THE ART OF SOCIAL IMAGINATION AFTER 1945

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PLAY

COLLECTIVISM
after MODERNISM

BLAKE STIMSON AND GREGORY SHOLETTE, EDITORS

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TO LOUISE AND ARIANA

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Preface

The collectivization of artistic production is not new—think of the various party games and other group shenanigans of the futurists, Dadaists, and surrealists, not to mention the more earnest and properly political efforts to collectivize authorship undertaken by the productivists, muralists, and social realists—but it is a development that seemed to have no ideological afterlife in the postwar period, no ism to sustain it as a vital enterprise, no critical literature to give itself pride of place as history. While there were plenty of group exhibitions, ersatz and real professional organizations, international conferences and journals, and other developments in the 1950s and 1960s that helped to make the likes of abstract expressionism, happenings, Fluxus, pop art, minimalism, conceptual art, and others over into art-historical categories, none of these brought the question of collective voice to the fore in the same way, none saw collectivization itself as a vital and primary artistic solution, none sought first and foremost to generate a voice that declared its group affiliation, its collectivization, as the measure of its autonomy.

Individual self-understanding was indeed downplayed as it had been before the war, it might be objected, and this was the basis of this later period's legitimate claim to be "neo-avant-garde." But it was different: now the nexus of artistic activity was projected outward and away from the core of the old Romantic expressive subject toward the material infrastructure of art-making—to the paint and canvas and drips and splatters, for example, or to the street or landscape, or to the gallery, the contract, and the advertisement—and not outward toward questions of social organization and collective identification. Put schematically, we might say that modernist art after the war no longer found the solution to its founding solipsism problem in collectivism but instead in a brute form of materialism: "this is not really a

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picture (much less an icon or shared ideal)," it convinced itself, "it is just paint on canvas, or stuff from the street, or arbitrary social conventions, and if you see in it anything more you are missing the point." Looked at in retrospect such a turn of hand is not surprising, really: the old modernist collectivism was indissolubly linked with a bigger ism, a bigger ideal that had failed—communism—and it had little choice but to distance itself. This does not mean that modernist collectivism did not persist, of course, even without the old backing from Moscow and the like, nor does it mean there were not other, New Left, forms of political vitality that had their impact on the self-conception of art. It is only this: collectivism had to redefine its meaning and purpose with respect to the past: it had no choice but to hedge. This volume studies that struggle with redefinition with all the attendant complications of carrying over into a new period—"after modernism," as we are calling it—as baggage from the past.

Our interest in this topic does not come from nowhere, of course. Indeed, we are at a particularly fortuitous juncture now to take up such a study: collectivism, it would seem, has recently been reborn once again, and often with little or none of the leftovers from its own rich past. One of us has already spoken to this new wave of collectivism in a spleenish letter to the industry's leading trade magazine, *Artforum,* which we reprint here in full.

To the editor:

For those who crave cultural distraction without the heavy intellectual price tag now comes a pack of new and inscrutable art collectives offering colorful, guilt-free fun. Forcefield, Derraindrop, Paper Rad, Gelatin, The Royal Art Lodge, HobbyPopMuseum, their names flicker impishly across the otherwise dull screen of the contemporary art world invoking not so much the plastic arts as the loopy cheer of techno music and its nostalgia for a make-believe 1960s epitomized by LSD, free love and day-glo—instead of civil rights, feminism and SDS. Yes, artists' groups are hot. Or so chime the harbingers of art world value production as its symbol-producing machinery gears up to meet what is still a speculative demand. As Alison M Gingeras tells us in the March edition of *Artforum* this new collectivity is not at all solemn. It is "insouciant." It eschews the "sociopolitical agenda associated with collective art making" and reflects "a juvenile disregard for historical veracity." And all that is fine because its indifference "mirrors the times."

What times I ask?

The United States has tossed international law to the four winds and invaded another nation using the most transparent of pretexts, global capitalism has penetrated every corner of life including art, education, and leisure time, and meanwhile the art world carries on, business as usual. Those times? Or the bad new days as Bertolt Brecht remarked?

One thing Gingeras does get straight however is that radical politics were very much a central concern for the collectives I knew and worked with in the 1980s and 1990s including Political Art Documentation and Distribution (PAD/D), Group Material, Carnival Knowledge, and REPOhistory as well as those that came before and after including Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC), Art Workers Coalition (AWC), Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), Paper Tiger in the 1970s and early 1980s, more recently Dyke
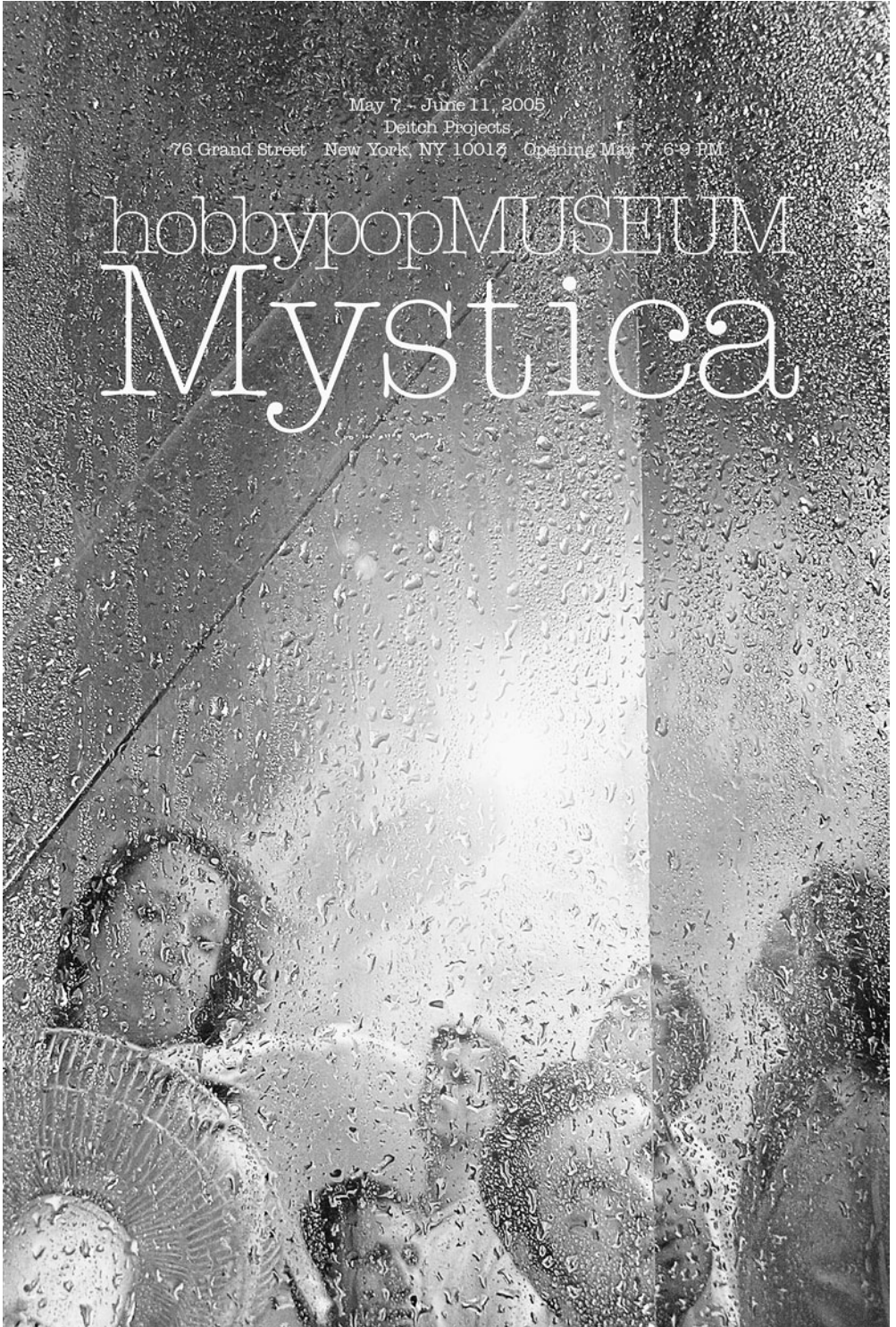
FIGURE P.1. Promotional poster for the art collective HobbyPopMuseum based in Düsseldorf and London. Courtesy of the artists and Deitch Projects.

Action Machine, Guerrilla Girls, Gran Fury, RTMark, The Yes Men, Sub Rosa, Critical Art Ensemble, Yomango, Whisper Media and Temporary Services to mention but a smattering of the many self-organized artists organizations that have emerged over the past thirty years. And if group anonymity permitted these varied art collectives to boldly challenge the status quo it is likely that it also provides a mask for the anti-social cynicism of the new and the few who "stake their identity on a certain strategic frivolity."

So why this sudden rush to revamp the political rebelliousness of group artistic practice? To re-package it as "tribal," "exuberant," "insouciant"? Because when compared to almost every previous collective and many new ones, the recent crop of gallery sponsored art groupettes is unmistakably a product of enterprise culture. As put forward by historian Chin-tao Wu enterprise culture is the near total privatization of everything up to and including that which once stood outside or against the reach of capitalism including avant-garde and radical art. If communal activity, collaboration, egalitarian cooperation run

FIGURE P.2. Picketing museum workers and artists in front of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Copyright *Artforum*, December 1973 (cover). Courtesy of *Artforum*. Photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni.

directly opposite individuated forms of individualistic greed, enterprise culture will not aim to overtly repress this tendency, but instead seek a way of branding and packaging contradiction in order to sell it back to us. No surprise then that this new collectivity is organized around fashion with its members sharing "nothing more than vacant facial expressions and good taste in casual clothes." Thus these groovy new art groups not only appear freshly minted but thanks to an endemic historical amnesia on the part of curators, art historians, art administrators, critics and sadly even artists they actually appear, choke, radical, well at least from within the circumscribed horizon of contemporary art.

My advice? Perhaps it is time to engage in a bit of reverse engineering. I mean if the prestige and financial power of the art world can be mobilized to authenticate one rather anemic form of collective practice, then why not use that breach to leverage other, more challenging and socially progressive collaborative forms as well? Why stop at the museum either? What about work places, schools, public spaces, even the military? The challenge therefore is to concoct a counter-vaccine or Trojan Virus that renders administrated culture defenseless before a self-replicating, radically democratic and participatory creativity but one that is every bit as playful and nimble in its own passionate way as so-called insouciant collectivity. Any takers?

Indeed, this volume might well be understood to position itself at a crossroads. "Collectivism after modernism," thus, is understood as a pivot or turning point to several possible outcomes. Put simply, modernist collectivism stopped making sense after the war and is only now coming back into view but often as a half-materialized specter in denial of its own past. This larger historical question is the main concern in the introduction that follows. Each of the contributors to this volume addresses the specifics—the successes and setbacks and complications—of artists and others as they grappled with the opportunities and burdens of their past. In so doing they inevitably reach beyond the conceptual frame—"collectivism after modernism"—that was used to bring them together in the first place. The aim of this volume is not to force fit the manifold rich and generative details of history to the easier comprehension given by its broad outline or vice versa. Instead our aim is to put the two into dialogue as checks and balances, forest and trees, for historical understanding. What follows is a brief sketch of those specifics.

Jelena Stojanović opens our study with her survey of four highly influential European collectives—CoBrA IAE, Internationale Lettriste, Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste, and the Situationist International—positioning them squarely within the era of the cold war and the cultural politics that era gave rise to. She points out that the *internationaleries* uniquely recognized the ideological pitfalls of a postwar modernism, which was effectively reduced to an apolitical functionalism, in the cold-war era. The *internationaleries* countered with what she calls a grotesque performance of those very ideals transforming such ironic play into tactics for intervening into everyday life. Reiko Tomii examines collectivism in

postwar Japan, pointing out that artists reacted with sarcasm to the "ingrained collectivism in Japanese society as a whole," connecting this *performative collectivism* to the accelerating dematerialization of the art object on the one hand and to concerns about national identity on the other. Chris Gilbert's chapter focuses on Art & Language and the way that group attempted to resist and repurpose the functionalism of postwar culture, institutionalizing themselves in an attempt to dictate the terms of their own sociality.

Jesse Drew's study of Paper Tiger Television looks at the role anti-colonialist guerrilla movements played, in combination with new, portable video technology, in compelling the formation of media-based collectives in the 1980s, while Rachel Weiss explores the successive series of collectives that responded to changing political, economic, and artistic circumstances in socialist Cuba. Meanwhile, Rubén Gallo notes that, because mural production in Mexico was a state-sanctioned form of collective art, interest in collectivism among younger artists did not manifest itself until the early 1970s, when a wave of independent collectives emerged that reflected the antiestablishment, cultural politics of the New Left. Alan W. Moore's chapter on activist-oriented collectives in New York City indicates that the art world has frequently overlapped with a countercultural world of squats, happenings, and raves as well as community-based art forms and activism yet seldom acknowledging this significant yet hidden connection.

Okwui Enwezor describes the way the Congolese collective Le Groupe Amos is made up of writers, intellectuals, activists, and artists who use public interventions to directly confront the material and educational needs of specific communities in Africa, and the penultimate chapter by Irina Aristarkhova focuses on the Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (CSM), whose work opposing the Russian military has transformed aspects of collective, political activism in that nation. Brian Holmes concludes the historical study by taking up the emergence of tactical media in the late 1990s by a new generation of collectives, including Gran Fury, the Guerrilla Girls, Ne Pas Plier, and later RTMark and The Yes Men, which points to the possibility of a generalized do-it-yourself creativity of collective networks and carnivalesque street celebrations that blur the lines between artists, service and information workers, activists, and people in developing countries in a struggle against the interests of transnational corporations and regulatory entities such as the World Trade Organization and the World Economic Forum.

As with any survey there are numerous omissions, and ours is no exception. As an act of general contrition we ask advanced forgiveness from those, both living and dead, collective or not, who have been omitted or who have been represented in less detail than we would have liked. We also

admit a desire to see all of these lesser-studied histories, as well as the topic of collectivism itself, better reflected in the curriculum of contemporary art history, media, cultural, and visual studies and done so with the complexity that the subject clearly deserves. It is our unabashed hope that this volume will help open the door to the study of collectivism, not as a means of "normalizing" it or representing it as one more genus of artistic practice, but to theorize it as a form of production and intervention that raises fundamental questions about the nature of creative labor and how history is recorded and transmitted, for whom, and to what ends.

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Introduction: Periodizing Collectivism

BLAKE STIMSON AND GREGORY SHOLETTE

> Since human nature is the true community of men, those who produce thereby affirm their nature, human community, and social being which, rather than an abstract, general power in opposition to the isolated individual, is the being of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own joy, his own richness. To say that a man is alienated from himself is to say that the society of this man is the caricature of his real community.
>
> —*Karl Marx*

There is a specter haunting capitalism's globalization, the specter of a new collectivism. We experience this specter daily now in two complementary forms, each with less or more force than the other depending on where we are in the world. Both of these forms have deep roots and complex genealogical structures and each returns to us now mostly as a ghost but as a ghost with a hardened, cutting edge running the length of its misshapen and ethereal outline, a ghost whose concrete effects and ungraspable vitality seem evermore to determine our present. This edge is fully within the crisis and the dream that is late capitalism, and for better or worse, it offers the only prospect for moving on. If the conditions prove right, the work of artists among others just might venture from its hiding place in this specter's ghostly vapor, find its once-heralded but now long-lost position at the cutting edge, and bring new definition to a rapidly changing world.

The first of these new, airy forms of collectivism, the one in the headlines as we write, is the collectivism of public opinion rising and falling on the Arab street or ricocheting across Al Jazeera's or Al Qaida's networks or whispering in this or that secret, self-isolated cell gathered together in a cave in the Pakistani countryside, or in an apartment in metro Toronto.[1] In this form collectivism imagines itself and conducts itself as a full-blown anti-imperialist force, as an organic community loosely but dynamically organized around beliefs and resentments, around faith and ideology and strategy, around a sense of belonging that realizes itself in the name of an ideal and against, with vitriol and spleen, the anti-idealism and immorality of the

(global) marketplace. In this sense the American televangelist or the Republican anti-gay-marriage activist shares (and, indeed, thrives on) a not-so-secret bond with the Mujahideen leader: each responds to and cultivates a yearning for an absolute and idealized form of collectivity, each makes the need for communality more pressing by reconstructing the glory of an imaginary social form, a holy-of-holies with its own intoxicating, often orgiastic, groupthink and groupfeel. We may well try to stand apart from this with some genteel, nineteenth-century notion of detached critical propriety, but none of us can deny its primordial appeal: to experience oneself as the glorious, all-encompassing body of Christ or God or Allah or King or Leviathan or Nation or State or Public is to experience collectivism as redemption, to experience the imagined community as an end to alienation and as a promise of eternal life. Indeed, collective social form is always first and foremost a fetish—a part that substitutes for the whole, a clerical or lordly or bureaucratic or symbolic epiphenomenon that stands in for the phenomenal reality of lived experience—and that's the way it should be: witness, for example, even such a latter-day scion of that old critical propriety as Louis Althusser, who was certainly right when he proclaimed with uncommon longing, and without any of the technocrat's customary qualification or contempt, that a communist is never alone.

Second, if a bit recessed at the moment, there is the other face of the new collectivism, that of the once-vaunted New Economy: the collectivism of eBay, say, or Amazon, or the old Napster and its more recent offspring, or of chat rooms and flashmobs and blogospheres and listservs. This is collectivism in its minimally regulated, hypercapitalist, DIY form, collectivism that struggles to replace the old glorious communitarian ideals of Christianity, Islam, Nationalism, Communism with extra-idealist "new media" and new technologies, collectivism that struggles to substitute the programmer for the ideologist. It is the collectivism of the computer geek rather than that of the holy warrior, and its allegiances range from public to private, from techno-anarchist hacktivism to hippie-capitalist, pseudocountercultural imperialism. Either way, as a private or public interest, as this or that transnational corporate conglomerate, or as this or that netopia, this other new collectivism speaks its bond in a distinct social form: rather than addressing its constituency in modernist terms "as anonymous citizens" (so notes one commentator), or even as sectarian faithful, it finds its bond instead as a community of "co-conspirators who are in on the joke."[2] It is this language of collectivity, this imagined community integrated by the Internet that animates the entrepreneurial, neoliberal spirit and fuels the demand for capitalism's labor and managerial classes alike to—in that most mystical and most meaningful of all capitalist slogans—"think outside the box" in order

to increase their productivity and leverage their status in the name of a "creative class." Equally so, it propels virus writers squirreled away behind computer terminals around the globe to develop new worms, Trojans, and the like in order to undermine or take cover from that same accelerated productivity, to negate the instrumental drive in the economy, to give pause to the shepherding of myriad oppositional forces into the emergent creative class. (A virus, feigns one such e-terrorist truthfully enough, is "a humble little creature with only the intention to avoid extinction and survive.")[3] In this sense the new e-economy that we are concerned with here is not all that different from the old industrial one, our workers and managers no different from those brought forth by Frederick Winslow Taylor or Henry Ford a century ago, and our virus writers not so different from the famed Luddites still another century before them. The newness of the new e-collectivism, like the newness of the new Arab street, is only a rebirth of intensity, the welling up of spirits from the past, a recall to the opportunities and battle lines of old.

That this all seems the same as it ever was does not mean it hasn't changed, however, and, indeed, it is our working premise that the desire to speak as a collective voice that has long fueled the social imagination of modernism—in the desire to speak as a nation, for example, or as a transnational class, or as the voice of some unfulfilled or underfulfilled universal human potential—underwent a distinct and significant transformation after the Second World War. Our argument is that collectivism can be and should be periodized, that we can gain from giving collectivism itself greater definition as a history, and that we occupy a distinct position and face a distinct opportunity now as a new period in that history emerges. Of primary interest is the collectivism particular to the cold war—hence the phrase "Collectivism after Modernism"—but only insofar as it exists as a prehistory, as a pivot point, for this moment now, that is, for a collectivism following "collectivism after modernism."

Let us be as clear as we can be here: the ambition driving our inquiry and our periodization is structurally no different from the old (modernist) ideal of nation-building—of collectivity imagined not by familial identification through the patriarchal means of gods, kings, and fearless leaders (or their rarer matriarchal substitutes) nor by forfeiture or reaction through the forceful hand of imperialism or colonization or enslavement or "regime change," nor imagined falsely (as a "caricature," Marx says) by substituting market relations for communal relations, but instead by the rights and laws and constitutions and customs of the abstract, universal, democratic political subject, that is, of what used to be called "Man." Patriarchs, empires, and markets all played their respective roles in previous rounds of nation-building, of course—they were, after all, the strike forces of collectivization that brought

people together into new and expanded social forms and configurations, but so too, we shouldn't forget, did ideas and ideals, and not just the false ones. The Enlightenment was many things but among them it was an engine of social production, a way of imagining community—and Marx is only the best example, nothing more—that did not forfeit individual autonomy to one form of illegitimate force or another. It is nothing other than this old dream of actually existing autonomy, of autonomy realized, of autonomy institutionalized, that haunts now with new vigor as a ghost from the past, but it does so not on the basis of the sheer strength of principle but instead by drawing its renewal and revitalization, by drawing replenishment of its lifeblood, from those strike forces of collectivization that are peculiar to our moment now.

There is another turning point in this story, of course—that is, the one forced by the events of 9/11—and we will need to give it its due in the history we are trying to sketch. Likewise our brief and broad overview will need to pay appropriate respect not only to the big players, the Al Qaidas and the eBays, but also nod to what Michael Denning calls the "intellectual shanty towns" of globalization—the temporary autonomous zones created in Seattle, Genoa, and Quebec, for example, or the provisional and often fleeting communal forms and community work developed by artist's groups such as Wochenklausur in Austria, Le Groupe Amos in Congo, or Temporary Services in Chicago—in order to recognize that, whether by deliberation or by unconscious reflex, any historically emergent force is always a hybrid, always a happenstance reorganization and reworking of available social forms and forces, always a fortuitous unleashing of sociality from its instrumentalization as a commodity form.[4] By reimagining existing technologies and developing new ones that might breathe new life into the darkened archives of failed rebellions and feeble art organizations, new forms of collectivization might emerge out of those incomplete ruptures and alternative histories even if only as one more displacement or pause or negation as partial and scrawny as the first, as little returns of the vast repressed past, as humble little creatures with only the intention to avoid extinction and survive within the horizon established by the dominant historical forces and tendencies of our day. It is here, in this space of thought outside the box, where the action is or where it ought to be, and it is here where the truth and beauty and consequence of our collectivist fetish is to be found.

MODERNIST COLLECTIVISM

Modernist collectivism, as we will have it here, was the first real effort to develop a sustained alternative to commodified social life by cultural means, and it was full of the spirited and sometimes foolish ambition of youth.

Modernist artists understood the collectivization of their professional roles, functions, and identities to be an expression of and, at best, a realization of the promise and/or pitfalls of social, political, and technological progress. In this capacity they acted as either agents or symptoms of supraindividual forces—sometimes on behalf of political parties, for example, or the working classes, but more generally in the name of more wide-ranging forces of social, political, and technological modernization. Their task as artists was either to envision a radically new society, often in terms that resembled a monumental social design problem, or to represent the psychical consequence of the loss of a premodern collective human bond caused by the emergence of mass culture and new technologies. The mandate for such artistic collectivism, in sum, was to give expression to modernity. The modernist adoption of the form of collective voice had different local ambitions and self-conceptions, of course—to speak in the name of a nation, or a class, or humanity was driven by very different intentions and had very different consequences—but, in one way or another, it maintained a consistent aim to give form to some variety of group being. Malevich's insistence that collectivism was the path to "world-man" and that the self had to be annihilated was consistent with Mondrian's aim to struggle "against everything individual in man" and was, in turn, consistent with Magritte's *L'invention collective* that was likewise consistent with the Italian Modigliani introducing himself
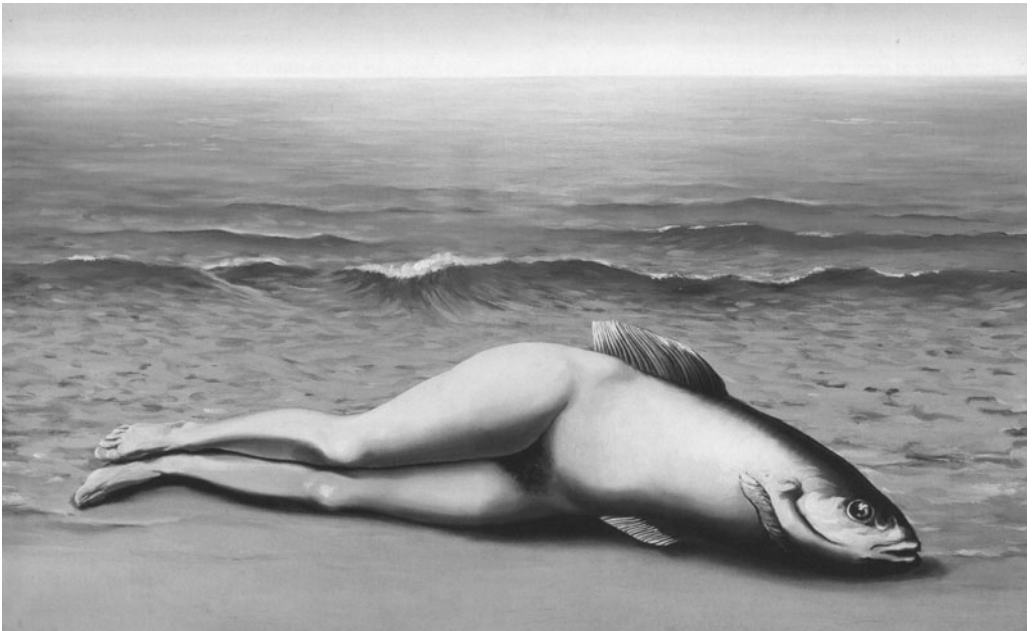

FIGURE I.1. René Magritte, *L'invention collective*, 1934. Courtesy of Artists Rights Society.

in Paris with the bold greeting "I am Modigliani, Jew." ("His ethnically diverse subjects lose their individual personalities in a collective portrait of the socially marginal," writes one art historian about his work; for example, "Modigliani's faces represent the hybridization of the European tribe.")[5]

The formula modernism-equals-collectivism was simple, really, even though it varied from this style or technique to that, from this piece of art-historical turf to that. The aim was to blur the boundaries between subjects and subjectivities, to diminish the sense of who did what and who was what in order to call forth, as the honored subject of history, some synergy greater than the sum of its constituent parts. It was this synergy that was the agent of modernization generally. Marx put it so: "When the worker cooperates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capabilities of his species."[6] "A futurist picture lives *a collectivist life*" is how one modernist interpreted the Marxian thesis, shifting the locus of self-realization from the worker to a painting, adding, "This is the exact same principle on which all creativity of the proletariat is constructed. Try to distinguish an individual face in a proletarian procession."[7] Indeed, we might even state our argument in stronger terms than we have heretofore: modernism in the sense we are using it here, that is, in the sense of Malevich and Mondrian and Magritte and Modigliani and all the others, was never anything else than this or that form of trickle-down communism; its aim was always to generate the glorious—ecstatic, even—indistinguishability of the proletarian procession; it was to generate that sense given by Althusser, when he had his guard down, that "a communist is never alone." This does not mean, of course, that the rarefied practice of petty bourgeois artists was the same as that done in factories or soviets, or in collectivized farms, or even in proletarian processions. Rather, it is that they shared an aim, even if it was rarely or never achieved, to "affirm their nature, human community, and social being," as Marx called it, "which, rather than an abstract, general power in opposition to the isolated individual, is the being of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own joy, his own richness." This was modernism's fetish, that collectivism would bring benefits to not only "strikes, sabotage, social creativity, food consumption, apartments," but also to "the intimate life of the proletariat, right down to its aesthetic, mental and sexual needs," that is, that it would liberate and give form to an innate human potential for life, joy, and richness.[8] That it was mostly only able to affirm that nature by picturing it, by imagining its structure and form, by assuming that the task at hand was nothing more than to somehow figure it out, was simply the limit of its own historical moment: its intentions were noble even if its means were limited.

Those good intentions have lingered in one form or another through the postwar period to the present, just as they have been recast darkly by cold war ideologues and used by neoconservatives and neoliberals alike to bolster a different fetish: that of individual sovereignty through which all manner of social privilege is venerated and collective aspiration is redeployed as a dehumanized abstraction, as a machine of exploitation and oppression. The ultimate expression of this recasting of the collective form is the bestowing of legal rights previously reserved for individual citizens to powerful, multinational corporations. Maintenance of this redistribution comes at a price: continuous, small acts of repression as well as the occasional spectacle of barbarity are required and typically carried out under the banner of personal freedom. As Augusto Pinochet once asserted, sometimes democracy must be bathed in blood, thus putting into words the peculiar logic of cold war cultural politics and its relentless march toward global hegemony.

COLLECTIVISM AFTER MODERNISM, OR THE CULTURAL TURN

The collectivist dream darkened immediately following the Second World War. In the U.S. media and its Western European counterparts, collectivism was portrayed as a colorless pastiche of state-run unions, collective farms, rows of indistinguishable housing projects, and legions of look-alike Young Pioneers all busily working to build socialism in the U.S.S.R. and its client states. Underlying these gray on gray, beehive-like representations was the barely hidden claim that collectivism represented a loss of individual will: the very thing Madison Avenue was quickly learning to regulate, homogenize, and commodify. At the same time, under pressure from the conservative, anticommunist, and probusiness Truman administration, the once-powerful organized union movement began its downward plunge. Despite an impressive strike wave in 1945–46, unions were put on notice to purge left-wing radicals from their ranks, and most did. Collective and militant modes of working-class dissent including walkouts and mass strikes were not the only targets of antiunion legislation. Communists, Trotskyists, anarchists, and fellow travelers were routinely denounced while the few progressive cultural organizations held over from during or before the war such as The Artists League of America and Artists Equity also fell victim either directly or through innuendo to the anticommunist campaigns. Art, like culture generally, took on new meaning and purpose. As one cold war bureaucrat put it, "the tremendous importance of the arts" was that they could serve "as an antidote against collectivism."[9]

Ironically, it was the direct repression of working-class resistance as well as attacks against international collectivist politics that gave birth to an ingenious and reified mode of capitalist collectivism. Home ownership, stock options, retirement plans, and other company benefits helped stave off lingering worker unrest even as the various disciplines of worker production were being radically deconstructed and hierarchically reorganized. In effect, traditional divisions of labor were intensified to such a degree that a qualitatively new form of worker control emerged. As Harry Braverman explains, it was a process in which worker sovereignty is increasingly compartmentalized thereby delimiting the potential of the collective form: "The novelty of this development in this past century lies not in the separate existence of hand and brain, conception and execution, but the rigor with which they are divided from one another, and then increasingly subdivided, so that conception is concentrated, in so far as possible, in ever more limited groups within management."[10] This in turn provided the groundwork for a new and supple type of worker supervision by a rising managerial class as well as the internalization of systems of control by the workers themselves. In Sartre's terms a new, "serialized" collectivity emerges exemplified by random groupings, urban queues, and perhaps most vividly, the legions of "company men." Decked out in striped suit and tie, stripped of any overt class-consciousness, and organized into the patriarchal benevolence of the corporate body, they appear to gladly exchange individual control over skilled production for a modest share of the capitalist's wealth and a volume on the latest motivational management theory tossed in for the bargain.

If, especially in the United States, collectivism—as a recognizable and self-conscious identity—was forcibly banished from the world of actual production and organized political activity, then not surprisingly it returned in mutated and often contradictory form within the cultural realm. This reemergence was especially striking in postwar popular cinema where collectivism typically took on a devious, even monstrous visage with all the repulsive pleasure that only suppressed and forbidden activities can summon. From Hitchcock's secret societies whose murderous conspiracies percolated just beneath the surface of normal life to the cold, vegetable consciousness of the alien invaders in various cold war science-fiction classics, collectivism was depicted as aberrant contagion with a mixture of fascination and dread. Despite an average income five times that of other nations and the largest standing military in history, middle America, white America, expressed a relentless fear about alleged communist infiltrators all the while harboring deeper anxieties about the socioeconomic encroachment of other races and peoples. Such postwar trepidations also reflected what was an already shifting collective identity as the stirring nationalism that peaked during the war,

and that helped give birth to the Popular Front, was rapidly being replaced by a new dynamic collectivism, that of mass consumer culture. In this regard, both the promises and fears that collectivism provoked in the early part of the twentieth century were crystallized into distinctly cultural forms during the massive reorganization of political, geographic, and economic boundaries that followed the Yalta Conference. Right on up until the collapse of the Soviet Union and its client states in the late 1980s it was the politics of culture—from bigger cars, better gadgets, and appliances to freer intellectuals and experimental music—that remained at the forefront of social transformation during the cold war. Collectivism after modernism, as Michael Denning argues for the period of the cultural turn more broadly, was marked by a shared experience: "suddenly . . . everyone discovered that culture had been mass produced like Ford's cars: the masses had a culture and culture had a mass. Culture was everywhere, no longer the property of the cultured or cultivated."[11]

Between 1945 and 1989 culture took on a definite political heft in the undeclared war between capitalism and socialism. And reciprocally, politics took on a cultural cast of its own. From the struggle for civil rights graphically captured in *Life* magazine, to the surrealist inspired slogans of May 1968, to the emergence of the New Left itself, entwined as it was with an emerging, youthful counterculture, the range of transformations and contradictions making up the presence of the cultural turn was reshaping the everyday lives and struggles of the subaltern classes, and "As a result, the cultural turn raised the specter of a cultural politics, a cultural radicalism, a cultural revolution"; it was a specter, Denning adds, that haunts the period of the cold war.[12] Still, something new was already beginning to stir near the end of this period even as the bitter, structurally unemployed offspring of a fast failing Keynesianism screamed "anarchy in the U.K." and a musical pulse from Jamaica inspired the youth of the southern hemisphere.

And what exactly is the power of a specter, a phantom? How does it interact, if it can do so at all, with the broader social and economic landscape including the struggle for social justice and the changing nature of capitalist accumulation? As we have contended, it is the seldom-studied desire to speak in a collective voice, a desire that has long fueled the social imagination of artists, that not only offers a unique breach into the postwar cultural turn, but continues to pry open the social narratives of today.

Like modernist collectivism, collectivism after modernism was well intentioned and thoroughly of its own historical moment. It marked a shift within the practices of visual artists from a focus on art as a given institutional and linguistic structure to an active intervention in the world of mass culture. At the same time it recognized that the modernist's collective vision

had failed to materialize. Therefore if the earlier ambition was, as Mondrian once put it, to struggle "against everything individual in man," then the aspiration of collectivism after the Second World War rarely claimed to find its unity as the singularly correct avant-garde representative of social progress but instead structured itself around decentered and fluctuating identities. Rather than fighting against the inevitably heterogeneous character of all group formations, collectivism after modernism embraced it.

Yet if collective social form during the cold war became political, this was still a form of cultural politics or cultural radicalism. That is, its medium and its concerns were cultural; its fetish was the experience of collective political autonomy in and through culture, art, communication. It assumed that the ideal of collectivism was to realize itself not in the social model or plan but in the to-and-fro of cultural exchange. From the Situationists to Group Material to the Yes Men, postwar cultural politics was most clearly realized within informally networked communities of artists, technologically savvy art geeks, and independent political activists who embraced the plasticity of postwar political identities while turning directly toward the spectacle of mass commodification, tentatively at first and then with increasing enthusiasm, in order to make use of its well-established network of signification, amplification, and distribution. But most of all it is precisely because

FIGURE I.2. Zero Dimension in performance of *Ritual* at "Anti-Expo Black Festival," Ikebukuro Art Theater, Tokyo, 1969. Photograph by Kitade "Tonbo" Yukio. Courtesy of Kuroda Raiji.

collectivism brings focus to—inevitably, uniquely—the broader social and economic conditions of production, which are themselves always collective despite appearance, that it is capable of returning again and again to haunt both past and present.

COLLECTIVISM NOW

Evidence that recent and profound mutation in the neoliberal agenda has occurred in the months since 9/11 is everywhere abundant. Likewise, collectivism is undergoing a radical transformation of its own. As we write this, Steven Kurtz, a founding member of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), is facing dubious criminal charges, connected to the group's public critique of the biotechnology industry, that were leveled by a federal grand jury impaneled to reveal the artist's involvement in bioterrorism.[13] Underlying the state's investigation, however, is the CAE's anarchist-inspired writings about tactical media and the creation of radical, collective cells for carrying out "molecular interventions and semiotic shocks that contribute to the negation of the rising intensity of authoritarian culture."[14]

All at once it seems that an era has transpired since the risk-taking, experimental approach embodied by contemporary art was being held up as the sexy doppelganger of the new economy. Ounce for ounce art's cultural

FIGURE I.3. Beatriz da Costa *(left)*, performing with the Critical Art Ensemble, helps an audience member spread transgenic E. coli on a Petri dish to promote the fictitious biotech company GenTerra, 2001. Courtesy of Beatriz da Costa and the Critical Art Ensemble.

capital also paid dividends of another type. According to John Murphy, a former vice president of Philip Morris Inc., art harbors an essential ingredient that "has its counterpart in the business world. That element is innovation—without which it would be impossible for progress to be made in any segment in society."[15]

But what appears to have set Kurtz and the CAE apart—at least for the moment—from other, similar artistic endeavors is most apparent by a question FBI officers posed to one of Kurtz's academic colleagues: why, they asked, is the CAE "listed as a collective rather than by its individual members?"[16] No longer mere symptom but now fully suspect, the innovative groupthink common to both unbridled corporate entrepreneurialism and a certain electronic vanguard sensibility will henceforth be required to take a loyalty test or face the consequences. There is only room for one collective enterprise now and that is state-sanctioned marketplace fetishism as imagined community. And with it comes the ethereal image of commingled youthful blood, always purposely kept offscreen yet always fully present. It is as ghostly a form of collectivism as that of Vicksburg, Normandy, Iwo Jima, and countless other mnemonic points of reference cynically mobilized by a new cult of communal sacrifice and blindly administered over by a swarm of embedded media, gray-haired talking heads, and evangelical party leaders.[17]

In other words, what was only very recently a primarily *cultural* battlefield waged over modes of representation, manifestations of identity, and even choices of lifestyle has abruptly shifted into increasingly direct confrontation that, as Brian Holmes argues, is constituted by "decentralized collective action that propagates itself via every means: word-of-mouth and rumor, communication between political groups, meetings of social movements, and broadcasts over specialized and mass media—above all the Internet."[18] Cultural politics may have ended, but in a world all but totally subjugated by the commodity form and the spectacle it generates, the only remaining theater of action is direct engagement with the forces of production. This repoliticization of the economy brings with it the ghosts of collectivism past. In this respect we cannot help but recall the words of El Lissitzky, "The private property aspect of creativity must be destroyed; all are creators and there is no reason of any sort for this division into artists and nonartists."[19]

Nevertheless, insofar as collectivism after modernism remains rooted in difference rather than its attempted neutralization, it is constituted within what Antonio Negri has described as a multitude consisting of creative workers, community and environmental activists, radical labor, and NGO administrators but also urban garden builders, houseworkers, and mothers. From puppet makers busted by the Philadelphia police to radical hip-hop

artists on Chicago's South Side, from rural peasants facing down agribusiness giants like Monsanto or the PRI in Chiapas to techno-geeks who dream of turning the very tools of global capital into the means of its destruction, the new collectivism at once resembles the tentative unity of the United Front in the 1930s while simultaneously counterposing the universal consumer to the romance of world man. Therefore, when the Carnival Against Capital occupies urban centers, when the group Yomango seizes merchandise simply "because you can't buy happiness," or when the Critical Art Ensemble creates home testing kits for identifying transgenic foods purchased at the local grocery store, they move within and are literally constituted by the same, nearly global force of capital they aim to disrupt.

This then is our fetish now: that the dream of collectivism realize itself as neither the strategic vision of some future ideal, of a revised modernism, nor as the mobile, culture-jamming, more-mediated-than-thou counterhegemony of collectivism after modernism, but instead as Marx's self-realization of human nature constituted by taking charge of social being here and now. This means neither picturing social form nor doing battle in the realm of representation, but instead engaging with social life as production, engaging with social life itself as the medium of expression. This new collectivism carries with it the spectral power of collectivisms past just as it is realized fully within the hegemonic power of global capitalism. Its creativity stands in relationship to the modernist image and the postmodernist counterimage much in the same way that the multitude of Sunday painters and other amateurs does to the handful of art stars: as a type of dark matter encircling the reified surfaces of the spectacle of everyday life. Vastly more extensive and difficult to pinpoint, this new collectivist fetish inhabits the everywhere and nowhere of social life. In so doing it gives its own interpretation to the old avant-garde banner—"art into life!"—that it proudly carries forward from its predecessors: that the ancient dream of the glorious, all-encompassing body of the collective—of Christ or God or Allah or King or Leviathan or Nation or State or Public—the dream of redemption, of experiencing the imagined community as an end to alienation and as a promise of eternal life, realize itself not as an image or as flight from images but instead as a form of social building that brings itself into being wherever and whenever it can.

In this regard, the developments discussed in this book serve as history in the richest of all senses: they are, or rather *were,* social experiments, each with its own peculiar mix of accomplishments and failures, vitality and obsolescence, memory and futurity, but experiments that stand now as building blocks footing manifold opportunities to address the pressing need for renewal and revitalization that we face today. Put another way, what this

book offers is an episodic overview of the postwar history of social sculpture, of the history of collectivism after modernism. The instances studied are not the only pertinent examples, by any means, but they are important ones that have been given thoughtful and learned and incisive consideration by the volume's contributing authors. Our hope for them, as for this volume as a whole, is only the usual for historical understanding: that it provide occasion to bring to fruition the lessons and opportunities of the past that have lain dormant or underrealized until now.

NOTES

1. There has been some confusion about what we mean in this paragraph that has come in from several corners. (For one published example, see Tirdad Zolghadr, "Envy as Consumer Credo and Political Temperament," *Bidoun* [Winter 2006]). We do *not* mean to invoke some neocon claptrap about the "clash of civilizations" or a good old-fashioned orientalist "us and them" (with or without the traditional barely veiled envy of the primitive horde that Zolghadr attributes to us). Our point is really the opposite: that the "us" and the "them," the e-economy and the Arab street, democracy and "terrorism are inextricably bound together in the same crisis. We state as much when we say, "We may well try to stand apart from this with some genteel, nineteenth-century notion of detached critical propriety but . . ." and in the previous paragraph when we locate both "fully within the crisis and the dream that is late capitalism." What we *do* mean is that the two forms of collectivism in all their differences are equally embodiments of a depleted statism that expresses its postmodern collective ideal, in the words of one study on the topic, as "a hideous amalgam of the feudal, the Nasserite 'national,' and the spectacular" (Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* [London: Verso, 2005], 33.) As we put it at the end of the following paragraph, "The newness of the new e-collectivism, like the newness of the new Arab street, is only a rebirth of intensity, the welling up of the spirits from the past, a recall to the opportunities and battle lines of old." The object of that battle, of course, has traditionally been named sovereignty or autonomy, and its principle field of action, its battleground, has most usefully been termed the public sphere. That this battle for hearts and minds is being waged on both sides most effectively and most tragically with the weapon of spectacle, as the authors of *Afflicted Powers* have it, is itself the crisis of collectivism that this volume as a whole attempts to address.

2. Geoffrey Nunberg, "Blogging in the Global Lunchroom," commentary broadcast on *Fresh Air,* April 20, 2004, and published at http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~nunberg/lunchroom.html.

3. Quoted in Clive Thompson, "The Virus Underground," *New York Times Magazine,* February 8, 2004, 33.

4. For one superb if all too predictable illustration of such instrumentalization, see Will Leitch, "Group Thinker," *New York Magazine,* June 21, 2004.

5. Emily Braun, "The Faces of Modigliani: Identity Politics under Fascism," in *Modigliani: Beyond the Myth,* ed. Mason Klein (New York: Jewish Museum, 2004), 39.

6. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992), 1:447.

7. N. Altman, "'Futurism' and Proletarian Art," trans. in *Bolshevik Visions: First*

Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia, ed. William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1984), 400–401.

8. Quoted by Mark R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline and Soviet Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 33–38.

9. Quoted by Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999), 23.

10. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 125.

11. Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London: Verso, 2004), 1.

12. Ibid., 5–6.

13. In May 2004, the Joint Terrorism Task Force illegally detained artist and SUNY Buffalo professor Steve Kurtz of Critical Art Ensemble (CAE). They seized documents, computers, and equipment used in three of CAE's projects, including scientific equipment used to test food for the presence of genetically modified organisms. They seized materials, including a project that was to have been part of an exhibition and performance at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) and another project that had been safely displayed in museums and galleries throughout Europe and North America. The New York State commissioner of public health determined that the materials seized by the FBI pose no public safety risk. All of the materials are legal and commonly used for scientific education and research activities in universities and high schools and are universally regarded by scientists as safe. A grand jury soon dropped charges of bioterrorism against Kurtz. And yet he and Robert Ferrell, a professor and former head of the Department of Genetics at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Public Health, both face a possible twenty years in prison for mail fraud. In what has become increasingly clear to most as a politically motivated attempt to silence an artist and scientist whose work is critical of government policy, motions for dismissal were denied in 2006, and it now seems very likely that the case will go to a full trial sometime in late 2007 or early 2008. For more on the case see http://www.caedefensefund.org/.

14. Critical Art Ensemble, http://www.critical-art.net/.

15. Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (London: Verso, 2002), 125.

16. Lynne Duke, "The FBI's Art Attack: Offbeat Materials at Professor's Home Set Off Bioterror Alarm," *Washington Post,* June 2, 2004.

17. Since we first wrote this introduction, several spectacular shifts have complicated our gloomy assessment, including an accelerated crisis for neoconservatives and a growing challenge to neoliberal globalization itself. First, the wave of jingoism that dominated domestic politics immediately following 9/11 has given way to malaise. Falsehoods, military failings, and human and financial costs have deflated, at least for the moment, the panicked demand for conformity and repression of journalists, artists, and dissenters. Second, and most provocative for our thesis, North American imperialism is now threatened by the rise of new forms of nationalism and socialism gathering momentum in Latin America.

18. Brian Holmes, in correspondence with the authors, August 10, 2002.

19. El Lissitzky, "Suprematism in World Reconstruction" (1920), in *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), 333.
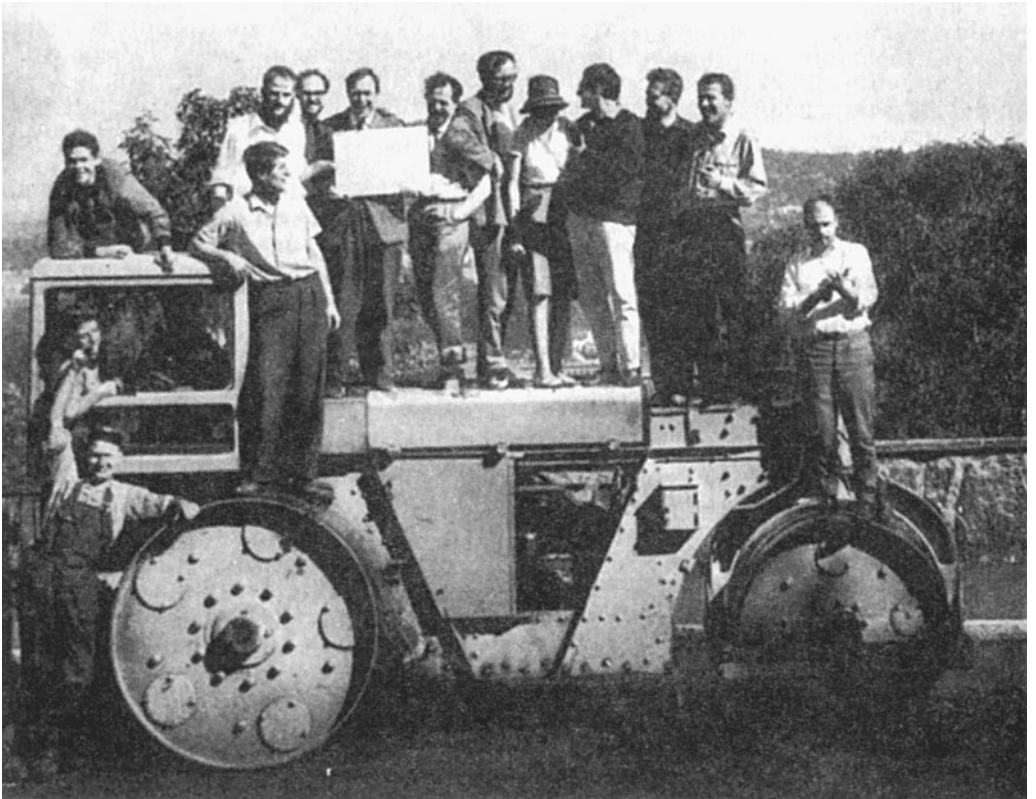
FIGURE 1.1. Internationale Situationniste members with workers in Göteborg, Sweden, 1962. *Internationale Situationniste,* no. 7 (April 1962). Copyright Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1997.

1. *Internationaleries:* Collectivism, the Grotesque, and Cold War Functionalism

JELENA STOJANOVIĆ

> We should not reject the contemporary culture, but negate it.
> —*Internationale Situationniste*

This essay examines specific ways some of the main modernist discursive tenets such as collectivism and internationalism have been rearticulated in avant-garde art practice during the cold war ideological warfare. It is important to note that this ideology became dominant in Europe with the implementation of the Marshall Plan in 1948. This was also the moment when globalization began to take root and when the term "international" began to figure prominently in the names of art collectives. By focusing on the theory and practice of four early cold war collectives this chapter will investigate the changing nature of collective art practice itself and its inter-action and future impact on the way modernism and modernist art practices are understood and interpreted.

One period text above all neatly and polemically articulated many of these concerns. Although written at the very beginning of the Second World War, Harold Rosenberg's 1940 essay "The Fall of Paris" warns of the impending death of modernism. Primarily focusing on Europe and on Paris in particular, Rosenberg identifies the spread of nationalism as a force that is about to destroy the cultural internationalism that had always character-ized this modernist capital. This metaphorical "fall" of Paris as the cultural international was for Rosenberg about to complete the fall and failure of the political international that had taken place in the twenties in Moscow. This judgment implied, or rather was based upon, a clear spatial, topographical metaphor. Hence the end of a political internationalism would inevitably be followed by the end of a cultural internationalism, thus finishing the final chapter in the irretrievable destruction of the modernist dream, that of a "world-citizen" included.[1] Rosenberg's rhetoric, while representative of the dominant interpretive tropes of modernism,[2] is yet another example of what

the collectives under scrutiny in this chapter strove to resist, or rather sought to reverse. Their primary if nonetheless utopian task was to negate the rhetoric that there were two avant-gardes[3]—one political, the other aesthetic—that are in turn divided along imaginary lines of demarcation and positioned by mutual subordination and subservience. This same utopian drive led them to challenge both official Marxist doctrine and institutionally established, artistic avant-gardism. They strongly believed that international collectives provided, inadvertently perhaps yet uniquely, the underpinning for both the aesthetical and the political avant-garde, and that the very existence of collectivism profoundly challenged any form of specialization, spatialization, or demarcation. As the Situationists explained in a text written almost twenty years later and coincidentally entitled, irony notwithstanding, "The Fall of Paris" ("La Chute de Paris"), the internationals and truly international collectives simply never existed and their time has yet to come.[4] Hence, these art "internationals," or more to the point, "internationaleries" in a droll rendition offered by Christian Dotremont, were inherently ambiguous formations, and their ambiguity was itself a form of negation and critique meant to subvert the dominant modernist discourse and its embedded cold war thinking. Simultaneously however, in a positive move, it sought to rescue whatever remained of public, collective subjectivity and the radical, political potential of internationalism. Therefore the very term *internationaleries*, and even more importantly the cultural practice it gave rise to, might be described as a "grotesque" manipulation of the modernist trope of international avant-gardism.

My use of the term grotesque is based on the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin who defined it as an ironic, performative tactic with a very important social role insofar as it both critically preserved and negated significant contemporary issues at "moments of danger."[5] It is this dual figurative/disfigurative function of the grotesque as a rhetorical tactic that reverses or inverts the intended and established uses of internationalism. To "degrade" means above all not so much to propose new modes, as much as to expose the lack and inconsistencies of the old ones including art, the avant-garde, and even collective practice itself. Hence, the grotesque is a collective act that culminates in a carnival, a "borderline between life and art."[6] Furthermore, Bakhtin maintains that insofar as the grotesque is also a speech act it is a spatial tactic as well. Its aim is nothing short of the reordering and rearticulating of the world as in a dialectical "change of gears." As an upside-down, inside-out movement the grotesque is probably best exemplified by the well-known Situationist tactic of *détournement*. True to the logic of the grotesque, it was defined in deceptively simple terms as a "reversal of perspective."[7] Through this grotesque mode of action the international collectives

played a "users game" in which their collective, often ludic activity derided the specialization and reification of cold war culture. Therefore, references to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*[8] abound in their writings and are often used to frame or redress paraphysical connotations and the remnant of surrealist desires.[9] More importantly, this signifies that their "game" was not conceived as an autonomous activity in the modernist sense. On the contrary, it was deeply shaped and informed by particular historical circumstances that would have unique and long-lasting implications for modern European history. Hence this hybridized, often monstrous logic of the grotesque led the *internationaleries* on a quest for "destructive preservation," yet another of their oxymoronic claims.

The *internationaleries* used the grotesque as a critical device in their experimentations and writings in order to frame the historic "escroquerie"[10] or myth that lay behind an all-pervasive cold war discourse, while simultaneously attempting to preserve whatever remained of collective subjectivity.[11] Allegedly, it was the American journalist Walter Lipmann who reappropriated and popularized the term "cold war,"[12] making it an accepted and valid denominator to this day. Anecdotal or not, this account underscores the strategic importance that the new mass media would play in waging this new form of conflict. The cold war (or Third World War)[13] was a conflict "of big interests" carried out by two superpowers who, while fearing "the unthinkable" as the press and the media repeated daily, resisted the use of arms while opting instead to primarily do battle through "psychological warfare" often carried out through the medium of culture. They not only turned on its head Clausewitz's classic definition of war as regulation through bloodshed, but more importantly the United States and U.S.S.R. exploded his concept of "total warfare" beyond its author's wildest imagination.[14] The cold war became synonymous with ideological warfare that, in the Situationists's words, was "colonizing" of each and every aspect of daily experience while simultaneously placing the political economy at the very core of existence.[15] With the implementation of various economic plans and treaties, most notably that of the Bretton Woods accords, values such as knowledge, social relations, and culture were not only instrumentalized and manipulated for ideological ends, but in an unprecedented way they also grew dependent upon and became inflected by economics, in particular economic exchange value. This massive and pervasive presence of political economy, now present in all aspects of life, necessarily entailed a heavy techno-bureaucratic apparatus that completed and complemented the "total warfare." In other words it was modernist, but monstrously so. A hyperrationalization of life that continued reproducing itself[16] and that the *internationaleries* referred to variously as "formalism" or more consistently as "functionalism."

In other words, functionalism was understood to involve various forms of social conditioning performed and enacted by the media and dominant culture, but most clearly revealed by the establishment of a new, mass-produced architecture in which, as Louis Sullivan famously quipped, "form *betrays* a function." More specifically, functionalism included and was based upon an imposed institutionalization and commodification of contemporary artistic practice that reinforced the notion of the artist as a single (male) practitioner.[17] Modern and contemporary art exhibitions now mushroomed across Europe, as did all manner of art museums, "international" and bi-annual cold war art exhibitions all perfectly mirroring the existing social divide.[18] All the while the division between the so-called East and West was carefully maintained even as a global market for art began to take shape. Simultaneous with this expansion was the rise of the so-called Kalte Kunst, or cold-art collectives whose objective was to reconcile art with industry, but always within strictly imposed geopolitical confines.[19] In sum, the cold war discourse, or what the artists labeled functionalism, was effectively an imposed modernization that implicitly confirmed the recuperation of the avant-garde discourse as yet another ideological tool in a dominant and dominating "total warfare." The solution was a "negation and not a rejection," itself an ambiguous and utopian project that sought to avoid the pitfalls of the dominant discourse through a tactical or grotesque reversal of power.[20] The four principal collectives forming the *internationaleries* were CoBrA, Internationale des Artistes Experimentaux (CoBrA IAE), Internationale Lettriste (Lettrist International, or LI), Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste (MIBI), and Internationale Situationniste (Situationist International, or SI). Each in different ways desired to redeem and redefine the very notion of international collectivism as an explicit critique of modernist, cold war functionalism.

From 1948 through 1951, CoBrA, or the Experimental Artists International, consisted of an international collective of artists' groups whose critical manipulation of surrealism and surrealist rhetoric was tempered precisely by a practical "experimental" collectivism,[21] often in a form of a profuse collaborative self-mockery,[22] but always emerging from a diverse, international membership. The name CoBrA itself was an acronym standing for the three principle cities these groups hailed from: Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam. Asger Jorn, Carl-Henning Pendersen, Egill Jacobsen, Henry Heerup, Else Alfelt, Sonja Ferlov, Erik Thommesen, Erik Ortvald, Mogens Balle, and Ejler Bille among others came from Denmark; Pierre Alechinsky, Christian Dotremont, and Reinhoud (Reinhoud D'Haese) from Belgium; Svavar Gudnason from Iceland; Karel Appel, Constant (Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys), Corneille (Guillaume Cornelis van Beverloo), Anton

Rooskens, Eugene Brands, Lucebert (Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk), Lotti van der Gaag (Charlotte van der Gaag), Theo Wolvecamp, and Jan Nieu-wenhuys from the Netherlands; Shinkichi Tajiro from the United States; Stephen Gilbert and William Gear from Scotland; Karl Otto Goetz from Germany; and Max Walter Svanberg from Sweden.

