For Ensslin, this rupture was deliberate. While awaiting trial, she explained to a court-appointed psychiatrist that she was determined to effect social changes in Germany and, eventually, the rest of the world. Her mission was political and economic, not an artistic experiment. “We don’t want to be just a page in the history of culture,” Ensslin insisted.\textsuperscript{28}

Despite such anti-aesthetic pronouncements, the European avant-garde did, in fact, cast a long shadow on the RAF, particularly in the group’s early years. Key members of the RAF were active in the visual and performing arts, creating a counterculture that linked major German cities. Andreas Baader belonged to Fassbinder’s circle of filmmakers and admirers in Munich.\textsuperscript{29} Holger Meins studied cinema at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg, where he knew the filmmaker Harun Farocki. Horst Söhnelein directed the Action Theater in Munich. In 1968, after laying the bombs that would start the Frankfurt fires, Ensslin and Baader spent the evening at the Club Voltaire, a locale that associated itself with the dadaists’ Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. As the RAF developed, however, they made conscious efforts to distinguish themselves as
a militant vanguard with an agenda separate from the aesthetic avant-garde. A few minutes after the bombs went off in the Frankfurt department stores, a woman, possibly Ensslin, telephoned the German Press Agency to make this distinction clear. Not wanting their act to be seen as a mere “happening,” she called the fires “a political act of revenge.”

How do the department store bombings in Frankfurt figure into the relationship between the SI and the RAF? When Ensslin and Baader set fire to the Frankfurt Zeil, they diverted and distorted the situationist strategies of Kommune 1 into a program of vanguard militancy. This statement is accurate, yet it suggests that the SI limited its agenda to aesthetics while the RAF’s motivations were purely political. In fact, the two groups operated on both levels. Aesthetic and political drives inflected them at different times and in different ways. Although the SI made its most significant interventions in the fields of visual culture and critical theory, Debord, in particular, tended to privilege the group’s political identity over and against its aesthetic inclinations. At moments when the SI came to crisis, Debord would reach, rhetorically, for his revolver, first reiterating the movement’s political premises, then dramatically expelling offensive members from the inner circle.

The SI reinvented itself through such rejections, dissolving its links to the periphery and tempering an ever-harder core. They studiously avoided defining the term situationism, but such acts of scission nonetheless articulated a negative aesthetic with a force to match any manifesto. These moves also changed the group’s rhetoric, such that it approached the overtly political tenor of the RAF’s later communiqués. At the start, the situationists saw architecture and urbanism as the prime instruments to channel radical desire. But artists and architects were the first to be ejected from the SI. Simon Sadler argues that Debord and the other “hard-liners” eventually turned away from material questions of “spatial location and decor” and concerned themselves more with formal and conceptual matters. Soon they came to regard “the situation” itself as pure “revolutionary consciousness.” RAF insiders chose more brutal methods of expulsion: when Ingeborg Barz tried to defect in 1972, they assassinated her.

The SI distanced itself from terrorist actions, affirming in a 1964 statement that they would “only organize the detonation” of social unrest. “The free explosion,” they asserted, “must escape us and any other control forever.” But as Tom McDonough has demonstrated, this stance didn’t mean that the situationists simply privileged thought over practice. Rather, they resisted the conditions of terrorist organizations—the obsession with operational details, the need for secrecy—and strove to balance their means and ends. Thus, the SI oriented itself toward the public interest. Although its membership dwindled, it always
remained “aboveground.” Several issues of SI, including that which contained “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy,” evince the group’s interest in the social repercussions of their initiatives. And more recently, Retort, a California collective that identifies with the SI, has emphasized that they heed Debord’s warnings against the “narrowness and secretiveness” of political vanguards. In Afflicted Powers, Retort surveys the vanguard ideals linking the RAF with Lenin, Blanqui, Mao, and “the words and actions of bin Laden,” acknowledging them as at once “understandable” and “disastrous.”

Rejecting terror as a political means, Retort has maintained that the society of the spectacle cannot be destroyed “by producing the spectacle of destruction.” From such a renewed Debordian perspective, one perceives an antinomy: the RAF’s underground operations contradicted SI principles, but the deed that inaugurated them—Baader and Ensslin’s crude reenactment of the Watts riots—was a response to the situationists’ provocation.

Toward a Political Economy of the Household Appliance
The Frankfurt court quickly settled the trial of Baader and Ensslin, sentencing them to three years of prison. In 1968, however, Ulrike Meinhof used her column in the New Left journal konkret as a platform to reconsider the case. Her deliberations return to the tensions between aesthetics and politics. Asserting the sanctity of human life, Meinhof begins her essay “Department Store Fire” with a distinction between harming people and destroying property. Although Meinhof doesn’t endorse the actions of Baader and Ensslin, she situates the Frankfurt fires within a matrix of political economy. On one level, she argues, the arson called into question the conditions of postwar commodity culture, in which Germans had shifted from securing basic needs to a historical moment overdetermined by profit motives. The new market facilitated capital accumulation; the social safety net was only a byproduct. “What you find in capitalism, you find in the department store,” she wrote. “What you don’t find in the department store is scarcely found in capitalism, an age of insufficiency and inadequacy: hospitals, schools, kindergartens, health care.”