In a similar vein, the members of the Lettrist International were active between 1952 and 1957. LI was a rebellious fraction formed out of departing members of the Lettrist group.[23] Formed around a small, yet very consistent number of members working in Paris they were, contrary to Rosenberg's complaint, truly international and included Guy Debord, Gill J. Wolman, Michele Bernstein, Andre-Frank Conord, Jacques Fillon, Gilles Ivain (Ivan Chtcheglov), Moustapha Khayatti, and Mohamed Dahou. From the very start their practice appropriated a critical reading of "everyday life" *(le quotidien)* taken from Henri Lefebvre's writings. They used this concept to focus their activity on various "modes of conditioning," while conceiving of their practice as a highly sophisticated tactical, rather than strategic, game[24] whose goal was achieving nothing less than a "permanent cultural revolution."[25]

The third group, Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste, or the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (MIBI), was active from 1953 through 1957 and formed as a collaboration between some CoBrA artists including Dotremont, Constant, and Jorn, but at various times also incorporated members from the Nuclear Movement (Il Movimento Nucleare) such as Enrico Baj,[26] as well as LI members such as Debord, Wol-man, and Dahou. They were joined by musicians, philosophers, architects, and sometimes simply amateurs from Italy, such as Giuseppe-Pinot Gallizio, Ettore Sottsas Jr., Pierro Simondi, and Elena Verrone, but also by Prvoslav Radu from Romania, Jan Kotik from Czechoslovakia, and Echauren Matta from Cuba. MIBI was responsible for the creation of the First Laboratory of the Imaginist Experimental Art in Albisola, and for staging the First Congress of Free Artists in 1956 that led to the Unification Congress and the formation of the Situationist International in 1957.

The SI was active from 1957 through 1972. Of all the *internationaleries* the SI has had the most long-lasting influence, which is being revisited today among younger artists, activists, and cultural critics. Extremely active in getting its ideas into print between 1957 and 1969, the SI published a journal under the same name, *Internationale Situationniste*, while various other SI factions published *Spur, Situationist Times, Deutsche Denke,* and *Situationiske Revolution,* to mention but a few of the highly developed if short-lived journals that advanced ideas about artistic practice as a purely tactical game. Accordingly, their grotesque critique of various forms of "spectacular"

conditioning, such as that carried out by the media or the movies in particular, took up a central position within their internationally conceived conferences. Totaling eight altogether, these gatherings were inaugurated in 1957 with the Unification Congress in Cosio d'Arroscia and concluded in 1969 with the Eighth Conference in Venice. The international ambitions of these collective events is made apparent by their emphasis on the membership in Africa, Latin America, and Asia as well as the fact that almost forty organizations from all over the world attended over the life span of the organization. As noted, however, only two groups stayed on permanently as part of the SI.[27]

COLLECTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/S:
TOWARD FORMING A GROTESQUE CRITIQUE

"Mr. Georges Lapassade is a cunt,"[28] exclaimed the Situationists, whose very language manifests itself as a form of excessively hyperbolic and caustic humor. Yet if the Situationist's grotesque begins in rude expressions and personal insults, it ultimately remained an ambiguous act. Its goal was to critically address a total reality and to do so in the form of an "inside out" reversal[29] or as a "third force"[30] that is ultimately "not beautiful but true."[31]

As is well known the experimental method or simply the "experimental" was a powerful modernist trope denoting an objective, positivistic, and scientific inquiry: a dispassionate recording and reordering of reality into a set of easily measurable, quantifiable units. More importantly, the experimental was not the "why" but the "how" things happen. As Émile Zola justified its use in what he termed the "scientific age novel," it was made to fit a "new, physiological man."[32] The *internationaleries*, however, "détourned" the term experimental, doing so with the hope that as a collective device it would become a practice, or rather a myriad of practices, for turning inside-out its own positivistic utilitarianism while resisting classification and homogenization. For example, with CoBrA IAE, the experimental was primarily understood as a "third force" that mocked the dominant cold war rhetoric of ideological and formal antithesis. In artistic terms this took the form of painterly abstraction vs. realism, or specifically, abstract vs. social realism. In artistic terms this meant an ideological struggle between painterly abstraction and realism, or specifically, American abstract expressionism versus Soviet socialist realism. As Christian Dotremont explained in 1950,[33] experimental practices were also a way to critically rework two important avant-garde legacies, surrealism and Marxism, that were becoming increasingly idealized and useless in the given historical situation. Although often in a polemical exchange with Henri Lefebvre,[34] who was himself an old surrealist,

CHRISTIAN DOTREMONT

LE « REALISME-SOCIALISTE » CONTRE LA REVOLUTION

« Seule, l'expérience est capable de faire les corrections et d'ouvrir des chemins nouveaux. Seule une vie fermentant sans entraves s'engage dans mille formes nouvelles, improvise, reçoit une force créatrice, corrige elle-même ses faux-pas ».   Rosa Luxembourg.

C O B R A
1950

FIGURE 1.2. *Le "Realisme-Socialiste" contre la revolution*, 1950. Collection Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, The Netherlands. Artist's publication. No known copyright holder.

the CoBrA IAE members drew heavily on his revision of Marxism and more specifically on his concept of *everydayness*. Lefebvre's first version of the *Critique of Everyday Life* appeared in 1947 and offered a critical analysis of the dangers of techno-bureaucracy and modernization. He identified passivity and overwhelming boredom as a consequence of specialization and the increasing amount of leisure time that in turn made the critical analysis of reality problematic and made creating the necessary tools of resistance extremely difficult.[35] In response, the CoBrA artists offered an oxymoronic product: the artist as a "professional amateur." Through a combination of collective ownership and active production this hybrid would, they believed, disrupt then obliterate normative, canonical modernist art making. In addition, the more they made their art temporal and ephemeral, the more commodification was resisted. Such collective, hybrid actions were always eclectic, often mixing together drawing, painting, poetry, sculpture, and decorative or applied arts such as ceramics and tapestry as well as even free cinematic experimentations. These collaborative encounters between artists and nonprofessionals also blurred the lines of specialized distinctions, literally making others into "professional amateurs." In addition, they also took total control of the reception of their work by not allowing any curatorial or art-critical interference.

CoBrA IAE carefully orchestrated a number of unconventional exhibitions including the famous 1949 project at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam[36] that powerfully mocked even the most unorthodox of surrealist installations. And contrary to surrealist happenings, they did not try to address or remotely create any form of "modern marvelous" but, on the contrary, sought to establish a populist and festive occasion that took place within the everyday "now." The same irreverent, informal mode was also characteristic of their conferences. During the 1949 gathering in Bregneroed they collectively repainted the interior of their meeting space, thus revealing the intrinsic logic of the "everyday" within common architecture while demonstrating one possible tactic of the grotesque. Many of these tactics reflected the teachings and writings of Gaston Bachelard,[37] a French thinker of discontinuities and epistemological breaks. Bachelard was in fact a philosopher of science and one of the rare "thought professionals" the group invited to take an active part in the pages of their journal *Cobra*. Rejecting completely the established modernist myth of an individualist creation ex nihilo, Bachelard argued instead for the importance of exchange and reuse and insisted that there are two types of imagination: one visual, the other materialistic. For him, the importance and power of the materialistic imagination, as opposed to the mechanical, repetitive tendency of the visual, was its ability to "reorder the world."[38] This was achieved by breaking down the existing order to build anew. Furthermore, his concept of materialistic imagination implied a careful examination of

and an active rethinking about the relationship of man-made objects with nature. Bachelard's work on imagination, in addition to Lefebvre's critical writings on space, provided CoBrA's experimental starting point and provided the group with a highly specific tool useful against all sorts of idealizations, generalizations, and ideological recuperation.

The CoBrA IAE experimentation also included an active, collective concern with the education of artists. For example, they proposed that art was a total, collective act and art pedagogy was an exchange among equals rather than a dynamic based on hierarchies of power. Another intrinsic and crucial part of their activity was publishing. Much of this took place in the "Cobra House" located in an abandoned house in the Atelier du Marais in Brussels where the group's printing press was located. It was here the members collaborated on a variety of experimental publishing projects including their journal *Cobra: An Organ of the International of Experimental Artists* as well as *Le Petit Cobra,* a more spontaneous publication that served to record the collective's key events, dates, and so forth. There was in addition a third organ called *Le Tout Petit Cobra* used to swiftly summarize group activities. Given the difficult economic circumstances in Europe during the late 1940s these publications were among their most important achievements. Considered together, the three collaborative journals, the group's research on existing and extinct folk traditions, their organization of numerous festivals and exhibitions, and the series of printed monographs known as the *Cobra Encyclopaedie* continue to demonstrate the significance of CoBrA IAE for the study and elaboration of visual culture and art history.

The 1950s were a particularly tense moment in the cold war. It was also at this juncture that the book *Kalte Kunst,* or "Cold Art," by Karl Gerstner, was published. Its title almost served as a homogenizing metaphor for the dominant functionalist rhetoric of the times.[39] Without any irony the author advocated a specific form of geometric, highly rationalized, and monolithic art making based on avant-garde constructivist-like forms, mathematical formula, and arithmetical color progressions as the progressive artistic form of the twentieth century. Yet the inconsistencies inherent in the functionalist approach so forcefully critiqued by the *internationaleries* are actually made apparent as the author rejects the role of the imagination preferring instead a modular regulation of artistic form. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of *Kalte Kunst* proved extremely popular among artists especially those in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Latin America with some of these ideas reflected in the large number of groups who shared a similar belief in the creation of systemic art including kinetic, op, or minimal art, and visual or concrete poetry. Often these artists couched their aesthetic ideology, as well as their obvious glorification of functionalism, in an outspoken desire to

CE NUMÉRO, LE DERNIER DE LA REVUE "COBRA", A ÉTÉ ÉDITÉ PAR LA SOCIÉTÉ ROYALE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE LIÈGE, A L'OCCASION DE LA IIᵉ EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE D'ART EXPÉRIMENTAL. IL A ÉTÉ TIRÉ A 2000 EXEMPLAIRES SUR LES PRESSES DE L'IMPRIMERIE KUMPS A BRUXELLES EN SEPTEMBRE 1951.

FIGURE 1.3. Back cover of *Cobra*, no. 10 (Fall 1951). Collection Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, The Netherlands. Photograph by Bob Goedewaagen, Rotterdam. A coiled cobra, a mystical beast and a prominent symbol in many ancient genesis myths, was the group's trademark. Homogenizing the group's acronym into one signifier clearly encapsulates their rhetoric of a third force and a desire to situate their international collective experimentation outside the dominant cold war discursive modes based on modernization and progress.

create a democratic Marxian (egalitarian) type of abstract art. However, for the *internationaleries*, the "Cold Artists" and their theoreticians, including Max Bill, Abraham Moles, and Max Bense, were deeply ideological. In sum, *Kalte Kunst* was the perfect embodiment of affirmative culture, blindly adhering to the cold war discourse without any critical reflection on its function within that paradigm.[40] Instead of analyzing their own historical circumstances in the present, these cold artists projected their practice into a mystified, idealized future. Ultimately, cold art reinforced the very ideology its adherents claimed to reject and, in doing so, committed the same crime as the believers in industrial design: a belief in a fully rational and perfectly homogenized human environment. This was a condition most adamantly denounced by Asger Jorn in his text "Against Functionalism."[41]

        This critique formed a base and materialized as both the name and program of a group, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, severely mocking the Hochshule für Gestaltung in Ulm, or the "New Bauhaus." MIBI believed such functionalist ideology was the primary culprit lurking within cold war ideology. Therefore MIBI's experimental critique of functionalism, modernization, and imposed specialization developed out of necessity, its own ironic forms including an excess of impractical actions and afunctional gestures. Once, for example, the members invited groups of school children to individually paint mass-produced white plates as a sardonic rendition mocking the self-absorbed "professional designer," or what Max Bill, the founder of the "New Bauhaus," reverentially called the "Artist-Creator." They continued their collective games by literally staging exhibitions, retrospectives, historical avant-garde revisions, and art conferences. And insofar as these practices were unspecialized acts they proved difficult to commodify and even more difficult to solidify into a single, homogeneous narrative. Dire financial straights, however, eventually forced MIBI members to reduce their voluminous publication efforts. Still, despite the setback, they collaborated on an issue of *Il Gesto* with the Movimento Nucleare while separately publishing a few texts written by Asger Jorn. They also managed to found an International Laboratory for Experimental Research in an old convent, which, once again, led directly to a state of "productive chaos";[42] one result of this activity was the famous "Industrial paintings" executed by Giuseppe-Pinot Gallizio and his friends.[43] By 1956, however, they were forced to consolidate their efforts into one issue of the journal, collectively choosing to call it *Eristica*,[44] mockingly debasing the very art of dispute while affirming the irrelevance of truth and veracity.

        It was about this time that the Lettrist International became familiar with MIBI's critique of functionalism and their grotesque experimentations. The LI's work offered a number of similarities with MIBI, especially

in the way they conceived their practice collectively. The LI members asserted that "What we need now is to take care of collective interests represented by a collective subjectivity."[45] At the same time, while continuing and challenging similar conceptual legacies to both surrealism and Marxism, they were also deeply influenced by the novelty of Lefebvre's critique of public disinterestedness. LI members were also, like MIBI, explicitly attacking the politics and discourse of the cold war, an approach especially evident in their filmmaking. They believed intervening in mass media challenged ideological "conditioning mechanisms." Perhaps more importantly such interventions also helped subvert the "leisure machines" that Lefebvre had defined so clearly in his writings.

LI members conceived of their artistic activity as a sophisticated tactical game. They devised a set of equally ironic collective gestures (parodico-serious they called them)[46] for carrying out their actions including "détournement," "dérive," "psychogeography," and "unitary urbanism." In every case the evocation of play and the logic of games became tools for a thoroughgoing social and cultural critique. For example, by "détourning" the mass media—one of the major "leisure machines" targeted by the group—they focused their activity not on the representation of news or politics, but on the way the media trivialized reality, maintaining the status quo through a "Balance of Power" that was in effect the inculcation of global fear. Hence, the group's freely distributed publications such as *Potlatch*[47] or *Internationale Lettriste* exhibit exactly the same trivialization of reality, *only in reverse:* "shake in your shoes, bureaucrats," they exclaimed, while mockingly inverting the powerful rhetoric of the global superpowers. Hence, their playful experimentation was deliberately conceived of as a reuse, recycling, or reversing of modernist productive and progressive ideologies that had in turn produced and reproduced the cold war discourse.

Always new, however also the same, the LI's aesthetic and intellectual approach to mass culture was essentially a form of plagiarism, or what they called *détournement*. This was in turn their main aesthetic tactic and was carried out in three distinct modes, deceptive, simple, and ultra, and included everything from simple quotidian plagiarism to borrowing clothing styles and types of behavior. It was in sum an irreverent, even blasphemous, way of altering private property in order to force it to be collective.[48] At the same time, *détournement* suggests an erosion of the imposed and constructed division between the public and private. As Louis Althusser suggested, this distinction was "internal to bourgeois law and valid in the subordinate domains in which bourgeois law exercises its 'authority.'"[49]

This form of grotesque critique with its use of tactical play and media experimentation probably reached its greatest expression in the actions

of the fourth and final group discussed in this chapter, the Situationist International. The SI reached its peak in the sixties, but continued on into the early 1970s. More theoretically poised than the LI, the SI was also more orientated toward radical politics. Their substantial work in cinema, graphics, theory, and publishing is today highly influential and increasingly studied.[50] Certainly from the perspective of the grotesque the group's *détourned* movies are exemplary. Seeking to undermine the usual mimetic experience of viewing cinema they destroyed the mirror-like, imaginary identification viewers typically have with the filmic image. However, it was the SI members' many experiments in publishing that most clearly express their approach to collective practice. Collaborative works such as *Fin de Copenhague* in which Asger Jorn and Guy Debord exchange artistic ideas are what we would call today "artist's books." Self-published in a limited edition, *Fin de Copenhague* consisted of two hundred printed copies and bore the unmistaken imprint of a rough, samizdat publication including irregularly finished pages, uneven coloration, and assorted other imperfections typical of non-mass-produced objects. Even its title acknowledged a grotesque experiment by invoking the idea of "ends" as well as "means" and further mocking the bureaucratic mystification of everyday life. In addition, just as in their films, *Fin de Copenhague* was a pilfered assemblage of cut-out materials appropriated from Danish newspapers, French advertising commercials, city maps, comic pages, and various stolen sentences pulled out of their original context including especially various political slogans of the day. Significantly, in keeping with other aspects of their practice, the book was also freely distributed.

As has been widely acknowledged, the most important "grotescoserious" experimental tool of the SI was without doubt their journal, the *Internationale Situationniste*. The journal's twelve issues between 1958 and 1969 were "luxuriously produced," and not without ample reference to avant-garde and constructivist aesthetics. However, instead of the primary colors associated with Kalte Kunst, the journal displayed glowing metallic covers in blue and pink, gold and silver, thus ironically framing the "new machine age." The magazine's initial layout also included photographs of the members with misplaced captions and judiciously peppered photographs of pinups girls in raincoats standing either on beaches or resting supine on the backs of horses. This visual diffusion functioned as an obvious parody of *Playboy* magazine, which had recently been launched in 1953. It mocked the new magazine's thinly veiled treatment of sexual desire as a product of political economy.[51] Inside, its pages contained detailed diagrams of modern cities, assorted maps of an unknown, dystopic suburbia, as well as a line drawing of an apparatus for generating a "Gaussian distribution" of drifting paths.[52]

In the 1960s the "détourned" comics of Andre Bertrand were added to the SI journal. Refusing to hold copyright, Bertrand's graphics ridiculed the ambiguous pop-art strategies of American artists. However, the largest influence the SI had came from their pamphlets including Raoul Vaneigem's 1966 brochure, *On the Poverty of Student Life, or The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art*. These were widely translated around the world and in many cases directly contributed to the core of student upheavals in the mid- to late 1960s.[53] But most influential of all was
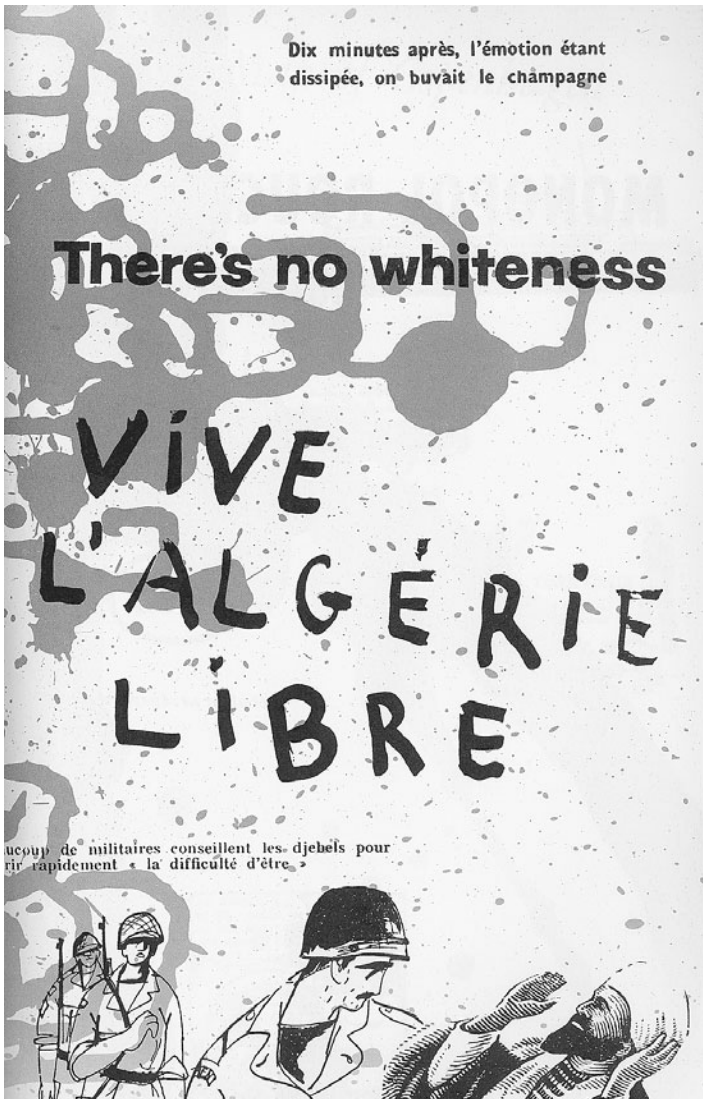

FIGURE 1.4. *Fin de Copenhague*, a MIBI *détournement* by Asger Jorn and Guy Debord, 1957. Graffiti reads "Long live free Algeria." Copyright 2004 fam. Jorn/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/COPY-DAN, Copenhagen.

Debord's 1967 pamphlet entitled *The Society of the Spectacle*. It was effectively Debord's attempt at rewriting and updating Marx's *Capital*, which had been published one hundred years earlier.[54] *The Society of the Spectacle* was a lapidary totalization or a *détournement* of not only Situationist theory that included most of their ideas published in the pages of SI magazines as well as those taken from congresses and conferences. Which is also another way of saying that through this text the group's experimentations and experimental mode had taken on its own materiality as a very peculiar and ambivalent critique of cold war political economy: it was avant-gardist, but with a profound, theoretical ambition unlike any other at that time. In it Debord argued that "the concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a speculative universe."[55] He rejected the often-rehearsed Hegelian "Aufhebung" scenario in which art finally surpasses itself through its own constant desire to reach beyond formal limitations, while arguing, in a wry *détournement* of Althusser's famous phrase, that practice consisted of "experimenting with theory." This experimentation was irreverent and plagiaristic, yet its objective was serious: to undermine cold war formalism and the resignation into "everydayness." Along with Debord, many other SI members took an active part in theoretical debates that became increasingly more intense in the sixties. Jorn also published a book-length text critiquing political economy.[56]

The debate in 1957 between Debord and what he termed the "Italo-experimentalist" artists helps to clarify the importance of theory for their practice. Debord denounced some members of the former MIBI for their unintentional specialization[57] and spoke about experimentation as an alternative mode of action that was opposed to the dominant and highly commodified modernist art and culture. In this context the theoretical, speculative elements actually impeded specialization, finalization, and the creation of a simple cultural product. It was also this experimental approach to theory that helped the group mobilize a diverse, extensive audience.[58]

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF UNITARY URBANISM

Focusing on a single "case study" or examining one exemplary and "illuminating" issue in the multifaceted practice of the *internationaleries* challenges the very core of their project. They would likely claim that this approach fetishizes and ultimately invalidates the main precepts of their entire practice because collectivity, heterogeneity, and experimentation were designed precisely to act as a guarantee against all forms of normalization and recuperation including the type of critical anthology to which this essay belongs. Nevertheless, in the case of "unitary urbanism," we find a tactic that, while

still ambiguous, is cohesive enough in structure to invite special scrutiny. Offering yet another oxymoronic turn of phrase as its title, this ultimate experiment in intervention was first fully formulated in the early fifties through common activities of MIBI and LI members. Unitary urbanism meant to examine the extraordinary mix of art, aesthetics, collective utopianism, and radical politics that grounded the work of these groups. It was a tactic that became especially prominent after a particular moment of political rupture within the cold war that was described by the *internationaleries* as "the general revolutionary resurgence characterizing the year 1956."[59]

This is why one of the first unitary urbanist events took place in December 1956 at the Unione Culturale center in Turin, Italy. For this occasion LI members Guy Debord, Gill Wolman, and Michele Bernstein traveled to Italy and joined the members of the MIBI. A flyer was produced with the title "Manifestate a Favore Dell'Urbanismo Unitario" (Act in a Favor of Unitary Urbanism). The language was of course hyperbolic. It promised "a big modern adventure" that would lead toward a "general revolution." It also emphasized another reframing tactic, that of psychogeography,

L'espace social de la consommation des loisirs. La surface circulaire grise que l'on distingue en haut et vers la gauche de ce cliché (stade de Milwaukee) est occupée par les 18 membres de deux équipes de base-ball. Dans la première zone restreinte qui l'entoure, il y a 43.000 spectateurs. Ils sont eux-mêmes encerclés par l'immense zone de stationnement de leurs voitures vides.

FIGURE 1.5. *Détourned* diagram of a baseball stadium in Milwaukee; in SI rhetoric, a perfect picture of a spectacularly colonized free time (the caption reads, "Social space of a leisure consumption"). *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (June 1960). Copyright Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1997.

in which the normative status of geography—one of the easiest to manipulate of all scholarly disciplines—was grotesquely revealed. Additional unitary urbanist actions were executed the next year in Brussels that consisted of a series of unplanned ludic games and *détourned* maps of the city.

The psychogeographies created in Brussels also produced a drift or *dérive* that collectively "discovered" and reframed the city, its civic functions or its lack of them. Brussels, once the site of the Second International, was at this moment in the cold war being transformed into the administrative and political center of NATO and by extension of the West. In theory, any collective, absurdist activity staged by LI would turn upside-down this transformed Brussels, recovering whatever remained of its older existence, and offer its citizens a radical mode of action for retrieving their city from the grips of techno-bureaucratization. Unitary urbanism was therefore a tactical rejection of officially imposed forms of urbanism including its covert policy of colonization, separation, fragmentation, and social isolation. Simultaneously, it offered the very opposite: a unifying if ephemeral act of serious festivity that was highly participatory and collectively realized.

One of the main conceptual forces behind unitary urbanism was a continuing interest in the writings of Henri Lefebvre. Particularly influential was his critique of the techno-bureaucratic regulation of cities, a process he termed the modernist "production of space."[60] In different ways the ultimate goal of unitary urbanism was a restoration of a totally human experience. This restoration was not unlike Lefebvre's concept of the festival as a celebration of the collective ownership of urban space. In this sense the theory and practice of unitary urbanist action was always conceived of as "a total critical act," and not just another "doctrine."[61] Some of these ideas percolated through SI writings prior to 1956 including Debord's 1955 study, *Critique of Urban Geography*, or Ivan Chtcheglov's 1953 text, *Formulary for a New Urbanism*. At the same time the critique of functionalism had already led them to previously denounce the modernist architect Le Corbusier and to *détourne* his famous phrase that the house is "machine for living" into their own interpretation: the "house as the machine for surprises."[62] In 1957 the "Report on the Construction of Situations" sought to make a clear turn away from an avant-gardism always controlled by the bourgeoisie and toward a more engaged form of direct action.[63] It was later that the group planned an "agitation and infiltration"[64] of UNESCO headquarters in Paris that was intended to ridicule its techno-bureaucratization of culture at that time. However the action was never executed. And while the concept of wreaking havoc on the so-called "international" distribution of "cultural needs" hoped to set in motion a truly global, if decidedly cultural, revolution, these radical goals remained in the final analysis merely theoretical.

Another significant unitary urbanist event was the 1959 exhibition entitled "La Caverna Antimateria" (Anti-Material Cave) that took place at the Galerie Drouin in Paris. In this case two Situationist members from the Italian section, Giors Melanotte and Giuseppe-Pinot Gallizio, collaboratively extended Gallizio's concept of "industrial painting" into the environment by creating a full-blown art gallery installation that addressed several issues simultaneously. By creating an environment made of an indefinitely reproducible, collectively made abstract painting reminiscent of bomb shelters that were commonly featured in daily newspapers, they targeted the persistent mass-marketing of fear through nuclear annihilation while linking this to functionalist art production.[65] In the same year the group founded Research Bureau for Unitary Urbanism (Bureau de recherche pour un urbanisme unitaire). In many ways it was a continuation of the MIBI Experimental Laboratory in Alba. The Bureau's first projects were in the form of a labyrinth that rendered everyday, lived situations events that surpassed art.[66] Much of this ludic play was itself based on an earlier project in 1956 entitled *Mobile Cities* and expressed a utopian belief that the city and its inhabitants should be able to circulate freely, anarchically, according to their desires. This same grotesque logic had previously informed another project entitled *Temporary Habitations*, which was a series of spatial living constructs for the Gypsy population in Alba. The Research Bureau for Unitary Urbanism revived this proposition for nomadic living as a constantly changing and variable architectural environment necessary for creating "collective spontaneity."[67]

However in 1962 the Bureau moved to Brussels. Here its tactics once again took up a more theoretical direction. This included the production of a number of texts including Vaneigem's "Basic Banalities" that directly attacked contemporary culture, but also the new program written by Attila Kotanyi and Raoul Vaneigem who together pronounced that the SI artists treated urbanism "as an ideology," without which the "spectacle is impossible."[68] In this sense the unitary urbanist actions dramatically departed from most other contemporary art practices including the "de-coll/age" work performed by Wolf Vostell, or such practices as "Destruction in art," done in a similar, performative mode.[69] By contrast the SI offered a powerful collective vision, something that was profoundly lacking from these isolated, individualistic political and aesthetic undertakings.[70] This degree of collectivism was not seen again until, perhaps, the emergence of Fluxus several years later, or in some of the collectivist actions staged by Jean-Jacques Lebel.

With the tactic of unitary urbanism artists stopped being the constructors of useless, artificial art forms in order to become the constructors of an environment for developing new forms of collective ownership. The SI above all believed that architecture and urban planning needed to

be demystified and that public space had to be taken away from the specialized few. Their objective was to teach citizens how to stop being passive consumers and how to become self-governing, active producers of their own culture and politics. However, it was not until the dramatic events of May 1968 that the theory and practice of unitary urbanism were truly brought into focus and that "the city once again became a center of games."[71] Albeit temporary as well as brief in duration, this moment of critical festivities, political upheaval, and urban joie de vivre seemed to fulfill Henri Lefebvre's speculation that the festival had the power to bring people back from the periphery and into the urban center so as to reoccupy the city as its rightful,

FIGURE 1.6. Illustration of a *détourned* bomb shelter. *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (April 1962). Copyright Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1997. The image first appeared in this issue to illustrate the editorial "Geopolitique de l'hibernation"; it appeared in other issues as a visual framing device and as one of the ways the SI tactic of undoing the cold war discursive strategies was performed.

collective owners.[72] It was Bakhtin who described the festival that is a car-
nival as the ultimate grotesque celebration producing a truly radical dislo-
cation of social roles, the upturning of class structure, and "the suspension
of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions."[73]

The events of May 1968 brought collective subjectivity once again
to the center of the group's concerns. Declaring that museums are morgues
and storage depots they organized with the other artists and students a
march to the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. As if to finally put into prac-
tice one of the first unitary urbanist events and slogans, they proclaimed
"Art is the Opiate of People!"[74] As the first Parisian factories were occupied
by striking workers the SI called for the creation of workers' councils: de-
centralized collectives based on self-management and direct democracy. Days
and nights blurred together into one uninterrupted sequence of assemblies
including the printing committee, the liaison committee, the requisition
committee, and so forth as a sense of internationalism sprang up virtually
overnight, with workers and intellectuals from all over Europe, as well as
many other parts of the world, suddenly echoing such *internationaleries* ideas
as "Power to the Imagination."[75] Meanwhile the SI set to work frantically
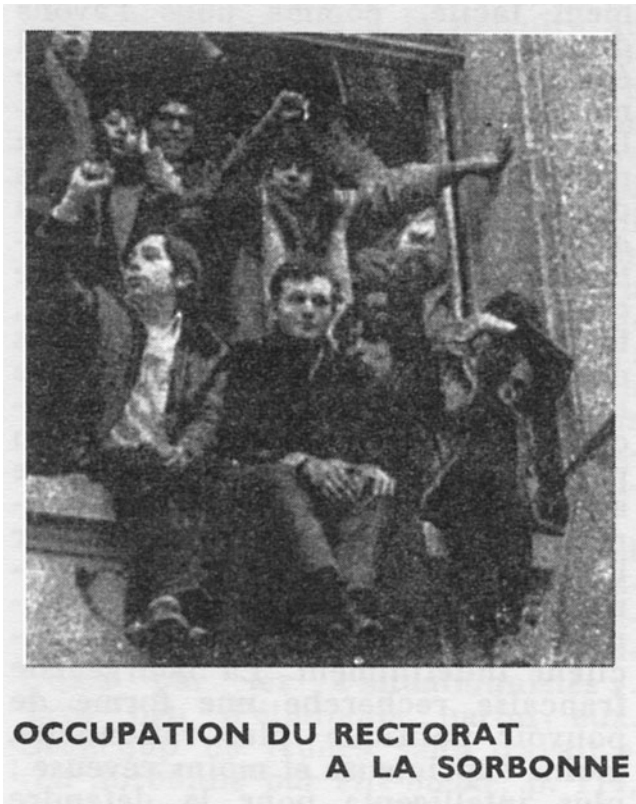

**OCCUPATION DU RECTORAT
A LA SORBONNE**

FIGURE 1.7.
Sorbonne, Paris, May
1968. *Internationale
Situationniste*, no. 12
(September 1969).
Copyright Librarie
Arthème Fayard, 1997.

printing a series of uncomplicated but graphically powerful posters and leaf-lets "Addressed to all workers." They reprinted their text "Minimum Defi-nition of a Revolutionary Organization" in a new edition of between 150,000 and 200,000 copies while seeing to its translation into English, German, Spanish, Italian, Danish, and Arabic. They also published several revolution-ary songs and some forty comic strips and used graffiti as a means of urban *détournement* arguing that the spray can, far more than the street poster, offers the writer the one way he can be certain of being read by everyone.[76]

It was de Certeau who succinctly summarized May Day 1968 as a "symbolic revolution,"[77] one whose most significant achievement was not merely a reversal of values but the creating of a new space and giving "every-one a right to speak."[78] "More importantly at the outer limit," he wrote, "it was a revolution of humor. . . . Instead of expressing what an entire nation surely knew, the symbolic action was aimed at opening perspectives that, until then, had been forbidden." The exemplary action "opens a breach, not because of its own efficacy, but because it displaces a law that was all the more powerful in that it had not been brought to mind. It unveils what was latent and makes it contestable. It is decisive, contagious and dangerous because it touches this obscure zone that every system takes for granted and it cannot justify."[79]

Still, insofar as May 1968 was an instance in which collectivism, direct political action, and the grotesque critique of formalist internation-alism all converged, it was also a remarkable moment of reconstitution that witnessed the rebirth of fraternalism between students and workers, French people and foreigners not seen since the days of the "Internationale."[80]

DIVIDED WE STAND:
THE USE, ABUSE, AND REUSE OF THE GROTESQUE

Bakhtin insists on the importance of the grotesque for his idea of carnival. In both its temporal and spatial aspects, grotesque imagery and grotesque real-ism are part of carnival's "festive laughter," whose utopian character acts as a guarantee of freedom for the people. "Carnival," he assures, "is not a spec-tacle seen by the people: they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all people."[81] The long tradition of grotesque realism continued to inform art and literature well into the nineteenth century. How-ever, with the arrival of the modern as an accepted category it was seen as a "gross violation of natural form and proportions."[82] Rejected on aesthetic terms, in reality this prohibition meant much more. It signaled an impor-tant reorientation of European culture away from its utopian, collective character and toward individualistic endeavor and functionalist rationality.

The *internationaleries* took upon themselves the immense and utopian task of reimagining collective subjectivity. That is, of redefining the very notion of utopia for the cold war era, a time when the "colonization of everydayness" first took on an unconditional presence. They sought to achieve this gargantuan task by employing what they believed was the only available tactic: a critical art practice, informed by the cold war in which negation, debasement, and blasphemy were discharged against all highly promoted cultural values including "art," but also the "avant-garde." Hence their use and interpretation of the grotesque remained close to Bakhtin's definition of an "ambivalent and contradictory"[83] act, even if in practice their application of grotesque varied a great deal. From one *internationalerie* to another, each redefined its own use on its own terms.[84] CoBrA IAE first outlined the task at hand—the fight for a free, experimental cultural practice set against an increasingly ideologized and functionalist everydayness. By sporting grotesque imagery and an impressive control over its own collective production, MIBI, the LI, and the SI slowly moved into a more politicized realm, dramatically altering artistic practice in the process. The first collective experiments in the early fifties by the MIBI lab in southern Italy carried the group into the streets in turn creating an unprecedented network of people with the same urge to fight functionalism and fundamentally transform everyday experience. The most radical artists, architects, designers, art critics, and theoreticians who were active at that time either received a copy of their publications or visited their exhibitions and organized events.

The spectacular organizational skills these artists displayed recalled both futurism and surrealism while generating a secret "public" fame. This grotesque collectivism was brought to perfection with the SI. Paradoxically, they did manage to turn the famous surrealist quip "Never work" literally into a political project. Ultimately however, they achieved not so much a fully realized critique of political economy as much as they redefined the idea of art within the specific historical circumstances of the cold war. Their famous, or rather infamous, conferences and tireless magazine publishing were impressive acts of production that successfully moved art away from an object-bound practice and into a more performative, "deskilled" tactical mode. Unitary urbanism especially demonstrates this shift and represents their most intriguing as well as perhaps most contradictory and therefore most grotesque product. It also demonstrates the increasingly ideological turn the *internationaleries* took on in response to escalating global tensions. Perhaps it is necessary to ask whether or not the grotesque collectivism of the SI and other *internationaleries* was at once a calculated response and an inevitable cohort to the cultural politics of the cold war.

NOTES

1. Harold Rosenberg, "The Fall of Paris," first published in *Partisan Review* (1940). From *Tradition of the New* (London: Grove Press, 1962), 209–20.

2. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 135.

3. See Renato Poggioli's discussion, *The Theory of the Avant-garde* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968).

4. "La Chute de Paris" (unsigned article), *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (June 1960), 7–9.

5. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

6. Ibid., 7.

7. "Les Methodes de détournement," *Les Levres Nues*, no. 8 (1956). Trans. "Methods of Détournement," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 8.

8. The reference is to a famous analysis of the play element in human culture by Dutch scholar Johan Huizinga (1872–1945), who has written about the crisis in modern culture criticizing the modern, technologically egalitarian world for its destruction of imagination and collectivity. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1949).

9. These references, attacks, and defenses testify to an ongoing fascination with surrealism. See in particular Asger Jorn, *Discours aux pingouins et autres ecrits* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Béaux-Arts, 2001).

10. Asger Jorn, *Lettres à plus jeune* (Paris: L'Echoppe, 1998), 48.

11. See Serge Guilbaut's ongoing work and analysis starting with *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983); and *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945–65*, ed. Guilbaut (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

12. The term "cold war" was allegedly used for the first time in the sixteenth century in Spain to describe an intensive diplomatic exchange between belligerent parties.

13. Eric Hobsbawm in his analysis of twentieth-century history thus qualifies the cold war, because of its long-reaching implications for a global population. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 225–57.

14. Prussian war strategist General Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), who was one of the first theoreticians of modern warfare. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J. J. Graham (London: Penguin, 1982), 101–231.

15. See for one of the first and highly polemical Georges Bataille, "The Marshall Plan," in *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1, *Consumption*, (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 169–91. This essay was originally published in French as *La part maudite* in 1949.

16. "Geopolitique de l'hibernation" (unsigned editorial), *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (April 1962). Trans. "Geopolitics of Hibernation," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Knabb, 76–82.

17. See more in Alain Quemin, *L'art contemporain international: Entre les institutions et le marché* (Nîmes: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 2002), 113–59; Raymonde

Moulin with Pauline Costa, *L'Artiste, l'institution et le marché* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 15–87.

18. On the social dynamics of the museum-going public, see Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, trans. Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman (London: Polity, 1991).

19. See more in the next section.

20. See in particular the issues of *Potlatch* in *Potlatch, 1954–1957*, magazine's reprint (Paris: Editions Allia, 1996).

21. A cursory glance at *Cobra* journal but also *Reflex* or *Surealisme Revolutionaire* reveals a complexity of this ongoing rejection/fascination with surrealism. See also Robert Estivals, *La Philosophie de l'histoire de la culture dans l'avant-garde culturelle parisienne depuis 1945* (Paris: G. Leprat, 1962), 23–88. Also see Jules-François Dupuis (Raoul Vaneigem), *Histoire desinvolte du surrealisme* (Nonville: Editions Paul Vermont, 1977), 7–47, 157–67; translated into English as *Cavalier History of Surrealism*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1999).

22. As was the case with Noël Arnaud and Asger Jorn, *La Langue verte et la cuite: Étude gastrophonique sur la marmythologie musiculinaire, linguophilée, linguophagée et postpharyngée* (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1968).

23. On Lettrism, see Robert Estivals's study *La Philosophie de l'histoire de la culture dans l'avant-garde*. Isidore Isou, *Mémoires sur les forces futures des arts plastiques et sur leur mort* (repr., Paris: Cahiers De l'Externité, 1998).

24. We are borrowing a distinction between tactic and strategy from Michel de Certeau. See *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984). "The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practice" (xvii).

25. The call for cultural revolution comes especially after 1956. See "Preface" in *Guy Debord presente "Potlatch"* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 7–9.

26. An excellent analysis of nuclear art is still the one by Arturo Schwarz, long time a gallerist and friend of these artists. See Arturo Schwartz, *Nuclear Art* (New York: M. Maestro, 1962).

27. For a very detailed study of their not always easy relationships, see Gianfranco Marelli, *L'Amère victoire du situationnisme: Pour une histoire critique de l'Internationale Situationniste (1957–1972)*, trans. David Bosc (Arles: Editions Sulliver, 1998).

28. "M. Georges Lapassade est un con," *Internationale Situationniste* 9 (August 1964).

29. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

30. Jean Baudrillard, "Le ludique et le policier," *Utopie*, nos. 2 and 3 (May 1969): 14. Baudrillard writes about the necessity to surpass existing critical dichotomies.

31. Christian Dotremont, *Le Petit Cobra*, no. 2 (1949).

32. Émile Zola, *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, trans. Belle Sherman (New York: Cassell, 1893), 8–28.

33. Christian Dotremont, "Le Réalisme socialiste contre la revolution" (self-published pamphlet). See Figure 1.2.

34. See the review of Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, vol. 1: *Introduction* (Paris: Grasset, 1947), by Noël Arnaud in *Cobra*, no. 1 (1949).

35. One of the points Lefebvre insisted on in his analysis in his first *Critique*. See Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*. Trans. by John Moore as *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 1991).

36. The exhibition conceived as an ongoing happening included conferences and created a huge public controversy. For more information, see CoBrA publications such as *Cobra* and *Le Petit Cobra. Cobra,* no. 4 (1949) served as the exhibition catalog. See Christian Dotremont, "Quelques observations à propos d'une exposition Cobra," in *Le grand rendez-vous naturel* (Caen: L'Echoppe, 1988), 41–46.

37. Gaston Bachelard, "Notes d'un philosophe pour un graveur," *Cobra,* no. 6 (1950). The text was an extract from the book *Paysages: Notes d'un philosophe pour un graveur* (Rolle: Eynard, 1950). See also Joseph Noiret, "Gaston Bachelard et Henri Lefebvre dans Cobra," in *Cobra en Fange: Vandercam-Dotremont, Dessin–Ecriture–Matière (1958–1960)* (Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1994), 37–55.

38. Gaston Bachelard, *L'éau et les rêves: Essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (Paris: José Corti, 1942), 6.

39. Karl Gerstner, *Kalte Kunst? Zum Standort der Heutigen Malerei* (Teufen: Arthur Niggli, 1957).

40. A good survey is in the catalog *Force Fields: Phases of the Kinetic Space* (Barcelona: Museu de Arti Contamporani, 2000).

41. Asger Jorn, "Contre le Functionalism," in *Pour la forme: Ebauche d'une méthodologie des arts* (Paris: Internationale Situationniste, 1958).

42. Famous designation offered by Giuseppe-Pinot Gallizio. See Mirella Bandini, *Pinot Galizio e il laboratorio sperimentale d'alba,* an exhibition catalog (Maggio: Civica Galleria d'arte Moderna da Torino, 1974).

43. Ibid.

44. *Eristica: Bollettino d'Informazione del Movimento Internazionale per Una Bauhaus Immaginista,* no. 2 (1956). The Italian word "eristica" means an act of refutation and the rejection of an argument regardless of its truthfulness.

45. Numéro des Vacances, *Potlatch* 22 (September 9, 1955), 97–106. Reprinted in *Potlatch, 1954–1957.*

46. "Methods of Détournement."

47. The title of the journal was an obvious nod to Georges Bataille and his theories of a general economy as seen in non-Western economies of the gift exchange. See Bataille, *Accursed Share.*

48. See the definition of *détournement* in "Methods of Détournement."

49. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 144.

50. The ever-growing bibliography about both SI and LI (and for many there is no real difference or rupture between the two collectives) is very impressive. Probably the most exhaustive bibliography produced to date is Gianfranco Marelli's *L'Amère victoire du situationisme.* Yet, paradoxically, the abundance of historical research is itself another confirmation of the soundness of their theses on spectacular recuperation.

51. See the article "A 'Playboy' Calls on His Memories," *New York Times,* December 11, 2003.

52. *Internationale Situationniste,* no. 7 (April 1962).

53. See the excerpts in *Situationist International Anthology,* ed. Knabb; also in the earlier work by C. Gray, *Leaving the 20th Century* (London: Rebel Press, 1974).

54. Guy Debord, *Preface to the fourth Italian edition of "The Society of the Spectacle,"* trans. Michel Prigent and Lucy Forsyth (London: Chronos, 1979).

55. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black&Red, 1970).

56. Asger Jorn, *Critique de la politique économique: Suivie de la lutte finale* (Paris: Internationale Situationniste, 1960).

57. Guy Debord, "Comments on the concept of experimental art." An internal note circulated among the membership. Private Collection.

58. Marelli, *L'Amère victoire du situationnisme*.

59. "The Alba Platform," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Knabb, 14.

60. Reference here is to Lefebvre's term as it appears in his numerous writings, and more specifically in the collection of his essays in the book with the same title: *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Blackwell, 1991).

61. Attila Kotanyi and Raoul Vaneigem, "programme élémentaire du bureau d'urbanisme unitaire," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 6 (August 1961). Trans. "Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. by Knabb, 65–68.

62. See the issues of both *Cobra* and *Eristica*, but also *Potlatch* and *Internationale Situationniste* with various critical texts on architectural functionalism. For example, Guy Debord, "L'Architecture et le jeu," *Potlatch*, no. 20 (May 30, 1955). Or perhaps Constant, "Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 2 (December 1958). Translated as "On Our Means and Our Perspectives," in *Another City for Another Life: Constant's New Babylon*, Drawing Papers 3 (New York: Drawing Center, 1999), a6–a8.

63. "Report on the Construction of Situations," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Knabb, 17.

64. "Manifeste," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (June 1960).

65. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 225–56; See also Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner, with an introduction by Konrad Kellen (New York: Knopf, 1965).

66. See Mario Perniola's article, "I situazionisti," *Agaragar* 4 (1972). See also "Die Welt Als Labyrinth" (unsigned article), *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (June 1960): 5–7; Asger Jorn, "Sur l'antisituation d'Amsterdam," in *Discours aux pingouins*, 267–74.

67. See the exhibition catalog *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architecture from Constant's New Babylon and Beyond*, ed. Catherine de Zegher and Mark Wigley (New York: Drawing Center, 1999).

68. Kotanyi and Vaneigem, "Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism."

69. For example DAS (Destruction in Art Symposium) was Gustav Metzger 's strategy that came out in his work on auto-destructive art. See *Gustav Metzger, Retrospective*, ed. Ian Cole, exhibition catalog (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1999). Wolf Vostell worked in a similar vein. He also published a very influential avantgarde magazine, *Décollage* (Cologne, began with issue for June 1962).

70. Viennese Action group, albeit in a different way, can be added to this lot. See Lorand Hegyi and Dieter Schrage "Between Provocation and Liberation: The Contextualization of the Body in Viennese Actionism," in *Art Tribes*, ed. Achille Bonito Oliva (Milan: Skira, 2002), 343–65.

71. Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. and ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 76.

72. Ibid., 168.

73. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

74. See the description of the unitary urbanist event in Turin in 1956 earlier in the chapter.

75. One of the famous Paris May 1968 slogans (Pouvoir à l'imagination).

76. May 1968 Graffiti.

77. Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speeech and Other Political Writings*, trans. T. Conley (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3–11.

78. Ibid., 11.

79. Ibid., 8.

80. On May 1968 see, among other testimonies, Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, and Jean-Marc Coudray, *Mai 1968 [i.e. Dix-neuf cent soixante-huit]: La Brèche; premières réflexions sur les événements* (Paris: Fayard, 1968).

81. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 7.

82. Ibid, 33.

83. Ibid, 25.

84. See Mirella Bandini's seminal and very exhaustive study *L'estetico il politico: Da Cobra all'Internazionale Situazionista 1948–1957* (Rome: Officina, 1977).

FIGURE 2.1. Hi Red Center, *Cleaning Event,* 1964. Documentary photograph of performance; photograph and copyright by Hirata Minoru.

2. After the "Descent to the Everyday": Japanese Collectivism from Hi Red Center to The Play, 1964–1973

REIKO TOMII

Where do we begin a study of "collectivism after modernism" in Japan? One possible—and obvious—place is Gutai, arguably the best-known Japanese avant-garde collective in post-1945 world art. Granted, no study of postwar collectivism will be complete without Gutai—or Gutai Art Association (Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai) in its full name—which was founded in Ashiya, a town west of Osaka, in 1954. However, Gutai is a collective unlike any other: it was ultimately an enterprise of its charismatic leader Yoshihara Jirō, the esteemed abstract painter and a senior member of the art world, who would be called "Mr. Gutai."[1] (The group was disbanded in 1972 after Yoshihara's untimely death.) He imaginatively expanded and ingeniously exploited the tradition of "exhibition collectivism," while he played the role of mentor to the other, much younger members, issuing his famous instructions, "Never imitate others! Make something that never existed!"[2] On his part, he practiced what he preached, by providing unprecedented exhibition opportunities, that is, the famed outdoor and on-stage presentations of 1955–58. In an incubator of innovative experimentation created by Yoshihara, Gutai thrived. Organizationally, it boasted a relatively large membership with an aggregate roster of fifty-nine members.[3] Artistically, the members accomplished what they set out to do: "We aspire to present a concrete (*gutai-teki*) proof that our spirit is free," as proclaimed by Yoshihara in 1955 in the inaugural issue of the journal *Gutai*.[4]

Gutai produced a host of landmark achievements, by "breaking open the object"[5] and pointing to the future of art in Anti-Art (*Han-geijutsu*). There were, to name a few, such action-based works as Shiraga Kazuo's *Challenging Mud* (1955), Tanaka Atsuko's *Electric Dress* (1956), and Murakami Saburō's *Passage* (breaking twenty-one paper screens; 1956). Gutai's place

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in history was further solidified by a series of strategic moves by Yoshihara, which included his internationalism, shrewd handling of publicity, creation of Gutai's own exhibition space called Gutai Pinacotheca in 1962 (Figure 2.2), and recruitment of a sizable number of new members in 1955 (notably Shiraga, Tanaka, Murakami, and Kanayama Akira from a small collective Zero-kai [Zero Society], as well as Motonaga Sadamasa) and 1965 (the so-called third-generation artists).

Yet Gutai's works remained primarily those of individuals within a collective environment, rather than those of a collective. In the decade that followed the foundation of Gutai, a new mode of collectivism—that is, "collaborative collectivism"—emerged, as Anti-Art practitioners increasingly breached the walls of the exhibition hall and departed from the institutional site of art. Emblematic of this mode was *Cleaning Event* by Hi Red Center (HRC) in 1964, which was staged on the streets of downtown Tokyo (Figure 2.1). From the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s, collaborative collectivism became a considerable force in the vanguard scenes characterized by various tenets of Non-Art *(Hi-geijutsu)*, which roughly paralleled Euro-American
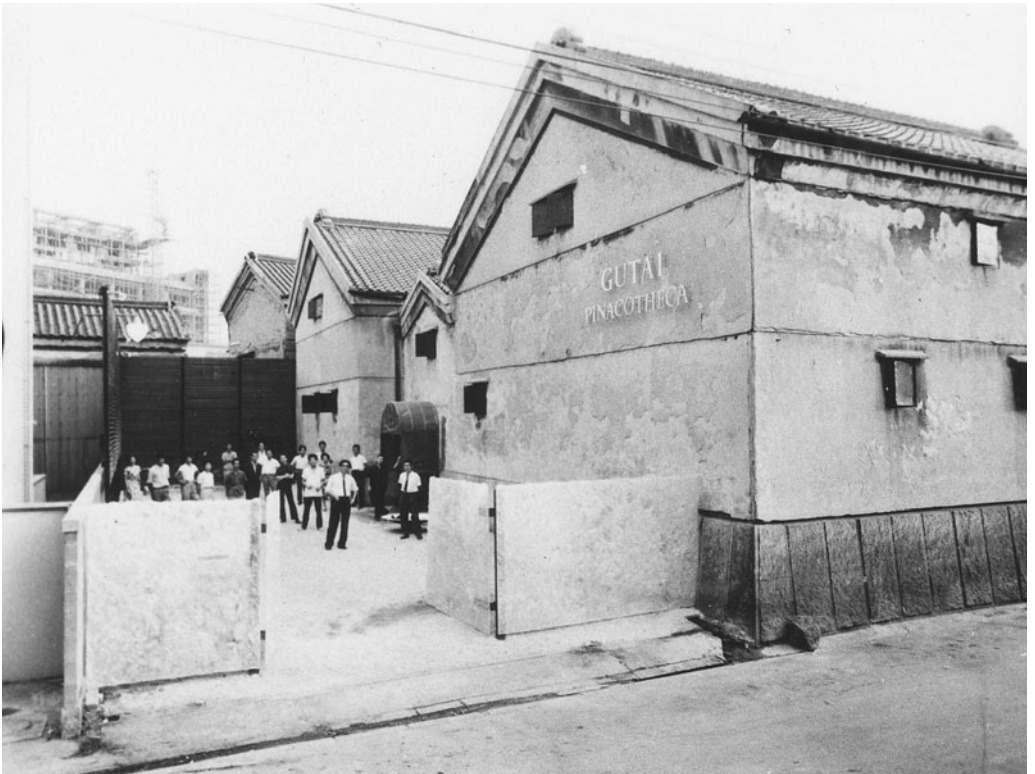
FIGURE 2.2. Yoshihara Jirō and Gutai members at Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka, 1962. Copyright former members of the Gutai group. Photograph courtesy of Ashiya City Museum of Art & History.

postminimal and conceptualist tendencies. This was aptly captured by the Second Kyoto Biennale organized by the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art in 1973 under the theme of "art by collectives *(shūdan)*."

　　　This chapter will examine a crucial decade between 1964 and 1973 in the history of Japanese collectivism. The survey begins with an introduction in three parts, providing a historical framework to "collectivism after modernism" in Japan. It will outline the modern practice of group exhibitions ("exhibition collectivism") and the various reactions against the state and other art institutions. It will also identify an end-point of modernism, by examining the notion of the "descent to the everyday," introduced in 1964 by the critic Miyakawa Atsushi, in relation to the evolution of collectivism. The introduction will be followed by a brief discussion of Hi Red Center's *Cleaning Event* and an overview of post-HRC collectives, including Akasegawa Genpei's 1,000-Yen-Note Incident Discussion Group, Group "I," Zero Dimension, Bikyōtō, and Psychophysiology Research Institute. Particular notice will be given to The Play, a collaborative collective with a scenic dimension, which was among the six collectives represented in the 1973 Kyoto Biennale. In these studies, different kinds of collectivism, such as "inadvertent collectivism" and "participatory collectivism," will be introduced, while issues concerning collaborative collectivism will be addressed. They will range from the connections between radical politics and collectivism to the use of parody, anonymity vs. publicity, and shock and spectacle, all of which vitally informed an increasingly public nature of collectivism. The chapter will conclude with an overall observation on collectivism after modernism.

INTRODUCTION IN THREE PARTS

"Collectivism" in Japan

Collectivism has been a vast topic in Japanese art since the Meiji period (1868–1912). Over more than half a century, through the prewar years, it is not an exaggeration to say that the evolution and maturation of modernism was propelled by collectivism in the form of "art organizations" *(bijutsu dantai)*. A main engine of what I term "exhibition collectivism," the art organizations functioned primarily as exhibition societies. The importance of the art organizations during the modern eras was such that Japanese art historians have routinely chronicled the evolution of modernism as a sequence of their foundings and disbandings. The intricate history was codified into a set of genealogical trees, one each for different areas of practice—for example, *yōga* (oil painting), *Nihonga* (the modern extension of traditional painting), and sculpture—which often accompany art-historical literature.[6]

In the early Meiji, Japan made a concerted effort to establish itself as a modern nation-state. Its artists needed to adapt themselves to the rapidly changing environment, as the Western institutions of exhibition, school, and museum were introduced. Both the concept of "fine art" and the practice of the public display of art were novelties. The self-organized nature of *bijutsu dantai* harks back to this period. While the government ministries offered institutional exhibition opportunities through the "Domestic Painting Competition" (*Naikoku kaiga kyōshinkai;* 1882 and 1884) and the "Domestic Industrial Exposition" (*Naikoku kangyō hakurankai;* 1877, 1881, 1890, 1895, and 1903), such early organizations as Meiji Art Society (Meiji Bijutsu-kai; founded in 1889) and Japan Art Association (Nihon Bijutsu Kyōkai; founded as Ryūchi-kai in 1879; renamed in 1887) sponsored their own exhibitions to create ongoing opportunities for public display.[7] Hereafter, an ever growing number of art organizations became the engine of exhibition activities in modern Japan. Through their regular exhibitions, these organizations provided forums for competing artistic idioms and ideologies, frequently embracing ambitions to create movements.

When the *Bunten* ("Ministry of Education Art Exhibition"; *Monbushō bijutsu tenrankai*) was instituted in 1907, this state-sponsored annual salon became a focal point of art-world politics and the shifting allegiance among *bijutsu dantai*. Significantly, through the early postwar decades, the annual or semiannual exhibitions sponsored by *dantai*—called *dantai-ten* ("organizations' exhibition")—remained an indispensable, if not exclusive, opportunity to display their works in public for artists of all ages and persuasions. The commercial gallery system, especially for modern art, was slow to grow. For example, even in 1957, a directory of the art magazine *Bijutsu techō* (Art notebook) listed only thirty-five galleries in Tokyo, an overwhelming majority of which were not commercial venues but "rental galleries" *(kashi garō)* that provided their spaces to artists for a fee.[8] Since *dantai-ten* took the form of *kōbo-ten* ("open call" exhibitions) that would accept non-members' works on a juried basis, the larger and older *dantai* soon acquired prestige and began to assume the influential place in the art-world hierarchy whose apex was the government salon. Given the limited exhibition opportunities, dissident artists, be they progressive or conservative, who were dissatisfied with the existing *dantai* or the governmental salon, had to create their own forums (i.e., their own art organizations) to show their works.

This was how the vanguard bloc emerged within *yōga* in the Taishō period (1912–26), when vibrant liberal culture and the spirit of democracy thrived in Japan. A complex organizational shuffling was initiated in 1914, when progressive oil painters broke away from the *Bunten* salon, because the salon refused to created a new separate section for artists with fresh approaches,

and formed their own Nika-kai (literally, "Second Section Society").[9] The first antisalon *yōga* collective, Nika would in turn spawn an ample number of splinter groups. One of them was Futurist Art Association (Mirai-ha Bijutsu Kyōkai), founded in 1920. It was soon reorganized into a short succession of equally short-lived offshoots under the name of Sanka (Third Section) in an effort to unite vanguard factions, including Mavo. Founded by the Dadaist-constructivist Murayama Tomoyoshi in 1923, Mavo was *the* precursor of postwar avant-garde collectives in both its spirit and action.[10]

In the early Shōwa period (1926–89), the so-called Fifteen Year War began in 1931, eventually leading to Japan's involvement in World War II. As the nation's war effort intensified, the art world was practically ruled by the newly founded promilitary art organizations, and other organizations were eventually forced to disband. Through this wartime consolidation, the state effectively controlled artistic production, exploiting the indispensable place the art organizations held in artists' lives. In the post-1945 period, most of the major prewar art organizations, including Nika,[11] were quickly revived and many have survived to this date. However, alternate forms of collectivism—and exhibition formats—were pursued in rejection of the earlier organizations' institutionalized nature: the rigid membership hierarchy, the less than transparent jury system, and the increasingly outdated artistic achievement. One variety was the across-the-board, interorganizational "federations" (*rengō* or *renmei* in Japanese), customarily boasting a democratic equal-opportunity policy. Another was the "independent exhibitions," which had neither jury nor prize, promising a truly free format. (In Japan, the regularly held nonorganizational exhibitions, such as the governmental salon and the "Yomiuri Independent Exhibition," were habitually regarded as "groupings" of artists.) Yet another was the small collectives, like Gutai and Hi Red Center, whose exhibitions were largely for members only. From the immediate postwar years onward, the sheer number of collectives in this last type—in a gamut of artistic manifestations ranging from abstraction to the avant-garde, from social realism to surrealism—characterized collectivism in Japan, both in the capital, Tokyo, and beyond. A proliferation of regional vanguard collectives was particularly notable throughout the postwar decades. In addition to Gutai, the Kansai region (encompassing the Kōbe-Osaka-Kyoto areas) was the birthplace of Group "I" and The Play in the 1960s. Those from other regions included Kyūshū-ha (Kyūshū School) of Fukuoka, Tosa-ha (Tosa School) of Kōchi, Zero Dimension (Zero Jigen) of Nagoya, GUN (acronym of "Group Ultra Niigata") of Niigata, Rozo Group (Rozo-gun) of Mito, and Genshoku (Tactile Hallucination) of Shizuoka, among others.[12]

To some extent, the Japanese collectivist vocabulary reveals the evolution of collectivism. The art organizations are *dantai*, connoting their

formal and structured nature. The organizational names commonly ended
with the suffix -kai (society) or with the word kyōkai (association). In this
sense, Gutai belonged to the old school with its official name Gutai Art Asso-
ciation (Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai), sharing part of its name with the conservative
Japan Art Association (Nihon Bijutsu Kyōkai) and the vanguard Futurist Art
Association (Mirai-ha Bijutsu Kyōkai). In contrast, some of Gutai's con-
temporaries preferred the archaic but native-sounding suffix -ha (school),
which derived from the premodern painting schools such as Kano-ha and
Rinpa. The import word "group" (pronounced gurūpu) was commonly used
to discuss contemporary collectives, and it was sometimes incorporated in
the names. In the 1960s and 1970s, the collectives were often called shūdan,
another Japanese word that also means "group," less formal in its assembly
than dantai. The theme of the 1973 Kyoto Biennale, "art by shūdan," capi-
talized on its somewhat subversive nuance. For the past decade, another
import word, "unit" (yunitto), became quite popular: Bikyōtō's Hori Kōsai
calls his current group of three "Unit 00."

     In concluding this short outline of modern collectivism, two things
should be noted concerning the postwar small collectives. First, they were
not a new invention of the postwar years. In addition to Mavo, prewar ex-
amples encompass the "street exhibitions" (gaitō-ten) with group identities,
such as "Black-Color Yōga Exhibition" (Kokushoku yōga-ten) of 1935. These
exhibitions, which helped foster abstraction and surrealism, were so called
because of their "street" location, distinct from the large-scale exhibition
halls at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in the Ueno Park—the venue
of the salon and major dantai-ten.[13] Second, this form of postwar collectivism
was accompanied by another huge sea change in artists' lives—the spread
and maturation of individualism—encouraged in a postwar society liberated
from wartime conformism. Emerging artists were much less constrained by
the stricture of dantai-ten, enjoying more opportunities to gain initial social
exposure at such new outlets as the independent exhibitions and the "prize
exhibitions" (these included the "Yasui Prize Exhibition" and the "Shell Prize
Exhibition"); there was also a substantial increase in the number of rental
galleries, in which they could present their solo exhibitions. For more estab-
lished artists, the possibility of forging a gallery affiliation expanded as the
number of commercial galleries gradually grew, making it possible to leave
the art organizations altogether. In this respect, collectivism in the name of
art organizations mostly lost its vanguard relevance by the late 1960s.[14]

"After Modernism" in Japan

In the history of post-1945 Japan, the 1960s constituted a major turning
point. The country's postwar recovery and subsequent development were

showcased in such international events as the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and *Expo '70* in Osaka, both firsts for Asia. Geopolitically, the decade was shaped by *Anpo,* the Japanese abbreviation for the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. That is to say, Japan's sixties began with the *Anpo* '60 struggle and concluded with the *Anpo* '70 struggle. Signed in 1951, *Anpo* turned the island nation into a key front base for America's Asian operations by allowing the station-ing of U.S. troops. Slated for renewal in 1960, the treaty incited fierce and massive popular protests, which failed to stop its renewal but managed to topple the cabinet. From the mid-1960s onward, the strong anti–Vietnam War movement merged with the student revolts nationwide, in expression of the moral crisis of postwar Japanese society. Toward 1970, these move-ments in turn merged with a larger movement of the New Left against *Anpo*'s decennial renewal. Haunted by the nightmare of 1960 and determined to quash any obstacle, the state used its iron fist to suppress opposition.[15] In ret-rospect, *Anpo* brought about the momentous political, social, and cultural movement that aligned leftist rhetoric with avant-garde strategies, making the 1960s as a whole a defining time of postwar Japan.

In art, the decade was marked by two movements: the junk-art tendency of Anti-Art arose around 1960, in part fueled by the fervor of the *Anpo* '60 struggle; and the tides of Non-Art arose around 1970 and contin-ued into the next decade. They prompted a major paradigm shift, completely transforming the face of Japanese art as well as the nature of the avant-garde. This shift paralleled, or in some cases preceded, what is called the "demate-rialization" of art—a move away from the self-contained object—that was widely observed globally during the same decade. Well before postmodern discourse was introduced, in the local context of Japan, the shift was initially recognized and theorized in 1963 as one from the modern *(kindai)* to the contemporary *(gendai)* by the art critic Miyakawa Atsushi. He discerned a symptom of the "collapse of the modern" in the gestural abstraction of *Art Informel* (the rubric encompassing both Gutai and American abstract expres-sionism) in the late 1950s, which he called "an adventure that staked an authenticity of expression . . . on the act of expression."[16] His observation was prescient in a broader context of culture: toward the end of the 1960s, the discourse of the modernity critique emerged simultaneously with the upsurge of radical politics of the New Left.[17]

In the evolutionary narrative of art, *Art Informel* was followed by Anti-Art, which dominated the vanguard scenes into the early 1960s after its emergence in and around the annual "Yomiuri Independent Exhibition," further propelling the collapse of the modern paradigm. "Descent to the everyday" *(nihijō-sei eno kakō)* was Miyakawa's "stylistic" thesis, with which he evocatively described the subversion of the conventional notion of art

(i.e., painting and sculpture) by Anti-Art: artists brought everyday signs, images, and objects into the work of art.[18] In other words, through the insertion of everyday things into the work of art, which constituted a locus of Art with a capital A—that characteristically modern concept, which boasted an absolute superiority over Life—Art was taken down from its pedestal and forced to descend to the humble realm of Life. This degrading move remained metaphorical, since it occurred within the work of art. However, artists did not stay with this metaphorical stage but made a "descent to everyday life," if you will: some artists actually made everyday life itself the site of their work, most typically staging performances in the real space of Life. This development was exemplified by *Cleaning Event* in 1964. In this performance, the members of Hi Red Center—who had made Anti-Art objects and presented them in the exhibition hall—now literally performed an everyday act of cleaning the streets, albeit with a twist, prefiguring many aspects of post-HRC collectivism.

In the latter half of the 1960s, practitioners continued to push forward, cutting a wide swath of experimental terrain into Non-Art of conceptualism and Mono-ha (literally "Thing School"),[19] wherein the mandate no longer concerned "making" in the conventional sense but explicitly "not making." (To be more precise, Non-Art even rejected Anti-Art's "rebellion against making.") By the mid-1970s, this transition was complete, and the avant-garde *(zen'ei)*, which had previously operated on the fringes of the art world, transmuted into what is today understood in Japan as "contemporary art" *(gendai bijutsu)*, which has since become an institution unto itself.

"Collectivism after Modernism" in Japan

Post-1945 collectivism continued the venerable tradition of modern collectivism, as a driving force of changes—specifically, prompting the fundamental shift from *kindai* to *gendai*. The shift toward *gendai* can also be understood in terms of the exhibition. As outlined above, the collectivism of the art organizations as exhibition societies helped Japanese society acclimate to the modern exhibition system. In the postwar years, collectivism's relationship to the exhibition underwent three phases of transition.

In the first phase, the possibility of the exhibition as a formal and structured means of presentation was pursued in a few significant manners. Outstanding in this respect was Gutai, especially in its early period after its foundation in 1954. In Tokyo, Jikken Kōbō (whose official English name was Experimental Workshop) from the first half of the 1950s was another important group; its intermedia experiments in stage design constituted an early example of collaborative collectivism under the vision of modernist "total art" and prefigured technology-oriented art in the late 1960s.[20]

        In the second phase, the "descent to the everyday" began within the site of exhibition from around 1958, as Anti-Art artists and individual members of collectives—most notoriously, Kyūshū-ha, Neo Dada (renamed from "Neo Dada Organizers"), Group Ongaku (Music), Hi Red Center, and Jikan-ha (Time School)—incorporated junk and everyday objects into their works, partly inspired by the fervor of *Art Informel*.[21]

        The third phase was the "descent to everyday life." On the one hand, some objects incorporated into works had a tendency themselves to move about inside the exhibition site and depart from it, as with the famed examples of Takamatsu Jirō's string and Nakanishi Natsuyuki's clothespins (both HRC members), shown at the "Yomiuri Independent" in 1963.[22] On the other hand, artists themselves were definitely an agency of the descent, taking their actions to the streets, often in order to promote their exhibitions. An unexpected precedent was found in Nika: in 1948, when the reorganized Nika began a tradition of scandalous publicity stunts, sending a truckload of costumed members and semi-nude models to the Ginza district in Tokyo on the eve of their exhibition opening, with some luridness even displayed as a calculated accident. The costume parade to Ginza was subsequently banned,[23] but Nika's "Opening-Eve Festival" preceded Kyūshū-ha's street exhibition in 1957, Neo Dada Organizers' street demonstrations in 1960, and Zero Dimension's crawling and other rituals since 1963, which in turn preceded HRC's extraexhibition performance works. The *Anpo '60* struggle was an undeniable influence in their move out of the exhibition hall: an urgent desire for "direct action" *(chokusetsu kōdō)* lingered, after the protest movement waned. It should be noted that parallel phenomena of "descent to everyday life" also took place in other cultural fields during this decade. Most significantly, troupes of underground theater *(Angura engeki)* such as Kara Jūrō's Red Tent and Theater Center 68/70's Black Tent were launched in 1967 and 1970, respectively; the playwright Terayama Shūji, who initiated the move out of traditional theater places, exploited the idea of "street theater" with his Tenjō Sajiki group in 1970.[24]

        In a sense, the departure from the exhibition was another face of the dematerialization of art. As practitioners moved from the combat zone of Anti-Art to the no-man's-land of Non-Art, object-based works were quickly replaced by works based on installation, conceptualism, and performance, the last of which was varyingly called "action" *(akushon* or *kōi)*, "Happening" *(hapuningu)*, "event" *(ivento)*, and "ritual" *(gishiki)* in Japan. The "descent to everyday life," epitomized by HRC's *Cleaning Event*, meant in real life the infiltration of the public sphere, often performed by collectives with an interventional intent. Accordingly, the nature of collectivism changed. Although the exhibition remained a key concern, vanguard collectives to a greater

extent worked as collaborative units to execute extraexhibition projects. In this sense, collectivism after modernism in Japan is closely identified with collaboration. As a result, the quintessentially modern concept of individualism and originality became an issue to interrogate. All these issues—latent in *Cleaning Event*—would be further explored by collaborative and interventional collectives after HRC in a full-fledged "collectivism after modernism," which pointed the way toward today's collectivism. This is an area of study extremely fertile yet hitherto little examined outside Japan.

HI RED CENTER'S CLEANING EVENT

Hi Red Center, active in Tokyo in 1963–64, was arguably the first "collaborative unit" to infiltrate the public sphere as its site of operation in postwar Japan. The equal partnership, especially on the conceptual level, among the three principal members (Takamatsu Jirō, Akasegawa Genpei, and Nakanishi Natsuyuki) was the essence of its collective identity.[25]

Among their projects, *Cleaning Event,* which was the very last, most saliently demonstrates HRC's collaborative collectivism charged with social critique (see Figure 2.1). Varyingly known as *Campaign to Promote Cleanliness and Order in the Metropolitan Area* (as billed in their flyer) or *Be Clean!* (as spelled out in English in their billboard prop), this performance work took place on the bustling district of Ginza in Tokyo on Saturday, October 16, 1964. The three core members and their associates were dressed in the uniform of a healthcare worker's white coat and, incongruously, a pair of shades and a red armband with the group's trademark "!" in white. They scrubbed sidewalks, and occasionally traffic lanes, in a highly meticulous manner using a toothbrush, a floorcloth, and other utterly ineffectual and out-of-place cleaning tools.[26]

Set on the seventh day of the Tokyo Olympic Games, which showcased Japan as a respectable member of the international world and a booming economic miracle two decades after the defeat in World War II, HRC's cleaning mocked the concerted effort of the city's hasty modernization and beautification for the occasion. (One example was a newly built network of metropolitan highways.) Their official-looking disguises—their white lab coats and the billboard prop—were a perfect cover for this clandestine act in broad daylight. In fact, hardly any passers-by questioned their ridiculous cleaning. One policeman even thanked them for their diligent work, perhaps mistaking it for a ubiquitous Games-related beautification effort.

Paramount in *Cleaning Event* in particular and HRC's works in general was the notion of "direct action," informed by radical politics of the anarchist martyr Kōtoku Shūsui in the early twentieth century.[27] The activist

approach suited HRC, who felt restless in the aftermath of the tumultuous *Anpo* '60 struggle, as Japanese society became increasingly content in everyday life. The group's name, which derived from the first characters of the three members' family names—*taka* (hi) + *aka* (red) + *naka* (center)—could be more than coincidental, hinting at their left-leaning mindset.

Another mockingly "official" feature was discursive in nature, found in their flyer, which functioned as a call for participation to interested colleagues, with the obligatory information outlined concerning where and when to meet and what to bring. Issued by the campaign's (imaginary) organizer, "Metropolitan Environment Hygiene Execution Committee," it duly listed an impressive roster of cosponsors, both real and fictional, possible and improbable. The total of twenty-one organizations are, in order of listing:

Tokyo Metropolitan Cleansing Projects Department
Anti-Pollution Countermeasure Headquarters
Sightseeing [Art] Research Institute*
National Federation of Shopping Streets
Youth Division of Ginza One-Thousand-Store Society
Rear-End Society
Imperial Palace Cleaning Volunteers
National Full-of-Flowers Campaign
Housewives' Federation
Chūō-Ward Satsuki Women's Society
Voice of Young Japan
Anti–Youth Delinquency Committee
Jiritsu ("Independent") School Lecturers' Group*
Taimei Elementary School PTA
Magazine *Kikan* ("Organ") Editorial Department*
Japan Yomiuri Newspaper Company
Small-Kindness Campaign
Tokyo's Olympics Organizing Committee
Fluxus Japanese Section*
Group Ongaku*
Hi Red Center*

The list pokes fun at the way many social programs and events were—and still are—organized and promoted in Japan, which bespeaks the ingrained collectivism in Japanese society as a whole. It should be noted HRC's abiding concern with the local context is in sharp relief to its international fame. *Cleaning Event* in particular has been frequently performed by the members of Fluxus outside Japan, but this discursive portion and the social commentary relevant in Tokyo in 1964 have been lost in these restaging efforts. Among the collectives discussed in this chapter, only Gutai, thanks to its leader Yoshihara's vision (as well as finance), consciously exercised internationalism. HRC's membership in Fluxus was not its own doing, but resulted

from the ambitious networking of George Maciunas, the principal organizer of Fluxus. Not that HRC was oblivious of international art; on the contrary, it lived in the age of what was then critically termed "international contemporaneity" *(kokusai-teki dōji-sei)*.[28] Still, when HRC and the post-HRC collectives departed the exhibition hall and entered the public sphere (that is, Japanese society) in their collaborative projects, their immediate concerns were more local than international.

In the local context of artists' collectivism, the list in HRC's flyer indicates a fluid collaborative network of small collectives directly or indirectly associated with HRC. (There are six of them, marked with an asterisk above.) Most important on the list is Group Ongaku, a musicians' improvisation collective, founded in 1961, whose member Yasunao Tone was close to Akasegawa. Both Group Ongaku and HRC, together with such individuals as Yoko Ono, were part of a loose affiliation of Fluxus Japanese Section—better known as Tokyo Fluxus. In turn, Ono's May 1962 concert at the legendary Sōgetsu Art Center was a forum of collaboration, in which her colleagues, including Akasegawa and Tone, performed her instruction pieces.[29] Furthermore, the first pre-HRC event, *Dinner Commemorating the Defeat in the War,* held on August 15, 1962, was a collaboration among Neo Dada, Group Ongaku, and the experimental dancers' group Ankoku Butoh, with Akasegawa joining as a "performer-eater." (The performers ate a sumptuous dinner before the audience, who unknowingly purchased a 200-yen ticket for the privilege of watching them eat.)[30] Even *Cleaning Event* itself was part of a larger collaboration, submitted as an entry to *Tone Prize Exhibition,* a conceptualist work conceived by Tone in critique of the "open call" exhibition system.[31] After HRC, this kind of "intercollective networking" would be adopted by the commune-oriented and conceptualist Kyūkyoku Hyōgen Kenkyūjo (Final Art Institute), active in 1969–73, which participated in the 1973 Kyoto Biennale with *Nirvana Data Integration.*[32]

In addition to the socially conscious "descent to everyday life," HRC's aspiration for "anonymity" set *Cleaning Event* apart from the parade-type precedents of Nika, Kyūshū-ha, and Neo Dada, which all received publicity in the media. Like it or not, by 1964, publicity entered the avant-garde equation, as a logical consequence of artists taking their action-based works to the streets, and creating and/or receiving publicity became routine with the post-HRC collaborative collectives. In contrast, the operation of HRC was frequently secretive. In a literal sense, wearing the white uniform assured anonymity in the crowd. However, more was at stake conceptually: not only was there no public notice for its guerrilla act of *Cleaning Event,* HRC did not even want to give the name of Art to its cleaning in rejection of the modern concept of Art. This embodied an Anti-Art attitude for "namelessness"

(mumei-sei), to borrow Akasegawa's term, making HRC the last in the line of Anti-Art collectivism.[33]

The end of Anti-Art was signaled by the termination of the "Yomiuri Independent Exhibition"—the hotbed of Anti-Art—which was announced in early 1964. In retrospect, as more artists and collectives sought to "descend to everyday life" and explore "action" *(kōi)* in their work, the "Yomiuri Independent" was perhaps beginning to lose its importance, if not its relevance, altogether. Conversely, its demise likely accelerated the departure from the institutional confines. Thereafter the idea of action and collaboration more explicitly informed collectivism in various manners.

Akasegawa Genpei after HRC

Theoretically, *Model 1,000-Yen Note Incident* (1963–74) hammered the last nail in the coffin of Anti-Art, with the artists themselves declaring that Anti-Art was indeed Art. From the birth of a "nameless" existence that was the facsimile 1,000-yen note fabricated for Akasegawa Genpei in 1963 to the criminal investigation and trial of the artist for currency fraud to its aftermath, the entire course of events unexpectedly became a gigantic collective project. The artist's money work followed a curious path of fate. Outside his intention or control, the facsimile money accidentally attracted the attention of the police, who were investigating a genuine and thorny counterfeit problem. Once inserted in the real-life space, his money work—in one theory—fell victim to the state's mid-decade preparation for the coming *Anpo* '70 struggle, and its creator was brought to the court of law as a "thought pervert" *(shisō-teki henshitsusha)*, a contemporary law-enforcement label reminiscent of the wartime "thought criminal." In a country where the interest of public welfare and social trust must always and unequivocally override constitutional rights, Akasegawa was found guilty in 1967, with his verdict upheld by the Supreme Court in 1970.[34]

In the investigation phase, when *Asahi Newspaper,* a national daily, erroneously linked Akasegawa to the major ongoing counterfeit case in 1964, HRC published the satirical *Eyedrop Special Bulletin* and took other "direct actions" against the newspaper company. When he was indicted in 1965, his colleagues gathered to form the 1,000-Yen-Note Incident Discussion Group (Sen-en-satsu Jiken Kondankai), or Senkon in short, which became an important agent of the *Incident.* In support of Akasegawa's legal battle, Senkon was responsible for aiding in his defense, publishing newsletters, and holding public meetings and fund-raising events. Significantly, the credit should
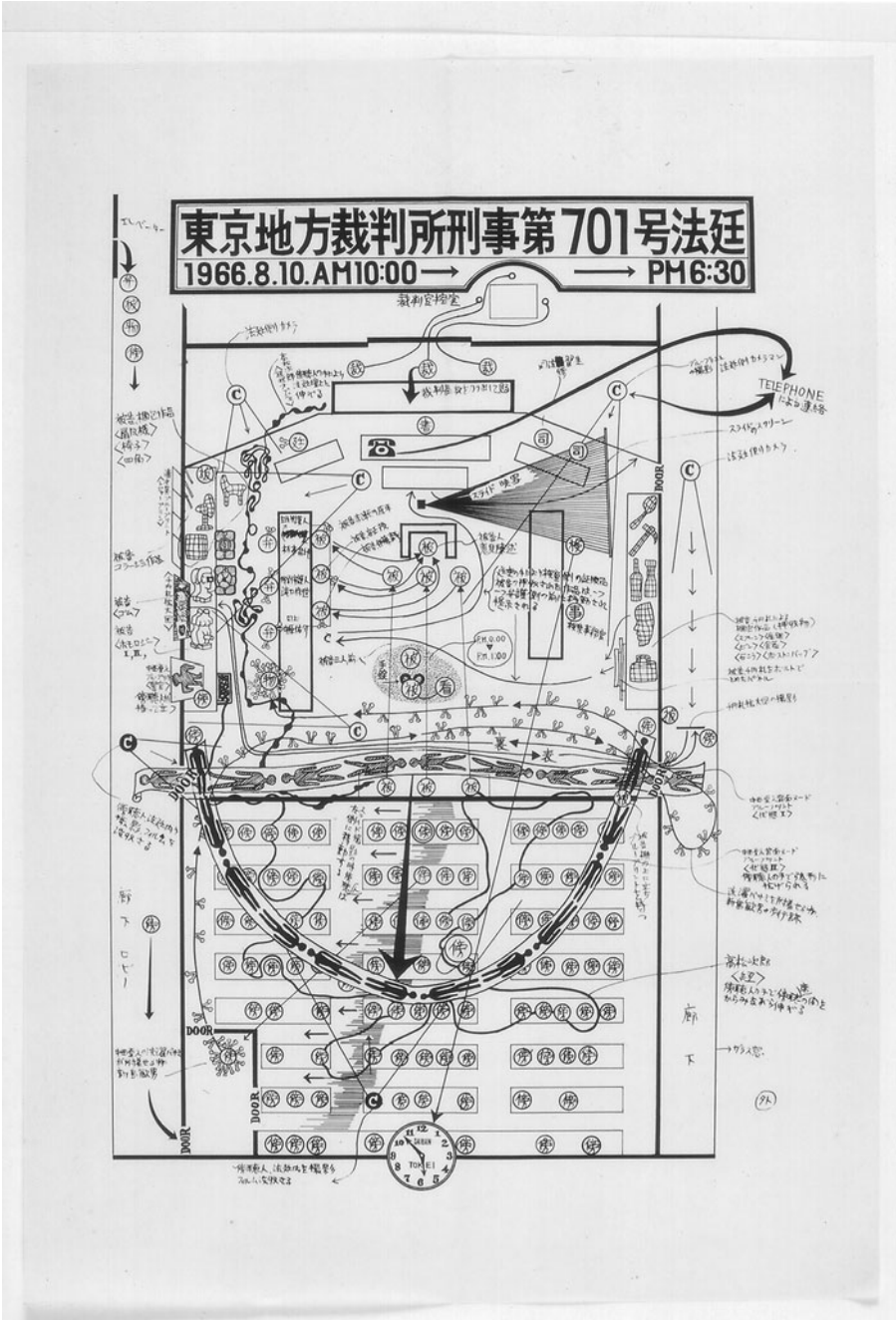
FIGURE 2.3. Akasegawa Genpei, *Tokyo Regional Court, Criminal Section Room 701 (Diagram of Proceedings on the First Trial Day)*, 1966. Poster, 43.6 x 30.4 cm, collection of the artist. Photograph courtesy of Nagoya City Art Museum.

go to Senkon for their preplanning of the trial as a performance work—most typically for the first day of the trial in 1966, which is now commonly known as *Exhibition Event at the Courtroom* (Figure 2.3); and it continued to actively appropriate the courtroom as its own discursive space. Also notable was the involvement of the law-enforcement authorities, who became unwitting collaborators of Akasegawa in bringing his money work out to a wider space of society. This participation of "nonartists" was inadvertent, to be sure. Yet this form of "inadvertent collectivism," so to speak, could expand the scope of a work—particularly when the work was staged in public space—making innocent bystanders an integral part of the work. In the case of Akasegawa's incident, without the police and the prosecutors' inadvertent collaboration, there would have been no *Model 1,000-Yen Note Incident,* which made HRC the best-documented Japanese collective of the 1960s.

After the regional court rendered the guilty verdict in 1967, Akasegawa went on to turn "inadvertent collectivism" into "participatory collectivism," expanding the role of nonartists in his work. By exploiting the print media, he invented a few scenarios to create a loose community of "willing" participants. In his *Greater Japan Zero-Yen Note* (1967), many helped him avenge himself against the state that put him through a legal ordeal by replacing real money with his new money of no value.[35] In his graphic project *The Sakura Illustrated* (1970–71), he conceived a mail-in program to recruit for his Sakura ("Cherry") Volunteer Army, which boasted a membership of over two hundred.[36] In 1972, he devised an ongoing project, *Ultra-Art Tomason,* for which participants sent him photographs of nameless works of "ultra-art" they found in everyday life.[37]

Group "I" and Anonymity

The end of the "Yomiuri Independent" triggered a few artist-organized independent exhibitions. Notable among them was the eleven-day-long "Gifu Independent Art Festival," held in August 1965 in Gifu. In this mountainous town in central Japan known for cormorant fishing, the organizer Vava, a local collective active since 1958,[38] extended Gutai's legacy of outdoor exhibition by selecting the venues at a riverbank, a park, and a gymnasium. A total of some one hundred individuals and nine collectives gathered, including such regional groups as Okayama Young Artists Group, Saitama Avant-Garde Artists Group, Jack's Society, Zero Dimension, Nomo Group, Gaga Contemporary Art, and Group "I." Although most of the outdoor works tended to be drowned out in a vast natural setting, Group "I"—which consisted of nine Kōbe residents, including Kawaguchi Tatsuo—drew most attention with its *Hole* on the bank of the Nagara River. Silently toiling under the scorching sun for the duration of the festival, they dug a hole ten meters

in diameter and filled it back in, in compliance with the river-related laws.[39] Its "Sisyphean task" was, in one critic's words, "a brutal critique of the object-dependent act of creation."[40]

     Hole was probably the most "rewardless" *(mushō)* work in 1960s art. To dig a hole only to fill it back in was a purposeless task that would garner no artistic, moral, or emotional reward. Needless to say, there was little expectation of marketplace reward, since virtually no art market existed at the time in Japan for contemporary art and performance art was decisively unsalable. The only reward was the collaboration in and of itself, and individual authorship meant little. In this sense, it was also an anonymous act. As the group proclaimed in its manifesto, its name embodied its goal: "Our name 'I' is *i* of *tan'i* [unit], *i* of *ichi* [position], *i* of *isō* [phase]. That is to say, we loosely mean each one of us is a unit within the multitude, and is positioned within it."[41] In its second exhibition, entitled "Impersonal Exhibition" *(Hininshō-ten)*, held in Kōbe in November 1965, the group put this idea in practice, with each member contributing two canvases, all executed in the same, specified colors and composition (a red vertical line on a blue ground).[42] The goal was to call into question the modernist faith in originality through presenting the eighteen identical abstractions, ironically accompanied by the individual creators' name tags. The members were no more than "parts" that constitute the whole, and their creations made sense, if at all, only within this framework. Group "I" continued its exploration of absolute collectivity in the third exhibition at a small Osaka gallery in January 1966. It was an indoor earthwork tour de force: a massive pile of gravels—actually twelve tons, or four truckloads brought from the street by a belt-conveyer—filled the gallery.[43] Entitled *E. Jari*, the exhibition paid homage to the French absurdist Alfred Jarry, through a word play that combined the group's name "I" (rhyming with *he*) and the material used, gravels, which is *jari* in Japanese.

     Before Group "I," Gutai experimented with a different kind of impersonality, when twelve members exhibited in the "Yomiuri Independent" under the single name of "Gutai."[44] The issue of originality and collectivity, as identified by Group "I," was further pursued by the conceptualist Kashihara Etsutomu and two colleagues in their collaborative project *What Is Mr. X* (1968–69), to create an "average" of the three.[45]

Zero Dimension "Rapes the City"

Founded in Nagoya around 1959, Zero Dimension is the most important collective among the so-called Ritualists *(Gishiki-ha)* of the 1960s—which also encompassed such collectives as Kurohata (Black Flag), Vitamin Art, Kokuin (literally, "Announcing the Negative")—who specialized in outrageous street and onstage performances.[46] The driving force of Zero Dimension as a

post-HRC performance unit was Katō Yoshihiro, who joined the group around 1963. He moved to Tokyo in late 1963 and started an electric store, the income from which financed the group's subsequent activities in Tokyo and other cities.

Zero Dimension's body of work is diverse, numbering over three hundred performances (Katō's estimate)[47] with some thirty participants or so for each. (The number was a factor in creating a presence in Zero Dimension's collectivism.) Mainly "naked demonstrations," its projects ranged from simple acts (e.g., crawling on the streets) that sometimes deployed large or small props to carefully planned stage productions, all imbued with a sense of absurdity and silliness. In addition to the urban streets of Tokyo, it also used various outdoor spaces, including commuter trains, graveyards, and barricaded university campuses; the indoor spaces they performed in were often vaudeville and underground theaters and clubs. Its frequent nudity and occasional pornographic male-female acts, together with Katō's provocative words ("We rape the city"[48] was but one), produced abundant mass-media publicity, and they were invited to TV programs and starred in a few films (see Figure I.2 in the Introduction).

Katō's description of *Buck-Naked and Masked Parade* in Tokyo on December 9, 1967, gives a sense of what to expect: "On the streets of Shinjuku bustling with a Saturday-night crowd, totally naked men made a procession, raising their right arms, trailing the long pipes of the gasmasks they wore, and deliberately taking one slow step at a time on the freezing concrete of shopping streets, as though no man had ever walked on it."[49] In 1965–68, the group's activities intersected with the burgeoning underground culture in Tokyo, whereas in 1969–71, it drew inspiration and energy from radical politics that transformed Japan's urban streets into battlefields, as the nation geared up to the *Anpo '70* struggle. Like many ritualists, Zero Dimension joined the cultural left's opposition to *Expo '70,* another international showcasing of affluent Japan.[50] While working with radical student groups nationwide, it formed Joint-Struggle Group for the Destruction of Expo (Banpaku Hakai Kyōtō-ha) with Kokuin and others. However, the joint group collapsed after Katō and a few central members were arrested by security police in 1969, and after 1971 Zero Dimension practically stopped its activity.

Bikyōtō and the Institutional Critique

Among activist collectives organized by artists and art students in the midst of the nationwide campus conflict in the late 1960s, Bikyōtō outlived its political life and went on to contribute its own modernity critique in the form of "institutional critique."

Bikyōtō (Bijutsuka Kyōtō Kaigi, or Artists Joint-Struggle Council)

was formally founded in July 1969 by, among others, Hori Kōsai (chairman) and Hikosaka Naoyoshi, students of Tama Art University in Tokyo. Arising from the "nonsect" movement of Zenkyōtō (Zengaku Kyōtō Kaigi, or All-Campus Joint-Struggle Councils), Bikyōtō had its origin in such on-campus activities as the drama and film clubs, *Self-Burial Ritual* (a procession-like performance in 1967 at Ginza by Hori, Hikosaka, and others), and League of Plastic Artists (Zōkei Sakka Dōmei), which organized an exhibition on the barricaded campus of Tama in June 1969. Bikyōtō identified its battle-field not as students but as artists *(bijutsuka)*, aiming to "Dismantle the Power Structure of Art!"[51] Its logical enemies included the stronghold of the mod-ern institutions: the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, where the salon and the organizational annual exhibitions were traditionally held, as well as *Nit-ten* (the postwar incarnation of *Bunten*) and *kōbo-ten*. The postwar institu-tions were also targeted, including *Expo '70* and such major exhibitions as the Tokyo Biennale. Forming intergroup alliances with other student radi-cals and art professionals, Bikyōtō made a few small successes: in one of them, the members joined the Nissenbi Smashing Joint-Struggle group to inter-rupt a jury meeting of the Nissenbi (Japan Advertising Artists Club) annual poster competition; jury selection was eventually completed but an exhibition

FIGURE 2.4. Hikosaka Naoyoshi, *Floor Event* (invitation postcard to "Revolution" part of Bikyōtō Revolution Committee's Solo exhibition series), 1971. Silkscreen and offset, 10 x 14.5 cm, collection of the artist. Copyright Hikosaka Naoyoshi.

was canceled.[52] Yet, Bikyōtō ultimately lost in their political battle, as the government authorities deployed their massive power to crush the student movement before the expected extension of *Anpo* in June 1970.

After 1970, under the leadership of Hikosaka, Bikyōtō reorganized itself into a constellation of subgroups to perform both discursive and artistic operations. Among them, Bikyōtō Revolution Committee was responsible for giving concrete forms to Bikyōtō's critique of "internal institutions" that would appear in an individual artist's mind whenever he makes and exhibits his work. In 1971 (see Figure 2.4), it organized a series of members' solo exhibitions outside the institutional sites; and in 1973 it proposed a pact of "not making or exhibiting" during the year 1974.

Collaborative collectivism was central to some members' practice. Hori incorporated other members' writings to create his installation for his solo exhibition held under the auspice of the revolution committee in 1971; his performance work *Act* in 1973 was an ingenious experiment to deconstruct consciousness, by integrating multiple readings of fragmented texts via live-feed video.[53] As his individual project, Hikosaka formed a "duet team" with Shibata Masako, while he led Group of Five's Photo-Book Editorial Committee (Gonin-gumi Shashinshū Henshū Iinkai), active 1971–73, and Shihyō ("History and Criticism") Group, which contributed a slide anthology, *Art Movements That Explore Collectivism*, to the 1973 Paris Biennale. Invited to the 1973 Kyoto Biennale, the Group of Five, together with an additional five associates, examined the tension between individuality and collectivity by altering each other's work without completely destroying the originals.[54]

Mail-Art Collectivism

Mail art was a great catalyst in conceptualism to go beyond the exhibition and, more significantly, transcend geographical restrictions. In the context of collectivism, Genshoku (Tactile Hallucination), founded in 1966 by Suzuki Yoshinori and others in Sizuoka Prefecture, mailed their object-based works to each other and nonmembers around 1968.

A collective that existed exclusively through mail art was the Psychophysiology Research Institute (Sisehin Seirigaku Kenkyūjo), initiated as a student-led seminar by Ina Ken'ichirō and Takeda Kiyoshi, then students at Tokyo Zōkei University.[55] Dissatisfied with the conventional curriculum, Ina and Takeda searched for a communication-based strategy, taking their cue from HRC, On Kawara, and Matsuzawa Yutaka, Japan's mail-art pioneer who had disseminated his language works via postal mail since 1964.[56] The premise of their monthly mailing scheme was as follows: "An invisible museum, in which local institutes participate through actions or nonactions that take place simultaneously at a specified time and space in their own

locales."[57] There were six mailings, from December 1969 through May 1970, plus one "after May 10, 1970, 12:00." Altogether sixteen "institutes" contributed, seven of them being identified with their locations and the rest with their family name. For example, Morocco Research Institute was Wada Hideo's tag; and Matsuzawa contributed twice as Matsuzawa Research Institute from Nagano Prefecture. The participants mailed to the "bureau" (maintained by Ina and Takeda) their works, which the bureau duplicated by high-quality Xeroxing, and these copies were sent to all the participants, naturally via postal mail. Thus, the institute successfully achieved its goal of "gathering and dispersing the documents of actions or nonactions by individuals who refused to have direct contact."[58]

The total of sixty-eight submissions reveals a gamut of conceptual practices. Participating in all seven mailings, the mail artist Horikawa Michio contributed methodologically tautological entries as the Niigata Research Institute: he sent the documents of his mail-art works. Two of them were his signature "political stones," sent to the American president Richard Nixon (December 1969) and Japan's prime minister Satō Eisaku (May 1970), to appeal for world peace in the midst of the Vietnam War (see Figure 2.5).[59] An odd man out in the group of mainly cerebral practitioners was Itoi Kanji, a resident of Sendai known as "Dada Kan." An individual counterpart to Zero Dimension, his Ritualist work consisted of streaking in public places. As Itoi Research Institute, he contributed to the sixth mailing a photo collage related to his successful run at *Expo '70* in Osaka on April 27, 1970.

The Play: Voyages into Landscape

> Mr. Technology walks on the moon. What will Mr. Play et al. do?
> Mr. Student Radical causes a bloodshed again. What will Mr. Play et al. do?
> Mr. Painting fills a white space. What will Mr. Play et al. do?
> . . .
> Mr. Expo stumbles. What will Mr. Play et al. do?
> Mr. Zero does a body ritual. What will Mr. Play et al. do?
> . . .
> Mr. Image cans the sky. What will Mr. Play et al. do?
> Mr. Play et al. prove the being. What will Mr. Play et al. do?
> Mr. Play et al. make a voyage. What will Mr. Play et al. do?[60]

In the mid- to late 1960s, two realities coexisted in Japan: a political uproar that wrought chaos nationwide and an economic success that bred everyday complacency. To stir content quotidian consciousness, some collectives variously explored the ideas of going beyond the urban streets. Sightseeing was one such direction. Sightseeing Art Research Institute (Kankō Geijutsu Kenkyūjo), active 1964–66, was founded by the painters Tateishi Kōichi and Nakamura Hiroshi to make art more accessible to society.[61] In 1966, Fluxus

member Ay-O, with Akiyama Kuniharu, staged *Happening for Sightseeing Bus Trip* in Tokyo. Going into landscape was another approach. A memorable instance was *Event to Alter the Image of Snow* in 1970 by the Niigata group GUN (founded by Maeyama Tadashi and the mail artist Horikawa Michio in 1967 and active through 1975): it "spray-painted the snow" on the bank of the local Shinano River in 1970.[62]

For The Play in Kansai, a major concern was to take a "voyage" away from everyday consciousness trapped in familiar space and time. It admittedly "went outside the institutions of art, which meant going outdoors. . . . It is important to do so in daily life, empirically, and persistently, like farmers do. The Play's actions constituted a return to man's essential being, and our plowing around it has become art."[63]

The collaborative collective was established after "The First Play Exhibition" in August 1967. Staged outdoors at a playground near the city hall in downtown Kōbe, it was a three-evening program of outdoor actions by thirteen artists. The initial core members included Ikemizu Keiichi, Okamoto Hajime, Mizugami Jun, Nakata Kazunari, and Fukunaga Toyoko, all of whom participated in the exhibition from which the new group took its name. The Play's signature works are its outdoor summer projects, which it annually undertook through 1986. The membership was fluid, each time a collection of participants gathered together. The constant presence was Ikemizu, who had first made his name with *Homo Sapiens*, confining himself in a cage under the summer sun on the riverbank at "Gifu Independent Art Festival" in 1965.

The Play's first collaboration was the grand-scale *Voyage: A Happening in an Egg*. The plan called for a release of a huge egg (3.3 meters long and 2.2 meters wide) into the Pacific Ocean, from Shionomisaki in Kansai's Wakayama Prefecture, the southernmost point of Japan's main island. There was a remote possibility that the egg might reach the United States (Figure 2.6). For this to happen, the seven participants needed to take the egg, made of polyether resin and fiberglass and weighing 150 kilograms, twenty miles offshore and drop it into the Japan Current, which flows into the California Current. They successfully secured cooperation from the local fishermen's union (which offered current data and arranged the use of a boat for the project), the prefectural fishery experimental station (which the union persuaded to provide another boat), and a professor of oceanography (who certified the project's research value). On August 1, 1968, the egg was released as planned. Ikemizu explained to one of the journalists who covered the project: "The egg carries an image of liberation from all the material and mental restrictions imposed upon us living in contemporary times."[64] There was one telegraph report of its sighting after a month.
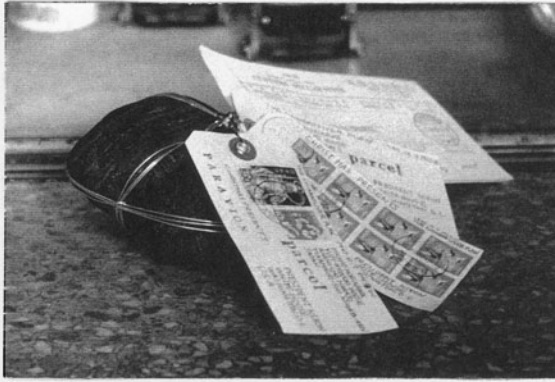
FIGURE 2.5. Horikawa Michio, *The Shinano River Plan (Christmas Present)*, 1969, from Psychophysiology Research Institute (1969–70). Printed matter, 21 x 29.7 cm. Photograph courtesy of Ina Ken'ichirō .

In the next summer project, *Current of Contemporary Art*, the members themselves made a voyage from Kyoto to Osaka. On July 20, 1969, ten members assembled a Styrofoam raft—in the shape of a gigantic arrow, 3.5 meters wide and 8 meters long—and rode on it, going down the rivers of Uji, Yodo, and Dōjima (Figure 2.7). The whole journey took twelve hours. Staging the project on a day before the historic landing of Apollo 11 on the moon, they struck a claim against scientific rationalism as well as placid everyday life, by spending a leisurely time on a rickety vessel. The trip from Kyoto to Osaka was subsequently repeated twice. In August 1970, eleven members walked with twelve sheep for eight days and slept seven nights along the roadside *(Sheep)*; in August 1972, twenty members constructed a house with a footprint of six *tatami* mats (4 meters by 3 meters), which became a vessel in which the five members spent six days, drifting downstream on the rivers Kizu and Yodo (*Ie* [House]).

Invited to the 1973 Kyoto Biennale, The Play transplanted its outdoor aspiration in the museum's exhibition hall. They built a thirty-meter-long suspension bridge that connected the entrance and the exit of the assigned gallery. After the exhibition, in a move characteristic of the group's whimsical temperament, the members "returned" this bridge—which was the "essence" of the bridge dissociated from its natural environment—to landscape, creating a new crossing over the Kizu River, albeit for a single day. This was the group's summer project that year.
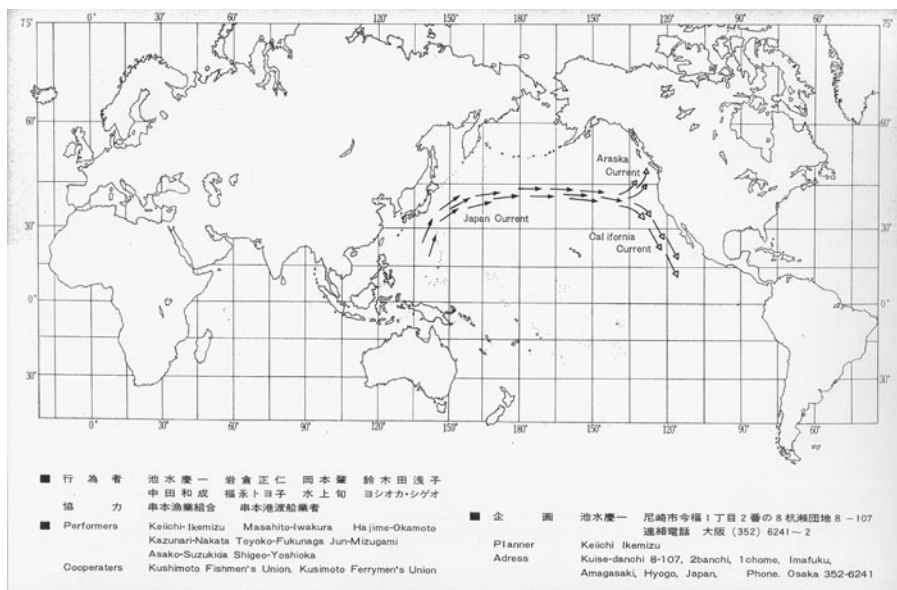
FIGURE 2.6. The Play, *Voyage: A Happening in an Egg*, 1968. Document (map and project summary). Photograph courtesy of Ikemizu Keiichi.

After 1973, The Play's collectivism increasingly assumed a communal mode, often with an earthwork dimension. Although the members had never been shy about the media's attention, they became more aware of the importance of communication through the group's newspapers, magazines, and documents, for if they "fail to plow people's everyday life through [these means of communication], [their projects] will be no more than personal experiences."[65] The group's "farmer-like" persistence was demonstrated by *Thunder*, a ten-year-long project to capture a thunderbolt on a mountaintop outside Kyoto. Between 1977 and 1986, altogether fifty people were involved to annually build a pyramid with logs in June. The structure, twenty meters long on each side and equipped with a lightning rod at its apex, was then taken down every September. It proved to be a rewardless task, for they witnessed or confirmed no thunder hitting the structure; still, over five hundred people shared the "time of waiting."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON COLLECTIVISM
AFTER MODERNISM IN JAPAN

Collectivism in post-1945 Japan evolved primarily in reaction to the modern form of "exhibition collectivism." However, its development toward

FIGURE 2.7. The Play, *Current of Contemporary Art*, 1969. Documentary photograph of performance; photograph by Higuchi Shigeru; courtesy of Ikemizu Keiichi.

"collaborative collectivism" reveals no tidy linear progression. This is particularly true with the pioneers. Gutai played a central role in devising innovative exhibition formats in its early phase, yet it reverted to more conventional exhibition practices after 1958. Among a few sporadic exceptions was "International Sky Festival" in 1960, in which paintings were flown in the sky, hanging from ad balloons. For Neo Dada, the important protagonist in early Anti-Art, its exhibitions were a manifestation of the camaraderie its members and associates cultivated at their often boisterous gatherings at the "Artists' White House"—member Yoshimura Masunobu's residence designed by the young architect Isozaki Arata—and its street demonstrations were a further extension of these action-packed evenings. In the case of Hi Red Center, which launched "collaborative collectivism," collaboration preceded exhibition. Its "official chronology"[66] includes two collaborative projects in 1962 as integral elements of the group's history, although not all three primary members were involved in them: *Dinner Commemorating the Defeat in the War* (Akasegawa et al.) and *Yamanote Line Incident,* staged by Takamatsu and Nakanishi, among others, on Tokyo's commuter railroad-loop. These two projects were followed by a panel discussion among Akasegawa, Takamatsu, and Nakanishi, on the topic of *Yamanote Line Incident,* organized for the art magazine *Keishō* (Form) by its editor Imaizumi Yoshihiko, who was instrumental in uniting Akasegawa and the other two.[67] These activities culminated in HRC's first exhibition in 1963, "The Fifth Mixer Plan," which formally announced the group.

It is tempting to see a source of post-1945 collectivism in the persistent Japanese social mores of "group orientation," which dates back to Prince Shōtoku of the seventh century, who famously proclaimed that harmony was of foremost importance. However, the often short-lived existences of such small vanguard collectives as Neo Dada and HRC points to a free-spirited "collectivity without conformity." There was no need to prolong the life of a group for the sake of prolonging it. This decidedly separates the small vanguard collectives from the established model of the art organization (which was exploited by the wartime regime in the name of nationalism), or Gutai's exceptional case (which ended with the powerful leader-mentor's death). In a sense, their collectivism constituted an individualism in the guise of groups.

Why, then, did these artists pursue collectivity? One reason was the power of multitude, which has always informed collectivism. There were particular twists in the 1960s, however, when artists took their projects to the public sphere and interrogated the modern institutions of art. Zero Dimension, which routinely gathered about thirty people or more for each of its rituals, exploited the number to create a substantial presence in the urban

crowd, and generated, by extension, publicity. HRC's cleaning was unquestioned because the presence created by a group of people normalized their peculiar activity; one person's cleaning—with a toothbrush or a handy rag—would have been more conspicuous. With Group "I," the collective context of its works made the issues of individual authorship, originality, and anonymity all the more explicit and consequential. Hikosaka Naoyoshi of Bikyōtō theorized the meaning of collectivity in relation to Bikyōtō Revolution Committee's solo exhibition series in 1971:

> The museum emerges wherever one conducts an act of art-making. However, it is meaningless if one artist holds an exhibition outside the museum/gallery. Our starting point is: several people encounter and discover the museum manifesting itself within the act of art-making, of which we as individuals have been previously unaware.
>
> Through our activities, we have aimed to concretely possess this "internal museum" as our commonality.[68]

Hikosaka's words saliently speak for the post-HRC collectivism, through which these artists endeavored to seek out a new horizon of practices.

Given the volatile social situation in the 1960s, it goes without saying that the explicit and implicit activism that pervaded Japanese collectivism cannot be understood without reference to the two anti-*Anpo* struggles and the student revolt. Still, the need for artists to band together in creating their own platform was not new, nor was the artists' ingenuity of inventing something new to meet, or prefigure, the changing historical, social, and cultural context. Even the seemingly apolitical projects of The Play have a profound implication of things to come. In fact, with The Play, collaborative and interventional collectivism came a long way from HRC, anticipating yet another type of collectivism that would emerge in the late 1990s: "grass-roots collectivism." This concerns the locally based collaborations between artists and area residents that have generated works of both artistic and social significance.

For example, the nonprofit collective Command N, led by Nakamura Masato, produced *Akihabara TV* (1999, 2000, and 2002) in Tokyo's famous electronics district Akihabara: it played dozens of international video works on television monitors displayed for sale at participating electronics stores. To execute this simple but clever plan, Command N closely worked with a local community for a great success.[69] Area rejuvenation was also the goal of *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial* (2000, 2003, and 2006), which was held in the mountainous Niigata Prefecture in central Japan. The project was a collaboration between the area's local governments and Art Front Gallery in Tokyo, which has functioned as not so much a commercial gallery as an alternative gallery since its foundation in 1976. In 2003, among more than 150 practitioners from twenty-three countries, a good number of artists and

collectives turned the local populace of the rural villages and towns—who had practically no familiarity with contemporary art—into willing and crucial collaborators to produce site-specific installations, performances, and video art, sometimes making them the main subjects and/or objects of the works.[70] In contrast to HRC's self-effacing public gesture or Zero Dimension's shock parades or Bikyōtō's radicalized actions, today's descent to everyday life is not necessarily a gesture of rebellion or dissent, but it can provide an opportunity to begin a broadly based partnership in grass-roots public engagement, while incorporating a broader global dimension. More than four decades after its first descent to the everyday, contemporary art today finally meets with everyday people on friendly terms.

NOTES

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East Asian names are given in the traditional order, except for individuals who primarily reside outside their native countries and adopt the Western system (e.g., Yoko Ono, Ushio Shinohara, and Yasunao Tone).

Bilingual titles (which may or may not indicate bilingual publications) are separated by a slash (/); and translated titles created for this publication are enclosed in square brackets.

All translations from Japanese material are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

1. Hirai Shōichi, ed., *"Gutai" tte nanda?/What's Gutai?* (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 2004), 18–21.

2. Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 87. This volume serves as a basic literature in English on postwar Japanese art, especially for the 1950s and 1960s.

From the same period, there were a few comparative collectives led or guided by the prominent prewar figures: Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop) under the guidance of the critic Takiguchi Shūzō, the abstract painter Eikyū and his Democrat Artists Association (Demokurāto Bijutsuka Kyōkai), and the critic Tsuchioka Hidetarō's Hokubi ("Northern Art") Culture Association (Hokubi Bunka Kyōkai) based in Fukui.

3. "Kaiin zaiseki kikan ichiran" [List of members and their membership periods], in *Gutai shiryō-shū/Document Gutai, 1954–1972,* ed. Ashiya City Museum of Art & History (Ashiya: Ashiya City Culture Foundation, 1993), 404–5.

4. Yoshihara Jirō, "Sōkan ni saishite" [Upon the inaugural publication], *Gutai,* no. 1 (January 1955); reprinted in *"Gutai" tte nanda?* ed. Hirai Shōichi, 37.

5. Ming Tiampo, "Gutai 1954–1972: Breaking Open the Object," in *Resounding Spirit: Japanese Contemporary Art of the 1960s,* exhibition catalog (Potsdam, N.Y.: Gibson Gallery, SUNY, 2004), 31–46.

6. For example, Urasaki Eishaku, *Nihon kindai bijutsu hattatsu-shi* [The history of the development of modern Japanese art] (Tokyo: Daichōkai Shuppan-bu, 1961) is a pioneering work on the Meiji-era *yōga* groups. For the organizational genealogical trees, see for example "Kindai Nihon bijutsu no nagare" [Lineages of modern Japanese art], found at the end of *Kindai Nihon bijutsu jiten* [Who's who in Japanese modern art] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1989).

7. For the early history of modern institutions, see *Nihonga: Transcending the Past, Japanese-Style Painting, 1868–1968,* exhibition catalog (Saint Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, 1995).

8. *Bijutsu nenkan* [Art annual], special issue, *Bijutsu techō* [Art notebook], no. 119 (December 1956): 118–19. For the convenience of artists, the listing gives galleries' addresses as well as rental fees. The fee section of commercial galleries customarily reads "no rental" or "gallery-organized *(garō kikaku)* exhibitions only."

9. For important oil painters' organizations, see Takashina Shūji and J. Thomas Rimer, *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting,* exhibition catalog (St. Louis: Washington University, 1987).

10. For Mavo and Sanka groups, see Gennifer Weidenfeld, *Mavo: Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde 1905–1930* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

11. A full member of Nika since 1941, Yoshihara Jirō was instrumental in its reorganization as a head of its Kansai branch.

12. For example, forty-four regional collectives and twelve independent-type exhibitions from 1947 onward are listed in "Nihon rettō: Zen'ei gurūpu gaido mappu" [Japanese archipelago: A guide map to vanguard groups], special feature of "Chihō no zen'ei" [Regional avant-garde], *Bijutsu techō,* no. 296 (April 1968): 85–86.

13. Omuka Toshiharu, "Kokushoku yōga-ten kara Jiyū Bijutsuka Kyōkai e" [From Black Color Yōga Exhibition to Liberal Artists Association], in *Onosato Toshinobu: Chūshō no paionia/Pioneer of Abstract Painting,* exhibition catalog (Takasaki: Museum of Modern Art, Gunma, 2000), 13. The title of this article, too, indicates the important place collectivism had in Japanese modernism.

14. Kitamura Yoshio, "Bijutsu dantai no kiki" [Crisis of the art organizations], and Miki Tamon, "Gadan wa naze kawattaka?" [What changed the establishment?], *Bijutsu techō,* no. 304 (November 1968): 70–80 and 81–87.

15. For art and politics around 1970, see Reiko Tomii, "Thought Provoked: Ten Views of Tokyo, Circa 1970 (1967–73)," in *Century City,* exhibition catalog (London: Tate Modern, 2001), 200–221.

16. Miyakawa Atsushi, "Anforumeru igo" [After *Informel*], *Bijutsu techō,* no. 220 (May 1963); translated and quoted in Reiko Tomii, "Historicizing 'Contemporary Art': Some Discursive Practices in *Gendai Bijutsu* in Japan," *Positions* 12, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 621.