Media coverage of the fires and the trials could awaken the public to the excesses of consumer society. That alone, however, would fail the imperatives of the present moment. After all, since insurance companies fully covered the damages, Baader and Ensslin’s intervention actually rejuvenated the economy, bleeding it out just enough to stimulate capital’s recuperation and reentrenchment. On a deeper level, Meinhof remarked, the department store arson was hardly an anticapitalist action; rather, it perpetuated “the system.” In her words, the fires themselves were “counter-revolutionary.”

And yet, Meinhof noted, a progressive moment remained in Baader and Ensslin’s intervention. It didn’t consist in the destruction of commodities but rather in the criminal nature of their acts—in legal violation. The law they broke did not protect people; it was framed to protect property. Drawing on André Gorz’s “Toward a Strategy of the Workers’ Movement in Neocapitalism,” Meinhof asked how legislation might be changed to defend individuals against the forces of capitalist accumulation and the “barbaric consequences” of the postwar market. Diverging from the political-economic analysis of the essay, Meinhof’s final two points intersected with a situationist aesthetic. Like the editors of the SI, she expressed a keen interest in the Watts riots, seeing the Los Angeles fires as an important precedent for the arson on the Frankfurt Zeil. To Meinhof, both events illuminated the progressive moment of anarchy. Whoever plunders the burning shops, she maintained, learns that “the system” won’t fall apart when he or she takes what is needed to get by. The looter can learn that a system is rotten when it withholds life’s necessities. In conclusion, Meinhof brought this parallel to bear on the statement of Fritz Teufel at a 1968 Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS) conference: “It is always better to burn a department store than to run one.”

A materialist premise subtends parts of both Meinhof’s essay and the SI issue on the spectacle-commodity economy. To Meinhof, the Watts participants took basic necessities: food, clothing, household things. Conversely, whatever Baader and Ensslin could have managed to steal would have been idle and sundry—the sort of commodities targeted by the situationists in their journal. Yet, as Meinhof remarked parenthetically, there was one important exception: dishwashers. She detailed how demographers had demonstrated that a substantial portion of working, married women in Germany didn’t have the dishwashers they needed. Not only the expense prohibited their acquisition but, frankly, their sheer weight. This, Meinhof suggested, kept the Frankfurt militants from stealing the valued household appliances and delivering them to working wives. (Now that researchers have shown how the acquisition of household appliances tends to raise consumers’ expectations and actually increase the amount of time women spend in their “double shift” of domestic labor, Meinhof’s premise of the liberatory force of dishwashers seems dated.) The message of the department store fires wouldn’t carry far enough, Meinhof concluded, because it limited the public’s focus to the order of the spectacle economy. The matter of real needs remained repressed. Perhaps this insight contributed to Meinhof’s decision, a few years later, to turn the RAF into a terrorist cell.

The situationists developed a more conceptual critique of the Watts riots, taking up not the dishwasher but rather the household air conditioner as their
object of interest. To the situationists, the Watts rioters brought about “the first rebellion in history to justify itself with the argument that there was no air conditioning during a heat wave.” The larceny of such modern conveniences proved the point of the situationist program. “Comfort,” they wrote, “will never be comfortable enough for those who seek what is not on the market.” Watts residents rebelled against the subordination of consumers to commodity values; they refuted the market’s oppressive rationality. The theft of appliances by people whose homes weren’t properly electrified, the SI maintained, rendered “the best image of the lie of affluence transformed into a truth in play.” Looted, merchandise can be subverted and refinished. Purchased with legal tender, it is fetishized as a status symbol.

These two perspectives on the Los Angeles uprising distinguish the RAF’s relative pragmatism—at least in the early years—from the situationist imagination. Whereas Meinhof identified the materialist issues at hand, the situationists’ “Decline and Fall” appreciated the symbolism of Watts residents stealing electrical appliances during a blackout. In a 1953 essay, the situationist Ivan Chtcheglov had anticipated the rioters’ subversive desires and scorned the utilitarian drive of most postwar society. “Presented with the alternative of love or a garbage disposal unit,” he complained, “young people of all countries have chosen the garbage disposal unit.” Chtcheglov’s early visions of playful sprees and dancing in the streets, however, differed from the actual program Debord and company developed over the next twenty years. Subsequent issues of the SI advanced an ever more totalizing critique. Refusing reform, the situationists disregarded the shifting terms of new social movements. Thus they were blind to the feminist critique that Meinhof introduced in “Department Store Fire.”