17. See Tomii, "Historicizing"; for its general background, see Tomii, "Thought Provoked."

18. Miyakawa Atsushi, "Han-geijutsu: Sono nichijō-sei eno kakō" [Anti-Art: Descent to the mundane], *Bijutsu techō,* no. 234 (April 1964); translated and quoted in Tomii, "Historicizing," 621.

19. "Mono-ha" is not the name of a formally organized group, but an art-historical grouping of artists who shared concerns with raw materiality and spatial exploration in the late 1960s through the 1970s. The term did not enter literature until

around the mid-1970s: significantly, by then an original instigator, Sekine Nobuo, changed his direction, establishing Environmental Art Studio in 1973 to work on public sculpture.

20. Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945*, 217; recent literature includes *Kaze no mokei: Kitadai Shōzō to Jikken Kōbō/Shōzō Kitadai and Experimental Workshop*, exhibition catalog (Kawasaki: Tarō Okamoto Museum of Art, 2003); and Miwako Tezuka, "Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop): Avant-Garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s" (PhD diss., Columbia University, New York, 2005).

21. Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945*, 154–59.

22. Illustrated in ibid., 162.

23. Taki Teizō, "Nika 70-nenshi: Monogatari-hen" [70 years of Nika: A narrative], in *Nika 70-nenshi* (Tokyo: Nika-kai, 1985), 27–28.

24. See Tomii, "Thought Provoked," 209.

25. Takamatsu Jirō, "Akasegawa Genpei" (1995), reprinted in *Fuzai eno toi* [Questioning the absence] (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2003), 127.

26. For a detailed account, see Akasegawa Genpei, *Tokyo mikisā keikaku: Hai reddo sentā chokusetsu kōdō no kiroku* [Tokyo mixer plans: Documents of Hi Red Center's direct actions], pocketbook edition (Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 1994), 249–68.

27. William A. Marotti, "Politics and Culture in Postwar Japan: Akasegawa Genpei and the Artistic Avant-Garde 1958–1970" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2001), 148.

28. See Tomii, "Historicizing," 614.

29. Midori Yoshimoto, "27. *Works of Yoko Ono, 1962*," in *YES Yoko Ono*, ed. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks, exhibition catalog (New York: Abrams and Japan Society, 2000), 150–53.

30. Akasegawa, *Tokyo mikisā keikaku*, 35–46.

31. See Reiko Tomii, "Concerning the Institution of Art: Conceptualism in Japan," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, exhibition catalog (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 20–21.

32. See "Anatagata ni totte shūdan to wa nanika" [What is collectivism to you?] in the brochure of the 1973 Kyoto Biennale; reprinted in *Bijutsu techō*, no. 372 (October 1973): 137.

33. Akasegawa Genpei, *Obuje o motta musansha* [An *objet*-carrying proletarian] (Tokyo: Gendai Shichōsha, 1970), 161, 185.

34. See Reiko Tomii, "State v. (Anti-)Art: *Model 1,000-Yen Note Incident* by Akasegawa Genpei and Company," *Positions* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 141–72.

35. Reiko Tomii, "Rebel with a Cause," *M'Ars* (magazine of the Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana) 12, nos. 3–4 (2000): 10–11.

36. Reiko Tomii, "Akasegawa Genpei's *The Sakura Illustrated*," *International Journal of Comic Art* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2002), 209–23.

37. Akasegawa Genpei, *Chō-geijutsu tomason* [Ultra-Art Tomason], pocketbook edition (Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 1987). See Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945*, 250–51, for illustrations.

38. "Vava," in *Nihon no gendai bijutsu 30-nen* [Three decades of contemporary Japanese art], special supplementary issue, *Bijutsu techō*, no. 436 (July 1978), 263.

39. Akane Kazuo, "Zen'ei bijutsu no ichi saiten" [A festival of vanguard art] and "Geppyō" [Monthly reviews], *Bijutsu techō*, no. 258 (October 1965), 81 and 131–32. *Hole* is reproduced in Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945*, 258.

40. Akane, "Geppyō" (no. 258), 132.

41. Statement (June 1965); reprinted in *Kansai no bijutsu/Art in Kansai, 1950s–1970s,* exhibition catalog (Kōbe: Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 125.

42. "Zen'in ga dōitsu no sakuhin," *Kobe shinbun,* November 11, 1965; Akane Kazuo, "Geppyō," *Bijutsu techō,* no. 262 (January 1966): 130.

43. Akane Kazuo, "Geppyō," *Bijutsu techō,* no. 264 (March 1966), 129–30.

44. *Gutai shiryō-shū/Document Gutai,* ed. Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, 32.

45. Tomii, "Concerning the Institution of Art," 25.

46. Kuroda Raiji (KuroDalaiJee), "Chikaku no fusuma: Toshi kūkan ni okeru 'Zero Jigen' no gishiki"/"The Rituals of 'Zero Jigen' in Urban Space," *R,* no. 2 (2003), 24/32. Paragraphs here on Zero Dimension have been adapted from Reiko Tomii, "Zero Dimension," in *Grove Art Online* (http:/www.groveart.com), posted June 1, 2005.

47. Kuroda Raiji has documented some eighty. See Kuroda, "1960-nendai Nihon no pafōmance kenkyū 1: Bunka to shite no Zero Jigen joron—eno hashirigaki" [Study of Japanese performance in the 1960s: A quick note for an introduction, Zero Dimension as culture], *Kashima bijutsu kenkyū* [Kashima art studies], no. 18 supplement (2001): 362.

48. Katō, quoted in ibid., 363.

49. Ibid., 365.

50. Tomii, "Thought Provoked," 203, 206.

51. For more on Bikyōtō, see Tomii, "Concerning the Institution of Art," 23–26; and "Thought Provoked," 217–20.

52. See *Nissenbi 20-nen/JAAC 1951–70,* exhibition catalog (Tokyo: Ginza Graphic Gallery, 2000).

53. *Hori Kosai ten: Kaze no me/The Eye of the Wind,* exhibition catalog (Takaoka: Takaoka Art Museum, 1996), 82.

54. Hikosaka Naoyoshi, interview with author, January 23, 2004.

55. Ina Ken'ichirō, e-mail to author, March 8, 2004.

56. For Matsuzawa, see Tomii, "Concerning the Institution of Art," 19–20; and "Thought Provoked," 214–15.

57. [Preface], *Seishin Seirigaku Kenkyūjo* (Tokyo: Seishin Seirigaku Kenkyōjo, 1970), 1. This compilation excludes Saitō Yoshiaki's works upon his request. See Iimuro Testuya, "Shishin" [A private letter], in *Seishin Seiri Kenkyūjo 1969–1970* (Tokyo: privately published, [1999]), unpaginated.

58. *Seishin Seirigaku Kenkyūjo,* 1.

59. Ibid., 5, 60. For Horikawa, see Tomii, "Thought Provoked," 215.

60. Okamoto Hajime, "Cross Meetin'" (1969); reprinted in *Play* [black cover] (Osaka: privately published, 1981), unpaginated.

61. "Kankō Geijutsu Kenkyōjo," in *Nihon no gendai bijutsu 30-nen,* 261–62.

62. Horikawa Michio, *Niigata gendai bijutsuka shūdan GUN to watashi* [Niigata's contemporary artists' group Gun and I] (Jōetsu: privately published, 1999), 18–19.

63. [Preface], *Play* [black cover], unpaginated. Descriptions of The Play's works have been culled from this publication, as well as *Play* [blue cover] (Osaka: privately published, 1991) and *The Play 1967–2000* [xerox] (Osaka: privately published, [2000]).

64. Quoted in *Shūkan Asahi* [Weekly Asahi], date unknown; reprinted in *Play* [black cover], unpaginated.

65. "Torokko" [Trolley], in *The Play* [xerox], unpaginated.

66. Chronology in Akasegawa, *Tokyo mikisā keikaku,* 17.

67. Special feature, "Tokubetsu kōdō-sha no kiroku" [Records of persons of direct action], *Keishō,* no. 8 (1963). The magazine was renamed as *Kikan* [Organ], whose name appeared on the flyer of *Cleaning Event.*

The behind-the-scene role Imaizumi played in the work of Hi Red Center was wide-ranging. See his memoir, serialized in sixteen installments, "Ekaki-domo no hentekorinna arekore maesetsu" [Preambles to painters' strange doings], first published in *Niōdachi kurabu* (1985–89); reissued with a new seventeenth installment on the Internet, http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~ee1s-ari/imaizumi1.html, imaizumi2.html, and imaizumi3.html; and reprinted in *Aida,* nos. 49–66 (January 2000–June 2001).

68. Shihyō Group and Hikosaka Naoyoshi, "Shūdan no shi: Kyōdō-sei o tsuikyū shita 4-tsu no purakutisu" [Death of the group: Four practices in pursuit of collectivity], *Bijutsu techō,* no. 372 (October 1973): 148–49.

69. Tomii, "Historicizing," 631.

70. Reiko Tomii, "Who Needs Globalism?" *Art AsiaPacific,* no. 39 (Winter 2004), 36–42.
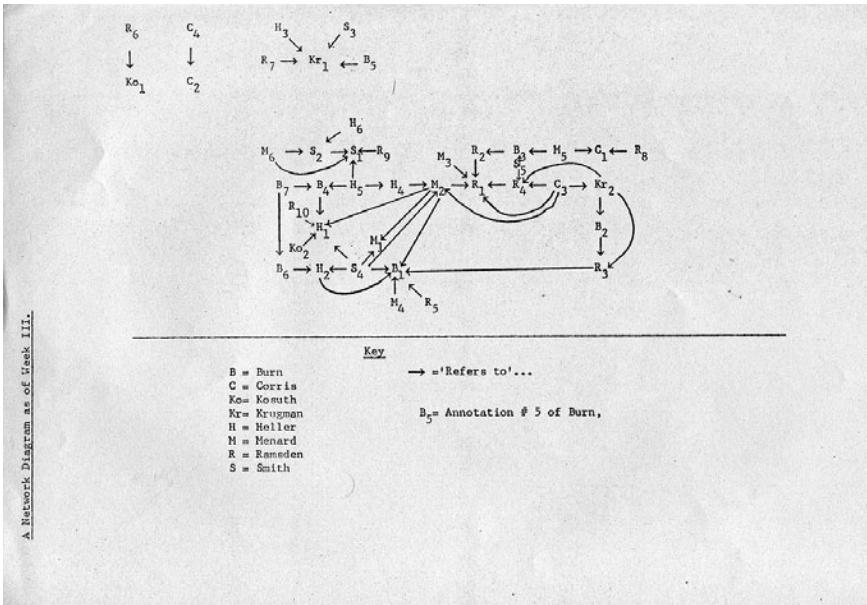
FIGURE 3.1. Michael Corris, *Network Diagram at Week 3 of the Annotations Project*, 1973. Courtesy of Michael Corris; copyright 2004.

3. Art & Language and the Institutional Form in Anglo-American Collectivism

CHRIS GILBERT

> Briefly, by bureaucracy, I do not allude to a massive centralized organization but to the fact that major cultural decisions (which for example determine fundamental things like the way we learn, the practical relations between people) *lie out of our control* and are now all basically directed through the impersonal operation of market institutions (e.g. commercial galleries) and private administrative control (e.g. here *Artforum,* the MOMA, etc.).
>
> —Mel Ramsden, 1975

> Despite the above reservations, a community still seems the only means by which we can overcome the extreme isolation of our vacant subjectivity, and begin to deal with the larger world. Such communities, based initially on professional groupings, could form the basis for the de-structuring of the present artworld; its institutions and authorities.
>
> —Karl Beveridge, 1975

The date 1945, somewhat arbitrarily, may serve to mark a quantum heightening in the organization of civilian societies of the United States and Great Britain. These societies, once mobilized for armed conflict (by means of rationing, extension of government, spontaneous conformity), were never subsequently fully "demobbed" in the peace that followed. Hence begins a postwar condition in which participation in what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer termed the "totally administered world," and so taking part in a kind of mass collectivity, was a pervasive and ongoing condition, while the question of *how* collective matriculation takes place supercedes the earlier question of *whether* one is to be matriculated at all.[1] A societal change of this kind could not fail to have consequences for artists' collectives. In the prewar period, artists' organizations had most often been loose associations geared for the support of avant-garde artistic practices (think of the impressionists, futurists, constructivists), which was a reasonable stance given the relatively open modes of agency in the society. Now, in the wake

of the Second World War these organizations took a turn toward bureaucratization, mirroring but also instantiating this turn taken by postwar U.S. and European culture. In this context, the decision of a group of artists to organize on their own terms itself embodied resistance, since in doing so they presumed to dictate the terms of their own sociality.[2]

A key concept for this new form of collectivity is the "institution." As a matter of definition, an institution may be considered an organization that, though formed for an external purpose, also enjoys a relative fixity and autonomy, as well as a capacity to sustain and reproduce itself.[3] Hence, while institutions have goals—and there are probably as many goals as institutions—each also takes itself in some measure as an end-in-itself, giving the organization an organic character or "institutional life." A number of explicitly institutional art collectives emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. For example, the Fluxus group, which exhibited the branding tendency characteristic of corporations (evident in its production of everything from *Flux*kits to *Flux*films and *Flux*meals), began in 1962. In the second part of the decade, the Art Workers Coalition (1969–71), a group with an anti–Vietnam War agenda, was formed and had a later offshoot in Women Artists in Revolution (1970–78). Both were organizations that, making no pretense of having a common artistic project within the group, coalesced instead around an extrinsic, oppositional political agenda. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, conceptualist duos and trios became widespread, such as the Vancouver-based N.E. Thing Co. (Iain and Ingrid Baxter), Gilbert and George, the Harrisons, and the Boyle Family. These latter, like Warhol's Factory, represented institutions of a limited kind since their corporate qualities were tempered by a close association with an individual or a family unit (though the majority had nominal pretenses to being self-sustaining institutions).[4]

Such coalitions, duos, and family groups were important components of the experimental, politicized art scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, by far the most influential artists' group of the time was Art & Language. Formed in Coventry in 1968, Art & Language is the focus of the present essay—a case study in postwar institutional collectivity. Parodying as well as instantiating the noninstrumental character of institutions, the group could be described as an institution that, if not wholly without a purpose, was at least one that allowed the issue of its own organizational structure and constitution to keep pace with almost any external raison d'être during its first eight years. This was the period from 1968 to 1976 during which Art & Language grew from a small group in the British art teaching system to a network of as many as thirty people. Then, following a series of internal

debates it ceased to exhibit a paradigmatically institutional character, while shrinking in numbers and acquiring a more directed, extrinsic purpose.

In a culture that primarily values acts of individual creation, it is understandable that histories of collectives would be tumultuous. Looking at the first eight years of Art & Language's institutional life, what is perhaps most remarkable are the levels of strife that existed inside the group over demands for internal reform, arguments about orthodoxy, or (not infrequently) seemingly trivial matters. Mayo Thompson, a musician associated with the group from the early 1970s through the 1980s, remarked that whereas in most groups internal conflict is the exception, in Art & Language "conflict was a norm of conversation."[5] Others inside the group, like Thompson, were baffled by its members' tendency to take issue with anything and everything, speculating that Art & Language's internal discord was a positive form of working out contradictions that were latent within the larger culture.[6]

One could speculate that Art & Language's internal strife was an effect of two givens: (1) the group's producing work under the aegis of corporate authorship and (2) its not having a presiding individual (a George Maciunus, Andy Warhol, or Mark Boyle) empowered to resolve conflict. Yet it follows from the group's institutional character, as outlined above—in particular Art & Language's uniquely self-reflexive instantiation of the artists' group idea—that concerns with internal issues of organization cannot have been anything but integral to the group's functioning. By the same token, the tendency to decry or dismiss such internal struggles for legitimacy involves a significant misunderstanding: if Art & Language's central purpose was to establish and maintain its own orthodoxy as an institution, then the strife that "plagued" it almost from the beginning in fact instantiates the iterative act by which it attempted to constitute itself as a group apart from administered culture. In a similar manner, the need for Art & Language to establish its correctness over the work of other conceptual artists, and in relation to critics and historians who take it as an object—which has led to a vast body of critical responses to almost every attempt to locate Art & Language within history—is not mere prickliness. Instead, it must be related to the group's search for an autonomous legitimacy, a legitimacy that is not to be conferred from without. Was Art & Language then an institution without a cause other than the ongoing, if limited aim of setting its house in order? Perhaps a more accurate way of wording this is to say that the group's key purpose, however "solipsistic," was to assert its own institutional character as an ongoing resistance to a larger sociality within which it would otherwise be, and was to a large extent, inscribed.

What does the history of an artist collective look like in a postwar period dominated by vexed issues of organization? The volatility of a given artists' group depended on its ability to resolve organizational problems that emerge, if for no other reason, because of the group's oppositional self-organization. In this regard, we may suppose that George Maciunas may have arbitrated disputes in Fluxus, while the members of Art Workers Coalition, for whom participation in the group was distinct from their work as artists, had at least a degree of separation from their collective decisions. For Art & Language, however, too much was at stake for easy mediation, since their collectivity was so integral to their artistic identities that the group's production was virtually equivalent at moments to the maintenance and reproduction of the organization. Even in Art & Language's beginnings in the late 1960s, issues of organization, concerning both the group's informal sociality and its more formal constitution, colored most of its activities.

These activities emerged from a common rejection of the forms of sociality and learning extant in the educational and market institutions around them. The initial Art & Language core group included Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, teacher and student respectively at Coventry College of Art, as well as David Bainbridge, who taught at Birmingham College of Art, and Harold Hurrell, then teaching at Kingston-upon-Hull College of Art.[7] Their embattled trajectory through an antiquated British art school system in the period 1969 to 1971 is well documented in their own writing and also fed later, more formal research by David Rushton and Paul Wood.[8] In a large measure what these young students and teachers opposed was a hegemonic modernist discourse that placed American artistic production at the center and that of Great Britain (and especially *provincial* Great Britain) at the periphery. A second placement they were resisting was the reframing of British art instruction as part of a liberal curriculum that followed from the reforms of the Coldstream Committee in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The latter reforms, in line with the principles of American modernism, attempted to sever the teaching of fine art from craft vocations (with emphasis going to art's pure or "high" character) while in the same gesture further deepening the system's long-standing and unreformed division between studio practice and theory.[9]

Tellingly, though some participants in Art & Language produced more traditional objects in this period, the group's principal work, and certainly its principal *collective* work at the time, took the form of a sustained attempt to resist and reshape an institutional context. Their two most significant areas of activity were Atkinson and Baldwin's teaching of a course

called "Art Theory" at the Coventry College of Art from 1969 to 1971 and the founding of the journal *Art-Language*, the first issue of which was published in May 1969. Hence from the start Art & Language had its sights on alternative means of education and alternative means of dissemination (both of them key aspects of self-organization). Struggles against bureaucratic structures that were seen as constraining and diminishing, these efforts exhibited a key tendency that would inform the group's practice over the next eight years: a propensity to place collective structures and communication channels above content. Throughout this period, the group's self-understanding was that their goal was not to create new physical objects but, principally, to examine the conditions in which art could be made. "What perhaps united the founder members of A & L more than anything else," according to art historian Charles Harrison, who began to work closely with the group in the early 1970s, "was an intuition that, under the specific circumstances of art at the time, the production of first-order art was a virtual impossibility unless assent were given to those fraudulent conceptualizations by means of which normal art was supported and entrenched."[10]

TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION: JOURNAL AND INDEXES

The journal *Art-Language*, which proposed to embody this oppositional stance and alternative means of communication, quickly transformed and fed into other collaborative projects. The first issue, which featured contributions by U.S. artists Sol Lewitt, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner, in addition to essays by founding participants Bainbridge and Baldwin, came out in 1969. *Art-Language* initially billed itself, according to its subtitle, as "The Journal of conceptual art." It quickly lost this appellation, however, and distanced itself from any extant variety of art production. By the second issue, *Art-Language* was dealing more explicitly with institutional power and resistance: "It is an astonishing but inescapable conclusion that we have reached," went an introductory essay, ". . . that the seemingly erudite, scholastic, neutral, logical, austere, even incestuous, movement of conceptual art is, in fact, a naked bid for power at the highest level—the wresting from groups at present at the top of our social structure of control over the symbols of society."[11] The second issue also deepened the journal's transatlantic character with Joseph Kosuth listed as American editor. This mirrored the de facto internationalism of the group, which by 1971 had found allies not only in Kosuth but also in Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden working in New York where they formed (with Roger Cutforth) the Society for Theoretical Art.[12] Most of the writing in the early years of *Art-Language*, including the fragment quoted

Art-Language

The Journal of conceptual art

Edited by Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge,
Michael Baldwin, Harold Hurrell

Contents

FIGURE 3.2. Cover of *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969). Courtesy of Art & Language.

above, consisted of what the group called "smart essay writing"—smartness, given the school system's tendency to favor the hand over the head, the studio over the study, having acquired the stamp of resistance in relation to the values of the prevailing educational institutions.[13]

In the early 1970s, with participation in the group swelling (and Baldwin cut off from employment at Coventry College of Art), Art & Language embarked on a series of groundbreaking projects: the indexes. This series of projects reflected the group's increasingly complicated and autonomous character—equivalent, according to the definition advanced above, to its increasingly *institutional character*. With the first such project, *Index 01* of 1972, Art & Language also entered its most self-reflexive period. Sometimes called *Documenta Index* after its first exhibition venue ("Documenta 5" in Kassel, Germany), this work was housed in filing cabinets that resembled library card catalogs. It consisted of a series of propositions, drawn from the *Art-Language* journal and other sources, together with wall diagrams showing how the propositions connected (whether they were compatible, incompatible, or had no relation to one another). Harrison observes that the work "dramatized the internal ideological and other conflicts in the group" and further that it "dramatized the social nature of thinking."[14] In effect, *Index 01* was a way of exhibiting the agreements and disagreements among selected propositions and beliefs held in the group, and in that way it depicted and thematized the group's social or institutional structure. Though a discrete object, made for exhibition and possibly even sale, it was significantly different from most physical art objects in that it was not merely intended for beholding or contemplation. Instead, what was essential to *Index 01* was its documentary and functional qualities, and key to this functioning was the alternative form of sociality and learning that the index reflected in the group.[15] This was a form of sociality that, like the use of the project itself, was permeable from the outside and based on participation rather than membership. Because of its open, dialogic structure, *Index 01* allowed the provisional and problematic features of the group's sociality to remain at the forefront.[16]

The index model became a pattern for the group's projects over the next few years. A subsequent series of indexes grew out of the *Annotations* project created from January to July of 1973. During that time, a group of eight participants met weekly in New York City and produced brief texts that commented on statements made in the previous week's meeting. In Britain, this material inspired the intractably complex *Index 002 Bxal*—which some Art & Language participants claimed never to have understood—while in New York, a group led by Michael Corris and Mel Ramsden developed the more open but no less sophisticated structure that resulted in the *Blurting in Art & Language* booklet. Hypertext avant la lettre, this booklet logged

and categorized the group's statements—referred to as "blurts" to indicate their not necessarily logical character—among which it established loose and more naturalistic, if not fully logical, connections. In both projects, a web of meaning and connections emerged, while the reader, made active rather than passive, was invited to retrace and reactivate the connections. These days the *Blurting* project is online on the Web site of Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, where one can test its working.[17] To take a not particularly representative example from the more than four hundred blurts in the booklet, blurt 32 under the heading "ART" reads: "Are we concerned with changing the rules of the game or starting a new one?" It leads via the strong connector (→) to blurt 54: "Challenging habit and reflection is surely not limited to categorically ambiguous art. Rather, categorically ambiguous art forces labyrinthine ruminations about 'art,' the 'category' art, the boundaries of art, art's 'nature' etc." According to the weaker style of connector (&), this blurt leads to blurt 212 under the category "LEARNING": "Art & Language's categorical 'trouble making' has caused some genuine cognitive distress in the art-world: hence a realization of the potential of the gallery (as a public learning situation)."
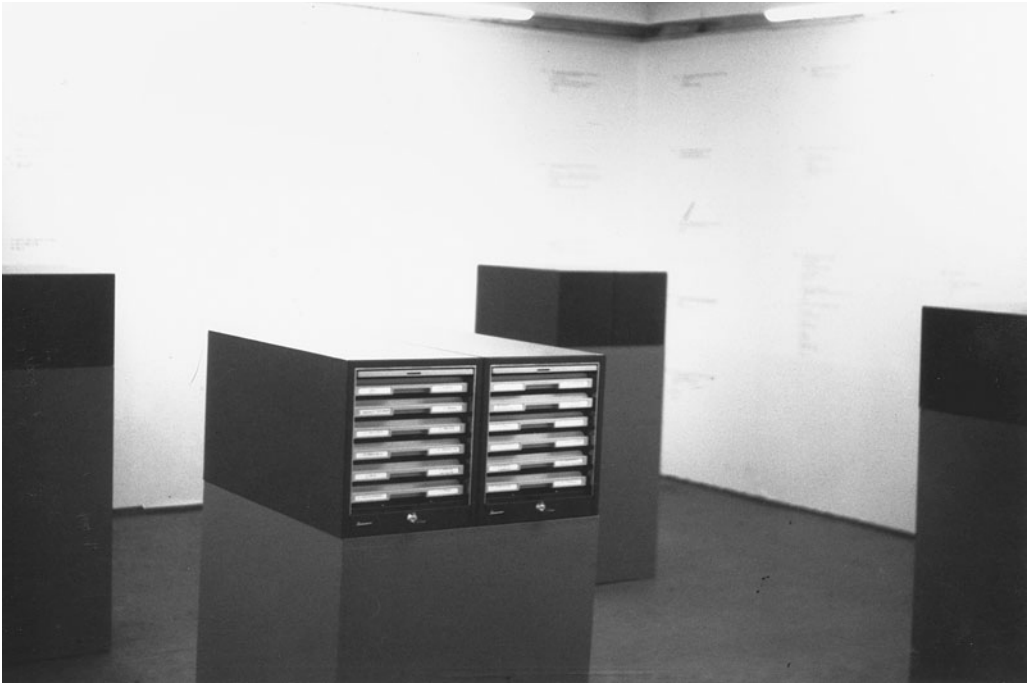
FIGURE 3.3. Art & Language, *Index 01 (Documenta Index)*, 1972. Eight file cabinets, text, and photostats; dimensions variable. Poster, lithograph on newsprint, 72.5 x 50.6 cm. Private collection, Zurich. Courtesy of Art & Language.

Blurting in A&L: an index of blurts and their concatenation (the Handbook) constitutes a problematic; that is, you can't (at least not without deliberation) ignore possible pathways without losing embeddedness (idiolects); deliberation (here, the issue of going-on becomes a self-conscious construction for the reader) admits broader reflection of a context of our/your/other activities: namely, the structure of our/your language/culture and (the prospect of) revisability of our/your language/culture. Published 1973 by Art & Language Press, 250 Bowery, New York, N.Y. and The Mezzanine, Nova Scotia College of Art, 1875 Granville Street, Halifax, N.S.

FIGURE 3.4. Cover of *Blurting in A&L: An Index of Blurts and Their Concatenation (the Handbook)* . . . Copyright Art & Language, 1973. Courtesy of Art & Language.

The purpose of *Blurting* was, like the *Documenta Index*, to make "working relations in the group visible."[18] It is notable that in the two years since the first index the group had acquired a more passionate didacticism, marked by references to the project as a *learning device* and sometimes as a *teaching machine* that readers could explore and share in (with "readers" being understood to include creators as well). The aim, then, was nothing less ambitious than a complete rethinking of the social and institutional conditions in which the eight participants were currently threaded. The introduction to *Blurting* makes this goal clear: the project aims not just to make a study of philosophy or abstract theory but to bring under consideration the "pragmatics" of the gallery situation and the daily conversation that took place in it:

> This means that we are critical of these conventions or are at least in a position where we can view them critically. In other words, we are trying not to be alienated from them (?)—all of the activities going to make up our pragmatics can be seen as necessitously related. For example, you don't just deal with bits of the art-domain (art-works), you deal with all of it.[19]

The ambition to deal with and rethink "all of it," meaning not just the whole social and political structures of art production but even the related facts of daily living, lay behind the *Blurting* project and the paper-and-text remapping of Art & Language's lifeworld that it offered. However, because it was published and circulated outside of the group, *Blurting* also sought to restructure the social relations of the anonymous reader-participants who might engage it. Accordingly, Art & Language at this time was "neither a model nor an attempt to convert—but, importantly, a bit of both."[20]

THE FOX

The Art & Language participants working in New York City in the mid-1970s operated under the heavy influence of the U.S. art market as well as the emerging practice of small-scale artist publishing initiatives. The result was that their next important publication, *The Fox*, initiated in 1975, took on some of the characteristics of the art magazine (trade journal–style) and of the artist's book.[21] Despite this new mode, *The Fox*—staffed by Corris, Kosuth, Ramsden, Sarah Charlesworth, Preston Heller, and Andrew Menard[22]—preserved much of the intragroup reflexivity of the early indexing projects in the extended dialogical threads that evolved among contributors. For example, Ian Burn and Adrian Piper carried out an ongoing exchange in the journal about the pricing of works of art, which is just one instance of the numerous back-and-forths in its pages among Burn, Kosuth, Charlesworth,

and almost all the other editors.[23] Most notable from the perspective of this essay was how the discussion of organizational issues in *The Fox* came, in the course of its brief print run, to compete with questions of "content." By the second issue, discussions addressing the shape and operation of the group ran through several of the editorial contributions. In the third and last issue, a long introductory article "The Lumpen-Headache" was devoted to sorting out issues of organizational unity. This article was framed as a dialogue and documented an actual meeting in which Art & Language argued about and voted on their principles of unity.

The debates about unity in *The Fox*, which focused on the issue of whether Art & Language participants could operate independently or had to subsume their work to an anonymous collective practice, may be seen as a necessary consequence of the drive in the group to assert and keep alive its act of self-begetting as an institution. Though the disputes had an irreducible ideological dimension, the crisis the group entered in 1976 because of arguments about principles of unity was also clearly a reassertion of the organizational issue.[24] This crisis would represent a Pyrrhic victory for the organizational impulse, for the years when *The Fox* was published (1975–76) were probably the last ones during which Art & Language struggled for and projected its own internal organization as a form of counterorganization to the general societal one. If the "Lumpen-Headache" disputes were true to Art & Language's original impetus—to persist in and maintain its institutional character—they also led to the collapse of the large group and the separation of a subgroup that included Michael Baldwin, Mel Ramsden, and Mayo Thompson who contrived to take with them the name and identity of Art & Language. When this group reformed as a smaller body in Britain, it had a more focused production based on the interrogation of certain art-historical genres, while the participants no longer with Art & Language, including Ian Burn, Michael Corris, Preston Heller, and Andrew Menard, among others, tended to pursue more activist and less purely institutional work. (The work of the last three on the short-lived *Red-Herring* magazine provided an important ancestor to such directly activist collectives of the 1980s as Political Art Documentation/Distribution [PAD/D] and REPOhistory.)[25] Hence both the group in Britain and the dispersed former participants in the United States and Australia ceased to be focused on reflexive issues of organizational structure.

AN AESTHETIC OR ETHIC OF ADMINISTRATION?

The above reading of Art & Language's initial phase (1968–76) is not just at odds with the views of many involved, who saw the internal disputes as

merely unfortunate and accidental rather than essential and necessary, but it also varies from the theorization of conceptual art's institutionality offered by critic and historian Benjamin Buchloh. Buchloh sees what he calls an "aesthetics of administration," clerk-like activities carried out in a rote and often antiutopian manner, as key to conceptual art's success in shutting down modern art's aspirations to transcendence, but at the same time contributing to conceptualism's collusion with bureaucratic and administered culture.
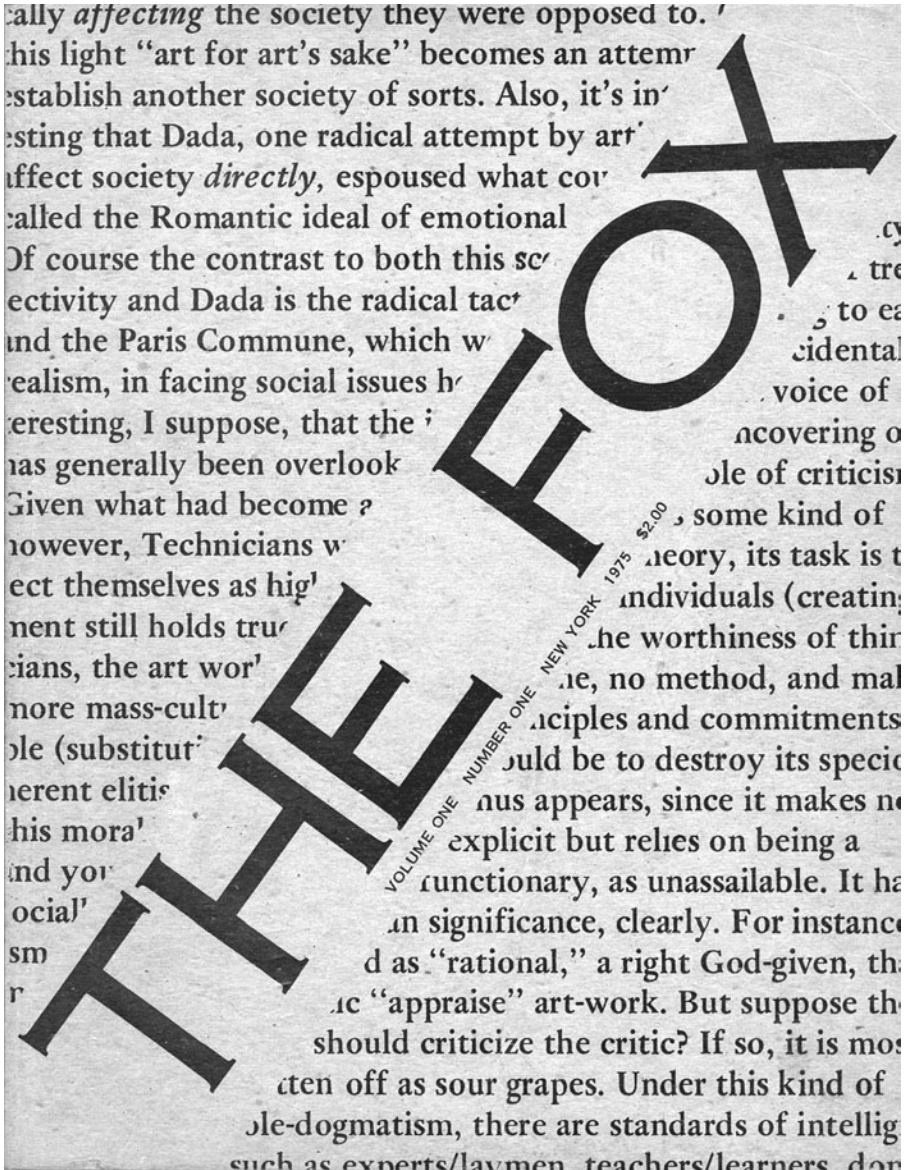
FIGURE 3.5. Cover of *The Fox*, 1975. Artist's publication. Collection Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, The Netherlands. Courtesy of Sholette Archive.

Buchloh writes: "[I]t would appear that Conceptual Art truly became the most significant change of postwar artistic production at the moment that it mimed the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality."[26] In his view, conceptual artists' adoption of tautological modes (evident principally in the view that artworks were analytic propositions but extendable to Art & Language's reflexive structure) aligned the practice with the identity and operation of a depoliticized technocratic postwar middle class. What his account does not seem to allow for, and would follow from the arguments above, is that appropriation of hegemonic bureaucratic or administrative methods was not simply a move against aesthetic transcendence. It remained, I have contended, an ethical move and a strategy that, while at times mimetic of the culture it opposed, was certainly also carried out in the name of and with a view toward forming a resistant self-determination.

　　　That Buchloh was writing at the end of a decade of neoexpressionist returns to transcendence and authenticity may have colored his view of the bureaucratic nature of conceptualism. Yet with the perspective of an additional fifteen years one may attempt to reframe with greater precision the practice of Art & Language and the *administrative* or *institutional* moment in conceptualism that it exemplifies with such clarity. How are we to understand this moment in which institutional life comes to the forefront of a collective practice to the extent that it serves as at least one group's raison d'être? There are two answers to this. First, as far as a simple genealogy of the present is concerned, one may look to how Art & Language's institutionalization of collective work—collectivity taking on an institutional character in an effort to secure autonomy from administered culture—did in fact mark a massive change in art production, after which it became impossible for even mainstream artists to unreflectively adopt the givens of studio practice, but they would henceforth have to locate their activities within self-instituted or at least self-theorized practices.[27] The period that came in the wake of Art & Language's administrative gamesmanship ushered in not only the "self-instituting" of most artists operating as individuals—together with the de facto institutionalization of institutional critique—but also an array of not-for-profit galleries and other public organizations (like Artists Space, Franklin Furnace, Printed Matter) that in many ways make up the landscape of today's art subculture. More important than this genealogy, however, is that from the standpoint of a radical historiography this case study of Art & Language points to how it is in the impulse to self-determination and the methodology of resistant organizational form that an important legacy of conceptual art may be located.

　　　It may seem that excessive weight is being put on one group in the above, and of course it would be mistaken to assume that Art & Language's

role was not also an index of what was going on in the culture more widely (and was evident in the corporate characteristics of contemporary groups such as the N.E. Thing Co., Fluxus, and the Factory). A parallel for how an organization could be preoccupied by structural and organizational issues spurring its members to greater activism (often outside the group) can be found in the brief history of Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC).[28] This group had been formed as a loose organization (with some overlap with Art & Language) that was aimed primarily at correcting misrepresentation and bias in the cultural sphere. The most famous of its undertakings was the *anticatalog* project of 1976 that proposed an alternative reading of the Whitney's "Three Centuries of American Art" exhibition. At one telling moment the group was visited by members from the Amiri Baraka–led Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union (AICU). The presence of representatives from this more radical group in the AMCC came as a kind of conversion experience for some of those involved,[29] and may have been a catalyst for a search for greater ideological unity within AMCC that, as with *The Fox*, ultimately caused many in the group to reconsider their participation. In any case, issues of organization soon took hold of the AMCC and left many participants with a desire for more direct political action.

In Art & Language, however, this evolution—from concern with art-related issues to organizational ones to activism outside the art context—happened earlier and in a more perspicuous manner. What the group's trajectory exhibits very clearly in the crucial period of 1968 to 1976 are some of the problematics and parameters of self-institutionalization as a resistant practice within the art subculture. Well before the existence and indeed proliferation of self-institutional projects under that name in the late 1990s, the group played out many of the challenges and limitations of that form.

NOTES

This essay, written in 2003, reflects my interest in and thinking about self-institutional practices and collectivism within the art subculture at the time of writing. Despite the limitations of its analysis of the postwar society and state—which lays emphasis on bureaucratization and the administration of society at the expense of a clear view of the class struggle that both produces and resists these societal effects (a class struggle in which the figure of collectivism, loosely defined, operates at times in the interest of the working class and at times in the interest of the bourgeoisie)—I am publishing it as it was written originally, with a few modifications for clarity. I do so in part because of limitations of time and format. The essay's principal error is one of focus: that of treating an art collective (Art & Language), the phenomenon of art collectivity, and also the larger entity that is the art subculture in isolation from the macropolitical and economic factors that have produced this subculture, this phenomenon of art collectivity, and this particular collective. As an error that

reaches to the core of the essay's project (and in my view carries over to the project of the volume in which it appears), it could not be corrected through mere revision. The reason for publishing the essay at all is that its problematically narrow focus proves redeeming in a small way when the essay arrives at its conclusions; these remain valid within their modest sphere of application, while the larger question of the significance of struggles within an art subculture and indeed the political valency of the art subculture in which these struggles take place looms outside the frame of the essay—looms outside of it with much greater urgency than what the essay and the book itself address.—CG, 2006

[The foundational premise of this volume is that neither art nor collectivism ever exists in isolation from macropolitical and economic factors. While Chris Gilbert's essay does not address these larger realities as directly as most of the other chapters do, we feel it makes a significant contribution by eloquently rendering the desire to withdraw from these larger influences—a desire that modern art has struggled with since its inception—as a period cultural symptom.—Eds.]

1. For two loosely concurrent, if very different voices on societal change in the postwar period, see Gilles Deleuze, "Post-Script on Control Societies," in *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), and Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Material Culture* (London: Verso, 1974), 41: "I am sure that it is true of the society that has come into existence since the last war, that progressively, because of developments in the social character of labour, in the social character of communications, and in the social character of decision, it extends much further than ever before in capitalist society into certain hitherto resigned areas of experience and practice and meaning."

2. The discussion of postwar collectivity here is informed by Gregory Sholette's "Counting on Your Collective Silence: Notes on Activist Art as Collaborative Practice," published in *Afterimage* (November 1999). In this essay, Sholette writes of the pervasiveness of de facto collectivity in modern society and distinguishes between two kinds of collectivity—an active and a passive one: "Instead of the individual opposed to the collective or the artist deciding to work with the 'community,' my contention is that 'collectivity,' in one form or another, is virtually an ontological condition of modern life. Two consequences follow from this supposition. First it guarantees that there is no location out of which an individual, an artist for example, can operate alone, in opposition to society. . . . [which allows us] to reconfigure the often stated opposition between collective and individual as that of a displacement between two kinds of collectives: one passive, the other active."

3. The two important aspects of institutions, *fixity* and *purpose*, appear in the following *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions: "6.a. An established law, custom, usage, practice, organization, or other element in the political or social life of a people"; "7.a. An establishment, organization, or association, instituted for the promotion of some object."

4. Scottish artists Mark Boyle and Joan Hills formed Sensual Laboratory in the late 1960s, a key project of which was *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*. Begun in 1969, this was an enormously ambitious project that involved casting portions of the earth. The work on *Journey* eventually involved their son Sebastian and daughter Georgia. By 1971, Sensual Laboratory had morphed into the Boyle Family. This name was appropriate insofar as, according to Charles Green, "The democratic, communal artistic 'family' was their overriding model, displacing all other collaborative

types and intentions" (67). Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, a married sociologist and artist, began to work together in 1971 forging a breed of environmental art that resembled a small business. "Effectively," Green writes, they "worked as environmental consultants." Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 59–121.

5. Mayo Thompson, interview with the author, October 13, 2000.

6. Andrew Menard, interview with the author, August 21, 2000.

7. Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, *A Provisional History of Art & Language* (Paris: E. Fabre, 1982), 15.

8. The history of the Art Theory course at Coventry College of Art is told in a summary fashion in Harrison and Orton's *Provisional History,* 25–27. David Rushton and Paul Wood began to work with Art & Language in the early 1970s and coauthored the study *Politics of Art Education* (London: Studio Trust, 1979). See also Rushton and Wood, "Education Bankrupts," in *Fox* 1 (1975): 96–101, and "Art-Learning," in *Fox* 3 (1976): 170–76.

9. Harrison and Orton, *Provisional History,* 9–11.

10. Ibid., 21. Art & Language frequently relied on a distinction between "first-order" and "second-order" art—a distinction comparable to that between a discourse that might function in business or exegesis and a metalanguage that might analyze the first, functional discourse.

11. "Conceptual Art: Category and Action," *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): 82.

12. Green, *Third Hand,* 53.

13. Harrison and Orton, *Provisional History,* 10: "The third [contradiction resulting from the educational restructuring] was that while the Coldstream Council prescribed a certain small proportion of the timetable for Art History and 'Complimentary Studies'—in line with its higher-educational aspirations for art—the priority, autonomy and prestige conferred on 'studio work' guaranteed a generally irreconcilable breach between studio and lecture room, practice and theory, 'doing' and 'reflecting.'"

14. Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 68.

15. Michael Corris, interview with the author, May 12, 1999: "we always tried to do something that made it inconvenient to see the work as ordinary, normal pieces of work, to problematize it, as one would have said in the 1980s."

16. "[O]ur dialectical loci are organizational tasks that don't feed off a general sentimentality about sharing." Quoted in Michael Corris and Neil Powell, "An Attempt at a Textual Analogue of a Possible Art & Language Exhibition," *Art-Language,* n.s., no. 3 (September 1999): 7.

17. The work of Thomas Dreher, the whole of *Blurting in Art & Language* together with an introduction and other essays, is online at the Zentrum für Kunst and Medientechnologie (ZKM) Web site: http://blurting-in.zkm.de.

18. *Blurting in Art & Language: An Index of Blurts and Their Concatenation (the Handbook)* . . . (New York: Art & Language Press; Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art, 1973), 10.

19. Ibid., 4.

20. Ibid., 12.

21. For more on the importance of the artist's book, artist's statements, and the self-published art magazine in the U.S. context, see Lawrence Alloway, "Artists as

Writers, Part One: Inside Information," *Artforum* 12, no. 6 (March 1974): 30–35, and "Artists as Writers, Part Two: The Realm of Language," *Artforum* 12, no. 8 (April 1974): 30–35.

22. Despite his deep involvement in *The Fox,* Ian Burn was excluded from the list of "editors" on the masthead of the first issue. Instead he was featured as "review consultant." By the second issue he was featured, along with the others, as "editor."

23. For the Ian Burn–Adrian Piper dialogue, see Burn's article in *Fox* 1 (1975), "Pricing works of Art" (53–59), and Piper's response in *Fox* 2 (1975), "A Proposal for Pricing Works of Art" (48–49). The Ian Burn and Michael Baldwin dispute was an ongoing one that touched down in several issues of *The Fox* as well as in *Artforum* and *Art-Language*. Throughout the pages of *The Fox,* Joseph Kosuth and Sarah Charlesworth took the position that the group should be open-ended and moderate, which drew criticism, especially in later issues, from Mel Ramsden and Mayo Thompson.

24. The role of ideology in this dispute is treated in my essay "Art & Language, New York, Discusses Its Social Relations in 'The Lumpen-Headache,'" in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice,* ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

25. Gregory Sholette, "News from Nowhere: Activist Art and After, a Report from New York City," *Third Text* 45 (Winter 1998–99): 45–62.

26. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 143.

27. Ibid., 140.

28. Alan Wallach, "Reading the Anti-Catalog: Radical Art History and the Decline of the Left," paper read at College Art Association meeting, Toronto, February 26, 1999.

29. Mel Ramsden, interview with the author, September 25, 2000.

FIGURE 4.1. Crowd turns out in public screening room during the first Gulf War to watch antiwar videos from Gulf Crisis TV Project (GCTV). Photo: PTTV.

4. The Collective Camcorder in Art and Activism

JESSE DREW

As myth has it, in the midst of the caveman choreography of the Chicago Police Department at the 1968 Democratic convention, the chant arose "the whole world's watching."[1] This vocal response to the frenzied beating of demonstrators has been described as a manifestation of the collective realization of the centrality of television, and of the prophesied global electronic village. The year 1968 was also when Sony Corporation's consumer-level video camera, the self-contained, battery-powered, quarter-inch, reel-to-reel Portapak, became widely available.[2] The camera was affordably priced and did not require the technical proficiency normally required for television production. The concurrence of these two serendipitous developments resonated with a new generation of artists and activists eager to experiment with the world's most powerful medium. It would be tempting at this point to reiterate the folklore surrounding the nascent video art years and the associated artists: Nam June Paik and the first Portapak, the playful studio experiments of Bruce Nauman, William Wegman and his dog Man Ray, Vito Acconci and his video repetition of simple gestures. This official history has already been written, however.[3] The intent of this essay is to poke around this well-established canon, and to provoke another way of looking at the foundations of video art in the United States.

In an art-world culture that worships at the altar of individualism, this essay seeks to blasphemously point a finger at the contributions made by collectives of videomakers, and to position their rightful place within the established framework of video art history. Certainly, some collective groups already form part of the established history of video art. References to groups like TVTV, Raindance, Ant Farm, and Videofreex surface frequently in citations, retrospectives, and anthologies. Their contributions,

however, are normally only recognized when their work crosses within the narrowly defined boundaries of what the art establishment has sanctified as "art." The reality is that many artists' groups were also working in the video medium, exploring the creative potential of the video image, subverting televisual representations, tinkering, collaging, and contributing to a body of video cultural work. This essay will grind a new lens using a set of expanded parameters, and focus on the work of video collectives within the period 1968 to 2000. In particular this investigation will look at one of the longest-lived video collectives in the United States, Paper Tiger Television.

Reevaluating the accepted parameters of video art reconnects video's historical roots to many past media groups, such as the Newsreel Film Collective, the Canadian group Channels for Change, and back to the Film and Photo League of the 1930s. Many of these media groups were concerned with the same subjects addressed by contemporary video artists, issues such as the politics of identity and representation, a critique of daily life, the deconstruction of cultural control mechanisms, and the subversion of authority, while also believing passionately in working collectively to produce and present ideas and work to the public. It is this kind of praxis that informs much of the early Portapak work that is gathering dust in archives around the United States; tapes of the first Woman's Liberation March up New York City's Fifth Avenue, images of a family picnic inside the walls of a New York State prison, early gay liberation activity, anti–Vietnam War demonstrations, numerous countercultural happenings, conversations with artists, intellectuals, and activists. In early black-and-white Portapak footage, whether the work of socially conscious video collectives or individual artists' video studio experiments, one sees a similar self-conscious playfulness on-screen, with murky and grainy images appearing to be shot through cheesecloth, with primitive single-tube cameras comet-tailing or blooming across the screen, the primary difference being a focus on content over form. This is a division not rigidified until the later "museumization" of video work. Marita Sturken, in her essay on early video art, explains that,

> While rigid boundaries are now drawn between socially concerned videotapes and video art by the institutions that fund and exhibit this work, few categorizations were used when artists and activists first began making tapes. The standard subcategories that are commonly used to describe video today—such as documentary, media-concerned, image-processing, and narrative—while glaringly inadequate now, had no relevant meaning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Distinctions between art and information were not initially made by these artists; to them, everything was simply "tape" (and many eschewed the title "artist" as one that connoted elitism).[4]

Evidence of this approach can be gleaned by viewing archival copies of *Radical Software*, the main journal of the video art movement. In

one column, Nam June Paik waxes enthusiastically about the video channels of the future. Some of his tongue-in-cheek lineup includes *Chess Lesson* at 7:00 AM by Marcel Duchamp, *Meet the Press* at 8:00 AM with guest John Cage, followed by confessions of a topless cellist by Charlotte Moorman, and *Guided Tour of Kurdistan, Turkistan, and Kazakstan* by Dick Higgins.

Many art critics, gallery curators, and other arbiters of the art world, of course, have been fixated on form, and often ignore work based on content or context. Likewise, they tend to dismiss such work as "political" art or not art at all, as somehow art that focuses on larger social issues, or art that is situated in the public sphere, is too depersonalized, less individualistic, and thus less intrinsic to the approved and marketable stereotype of the sensitive and creative artist. Video collectives have naturally tended to focus more on larger social concerns relevant to the public, the marginalized, and the dispossessed. Contrary to those who dismiss such work as being too "social," video collective proponents have countered that the seemingly spontaneous generation of art, as lionized in the art world, is typically a manifestation of the internalization of social norms and culture, absorbed from the artists' social, economic, and political position, and is thus ultimately a collective product as well.

Is video art concerned only with new forms or the self-conscious use of the medium? Or can it work to reintegrate media practice with daily life, challenge complacency and cultural passivity, and confront the public's expectations and prejudices? Arts movements such as surrealism and Dadaism, movements often given lip service by the art establishment, were concerned with such issues as were other cultural movements that sought to fuse daily life with artistic expression, such as Situationists, Beats, Diggers, and Hippies. Many video collectives continue to work in and be inspired by the traditions set by such movements. As Marita Sturken put it, "The marginal way in which the collectives are treated in video history is indicative of the way in which socially concerned work was simply written out of the art-historical agenda for video set forth in its museumization (and ultimately historicized quite separately)."[5]

That the art world does not validate the collective role in art production is well understood by video collectives. Contemporary art production is intimately connected to the art market, and thus financial considerations often take precedence over many aesthetic concerns. Thus, the question of ownership and authorship becomes crucial within this context if an art product is to have value. Collective art production is often antithetical to authorship and ownership, or is at least ambiguous. The question of authorship, however, is strongly tied to the financial value of the work. Even more, it is integral to modern Western ideas of the genius of the individual as the

prime mover of history. Prevailing ideas of individual art production and creativity have been ingrained for so long they have become nothing less than "common sense." This despite the transformation by mechanization, industrialization, and the recognition of intertextuality that lie at the core of modern cultural production. Even the most industrially organized of the creative arts, that of cinema, succumbed decades ago to the cult of the individual, with the adoption of the notion of "auteurship." Ingmar Bergman lamented this situation memorably in 1957: "Today the individual has become the highest form and the greatest bane of artistic creation. The smallest wound or pain of the ego is examined under a microscope as if it were of eternal importance. The artist considers his isolation, his subjectivity, his individualism almost holy. Thus we finally gather in one large pen, where we stand and bleat about our loneliness without listening to each other and without realizing that we are smothering each other to death."[6]

That said, while painting and writing tend toward being solitary pursuits, video production is often intrinsically collective, tied as it is to practicalities like feeding tape stock, wrangling electricity, and tweaking machines. Perhaps no other artistic medium has such an integration of craft and art, providing a kind of vitality intrinsic to video productions. Other reasons for a collective approach to video production have been the cost of the equipment, whose steep price encourages many artists to collaborate. One of the primary funders of early video art, the New York State Council of the Arts, solely funded groups and collectives for reasons of economic efficiency. This is a radical change from today, when most funders stipulate that only individual artists can apply for support.

Video work, however, is about not only production but also, perhaps as importantly, exhibition and distribution. Organizing video playback, exhibition, and distribution is often a collective endeavor involving a division of labor in procuring and setting up equipment and assembling an audience, an activity that culminates in the collective experience of a video screening, in contradistinction to the normally solitary activity of modern television viewing.

There are many other reasons not endemic to the technological or financial imperatives for the collective production of video in the early years of its development. Frequently downplayed or ignored by believers in "the great man" theory of individual genius is the symbiosis of the work with the social, economic, and political environments inhabited by artists. Video art's development at the end of the sixties and into the early seventies had much to do with its aesthetic, content, and style of work. The social, political, and economic context in which this video art practice arose is often forgotten or downplayed as the individual is decontexualized and placed within

the hermetic environment of the art gallery. An essential element of late 1960s activism was the yearning to incorporate daily life into one's beliefs, so that convictions and everyday life become one. This "lifestyle" ideology was mostly absent from those of pre–World War II media radicals, whose domestic life was often untouched by their politics. Many in the 1960s and 1970s countercultural milieu couldn't justify spending the day being an activist or artist only to go home to a routine living arrangement in mainstream culture. The belief in making personal life as important as political/cultural life propelled the movement to build communal living situations in many areas. These living arrangements encompassed many thousands of people and established collectives of all kinds, from filmmaking to organizing to bread baking to newspaper publishing. The growth of feminism and the gay rights movement in the early 1970s helped to spread these concerns to all parts of daily life, throughout the home and into the bedroom and kitchen.

Scanning the graveyard of video archival material from the 1960s and early 1970s, one sees a plethora of titles shot during these early years by groups such as Alternate Media Center, People's Video Theatre, Downtown Community Television Center, Portable Channel, Marin Community Video, Broadside TV, Headwaters TV, University Community Video, and Videopolis. New York State alone had over a dozen functioning video collectives. For many of these early videomakers, the rising of the little Portapak against the major studio cameras was an electronic David versus Goliath, an apt analogy that fed into the articulation of guerrilla video. This potent image arose in a world inflamed by the rebellion of oppressed people against modern imperialism and neocolonialism. Che Guevara, the Vietnamese revolution, the uprisings in Africa against Apartheid in the South and against the Portuguese colonies in the North, and a myriad of armed foci rebellions against the "gorillas" (dictators) in Latin America played a major role in shaping the mindset of a generation of video artists. A collective form of organization was part and parcel of this ideology. Guerrilla tactics were seen as essential in an environment where television was rigidly controlled by just three major corporations—CBS, NBC, and ABC—and guerrilla tactics required a collective style of work.

What constitutes a collective is clearly something open to interpretation. Collectives run the gamut from loose associations of like-minded individuals working toward a common goal, to rigid, cadre-like, single-minded organizations with a vanguardist, democratic centralism at their heart. It would be safe to say at least that collectives generally seek some kind of consensus around work to be performed, be it a film production or a potato harvest. Egalitarian concerns are high on the list of priorities, whereby rank is downplayed, at least official rank, and the division of labor seeks to be

nonhierarchical and rotating, so that everyone can do all. These ideals spring from utopian elements of communalism and are influenced and tempered by political imperatives often derived from clandestine liberation movements. Guerrilla manuals reflect on the necessity for egalitarianism, not only for building the "new society" but to make a more fungible political movement. In centralized organizations, if the head is cut off, the organism dies, but in a decentralized movement, many more heads just spring back up. Of course, to use a more mundane example, if the character generator technician doesn't show up, the cameraperson can take over the job for the shoot.

Early video collectives held these ideals in common with many of today's video collectives. As pointed out by Martha Rosler, the early video movement was infused with this kind of "utopian" ideal. Video was going to change the world and collapse the art world into itself:

> Thus, video posed a challenge to the sites of art production in society, to the forms and "channels" of delivery, and to the passivity of reception built into them. Not only a systemic but also a utopian critique was implicit in video's early use, for the effort was not to enter the system but to transform every aspect of it and—legacy of the revolutionary avant-garde project—to define the system out of existence by merging art with social life and making audience and producer interchangeable.[7]

With the slow decay of the heady, idealistic 1960s, much of the video art world devolved into a bland narcissism, wrapped up in the solitary gesture or the gimmickry and gadgetry of the medium. Provoked by a culture of ironic detachment, video artists mushed around with the form, experimenting with the equipment while side-stepping its roots in television. In the depoliticized climate, becoming void of social consciousness made for better response from gallery patrons, and what was good for the patrons was good for the galleries.