The Spectacle

In their own ways, both the SI and the RAF warned against the lure of the spectacle. But a striking contrast lay in their different relationships to the media. Especially in the seventies, the RAF’s principle interlocutors were news editors and producers. Meinhof, Baader, and Enslin played to the media, prefacing their acts of subterfuge with telephone calls to news bureaus. When the second generation, still at large, resorted to kidnapping, they mobilized new technologies to pull off their plans. The RAF made media history in 1977 when they took the industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer hostage and videotaped his forced testimony in the so-called people’s prison. Turning their camera into a weapon, they opened a new aperture for terrorism, and we can trace the technologies of today’s Iraqi insurgents back to this foundational moment. In the RAF’s self-production, Schleyer sits before the group’s machine-gun insignia, atoning for
his Nazi past and pleading for government cooperation with the militants. The tapes became part of the RAF’s discursive apparatus. The RAF revolution would be televised, or it would not be.

The situationists, by contrast, resisted mediatization, aiming instead at its negation. A line from Debord’s *In girum imus* seems to address the RAF tactic of playing to the press: “this society signs a sort of peace treaty with its most outspoken enemies by giving them a spot in its spectacle.”48 Caught in the limelight of the German media, the RAF lost some of its sharp edges. If television and tabloids didn’t exactly domesticate its armed struggle, they lent a certain glamour and dynamism to the movement. Both women and men of the RAF and Kommune 1 attracted the camera’s eye: a recurring series of photos in *Bild* and *Der Spiegel* showed some of the more striking upstarts loping around Berlin and Frankfurt with their long, loose hair and, at times, short skirts. Baader, too, gave the opposition a distinctive look. Something of a dandy, he made his mark, according to RAF historians, by insisting on wearing his own, self-tailored velvet trousers while training with the PLO in Yemen while the other comrades wore camouflage.49 Such trappings—more theatrical than feminine—trade-marked the movement. When RAF leaders died in the prime of life, a tragic allure was lent to their legacy. Today the fashion world takes some of its cues from this cultural moment. Editors of the German lifestyle magazine *Tussi Deluxe* ran a terrorist couture feature in 2001, the design house Comme des Garçons ran a Guerrilla Store in Berlin in 2004, and the Hamburg boutique Maegde und Knechte sold underwear silk-screened with the logo “Prada Meinhof.” Together with the proliferation of films about German militancy—from *Starbuck: Holger Meins* (2002), to *The Edukators* (2004), to a brief RAF-inspired sequence of Steven Spielberg’s *Munich* (2005)—this pop culture tendency connotes a reappropriation of the RAF agenda. But the RAF themselves, through their ploy of disguise and self-styling, played into this spectacular co-optation. Indeed they collaborated in the spectacle that still surrounds their campaign.

Debord located the danger of spectacularization not only in society at large but also in his own films. Key interventions—such as the inclusion in *In girum imus* of a photo captioned “age forty-five” that shows him looking bloated and worn out—seem intended to neutralize and even deeroticize the cinematic space. An essay by Asger Jorn positions Debord’s scenarios beyond the circuits of the culture industry, in which fame and careerism obscure aesthetic process and distort political salience.50 These remarks square with a statement Vaneigem made at an SI conference in 1961. The imperative was not, he insisted, to elaborate the spectacle of refusal but rather to refuse the spectacle itself.51 Resisting the aestheticization of politics, Debord took on Vaneigem’s challenge in his films.
Interrogating the notion of the individual, Debord’s films were pitched to resist the allure that surrounded cinema auteurs in the sixties and seventies. Such a critique marked another point of divergence from the RAF and its circles of sympathizers because armed struggle in Germany invited heroization. With few models of rebellion in the postwar period—no James Dean, no Rolling Stones, no Godard—young Germans looked westward for subversive impulses. The emergence of the RAF, in all its fury, gave them more familiar profiles of autonomy and provided a focal point for the militant denazification that many youths took as their cause.

In the late seventies, a multimedia hagiography began to develop around the RAF, amplifying over the next decades to generate a full-blown RAF-Kultur that culminated in the blockbuster show “Regarding Terror” at the Kunst Werke Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin in 2005. This recent formation distinguishes the RAF from other radicals of the sixties and seventies. The aesthetic response to Weathermen or the Black Panthers, for example, has been less resonant. The Weather Underground, with their ordinary, on-campus looks, didn’t hold a grip on mainstream culture the way the RAF has done since the German autumn of 1977. The Black Panthers have also left a legacy that withstands extensive recycling. To date, the iconic photographs of black nationalists raising their fists have resisted misappropriation. Rapid suppression by the American FBI meant the Panthers registered only briefly in the national press. More important, the party’s “ten-point” program for the survival and advancement of African Americans retains its founding urgency, unlike the manifestos and communiqués of the RAF. When the RAF officially disbanded, in 1998, they conceded that the mediatization of the group signaled the failure of their objectives: instead of sparking widespread revolt, the militants’ media encounter fanned the flames of a personality cult and gave the state the justification it needed to clamp down. Coming too close to the spectacle, the RAF’s anti-imperialist mission burned out. But the half-life of their image is remarkably long.

**Terror and Autonomy**

After the SI’s formal dissolution, Debord’s thought turned repeatedly to terrorism, as was the case in his mention of bombing the Eiffel Tower in *In girum imus*. His *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1988, followed the trajectory of Gianfranco Sanguinetti’s *On Terrorism and the State* in its view of the mutually constitutive relationship between democracy and terror. “The story of terrorism,” Debord maintained, “is written by the state.” The citizens (“spectators”) always have a partial grasp of terrorism and militancy. They know just enough to be convinced that “compared with terrorism,” everything else...
must be “more rational and democratic.”

Although some SI texts insist that situationists “should never play with terrorism,” Vaneigem’s writings reveal an interest in the fin de siècle anarchists François Ravachol and Jules Bonnot, who, at times, resorted to terrorist means. To some extent, Vaneigem’s reference to strategic violence and impatience with theoretical reflection prefigure the stance of the RAF’s first generation. At odds with much of Debord’s philosophy and political engagement, Vaneigem’s Revolution in Everyday Life configures a “radical subject” to counter the complacency of postwar life. It privileges “the lightning of violence” over “the long agony of survival” and calls for “new revolutionary tactics.” Whereas Debord exposed the internal contradictions of the spectacle, Vaneigem demanded direct action to negate it as a whole. His radical subject would short-circuit theoretical mediation, quickly reaching an endpoint where historical struggle would be reconciled in an orgasmic convulsion. Vaneigem’s erotics accorded with aspects of the social psychology that inflected the German counterculture, especially Kunzelmann’s Kommune 1. But more than this, his rallying call prefigured a move that German radicals would soon make: once the RAF rejected theoretical debate, they sought a purportedly practical path to violence.

The SI and the RAF both argued for autonomy, but they understood its principles differently. Aligning with the surrealist and dadaist trajectories of the historical avant-garde, the situationists called for the supersession of art. They departed from Kantian aesthetic principles and sought to release the conceptions and conditions of art practice from the strictures of the atelier, the salon, and the museum. The German New Left, meanwhile, redefined the notion of autonomy in the sixties and seventies. Drawing from Herbert Marcuse’s critique of the “one-dimensional” thought that was determined by postwar affluence and the strictures of “administrative society,” young dissidents sought to reclaim parts of several German cities and turn them into autonomous zones. The self-styled Autonomen wanted to make their squats into sites for the “great refusal” that Marcuse described. In his writings, Marcuse exposed structures of imperialist domination and colonialist repression and called for a moral and cultural critique. To some extent, his concept of refusal seems to have converged with (or at least echoed) the situationists’ call to “refuse the spectacle” in 1961. But extremists among the German radicals yearned for revolution and sought out direct and often vulgar applications of Marcuse’s late Marxism, entrenching themselves in street battles as if to defend democracy on an international scale. The RAF stood on the front lines of the antitheoretical vanguard, first conflating their struggle with several movements of national liberation (especially with Vietnam), then entirely dispensing with the question of how and when a revo-
lutionary subject could be defined.

This eclipse of critical autonomy within the RAF connects the extreme left of the seventies with the right-wing nationalists of the Third Reich. Jürgen Habermas was one of the first to warn against this affinity between the “anti-imperialists” and the Nazis. When an anti-imperialist demonstration in 1967 escalated to armed violence, Habermas published a series of articles denouncing the German dissidents’ facile equation of local and international antagonisms. Although he shared their outrage at any use of repression “in the name of freedom,” he warned against the radicals’ “emotional identification” with other oppressed groups, including “the blacks in urban slums.” As Habermas explained, the situations in Vietnam, Los Angeles, and Germany were as “incomparable” as the problems that each posed and the tactics that each demanded. Some of the extraparliamentary opposition were alert to this criticism. Others, especially those who splintered into militant groups like the RAF and the June 2nd Movement (Bewegung 2. Juni) rallied around a distorted sense of internationalism. In a prescient essay of 1968—published two years before the RAF came into formal existence—Habermas diagnosed the increasingly brutal uprisings of students and other radicals as “masochistic.” Condemning their attempts to trigger state violence, he denounced the militants’ agenda, seeing in it the potential for “leftist fascism.”