Curiously enough, official video art history ends in the 1970s, when the medium enters the palaces of art and lives happily ever after in the glow of Bill Viola installations. But, perhaps it's time to realize this history was written prematurely. As time stretches out, and as we gain the advantage of hindsight in a "history" that is now forty years old, the contours of the past become clearer. In such a shadowy world there would be more importance accorded to the early 1980s as the coalescing moment at the heart of the video art movement. It was then that many of the more utopian ideas of the movement reached some fruition, with greater participation of women and people of color, and with less fetishism placed on the gadgetry and mechanical awe of the products.

The election of Ronald Reagan and the rise of the Moral Majority in 1980 fueled a younger generation of artists, particularly those not part of the art establishment. The impending culture wars and the attack on the

morals and aesthetics of artists led many to search for the reasons that led to this disconnect between cultural creators and the public. Defunding also led to a major effort to reconnect with the public and reestablish a connection between cultural workers and community. Much culpability was placed on the role of the mass media and the culture industry, which had been forming the pictures in people's minds while video artists were busy playing with their own image on the screen. The new political and economic realities of the 1980s led to an investigation into how to reconnect with the public while challenging the views of the religious right and other groups hostile to artists. For many video collectives, public access television was one way that allowed artists entry into the homes of people not accustomed to visiting galleries and museums. The establishment of neighborhood media and art centers was another, as part of a strategy to get art out of the galleries and into the streets and neighborhoods.

This cultural groundswell was not just part of the art scene, however, but was intricately bound up in the burgeoning contestatory subcultures of punk and hip-hop, with their funky, homegrown DIY aesthetic. These subcultures were frequently collective creations. The punk scene, often deprived of venues for its music, had to organize its own alternative spaces, in warehouses, abandoned storefronts, and squats, relying on a system of alternative 'zines to spread the word. Bands, fans, 'zines, and spaces were part of a collective apparatus that went along with the territory. Hip-hop culture, homegrown in the ghettos and barrios, was often organized around "crews" whose cultural work collectively ranged from spinning vinyl and organizing block parties to holding dance competitions and painting spray-can art on trains and public walls. All of these activities were contributing to a new type of collective cultural production that privileged group activity over individual activity. This collective groundswell rose alongside growing right-wing Reaganite repression.

In the early 1980s, the ever-increasing corporate stranglehold over commercial television and mass media became more apparent, but for the most part established video artists showed no great concern. As the "professionalism" of the video art genre grew, the stakes got higher and higher for experimenting with new high-tech video tools. Artists and galleries wanting to play in this game grew increasingly dependent on corporate sponsorship, frequently from the same corporations benefiting from the new drive toward media conglomeration. Besides, video artists were usually eager to distance themselves from television, which they saw as the hillbilly cousin of aristocracy. Younger video artists, however, who were surrounded by and absorbing popular culture, were eager to critique, comment on, deconstruct, and defeat the message of commercial television and media. Work increasingly

focused on such a task, creating spoofs, subverting messages, and implementing the slogan "copyright infringement—your best entertainment value." Such a spirit was more in tune with bohemian art movements such as funk, pop art, collage, and Dadaism and stood in stark contrast to much of the cold and bleak techno-art beeping and flashing in galleries. This upsurge in media activity emerged simultaneously as a heightened interest in cultural studies, mass media studies, and cultural criticism. Television is, after all, at the heart of our popular culture, the culture of the everyday, and dominates the media landscape. Video, when all is said and done, is a form of television, a media device that conveys information. It is natural that video artists cross the boundaries of art and activism, and frequently choose to subvert the message, not just exploit the form. This artistic jujitsu, using the weight of television to fall upon itself, emerged as a popular strategy among video collectives. Increasingly, video artists in the 1980s and 1990s embraced the necessity to reflect on, intervene, and challenge the contested terrain of television, mass media, and popular culture, and leave the art-video aesthetic behind. As B. Ruby Rich points out, this approach blurs further the distinction between "art" and "activism":

> Once upon a time, way back in the seventies, it was possible to speak of "two avant-gardes" that posited a binarism of form and content. Times have changed, and along with them, categories of concern. Such a construct is irrelevant to a nineties video/film praxis that locates its politic instead within a renegotiated subject position, for both artist and audience. In the process, genres are recast, media resituated. It's no longer possible to speak of aesthetics in a vacuum, to speak of intentionality without the counterbalance of reception, to speak arrogantly of the individual without speaking humbly of the collective, not as something abstract but as a quality within us.[8]

The convergence of these new political, cultural, social, technological, artistic, and economic developments provides the impetus to the establishment of Paper Tiger Television (PTTV). While the instigators of PTTV had roots in the sixties and seventies art scene, the raw energy came from a new generation of artists, angry and hungry and ready to tear into the dominant culture. The early Paper Tiger collective was an amalgam of artists, activists, critics, cultural theorists, and academics eager to seize control of the medium of television and reinject it into the American psyche.

According to Dee Dee Halleck, one of the founders of the group, Paper Tiger Television came out of a group of students, artists, and activists in New York City, emerging from a group project called *Communication Update*.[9] The first Paper Tiger program was based upon the analysis and personality of Herbert Schiller, then media scholar at Hunter College in New York City. Schiller, with his biting critique of the culture industry and his prophetic take on the consolidation of media by corporate giants (not to

mention his heavy Brooklyn accent), was the perfect person to begin the series. Shot entirely live to tape in the studio, the backdrop consisted of Schiller sitting in a funkily arranged New York City subway, while he deconstructs and shreds away at the paper of record, "the steering mechanism of the ruling class," the *New York Times*. In one scene, he analyzes and deconstructs an image in the paper of an astronaut, an image of a NASA space shot, and reinterprets the framing, perspective, and intent of the photo and accompanying text. The production is entirely put together by the newly formed collective and launches the first of many programs.

The newly formed Paper Tiger Television collective created sixty or so tapes of this kind in their first few years of existence, featuring a broad spectrum of scholars, artists, and activists. Some of these early studio productions include *Joan Does Dynasty* (Joan Braderman's take on the *Dynasty* TV program), *Renee Tajima Reads Asian Images in American Film: Charlie Chan Go Home*, *Donna Haraway Reads National Geographic*, *Artist's Call to Central America: Lucy Lippard and Art for a Cause*, *Eva Cockcroft Reads ArtForum: Art and Language and Money*, *Martha Rosler Reads Vogue*, *Michele Mattelart Reads the Chilean Press Avant-Coup: Every Day It Gets Harder to Be a Good Housewife*, *The Trial of the Tilted Arc* with Richard Serra, and *Tuli Kupferberg Reads Rolling Stone*. Dee Dee Halleck describes the difficulties of collective television production:
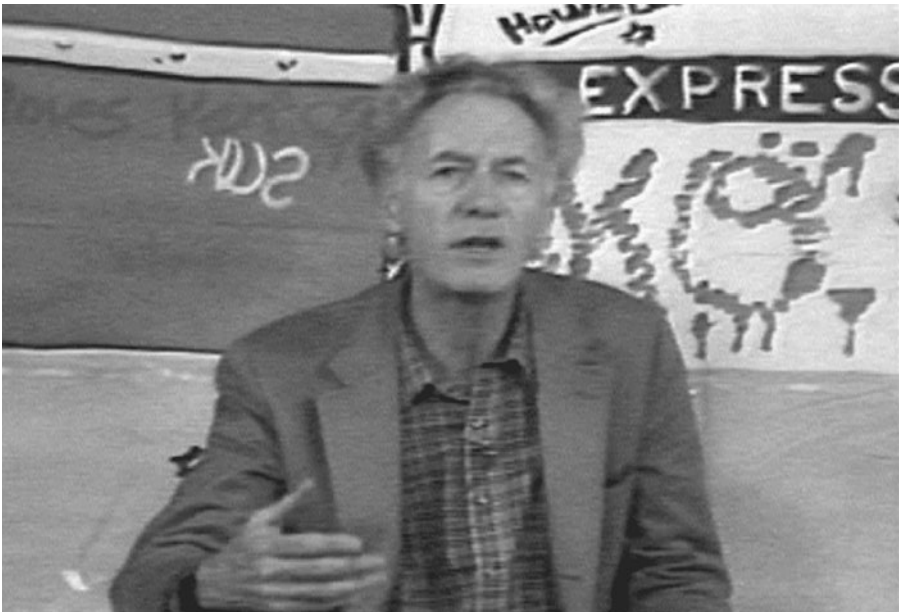
FIGURE 4.2. Media critic Herbert Schiller dissects the *New York Times* in an early Paper Tiger Television production. Photo: PTTV.

There is something about going out to audiences live that sets the adrenaline pumping. However, it's hard to put together a show on short notice, using a large crew. Most television is not made with a collaborative, non-authoritarian structure. Achieving unity and strength while maintaining maximum participation, imagination, and humanism is a basic problem for any group. To try to make a TV show in a non-authoritarian structure is formidable. Subtlety and tolerance are difficult to achieve in the supercharged tension of a television studio, about to go on the air in three-and-a-half minutes.[10]

Paper Tiger was built on the distribution network provided by public access television, the electronic commons fought for by media activists and artists in the 1970s. As Paper Tiger tapes began to be distributed to other access centers, it became apparent that many others were becoming aware of the creative possibilities of television production. The involvement of hundreds and then thousands of community TV producers began to swell the ranks of access stations nationwide as TV programs on all subjects bloomed across the nation's TVs. Such activity stimulated the creation of the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers, an organization that served as the central locus of public access television constituents (now called the Alliance for Community Media). Relying upon this nascent network of public access producers for local cablecast, Paper Tiger tapes began to get mailed around the country, provoking the idea of a national distribution network. It became apparent that there were many local video groups producing tapes, and the idea emerged for a unified system that could tie together all these local groupings into one national network. Observing that the burgeoning commercial cable networks are essentially held together by satellite uplinking and downlinking, Paper Tiger members adopted the same technology and initiated the Deep Dish TV Network to distribute videowork.

A glance at the booklets and directories produced by Deep Dish TV after the first two broadcast seasons conveys a picture of the growing movement of video collectives in the mid-1980s. The purpose of creating the Deep Dish directory was to establish lines of communication between newly organized video groups around the country by publishing contact information on the groups that had submitted tapes to the Deep Dish series. In the booklets, the work of many collective and group efforts is evident, and reflective of a wide range of interests and backgrounds. Among the groups that submitted video for the series were Alternative Views (a group that had been in existence as long as Paper Tiger), Somerville Producers Group, Southwest Reports, The Committee to Intervene Anywhere, Xchange TV, Madre Video Project, Mill Hunk Herald, Labor Information Committee (from Toronto, Canada), The Cambridge Women's Video Collective, Mon Valley Media, Ladies Against Women, Video Band, The Alternative Media Project (based in New Haven, Connecticut), The Atlanta Media Project, Artists TV Network,

Subterranean Video, Squeaky Wheel (Buffalo, New York), The Labor Video Project (based in San Francisco), The Coalition to Save General Motors/Van Nuys, The Committee for Labor Access (from Chicago), The Labor Media Group (from Ann Arbor), The New York City Labor Film Club, The Not For Profit TV (based in Harlem, New York), Video For Kids (Mt. View, California), and Third World News Review.

      The proliferation of these groups and collectives shows the growth of the collective approach to video work in the 1980s and early 1990s. Groups often came together as video arms of both broad-based and single-focus organizations such as gay and lesbian groups, nuclear freeze groups, Central America activist groups, labor groups, and many more. Some groups, such as Not Channel Zero, produced work from the perspective of Black and Latino youth in New York City. Among the most active video collectives was DIVA (Damn Interfering Video Artists), allied with the group ACT UP, which became an important and effective catalyst for fighting AIDS and for challenging the public's perceptions of the disease. This group produced many tapes detailing the fighting spirit of HIV-positive people and helped propel a culture of optimism in a community devastated by sorrow. As Jim Hubbard wrote in an essay for the 2000 Guggenheim show on archived AIDS videos, "Fever in the Archives":

FIGURE 4.3. Radio activists go on the air with a transmitter built by mini-FM advocate Tetsuo Kogawa. Low-power FM radio experiment in San Francisco. Photo: PTTV.

> Many of these tapes, although made solely as timely responses to the crisis, retain an extraordinary vitality. The videomakers clearly positioned themselves in opposition to an unresponsive and often antagonistic government and mainstream media. They eschewed the authoritative voice-over, the removed, dispassionate expert, and the media's tendency to scapegoat, while embracing a vibrant sexuality and righteous anger.[11]

Some groups began using video as countersurveillance, such as Cop-Watch, which began video surveillance of rogue cops. Labor groups formed in Chicago, San Francisco, and other cities to challenge the antilabor bias of mainstream television and to give voice to the creative expression of workers. The growth of these grassroots video collectives was propelled by the enthusiastic response of audiences and constituents, who were thrilled when their own stories, identities, and representations appeared on monitors and screens, in storefronts, community centers, and alternative spaces, as well as video-projected into public spaces. Artists could take advantage of this growing network of video exhibition, bypassing official channels to explain their own perspectives on AIDS, censorship, domestic violence, racism, cultural values, homelessness, and other issues not talked about in Reagan America. The fact that these videos were often made by those directly affected, and not by outside professionals, made them all the more powerful. A Paper Tiger Television production produced by PTTV members in conjunction with striking miners in Pittston, Virginia, illustrated such enthusiasm. The tape (*Drawing the Line at Pittston*) showed at a conference of labor representatives, following a screening of a "professional" tape on the same subject, for which the audience sat politely and gave tepid applause. The PTTV tape, on the other hand, played to wild and tumultuous applause, as the self-shot viewpoints of the miners themselves came across in the face of police repression, shaky cameras and all. It was audience response in these kinds of venues that helped fuel the desire to create a collective movement of grassroots video.

By the early nineties, the culture wars had become more pronounced, as right-wing politicians hacked away at the funding base for the

FIGURE 4.4. Video frame from *Drawing the Line at Pittston*. Paper Tiger Television. Photo: PTTV.

arts. The introduction of the camcorder, particularly the range of "pro-sumer" formats such as Hi-8 and S-VHS, allowed the producer to get out of the studio and into the streets. Mobile video operators proliferated at public events, as programs began to be produced entirely in postproduction, which also allowed a number of special effects technologies (slo-mo, fades, wipes, text) formerly restricted by economic reasons to the major broadcasters. These changes became more apparent in later series of Deep Dish TV programming. Of hundreds of tapes submitted to Deep Dish programming, the majority indicated an association with a group effort, from simple partnerships to collectives and co-ops, yet this tremendous collaborative effort does not as yet show up on the radar of most galleries and venues of the arts institutions. This "utopian" moment of video, seemingly lost in the early 1970s, was growing invisibly under everyone's feet.

The morphing of the Reagan regime into the Bush regime only helped spur the desire for independent video production. In the face of the militant mediocrity of the culture industries, demands for representation of people of color, of working people, of gay and lesbian people fueled the independent artistic production of video, television, and film. Many new independent media groups were created, and established cultural groups swelled with eager younger members, in groups such as Film Arts Foundation, Cine Accion, Frameline, National Association of Asian Television Artists, Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, Bay Area Video Coalition, Artist's Television Access, Third World Newsreel, and California Newsreel. A collaboratory effort resulted in the creation of the Independent Television Service in 1991, an important funding resource for independent videomakers. These efforts were attempts by artists to create or influence television, not perpetuate the precious videotape as art object. The people involved in these efforts recognized television as a stream of electronic images, and recognized the benefits of some kind of industrial organization, particularly in creating an audience for such work.

The Paper Tiger collective evolved along with these multitudes of video organizations, moving beyond media criticism, away from reacting to the culture industry, toward determining its own agenda, its own aesthetics, its own relationship to technology. By the 1990s, the Paper Tiger collective had made some several hundred video programs, on a wide range of both social and artistic subjects, that sought to illuminate what was ignored by the culture industry. They did so with the now standard PTTV approach—a sense of humor and a decidedly low-tech, DIY sensibility.

With the launching of the so-called Desert Storm by George Bush Sr., Paper Tiger initiated the Gulf Crisis TV Project and plugged into a wide network of active video groups nationally and internationally. This project

took on national and international significance and brought together a wide coalition of video collectives and artists, creating ten thirty-minute programs critiquing the war in the gulf. The voices and vision of artists, intellectuals, and activists were highlighted in this series that made its way into the homes of millions of viewers nationally and internationally.

The electoral defeat of the Reagan-Bush dynasty was welcomed by many artists as a respite from many years of conservative scapegoating of artists as cause for moral decline and social turmoil. During the last month of the 1992 electoral contest, Paper Tiger TV had built a large-scale installation at the McBean Gallery in the San Francisco Art Institute. It was modeled as an enormous television, and the public walked through the cracked screen of an enormous CRT screen and along the electronic copper traces past capacitors and resistors to view the "myth" circuits embedded in our electronic culture, such as the myth of High Art and the myth of Freedom of Choice. Election night 1992, the gallery was packed with hundreds of artists and activists, as PTTV members performed a live mix of election returns and found footage and sound. The art critic for the Hearst San Francisco Examiner described the event this way:

> The most dramatic demonstration of the beginning of the end, the end of the Reagan/Bush era, revealed itself at the San Francisco Art Institute, where Paper Tiger Television, the activist TV collective, hosted an election night party. When Bush gave his concession

FIGURE 4.5. Paper Tiger set of television studio. Photo: PTTV.

speech, the crowd of young artists-to-be let loose a storm of curses, imprecations, and threats that was as terrifying as it was liberating. Their uncompromised expression underscored the widespread hatred felt for Bush and the Republican Party he led into a fatal flirtation with far-right extremism.[12]

By the late nineties, it was obvious that all was not quiet on the technological front. A new wave of digital camcorders was blowing apart the "not broadcast quality" excuse both commercial and public broadcasters used to ignore independent production. The Internet, the so-called information superhighway, was expanding exponentially, multiplying the communications reach of videomakers, whose tactics range from building Listservs of potential viewers to marketing tapes online to streaming real-time video clips. Hypertext, CD-ROM, DVD, and other formats promising nonlinearity, instantaneous deliverability, and the possibility of including extensive background material inspired many video activists. Many video groups embraced a multitude of mediums and divorced themselves from the restrictions of medium dependency, further confounding the museum and gallery establishments that depend upon such classifications.

The growth of low power FM radio was also seized upon, and a burgeoning network of "pirate" radio stations sprang forth, such as Free Radio Berkeley, SF Liberation Radio, Steal This Radio, Radio Mutiny, and many others. This movement has resulted in the legalizing of hundreds of new LPFM

FIGURE 4.6. Free Radio advocate Tetsuo Kogawa leads a radio-building workshop for media activists in San Francisco. Photo: PTTV.

community radio stations, now in the process of becoming established. The possibility for communication and for an end run around mass media and the culture industries was heartening. Many saw the uprising of the Zapatista rebellion of indigenous peasants in Chiapas, Mexico, and its poet-leader Subcommandante Marcos as especially inspiring, with its fusion of art and politics. In a videotaped statement to a cultural gathering in Mexico, organized by Rage Against the Machine and others, Zapatista spokesperson Subcommandante Marcos, holding a guitar, says:

> If you would like me to sum it up, I would tell you that we made ourselves soldiers like that so that one day soldiers would no longer be necessary, as we also remain poor, so that one day there will no longer be poverty. This is what we use the weapon of resistance for. Obviously, it is not the only weapon we have, as is clear from the metal that clothes us. We have other arms. For example, we have the arm of the word. We also have the weapon of our culture, of our being what we are. We have the weapon of music, the weapon of dance. We have the weapon of the mountain, that old friend and compañera who fights along with us, with her roads, hiding places and hillsides, with her trees, with her rains, with her suns, with her dawns, with her moons.[13]

It was many of these ideas of cultural activism, media criticism, and culture-jamming that inspired video activists and media activists to come together around the planned World Trade Organization protest in Seattle in 1999. Armed with a myriad of new media tools and the network capability of instantaneous Internet access, an organism coalesced around the creation of an Independent Media Center (IMC), now a model for the surging tide of worldwide independent media production. That such an effort reached fruition largely from electronic exchanges between mediamakers is testimony to the promise of networks. Independent Media was born amid the chaos of tear gas and truncheons, in a chorus of digital images, sounds, and text. The IMC model has brought forward a new generation of collectives, now no longer limited by physical proximity, but united around the idea of cultural expression of truth and justice, built around temporary autonomous zones and flash mobs. There are now many IMCs around the world.

Comparing the Independent Media Center's coverage of the "Battle of Seattle" with TVTV's ground-breaking coverage of the Nixon Republican Convention in Miami Beach in 1972, *Four More Years*, one sees both the similarities and the differences between contemporary collective media production and those of the 1970s. Much of the motivation remains the same, and as Sturken says about the early 1970s collectives,

> While the members of these collectives were artists (and many still are practicing artists), their concerns with amassing alternative information, addressing issues of media and technology, and their pluralist approach to documenting history were antithetical to the way in which discussions of video evolved in the art world. The belief structure of art in

Western culture espouses the primacy of the individual creator and the notion of a master-
piece as a means to establish the financial worth of a work of art; it does not bend easily
toward the concept of collectivity.[14]

In *Four More Years*, TVTV, like the IMC video crews that roamed
Seattle, wanted to convey a perspective not shown in the usual channels.
Then, as now, artists continue their love/hate relationship with the medium.
As TVTV members were fondling their Portapak machines inside the con-
vention, a popular float paraded around the chaotic streets surrounding the
Miami Beach Convention Center, an installation mounted on a flatbed truck
presenting television as the "Great American Lobotomy Machine."

Like the subversive call to on-duty soldiers, "Turn the guns
around," TVTV righteously turned its cameras around onto the media, punc-
turing the pomposity and arrogance of the chosen few who determine what
we see and don't see on television. Viewed from our current jaded era, how-
ever, this can seem somewhat quaint and antiquated. In the tape, TVTV
still admires and respects the news anchors, and by placing them at the cen-
ter of their gaze, empowers them. It still reflects the public obsession with
TV personality. The news organizations' agenda forms TVTV's agenda.
Today's independent media artists have few such illusions. Grandpa Cronkite
is long gone, and with the near-complete seizure of media by corporations,
so is much semblance of journalistic integrity.

While TVTV was ensconced in their posh digs outside of town,[15]
today's camcorderists would have been bivouacked in Miami Beach's Flamingo
Park, along with the thousands of other demonstrators. They would not have
been content being an "embedded" alternative news crew on the convention
floor. On the last night of the convention, frustrated and overworked riot
police invaded Flamingo Park, viciously attacking, beating, and macing thou-
sands of unsuspecting campers. Their unrestrained violence went unrecorded.

Contemporary collective video is integrated along with many
other facets of digital media to challenge the cultural hegemony of the cul-
ture industries, to express emotional and intellectual concerns of artists, and
yes, even to create works of beauty. To these ends, many other forms have
been adopted, extending to radio, CD-ROMs, Web sites, and DVDs. The
negative effects of globalization have provoked an awareness of the deleteri-
ous effects of the corporate domination of media and have spurred a new col-
lective response to it. Contemporary groups and collectives such as RTMark,
Electronic Disturbance Theater, los cybrids, Independent Media Centers,
Undercurrents, and others have arisen to meet this challenge.

It has turned out that the fate and destiny of video art is much
larger than the art world. Independent video penetration into the public

sphere has become paramount, and public interventions such as peer-to-peer file sharing, blogging, streaming, and even the lowered cost of video projectors have become important means allowing artists to reclaim public space. Through this process, video work enters into culture, not just the rarefied art world of the museums and galleries.

> Authentic cultural creation is dependent for its existence on authentic collective life, on the vitality of the "organic" social group in whatever form. . . . [The] only authentic cultural production today has seemed to be that which can draw on the collective experience of marginal pockets of the social life of the world system . . . and this production is possible only to the degree to which these forms of collective life or collective solidarity have not yet been fully penetrated by the market and by the commodity system.[16]

New video practices will emerge in the cracks and crevices of social life on the fringes of a market-driven economy. The collective response will continue to be a vibrant, dynamic, and appropriate means of creating art and culture, no matter what the form.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World's Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).

2. Setting a date for new technology introduction can be difficult, as there can be a discrepancy between unveiling a prototype, releasing a limited introduction, and releasing it in different markets. While there have been Portapaks as early as 1965, this model is considered to be the first standardized, marketable video camcorder system. See, for example, B. Keen, "Play It Again Sony: The Double Life of Home Video Technology," in *Science as Culture*, vol. 1 (London: Free Association Books, 1987).

3. Probably the best survey of writing on video art is D. Hall and S. J. Fifer, eds., *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* (San Francisco: BAVC/Aperature, 1990).

4. Marita Sturken, "Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form," in *Illuminating Video*, ed. Hall and Fifer, 107.

5. Ibid., 113.

6. Ingmar Bergman, Introduction to *The Seventh Seal* (1957).

7. Martha Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment," in *Illuminating Video*, ed. Hall and Fifer, 31.

8. B. Ruby Rich, "The Authenticating Goldfish: Re-viewing Film and Video in the Nineties," from the catalog of the 1993 Whitney Biennial, 91.

9. Dee Dee Halleck, *Hand-Held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

10. Ibid., 120.

11. J. Hubbard, "Fever in the Archive: AIDS Activist Video" (2000), essay for exhibition. Online source at http://www.actupny.org/divatv/guggenheim.html.

12. D. Bonetti, "Artists Ponder Clinton's Election," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 4, 1992, D1, D4.

13. Subcommandante Marcos, videotape message to the public forum "Culture of Resistance" in Mexico, D.F. (1999). From the online EZLN archives, http://www.eco.utexas.edu/~hmcleave/chiapas95.html.

14. Sturken, "Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form," 115.

15. See Deirdre Boyle's account and analysis of TVTV in *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

16. Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," in *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 23.

FIGURE 5.1. Arte Calle, *No queremos intoxicarnos*. Arte Calle members are in the gas masks. *Left to right,* panel participants are Jorge de la Fuente, Lupe Alvarez, and Tonel. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Aldito Menéndez.

5. Performing Revolution: Arte Calle, Grupo Provisional, and the Response to the Cuban National Crisis, 1986–1989

RACHEL WEISS

> The big fish eats the little fish. Moral: Strength is in union (effective strength). For love of art and in defense of Cuban culture.
>
> —Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas, artist and member of Grupo Provisional, July 1988

Collectivism as an artistic practice has had an episodic presence in Cuba throughout the twentieth century and especially since the Revolution of 1959. Within the time frame of the "new Cuban art,"[1] collective formations have appeared notably in three approximate moments: during the first half of the 1980s, in the latter half of that decade, and around the turn of the millennium (although this third "moment" had its genesis as early as 1990). These moments have tracked to the dynamics of this exceptionally volatile period, squaring with, first, a moment of *apertura* facilitated by relative economic stability and the recent formation of the Ministry of Culture;[2] second, an intensifying sense of ideological crisis prompted by developments in the U.S.S.R. (glasnost and perestroika) and by stagnation in the Cuban arena; and third, reaction to the profound disenchantment resulting from the simultaneous discrediting of European socialism, the lack of political change within Cuba, and the free fall of the Cuban economy.

The second of these moments was a time in which the collective became a primary vehicle for a very critical and political art that galvanized a broader public awareness of, and audience for, visual art in Cuba. Because of this, and because this work has been a touchstone for much of the subsequent contemporary art produced on the island, it is this particular moment that is the subject of discussion here. For the most part the works produced by these collectives were modest in aesthetic terms, not the more complex projects that have mostly characterized the new Cuban art. What is most

significant about these collectives was the phenomenon that they became and created in a moment of political convulsions, through their confrontation with power and their magnetizing and catalyzing effect on public space.

From the outset here, it is worth sounding a note of caution with regard to the question of what constitutes a "collective." More than collective in the highly intentional, patently ideological sense (as figure of opposition and/or resistance) that the word generally has in capitalist settings, the Cuban groups have worked without manifesto or platform[3] and have tended to be more loosely cohered, organisms of friendship first and foremost, rather than of methodology or telos.[4] Until relatively recently, the collectives have therefore generally functioned principally as extensions of typical modes of interpersonal, social interaction and not especially as instruments of ideological or aesthetic determinism.[5]

Cuba, as a socialist society, obviously accepts the idea of a collective body as its very substance: the social body in toto is claimed to be, or at least aspires to be, a collective. To form a collective-within-a-collective therefore somehow confounds this overall project, demarcating zones of separateness. This is not to say, however, that the artist collectives under view here have been antisocialist in position (and they generally have not). In fact it seems likely that the fluid range of collective modalities that has developed in Cuba has been preconditioned by the permeating ethic of the collective that underlay the revolutionary project.

Following this, then, the "collective" exists at several different levels and scales in Cuban society. There has been a tendency to insert into this taxonomy of collectives an intermediary level between that of national entirety and small band of creators, ascribing a kind of collective character to the various "generations" of Cuban artists in this period. In fact it is extraordinary that, among such a small cohort of artists and a group who, moreover, had extremely close and prolonged contact with each other, the range of artistic proposals is so diverse, with so little overlap from one to the next. For probably a whole complex of reasons, including the romantic "heresy" of Cuban socialism that insisted on creating its own path rather than following established orthodoxies,[6] Cuban artists have developed a kind of individualism that is harmonious and continuous with collectivism.

This leads us then to consider the role of art criticism, which has been largely responsible—especially through the work of Gerardo Mosquera[7]—for forming the reading of this period in terms of consolidated groups. In fact, as Mosquera has made explicit recently, his writing in defense of the young artists in the 1980s was strategically voiced, calibrated and aimed to provide interpretive frameworks that squared the artists with the overall doctrine and project of the socialist state.[8] Mosquera's copious writing, in

developing schema within which to read the works and artistic trajectories, has probably tended, if indirectly, to encourage a reading of these individuals as being more firmly situated within group (or "generational") identities than they actually were. (To be fair, Mosquera has consistently taken pains to point to the heterogeneity of proposals and approaches.)[9] Historicizing of the period has also tended to have this marshalling effect, tracking apparently telltale currents that typify and congeal the artists into a "movement" revolving around an axis of sociopolitical concern and comment.[10] Such collectivizing baptisms run the risk of creating an exaggerated sense of collective purpose at the level of "generation" or "movement"[11] and make clear that, in the case of Cuba, artistic collectives have been the product not only of artists' self-definition but also of pattern-seeking narrations. Within these "generations," however, there were subgroups that coalesced and those are, for the most part, the "collective" subject as defined here.

Moreover, collectivism under socialism has another implication in relation to the question of the origin or genesis of the artwork: if modernist authorship implied a process of exteriorizing an internal subjectivity, then socialism demands an inverse operation through which an exterior, social, collective reality is absorbed into the new, collectively creative subject, forming its essence.[12] This expectation yields a programmatically freighted paradigm of the revolutionary intellectual as "reproducer, transmitter, illustrator, preferably collective, of ideology generated from outside of art," a more properly antimodern than postmodern dissolution of the authorial subject in order to "prevent [him/her] from becoming a source of heteroglossia within ideological space."[13] All of this is to indicate, preliminarily, that collective artistic practice in the Cuban context has contended with an array of sometimes conflicting precepts, histories, and directives during the length of the period under review.

AUTONOMY

Certainly in the case of Cuba the idea of the collective, first of all, must be considered in proximity to the revolutionary ideal of a communal social body. Some sense of what this ideal has meant in affective terms is conveyed in Magaly Muguercia's description of Cuban youths who worked in the literacy brigades of the 1960s: "The neighbors didn't recognize them when, a year later, they returned to their homes, thin and muscular, their uniforms reddened by the earth, garlands of seeds around their necks, and with an air of confidence mixed with sadness. Enormous and varied cultural crossings engendered in the Cuba of the sixties a democratic, egalitarian, dignified and communal body."[14] Owing, however, to the particular Cuban conception(s)

of socialism, and of the New Man who was to construct it, this body has generally been imagined as multiple, an "aggregate of individuals" in Che Guevara's words,[15] which was simultaneously heterogeneous and consensual. "This multifaceted being," wrote Guevara in his classic text *Socialism and Man in Cuba*, "is not, as is claimed, the sum of elements of the same type (reduced, moreover, to that same type by the reigning system), which acts like a flock of sheep."[16] The New Man was neither alienated nor "house-broken" nor fooled by bourgeois idealism with its deceitful yearning toward "freedom": he was an individual being whose individuality did not clash with his simultaneous subsumption into the collective social body. Or as Muguercia puts it, "not a being but a principle of association that rejects the categorical division between the self and the society, between the personal and the mediated," and constituting the Cuban people's "potential for obedience or revolution."[17] (Guevara's formulation, however, was not the only one with traction: against his emphasis on ethics, conscience, and cultural change, a more traditional and orthodox Marxist model was held by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, in which productive forces transform productive relations, not the other way around.)[18] For leftist intellectuals elsewhere in Latin America, the revolutionary achievement in Cuba signaled an unprecedented and precious moment: the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti, for example, wrote in 1968 that, even though increased pressure on intellectuals to "participate" in the revolutionary process was likely to develop, nonetheless it was worth it, as "the only opportunity (and watch out when it is lost!) that a human being has for participating in a collective assumption of dignity."[19]

"Volumen Uno," the exhibition that launched the new Cuban art in January 1981,[20] manifested the loose collective spirit born among young artists of a shared refusal of the ideological prescriptiveness applied to art and culture as a consequence of the Sovietization of Cuba in the 1970s.[21] In place of instrumentalization they proposed that ethics lie at the core of art, and further that such ethics are situational rather than metaphysical, derived from their work and from the affiliations and obligations they had to each other rather than from grand claims. The show was organized by a group of artists who—more out of friendship than from any concerted aesthetic or ideological platform—opened a process that transformed not only artistic practice in Cuba, but also the ideas and aspirations that were its foundation. With its mix of installations, performance, and pop influences, and its general freshness, the show overturned reigning visual orthodoxies and presented, in their stead, what the Cuban critic Tonel has called "an almost totally renovated image of what a work of art could be in Cuba."[22] What bound this group together was a conviction about artistic creation as a process of investigation and introspection, cognitive-ethical in nature, that was conceived not within the

strictures of a "national art" or identity, but rather in a more expanded, international field of contemporary practice. As Flavio Garciandía has described it, "we did things as a group that functioned at a specific moment, and there was still a sort of utopic idea that we might have some impact on the wider cultural and social level . . . for us it was not so much a matter of being Cuban or a matter of nationalism, but simply a matter of adapting to the circumstances and acting accordingly (*congruente y consecuente*) . . . we were very much imbued by that spirit. Now, looking back at the work that each of us did in particular, I believe that we really were a force as a group, but the works in particular arose from precepts that were very different from one another."[23]

The friendly collectivity of "Volumen Uno" has been romanticized anecdotally over the years, especially as a type of reprimand to the more individualized production that has gradually become the norm more recently.[24] It is therefore important to note the particular socioeconomic circumstances within which this work was done, and that enabled an artistic practice based not only in a cooperative, rather than competitive, social structure but one that also was characteristically process-oriented, gestational, discursive, and investigative rather than product-oriented—a fact that can be attached quite directly to the condition of not depending on their artwork for economic survival. These conditions were propitious for collective-based working processes that are, among other things, notoriously time-consuming and therefore difficult to maintain under the pressures of a market-driven production.[25] The groups of the 1980s, then, can be understood not only in terms of an intersubjective ethic, but also as the fruits of an advantageous (and rare) situation vis-à-vis the pressures of market and livelihood. Until the radical economic changes that began around the end of the 1980s (with the emergency conditions of the "Special Period"[26] beginning around 1990 and then the decriminalization, in August 1993, of the dollar),[27] artists could live, albeit modestly, without financial pressure, and work without taking the future sale of what they were making into consideration. Moreover, a primary place of employment for the young artists, the Taller de Serigrafía René Portocarrero, was also a vortex for the energy and ideas of the general collective spirit of the time.[28] This idyllic employment situation also facilitated the kind of extended conversations among artists that were then typical, and decreased the anxieties, distractions, and conflicts that came later as artists found themselves in tacit competition with each other. This continually stimulating and challenging ambience was, in turn, heightened by the proximity afforded by the tight geographic focus of the art scene in Havana, the closely overlapping social circles among many of the artists, and the continuing connection that many of them retained, even after graduation, to the educational and institutional apparatus.

The impulse of "Volumen Uno" formed against the backdrop of a corseting, overdetermined state voice regarding culture, including schemes for the instrumentalization of art in the national economy,[29] elements of proscribed and prescribed content (abstraction[30] and *campesinos*, respectively), incidents of censorship, and a general depletion of energy and creativity among the artistic proposals of the 1970s.[31] As Tonel has explained: "With the Declaration issued [by the first National Education and Culture Conference in April 1971], cultural bureaucracy was handed an aggressive program, directed toward the imposition of Socialist Realism—to some extent 'tropicalized' and almost never mentioned by its name in that context—as the only valid method of art and its interpretation on the island. Certain ideas contained in this document became familiar slogans in the art world, such as the fragment which said: '. . . art is a weapon of the revolution. A product of the spirited morality of our people. A shield against enemy penetration.'"[32] According to this logic a "desubjectivized" art was advocated, sheltered in the alibi that "true genius is found in the womb of the masses,"[33] a process to dissolve the creative-modernist personality and the legitimacy of personal artistic discourse.

"Volumen Uno" was staged only after a protracted battle to obtain an exhibition space (in fact it was first installed in the home of José Manuel Fors, one of the participating artists)[34] and was organized in a collective manner that was unheard of at the time in Havana: together, the artists curated the show, installed it, printed and distributed the announcements, and so forth.[35] Their efforts were rewarded with the extraordinary attendance of thousands of people.[36] The aesthetic iconoclasm of "Volumen Uno," which in retrospect might seem rather formalist and tame, nonetheless ignited a campaign against the young artists launched by the artistic and critical establishment, full of accusations of ideological diversionism and bad art. As Flavio Garciandía has explained, "when we did 'Volumen Uno' we were very, very conscious of the fact that the 'state of the arts' in Cuba was absolutely terrible, precisely because of those ideas of programmatic 'contentism' (*contenidismo prográmatico*).[37] And we knew that we were introducing a totally new vision (*óptica*), and that 'Volumen Uno' was a political exhibition. Given the circumstances of the context, it was an exhibition that was proposing . . . art as a totally autonomous activity, not as a weapon of the Revolution as the Constitution says. No, art is a totally autonomous entity with its own discourse and its own directions . . . it is in no way a weapon of propaganda, nor can it be directed by anybody, nor channeled by anybody. And at that moment that was quite a strong political statement."[38]

Being forced to publicly defend their work almost certainly enhanced the sense among the "Volumen Uno" artists of themselves as a

group, and their inauguration into the Cuban art world read additionally as the consolidation of a group effort. Another factor that probably forged a sense of collective will and determination among them was the Mariel exodus in April 1980: the departure of friends (in some cases, forced) and the acts of ferocious public repudiation staged against remaining family members were profoundly disillusioning for many, a loss of political innocence that led to a loss of faith in the revolution.[39] The project of together developing an "autonomous" art was therefore also in some ways a project directed against and in spite of the regime, a project to create within the corrupt surrounding a shared, independent zone of creativity.

Paradoxically, the "Volumen Uno" artists' insistence on autonomy for art eventually resulted in that very rare phenomenon of a contemporary art connected in complex and organic ways to the life of the society. Its formal breach signified and detonated a deeper schism between liberal and orthodox-dogmatic positions about the right to—even the responsibility for—critical speech under socialism. In this, "Volumen Uno," like the legendary Los Once group of the 1950s,[40] behaved collectively mostly in terms of being united in the struggle for an open space for art. They were not a collective in the sense of coming together in an act of shared authorship to produce works, but rather in the production of a new situation.

Several members of the Volumen Uno generation were also involved in a pedagogical effort that served to both set them apart from their predecessors and augment the sense of mutual purpose among the group: Flavio Garciandía, along with Consuelo Castañeda and Osvaldo Sánchez at ISA and Juan Francisco Elso at the Escuela Elemental level, developed curricula that jettisoned the academic, Soviet-style pedagogy to which they had been subjected. In this, they also had an indirectly uniting effect on the subsequent group of artists who shared the experience of a credible, challenging educational formation. Tania Bruguera, who studied with Elso, recalls that time as key in her own artistic development, motivating her to adopt a skeptical and problematizing approach to artmaking, and most importantly to see herself, as an artist, as an "agent of change."[41]

"DETECTING A NEW SITUATION"

The extended process of testing the limits of the permissible moved from Volumen Uno's initial, apparently formal challenge to convention and status quo to the emergence, around 1985 or 1986, of a more explicitly political and critical art, a type of public articulation of peoples' private discourse about the public. By the mid- to late 1980s, the Cuban national situation was spiraling downward into a crisis of ideological isolation and the beginnings of

profound economic collapse.[42] By 1986, the pressures of both external change and internal corrosion had become intense enough that Fidel Castro launched the highly rhetorical "Rectification" campaign, avowedly to return the revolution to its original (Guevarist) path.[43] Collectivity as redefined by groups of younger artists took on an urgency and radicality that matched these new circumstances. Many of the generation's artists formed into a series of shifting groups,[44] including Grupo Puré, Arte Calle, Art-De,[45] Proyecto Hacer, Proyecto Pilón, and Grupo Provisional, whose mostly performative and disruptive works[46] sought to reinscribe a space for a critical culture within the broad emergencies of Cuban society. Paradoxically, the further challenge that their work represented was made possible, in part, by a more relaxed attitude on the part of the government following Mariel's purge of "undesirables" that, along with the gradual withdrawal of the Soviet presence, temporarily resulted in a more benign, permissive climate for culture.

For these artists, collectivity and political critique were inseparable parts of "that idea, half-utopic if you like, that somehow art should serve for something,"[47] an art that therefore escaped the risk of formalism and solipsism. The work of these groups, characterized by audacity, acid humor, and passionate attachment to the idea of art as ethical practice, was a kind of hooligan hotwire job, bypassing official ignition circuits. It magnetized a large following in Havana, leading the way in raising for public discussion the taboo subjects of corruption, dogmatism, cult of personality, lack of democracy, and so on. Despite this strong critique, these groups (with the exception of Art-De) were not dissident but rather worked in an uneasy and volatile process of negotiation with state power, opening a space of critique that was neither fully inside nor outside of it.

The time during which these groups were active was one in which all the groups, all the proposals, filled together into a grand mosaic, a kind of spontaneous whole. The groups of the mid- to late 1980s spanned a range of opinions about the willingness of the regime to enter into dialogue and, thus, about the possibility of political change. All of them, though (except Puré, which was slightly earlier), shared a conviction about art as a site for reshaping public agency and saw their own work as part of a broader movement or sentiment in Cuban society. The collectives of this short period were, fundamentally, vehicles through which to engage in this political dialogue, using a graffitti and guerilla theater aesthetic in order to shock and to reinvigorate, visually and politically, the languages of Cuban art. The works often had an intentionally bad-art character, more half-done than poorly done, refusing to become Art or to become fixed ideologically.

The transition from "Volumen Uno" to the more intentional collectivity and more explicit politics of Arte Calle and Grupo Provisional

lies in Grupo Puré, which was formed in 1984.[48] Puré did not identify itself as a political group, but rather as one that was "detecting," and responding to, "new situations, new problematic conditions that were not being addressed or had been treated earlier but with very little depth."[49] The group "was born of the need to make a collective statement . . . [the] work uses contemporary forms and media to express a critical and judgmental view of [Cuban] society and times," as they explained in the catalog for their first exhibition, "Puré Expone."[50] Puré's preoccupation with the popular and quotidian linked them to their predecessors, but they felt that they were pushing the question further:[51] the observations are more pointedly situated within the daily tensions of life and stood as a kind of "critical empathy"[52] expressed as scatological funfair.

As an example, Adriano Buergo's interest in the ubiquitous Cuban habit of material-mechanical improvisation inevitably placed emphasis on the deteriorating conditions that necessitated such continual improvisation, reworking Cuban art's traditional preoccupation with representing *lo cubano* to insert an indirect, but unmistakeable, critical voice.[53] Equally important, the street and cartoon humor of Lázaro Saavedra and Ciro Quintana introduced a new acerbity into artistic satire[54] at the same time that it opened questions about mass culture that functioned, in their work, as a type of midground between a quotidian and an ideological frame of reference.

Puré's work served as a kind of bridge to a more explicitly political critique that began about a year or two later,[55] mining the depth charge latent in the registration of Cuban quotidian reality. While Volumen Uno's treatment of materiality (in Juan Francisco Elso especially, and also Ricardo Rodríguez Brey and José Bedia) was related to Arte Povera, in which the *povera* had some sense of ennoblement, Puré's installations really were materially impoverished ("squalid," in Tonel's words), a brazen, disorienting agglomeration—a "demystifying Bronx cheer"[56] that had an element of aggression in it that had been mostly absent in the gentler and more pleasing aesthetic of much of the earlier group.[57] Puré also foregrounded what had been a tendency among some in the Volumen Uno generation (especially Consuelo Castañeda) toward a postmodern pastiche and appropriation, and that later became a primary methodology for ABTV. Puré's "brazen idea of exhibiting their genealogy" as Tonel put it, "wearing their debts . . . on their sleeve,"[58] making "the borderline between plagiarism and quotation foggier than ever"[59] struck another in a continuing series of blows against the modernist conception of authorial, and individual, artistic identity.

Puré's way of hanging shows, such that the works of all the different artists intermingled and interpenetrated,[60] was central to their identity as a collective and opened a fuller consideration of the group as a form of

artistic production. Puré was no longer a collection of individuals talking and showing together; it was more internally coherent, and the works (the final works, as it were, being the exhibitions as totalities) were a collective product.

In 1986, a group of students (ringled by Aldito Menéndez) at the vocational art school "20 de Octubre" launched Arte Calle,[61] initially as a kind of "discharge" or "unloading," more than as a strategy for working.[62] With them began a period of increasingly disruptive and radical work, often in the form of performances and interventions, that opened a discussion about art beyond art, art that was very directly intended to reach beyond its own cloister and beyond any official, institutional frame in order to function directly in the society at large. In the undated document "Arte Calle Teoría," they asserted that "the group Arte Calle proposes to transcend the frame of the artistic so as to keep investigating, but now beyond a social point of view. In order to do so they use all necessary means that are available to them, whether artistic or not."

Arte Calle was a sort of "SOS to revolutionary art." The group's members, adolescents between fifteen and eighteen years old, thought of themselves as art terrorists (an "aesthetic and Cuban parody of the Red Brigades,")[63] a clandestine gang that wanted to function "as a catalytic agent, a bomb: . . . we had some proposals, that the government would never accept. And so we functioned more than anything else as a sort of catalyst within the field of art so that other people might feel themselves somehow within this space or in the context, in order to be able to do things . . . [we] wanted to discuss things and change things . . . somehow, by aggression."[64]

Arte Calle is mostly remembered for the humor of works such as *No queremos intoxicarnos*, their intervention at a roundtable discussion on "The Concept of Art," to which they arrived wearing gas masks and carrying placards mocking political slogans (e.g., "Art critics: know that we have absolutely no fear of you," parroting the billboard that has stood for years in front of the U.S. Interests Section, declaiming "Señores imperialistas, know that we have absolutely no fear of you!"). For their exhibition "Ojo pinta"[65] nothing was predefined or predetermined (nonetheless, amazingly, it was allowed to take place in an official, public gallery): an anarchic spectacle ridiculing the protocols of art openings, the "exhibition" consisted of inviting friends to install whatever they liked. Among the most memorable contributions were a goat tied to the gallery door and a performance by Grupo Provisional, disguised as the trio Rock Campesino, who wandered the gallery incessantly playing a tuneless, drunken version of "Guantanamera."[66]

In general, Arte Calle's works that confronted the institution of Art shared this levity and earned them the admiration and affection of Havana's artists and critics. On the other hand, their works attacking larger

problems in Cuban society had a different poetics, maybe no more striking in their imagery but often more resonant. One such work was *Easy Shopping*, done in response to the government's establishment of *casas de oro* that bought back gold and silver heirlooms from citizens, under disadvantageous terms, in an attempt to generate hard currency revenues.[67] In Arte Calle's view this amounted to the return of Hernán Cortés ("the Spaniards come with their little mirrors, the Indians hand over the gold"), and their anti-neocolonial resistance consisted of painting their bodies gold and silver and walking through Old Havana's streets with signs that read "Sígannos, somos de oro, venga con nosotros" ("Follow us, we are made of gold, come with us") until, having attracted a substantial crowd that followed them to the edge of the bay, they threw themselves into the filthy, oil-slicked waters. It was, according to Glexis Novoa, "like an act of suicide. For ethics."[68] Significantly, with this beautiful, tragic image and with their later guerrilla murals (one, painted in the same spot where an earlier mural of theirs had been painted out by State Security, said simply "Revenge"), Arte Calle fulfilled its promise of taking up positions in the city, whether in obscure corners or right in the middle of things, using the city not as backdrop but as battleground.

Arte Calle's nocturnal, guerrilla actions fed avid rumor circuits throughout Havana. "When, for example, we made the mural that said 'Art is just a few steps from the cemetery' in front of the Colón Cemetery in Havana," says Aldito Menéndez, "the rumor that spread was that a group of youngsters had painted a poster on a tomb in the graveyard that said 'Freedom has been buried by the Revolution.' Or, when we abbreviated our group name in signing a mural as 'AC,' people would interpret it as 'Abajo Castro' ('Down with Castro'). Our works functioned as collective texts with multiple meanings, and in our inscriptions people saw reflected their own obsessions with the suffocating reality in which they lived."[69]

While for the other groups questions of individualism and authorship were mostly nonissues, Arte Calle was explicitly critical of "egotism and individualism," which they considered "fatal to artistic labor."[70] By 1987, having become known as an artistic entity, the group felt they were betraying the original idea "of taking art to the street and that the artist merge somehow with the people and that it be an art for the people."[71] Their solution to this dilemma of "success" was to dissolve into Arte Calle Tachado ("crossed out"), cancelling the identity that the group had become.[72] Nonetheless as a group they organized one more project, the exhibition "Nueve alquimistas y un ciego" (Nine Alchemists and a Blind Man),[73] which sought to put into crisis the concept of art legitimated by institutions. Ariel Serrano's contribution, *Dónde estás caballero gallardo, hecho historia o hecho tierra? (Che Guevara)* (Where are you gallant knight, made history or made earth? [Che

Guevara]),[74] was a large portrait of the guerrilla martyr that covered most of the gallery floor. During the opening, someone dressed in a policeman's uniform (a stranger to the artists) walked across the work, and then some others improvised a kind of dance on it.[75] This generated an enormous scandal, with the artists accused of sacrilegious treatment of the revolutionary icon. In a harshly critical review published in *Juventud Rebelde* (authored not by an individual writer but by the entire "Cultural Editorial Group"), the show was attacked for "vulgarity, superficialism, the absolute absence of convincing artistic value, and an excess of snobbery." With their "coarse dogmatism and schematic pronouncements, supposedly critical of socioethical problems," it declared, the artists had only succeeded in defining a position "contrary to the interests of our socialist culture."[76] Despite its denunciation of the exhibition on aesthetic grounds, however, there is no mention, much less discussion, of any of the exhibited works in the review, a fact pointed out in the artists' response (which the newspaper refused to publish). The review, they wrote, was a political manipulation: whatever the weaknesses of the artworks, they were the sincere expressions of young people "who are part of this Revolution and who are integrated and committed to the destiny and political reality of this country in the process of building socialism."[77]

The review is a telling document for two reasons. First, it discredits the art on aesthetic terms, without bothering to make any aesthetic argument: this flimsy strategy was used regularly to deflect attention away from the content of problematic works. It also had the indirect effect of divorcing a work's form and content (an odd feature of Cuban cultural policy since the beginning of the revolutionary period),[78] placing primacy on formalist criteria in the evaluation of a work of art and in fact disallowing any critical expression that did not first conform to unspecified and evasive standards of technical accomplishment. Second, while the review acknowledged that there were problems in Cuba and that it was acceptable for "revolutionary" artists to be critical, it insisted that this must be done in a "revolutionary" manner: here, in full bloom, was the danger signaled much earlier by various critics in response to Castro's 1961 dictum "Within the Revolution, everything. Against the Revolution, nothing," namely, that of who would have the power to determine what was "inside the Revolution" and what was not. In the wake of this scandal, Arte Calle was placed under continual surveillance by State Security, and not long afterward, in January 1988, it dissolved for real and for good.

Grupo Provisional (which started at more or less the same time) was a kind of fraternal twin to Arte Calle in its roughhouse aesthetic, its strong ties to the punk and *rockero* subcultures,[79] its generally anarchic ethic, and most importantly its supra-artistic conception of art's relation to politics.

Grupo Provisional, according to Glexis Novoa, consisted of a group that had neither specific members[80] nor "a time"; "the group existed when we were going to do a project. When the opportunity arose we used the name Provisional and included any number of artists in that exhibition."[81] The group's strategy was influenced by both the Russian revolutionary poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and the 1916–17 Zurich Dada Cabaret Voltaire, supposing that "those past experiences were also a reaction to a political and social environment and could find a similar fate in Cuba."[82]

To some extent Grupo Provisional functioned as a kind of friendly parasite on Arte Calle. They made an appearance at the same critics' conference at which Arte Calle had intervened with gas masks and placards, following that performance with their own in the form of an awards ceremony honoring the very same critics that Arte Calle had just catcalled. In Novoa's description the group's cacophonic aesthetic is the crux: "this performance . . . was called *Japón* ('Japan'). This boy [who was performing with them] was schizophrenic, half crazy, and he had an expression for whatever he found that was good; instead of saying 'Yuma' [a popular colloquialism for the United States] he said it was Japón, 'this is Japón!' We made a presentation of prizes to certain personalities like Mosquera, Tonel . . . and every time I mentioned one of those people I asked the boy 'What is Aldo Menéndez like?' and the boy would shout to me through the microphone 'Japoooón!!' But it was a hysterical shout, it was crazy, and I'd say to him 'But why can't I hear you?' 'Japón!!' The boy was in his element there."[83] And Arte Calle's (non)exhibition "Ojo Pinta" was the occasion on which Grupo Provisional's alter-ego Rock Campesino materialized, filling the empty container that Arte Calle provided with their genial humiliations.

Grupo Provisional's 1988 *Very Good Rauschenberg* performance took place simultaneously with Aldito Menéndez's own homage to the American artist, who was in Havana on the occasion of his exhibition there. Like the *Japón* piece, Provisional's work took the space of art-world ceremony and protocol as its location and lacerated it for its overly obsequious attitude: Rauschenberg, whose gargantuan *ROCI-Cuba (Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Exchange-Cuba)* project was at the time stuffed into the city's museums and galleries,[84] was greeted by Grupo Provisional who stormed the museum's auditorium bearing signs reading "Very Good Rauschenberg" that they insisted (in Spanish, which he did not understand) the befuddled artist autograph. Meanwhile Menéndez, dressed only in a loincloth and sitting on the floor directly before the artist, listened intently and inscrutably. In this work the politics are a bit more conventional than in *Japón* (at least for the Cuban setting), skewering the self-colonizing impulse behind the museum's decision to turn itself over to Rauschenberg's self-aggrandizement.

Provisional's carnivalesque, faux-groupie play was masterfully impish in its dismissal of the "very good" artist, the simple, silly gesture farting on myth at several levels: the art student's adulation of fame, the anti-imperialist position of the Cuban national institution, the "Indian's" warm embrace of the conqueror, the "universality" of the language of art. Meanwhile Menéndez's cooler response might be read as not so much mimicking as over-identifying with the Cuban public's role as habitual receptor of weighty orations.

As witty and amusing as these works of Provisional's may have been, they are misleading in reading the group's actual work. More than a producer of art, Grupo Provisional was the mischievous ghost in the machine, the undifferentiatable substance that seeped into and transformed the whole system of artist-audience-power. Their absolute refusal of stable authorial identity (even to the point of consecrating a nine-year-old schizophrenic child as a full member) and their total rejection of fixed, conventional, artistic borders framing the group was a de facto declaration of the unspeakable corollary: this is not just an argument between artists and institutions. Everyone is involved.

Arte Calle is often considered to have been both aesthetically more conservative (having started out as graffitti muralists)[85] and considerably more positivist than Grupo Provisional: its message was that of "Revive the Revolution . . . , a positive message from a contentious, rebellious language, but there was still a possibility, it was believed, that we could work

FIGURE 5.2. Grupo Provisional, *Very Good Rauschenberg*. Photograph by Adalberto Roque.

from within the Revolution, that we could do things with the State, with the government."[86] Nonetheless, Arte Calle got into more hot water politically than Grupo Provisional largely because, unlike Provisional, they broke the art institution's intellectual and spatial membrane. This was the line that could not be crossed with impunity, and the severe official reaction seems to have been incited by the artists' entry not only into public space but also into public concerns: as the *Juventud Rebelde* review said, "But when the matter becomes known throughout the community, then, that is a problem."[87]

Strangely, although both Novoa and Cárdenas, individually, were producing works that were sharply critical of the regime's flimflammery, pomposity, and ossification, their work as Grupo Provisional limited itself to existence within the art system and critique of it. Nonetheless, Grupo Provisional's overall vision, echoed by Arte Calle in its "Tachado" phase, was perhaps the more radical element, in framing the critique that the artists were engaged in as something societal rather than linked to the limited scope of artistic identity. This generational unity was eventually made explicit in two projects (one realized, the other thwarted), leaving no further doubt about the scope of dissatisfaction and the consequences of its articulation.