Although Marcuse, among Frankfurt School thinkers, was the closest ally of the New Left, even he conceded that Germany didn’t present the objective conditions for social revolution. Indeed, ultralefists such as the RAF seemed to confuse regression with revolution, blindly demanding the primacy of action over and against theoretical development. This slant, Theodor Adorno maintained in an exchange with Marcuse, did, in fact, portend a leftist fascism. Denying that the radicals could somehow fast-forward Germany to a more democratic state, he charted parallels between them and the Nazi generations of the thirties: both movements stifled debate and insisted upon technocratic formalism, and—most alarming—the radicals’ pro-Palestinian agenda was approaching anti-Semitism. Indeed, as Wolfgang Kraushaar demonstrates, Dieter Kunzelmann staged an attack on a Jewish community center on November 9, 1969. Together with the group Tupamaros West-Berlin, he planted a bomb in the Berlin center before a memorial ceremony for Kristallnacht in 1939. Although the device never detonated, Kunzelmann’s plan nevertheless signaled the anti-Semitic charge of some German militancy in the postwar years. For Adorno, the New Left was “mixed with a dram of madness,” in which “the totalitarian” resided not simply as a repercussion but in its very telos.

Whether or not all of the New Left harbored authoritarian tendencies, the
RAF inadvertently provoked a conservative turn in German law and prompted the reinforcement of repressive institutions and maximum-security prisons.\textsuperscript{68} The situationists, meanwhile, were concerned to critique the built environment. Vaneigem once claimed that there was “no such thing as situationism,” not even a situationist work of art. This statement had rhetorical force when he made it in 1961, and, in retrospect, the dematerialized condition of the SI seems to speak the clearest truth about the group’s vision. The situationists contributed to the cultural revolution that attended the uprising of May 1968, but, as historians have demonstrated, the events were produced by multiple agents, most of which had a more diversely popular base than the SI.\textsuperscript{69} Thus, Kristin Ross argues, Debord’s claims that he “chose the time and direction” of the Paris revolts, amount to “political illiteracy” and megalomania.\textsuperscript{70} The May events “made The Society of the Spectacle known and read.” Indeed, most readers turned to SI texts after the uprising in an attempt to make sense of what had happened.\textsuperscript{71} If the situationist legacy seems transitory, ephemeral, contingent, RAF actions, on the other hand, broke German law and transgressed the internalized boundaries of the middle classes. As a result, their social interventions can be more substantively documented than those of the SI. The least we can say about the RAF is that they left Germany with a hulking paradox: Stammheim endures as the most concrete precipitate of their actions.

\textbf{Dissolution}

The two statements of the SI’s and the RAF’s dissolution present another moment of contrast. By the early seventies, Debord had pruned the SI to the quick, and internal disputes foreclosed any viable future for the SI as an organized movement. A 1972 document by Debord and Sanguinetti titled “The Real Scission in the International” acknowledged this fractiousness, but, over and against this, it emphasized the new conditions of critique. It located the revolutionary impulses that, to their minds, continued to course through culture and society. Debord and Sanguinetti drew from early SI texts to justify their dissolution. The situationists had long expected that cultural revolution would make redundant their strategies of détournement. Now the public no longer considered “improbable” the subversion of the spectacle. As viewers took more cynical views of the icons of modernity, the situationist project became less urgent.\textsuperscript{72} The SI itself, Debord and Sanguinetti insisted, amounted to nothing more than the concentrated expression of a historical subversion “that is everywhere.”\textsuperscript{73}

The RAF’s dissolution was predicated by abrupt fragmentation. Well before the moment the RAF formally disbanded, the movement found itself marginalized. Its first generation of leaders had been dead for two decades; nine core
members were still doing time in German prisons, but many RAF members remained actively at large well into the nineties. In the first decade of post-Communist unification, the RAF assassinated Detlef Rohwedder (the director of the Treuhand Anstalt Corporation responsible for privatizing East German concerns) and issued communiqués justifying the movement’s continued existence. When they released a statement titled “The Urban Guerrilla Is History” to Reuters in 1998, the RAF elaborated a partial self-critique. Although the authors tried to justify their attempts in the seventies to free RAF prisoners “from torture,” they conceded that most members had lost sight of the “social-revolutionary dimension” of their struggle and become mired in internal politics. In trying to reject the conditions of German liberal democracy, the RAF had broken off its relationship to society as a whole. Soon their energies were directed exclusively toward tactical violence. The task of addressing political and cultural processes—which, they admitted, should have been the precondition for any “new revolutionary project”—fell by the wayside.

Setting the endpoint of urban guerrilla history, the authors of the RAF’s dissolution statement gained a belated purchase on postwar German militancy. What the communiqué brought into view was that the RAF had wagered their lives and those of their victims before developing a viable alternative to West Germany’s Gewaltmonopol, or exclusive right to wield violence. Instead of undertaking the protracted labor of seeking “new ideas for the process of liberation,” they accelerated a violent implosion. Seeking to destroy the state’s dominance, the RAF increased the intensity of its attacks but did not attend to the cultural consensus between the state and the society. Without revolutionary consciousness in the general public, the militants’ social impact would be self-limiting.