During these years the relationships between the artists, state control, and the Havana public were in continual negotiation and flux. The artists became more and more aggressive and they attracted more and more notice, for better and for worse, converting art into a popular voice for social and political criticism. A special charisma accrued to these bands of youngsters, a fact that probably made them seem to be even more of a threat (the "Grand Monologue" of Cuban state power being, as Desiderio Navarro has noted, "paradoxically anti-charismatic in the sphere of art and charismatic in the political sphere").[88] For the artists this evolved as something "natural, intuitive," the logical continuation of Volumen Uno's most precious legacy: an art "free of any concessions or complexes." Nonetheless the galvanizing effect of the artists also served a useful purpose for the state, an "escape valve" that released some of the pressure of popular discontent. According to Novoa, "there was a tolerance for all that on the part of the state. A tolerance that seemed perfect, but that had very well-defined limits. Within those limits everything could happen and appear, but you couldn't go beyond those limits. And that created an impulse, and the people kept coming closer [to the limit] each time. The artists became more clever, more ingenious at creating a work that would not exceed the limits, but at the same time would provide a strong discourse and would try to make it."[89]

Paramount among those "clear limits" were a couple of prohibitions: no images of Fidel, and no transgression from art into politics (the old form-and-content problem). Alongside the escalating artistic challenges

of Arte Calle and Grupo Provisional, yet another group, Art-De (Arte-Derechos),[90] took the decisive step of abandoning "art" and the shelter of its various institutional mechanisms.[91] With their direct invocation of the issue of human rights (taboo in Cuba, since all activism vis-à-vis human rights is seen as external [meaning, U.S.] subterfuge), Art-De brought into play yet another aspect of the dilemma of collectives under socialism: in Cuba, where priority is placed on a collective conception of human rights, Art-De located those rights within the individual, as is typical in Western liberal tradition. The fact that they performed this move as a collective bespoke a more strategic and cunning use of the collective body, and also a more directly antisocialist formulation of it: under the cover of the collective, this group of three managed to give the impression of being considerably larger than it actually was,[92] and by forming a collective based explicitly in political dissent, they declared the socialist collective promulgated and prophesized by the state to be a fraud.

Art-De organized a series of events in busy public locations in Havana's streets and parks[93] that stepped over the dividing line between "art" and "politics" that artists had been carefully guarding: there was, as one spectator put it, "no divorce between their role as citizens and as artists." These events were mostly of an audience-participatory sort, in which the encounter with the spectator was seen as an integral part of the work.[94] Art-De performed anguished, abreactive performances such as *Me han jodido el ánimo* (They've screwed up my spirit), in which Juan-Sí González wrapped himself in a large plastic bag and slowly suffocated in a gesture of existential agony until a panicked spectator finally stepped in and tore the plastic away from his face. These events were of mixed success in artistic terms and were easily relegated to the status of mediocre art that was employed in order to discredit, and disappear, work that had gone too far,[95] but the public's reaction was often supportive, welcoming the artists' stance because of the debate it inspired.[96] Probably the most important achievement of Art-De came from its resort to the direct, unmediated encounter with the public: their events became the site of extraordinary public debates about art, about Cuban society and its problems, and about the places where those could or should intersect.

Art-De's works used traditions from art (especially Dadaist provocation) as the mise-en-scène for what were essentially public allegations against political censorship made by "sons of the Revolution" for whom free expression was a birthright.[97] In González's formulation, Art-De was an effort not only to break with the artist's dependency on the state but also to establish a real "state of rights" within Cuba, from Cuban traditions.[98] Of all the contestatory groups, it was Art-De that received the full measure of the State's

FIGURE 5.3. Art-De (Juan-Sí González), *Me han jodido el ánimo*. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

displeasure: the group was censored, had their works confiscated by the police, and on several occasions was arrested. Ultimately, two of its members were imprisoned, and the exile that González entered in 1991 was not the "low intensity" one of his contemporaries who had left for Mexico.

THE ART SYSTEM AS TARGET

In addition to this cluster of politicized collectives, the spectrum of aesthetic-ideological strategies extended to yet another group, the quartet of ABTV,[99] which fell somewhat outside the largely performative, street theater arena of these groups. The critical position adopted by ABTV was no less concerned with the political situation of the country, but in their case this was couched primarily in terms of the systems and institutions of art. Over the course of several years, ABTV developed a series of complex collaborative projects that, informed by the practices of Hans Haacke and Group Material, stripped bare the ideocuratorial and economic agendas of the various cultural institutions through which the work of the entire generation was being both enabled and hobbled.

In contrast to the "hot" political critique practiced by Arte Calle and Art-De, ABTV maintained a "cooler" mode, in part because of their sense of being at a further remove from the catharsis and charisma of the revolution. ABTV convened spontaneously, around 1988 or 1989: their work, based in an informal attitude toward authorship ("it was something we didn't believe in, as if we said to ourselves, 'If we spend all our lives copying everybody, how are we going to start demanding originality, authorship?'")[100] and a critique focused on the institutions of Art, stood as a kind of counterpoint to the work of the other groups, among other things contributing a potent analysis of the commercialization of Cuban art, which was then emergent.[101] In their identity as a collective there is an interesting convergence of the postmodern idea of appropriation/copying (with its particular idea of the death of the author) and of the antimodern death of the author that came from the official Cuban invocation of collectivity.

ABTV often worked as a sort of copy machine, producing critical commodities and countersystems of distribution. In their exhibition "Él que imita fracasa" (He Who Imitates Fails) they faithfully reproduced—in triplicate, with astonishing technical bravura—the abstract canvases of one of their teachers. In their curatorial project *Nosotros* they repeated the retrospective exhibition of work by Raúl Martínez staged earlier at the National Museum of Fine Arts, in such a way that their selections and narrative exposed the lacunae of the museum's version ("emphasizing those aspects, let's say, that were the loose ends of the big exhibition"),[102] their simulation of

the museum shedding an "indiscreet light on the links that most tautly connect art and politics . . . in Cuba."[103] In each case the act of repeating not only exposed the various mythologies surrounding the original (e.g., the unrepeatability of abstraction and the objective scholarship of the retrospective) but also elaborated various kinds of camouflage that allowed the group to comment on taboo subjects (the ideological unacceptability of abstraction under dogmatic socialism, the fact that Martínez—by then practically canonized as exemplary revolutionary artist—in fact held many opinions in common with the younger, contestatory artists). The Martínez project, which the group did during their third year of study at ISA, also had a more consciously strategic vein. Satisfying the curricular requirement that they complete a work of "social realization," the artists decided to do something that would make a place for themselves in the Institution, by working as curators: their collective identity opened the door for them into the premier art institution of the country that, as mere students, would have been closed to them otherwise. A few months later they again exploited the special prerogative of the curator in a "para-institutional" project that consisted of handing over their exhibition slot at the Centro Provincial de Artes Plásticas to Pedro Vizcaíno, a very young artist who otherwise would never have been granted space in that prestigious institution.

Probably ABTV's most important project was *Homage to Hans Haacke,* which they organized as part of the cycle of exhibitions at the Castillo de la Fuerza in March–October 1989. This cycle of shows, organized by Alejandro Aguilera, Alexis Somoza, and Félix Suazo, although initially proposed as a series focusing on sculpture, became an effort directed at the mounting crisis between the young artists and the Cuban state, by presenting the controversial art and artists in a setting intended for debate. (At one point, twelve exhibitions were planned: of those, six were prepared and only five actually opened. Of those five only four remained open for the duration of their scheduled run.) ABTV's contribution, again deploying methods of institutional critique adapted from Group Material and from Haacke himself, managed a stinging analysis not only of the cultural politics in Cuba but also of those in Miami. The invisible line of the permissible had been migrating with the increasingly tense situation around the young artists, and with this project it was again crossed: after extensive "conversation" between the artists and the vice minister of culture[104] the show was not allowed to open because the artists finally refused to make the "changes" demanded of them. The protracted negotiations had left the group depleted and riven, unable and unwilling to pursue the "pact with power."[105] The dynamic among the artists became even worse when they could not agree on whether or how to respond to the censure: finally, two group members
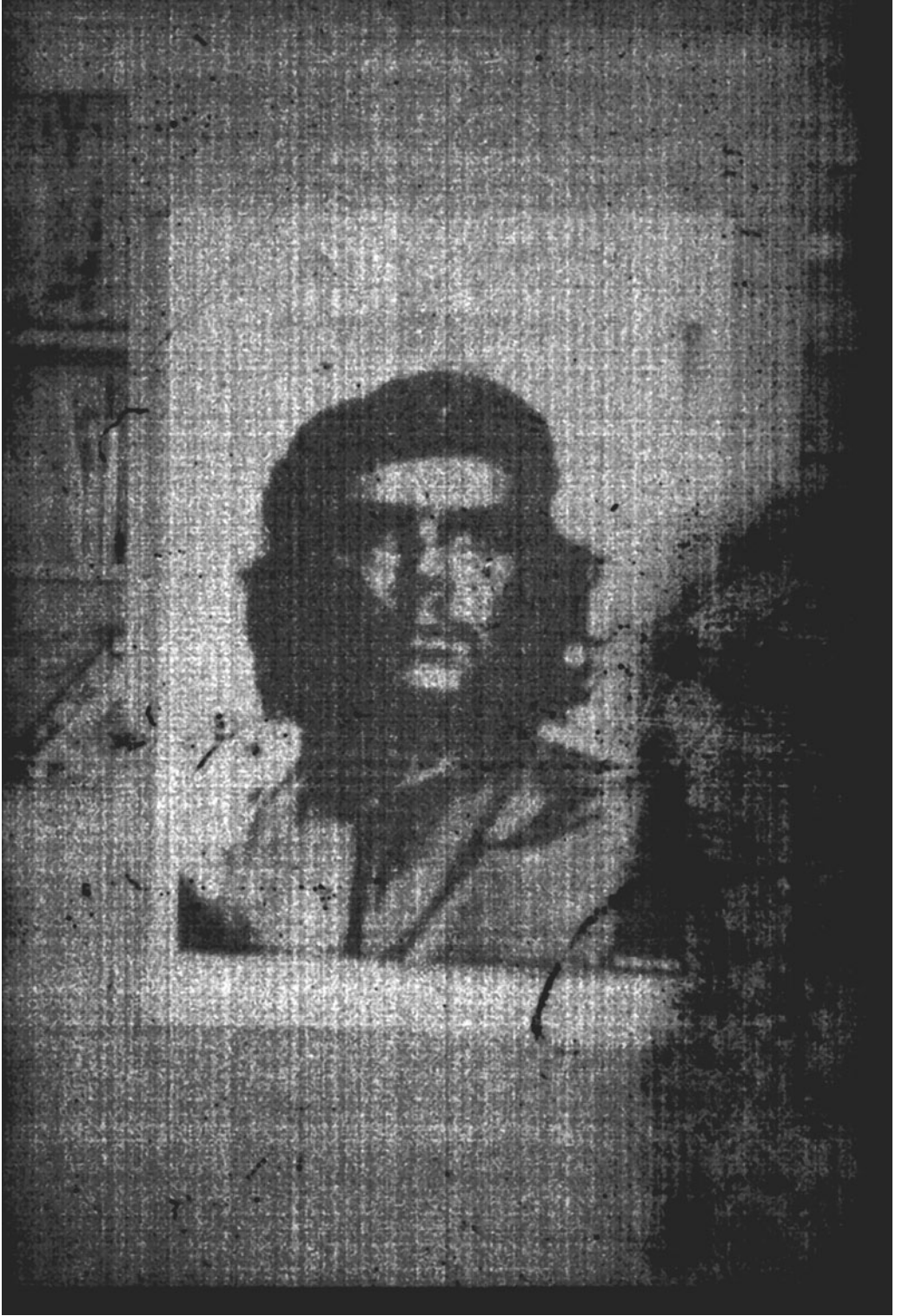
FIGURE 5.4. ABTV, poster for *Homage to Hans Haacke*. Photograph by Luis Camnitzer.

distributed a statement of protest, passed off as a statement by the entire group even though the other members disagreed with the tactic.[106]

In a bitter irony, the group's identity was by then well established in the public's mind and, despite the poor relations among them, ABTV cynically decided to proceed as a collective in order to participate in the various important exhibitions to which they had begun to be invited. The actual collective process of working, however, was abandoned: ABTV was now four artists in collective drag. "We were apart from each other for about a year without having any relationship at all, but what happens? Now we were somehow officially a group, and from a practical point of view we began to appreciate the benefits that that brought us, cynically . . . so then it was a much more pragmatic relationship in that each of us took whatever artistic opportunities were offered to us but excluded the others as authors. And that way, for example, 'ABTV' participated in various ways when in fact they were individual participations. It went on like that for some time . . . we committed hara-kiri you might say, we pushed aside all the personal problems and we concentrated on the professional reasons and we did the projects. The personal relations were not good but . . . it was an example of discipline, and of love for the work."[107] As the confrontation with power became more protracted, as moderate officials were replaced with enforcers, as individual positions among artists became more clearly delineated, things began to fall apart, and the only glue left was the career benefit of the group's brand name. The collective that, perhaps even more than the others, had evolved fluidly out of friendship and artistic affinities, dissolved into a cynical maneuver.

A COLLECTIVE OF COLLECTIVES

What happened in the second half of the 1980s resembled in many ways what Thomas Kuhn has described as the structure of scientific revolutions:[108] a normally slow and gradual evolutionary process, stable in its environmental adaptation, is suddenly accelerated into a "revolution" when that environment is disturbed by the emergence of new ideas powerful enough to overthrow the prevailing theory. According to this analogy, the rupture came with Volumen Uno, and what developed in the latter half of the decade constituted a body of ideas sufficiently strong to sustain that rupture beyond a momentary convulsion into an authentic and significant change in the environment. Arte Calle, Grupo Provisional, and other groups flourished between 1984 and the end of the decade, producing not only an extraordinary number of exhibitions and events but also, more broadly, a supercharged and superenergized atmosphere. By 1988, the accumulated impact of it all brought

things to a head: censorship of exhibitions became a routine response by the authorities,[109] and the summary removal of the more liberal cultural administrators who had been advocates for or protectors of the young artists left the situation even more polarized. Although under the weight of this continual tension and confrontation some of the collectives began to fray, the showdown between artists and power also had the opposite effect, becoming in itself a collective referent and galvanizing unity and collective purpose not only among the small groups that had been such irritants but also among virtually all of the active and visible artists in the city. If the groups discussed above functioned collectively according to a range of definitions, methodologies, and linkages, they also functioned, increasingly until around 1989, as a collective of collectives.

Performances, exhibitions, interventions, debates, disturbances, aggressions, retaliations, counterretaliations all piled up like tightly packed isobars in the years between 1986 and 1989. "The moment of splendor of these groups was 1987 and 1988," writes Aldito Menéndez,

> It took the Cuban government two years to dismantle this phenomenon which, like a child, had slipped between its legs . . . Debates and group shows took place in galleries, museums, universities and all kinds of cultural centers, and in private homes, parks and streets. We were not focused on personal benefit or transcendence, but rather on fraternal collaboration based on common goals . . . Artists met almost every day, since there was a strong sense of the historic role that we were playing, and the leaders of the movement wanted to achieve certain goals by setting out collective strategies to meet them before we were neutralized. We were working against the clock, and immediacy and the ephemeral were the only means of achieving transcendence. . . . None of this would have been possible if it had not been for the popular support we received from the outset. Nothing was easier for the experienced and efficient Cuban censors than to repress a bunch of crazy youths, but the massive popular participation in our events created international repercussions that made the work of the censors quite difficult. Here we must ask: why did the Cuban people support modes of expression that were strange and incomprehensible? Very simply because the same worries and needs that motivated us were shared by them, and because these angry and rebellious methods established an alternative mode of public communication that compensated for the lack of liberty in the mass media. Our works expressed popular sentiments, and the public ratified this by their approving presence.[110]

At a certain point this sense of mutual purpose and will made the collectives obsolete: there were numerous crossovers and collaborations that had blurred the boundaries of the grouplets, their work often addressed similar or overlapping issues, and there had been a rich and cumulative dialogue among the artists, all of which enhanced the sense of being one large polis. "We shared ideas," recalls Lázaro Saavedra,

> actually we worked together from the point of view of discussions, reflections. For instance, we came to similar conclusions regarding the pedagogy of art, . . . battles we felt we had to win. There were various nuclei of interests that had to be renewed . . . that was the

reason for the collective exhibition "No es sólo lo que ves" (It's not just what you see),[111] which came precisely from those discussions among all of us. Because the phenomenon of the group was gradually becoming blurred, disappearing. It was already practically absurd to have a group because we were all working collectively. This is one of the external reasons why Puré disintegrated, because the proposals that gave rise to Puré were being done . . . it had moved to the level of the generation, and so there was no sense in maintaining a group. In addition there was more sense of a relationship among us: in 1987 or 1988 what is now called Fototeca was created, spaces were created for debate where the members of all the groupings or those who did not belong to any group went and had discussions. It began with a small group but it grew and at a certain point the fact of the meetings bothered somebody high up and they sent a social psychologist to investigate . . . to investigate the concerns of young people, to make inquiries into what was being said there, to find out about our motivations.[112]

While there may have been unanimity about the goals that were being fought for, there were real differences in strategy and tactics. These were perhaps most clearly manifested in the piece done by an assembly of artists in the Plaza de la Revolución on the occasion of Che Guevara's sixtieth birthday in 1988—twenty years after Guevara's death.[113] The artists were solicited by Roberto Robaina, at the time the head of the UJC (Union of Young Communists), who had adopted a policy of constructive engagement with the artists and other Cuban youth who were agitating for change.[114] After much debate, the group decided to make a large sign reading "Meditar," a plaintive demand for reflection. The other option that was considered was a sign reading "Reviva la revolu . . ."—literally, "revive the mess/confusion" and playing on the slogan "Viva la Revolución," as if to suggest the radical incompleteness of that project or even its death.[115] The disagreement was not only over the positivism of the former proposal that, like perestroika (of which the artists were very aware), was a basically reformist proposition, but also with regard to the nature of the "pact with power" that would, or would not, be conserved. According to Ernesto Leal, the goal for some was not the overthrow of socialism but rather the emergence of a "real," or "radical" form of it (and keeping in mind that "radical" means not only "carried to the utmost limit" but also "arising from or going to a root or a source");[116] for others, however, *Meditar* represented a fundamental and unacceptable compromise in agreeing to coexist with power, and on terms acceptable to it. *Meditar*'s neutral, philosophical, and inoffensive tone masked the fact that others in the group were far too disenchanted to believe that simply thinking well about things was any kind of response.[117] (Later that year Novoa did a performance, *Levitar,* perhaps as a belated retort to the lightness of the work's proposition.)

"No es solo lo que ves" had performed on a broader platform what had happened in 1981 when the "Volumen Uno" exhibition symbolically

unified a relatively diverse group of artists such that they were understood as consolidated. The cycle of exhibitions staged shortly thereafter at the Castillo de la Fuerza went even further in this direction, and additionally made explicit that the glue that was holding everything together was an antagonistic relation to power (whether construed as the state generally speaking or, closer to home, the bureaucracies of culture) and an urgent desire to reform the "rules of the game."[118] The Castillo project, "a full artillery schedule" according to Mosquera, became a crucial framework in the final, definitive skirmishes between artists and power at the end of the 1980s. In Aguilera's telling, the project was a way to cut through the fiction that artists did art and not politics, a fiction that had been convenient in certain ways for both sides:

> at that time there was a criterion that we said was "extra-artistic," that came from the bureaucracy, of cutting and censoring, separating, leaving works out. Recently somebody said to me, Look, if you artists make political art, you have to know how to do politics. For me the Castillo de la Fuerza was in some measure that kind of attitude, a group of people clearly making political art. At that time it was called "social art," but it was a political attitude. You are talking about subjects that, let's say, politics keeps for itself alone. You want to remove those subjects from politics and put them into a public discussion, a social discussion, and that is a political act too.[119]

The Castillo de la Fuerza project was organized with the hope of reversing the crisis by reestablishing a tactical dialogue between artists and power, but ultimately became one more victim of censorship and hardline politics. In frustration and defiance, artists pulled together again, this time not only across group borders but across generations as well into an extraordinary moment of collective defiance, coalescing first around the "retro-abstraction" exhibition project "Es solo lo que ves" (It's just what you see, which was supposed to have taken place from December 1988 to January 1989), and then the baseball game, *La plástica cubana se dedica al béisbol* (Cuban art dedicates itself to baseball) on September 24, 1989.[120] The former was to have been an exhibition of abstract art staged in galleries throughout Havana—"an art without problems"—made by the young artists especially for the occasion (in fact Navarro advocated not only for abstraction but for geometric abstraction, which he considered to be even more semantically void and therefore "unproblematic"). The fatal flaw in the plan was that, as a traditional gallery-based exhibition it depended on the cooperation of official organizations, which was not forthcoming. Nonetheless each request for gallery space, and each denial, drew more and more enthusiasm for the project among artists until the list of participants was huge.[121]

A few months later the artists perfected this devious, detouring strategy in the form of the baseball game. "After so much censorship," recalled Rubén Torres Llorca, "we organized a performance called 'The Baseball Game'

which consisted of—since they would no longer let us make art—then we would play sports, which was what the Commander-in-Chief liked. So, we organized a ballgame, and I think it was one of the most beautiful works of the whole movement of Cuban visual art because every artist who mattered in the entire country attended. All the artists, all the critics, everyone related to the visual arts made themselves present, people who had not spoken to each other in years played on the same team, you know."[122] With the (thwarted) exhibition and then the game, the collective solidified as a body of protest. The baseball game was a kind of swan song for the era, followed not only by the facilitated emigration of many artists but also by the exhibition "Kuba OK" at the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf in April–May 1990, which signaled, in earnest, the opening of the international commercial market for Cuban art.[123] Also in May, the "El objeto esculturado" exhibition opened, and then closed, after an impromptu performance by Ángel Delgado (consisting of defecating on a copy of *Granma*, the Communist Party newspaper) during the exhibition's opening: the ensuing scandal landed the artist in prison for six months, an unambiguous indication of what the response would be, henceforth, to the artists' troublemaking.

FIGURE 5.5. *La plástica cubana se dedica al béisbol,* September 24, 1989. Photograph by José A. Figueroa.

THE COLLECTIVE AND/IN THE "PUBLIC"

Another collective tendency cuts across this chronology of disenchantment, however, with strong sociological intentions for breaking down barriers around art by interacting on an equal footing with local communities, with the goal of working in a more long-lasting way and on a deeper cultural level.[124] One of these projects was Proyecto Hacer,[125] which proposed to "link art with socially useful work, offering the individual new perspectives for confronting and coming to understand his own activity; to design a pedagogical method applicable to the art schools while looking forward to professional activities; and to create a cultural treasure for people that will arise from within their communities, their own lives and spiritual characters."[126] While Hacer seems to have existed mostly in theoretical terms, another project with very similar goals and definitions (and some of the same participants) did materialize in 1989.

At the height of the tensions, censorship, and confrontations, this extraordinary project was launched in the impoverished eastern town of Pilón—a fact that, among other things, also brought into much clearer focus the assumptions about the inherent affinity between artist-collectives and the public that had been implicit in much of the work during the latter half of the decade.[127] Not only departing from the architectural and bureaucratic institutions of art but also from the urban center within which the new art had been mostly confined, the Pilón project envisioned an entirely new situation in which the definition and practice of art itself would emerge from the public, and its circumstances, rather than be overlaid onto it.

The project arose from the artists' discontent with the breadth of the audience and the social discourse that was engaged by their work. Despite the significant public presence that the new art had achieved, still the audience for this work, with few exceptions, was limited to the orbit of the specialist and aficionado.[128] Dissatisfaction with this situation had already found repeated expression, whether in Arte Calle's street commotions or Art-De's actions and debates in the parks. Each of these moves out of the gallery and museum drew a parallel between the idea of the "public body" and "public space" and implied a change in the identity of the spectator that was being sought. Leaving the gallery and museum was the spatial move that facilitated this work in the direction of a new audience, and the move out of Havana signaled an even more radical effort to engage those who had largely been left behind by the revolution and its cultural projects. The Pilón project went further than Arte Calle, Grupo Provisional, or even Art-De had in implicating the bystander in critical acts, through its immersiveness (the artists lived in the small town for several months) and in its total recasting of the source of art itself.[129] The project, moreover, was staged in a location

in which the general level of dissatisfaction with the revolution was sharpened by poverty and remoteness, and its threat of stirring up local sentiment was probably among the reasons why it was eventually blocked.

The question of "the public" has dogged much progressive art of the twentieth century, in which the aim to engage broadly with the concerns and realities of people excluded by the high borders of high culture has mostly proven elusive. In Cuba, while the overall dilemma is shared, the specific contours of the situation are distinct.

The idea of an expanded public audience for art is coextensive with a vision of assimilating artistic practice into social practice, and of art as integrated into and integral to the emancipatory project of the revolution. However, Cuban cultural policy has been riddled with contradictions, notably that it has left bourgeois ideas of high culture intact and dominant (for example, the national ballet is one of the country's premier cultural institutions; the national museum showcases painting and sculpture, with almost no space devoted to the various more popular forms of visual creation on the island) and meanwhile banalized the interpretation and participation of "the masses" according to directives that coincide with the ideological formulations of the state. This "reductivist, paternalistic and demagogic use of the concept and image of 'the people' and its applications in the cultural field ('art for the people,' 'elitist art,' 'popular taste,' 'popular sensibility,' etc.)"[130] meant that the populist agendas of the young artists were in direct conflict with the cultural "massification" programs of Cuban state socialism. Moreover, unlike in capitalist countries, in Cuba the ranks of artists and other intellectuals have been filled by people who are, "by origin, formation and vocation, an essential part of Cuban society,"[131] which makes the social segregation of high culture an even more twisted topography, since popular participation for the artists was a matter of reaching across rather than down. (Nonetheless, ideas of an artistic avant-garde and other formulations that place artists at some remove from the general population have persisted in Cuba, alongside socialist ethics: even Arte Calle, the most explicitly interactive and populist of the groups, worked more with an eye toward destabilizing the habitual than fomenting real dialogue.[132] This is an interesting paradox: the same group that aspired to radical socialism conceived of their participation in that process as one in which they were not exactly part of the social body, but rather a kind of outside irritant.)

The significant gap between what the revolution extolled and what it administered as cultural policy was catalytic: many artists felt passionately about the possibility of being part of building a truly integrated, revolutionary culture, "demystified and desanctified" not in order to be recruited

into rhetoric but rather to realize its potential as a "practical-transformational praxis."[133] Inevitably, their embrace of the revolutionary path put them on a collision course with the revolutionary apparatus. Moreover, the demands for change in cultural policy were increasingly a microcosm of questions implicit more broadly in Cuban life regarding individual rights to question, criticize, and challenge as legitimate participation in the revolutionary project of "emancipation, self-definition, and development." A double kind of operation was set up in which, to use the language of the day, the socialization of culture would parallel the democratization of politics, within the historical project of the emancipation and disalienation of man.[134] Certainly, then, this question of the audience for art must be held in proximity to that of the relation between art and politics, since it was the artists' base of political critique that resonated so deeply with the nonart public in Havana.

By the end of the 1980s, many artists in Havana had come to see their work, and their responsibility, as effecting political and social transformation. This was understood both as challenging policies and bureaucracies, and equally in terms of reasserting questions of a just society and dignified citizenry. Theirs was an idea of art that worked fundamentally "not in visual changes, but as a form of mental transformation."[135] The Pilón project took this ambition, which until then had mostly been directed toward the transformation of the spectator's thinking, and turned it inward toward the artists themselves. The project was structured such that—in removing all of the assumptions and tacit agreements about art—it fundamentally challenged the artists' view of themselves and of what they were doing. In this, it was perhaps the most honest collective project of all, if we understand collectivity as essentially a manner of relinquishing the defended self-identification in search of a truly social one.

The project in Pilón was utopian and it was read, by some at least, as utopian-revolutionary.[136] The artists' idea was, basically, to live in Pilón, to learn to understand the people and life there, and to make art with them in a fully collaborative process. The work, and the idea of "art," would arise from those people and that place, not from any prior expertise or professionalism that the artists brought with them: in fact this was the crux of the matter if the project was to avoid becoming just another example, however well intended, of cultural colonialism.

Unlike Arte Calle's works that sought to destabilize official structures, the Pilón project made a "pact with power."[137] The project was formally proposed to and accepted by officials at the Ministry of Culture who oversaw visual art: in fact, it generated such strong support that Armando Hart himself met with the artists during a visit to the region.[138] Despite—or

perhaps because of—this ideological and financial backing, the project was caught in the middle of a power struggle between the relatively liberal Hart and Carlos Aldana, the secretary of the Cuban Communist Party in charge of ideological matters. (This conflict had surfaced publicly with the censorship of Tomás Esson's solo exhibition at the 23 y 12 Gallery in Havana, which was closed by neighborhood party officials, over Hart's objections.)[139] Arriving in Pilón, the artists immediately encountered strong resistance from local party officials and, although they remained for an extended period, they were prevented from accomplishing much and, ultimately, were "counseled" by ministry officials that it was "advisable" that they withdraw.[140] While not everyone was in agreement, several of the artists decided to leave, and the project folded, "frustrated precisely because of the level of contradiction that existed in the political structures there."[141]

Pilón was, probably not coincidentally, also the project that brought the internal strains in the collective into sharper relief; this is not surprising given the extremely tense conditions under which the group was working. But it also seems likely that these internal tensions resulted from the fact that the artists were working in even more unknown territory, and thus there was less background consensus about what they were trying to accomplish.[142] Perhaps for this reason, the group's interactions with the local public were relatively limited, despite the original plan: they did work together on some things, most notably an exhibition of more or less documentary nature about the realities of life in Pilón (which was censured),[143] but it seems to have been primarily the interactions among the artists that were the project's axis. Ironically, once art's "other" was allowed to be truly other, rather than just a revised version of art, the collective collapsed into a conversation with itself.

In the end, it was the day-to-day experience of life in Pilón, more than the aesthetic experience, that had the most impact on the artists. They were shocked by the poverty they saw, and by the level of anger against the revolution, in a zone that was supposedly the beneficiary of a special plan for rural development and that had special significance in revolutionary history.[144] The utopian plan of making art in Pilón had disintegrated in the midst of this situation and the fierce political infighting that they had been caught in, and their idea of art, inevitably, changed: as Saavedra noted, "many of my utopias crumbled too: it diminished me somewhat . . . or I was a little more realistic about the transformative capacity of art."[145] As long as art had remained within the sphere of Art, it was possible to hold utopian expectations for its transformative power. However, there was a double exit from the precinct of Art: one was into a practice no longer divorced from political activity and the other was to Pilón, outside the realm of a definable,

historically continuous, and recognizable idea of art. One of these exits led to exile and the other to despair: Saavedra, after living in Pilón for eight months, finally went back to Havana, stopped making art, and joined a construction brigade.[146]

THE NEW BODY

The implosion, disillusionment, and dispersal of artistic energy in Havana that followed the events around 1990 produced an interregnum during which collective practice among artists became rare, victim to, among other things, a sense of having been mistaken, of having believed when belief was not warranted. The daily struggle for survival during the Special Period came to be the linking, uniting experience of the Cuban population: a collective formed of individual, and privatized, struggles. Provisionality and precariety, in the 1980s a centripetal force, became a centrifuge in the 1990s.

It was against the Guevarist-idealist backdrop that the artists who comprised the groups of the early 1980s (Volumen Uno, Grupo Hexágono) were raised; it was in light of the crisis that this ideal had entered that subsequent collectives (Grupo Puré, Arte Calle, Grupo Provisional, Art-De, ABTV) formed; and it was around the absence of it that the new, millennial collectives (DUPP, Enema) have coalesced. The "new body," which has gradually replaced the "New Man," is one of complicity rather than solidarity, within which the collectivizing gesture stands as anomaly rather than synecdoche. It seems that much of the recent impulse to work in groups comprises a collectivism in reaction, a gesture of refusal pointed to the social and philosophical-ethical withdrawal that these younger artists have witnessed in their predecessors. Part of this gesture has been to reromanticize the moment of the 1980s, especially for its vaunted solidarity among artists[147] and its political-moral agency. In the face of the definitive end to the idea(l) of the socialist body, these groups have been concocting a postsocialist collective body that is, paradoxically, inherently Emersonian with its romantic, spiritualizing overtones and emphasis on self-reliance as almost an aesthetic virtue. It is the paradox of a collective based in what Emerson referred to as his single doctrine, the "infinitude of the private man," not unrelated to the idea currently fashionable in marketing of "mass individualism." In fact with the emergence of market forces in the 1990s (or, it could be argued, their supplanting of the ideological space of socialism) and the survival mentality under dollarization, collectivization has taken on new strategic and tactical dimensions, reflective of the political and economic realities.[148] This new collectivity has also been characteristically more tentative, chastened and generally delimited by the borders of the student experience.

These privatized 1990s collectives are, in some sense, the synthesis spawned by the thesis of activist collectivity in the 1980s and the antithesis of the early 1990s cynical individualism. The disaffection they express tends to have a diffuse character: it is "not adding up, non-cumulative," it does not "condense . . . into a unifying public cause," much less gather people "around an alternative social vision."[149] It is a collectivism much more similar to the American dream (and this is, even if painfully ironic, not surprising), of utopia as a mostly private realm. This means that, while the figure of the collective has remained more or less constant during the period of the "new art," its fundamental meaning and vision has now inverted, from a vision that was public and civic to one that is often private and hermetic.

Despite the central role that collective practice has played in the new Cuban art, the collectives have generally not been accepted into historical accounts of the period. At ISA, students must graduate as individuals, and the school's archives hold no documents pertaining to any of the groups. And in the National Museum of Fine Arts, the recent reinstallation of the contemporary Cuban art galleries virtually erases the 1980s collectives from history: not a single work or piece of documentation is there to indicate the central role that these collectives played in what was undeniably one of the most dynamic, most important periods of Cuban art.

These collectives were, almost without exception, the project of teenagers, midway between a child's energy of defiance and the adult's sense of loss. The sheer excitement of the time, and the sense of participating in history, is the meaning that they now offer to artists working in a depleted, dispirited Havana. "At that time," Toirac recently reminisced, "really, there was a context that nourished you a great deal, or rather, the relations between artists were so close. . . . We went to parties, discussed this, that, and the other thing, it was quite an active collective life. And the ideas arose like that from nothing. . . . At that time we threw parties practically every day, there was a reason to celebrate. What times those were!"[150]

NOTES

Translations from the Spanish are by Cola Franzen.

1. The "new Cuban art" is usually dated from 1981 with the exhibition "Volumen Uno." The term is generally understood to refer to the appearance of several waves of young visual artists whose artistic proposals were varied and fresh, and who shared an ethical presupposition about the role of art. Luis Camnitzer also coined the phrase "Cuban Renaissance" to refer to this period: *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

2. The founding of the Ministry of Culture in 1976, and the appointment of Armando Hart as minister, is generally recognized as a key stimulus to the

development of Cuban art: among other things, it increased the distance between culture and the military and granted it cabinet-level status.

3. The artist Ernesto Leal has described it thus: "in that moment there was quite a lot of awareness of ourselves as a generation . . . but I remember one time we met in a park, where there were a lot of artists, and the discussion was whether we should make a manifesto or not, a manifesto of the eighties, and there was a lot of disagreement about trying to enclose that configuration in a manifesto, about starting again with that question of the avant-garde. Because things were very agitated then, one thing happening and then something different, but in the end, all of it united by conscience." Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

4. Although it would certainly be possible to discuss Cuban collectivism in terms of the traditions of collectivity established in the mainstream of the art world, it seems more productive, and more accurate, to explore it instead within the terms and conditions that have principally given rise to it, rather than measuring it according to parameters that are largely extrinsic. This is not to suggest that Cuban collectivism has existed in a vacuum, but rather to insist that it, along with other local cultural phenomena, has developed as a response to the specificities of the Cuban situation, rather than mimetically in relation to "international" practice. This is essentially the same method adopted by me and my colleagues in the exhibition "Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s." See *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s,* exhibition catalog (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

5. The case is different for the most recent collectives, which actually do function in a more consciously self-aggregating way, and which see themselves as constituted more in opposition to an environmental tendency than toward individualism. These later collectives are beyond the scope of this text.

6. The Cuban revolution represented a major break with the Soviet model, proposing a looser, more dynamic and consciousness-based model. The historian Marifeli Pérez-Stable understands this character of the Cuban process as one of its most important resources: "the revolution's own initial experience underscored the importance of creativity to preserve Cuban distinctiveness. Popular effervescence was itself a resource at the disposal of the revolution . . . During the 1960s Cuba defied reigning orthodoxy and rejected institutionalizing the Soviet model, which held material incentives higher than *conciencia.* Instead, mass mobilization for production and defense became the cornerstone of revolutionary politics." Marifeli Pérez-Stable, "In Pursuit of Cuba Libre," in *Cuba: Facing Challenge,* special issue, *NACLA Report on the Americas* 24, no. 2 (August 1990), 37. Jorge Castañeda's description adds an aspect of regionalism and points to the island's distinct political and intellectual tradition, but notes that in the end the upstart character of the Cuban revolution dimmed considerably: "the island revolution . . . was freer, more democratic, disorderly, tropical, and spontaneous, as well as being intellectually more diverse and politically more liberal. With time, the resemblance between the models would grow, and Cuba would come to look much more like the Soviet Union." Jorge Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 74.

7. This is true for readers both inside and out of Cuba. While Mosquera has been, by far, the most widely published of the Cuban critics of this period, there are several others who were also extremely important to the development of a critical and theoretical discourse; these include Osvaldo Sánchez, Tonel (Antonio Eligio), Desiderio Navarro, Orlando Hernández, Iván de la Nuez, Jorge de la Fuente, Lupe Álvarez, Magaly Espinosa, and Rufo Caballero.

8. Gerardo Mosquera, interview with the author, Havana, March 26, 2002. Flavio Garciandía explains it thus: "I think that Gerardo is the one who really did it, he was the first to try to give a theoretical, or rhetorical vision of the whole of it . . . and later he was precisely the one who took on the task of going to the specifics of each artist. . . . Also you have to realize that on the institutional level there was a certain rhetorical discourse, . . . and Gerardo was trying to use some of the same official, institutional rhetoric, to give it a twist, to change it, but he had to use certain elements, let's say, of rhetoric." Interview with the author, Monterrey, Mexico, April 19, 2003.

9. For example, Mosquera writes the following in his short text for the "Volumen Uno" exhibition: "The exhibitors do not constitute a group nor do they defend a particular tendency. Their reunion in this room has an informal character. If they have joined here in a group it is—in addition to personal affinity—because of a common desire: to experiment within the currents of present-day plastic arts. All of them have been sensitive to the latest directions of the search in the evolution of art. Starting from those they have intended to speak their own words." Gerardo Mosquera, *Volumen Uno,* exhibition brochure (Havana, 1981), unpaginated.

10. For example, Magaly Espinosa writes "This ability to bring art close to the socio-cultural framework allows one to explain the strength with which the sociological conscience of the artists had been established, artists who did not form an organized group, and possessed neither programs nor manifestos but who, attached as they were to the daily life, to religious contexts, to the paraphrasing of political icons and kitsch, succeeded in marking out the principal paths imaginable by which Cuban society left a record of its investitures." Magaly Espinosa Delgado, *La espada y la cuerda: A veinte años de Volumen Uno* (Havana: unpublished typescript, 2002), 4.

11. Both of these terms are somewhat problematic, "generation" because it indicates a cycle of succession related to entire career spans, while the Cuban situation has seen the emergence of distinct moments on a much shorter time frame, as little as five years; some have proposed the term "promotion," instead, to indicate that artists have tended to come into visibility in groups, as a result of their promotion by the Cuban cultural apparatus. "Movement," also, is misleading in the Cuban case, since it again indicates an inflated degree of cohesion among artists, in this case by virtue of a mutually agreed manifesto or platform or program—all of which were specifically absent during this period.

12. For an extended discussion of this question of subjecthood and socialism, see Desiderio Navarro, "Unhappy Happening: En torno a un rechazo en la recepción cubana del pensamiento francés sobre la literatura y las artes," in *Gaceta de Cuba* (Havana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 2002), 21–25.

13. Ibid., 23–24.

14. Magaly Muguercia, "The Body and Its Politics in Cuba of the Nineties," in *Boundary 2* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–76.

15. Ernesto Che Guevara, *Socialism and Man in Cuba* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1989), 6. Originally written in the form of a letter to Carlos Quijano, editor of *Marcha* (Montevideo) and published there on March 12, 1965.

16. Ibid., 5. Guevara does follow this comment with the observation that the Cuban people nonetheless follow their leaders "without hesitation," an apparent contradiction that he reconciles in the orgasmic relation that he saw between the Cuban people and their Commandante: "In this Fidel is a master. His own special way of fusing himself with the people can be appreciated only by seeing him in

action. At the great public mass meetings one can observe something like the dialogue of two tuning forks whose vibrations interact, producing new sounds. Fidel and the mass begin to vibrate together in a dialogue of growing intensity until they reach the climax in an abrupt conclusion crowned by our cry of struggle and victory" (6).

17. Muguercia, "Body and Its Politics in Cuba," 177.

18. For a fuller discussion, see Iván de la Nuez, "Al encuentro de los pasos perdidos," in *Cuba Siglo XX: Modernidad y Sincretismo* (Las Palmas de Gran Canario: Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, 1996), 62.

19. Mario Benedetti, "Present Status of Cuban Culture," in *Cuba in Revolution*, ed. Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, Doubleday, 1972), 526.

20. The participants were José Bedia, Juan Francisco Elso, José Manuel Fors, Flavio Garciandía, Israel León, Rogelio López Marín (Gory), Gustavo Pérez Monzón, Ricardo Rodríguez Brey, Tomás Sánchez, Leandro Soto, and Rubén Torres Llorca. "Volumen Uno" was neither the first exhibition of these artists (the exhibition "Six New Painters," including many of them, had been planned for 1978, and in 1979 many of the same artists organized "Fresh Paint," which was first presented in a private home and subsequently in an official gallery in Cienfuegos) nor the only grouping during the early 1980s. Other group projects emerged in subsequent years, including Grupo Hexágono (1982–85, a group whose work focused mainly on landscape; members included Consuelo Castañeda, Humberto Castro, Ángel Sebastián Elizondo, Tonel, Abigail García, and María Elena Morera).

21. Various authors have pointed out much earlier tendencies or indications, during the first years of the revolutionary period, toward a prescriptive and censorious behavior on the part of the Cuban government vis-à-vis cultural expression: see, for example, Desiderio Navarro, *In medias res publicas* (Havana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 2001), 40–45, and Gerardo Mosquera, "The New Cuban Art," in *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*, ed. Ales Erjavec (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 216. The 1970s period of institutionalization/Sovietization is seen here as the proximate, but not the sole, antecedent condition to which these artists were responding.

22. Antonio Eligio (Tonel), "70, 80, 90 . . . tal vez 100 impresiones sobre el arte en Cuba," in *Cuba Siglo XX*, 292.

23. Flavio Garciandía, interview with the author, Monterrey, Mexico, April 19, 2003.

24. This is explicit, for example, in comments by members of the artist collective DUPP: "one thing we learned . . . was that the sense of dialogue, of conversation among the artists, has been totally, completely lost." Interview with the author, Havana, March 19, 2002.

25. Abel Oliva describes this extended, conversational working methodology within Cuban theater: "then there was much more sense of community. In the eighties, in the theater, there were more experimental groups: the theater was much stronger, and the groups lasted, a group could spend up to four or five years experimenting in order to bring out a work, living together, working. Now, for example, the theatrical formula is that it's impossible to form a group that works that way . . . the actors leave. That is, you can't create a work within that method of working, which is all research, and in which the product is not, let's say, the objective. Now the objective is the work itself, and as quickly as possible." Interview with the author, Havana, December 25, 2002.

26. In 1990 Fidel Castro declared that the country was entering a "Special Period in Time of Peace," his euphemism for the period of economic collapse in Cuba.

27. This led, directly and inexorably, to a dollar economy that paralleled and eventually overtook the peso economy—a development that has left many Cubans (those without ongoing sources of dollars) increasingly priced out of even basic goods, in an evolving economic train wreck.

28. The Taller was opened in 1983 under the direction of Aldo Menéndez. Many of the young artists were hired to work there, and the studio produced editions by the vast majority of the artists then working in Havana, as well as various others who were invited to produce prints while visiting Cuba.

29. The "productivist" schemes launched by the Ministry of Culture in the second half of the 1970s were, according to Tonel, fundamental to the events of the 1980s, determining the "work" that was designed for the artists being produced by the new institutions (especially the Instituto Superior de Arte/ISA). As Armando Hart put it at the time: "Within socialism, in order that art as such is able to fulfill its role in the economy, it must think about penetrating all spheres of life; and respond to the demands that technological development and the spiritual needs of the great mass of the population impose on it." Cited in Eligio (Tonel), "70, 80, 90 . . . tal vez 100 impresiones sobre el arte en Cuba," 289.

30. Although at the outset of the revolutionary period abstraction was tolerated, a subsequent reappraisal of it saw it as capitalist art, lying "outside the revolutionary actuality"—as a "pure" form that was nonsocial (not antisocial), unable to represent the collective because of its basically introspective gaze. See Manuel Díaz Martínez, "Salón Anual de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado," *Hoy Domingo* (Havana) 1, no. 12 (October 18, 1959), 4–5; reprinted in *Memoria: Cuban Art of the 20th Century,* ed. José Veigas, Cristina Vives, Adolfo V. Nodal, Valia Garzón, and Dannys Montes de Oca (Los Angeles: California/International Arts Foundation, 2002), 422. On this subject the artist Raúl Martínez has said: "I began to feel that abstraction had nothing to do with our new environment. Besides, there were a lot of new pizzerias and public places that groups of painters were decorating with designs that resembled abstract painting . . . I realized that abstraction and all my experiments with it were part of an attempt to find out who and what I was. I also realized that the revolution had made me more interested in finding out about others." Quoted in Coco Fusco and Robert Knafo, "Interviews with Cuban Artists," in *Social Text* (New York: Winter, 1986), 41.

31. In the 1970s Antonia Eiriz and Umberto Peña had "stopped painting" in the face of harsh official disapprobation of their work, "dynamiting . . . the bureaucratic conformism and voluntarism to create, from the abstract, a kind of art that was contingent, heroic and eternal," according to Osvaldo Sanchez, "Tras el rastro de los fundadores: un panorama de la plástica cubana," in *Trajectoire Cubaine* (Corbeil-Essonnes: Centre d'Art Contemporain, 1989), 14. Their retreat from painting and into apparent popularisms like papier-mâché, however, was a complicated move, neither simply an act of revolutionary insistence (as Luis Camnitzer has suggested), despite the repression of their main work as painters, nor a paltry substitute (as Toirac suggests), evidence of their incapacitation as artists. In fact, by the mid-1970s the sanctions imposed on Eiriz (around the end of the 1960s) were being lightened, to the point that she was included in an official delegation to Moscow. According to Desiderio Navarro, "she was not in good shape economically at the time, and she welcomed the thaw. In her neighborhood of Juanelo, and in her CDR, she began to

teach workshops in papier-mâché, and then Nisia Agüero and María Rosa Almendros included her in the work of the Group for Community Development (Grupo de Desarrollo de Comunidades), bringing her to its workshops and seminars in various communities." Her work in these activities was "without the slightest tinge of irony," done out of both conviction and economic necessity. E-mail communication with the author, May 4, 2004. Interestingly, papier-mâché was a technique with no history or tradition in Cuba, so its reincarnation as a "popular" expression was pure invention: not yet meant for the tourist market (though it later became a mainstay), papier-mâché was supposed to be a cheap, accessible medium through which any- and everyone could overnight become an artist. The production was exhibited in galleries throughout the island, the realization of the cultural "massification" policies of the revolutionary government. Meanwhile, although the fad was not taken particularly seriously from the perspective of "high art," Eiriz's participation had lent some aura of high cultural legitimacy to it. Again according to Navarro, the papier-mâché fad "disappeared as quickly as it appeared. And one of the factors was precisely that a large part of the general public resisted the idea that anyone—even their most uneducated neighbor—could become an artist in a matter of a week or two." In addition, most of the production was exceptionally uniform, "ornamental, and with an extreme poverty of formal and chromatic patterns, etc." This may have been due, at least in part, to the manner of teaching: among other things, in the papier-mâché workshops the study of historical works of art was specifically and programmatically excluded.

32. Eligio (Tonel), "70, 80, 90 . . . tal vez 100 impresiones sobre el arte en Cuba," 282.

33. Fragment of the declaration of the Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura, Havana, April 1971. Política Cultural de la Revolución Cubana, documentos, 1977 edition.

34. Fearful of establishing a precedent in which artists acted independently of any official cultural structures, the Ministry of Culture granted the artists permission to reinstall the show in the Centro de Arte Internacional (now Galería La Acacia) in January 1981, after its successful run in Fors's house. In fact Flavio Garciandía has joked that the artists should thank State Security for the gallery space: the artists' hugely successful self-promotion apparently convinced the security forces that it would be better to cooperate with, and thereby coopt, the artists rather than risk a runaway phenomenon of "underground" or "dissident" cultural activity.

35. While this was exceptional at that time in Havana, it is a practice with a long and diverse history that includes Dada, surrealism, and Fluxus, all groups of artists who also developed their own exhibitions out of frustration with the conventions and institutions of exhibition-making that were available to them.

36. Around ten thousand people visited the show in two weeks, and even Armando Hart, the Minister of Culture, came, making it "an almost popular event." Eligio (Tonel), "70, 80, 90 . . . tal vez 100 impresiones sobre el arte en Cuba," 292.

37. This term describes a position that is opposite to formalism, in which the content of the work is prioritized or absolutized above and beyond the form.

38. Flavio Garciandía, interview with the author, Monterrey, Mexico, April 19, 2003.

39. In April 1980, twelve Cubans crashed a minibus through the gates of the Peruvian embassy in Havana and demanded asylum. The Peruvian chargé d'affaires announced that any Cubans wishing to defect would be granted access to the embassy,

which approximately ten thousand people subsequently did. U.S. President Jimmy Carter then announced that the U.S. borders were open to "freedom-loving Cubans." On April 22 an announcement was made in *Granma* that any Cuban wishing to leave could do so via the port of Mariel. The ensuing exodus included about 125,000 people, some released from Cuban jails (including thousands of petty criminals), some pressured to leave, and some leaving voluntarily.

Juan-Sí González recalls that the UJC asked young people to take part in actions meant to demoralize those who were leaving—to shout, throw garbage, rob them, pull their hair. He refused and was subsequently expelled from the organization.

40. The original membership of Los Once consisted of Francisco Lázaro Antigua Arencibia, René Salustiano Avila Valdés, José Ygnacio Bermudez Vazquez, Agustín Cárdenas Alfonso, Hugo Consuegra Sosa, Fayad Jamis Bernal, Guido Llinas Quintans, José Antonio Díaz Pelaez, Tomás Oliva González, Antonio Vidal Fernández, Viredo Espinosa Hernández, and Raúl Martínez González. Los Once was a more homogeneous group than Volumen Uno in aesthetic terms, having coalesced under the common denominator of abstract expressionism. Interestingly, this stylistic adherence also had a clear ideological profile, as was later the case with Volumen Uno. According to Tonel: "in a historical context, the abstract expressionism favored by many members of the group during this decade was undoubtedly seen as 'insurgent,' and it did turn out to be the most effective means of defying just about everything: pre-existing art (the conventional academic tradition and everything it represented) as well as the politics of the dictatorial regime of Fulgencio Batista (including its cultural initiatives)." Antonio Eligio (Tonel), "Cuban Art: The Key to the Gulf and How to Use It," in *No Man Is an Island* (Pori: Pori Art Museum, 1990), 70.

41. Tania Bruguera, interview with the author, Havana, January 4, 2002.

42. Cuba's economic problems actually began accumulating before the catastrophic blow of the withdrawal of Soviet support. Unlike much of Latin America, Cuba's economy grew from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. In addition to trade with the socialist bloc, Cuba was receiving—and paying back—loans from the West. But a series of factors combined to bring the economy to a halt. As economist Andrew Zimbalist has summarized, "Low sugar prices, plummeting petroleum prices (Cuba's re-export of Soviet petroleum provided roughly 40% of its hard currency earnings during 1983–85), devastation from Hurricane Kate, several consecutive years of intensifying drought, drastic dollar devaluation, the tightening of the U.S. embargo and growing protectionism in Western markets, all combined to reduce Cuba's hard currency earnings by $337.1 million, or 27.1%." Cited in Medea Benjamin, "Things Fall Apart," in *Cuba: Facing Challenge*, 15.

43. The "process of rectification of errors and negative tendencies" was initially undertaken in order to tighten quality controls and work norms, weed out corrupt administrators, and drive home the work ethic. It quickly took on the much more ideological meaning of being a process of "purifying" the Cuban revolution. Castro, in the speech "Che's Ideas Are Absolutely Relevant Today," delivered in 1987 at a ceremony marking the twentieth anniversary of Che's death and later published as a postscript to Guevara's *Socialism and Man in Cuba,* referred to rectification in the following terms: "What are we rectifying? We're rectifying all those things—and there are many—that strayed from the revolutionary spirit; from revolutionary work, revolutionary virtue, revolutionary effort, revolutionary responsibility; all those things that strayed from the spirit of solidarity among people. We're rectifying all the shoddiness and mediocrity that is precisely the negation of Che's ideas, his revolutionary

thought, his style, his spirit, and his example." Guevara, *Socialism and Man in Cuba,* 34. Cuban Rectification was a rejection of the principles of perestroika (economic and political reform) and glasnost (a policy of openness, freedom to "speak the truth"), insisting on a "Cuban solution to Cuban problems," and also probably to ward off any Cuban version of the changes that did take place under the Soviet reform movement (in Castro's view, Gorbachev's mistake was to undertake glasnost in advance of perestroika). For this reason, its legitimacy as an authentic reform movement is dubious: as Gerardo Mosquera put it at the time, "Rectification, but not too much."

44. These artists have generally been considered a separate "generation" from Volumen Uno, a distinction supported by the fact that the members of the earlier group were the teachers of these younger artists. Among this younger group, collectivity was a much more widespread phenomenon, even to the point that Luis Camnitzer, writing in 1994, contended that the "generation is (or was) loosely formed by six groups . . . plus some individual artists." Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba,* 177–78.

45. Grupo Art-De formed in 1988. It changed its name to Ritual Art-De in 1989, to reflect its joining together with Ritual, a group of independent film and video makers.

46. This period is well known for the sheer quantity of performance works done then. It was not, however, the first time that performance formed part of artistic practice in Havana: the members of Volumen Uno had earlier staged various performances, a fact that is often overlooked. However with the exception of Leandro Soto, these works were generally of a secondary status in the artists' overall production, something they did in addition to their studio work.

47. Ernesto Leal, interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

48. Members included Adriano Buergo, Ana Albertina Delgado, Ciro Quintana, Lázaro Saavedra, and Ermy Taño. The name "Puré" (puree) was aptly descriptive of the group's jumbling together of various topics, sources, and aesthetics.

49. Puré's innovations were not solely founded in these changing societal circumstances; they were also in the more prosaic manner of challenging, in order to surpass, their predecessors: "And it's also a mechanism that generations use to impose themselves, not only formal mechanisms but also content mechanisms. It's like saying, 'Here's what is mine, I'm going to deal with this problem because nobody has done it this way yet, I want to talk about this, in this way.'" Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

50. January 1986. The show was installed at the Galería L in Havana, and in the street outside the gallery.

51. "Really the group had a deep concern for the ordinary life, and having such a concern for the events of daily life meant including them in your work, which made you realize that the reality had changed a lot . . . the reality which Volumen Uno faced was very different from the reality which Puré faced." Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, December 12, 2002.

52. Eligio (Tonel), "70, 80, 90 . . . tal vez 100 impresiones sobre el arte en Cuba," 296.

53. According to Saavedra, Buergo had "a very strong concern for a whole series of topics considered from the Cuban point of view but that were not considered Cuban in orthodox, more conservative opinions because the Cuban—the 'real' Cuban—was what belonged to the old generation of the twenties, the thirties, what had been proposed as Cuban at that time. And Adriano lived in Marianao, in a very

marginal zone, and he saw a lot of things that he considered Cuban." Interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002. Buergo's solo exhibition "Roto Expone" (Broken Exhibition, Castillo de la Fuerza, June–July 1989) was a kind of extended essay on the broken-down and oft-repaired objects of daily life that are ubiquitous in Cuban households, including an electric fan that, in Buergo's treatment, was recognized as a fully invented, sculptural object.

54. The crucial antecedents for this sensibility in Cuban art are Chago, beginning in the 1960s, and later Tonel, in the 1980s.

55. This may seem like a very short interval to bother taking note of, but in the context of the period a year or two was a relatively long time. Remarkably, when Tonel wrote about Puré's inaugural exhibition he referred to it as "an assault on the relative homeostasis achieved in the 5 years following Volumen Uno." Antonio Eligio (Tonel), "Acotaciones al relevo," *Temas* 22 (1992): 61; reprinted in *Memoria: Cuban Art of the 20th Century,* ed. Veigas et al., 475. In other words, the situation was so dynamic that five years was considered a long time for there not to have been a major new shift.

56. This is Gerardo Mosquera's term. Gerardo Mosquera, "Nuevos artistas," *El Caimán Barbudo* (Havana) 20, no. 228 (November 1986): 2–4; reprinted in *Memoria: Cuban Art of the 20th Century,* ed. Veigas et al., 475.

57. There is an important exception in the work of Leandro Soto, a contemporary of Volumen Uno, whose work presaged both the political tone of the later 1980s and also its performativity.

58. Puré was especially influenced by Jonathan Borofsky, Keith Haring, and Francesco Clemente. In fact it was Garciandía, who was their teacher at the time, who had introduced them to the work of these and other contemporary artists outside of Cuba. Garciandía, who was a voracious consumer of information, was well informed about developments in the international art world, and his students and friends benefited from his diligence.

59. Eligio (Tonel), "Acotaciones al relevo," 61.

60. As Saavedra describes it, "when you went into the space of Puré, . . . you did not go into an architectural space where objects were hung, you went into a space of virtual reality, into a three-dimensional world where you found a work on the floor, on the ceiling, on the walls, wherever." Interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

61. While the group's membership changed somewhat over time, those identified as members of the group in their self-produced video documentary are Aldito Menéndez, Pedro Vizcaíno, Erick Gómez, Iván Alvarez, Ernesto Leal, Ofill Echevarría, Leandro Martínez, and Ariel Serrano.