What Remains

How to compare the ends of the RAF to those of the SI—each movement’s goals and the cultural and political effects of their dissolution? While it was active, the RAF took thirty-four lives. Such results can be quantified and registered, but the broader social effects defy precise calculation. The core period of RAF interventions was between 1972 and 1977, but the residues of this time remain strong. The effects of the movement are both material and discursive. Elsaesser asks whether we can argue that “despite its very real victims,” the armed struggle that gripped Germany in the seventies was “essentially symbolic.” To a considerable extent, the meaning of German militancy was inflected and disseminated by the government and media. Answering the RAF’s provocations, the public coined the symbolism of the movement. To extend and develop Elsaesser’s
apparently rhetorical question, did the RAF exploit the conditions of spectacle society or reinforce them?

To commit symbolic violence is to refunction the spectacle so that it breaks the circuits of commodification. As a result, sites of political contestation once suppressed or obscured by systems of domination are disclosed. The RAF failed to make the sort of critical interventions first imagined by Debord. Baader, Meinhof, and Ensslin hoped to transform the postwar status quo, but their assaults backfired. Not only did they give German forces the grounds to tighten controls, their acts served as prime media feed. When the militants lost interest in journalistic agitations and spontaneous acts of civil disobedience, they resorted to violence and played into the hands of their opponents. Setting fire to the Frankfurt department store, the RAF entered the media spectacle.78

In their hopes for global revolution, Europe’s radicals of the sixties and seventies sought to link subversive energies from city to city. But the Watts riots disclosed the differences between the vanguard and avant-garde factions that would diminish the Left’s power in decades to come. From the fires of Los Angeles, the situationists gleaned that social change had ignited and would transform the world. Having met its task, the SI could dissolve. But the RAF derived another lesson from Watts: they tried to advance revolution from underground but ended up burying it.

Traces of the RAF persist in a wide range of material substrates, from the lightweight cotton of “radical chic” T-shirts to the reinforced concrete of Stammheim. But the SI is everywhere and nowhere at once. They seem to have fulfilled the prescriptions they made from their earliest appearances to their final statement of dissolution. Debord’s prohibition against the screening of his films made situationism clandestine and inaccessible. And yet the obscurity of these vestiges is countered by an aura that surrounds the SI legacy. In the wake of Debord’s suicide, many have picked up and extended the situationist current. The movement’s concepts and practices are open to contest and further elaboration, as seen in the work of artists such as Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, and Thomas Hirschhorn, as well as in the initiatives of the Retort group. The RAF, meanwhile, came to a deadlock. Lacking a coherent program, the group failed to advance any progressive transformations or to secure connections to other social movements. Most of the art that has followed in their aftermath can only mimic their postures.79 Neither reformist nor revolutionary, the RAF first imploded into narcissistic self-sacrifice, then returned in collective memory as a style, not a stratagem.

The history of the RAF and its cultural fallout point up a number of truths anticipated by the situationists. The staging of RAF violence played into the
spectacle, revealing one endgame of our predicament to be not just alienation but death. Indeed Habermas and Adorno’s anxieties about leftist fascism accord with this critique. Not simply an unfortunate excess of postwar cultural politics, the RAF collaborated in the operations of spectacle society. They were its producer and product at once. And yet even though Debord might have agreed with this assessment, it nonetheless sharpens questions about what, in *In girum imus*, he wanted with the RAF and how his sense of them might have been wrong. Perhaps he saw in them a complement to the situationist project. But if, to his mind, the German militants conducted a radically negative charge, then he misread their message. Dead set on militarization, they could not supersede the spectacle. Baader and Ensslin distorted situationist signals in their rush to arson and in their dive underground. Meinhof, too, perceived in the Watts riots all the components for immediate and international revolution—this underscores the RAF’s failure to fully heed the critiques of the SI and other radicals who insisted that theory and practice move forward in a dialectical manner.

The dissonance between the SI and the RAF—in their formal agendas, their mutual misrecognition, and their eventual decay—unsettles certitudes about postwar Europe. This discord prevents the sort of historicization that configures “1968” as the cipher for a generation. Once marked, it reveals the disparate antagonisms that unleashed a series of events and discloses the SI and the RAF as agents of a fraught cultural moment—two torn halves that don’t add up.
Notes

1. The deaths of Ulrike Meinhof, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe have long been debated. Because no substantive evidence suggests that the RAF leaders were murdered, most historians have come to agree that they committed suicide. See, for example, Stefan Awt, *The Baader-Meinhold Group: The Inside Story of a Phenomenon*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Bodley Head, 1987); and Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and the Revolutionary Violence of the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).


7. “Ideologie und Strategie,” the first volume of the Bundesministerium-sponsored study *Analysen zum Terrorismus*, dissests the various theoretical strains that ran through German militant movements in the postwar years. Central influences on the RAF were Marx and Mao, particularly as reformulated in the work of Herbert Marcuse, Régis Debray, and Carlos Marighella. Iring Fetscher et al., *Analysen zum Terrorismus* (Opladen, Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1981).


in the 1980 bombing of a Bologna railway station that killed eighty-five people.