62. Ernesto Leal recalls it as follows: "That was the first, like a kind of opening salvo . . . That is, I don't think that either the idea that it was a group existed consciously or any idea of the importance it would have." Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

63. Eligio (Tonel), "Acotaciones al relevo," 61.

64. Ernesto Leal, interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

65. This one-night event was staged at the Galería L on January 11, 1988.

66. According to Ernesto Leal, "the idea was this notion of an opening, where people go to have a drink and so on; so what we did was buy a lot to drink and get everybody drunk, that was more or less the idea." Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

67. Personal possessions were also sold or bartered on a private level: in desperation, Cubans have traded in their furniture, cutlery, paintings, picture frames, statues on the family crypt, garden ornaments, and now even their books, which are resold (mostly to tourists) by street dealers in the old city.

68. Glexis Novoa, interview with the author, Miami, December 30, 2002.

69. Aldo Damián Menéndez, "Art Attack: The Work of ARTECALLE," in *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (London: Routledge, 2000), 277.

70. Ibid., 278.

71. Ernesto Leal, interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

72. In "The Masked Philosopher" Michel Foucault makes a wonderful suggestion about the value of anonymity: "Why have I suggested that I remain anonymous? Out of nostalgia for the time when, being completely unknown, what I said had some chance of being heard. The surface contact with some possible reader was without a wrinkle." Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," in *Foucault Live* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989, 1996), 302.

73. Galería L, Havana, October 13, 1987. Participating artists included Pedro Vizcaíno, Erick Gómez, Hugo Azcuy, Iván Alvarez, Ernesto Leal, Max Delgado, Alán González, Ofill Echevarría, and Ariel Serrano.

74. The title quotes from a patriotic poem by Mirta Aguirre, which suggests that Che should not be reduced to history or to conveniently edited aspects of his revolutionary work, meanwhile leaving aside the ethical demands that he set as his revolutionary example.

75. Frency Fernández Rosales has blamed this provocation on the Group on Human Rights headed by Ricardo Bofill in "La vocación inconclusa: Notas sobre Arte Calle," in *Enema 2 y 3* (Havana: Instituto Superior de Arte, 2000), 49.

76. Editorial de la redacción de la culture, "Arte es huir de lo mezquino, y afirmarse en lo grande," *Juventud Rebelde* (Havana), October 1987.

77. "Ud. se equivocó de exposición," unpublished typescript, October 1987, 4. Signed by Hugo Azcuy, Iván Alvarez, Max Delgado, Ofill Echevarría, Erick Gómez, Alán González, Ernesto Leal, Ariel Serrano, and Pedro Vizcaíno.

78. In the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, Chapter 4, Article 38, section d reads: "artistic creativity is free as long as its content is not contrary to the Revolution. Forms of expression of art are free."

79. In this, there is an interesting echo of Brazilian *Tropicalismo* at the end of the 1960s, which also struck a position somewhere in between counterculture and orthodox left, incorporating the former and distancing itself from the latter. On Christmas Day 1968, Caetano Veloso appeared on TV and sang a sentimental Brazilian Christmas song while holding a gun to his head. He and other *tropicalistas* were subsequently "invited" to go into exile.

80. Grupo Provisional is identified by Camnitzer as consisting primarily of Glexis Novoa, Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas, and Segundo Planes, with Planes as a much less active partner. In fact, Planes does not list the Grupo Provisional activities on his resumé (the reference here is to the catalog for his major exhibition in 1993 at the Galería Ramis Barquet). According to Novoa the group was formed by him, Cárdenas, and Francisco Lastra.

81. Glexis Novoa, interview with the author, Miami, December 30, 2002.

82. Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas, untitled grant application, 1997.

83. Glexis Novoa, interview with the author, Miami, December 30, 2002. The

boy in question was Alejandro Acosta, a neighbor of Novoa's, "with certain troubles *(trastornos)* and a singular personality which allowed him to join in our projects." E-mail from Novoa, August 19, 2004.

84. February–March 1988. Sites for the installation included the National Museum of Fine Arts, the Castillo de la Fuerza, La Casa de las Américas, Galería Haydée Santamaría, and Habana Club. As though anticipating criticism of the project from an anti-imperialist position, Roberto Fernández Retamar (the President of La Casa de las Américas, and a leading official intellectual figure) went to some lengths to justify its importance in "Rauschenberg, American Artist," his text for the exhibition brochure: "It is understandable that a man who incorporates so much [referring to the artist's work with assemblage] goes around the planet to show his wares in the most distant sites, and also to enrich those sites with new visions, born in those sites. Of course: one should not look in those visions for the spirit of the people in those places, but instead for that of Rauschenberg, heir to the pedigree including those North Americans who, like Whitman or Hemingway, brought together in their work, in the manner of vast collages, that which the world requires to express itself: in order to express the best of a community of energetic pioneers, who we cannot confuse with those responsible for other adventures."

85. The group did quickly move on to more confrontational, performative works. And, as Novoa has pointed out, even if they were painting murals, "more than painting on the wall it was the fact of going and doing it illegally, clandestinely, of doing it on the run. Also, with the attitude that they would arrive and burst into some place or other." Interview with the author, Miami, December 30, 2002.

86. Glexis Novoa, interview with the author, Miami, December 30, 2002.

87. According to Leal, "they made something like a pact with us, that was not actually a pact but more like a threat: that we could no longer keep doing those things outside." Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

88. Navarro, "Unhappy Happening," 25.

89. Glexis Novoa, interview with the author, Miami, December 30, 2002.

90. Art-De consisted of an artist (Juan-Sí González), a lawyer specializing in human rights (Jorge Crespo Díaz), and a filmmaker (Elizeo Váldez).

91. The Brigada Hermanos Saiz (the youth wing of UNEAC, the Cuban Artists' and Writers' Union and therefore an organ of the Communist Party) actually provided support and cover for even the most provocative works—so long as they were legitimated on the grounds of being art. In that case, the Brigada's role was to manage the situation, and to work with the dynamics of the "adolescent rebellion" to produce a more positive dynamic. Art-De's cardinal sin was to position themselves completely outside of this official safety net, seeking neither recognition as art nor the support of any arm of the cultural apparatus for the creation or presentation of their work.

92. Ernesto Leal has also spoken of this safety in numbers: "it was not so palpable *(presente)* as it is now, the fact that something can happen to you, to your personal integrity. At that moment it was more softened, more diluted—the idea that we were a large group that is, that there were people that, when we were arrested, were in the police station, there would be a group of people outside waiting, and somehow that gave you strength. Today they take you prisoner and you are alone." Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

93. At first these events were held in the Coppelia park in Vedado every Wednesday afternoon (March 2, 9, 16, 23); permission to use that site was then withdrawn,

and the group moved to the park at the corner of 23 and G, also in Vedado (April 6, 13, 20, 27, May 18). The group was then prohibited from working further in public.

94. Juan-Sí González notes that "we faced all kinds of publics, we faced their questions and their thoughts and on occasion they offended us. Everything that happened there was part of the work." Untitled video documentary, 1988.

95. Glexis Novoa explains it thus: "They said we were mediocre, they didn't include us in any important exhibitions, we didn't travel abroad, and when foreign curators came to Cuba they never took them to see us. That segregated you. That's what the Cuban government knew how to use, that implacable silence which separates you and dissolves you as an artist." Interview with the author, Miami, December 30, 2002.

96. One spectator commented that "to my way of thinking it is more a generational movement, a sociological phenomenon, which shows the desire of the youth to participate in a process of change which the entire country is immersed in . . . As a phenomenon, a movement, it seems to me important: you have to follow it, look at it closely and support it, and hopefully it will not be just here in the park." Untitled video documentary, 1988.

97. "Cronología" of Art-De, unpublished typescript, 2.

98. "I got into a very rare contradiction . . . I did not want to use any of the materials that the school gave me, I didn't want to take anything, I wanted to break that relationship of dependence, of co-dependence with the school, the Party, the Revolution, everything . . . I wanted to have a voice but be ethical in order to have a voice . . . and around then I began to say different things, without resources that came from officialdom . . . I began to get into a battle because I felt that in Cuba there was not a state of rights, I began to understand all of that better . . . In that moment I was not thinking from a purely aesthetic point of view like other artists . . . We were very naive in the beginning, we believed it was possible, a change from within, we did not believe in any change from the outside, we were against the embargo, it was to create . . . an internal dynamic of renewal, of thinking, to end that old-fashioned and even bourgeois attitude, including xenophobia and racism . . . We were working with those elements, those were our materials, not color . . . and in general the thinkers we used were not aesthetes, not artists, not cultural ideologues: some were priests, others were santeros, we used Varela, we used Martí a lot, but we were always searching for the contrast between what they had always taken from Martí and the other part of Martí that is never mentioned, that game between the two." Juan-Sí González, interview with the author, Yellow Springs, Ohio, April 4, 2003.

99. ABTV did not consider itself a "group" until somebody else called them that: Luis Camnitzer's use of the name "ABTV" for the artists Tanya Angulo, Juan Pablo Ballester, José Angel Toirac, and Ileana Villazón was, effectively, a collectivizing baptism that gave a firm and conventional form to what was more properly an amorphous relational dynamic. As Toirac explains it: "The business about the group arose spontaneously because, more than a worker's collective, we were friends . . . we had never considered ourselves a group until Camnitzer said, 'You are a group' . . . we were a group of friends who shared countless things, we went to parties, we passed books and magazines back and forth, we consulted with one another, we helped each other out in work and never bothered about authorship." Interview with the author, Havana, December 22, 2002.

100. José Angel Toirac, interview with the author, Havana, December 22, 2002.

101. They were not the only ones to concern themselves with this topic: Ponjuán and René Francisco had also been working on this, as had Novoa and others.

102. José Angel Toirac, interview with the author, Havana, December 22, 2002. For example, in the ABTV catalog there is a chronology that repeats, but slightly alters, the one published by the Museo Nacional, adding notes about when Martínez began to make a living off his work, when he began to work with assistants, and so forth.

103. Eligio (Tonel), "Acotaciones al relevo," 61. In the exhibition brochure, ABTV wrote: "Even though his abstract paintings did not contribute anything essential to the language of Abstraction nor of Abstract Expressionism, they worked in opposition to 'the stereotypes postulated by the School of Havana: light, the baroque, colorism, typical-ism' (Amelia Peláez, Carlos Enríquez, Victor Manuel, René Portocarrero . . .), and as a means of political opposition, in his participation in the antibiennial of 1954 in response to the Hispanoamerican Biennial of Art organized by Batista's National Institute of Culture and Franco's Hispanic Council on the occasion of the centenary of Martí. When these 'abstract' works are decontextualized, the content that springs directly from the formal properties of the work is lost, which is why we left out the 'paintings' and presented a type of documentary information that would in some way make those contents plain that the works had been made to transcend . . . If in the period from 66–70 the political conscience became a fundamental and indissoluble ingredient of his work (portraits of heroes, etc.), putting to work in an effective way the contents of our culture, it turns out to be paradoxical that only a few were exhibited, in an isolated way, in group exhibitions, and that critics abstained from analyzing them. . . . From July to October 1988, the National Museum organized what would be the first anthological exhibition of the work of Raúl Martínez, *Us*. The exhibition . . . placed emphasis on presenting Raúl as the myth of the great painter, of the modern artist as a minor deity. [Our exhibition, also titled] *Us* tries to show him as an accessible creator, who has used his work to confront individual, social, ethical, and artistic problems in an effective way."

104. Actually, the dialogue was with two vice ministers since the first one, Marcia Leiseca, who had been sympathetic to the project, was fired before it could open. The show prior to the Haacke project, an installation by René Francisco and Ponjuán, had recently been closed down in a furor over images of Fidel (wearing a dress and standing in line, in one case), and Leiseca was sacked as a result. Her replacement, Omar González, was much more hardline politically such that his political interests apparently overshadowed his effectiveness with regard to questions of art.

105. As Toirac explains, "maybe we could have managed to put on an exhibition but really by then we were exhausted, the internal relations of the group were not the same as in the beginning . . . all that tension had had an impact on our friendship and we decided to call the work finished once and for all: the work was what it was, and if Omar González didn't accept it, well . . . he didn't accept it but we were not going to make any more changes." Interview with the author, Havana, December 22, 2002.

106. "Ballester and Ileana circulated a paper telling what had happened, with which Tanya and I were not in agreement . . . [they thought that, as a matter of ethics, that] one had to give an explanation, an apology or say what happened. But the censoring of *Homage to Hans Haacke* was not an exceptional case; you don't have to explain, everybody knows what happened. But the reason why we were not in

agreement was also something else, an ethical problem of the relationship with the institution . . . the institution can play dirty with the artists but the artists have to play fair with the institution. And we also disagreed about the signatures . . . because for example when Arte Calle circulated papers, those who agreed with it signed and the others did not. But this paper about *Haacke* wasn't signed, and so was taken as a collective decision, which it was not, really." José Angel Toirac, interview with the author, Havana, December 22, 2002. The text of that document was as follows: "The exhibition *Homage to Hans Haacke* by Tanya Angulo, Juan Pablo Ballester, José A. Toirac, and Ileana Villazón, which was supposed to have opened today, was suspended because its authors did not accept the conditions that Omar González, current President of the National Council of Plastic Arts, proposed to them. These conditions are: (1) Exclude a photocopy of a portrait of Fidel Castro which Orlando Yanes made in 1986. (2) Exclude from the Curriculum Vitae of Orlando Yanes that in 1975 he designed the flag and logotype of the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party. (3) Exclude a photograph in which the authors appear together with Marcia Leiseca. The authors decided not to accept these conditions since they considered that the parts which they endeavored to exclude were essential to the exhibition, and because it was unacceptable to accept them in a project which endeavored, among other things, 'to displace the most recent polemics from the realm of the extra-artistic back into artistic discourse.' Friday, September 29, 1989."

107. José Angel Toirac, interview with the author, Havana, December 22, 2002.

108. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

109. Among the shows closed during 1988 were "A tarro partido II" (The Broken Horn: work by Tomás Esson), "Nueve alquimistas y un ciego" (Nine Alchemists and a Blind Man: organized by Arte Calle and Grupo Imán), and "Artista de calidad" (solo show by Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas), while in 1989 the exhibitions both by Ponjuán and René Francisco and by ABTV were censored within the Castillo de la Fuerza exhibition project.

110. Menéndez, "Art Attack," 276–77.

111. Faculty of Art History, University of Havana, 1988.

112. Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

113. Participants included Abdel Hernández, Ciro Quintana, Hubert Moreno, Arnold Rodríguez (Peteco), Rafael López Ramos, Lázaro Saavedra, Alejandro López, Jose Luis Alonso, Luis Gomez, and Nilo Castillo.

114. In general, maintaining contact with the artists advanced the state's need to find new mechanisms of control: Leal even says that, ironically, Arte Calle wound up teaching the state how to manage what was, then, a new level of aggressiveness, an art that no longer stayed within the precincts of art and that therefore achieved a new level of "concreteness." "It's regrettable, but all that experience of Arte Calle actually was of service to the state, the government, as to how to treat that kind of activity. Up until that moment, nothing had occurred in Cuban culture with that degree of aggressiveness—that we didn't care about losing anything. They could put us in prison and there would be no problem because we were students—that is, we had our parents who would see to us somehow. And up to that moment they had not known how to tackle that, not even with what happened with the writers in the sixties or seventies—there had been nothing like what we did because these were concrete actions that went even beyond art. That reached the social sphere, to give things to people in the streets, to make performances, to create problems.

And I believe that that helped them to develop a strategy." Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

115. This would have been basically a reprise of an earlier installation work by Aldito Menéndez, who had scrawled the same phrase on a canvas and then placed a collection plate in front of it, asking for donations to complete the revolutionary project.

116. Ernesto Leal explains it thus: "There was a newspaper called *Novedades de Moscú* ('News from Moscow') and we bought it every time it came out, because there was a lot of information about Perestroika and discussions about how they were handling it, the process—and that influenced us a lot. Besides, we didn't want to know how to change the society into a kind of capitalism or something like that, but how to make a type of socialism that was real and radical." Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

117. According to Novoa, he and Carlos Cárdenas ultimately decided to withdraw from the group "because the mindset was very positivist. One had to be there, one has to say something that causes one to reflect . . . the thing was not to lose the space of Power. That's what Abdel Hernández said, that was the thing that was inducing, managing all the artists—he was the intermediary between the Central Committee and us. Originally we wanted to make it 'Reviva la Revolu . . .' without ending the word. And that turned out to be too strong for the Central Committee (in this particular case we were 'handled' directly by Dr. Massábala), because it was as though the Revolution were dead, and we were going to recuperate it, revive it. But it was very strong at that moment and we had to 'edit' it, and say nothing really. And well, that's the way those things went." Interview with the author, Miami, December 30, 2002.

118. *Changing the Rules of the Game* is the title of a book by Armando Hart, the Cuban minister of culture from the time of the ministry's founding in 1976 and through the 1980s. The text (which is the transcript of an interview with Luis Báez) outlines Hart's general policies that were seen, at least initially, as liberal and favorable to the development of a free-thinking, contestatory art as compatible with the revolution.

119. Alejandro Aguilera, interview with the author, Atlanta, March 8, 2003.

120. While there were apparently two "teams"—the Red team (Rafael López, Glexis Novoa, Iván de la Nuez, Alejandro Frometa, Lázaro Saavedra, Rene Francisco Rodríguez, Pedro Vizcaíno, José Angel Toirac, Juan Pablo Ballester, Gerardo Mosquera, Llopiz, Flavio Garciandía, Silveira, David Palacios, Adriano Buergo, Azcano) and the Blue team (Nilo Castillo, Aldito Menéndez, Tonel, Ponjuán, Luis Gómez, Abdel Hernández, Hubert Moreno, Ermy Taño, Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas, Erick Gómez, Victor Manuel, Alejandro Aguilera, Tomás Esson, Nicolás Lara, Pedro Alvarez, Alejandro López, Robaldo Rodríguez, Rubén Mendoza, Ángel Alonso)—most accounts of the game stress that anyone who wanted to play did, such that the fact of there being two "teams" did not actually mean very much: it was more like everyone playing together. The game was played to the accompaniment of rockers Zeus and Takson and meanwhile a game between members of State Security coincidentally went on in the next field over.

121. Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, March 20, 2002.

122. Rubén Torres Llorca, "Oral History Interview with Rubén Torres Llorca, Miami, Florida, January 31, 1998, Interviewer: Juan Martínez," Smithsonian Archives of American Art, http://artarchives.si.edu/oralhist/torres98.htm.

123. Much of the exhibition was bought by the German chocolatier and art collector Peter Ludwig. According to Magaly Espinosa, that was "the unexpected part of the exhibition . . . opening the Cuban artists' eyes to the tangible possibility of a market. So artistic experimentation, and the development of personal poetics, met at the border of extra-artistic requirements with this insertion into one of the most important art collections in the world." Espinosa Delgado, *La espada y la cuerda,* 3.

The activity around the "Kuba OK" show built on momentum that had already been established by earlier exhibitions of Cuban art in the United States, including "New Art from Cuba" organized by Luis Camnitzer for the Amelie Wallace Gallery/SUNY Old Westbury in 1985 and "Signs of Transition: 80s Art from Cuba" organized by Coco Fusco for the Center for Cuban Studies and Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art in 1988. An enthusiastic article by Lucy Lippard in *Art in America* reviewing the new Cuban art ("Made in USA: Art from Cuba," April 1986, 27–35) was also influential, as was the invitation (by curator Heidi Grundmann) to Flavio Garciandía to participate in the *Aperto* section of the 42nd Venice Biennale in 1986.

124. These are aims that artists have expressed on various occasions throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, and the history of this trajectory in Latin American art is especially marked. An important precedent for Pilón can be found in the Argentinian project *Tucumán arde* (1968): Rubén Naranjo, one of the participants, explained that project as an attempt to create "a space that opens coming from art, in which social reality is offered in a dimension that exceeds denunciation of the kind usually provided by social or political chronicles." Cited in Luis Camnitzer, *Contextualization and Resistance: Conceptualism in Latin American Art* (unpublished typescript, 2003), 152. The manifesto distributed at the *Tucumán arde* opening called for "total art, an art that modifies the totality of the social structure; an art that transforms, one that destroys the idealist separation between the artwork and reality; an art that is social, which is one that merges with the revolutionary fight against economic dependency and class oppression." Ibid., 153.

125. 1988–91. The group included Abdel Hernández, Ernesto Leal, Alejandro López, and Lázaro Saavedra.

126. Unattributed "author's note," in *Memoria: Cuban Art of the 20th Century,* ed. Veigas et al., 293.

127. The Pilón project took place during 1988 and 1989. The participants were Abdel Hernández, Lázaro Saavedra, Nilo Castillo, Alejandro López, Hubert Moreno, and the musician Alejandro Frómeta.

128. "The public that went to the galleries was practically the same, they were art students, the artists themselves, or people who in one way or another were connected with art, worked in it or were part of the institution of art. Everything was closed. Obviously, the artists had friends and maybe occasionally a lot of those friends visited the galleries. There were also students at the university who had nothing at all to do with art, physics students, mathematics students, or other subjects. And then there was a moment when there was a desire to open up a lot. They even did things outside the gallery as if trying to find another type of public." Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, March 20, 2002.

129. As Saavedra notes, "it was a kind of project that not only wanted to extend this investigation into new sites to produce art but also the process itself of the construction of the work, wanting to make it totally dependent on that new place; that is, starting from zero. In general, what had been done earlier was to always keep the

structures of production intact in the new contexts; we simply moved from one place where we were showing to another." Interview with the author, Havana, March 20, 2002.

130. Proyecto Paidea, "A manera de introducción," unpublished typescript dated July 26, 1989.

131. Ibid.

132. In Ernesto Leal's words, "in reality they were not interactions that were meant to improve concrete situations in particular places . . . it was, rather, a desta-bilizing work, work that was supposed to be totally destabilizing of structure, that was supposed to be a STOP, an aggression. 'Why is all this happening?' the people were asking, why do they let them do this? And later, perhaps they would be able to think about what their attitude was at that moment." Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

133. Proyecto Paidea, "Objetivos, tareas y programa," unpublished typescript.

134. "with creative liberty, and an organic commitment to the historical project of the emancipation and dis-alienation of man, the socialization of culture and the democratization of politics." Ibid.

135. Lázaro Saavedra likens this to "the cathartic phenomenon of theatre in ancient Greece, where art was a medium for presenting and criticizing problems that belong to us all. So here you went to a gallery to find that effect." Interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

136. In a meeting to discuss the project at the proposal stage, Gerardo Mosquera declared it the most revolutionary artistic proposal generated until that moment. Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

137. This is Ernesto Leal's phrase. Interview with the author, Havana, March 18, 2002.

138. Hart's support of the project was both strong and visible: "He went to Santiago de Cuba for the 20th of October, which is the Day of Cuban Culture and he made an official appearance in Pilón, in the Hotel Marea de Portillo; he sponsored a luncheon and we went and had a meeting with Armando Hart, in that place." Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

139. Saavedra explains the situation thus: "The conflict came to light with Tomás Esson's exhibition in the 23 y 12 Gallery that was censored, where the political structures of the Communist Party went over the Ministry of Culture—that is, there was an exhibition that was censored by the municipal government of the party, and the Minister of Culture wasn't able to prevent them from doing it. That is, he allowed it to be censored." Interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

Critic Iván de la Nuez explains the rift as follows: "This faction [i.e., Armando Hart, Haydée Santamaría, and Alfredo Guevara] supported patronage in the traditional middle class manner. It might even be said that their style came from that middle class which during the 1950s was never able to implement its own cultural program and practically used the revolution as a platform for carrying it out . . . Now at last . . . anti-Soviets but devoted to Fidel and Che Guevara, eager to connect with Latin America and Europe, this group was offered the chance to further cultural policy in the 'Cuban way,' which had raised such high hopes among leftist intellectuals in the West and in the Third World as a whole. While this faction took its mainly institutional positions, and the orthodox group took its mainly party or ideological positions the artists censured by one or another faction sought comfort and support in the rival camp, although taking care that their 'failings' stayed

within the bounds that both factions subscribed to." De la Nuez, "Al encuentro de los pasos perdidos," 69. In Guevara's view, the three more "liberal" institutions—his own ICAIC, Casa de las Américas, and the National Ballet—had been able to exempt themselves from the more hardline, persecutory practices because of the strength of their leadership (consisting of himself, Haydée Santamaría, and Alicia Alonso). See Ann Marie Bardach, *Cuba Confidential* (New York: Random House, 2002), 263.

140. Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, March 20, 2002.

141. Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, March 20, 2002.

142. Saavedra noted, in an unusually cryptic formulation: "Look, the group that went to Pilón might have been a homogenous group, but it would be interesting to investigate some day what the points of contact were among the five and what were the contradictory points." Interview with the author, Havana, March 20, 2002.

143. "We worked basically with the elements of the place, as much on the audio level, recordings we had made, things we had heard and written in the exhibition, and images, photographs—it was based mostly on documentary photographs of the place, the people, the area, all mounted into a big installation. The people painted, they put up texts, made things there, they began to paint each other—the young guys ended up plastered with paint, they made a kind of performance. But the exhibition was quickly closed. And the secretary of the party there, he didn't have the courage to censor the show, he ordered the secretary of the UJC (Union of Young Communists) to do it, and then later they finally called us and told us that the wisest thing we could do was to abandon the project." Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

144. The choice of Pilón was actually the idea of Marcia Leiseca, then the vice minister of culture, who, according to Saavedra, had a certain emotional attachment to the town because it had once been the home of Celia Sánchez, companion to Fidel Castro until her death. The cultural reanimation of Pilón, one of the poorest and most underdeveloped areas of the island, therefore may have connoted a reanimation in other terms, harking back to the most hopeful period of the revolution.

145. Lázaro Saavedra, interview with the author, Havana, December 12, 2002.

146. After about a year he resumed his artistic practice and continues to be a central figure in Cuban visual art today.

147. Among other things, little documentation remains of these earlier artists and works, and younger artists and students have learned the little they know of them mostly through oral histories—accounts, generally delivered by 1980s protagonists, that are almost certainly inflected by the nostalgia and sense of loss that those artists feel for the former moment.

148. Other, smaller-scale phenomena related to the deterioration of conditions in the country have also encouraged a new collectivism, such as the decline of art criticism, such that the collective has become, among other things, a forum for dialogue and critique that is unavailable elsewhere.

149. Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 238.

150. José Angel Toirac, interview with the author, Havana, December 22, 2002.

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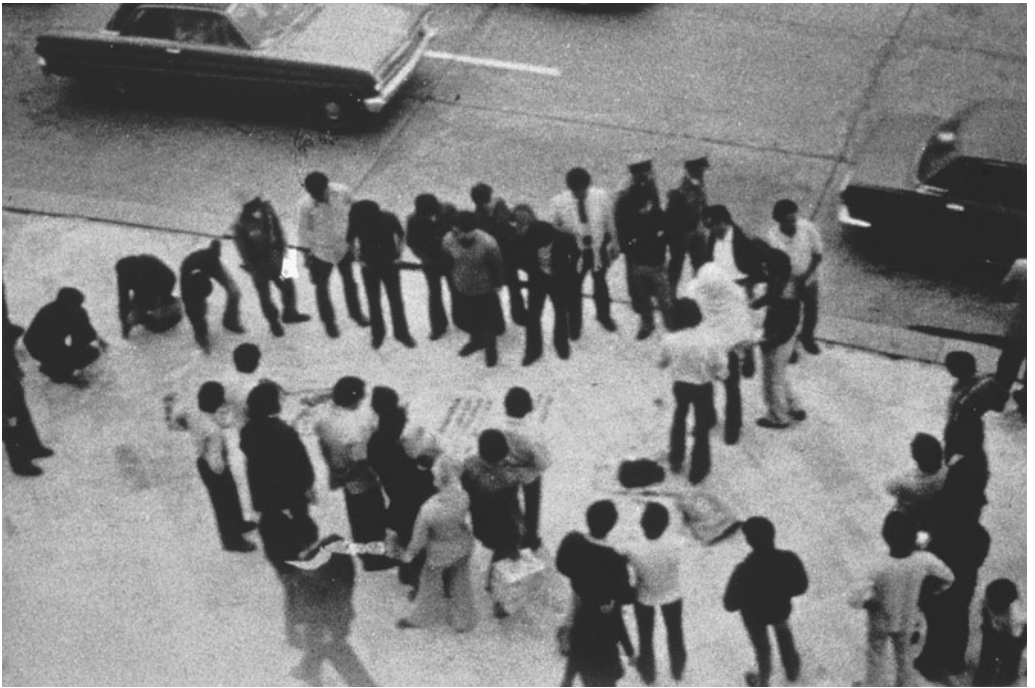
FIGURE 6.1. Proceso Pentágono, *El hombre atropellado* (A Man Has Been Run Over), action presented on a street near Bellas Artes, in Mexico City, during the exhibition "A nivel informativo" (On an Informational Level), 1973. Photograph courtesy of Víctor Muñoz.

6. The Mexican Pentagon: Adventures in Collectivism during the 1970s

RUBÉN GALLO

COLLECTIVISM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY MEXICO

Collectivism, in its various guises, shaped crucial aspects of twentieth-century Mexican culture and politics. The 1917 constitution, drafted in the final stages of the Mexican revolution, contained several articles promoting the collective organization of agriculture, business, and the economy; the most famous was article 27 instituting the *ejido,* or communally owned farmland, as the guiding principle of land redistribution. This article was meant to replace the greedy individualism that had become a trademark of the old regime—the presidency of Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico from 1876 until the revolution exploded in 1910—with a socialist legal framework emphasizing the well-being of the collective.

One of the tacit messages of the 1917 constitution was that individualism—especially in regard to owning property—was to blame for the social ills that led to the outbreak of the revolution in 1910. Land ownership was a compelling example: before 1910, most land was owned by a tiny elite who controlled most of the country's wealth and had tremendous influence in politics. Revolutionary fighters like Emiliano Zapata fought to break up *latifundia* and replace them with communally owned plots of land that would give impoverished peasants a means of subsistence. (One of Zapata's mottos was *La tierra es de quien la trabaja* [The land belongs to those who work it].)

In the years following the revolution, the zeal for collectivism extended beyond agriculture into other fields, including the economy (postrevolutionary governments nationalized factories and industries so that the means of production would be collectively owned by all Mexicans) and the arts. In the arts, the muralist movement—led by Diego Rivera and financed in large part by Minister of Education José Vasconcelos—emerged as the preferred postrevolutionary art form, in part because it replaced the

individualistic production and reception of art (a process that followed a capitalist model) with an art form that was collectively produced (a large team of painters and helpers was needed to paint a mural) and destined for collective reception (large crowds could stand in front of a mural and study its message). Starting in the 1920s, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) governments supported mural painting through hundreds of generous commissions and grants.

Paradoxically, though most murals were the work of collectives, they were signed by individuals, thus perpetuating the myth of the single author. The murals at Mexico City's Secretaría de Educación Pública, for example, were painted by a team of hundreds of painters, plasterers, manual laborers, and assistants—including well-known artists like Jean Charlot—yet they were signed only by Diego Rivera. It is one of the ironies of Mexican muralism that a movement predicated on collectivism and socialist values led to the glorification of a handful of individuals—Rivera, David Alfro Siqueiros, and Clemente Orozco—who would go down in history as *los tres grandes* (the three great muralists), a label that condemns to oblivion the numerous artists that collaborated in their projects.

In the 1930s there was a different experiment with collectivism in the arts: the workshop known as Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP), founded in 1937 by a handful of artists and devoted to printing posters, flyers, and other "graphics" with overtly political subjects. The TGP was founded by Leopoldo Méndez, Pablo O'Higgins, and Luis Arenal. Though its members came together to discuss political issues and their relation to art practice, most of them signed their works as individuals: for them collectivism was about political discussion and strategizing, but when it came to authorship, most members preferred to be known as individuals.[1]

During the 1950s and 1960s Mexican artists expressed little interest in collectivism. These two decades saw the rise of "the generation of rupture," a group of younger artists—including Manuel Felguérez and Fernando García Ponce—who broke with muralism and embraced both abstract painting and the myth of the single author. If murals were painted by collectives, the works of the rupture were painted by individuals; if the former aspired to represent the Mexican nation, the latter focused merely on the painter's subjective experiences. The shift to abstraction was a return to the Romantic myth of the creative genius.

THE GROUPS

The next wave of artistic experiments with collectivism did not come until the 1970s, with the emergence of a dozen artists' collectives known as *los*

grupos (the groups). These included Grupo Proceso Pentágono, Grupo SUMA, Grupo Tetraedro, and Taller de Arte e Ideología (Art and Ideology Workshop, TAI), which embraced collectivism both as a working method and as a political value. This is one of the most fascinating and least known periods in Mexican art, and most surveys either ignore it or devote, at most, a few sentences to these radical experiments with the processes of production and distribution.[2] Though their dynamics, working methods, and artistic production varied considerably, most of the groups shared a number of traits: their members were young and passionate about politics (especially the recent events that had shaken Latin America, including the 1973 U.S.-backed coup in Chile and the military dictatorship in Argentina); they created projects, usually on the street, that straddled the line between art and activism; and they saw collective organization—artistic and otherwise—as an important step toward building a socialist society. In contrast to the muralists, who were largely financed by state institutions (and used their work to further the ruling party's vision of Mexican history), these groups operated not only outside but also against most state institutions.

Felipe Ehrenberg, one of the founding members of Proceso Pentágono, argued that the most radical achievement of the groups was "the collectivization of artistic practice."[3] "Our findings," he wrote, "eroded concepts that were drilled on us in childhood (a powerfully individualist outlook, solitary work habits, a cult to alienation)." Producing work as groups rather than as individuals was "one of the world's most revolutionary achievements in the field of visual arts," Ehrenberg argued, and a practice that was linked to other utopian experiments in collectivism, including "the *ejido*, the kibbutz, the koljoz, and agricultural co-operatives."[4]

In Ehrenberg's view, participating in a group required members to change their work habits and develop a flexibility he praises as a poetics of collaboration. "Collective creation," he wrote, "can be compared . . . to [the techniques used by] jazz bands or Afro-Caribbean musicians, in which set structures provide a frame for improvisation."[5]

Most of the groups were founded in the 1970s—Proceso Pentágono was the first to arrive on the scene, in 1973, followed by Tetraedro in 1975, SUMA in 1976, and others, including the No Grupo (Non-Group) in later years—and disbanded during the 1980s. The peak of their fame came in 1977, when four groups were invited to represent Mexico at the Tenth Paris Biennale.

These collectives shared a concern with proposing strategies of resistance to the increasing brutality of the Mexican state. There were two important historical events that shaped the political atmosphere of 1970s Mexico in which these artists operated. The first of these events was the

Tlatelolco student massacre. On October 2, 1968, the Mexican army opened fire on a peaceful student rally in what became the bloodiest episode in post-revolutionary Mexican history. Several hundred students were killed and hundreds more were imprisoned. The government of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz tried to blame the students for the shootout, suggesting that communist agents at the service of the Soviet Union were attempting to subvert the Mexican government—a bogus charge that CIA and FBI reports quickly disproved.[6]

But Tlatelolco was not the last act of violent repression against peaceful protesters. Three years after the massacre, there was a second confrontation between students and the military. On June 10, 1971, an elite army unit known as Los Halcones (The Falcons), whose members had been trained abroad, opened fire on another group of students in Mexico City's downtown district. Fifteen students were killed and several hundred were wounded. The rest of the 1970s were marked by an increase in police brutality. Radical guerrillas sprung up in the countryside around Mexico City, and the government reacted by launching a "dirty war" against students and activists. Suspected "radicals" were arrested, tortured, or imprisoned, and hundreds "disappeared" after being detained for questioning.[7]

Ironically, these acts of repression were undertaken by a government that presented itself as an heir to the Mexican revolution, and that officially embraced socialist ideals. Police repression was most widespread during the governments of Luis Echeverría (1970–76) and José López Portillo (1976–82), the two most left-of-center presidents since the 1930s. While these two men officially embraced socialist causes—they were strong supporters of the Cuban revolution, expanded ties and cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union and the nations of the Warsaw Pact, denounced the U.S.-backed military coup in Chile, and granted political asylum to Chilean and Argentinean dissidents—their administrations had little tolerance for dissent at home and were quick to torture and imprison suspected radicals and activists.

As often happened during the PRI's seventy-one year rule (it governed Mexico uninterruptedly from 1929 to 2000), there was a complete disconnect between the party's official rhetoric (committed to furthering the utopian, social-minded goals of the Mexican revolution) and its actions, which during the 1970s were identical (though not in scale) to those practiced by the officially vilified dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. Indeed the PRI was so successful at concealing its repressive tactics that it was not until 2000, when the PRI lost the presidency to Vicente Fox, that the government's archives on Tlatelolco and the dirty war were opened and the details about the 1970s' violence became known.

It was against this background of repression and violence that the groups made their appearance in the 1970s. They shared an interest in communicating with people on the streets and exposing the criminal actions of the Mexican regime. Out of all the groups, Proceso Pentágono was the longest-lived, and the one that managed to articulate the most coherent artistic and political program. I would like to devote the rest of this chapter to analyzing three projects that demonstrate this group's working methods and political concerns: a 1973 street action, the group's project for the 1977 Paris Biennale, and a 1980 book publication.

PROCESO PENTÁGONO

Proceso Pentágono was founded in 1973, the year of the military coup in Chile, by Felipe Ehrenberg, Carlos Finck, José Antonio Hernández, and Víctor Muñoz (Figure 6.2). Initially, the group was formed to search for alternatives to the government-run museums and galleries in Mexico City—locales that Proceso Pentágono denounced as complicit, however indirectly,

FIGURE 6.2. Proceso Pentágono, 1977. *Left to right,* Víctor Muñoz, Carlos Finck, Felipe Ehrenberg, José Antonio Hernández. The members left an empty seat to represent the place "chance" occupies in their activities. Photograph courtesy of Víctor Muñoz.

with the government's policies of violent repression. In one of its documents, the group claimed that "working in a group, that is to say, as a collective, was a necessary step to confront both the state's bureaucratic apparatus that administers cultural life and the elitist mafias which—consciously or unconsciously—reproduce the dominant ideology."[8] One of Proceso Pentágono's most pressing concerns was to find alternative exhibition venues that could exist outside the "state's bureaucratic apparatus."

This refusal to participate in government institutions led the groups away from the museum—a decision that, as Gregory Sholette has shown, was taken by most activist artists around the world—and out on the street.[9] To drive this point home, Proceso Pentágono staged one of its first projects, "A nivel informativo" (On an Informational Level, 1973) on a street outside Mexico City's most official museum: the Palace of Fine Arts, a corny, pretentious, cake-like marble behemoth that was the last public project commissioned by dictator Porfirio Díaz before being ousted by the revolution in 1910.

"A NIVEL INFORMATIVO" (1973):
BRINGING ART OUT ON THE STREET

The venue for "A nivel informativo" was politically charged. More than any other government space, Bellas Artes, as the Palace of Fine Arts is known to city dwellers, illustrated the vast disconnect between cultural institutions and everyday life in the city. Bellas Artes stands in one of the liveliest and most vibrant working-class neighborhoods in the city—the Centro—but its interior is a cold, tomblike, marble gallery. Outside there are crowds of street vendors, book sellers peddling Marxist treatises carefully laid out on white sheets on the sidewalk, Indian women begging for money with their babies in tow, young couples making out, children screaming, and all kinds of people making a racket—young and old, rich and poor, employed and unemployed; inside, there are empty galleries illuminated by crystal chandeliers.

The street outside Bellas Artes is dirty, full of food, garbage, detritus left behind by the crowds; inside, the marble floors are kept spotless by an army of sweepers and cleaners. Outside, there is street culture: impromptu performers—fire-eaters, kids dressed as clowns, fortune-tellers—offering their services for a few pesos. Inside there is a ghostly space devoted to opera, ballet, and other spectacles of High Culture. Theodor Adorno once pointed out that the words "Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. They testify to the neutralization of culture," and nowhere is this more evident than around Bellas Artes: the street teems with life; the museum is a mausoleum, a tomb, a dead space.[10]

When Proceso Pentágono was invited to present a project at

Bellas Artes in 1973, the group accepted the invitation despite their opposition to government-run spaces. The members of the group decided to use the invitation as an opportunity to expose Bellas Artes as an institutional space completely out of touch with its surroundings.[11] Their project, "A nivel informativo," effectively opened up the Palace of Fine Arts to the street: while they did use some of the museum's galleries (they filled them with installations urging spectators to become active participants in both art and life, including an installation about passive viewers featuring a room filled with bound and gagged mannequins watching television), the bulk of the "exhibition" consisted of street actions designed to interact with passers-by.

Two of the actions staged on the street were designed to confront passers-by with the violence of city life. The first of these, titled *El hombre atropellado* (A Man Has Been Run Over, Figure 6.1), pointed to one of the gravest problems faced by Mexico City in the 1960s and 1970s: the modernizing boom that, coupled with an unprecedented population explosion, transformed a city of flaneurs into a megalopolis of freeways and overpasses. For this action, the members of the group went out on a street near Bellas Artes, laid out sheets of plastic on the sidewalk, drew the contours of human figures in red paint, and left them in the middle of the road to be run over by passing cars, which then left bright-red tire marks on the pavement—an unorthodox form of "action painting" that read like the bloody aftermath of a terrible traffic accident. As passers-by gathered around to watch the simulated bloodbath, members of the group asked each spectator to describe his or her reaction in one word and wrote down the responses on pieces of cardboard that they then arranged on the sidewalk. The result was an exquisite corpse that read as an ode to the real corpses left behind by traffic accidents.

For a second street action, titled *El secuestro* (Kidnapping, Figure 6.3), Proceso Pentágono staged a kidnapping on the streets adjacent to Bellas Artes. One of the group's members pretended to be a passer-by, mingling with the crowd. Suddenly, three men (the other members of Proceso Pentágono) ran toward him, threw a sack over his head, tied him up, and carried him away in front of an astonished crowd.

These actions effectively moved the core of the exhibition from the museum to the street. Visitors who were counting on spending a few peaceful hours looking at art in a marble-clad museum were instead asked to go on the street, confront the violence of city life, and engage in dialogue with unknown bystanders. The title of the project—"A nivel informativo"— was significant: it stressed that Proceso Pentágono was less interested in making art than in conveying information, and that the privileged site for a productive exchange of facts was not the rarefied space of the museum, but the chaotic streets and sidewalks of downtown Mexico City.

This fascination with the street as a site of the production and exchange of information was a constant theme in Proceso Pentágono's projects during its eighteen-year history. Felipe Ehrenberg explained that the group "sought, with a sense of urgency, to connect as directly as possible with the man on the street,"[12] and this was a desire shared by many of the other groups whose members chose to stage projects outdoors in the midst of urban chaos. In 1977, for example, the members of Grupo SUMA organized a project titled *Introducción a la calle* (Introduction to the Street)—consisting, as most of this group's activities did, of painting political messages and striking graphics on blank walls around the city—after declaring that "The man on the street, with his endless anxiety and increasing loss of identity, is our point of departure."[13]

But what were the origins of this sudden and widespread interest in the street? Why did artists decide en masse that Mexico City's streets were alive and its museums dead?

The sudden interest in "the street" was, in part, a reaction to the profound urban changes that affected Mexico City after 1950. The capital's population grew exponentially from 1.5 million inhabitants in 1940 to nearly

FIGURE 6.3. Proceso Pentágono, *El secuestro* (Kidnapping), action presented on a street near Bellas Artes, in Mexico City, during the exhibition "A nivel informativo" (On an Informational Level), 1973. Photograph courtesy of Víctor Muñoz.

5 million in 1960,[14] an explosion that was accompanied by a torrent of public works—freeways, expressways, overpasses, tunnels, and ring roads—that, much like Robert Moses's network of highways and bridges in New York, radically transformed the region's urban fabric. A city that had once been filled with flaneurs and lively streets rapidly became a megalopolis of traffic jams, insurmountable cement structures, and homicidal vehicles. Sidewalks were narrowed to make room for more cars, and tree-lined dividers were demolished to transform quiet streets into expressways. Neighborhoods were slashed by highways, making it impossible for residents to get across a few blocks without getting into a car and driving over a maze of bridges and overpasses.

José Joaquín Blanco, a writer who lived through these modernizing projects, has described their detrimental effects on city life in the 1970s:

> For several years, the city government has launched spectacular highway projects that benefit motorized individuals. This state of affairs, serious enough already, is becoming worsened by some even more alarming developments. The constructions favoring the individual transportation of the privileged not only take precedence over public transport for the masses, but positively hamper it, making it even slower and more tiresome; they destroy the lifestyles of the neighborhoods they cut through; they tend to ghettoize the poorer enclaves (some of which were not so badly off before, when a mixture of social classes brought with it better services). These areas are thus turning into quasi-underground slums, covered by fast, streamlined bridges carrying the privileged driver across and preventing him from touching or even seeing what lies beneath as he cruises in a matter of minutes from one upmarket zone to another. The proliferation of bypasses, urban freeways, expressways, turnpikes, and the like has a twofold purpose: to link together the city of affluence while insulating it from the city of indigence by means of the retaining walls of these grand constructions.[15]

The street, in other words, was under attack by modernizing forces: public spaces where random people could come together to meet, stage demonstrations, or simply congregate were being demolished to make way for freeways that discourage interaction (drivers, unlike pedestrians, are physically isolated from one another as they move through the city). Mexico City was becoming what Rem Koolhaas has called a "generic city"—a metropolis of highways and disconnected neighborhoods where "the street is dead."[16]

The attack against the street led not only to widespread alienation but, in some extreme cases, to death. The most striking example of the potentially devastating consequences of urban modernization was the student massacre of October 2, 1968, at Tlatelolco, which was made possible, in part, by urban planning and architecture. Tlatelolco is a middle-income housing project designed by Mario Pani—a well-connected architect whose vast projects so transformed Mexico City that he could be described as the Mexican Robert Moses—and its architecture played an important role in

the unfolding of the massacre. Pani, like Moses, was a disciple of Le Cor-busier, and most of his projects aspired to the modernist ideal of rational, efficient urban planning. Tlatelolco was a case in point: the housing de-velopment was erected on a piece of vacant land far from the city center and was accessible only by the newly constructed high-speed roads. The complex consisted of a dozen towers, separated by gardens. In interviews, Pani explained how everything from the number of trees in the gardens to the square footage of individual units was computed according to formu-las. Tlatelolco was to be one of the most efficient, rational housing projects in Mexico.

And also the most deadly. The flipside of Pani's architectural rationalism was an obsession with crowd control: like most modernist com-plexes, Tlatelolco had mechanisms of surveillance and control built into its design. There were few entrances to the complex and a set number of des-ignated public spaces. A series of gates allowed guards to quickly and effi-ciently cut off access to the buildings. During the student rally on October 2, 1968, these typically modernist elements transformed Tlatelolco into a deadly trap: the students had assembled in a plaza that was one of the few public spaces in the complex. When the first shots were fired, the guards locked the gates, and the students were trapped. They became easy targets for the military, whose soldiers were perched on top of the modernist blocks, from where they had an unobstructed line of fire. The students were in fact standing in a modernist panopticon, where they could be surveyed from almost any point in the complex.

It was the architecture of Tlatelolco that made the massacre so deadly. If the students had gathered, say, on the streets of the Centro (where Proceso Pentágono staged most of its actions), they would have had a mil-lion possibilities of escape: they could have fled though any of the numerous alleys, passages, or even subway entrances; they could have easily disappeared into the labyrinthine chaos of the Centro. But in Tlatelolco's modernist pan-opticon there was no exit. In the Centro, with its narrow streets and densely packed buildings, the military sharpshooters would have never found a van-tage point with an unobstructed line of fire.

Staged in the midst of these massively disruptive urban projects—from freeways to modernist housing projects—Proceso Pentágono's street actions should be read as an effort to remind the city's inhabitants about the devas-tating effects of modernization: violent crime (the kidnapping piece), the disappearance of the street as a space for flaneurs (the traffic accident per-formance), and the rising sense of isolation and alienation (for a 1974 proj-ect, the group placed a maquette of Mexico City inside a vitrine and then

filled it with rats, as if to suggest that the city's inhabitants were becoming like rodents trapped in a cage).[17]

But the group's projects did not merely point the finger at these problems; they also proposed ingenious, utopian solutions to many of these ills: many of Proceso Pentágono's actions were designed to counteract alienation—one of the inevitable symptoms of urban modernity. This effort began with the formation of the group: four artists renounced the isolation of individual production, a staple of capitalist production, in favor of collective organization. For them forming a group was part of "the struggle against bourgeois individualism and against the [ruling class's] vision of the world."[18] As in all big cities, pedestrians had little time to interact with one another as they rushed to and from their jobs, so Proceso Pentágono staged mock accidents and random acts of violence that jolted them out of their routine, made them pause for a second, and inspired them to talk to their fellow denizens—or at least to members of the group—about their feelings and anxieties. In projects like *El hombre atropellado*, dozens of random pedestrians had the experience of seeing their words—and their feelings of shock, fear, disgust—transmuted into art, written on the sidewalk, and inscribed onto the fabric of the city. A magic cure for urban alienation: random pedestrians were now coauthors of the city as text.

Above all, these outdoor projects were a serious effort to vindicate the street as a privileged site of social interaction. At a time when walkable streets were being replaced by freeways and vast modernist complexes like Tlatelolco, projects like "A nivel informativo" forced museum visitors—including those who traveled by car and were enthusiastic supporters of the government's "modernizing" urban projects—to experience the unpredictability, the intensity, and the violence of Mexico City's public spaces.

There is one final characteristic of "A nivel informativo" that I would like to examine: its deployment of an original form of institutional critique. Most of Mexico City's Groups were passionately opposed to government-run institutions, and they refused to exhibit their work in museums, galleries, or cultural centers, opting instead for streets or public plazas. Proceso Pentágono shared this aversion toward official institutions, but its members adopted a slightly different strategy: instead of refusing to show in government-run spaces, they accepted such invitations whenever they came, but only to lure visitors away from the museum and into the street. The group turned art into a Trojan horse—a clever ploy that allowed them to penetrate enemy territory in order to stage a fierce battle from within.[19] (Proceso Pentágono used a strategy that was the exact opposite of that preferred by the U.S.-based activist collectives analyzed by Gregory Sholette: many of these American

groups began showing in art spaces but found a more politically desirable alternative on the street; Proceso Pentágono, on the other hand, started by making projects on the street and later moved into the museum in an effort to crack it open.

THE 1977 PARIS BIENNALE

During its eighteen-year history, Proceso Pentágono participated in several museum-sponsored exhibitions, and the group always used its projects as Trojan horses designed to attack the institution from within. This strategy was most successful in the group's 1977 project for what at the time was one of the most respectable institutions in the international art world: the Paris Biennale, held every other year at the Palais de Tokyo.

The story of Proceso Pentágono's unlikely participation in this venerable European institution contains all the drama, suspense, intrigues, and plot twists of a good thriller. It all began in 1976, when the director of the Paris Biennale, Georges Boudaille, decided that the event was to include, for the first time, a section devoted to Latin American art. He entrusted the selection to a Uruguayan critic, Ángel Kalenberg, then director of the Museo de Artes Plásticas in Montevideo.

These were the days before the advent of the jet-setting international curator, and instead of flying all around Latin America to visit studios and select the works, Kalenberg asked local critics and curators to recommend the most interesting young artists in their countries and send him a selection of slides and CVs. In Mexico, he tapped Helen Escobedo, a young sculptor who was running the University's Museo de Ciencias y Artes and had transformed it into a showcase for young, experimental art.

Although Escobedo was initially asked to select individual artists, she convinced the Biennale organizers that the most interesting art projects in Mexico were being done by collectives and recommended that they invite four of the most politically engaged groups: Proceso Pentágono, SUMA, Tetraedro, and Taller de Arte e Ideología.[20]

The Biennale organizers accepted the proposal, and the story might have proceeded to a happy ending—an exhibition in Paris, international acclaim, museum shows in Europe and New York—were it not for Proceso Pentágono's deep-seated anti-institutionalism, which added a few unexpected twists to the plot.

As the time to travel the Paris drew nearer, the members of Proceso Pentágono grew increasingly suspicious of Ángel Kalenberg. On February 22, 1997, Felipe Ehrenberg circulated an open letter titled "Who is Ángel Kalenberg?" to the three other groups selected for the Biennale. Why,

Ehrenberg asked, had the Biennale invited a resident of Uruguay, a country governed by a military dictatorship, to oversee the Latin American selection? Was Kalenberg a puppet of Uruguay's right-wing regime? Did he have the moral authority and political vision to make a representative selection of Latin American artists? Which Chilean artists would he select, Ehrenberg asked, "those who are acceptable to the military junta, those who live in exile, or both?" Ehrenberg closed his letter by accusing Kalenberg of being an agent of "the murderous government of Uruguay" and one who, to make matters worse, wrote in "a pompously ornate and pretentious language."[21]

Ehrenberg's letter made it back to Kalenberg, who responded with a polite—if ornate and slightly affected—missive reassuring the groups of his honest intentions, of his commitment to art, and of his unwavering support of their politically charged work (though he never revealed his stance toward Uruguay's military government).[22]

Assuming the Mexicans had been appeased, Kalenberg went back to work on the catalog for the Latin American selection, for which he had grand ambitions. In a letter to Escobedo, he laid out his master plan: he would invite three distinguished intellectuals to write about the young artists included in the Biennale: Jorge Luis Borges from Argentina, Octavio Paz from Mexico, and Severo Sarduy from Cuba. It is easy to see what led Kalenberg to these three names: Borges was the most widely translated Latin American writer; Paz had written about Breton and Duchamp and was well respected in France; and Sarduy, a poet, novelist, and painter much admired by Roland Barthes, lived in Paris and was the only Latin-American member of the Tel Quel group.[23]

Kalenberg's plan was brilliant, though quite unrealistic. Who can imagine Borges—arcane bibliophile, explorer of logical fallacies, and lover of obscure philosophical systems—agreeing to write a text on Proceso Pentágono's staged kidnappings in Mexico City? Or Paz—Mexico's most refined modernist—analyzing a rat-infested maquette? Even Sarduy, who was much younger than Paz or Borges, had an artistic sensibility—he loved abstract art and action painting and named one of his novels after the CoBrA group— that would have been at odds with the Mexican projects.

When Proceso Pentágono heard about Kalenberg's plan for the catalog, their suspicions intensified. The group members immediately recognized a thread linking the three famous writers to Kalenberg's politics: at a time when Latin American intellectuals were deeply and bitterly divided over Cuba, Borges, Paz, and Sarduy were not among Castro's supporters. Borges, who was frail and old, never cared much about Cuban politics and failed to be seduced by Castro's charismatic personality; Paz, who like many Latin American intellectuals had initially supported the Cuban revolution,

had broken with Castro in the sixties to become one of the most vocal crit-
ics of Cuba's treatment of dissidents, writers, and homosexuals; and Sarduy,
a gay writer who had left Cuba soon after the revolution, became a perma-
nent exile in France after learning that Castro's government was imprison-
ing homosexuals in concentration camps.

Proceso Pentágono could only see the three writers as anti-Cuban.
Scandalized by what they perceived as a right-wing conspiracy, the four groups
sent a letter to the Biennale organizers demanding Kalenberg's ouster. Chief
among their complaints was the prospect of having Borges—"who recently
received an award from the hands of the Chilean military government"—
write about their art![24] More disturbingly, they thought they had uncovered
Kalenberg's hidden ideological agenda: "to use culture as a means to legitimize
military governments in Latin America—regimes that without exception
imprison, torture, and murder dissident artists." In addition to Kalenberg's
removal, the four groups demanded that the catalog texts be written by
authors of their choosing: Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario
Benedetti, three of Castro's staunchest supporters (although probably as un-
prepared and unwilling as Borges, Paz, and Sarduy to write about activist art).[25]

The Mexican press got wind of the struggle between the groups
and the Biennale, and most local critics were quick to side with the artists.
Raquel Tibol, Mexico's most prominent art critic and one-time secretary of
Diego Rivera, published a scathing article in *Proceso* defending the stance
of the groups. "It is paradoxical," she wrote, "to choose a blind man, Jorge
Luis Borges, a passionate defender of petty dictatorships, who give him medals
and homages, to write about something he cannot see." More important,
she praised the groups for standing up against the Uruguayan government:
"recent news about *Operation Condor* and the aggression against university
students add to our conviction that these young Mexican artists have taken
a just and timely posture." Tibol ended her article by applauding the groups'
"absolute refusal to collaborate in any way with the criminals who rule the
Southern Cone" and their stance against "the stomach-turning, blood-stained
Uruguayan tyrants."[26]

When the Biennale organizers got wind of the Mexican uprising
against Kalenberg, their response was tepid and bureaucratic. Boudaille sent
a laconic letter to the groups assuring them that the upcoming exhibition
was "an artistic event and not a political one" and urging them to behave
professionally.[27] The catalog, he declared, would go ahead as planned, and
Kalenberg would continue as head curator of the Latin American section.

The four groups responded by announcing their plans to publish
a "Biennale countercatalog" written by pro-Cuba intellectuals. (The groups
seemed unaware that at the time the Cuban government was in the midst

of a campaign of violent repression against dissidents that was as brutal as that of Operation Condor.) The Mexican groups went ahead and produced their countercatalog, a modest paperback with texts by García Márquez (the only famous writer to accept their invitation), Alberto Híjar (a Mexican professor of Marxist theory who was also a member of TAI), and Alejandro Witker (a Chilean exile) that also included visual documentation of the works produced by the four groups for the Biennale.