18. Spur was published under the SI imprint from 1958 to 1962. Dieter Kunzelmann first realized his talent for artful mischief and the production of public outrage in the fifties, while active in the Schwabing artists’ milieu of Munich. Kunzelmann’s association with the SI is recounted in Gerd Koenen, Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 2001), 152, 155. Kunzelmann is cited several times in the Internationale situationiste. See issues 6: 28–29; 7: 25, 27, 28, 31, 49; and 8: 25. Thanks to Tom McDonough for this information. In 1961 the German police confiscated available issues of Spur. As Inga Buhmann notes, the journal was considered obscene and blasphemous. See Inga Buhmann, “Kunzelmann’s Keller,” in Leisten sie keinen Widerstand! ed. Fröba and Nitsche, 34.

19. Klaus Hartung, Der blinde Fleck: Die Linke, die RAF und der Staat (Frankfurt: neue kritik, 1987), 223. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine. The last line of the leaflet is in English in the original: “Burn, Ware-House, Burn.”

20. Aust, 49.


24. Holthusen, 115.


27. Aust, 58.
29. Koenen describes Fassbinder and Baader's milieu as "bisexual" and "decadent," underscoring the cultural currents that informed the RAF. Koenen, 156.
30. Aust, 50.
31. Social scientists have identified the dynamic of expulsion as central to the formation of terrorist organizations. For an overview, see Jessica Stern, "Holy War Organizations," Terror in the Name of God (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 139–296.
34. McDonough, ix–xx.
47. When Meinhof went underground with the RAF, she effectively turned away from her early feminist materialism and dedicated herself to an armed struggle that some purported to be waged beyond sexual politics. Still, the question of gender exposes another difference between the RAF and the SI. Whereas women figured prominently in the RAF leadership (not just Meinhof and Ennslin but several others), the SI seemed to reengage the misogyny of the surrealists. For an analysis of the sexual politics of German militancy, see Ulrike Edschmid, Frau mit Waffe: Zwei Geschichten aus terroristischen Zeiten (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1996).
49. Aust, 93.

Grey Room 26
Denmark: Institut Scandinave de vandalisme comparé, 1964).


52. For a critique of Regarding Terror, see my article “Re: Terror: Curating the Red Army Faction,” The German Monitor, forthcoming.

53. Although representations of the Weathermen and Black Panthers has largely resisted the recent appropriations of RAF-Kultur, several instances of the recoding of U.S. militancy should be considered. Sam Green and Bill Siegel’s documentary The Weather Underground (2002) registers some of the lingering fascination with the group, as does some of Raymond Pettibon’s film work. Images of Huey Newton and other black nationalists have figured in advertisements, and Howard Stern has tried to assume the upraised fist of the Panthers. Already in the sixties, John and Leni Sinclair appropriated the group’s postures in their styling of the White Panthers, and rock bands such as the MC5 played extended riffs on black militancy. Still, as Mike Kelley maintains in “Death and Transfiguration,” the racial charge of the Black Panthers’ project has made them relatively resistant to spectacularization. See Mike Kelley, Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism, ed. John c. Welchman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 138–149. I thank Branden Joseph for this comparative perspective.


58. References to the orgasmic supersession of art run throughout Vaneigem’s Revolution. See, for example the chapter “The Project of Communication.” Vaneigem, 248–253.

59. In “For a Revolutionary Judgment of Art,” Debord claimed that a revolutionary alteration of the present forms of culture can be nothing other than the supersession of all aspects of the aesthetic and technological apparatus, an apparatus that constitutes an aggregation of spectacles separated from life. Knabb, 310; and Guy Debord, “Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l’art,” Contre le cinéma, 13.


61. For a social history of the German militant and alternative scenes of the sixties and seventies, see Sibylla Flügge, “1968 und die Frauen: Ein Blick in die Beziehungskiste,” in Gender und Soziale Praxis, ed. Margit Göttert and Karin Walser (Berlin: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2002).

62. A Berlin demonstration against the Shah of Iran on 2 June 1967 heightened tensions among the city’s far left wing, its police, and other major institutions, such as the Springer Press. When an undercover policeman shot Benno Ohnesorg, a young protester, Günter Grass denounced it as “the first political murder in the FRG.” Many see this death as the triggering event for the
RAF. For a detailed account and analysis of these incidents, see Varon, 38–40, 73.


64. The June 2nd Movement (Bewegung 2. Juni or B2J) was an organized response to the killing of Benno Ohnesorg. Led by Michael “Bommi” Baumann and other Berlin anarchists, the movement distinguished itself from the “intellectual elitism” of the RAF with its populist bent and a few random acts of kindness toward members of the working classes. Nonetheless, B2J engaged in strategies of abduction and assassination, like the RAF, and were alleged to have murdered one of their own members. After kidnapping and then releasing the GDU official Peter Lorenz, they published a widely disseminated leaflet “Die Entführung aus unserer Sicht” attempting to justify their crimes. See Bewegung 2. Juni, Der Blues: Gesammelte Texte der Bewegung 2. Juni, Vol. 1, 2 (n.p., n.d.). For overviews of B2J, see Peter Brückner and Barbara Sherman, Solidarität und Gewalt (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1974); and Ralf Reinders and Ronald Fritzsch, Die Bewegung 2. Juni (Berlin: ID-Archiv, 1995).


68. Major studies of the West German government’s response to the rise of left-wing militancy, including directives such as the 1972 Radikalenerlaß that banned “enemies of the state” from civil service occupation and the planning of the Stuttgart-Stammheim Prison include Fritz Sack et al., Protest und Reaktion: Analysen zum Terrorismus (Opladen, Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1984); Miklos K. Radvanyi, Anti-Terrorist Legislation in the Federal Republic of Germany (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Law Library, 1979); and Kurt Groenewold, “The German Federal Republic’s Response and Civil Liberties,” Terrorism and Political Violence 4, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 147. A productive comparison could be drawn between the FRG and France in the seventies and eighties: Germany’s conservative clampdown in response to the RAF explosion paralleled, to some extent, the renewed of de Gaulle’s potency after May 1968.

69. Herbert Marcuse’s One Dimensional Man had a similarly belated impact on the Paris events of May 1968. The work was translated into French and published during the month of May, but most of the more than 300,000 copies sold were purchased in June. See Patrick Combes, La littérature et le mouvement de Mai 68: Écriture, mythes, critique, écrivains, 1968–81 (Paris: Seghers, 1984);


71. Ross admits that The Society of the Spectacle and the SI “undoubtedly helped perform an intellectual task of demolishing and desacralizing of bourgeois consumer society for the elite readership who had access” to them in the early 1960s. Although most SI texts had a limited readership, Mustapha Khayat’s pamphlet “De la misère en milieu étudiant,” which was disseminated to a large and diverse audience in 1966, stands out as an exception. Ross, 194.

72. Debord and Sanguinetti, 90.

73. Debord and Sanguinetti, 5. Although this argument about the pervasiveness of the SI critique enabled the group’s dissolution, Debord amplified his call for scrutiny in subsequent writings and film work; for example, his Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, trans. Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990); and the posthuminously broadcast television program Guy Debord, son art, son temps, directed by Guy Debord and Brigitte Cornand (Canal Plus, 1995).


76. The RAF is alleged to have killed the following individuals: Norbert Schmidt, Herbert Schoner, Hans Eckhard, Paul Bloomquist, Clyde Bronner, Ronald Woodward, Charles Peck, Andreas von Mirbach, Heinz Hillegaart, Fritz Sippel, Siegfried Buback, Wolfgang Gobel, Georg Wurster, Jürgen Ponto, Heinz Marcisz, Reinhold Brändle, Helmut Ulmer, Roland Pieler, Arie Kranenburg, Hanns-Martin Schleyer, Hans-Wilhelm Hansen, Dionysius de Jong, Johannes Goemans, Edith Kletzhänder, Dr. Ernst Zimmermann, Edward Pimental, Becky Bristol, Frank Scarton, Karl Heinz Beckurts, Eckhard Groppler, Gerold von Braunmühl, Alfred Herrhausen, Detlev Karsten Rohwedder, and Michael Neuwrrzella. Although no conclusive evidence has been presented, Wolfgang Grams, a member of the RAF, is suspected to have shot and killed Michael Neuwrrzella, a former GSG-9 officer, in 1993. Grams was also killed in the exchange. A recent account of this incident is Butz Peters, Wer erschoss Wolfgang Grams? (Berlin: Ullstein HC, 2005).

77. Elsaesser, 292.

78. Aust discusses the suicidal quandaries of the RAF leaders in the chapter, “Arson, or, You Can’t Go Home Again,” in Aust, 48–52.

79. This comparative French/German analysis discloses the distinctions between the cultural memories of the RAF and the SI; whereas the recent popularization of RAF imagery has defused the legacy of German militancy, the French response to the rise and fall of situationism has been rarified. The strains of the movement—as they have played out in France—remain relatively consonant with Debord’s original impetus. Expanding this analysis to include the UK would produce different questions and answers. As several cultural historians have demonstrated, the British punk and anarchy scenes of the seventies and eighties variously translated and refunctioned the situationist program, often in ways that spectacularized Debord’s initiatives. See, for example, Stewart Home, The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War (London: Aporia Press and Unpopular Books, 1988); and Sadie Plant, The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age (London: Routledge, 1992).