And what did García Márquez have to say about Mexican collectivism? Very little—his text was merely five paragraphs long and it demonstrated a complete misunderstanding of the groups' projects. He referred to the artists in the groups as "painters" and had nothing to say about their art. His text simply endorsed their political stance: "These painters were alarmed," he wrote, "that the Biennale organizers responded to their objections [against Kalenberg] with the argument that the event was apolitical. First point: during these trying times in our continent, as fascism advances toward us like a giant beast, one cannot do anything that is not political in one way or another. Second point: life has taught us that those who proclaim to be apolitical are really reactionaries ready to pounce."[28]

Ángel Kalenberg, for his part, did not do much better with his catalog. Borges and Paz—as any reader familiar with their work would expect—declined to write for the publication. Sarduy accepted, but sent a text titled "Un baroque en colère" (An Angry Baroque) that did not mention the artists selected and read like a random, jumbled fragment extracted from one of his many publications on the subject. Consider the following quote, which gives a clear idea of the general style of Sarduy's text: "If anamorphosis—the point at which perspective plunges into the illegible . . .—was used in the old baroque to codify a surplus that was often moral—allegory or *vanitas*—, it reappears in South American baroque without the trope of double meaning, reduced to a pure critical artifice and presented, beyond any didactic ambition, as a 'natural' technique: neither a deceptive shell nor an encoded landscape."[29] "Baroque" was certainly not the most appropriate label for street performances such as those staged by Proceso Pentágono.

Even worse was Kalenberg's own catalog text, a sentimental ode to Latin America as a land of noble savages. To understand the new art produced in the region, he wrote, critics need a new vision, "a vision that leaves behind Eurocentric ways of seeing, one that can judge using a criterion that is less gestaltic *[sic]*, and realizes that though we might have an incorrect use of syntax, we possess a life-giving sap that has dried up in Europe."[30] It is unfortunate that neither Kalenberg's catalog nor the "countercatalog" offered an in-depth analysis of any of the actual projects presented

by the groups, which included extremely provocative and politically charged works. Proceso Pentágono, for example, created an installation titled *Pentágono* (Pentagon, Figure 6.4) that showcased the culture of violence and repression that prevailed in 1970s Mexico.

THE BIENNALE PROJECT: *PENTÁGONO* (1977)

Pentágono consisted of a room in the shape of a pentagon that visitors could enter through various doors. Outside, the walls contained graphics and statistics illustrating the budget priorities of various Latin American countries
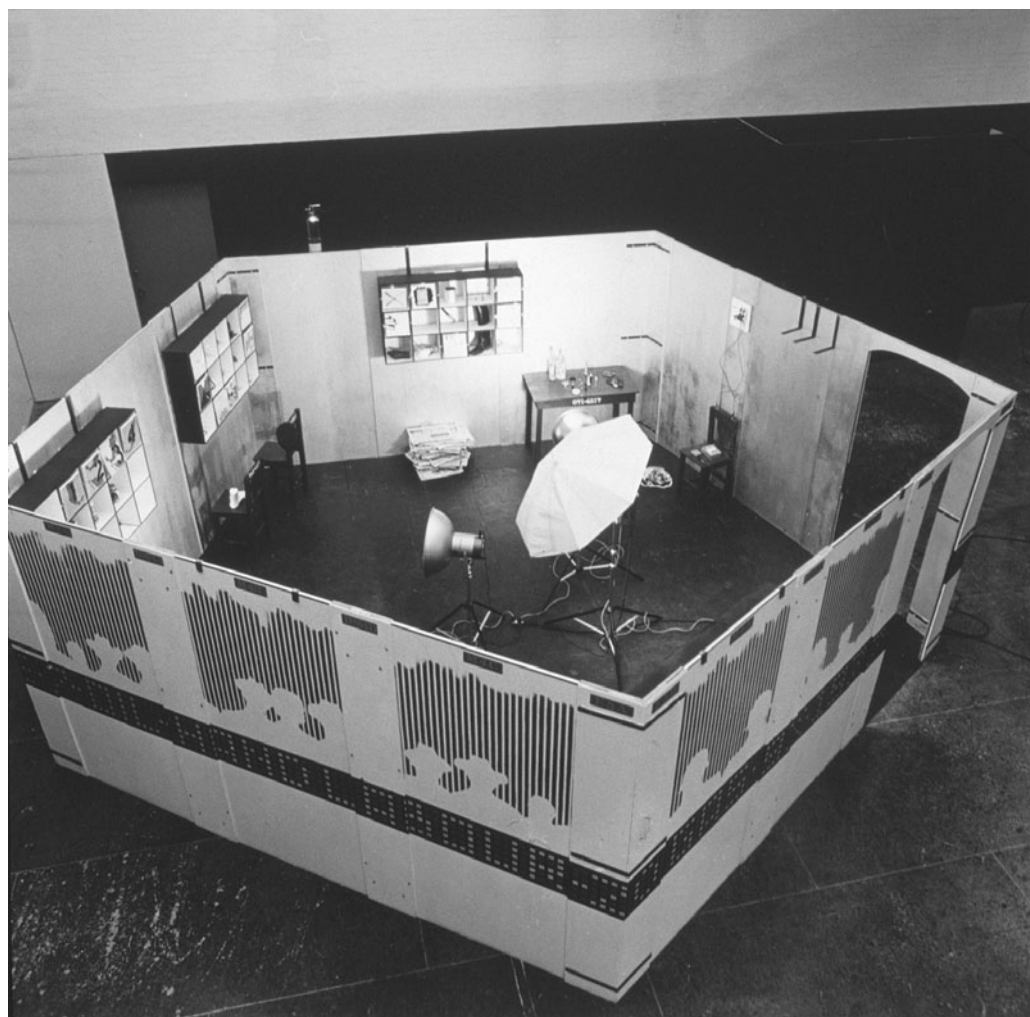
FIGURE 6.4. Proceso Pentágono, *Pentágono*, 1977. Installation presented at the Tenth Paris Biennale and at Museo de Ciencias y Artes, Mexico City. Copyright Lourdes Grobet. Photograph courtesy of Lourdes Grobet and Víctor Muñoz.

(including figures for recent spending on education, the military, and foreign debt servicing)—a presentation continuing the group's tradition of replacing art with information. "These five walls," the group explained in the countercatalog, "exhibit reprocessed information and data which are jealously guarded by the vaults and walls of the other PENTAGON."[31]

But the real shock came when visitors entered the roofless pentagon through one of several doorways: inside, the group re-created one of the torture chambers routinely used by the Mexican police. Against a wall there was a chair for the accused (visitors were encouraged to take a seat), surrounded by cables for the application of electric shocks; next to the chair, there was a table covered with bottles allegedly containing dangerous chemicals, including the corrosive acids used by torturers to disfigure their victims; in a corner, a pile of Mexican newspapers attested to the rising tension between the Mexican military and various guerrilla groups—whose members, when captured, were immediately subjected to the type of tortures that surrounded the visitor to *Pentágono*. Other elements scattered throughout the installation "alluded to [Latin American] dictatorships" and to "the imperialist policies of the United States in Latin America," as Dominique Liquois has explained.[32]

In the same way that previous projects like "A nivel informativo" sought to confront Mexicans with the violent reality of the street, *Pentágono* confronted the multitude of Biennale visitors with the shocking reality of Mexican political life. At a time when Mexico used its foreign policy to promote itself as a champion of human rights and haven for political refugees from military dictatorships, Proceso Pentágono's project showed the world— or at least the art world—the country's darker side: the torture, "dirty war," and disappearances engineered by the ruling party to maintain its hold on power.

Pentágono was one of the group's most forceful projects, and one that could be read as the clearest articulation of the group's political and artistic manifesto: this piece embodies the group's conviction that museums, galleries, and art spaces should be used as platforms to disseminate information. The focus on torture illustrated the group's insistence on confronting the spectator with the violence that characterized daily life in Mexico. And *Pentágono* is the perfect example of how most of the group's activities were directed against a single enemy: the PRI, Mexico's ruling party, and its mystification of the country's political reality.

In 1979, Proceso Pentágono created a slightly different version of *Pentágono*. The PRI was about to celebrate fifty years of existence (the party had been created by Plutarco Elías Calles in 1929), and the government had planned three days of rallies, conferences, and speeches. Proceso Pentágono
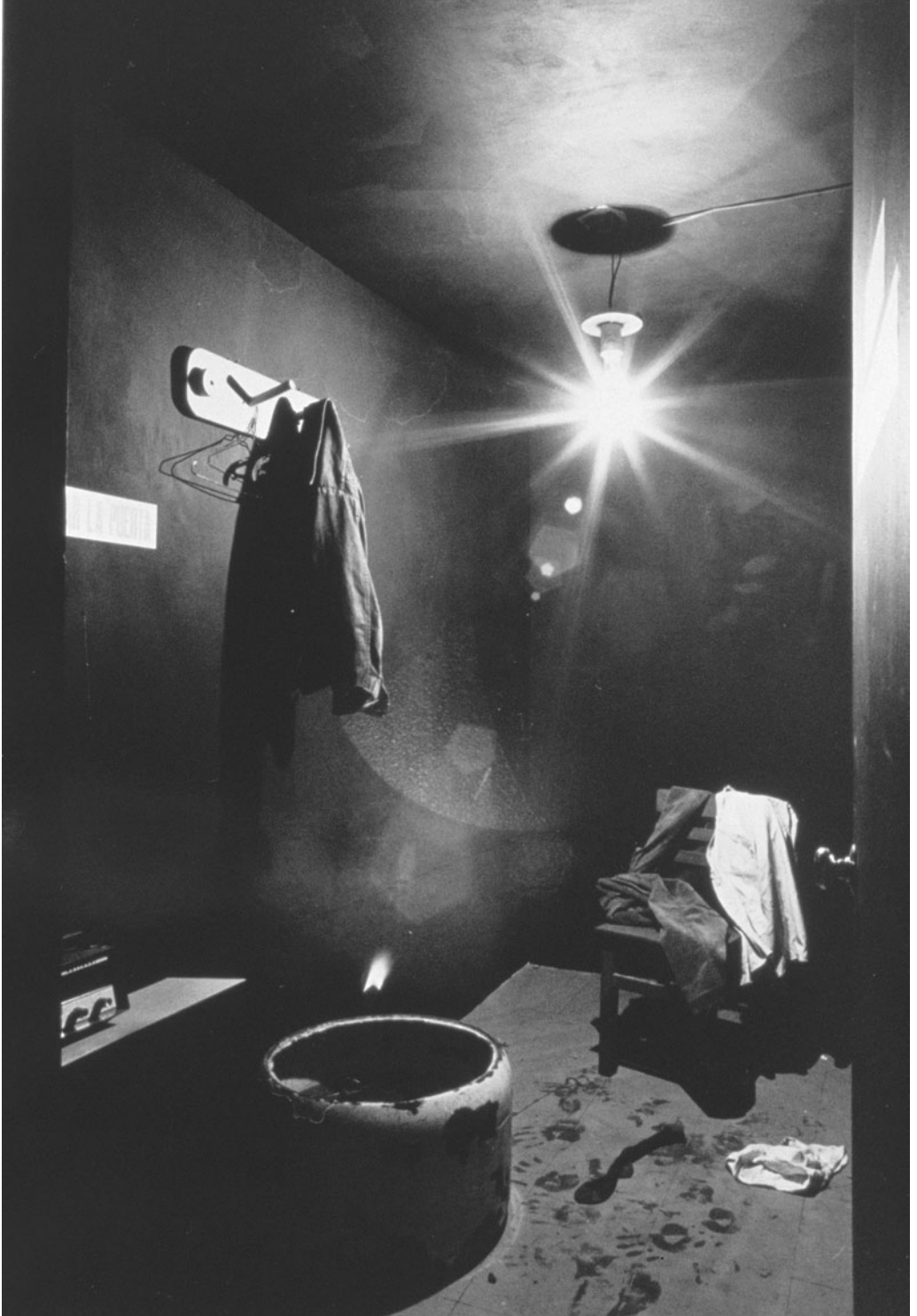
FIGURE 6.5. Proceso Pentágono, *Proceso 1929*, 1979. Installation view, Mexico City, Auditorio Nacional. Copyright Lourdes Grobet. Photograph courtesy of Lourdes Grobet and Víctor Muñoz.

contributed to the celebrations by creating an installation in Mexico City's Auditorio Nacional, a vast arena where party leaders planned to hold some of its events. Like *Pentágono,* this new project, titled *Proceso 1929* (1929 Process, Figure 6.5) recreated the interior of a police station, complete with torture devices, but this time it was created on a much larger—and much more disturbing—scale than in Paris.

      Proceso 1929 was a vast installation, covering over twelve hundred square feet. It was a cavernous succession of rooms, re-creating the atmosphere of a Mexico City police station. The first room was an office containing all the usual signifiers of Mexican bureaucracy: a desk with a phone, a portrait of the president (though his face has been cut out), various signs on the door forbidding visitors and strangers—"personas ajenas," as they are called in Mexican bureaucratese—from entering. Other rooms were more sinister: there was a blackened torture dungeon, complete with a bucket of dirty water for submerging the suspect's head (a horrific torture method known as "the submarine"); and another room in which torture devices have been neatly arranged on the walls. The labyrinthine installation was so brutal in its realism that panicked government officials shut it down during the three days of official celebrations.[33]

THE BIENNALE: *EXPEDIENTE BIENAL X*

But let us return to the Biennale. If Proceso Pentágono created *Pentágono* for the Biennale, the group also produced another piece *about* the Biennale experience. Three years after participating in the Paris Biennale, the group published a pamphlet called *Expediente Bienal X* (Figure 6.6). The book, printed on cheap paper, included copies of all letters, responses, and newspaper clippings generated or exchanged between Proceso Pentágono and the Biennale organizers. Most of the documents relate to the group's inquiries about Ángel Kalenberg and his relationship to Uruguay's military government. If the Biennale aspired to show Europeans the work of Mexican artists, *Expediente* did just the opposite: it revealed to the Mexican public the workings of the venerable Parisian institution.

      Expediente opens with a brief introduction by Felipe Ehrenberg, who presents the book as evidence of a "foiled plot" against the Mexican groups. "This dossier," he writes, "is a weapon designed to unmask the jackals, to convince the skeptics, and to urge all artists not to become passive participants in this type of 'prestigious' events, but to use them as one should."[34]

      The publication offers a fascinating insight into the dealings between the artists and the Biennale organizers, and allows the reader a privileged view at how Boudaille and Kalenberg responded to the artists' questions,
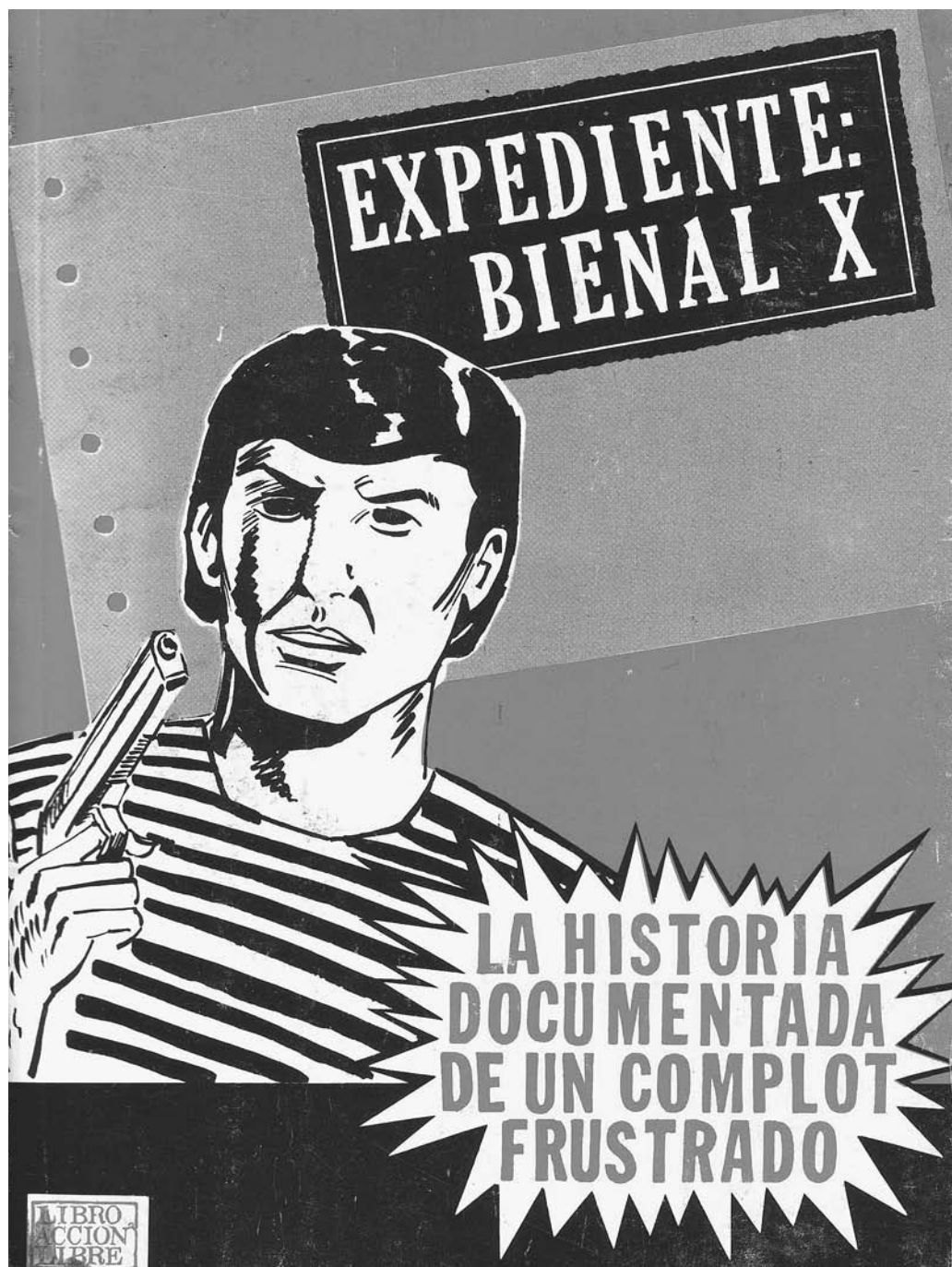
FIGURE 6.6. Proceso Pentágono, *Expediente Bienal X* (Mexico City: Editorial Libro Acción Libre, 1980). Photograph courtesy of the author (Rubén Gallo).

criticisms, and attacks. Perhaps the most striking document is a letter from Georges Boudaille chastising the four groups for being so difficult and arguing that the Biennale was an artistic event and not a political one.[35]

Expediente reveals the process through which art institutions like the Biennale can neutralize the political value of works of art—even those with an overt political content, like Proceso Pentágono's Pentágono. The Biennale had accepted Pentágono, one of the most politically charged pieces ever produced in Mexico, yet its officials treated it no differently from the abstract paintings and kinetic sculptures that formed the bulk of the Latin American selection: it became yet another artwork that needed to be selected, cataloged, transported, installed, and inaugurated. In the letters published in the Expediente, Kalenberg and Boudaille come across not as rightist boogie monsters intent on censoring radical art, but as cold bureaucrats concerned only about their exhibition and impervious to the wider political implications of artists' projects. Their letters strike the reader with the "banality of the art institution," to paraphrase Hannah Arendt's famous dictum about "the banality of evil."[36]

Proceso Pentágono, on the other hand, exhibits a much more consistent position throughout the entire exchange. In the same way that their piece, Pentágono, sought to reveal the violent reality behind the PRI's facade of tolerance, their attacks against Kalenberg and Boudaille aimed to expose the political affiliations—from ties to military regimes to the event's neutralizing effect on individual art projects—hidden behind the Biennale's status as an apolitical artistic event. Their "difficult" questioning of Kalenberg, his politics, and his motives was simply an extension of the critical impulse behind a work like Pentágono.

But why did the artists of Proceso Pentágono, despite their dislike of the organizers, and their politics, decide to participate in the Biennale after all? I would argue that this was yet another Trojan-horse strategy, comparable to the group's decision to exhibit in a museum for "A nivel informativo." As they had done with Bellas Artes, the artists penetrated into the bowels of the Biennale in order to attack it from within. In this case their attack consisted not in diverting visitors to the street, but in exposing the inner workings and political affiliations of the revered Paris Biennale through the publication of Expediente Bienal X—a document that has allowed this author to narrate the complicated plot twists of this story.

PROCESO PENTÁGONO AND INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

Readers might wonder how Proceso Pentágono's actions relate to projects undertaken by artists north in other countries. Street actions like El hombre

atropellado and *El secuestro* recall projects by American activist collectives like the Guerrilla Girls, the Art Worker's Coalition (AWC), and Artists and Writers Protest (AWP). In 1969, for example, AWC and AWP staged a "Mass Anti-[Vietnam] War Mail-in" addressed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. For this action, group members—including Lucy R. Lippard—stood in line at the post office and flaunted their packages, which included a papier-mâché bomb; they carried body bags inscribed with the number of American and Vietnamese casualties; and, in a strategy that could be fruitfully contrasted to Proceso Pentágono's fake kidnapping in Mexico City, members of the AWC mailed an invitation to a meeting to discuss "plans to kidnap Kissinger"—an event that attracted the attention of the FBI.[37]

Other projects by Proceso Pentágono seem closer in spirit to North American examples of institutional critique. The publication of *Expediente Bienal X*, for example, follows many of the same strategies deployed by Hans Haacke in his *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees* (1974). Haacke's project consisted of displaying a series of simple text panels tracing the business connections of the Guggenheim trustees. It showed, for instance, that two museum trustees and a Guggenheim family member served on the board of the Kennecott Copper Company, a transnational corporation that owned many Chilean mines and that had been criticized by Salvador Allende as draining the country's resources.[38] This simple presentation of research demonstrated that the Guggenheim Museum, far from being an apolitical art institution—as its director, Thomas Messer, had claimed during the 1971 controversy generated by the cancellation of Haacke's *Shapolsky et al.* project ("this museum," he wrote, "was not to engage in extra-artistic activities or sponsor social or political causes")—was in fact sustained by individuals with very clear and very powerful political connections.[39]

Out of Proceso Pentágono's many anti-institutional projects, the publication of *Expediente Bienal X* was closest in spirit to Haacke's *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees*. Both of these projects transform art into information; both unearth data about the individuals behind art institutions; and they both demonstrate that museums and biennales are never apolitical but, on the contrary, attempt to conceal their political affiliation behind a screen of artistic autonomy. Haacke demonstrated that the Guggenheim Museum was financially linked to Pinochet's repressive regime, while Proceso Pentágono proved that the Paris Biennale was institutionally tied to Uruguay's military dictatorship. In both cases, these projects brought to light what the art institutions had concealed as "extra-artistic" matters.

There are also some important differences: while Haacke never managed to show his "real-time social systems" at the Guggenheim, Proceso Pentágono did show *Pentágono* at the Biennale and used this experience as

material for *Expediente*. And while both Haacke's and the Mexican artists' projects zeroed in on the individuals behind the institution, Haacke's exposure of the Guggenheim's trustees was the work of an individual, while *Expediente* was the work of an artists' collective. Unlike Haacke's piece, Proceso Pentágono's project questions the politics of individualism by suggesting a number of provocative questions: Why is it that art institutions often conceal the role played by individual administrators behind a facade of institutionalism? Why is it that museums have always favored art authored by individuals over collective, collaborative projects? Does the nature of collective organization threaten the structures of museums, biennales, and other artistic institutions?

CONCLUSION

A fascination with collectivism—as an organizational principle, political weapon, and utopian value—characterized all of Proceso Pentágono's works. And collectivism is closely related to the three themes I have discussed in the group's production: the celebration of the street, the focus on information, and the Trojan-horse strategy of institutional critique.

By staging many of their actions on the street (as in *El hombre atropellado* and *El secuestro*), the members of Proceso Pentágono proposed a remedy against the alienation generated by the numerous modernizing projects of the 1950s and 1960s. At a time when freeways and other projects were transforming the capital into a city of individuals cut off from one another, the group's projects encouraged random people to walk on the streets, think critically, and interact with one another. These actions aspired to transform spectators into a collective of engaged citizens.

By shifting the focus away from "art" and toward "information" (as the group did in "A nivel informativo") the members of Proceso Pentágono distanced themselves from the Romantic ideal of the artist as individual. They moved away from the nineteenth-century concept of the "artist" and embraced the twentieth-century ideal of the "cultural worker," as group members preferred to call themselves. Through their shift in terminology, the artists in Proceso Pentágono not only suggested a provocative opposition—art is done by individuals; information is processed by cultural workers—but they also greatly expanded the social context of their activities: they related their projects to other forms of collective organization, including labor unions and political parties. In 1978, for instance, members of Proceso Pentágono helped found the Mexican Front of Groups of Cultural Workers, a hybrid organization that was part labor union and part artists' collective.[40]

And lastly, the Trojan-horse strategy deployed by Proceso Pentágono in projects like "A nivel informativo" and *Expediente Bienal* X fostered collectivism in a most unorthodox way. The group could have refused to show in Bellas Artes, and it could have withdrawn from the Paris Biennale, but it decided to stay in order to attack these institutions from within. Had the group withdrawn, it would have isolated itself from institutions; its decision to participate while criticizing the institution, on the other hand, fostered discussion, debate, even direct confrontation between the group's members and Biennale officials. As Ehrenberg argued, artists should neither become "passive participants" in nor cut off all ties with the institution; they should "use" their participation in these events for political purposes—in this case for the purposes of forming a collective. Through the heated arguments generated by Proceso Pentágono's criticisms, Kalenberg and Boudaille were brought into the dynamics of the collective—they were forced to do what the members of Proceso Pentágono did at every meeting: argue and fight (no one ever said working collectively was always agreeable!).

In their utopian faith in the power of collectivism, the members of Proceso Pentágono shared the spirit of the revolutionaries who drafted the 1917 Constitution. As Ehrenberg noted, the groups had much in common with "the *ejido*, the kibbutz, the koljoz."

NOTES

1. On the TGP, see *60 años: TGP* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1997).

2. See, for example, the entry on "Mexico: Painting, graphic arts and sculpture, c. 1950 and after," in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (New York: MacMillan, 1996), 390.

3. Felipe Ehrenberg, "En busca de un modelo para la vida," in *De los grupos, lo individuos*, exhibition catalog (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1985), unpaginated. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. See the documents on the Tlatelolco massacre assembled by the National Security Archive, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/index.htm.

7. See, for example, "La desmemoria de Echeverría," *Proceso*, June 11, 2002.

8. "Grupo Proceso Pentágono," in *Presencia de México en la X Bienal de París, 1977* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1977), unpaginated.

9. "The only avenue perceived to be open to those who would pursue a politically engaged art was one that led directly out of the museum." Gregory Sholette, "News from Nowhere: Activist Art and After, a Report from New York City," *Third Text* 45 (1998–99): 45–62.

10. Theodor Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," in *Prisms* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), 175.

11. The group was invited by Raquel Tibol, the prominent art critic, who had been commissioned to curate an exhibition of young artists. Víctor Muñoz, personal communication, January 30, 2004.

12. Ehrenberg, "En busca de un modelo para la vida."

13. Raquel Tibol, "La calle del grupo SUMA," *Proceso* 15 (February 12, 1977).

14. Néstor García Canclini, *Cultura y comunicación en la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1998), 2:15.

15. José Joaquín Blanco, "Panorama bajo el Puente," in *Función de medianoche* (Mexico City: Era, 1981), 62–63.

16. Rem Koolhaas, "The Generic City," in *S, M, L, XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 1253.

17. The piece was called *Las ratas (The Rats)* and it was presented at the exhibition "El arte conceptual frente al problema latinoamericano" [Conceptual Art and the Latin-American Question], held at the University's Museo de Ciencias y Artes, Mexico City, in 1974.

18. "Grupo Proceso Pentágono."

19. In a different context, Lucy R. Lippard has discussed the "Trojan horse" as a metaphor for activist art. "Maybe the Trojan Horse was the first activist artwork," she writes. Lucy R. Lippard, "Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power," in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 341.

20. Códice, a fifth group, was invited to the Biennale at the last minute. The members of Proceso Pentágono claim that the group was an invention of cultural bureaucrats in order to sneak their artists, who had worked as individuals until then, into the exhibition.

21. Felipe Ehrenberg, "¿Quién es Ángel Kalenberg?" in *Expediente Bienal X: La historia documentada de un complot frustrado* (Mexico City: Editorial Libro Acción Libre, 1980), 27–31.

22. Ángel Kalenberg, letter to Helen Escobedo, March 9, 1977, in *Expediente Bienal X,* 41–43.

23. Ibid.

24. Grupo Tetraedro, Grupo Proceso Pentágono, Grupo SUMA, Grupo Taller de Arte e Ideología, letter to Georges Boudaille, April 21, 1977, in *Expediente Bienal X,* 53–57.

25. Ibid., 55.

26. Raquel Tibol, "México a la Bienal de París en línea directa," *Proceso* 30 (May 30, 1977); reprinted in *Expediente Bienal X,* 77.

27. Georges Boudaille, letter to Grupo Proceso Pentágono et al., May 3, 1977, in *Expediente Bienal X,* 61–62.

28. Gabriel García Márquez, untitled text, in *Presencia de México en la X Bienal de París,* unpaginated.

29. Severo Sarduy, "Un baroque en colère," in *Amérique Latine: 10e Biennale de Paris* (Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 1977), 8.

30. Ángel Kalenberg, "Hoy por hoy," in *Amérique Latine,* 3.

31. "Grupo Proceso Pentágono."

32. Dominique Liqouis, *De los grupos, los individuos* (Mexico City: Museo de arte Carrillo Gil/INBA, 1985), 29.

33. Víctor Muñoz, personal communication, January 30, 2004.

34. Felipe Ehrenberg, "Prólogo," in *Expediente Bienal X,* 6.

35. Boudaille, letter to Grupo Proceso Pentágono et al., 61–62.

36. Arendt argued that the officials who kept the Nazi machinery running operated not out of evil intentions, but out of an extremely banal, bureaucratic attitude of following orders and getting the job done. See her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin, 1964).

37. Lucy R. Lippard, *A Different War* (Bellingham, Wash.: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, 1990), 24.

38. On Haacke's project, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate and the Museum," in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 159–92.

39. Ibid., 165.

40. Liquois, *De los grupos, los individuos*, 32.

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FIGURE 7.1. Demonstration/performance by the Art Workers Coalition at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1971, in support of AWC cofounder Hans Haacke, whose exhibition was canceled by the museum's director over his artwork *Shapolsky et al., Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971.* Photographer unknown.

7. Artists' Collectives: Focus on New York, 1975–2000

ALAN W. MOORE

The question of collectivism in recent art is a broad one. Artists' groups are an intimate part of postmodern artistic production in the visual arts, and their presence informs a wide spectrum of issues including modes of artistic practice, the exhibition and sales system, publicity and criticism, even the styles and subjects of art making. Groups of all kinds, collectives, collaborations, and organizations cut across the landscape of the art world. These groups are largely autonomous organizations of artistic labor that, along with the markets and institutions of capital expressed through galleries and museums, comprise and direct art. The presence of artistic collectives is not primarily a question of ideology; it is the expression of artistic labor itself. The practical requirements of artistic production and exhibition, as well as the education that usually precedes active careers, continuously involves some or a lot of collective work. The worldwide rise in the number of self-identified artist collectives in recent years reflects a change in patterns of artistic labor, both in the general economy (that is, artistic work for commercial media) and within the special economy of contemporary art. This has to do primarily with technological change in the means available to art, but also change in the scope and purview of contemporary art. At the same time, a public is growing for art produced outside the paradigm of individual authorial production.

This chapter considers a range of artistic collectivity, principally in New York City,[1] and mostly politicized. Two groups are discussed in more detail, the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) and Group Material. Most artists' collectives formed up behind social movements; they were produced as a result of them and were influenced by them. Artists' groups are usually thought of in connection with politicized art. A clear instance of this is the Art Workers Coalition of New York City, a large, heterodox, and short-lived group

formed in 1969. Thereafter, conceptions of political art changed and broadened. During the last decades of the twentieth century, artists moved regularly from the gallery and museum into the public sphere, and theory moved confidently from aesthetic autonomy to engagement with the social. Within the broad field of visual arts production, this reorientation was accomplished in large measure by the efforts of artists' groups of all kinds. One of the most prominent was the exhibiting collective Group Material, formed in 1979, the second example considered in more detail in this chapter.

It is neither easy nor especially useful to separate collectivity in the visual arts from the welter of group activities in multiple media that made up the war-resisting counterculture of the 1960s. This was a cultural revolution bound up with conceptions of political revolution. Within it collectivity was a general condition of both cultural and political work. The powerful popular models of collectivity that impacted artistic production then and remain influential today did not respect the lines of artistic disciplines. By the mid-1960s two spectacular instances of collectivity on the east and west coasts of the United States had been celebrated in the news media. Based in San Francisco during 1965 and 1966, the rock 'n' roll band Grateful Dead toured with writer Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters performing LSD "acid tests" for (and on) ecstatic crowds.[2] In New York, at nearly the same moment, Andy Warhol ran his silver Factory, producing a stream of silkscreened paintings and films blandly descriptive of an amphetamine-driven ambisexual milieu.[3] These two modes of collectivity, warm and cool, experiential and productivist, time-based and material, both received extensive mainstream press coverage and valorized the cultural collective idea in the popular imagination.

These widely publicized instances of collectivity reflect not only the neotribal 1960s culture,[4] but also the collective nature of much artistic production. Yet the clearest lines of sight on modern collective social formations in art are probably afforded by examining political groups. As the title of this volume indicates, collectivism is a continuous tradition as artists on the left, inspired first by anarchists and then by the ideals of the Soviet Union, sustained modernist collectivism in Europe.[5] With socialist revolutions in China in 1949, models of state socialism pervaded the postcolonial Third World. The arising of the U.S. civil rights movement against southern apartheid, together with the victory of Fidel Castro in Cuba in 1959, inspired artists throughout the Americas. In 1968 an international wave of student rebellion shook both capitalist and socialist states, bespeaking the new political styles of a postwar generation coming of age. The propaganda styles and guerrilla tactics used in insurgent Third World liberation struggles were expressed in much artistic collectivity.

        In the ghettoes of U.S. cities, as factories closed and poverty spread, Black Panthers, Young Lords (a Puerto Rican movement), and Brown Berets (Chicanos) formed militant revolutionary political collectives in the 1960s and 1970s. Artists of color responded to this broad-based nationalist organizing by forming print-making and mural collectives to back the movement and cultural centers to carry out cultural education.[6] These initiatives, supported and shaped by state and federal grants, resulted in a network of community art centers, some of which persist in the regional art worlds of the United States like raisins in tapioca pudding.

        The Chicano[7] and black liberation muralists sought to image change—to promote solidarity and positive social values in ghetto environments. They often worked with imagery of an ancient past to build racial pride through a recovery of historical culture. The mythic past of Aztlan, the great lost Mexican nation of which the U.S. southwest formed a part, figures in the murals of Los Angeles, San Diego, San Antonio, and Tucson. Motifs of the indigenous Taino peoples of Puerto Rico mark the graphic work of the Taller Boricua in New York's Harlem. The work of these groups was often visible on the streets of their neighborhoods, asserting the image at least of local control over the urban space of the ghetto.[8] Much of the work was also well known to the movements that spawned these groups through the nationwide network of underground newspapers. It was only dimly visible in mainstream media, however, and largely unsupported by museums and cultural institutions. It was part of the counterculture—albeit a largely segregated part—a blanket term applied to the youth culture of the 1960s by social critic Theodore Roszak in a book of the same name. Roszak and others noted the collective trends among the generation of the late 1960s: the homogenizing psychic influence of shared drug experience and rock 'n' roll music concerts, the influence of social movements based in ideas of equality and freedom, and, finally, the sheer press of demographics as the postwar baby boom of young people entered the world of work and culture.

        Of the activist cultural groups, those comprised of visual artists were less known in their time than the theater troupes. The San Francisco Mime Troupe and Teatro Campesino in the West and, in the East, the Bread and Puppet Theatre were highly visible through the close support roles they played at large demonstrations. The Bread and Puppet Theatre was started by sculptor Peter Schumann to support "ban the bomb" demonstrations in 1962, and their performances are heavily based on props, particularly giant puppets.[9] From their home community in Glover, Vermont, the troupe remains a visible part of the peace and global justice movement and tours the country and the world. They help support themselves through the sale of "cheap art," posters, prints, and paintings that are outgrowths of making props.

FIGURE 7.2. *Ah! The Hopeful Pageantry of Bread and Puppet,* a film about the Bread and Puppet Domestic Resurrection Circus shot between 1990 and 1998, by Dee Dee Halleck and Tamar Schumann. Released 2005. Production still by Ron Simon. Courtesy of Dee Dee Halleck.

Much of this countercultural collectivity came to bear on the world of high art in New York with the coalescence of the Art Workers Coalition in 1969. This group began with an action in the Museum of Modern Art[10] protesting a violation of artists' rights. The well-organized self-removal of a sculpture by kinetic artist Takis brought agitated museum officials out to talk to the artist and his supporters. This and subsequent events were closely covered in the *New York Times,* as well as the "underground" weeklies *Village Voice* and the *East Village Other,* and the group's meetings swelled.

This all followed on the May 1968 "events" in Paris, an insurrection in which the New York–based Living Theatre played an active role. Sit-ins at the Venice Biennale and takeovers of art schools by their students in England led New Yorkers to feel they "ought to be doing something."[11]

The AWC was an antihierarchical, democratically open organization of artists. They drew up an agenda to transform the art world and pressure museums to change. The demands of the group were grounded in the civil rights struggle—equal exhibition opportunities for artists of color and

women and expanded legal rights for all artists. This reform agenda was summarized, refined, and deranged during a freewheeling "Open Hearings" event in which artists and critics spoke.[12]

Like a "great spinning wheel," as Jon Hendricks called it, the AWC spun off and recirculated other artists' groups. These included the band of Puerto Rican artists who went on to found El Museo del Barrio and the group of feminists called Ad Hoc Women Artists that struck the Whitney Museum. Faith Ringgold recalled the scene at the coalition meeting space, Museum: A Project for Living Artists. This was a big loft space on lower Broadway where artists, both famous and unknown, sat around in a circle. "To find out what was really going on in the art world, you had to go."[13]

The AWC was taken seriously by established interests because it included so many prominent artists and critics. Among them were minimal sculptor Carl Andre, technology artist and Zero group member Hans Haacke, Sol Lewitt, critic Lucy Lippard,[14] and curator Willoughby Sharp. Its emergence marked the beginning of a period of substantial change in art institutions in New York City. The AWC itself split in early 1970. One faction merged with the movement against the Vietnam War, while another faction persisted for many years. The Art Workers Community was an artists' service organization, offering insurance and a credit union and publishing the *Art Workers News*. (This AWC echoed the still-extant Artists Equity, an outgrowth of artists' organizing during the 1930s.)[15]

While the 1969 coalition quickly grew to include many different kinds of artists, the Art Workers Coalition was started by cosmopolitan technology artists. Takis (who today lives in Greece) and the German-born Haacke were certainly familiar with artists' uses of collectivity. In Europe, the Zero group was an international avant-garde. The world of technology art was based in research science and technology, with strong academic connections like the venturesome program at MIT. Within the movement, collective work was understood as necessary because of the highly specialized nature of technology. This more productivist mode of collectivity was supported by the funds and influenced by the mores of business and government.[16] Before institutional interest in "tech art" dried up, groups like Pulsa and USCO, with one foot in academic departments and the other in the counterculture, produced complex technology-based environments in popular museum shows around the United States.

The tradition of the techno-art collaborative was forcefully revived in the 1980s with the Survival Research Laboratories, based in San Francisco. Fronted by Mark Pauline, SRL performance work was distributed on video by the group Target. SRL toured robots, made from chopped lawnmower and chainsaw engines and other industrial parts, which were controlled in

thematized battle performances. In nightclubs and parking lots, the SRL crew used remote control to clash their aggressive or abject mobile robots in intentionally frightening evenings with titles like "Bitter Message of Hopeless Grief." SRL was closely tied to the punk music scene, while at the same time they benefited from California's aerospace and weapons systems engineers, dropping by their shop to chat.[17]

During the 1960s and 1970s, numerous groups made lightshows and nightclub effects for the rock music shows that became an essential part of 1960s psychedelic style and the hippie rock venue. One of these groups was the Joshua Light Show, known for its work in concerts at the Fillmore East in New York City. In 1999, performance artist Michael Smith and Joshua Harris, a principal in that lightshow, made a collaborative installation artwork called *MUSCO*. Through the pretext of the going-out-of-business sale of a fictitious lighting design company that had opened thirty years before, the artists wryly reflected on the question of artistic survival and obsolescence.

A related strain of collective artistic production was briefly exhibited in the show "Aims of the Revolutionary Media" at the above-mentioned New York–venue museum in 1969. Participants in this exposition of critical resistant media included underground newspapers, film collectives like Third World Newsreel, and video groups like TVTV and Videofreex. These groups of artists and journalists used the newly marketed portable video recorders to produce news programs and features pointedly at variance with mainstream television.[18] Their work seeded the alternative media movement, which had a second efflorescence with the rise of cable and satellite TV in the 1980s. Artists like Paul Ryan and Ira Schneider, both part of Raindance, investigated ways to use video as a responsive community-building tool. Ryan did extensive video studies of what he called the triad, the three-person building block of collective organization.[19]

The political impulse within the Art Workers Coalition took on a hyperbolic strain with the formation of the Guerrilla Art Action Group as an outgrowth of the AWC's action committee. The GAAG produced dramatic actions, many in front of and inside museums, directed against the prosecution of the Vietnam War and the underrepresentation of artists of color within the art world.[20] The GAAG was founded by artists of the Destruction art movement in the Judson Church circle of poets, artists, and dancers. The styling of the GAAG was a self-conscious theatrical militance inspired by Third World guerrilla movements. The GAAG also consciously referenced conceptual art in their "communiqués," constituting a true militant avant-garde of that style. While they worked within the context of the art world, they shared the agit-prop street theater strategies of radical political groups like the WITCH feminists (Womens' International Terrorist Corps

from Hell) and the anarchist Black Mask (later the Motherfuckers). These groups staged dramatic actions at cultural events, concerts, and political street demonstrations. This radical activism was of a piece with the many symbolic political actions during the late 1960s, like the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupation of Alcatraz and the Statue of Liberty, the Yippie seizure of the pirate ship in California Disneyland, and the Weatherman bombing of the police memorial in Chicago.

Feminist collectivity was a continuous presence exerting pressure on the mainstream. Feminists inspired, directed, and sustained collective organization among progressive artists throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s although they and their issues were often sidelined. Ad Hoc Women Artists and WAR (Women Artists in Revolution) were from around 1970[21] the angry activist face of radical feminist artists in New York, organizing for a piece of the pie. The movement had been working collectively for years. The consciousness-raising group, a key feminist organizing tool, was an adaptation of the Chinese communist practice of "speaking our bitterness," a discussion intended to reveal the political nature of women's personal problems. These meetings could generate texts: the east coast Redstockings group regularly published position papers and polemics, individually and collectively authored.

FIGURE 7.3. Feminist art collective Carnival Knowledge posing with porn stars at the time of their Franklin Furnace exhibition "Second Coming," New York, 1983. Photograph by Dona Ann McAdams.

In Hollywood, California, the Womanhouse exhibition project (1972) was an influential example of collaborative work and a defining moment for feminist art. This transformation of a suburban house achieved underground fame as a collective exposition of the plight of American women enslaved by male expectations and entombed by housework. The Womanhouse project was a work by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro with their students in a feminist art program. Judy Chicago's subsequent major projects, the *Dinner Party* and the *Birth Project,* were both made in collaboration with other artists and craftswomen, elevating traditional anonymous female cultural production, china painting and needlework, to the status of high art.

The feminist art movement, like its political counterpart, was advanced through its own network of independent journals,[22] like the *Feminist Art Journal.* The most adamantly collective of these was *Heresies,* founded in 1977 by a "mother collective" of activist artists and critics. Each issue was edited by an autonomous editorial group. Through 1993, a parade of volumes dealt with key issues for radical artists, including housework, working collectively, violence against women, and lesbian art. Today the collective Guerrilla Girls builds on this tradition of feminist agitation within the art world. The group debuted in 1985 with a street poster campaign documenting continued inequities in the exhibition of male and female artists. In recent years the Guerrilla Girls have published popular books revealing the structural sexism of western art history.

FIGURE 7.4. The Guerrilla Girls marching in costume for a pro-choice demonstration in Washington, D.C., 1992. The Girls urged right-to-lifers—and the Catholic Church—to repent their sinful, modern ideas. Photograph courtesy of the Guerrilla Girls.

In New York's Soho (an acronym from lower Manhattan "SOuth of HOuston" Street), the Art Workers Coalition expressed the general mood of discussion and cooperation that led to the establishment of co-op galleries and alternative spaces. The Soho zone of derelict factories slated for urban renewal became an artists' district in the 1960s. The founders of the co-op 55 Mercer Gallery met each other at the AWC. The abstract painters' collective Anonima (1960–71), also active in AWC, opened their gallery uptown. The co-op gallery, in which artists band together to maintain a space, was an institution familiar to artists from the 1950s, when painters opened a number of them on 10th Street. To this Soho added the model of the artists' space, or "alternative space,"[23] an exhibition venue that was soon supported by state and federal monies to exhibit work by an ever-increasing stream of new artists.

As an artists' neighborhood illegally ensconced among derelict factories, Soho was already home to unorthodox real estate arrangements. George Maciunas, self-proclaimed *chef d'école* of the international Fluxus movement, dedicated much of his energies to purchasing properties there through a rotating capital pool. Maciunas called these Fluxhouses. He also assembled "Fluxkits," with contributions by many artists "edited" into a single multipartite box. Fluxus was (and is) a loose-knit transnational network of artists who often worked together. While Maciunas idealized the Bolshevik artists' group Lef, historian Barbara Moore insists the group was more "anthological" than collective.[24]

Dick Higgins, a key writer and publisher in the Fluxus scene, propounded a theory of intermedia to explain simultaneous work in poetry, music, performance, and visual art. In music, Fluxus performances related to the numerous international improvising collectives of musicians in the new music and loft jazz scene. The artists of Fluxus were regularly visible in New York through the large Avant Garde Festivals produced by Charlotte Moorman from 1963 to 1980 with financial support from John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

The best known of the new Soho artists' spaces was 112 Greene Street, started by Jeffrey Lew who owned the building. The place was a center of postminimalist process sculpture, continuous freewheeling material experiments, and improvisational dance. This space was a model for the U.S. federal National Endowment for the Arts workshop grants category, which spread monies across the country to fund similar "alternative spaces."[25] These would include Los Angeles Institute for Contemporary Art (LAICA), And/Or in Seattle (both founded in 1974), Washington Project for the Arts (WPA), Hallwalls in Buffalo (both 1975), the Social and Political Art Resources Center (SPARC) in Los Angeles (1976), Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago (1979–98), and Atlanta's Art Workers Coalition (1976–82).

The guiding light of 112 Greene Street was Gordon Matta-Clark, also instrumental in the first years of Food, a restaurant founded as a collective and linked to commune farms. Matta-Clark also convened the group Anarchitecture, a short-lived collaborative concerned with the intersection of art and urban space whose members exhibited anonymously. Matta-Clark's work was based in the collective, both actual and conceptual. His later grand cut-ups of condemned architecture relied on a crew of riggers and sculptors. Matta-Clark, however, did not reject the authorial signature. Nor did Paul Thek, an American living in Europe, who became famous for a series of installation works in museums during the 1970s executed with a group of artists he called the Artist's Co-op. Members of Thek's crew had creative autonomy within areas of the overall environment, leading to a densely constructed, richly symbolic piece.

Despite its collective creation, Thek's work with his co-op was subsumed into what influential curator Harald Szeemann called "personal mythologies." Erstwhile Fluxus artist Joseph Beuys was also one of Szeeman's mythologists. In 1974 the charismatic German, who had opened an office for direct democracy in the 1972 art exposition "Documenta 5," toured the United States for the first time, propounding a mystical Marxian vision of social sculpture that had a strong effect on many artists. Versions of this idea have informed the work of many subsequent artists' collectives.

Always consistently collective in their austere authorial stylings is the Art & Language group of conceptual artists. They were based in England, but in the 1970s several members from England and Australia were in New York, working with Joseph Kosuth. The New York Art & Language group launched a sustained collaborative critique of formalist art criticism and the structure of art markets and institutions. With the convening of the group Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, Art & Language's process of discussion and critique was brought to a local public of artists and activists. Journals like *The Fox, Red-Herring,* and the *anti-catalog* reflect this moment.

The *anti-catalog* was a collaboratively written response to the 1976 Bicentennial exhibition of the Rockefeller collection of historical American art at the Whitney Museum. In a sharp and extensive critique inspired by British critic John Berger's book *Ways of Seeing,* the authors pointed out the absence of women, African, and Native American artists in the exhibition and more broadly questioned the possibility of a nonideological history of art. This was a significant early instance of revisionist cultural history produced on a national anniversary, the American Revolution. By 1992, the quincentenary of Columbus's voyage to the Americas, activists and artists committed to community arts work could mobilize an extensive

nationwide program of events and education to assert the priorities of indige-nous people.[26]

Even as the AMCC was meeting in New York to question the art world's structures through the lens of Marxian political economy, a contin-gent mode of collectivity appeared among graffiti writers of the mid-1970s.[27] This vernacular art form was born in the ghettos of New York City from the graphic opportunities presented by the new technology of spray cans and felt-tip markers. The quintessential work of graffiti art is the signature, the writer's name or "tag." Still, performing this "sport" of spray-painting subway trains is both illegal and dangerous, and it required close coordination and support among "crews" of teen-aged writers. In 1972, sociologist Hugo Mar-tinez rented a studio for some of them to work together on canvas, and they exhibited in Soho art galleries as United Graffiti Artists (UGA).

In the later 1970s, the rise of punk rock in New York and Lon-don stimulated visual artists to embrace a DIY (do-it-yourself) practice and an aesthetic of damage and rude collage. In the United Kingdom, Malcolm MacLaren appropriated Situationist theory to stage-manage a youth subcul-ture of "punk" street fashion with the rock band Sex Pistols at the center.[28] The U.K. punk music scene was entwined with Jamaican music, reggae, and "toast," a proto-rap. These same currents were felt in the Caribbeanized ghettoes of New York, as the hip-hop culture was being born.

With the rise of conservative governments under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, the left went on the defensive. The 1980s is largely recalled for the superheated art market, but the decade was in fact a golden age of artists' groups. Self-described producing collectives emerged, groups that made of their coherence a point of principle and purpose, and in the process refined and enlarged the models of artistic collectivity.

In the bohemias of downtown Manhattan, the band- and crew-based practices of art rock and super-8 filmmaking thrived. The first artists' group to achieve prominence in New York was Colab (Collaborative Pro-jects), which produced a show in Times Square in 1980. This exhibition was a groundswell of popularly accessible socially themed artworks held in an empty building that had housed an erotic massage parlor. Critics called it "punk art"—"three chord art anyone can play." The South Bronx art space Fashion Moda participated in the Times Square show, bringing in some of the new generation of graffiti artists who had been exhibiting in the Bronx as part of the hip-hop culture of writers, rappers, and break dancers. A forty-member democratically run membership group, Colab inspired other artists to form groups and mount huge shows in Brooklyn lofts, seeding the present-day artists' communities there. Earlier in 1980, artists emulating 1970s' Puerto

Rican activists had seized a building on New York's Lower East Side and opened it as a collectively run cultural center.[29] ABC No Rio was passed on to successive managements until today it is an anarchist cultural center run by a collective with close ties to the publishing group Autonomedia.

The longest-lived and best-known of these politicized groups or collectives was Group Material. The first collective was comprised of thirteen artists, several of them Joseph Kosuth's students. After a series of meetings, Group Material opened one of the first art spaces in the East Village in 1980. There they developed their work as curation, a heady mix of pointed even polemical political art mixed with popular and folk culture in clean, strongly styled exhibitions. A show of their neighbors' objects, "People's Choice" (Arroz con Mango), was a key event for the group, driving them toward a populist program.

After 1981, the group shrank and they gave up the East Village space. Group Material produced projects in public spaces, including subways and buses, and on a vacant department store facing Union Square Park. They began to work from an office in the Taller Latinoamericano run by

FIGURE 7.5. Production still from the collaborative video production *Cave Girls*, photographed in the backyard of the art space ABC No Rio, New York, 1983. Pictured are Rebecca Howland, Judy Ross, Kiki Smith, and Marnie Greenholz. Photograph by Ellen Cooper. Courtesy of Collaborative Projects.

exiled artists from Central America. After a small show at the Taller on the theme of strife in Central America, the group engaged with the exiles to produce the monumental installation at the P.S. 1 museum in Queens, New York, of a time line of U.S. intervention in Central America. This was part of the 1984 Artists' Call, a broad cultural front protesting Reagan's support for repressive regimes in El Salvador and the U.S.-funded counterrevolution in Nicaragua. The installation featured the raw materials—piles of coffee, copper ingots, bunches of bananas—that U.S. corporations extracted, mixed in with artworks and artifacts of popular culture, like a red Sandinista bandana.

In the broad front of activist art organizing against Reagan's foreign policies, Group Material worked with the advocacy group Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). They also worked closely with the artists in PAD/D—Political Art Documentation/Distribution. PAD/D formed in New York in 1981 and quickly became an organizing and archiving resource for a network of groups in the United States and abroad working under the banner of cultural democracy. (Today these archives are in the Museum of Modern Art library.) The group formed around Lucy Lippard, then writing regularly about art for the weekly *Village Voice*. PAD/D held regular lectures and discussions, produced performances and projects, and made signs for demonstrations. A key project of PAD/D was *Not For Sale*,[30]

FIGURE 7.6. Political Art Documentation/Distribution's (PAD/D) antigentrification street poster project *Not For Sale*, East Village, New York, 1984. Photograph courtesy of Gregory Sholette.

a campaign of works on city streets contesting the gentrification of the Lower East Side, then becoming known as the East Village.

By the mid-1980s, a thriving scene of largely artist-run commercial galleries had spread to this ethnically diverse working-class neighborhood, launching many careers and forming the visual arts substratum of a city-wide nightclub culture.[31] Bouyed by the booming art and luxuries market in the Reagan years, some galleries moved to the upscale Soho district. Most failed. But the galleries had glamorized the district, accelerating gentrification on the Lower East Side.[32] This was the complicated urban economic process emblematized by PAD/D artists and their allies in *Not For Sale*, which directly critiqued artists' complicity. Colorful graphics were mounted on the walls of several street-corner "galleries" and posted throughout the district. The London-based antigentrification Docklands Community Poster Project began in 1981, and PAD/D had collected their posters in their archive. Today a successor group, Art & Change, continues to produce billboards and do teaching projects in London to develop "local narratives" around issues of diversity.

For most artists, the collective experience in the East Village was entrepreneurial. Group Material had opened the first art gallery of the 1980s in the East Village, albeit in advance of the commercial wave. In 1985, the group curated a show called Americana in the ground floor of the Whitney Museum as part of the Biennial exhibition. As the neo-Expressionist and appropriationist artists of the East Village gallery movement showed their work upstairs, Group Material's show comprised a veritable manifesto of a critical point of view on U.S. culture, mixing video, audio, store-bought packages, and artwork by artists high and low. (They exhibited painter Leroy Neiman, who despite his wide popularity had been frozen out of American museums.) The centerpiece of the exhibit was an appliance—a washer-dryer combination. This dense, rigorously structured installation at a major exhibition put Group Material on the map, and their institutional opportunities increased. These included the 1987 "Documenta" exhibition in Germany where the group mounted *Castle*. This curation was based on a parable from Kafka, a story in which lions, after generations of attacks, become part of a temple ritual. The complex assemblage mounted on metal walls strived to produce the "look of power," mixing historical cultural objects with consumer products to evoke the fascination of hegemonic symbolic order. The choice of the parable seems like a metaphor for the dynamics of "institutional critique,"[33] a problem that absorbed the attention of many artists in the 1990s.

As the Reagan years of the 1980s wore on, the mounting toll of the AIDS epidemic turned a civil rights crisis for gay people into a struggle for survival. Resistance to conservative government and religion and pressure

FIGURE 7.7. Doug Ashford of Group Material addressing an audience at the offices of CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador). Copyright 1984. Photograph by Lisa Empanato.

FIGURE 7.8. Group Material, *Da Zi Baos*, Union Square, New York, 1982. Photograph courtesy of Julie Ault and Group Material.

on health bureaucracies became urgent matters for action. ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, formed 1987) included numerous action cells of artists, collectives that made graphics for the street and video for cable TV. One of these, Gran Fury, was named for the police department's favorite model car for undercover work.[34] These groups used the increasingly receptive art institutions as a base to bring their message to the public. The work collectives produced—posters, telegenic demonstrations, videotapes—was highly instrumental, using commercial techniques to get the angry message out. These groups worked like advertising agencies for their cause, laying a baseline of sophisticated agit-prop graphics and an example of collective cultural production in social service.

Groups such as DIVA-TV, which documented the dramatic demonstrations and confrontations of the "positive" people's movement, were able to put their work on public access cable television. This opportunity, secured by an earlier generation of video activists, had been sustained and developed by successor groups of video artists. When cable TV came to New York in the 1970s, numerous producing groups formed.[35] The longest lived of these are the political Paper Tiger collective and the national Deep Dish satellite network.

General Idea came together in Toronto in 1969, and the three artists lived together. The group made videotapes and published *File* magazine, a standout in the vibrant Canadian neo-Dada and correspondence art scene.[36] In 1970–71, they promoted a campy "1984 Miss General Idea Pageant," and in 1974 founded the Art Metropole artists' bookstore. In 1986, the group moved to New York and soon began producing work around the crisis of AIDS. In "One Day/One Year of AZT" (1991), they filled a gallery with giant pills to denote the constant heavy regimen of medications AIDS patients must take. Jorge Zontal and Felix Partz died of AIDS-related causes in 1994; AA Bronson continues to work solo and with other artists.

The AIDS crisis reshaped art by devastating the ranks of artists and changing the attitudes of many toward political action. AIDS activists imbued the collective with the fervor of a life-and-death struggle. This cauterized lingering socialist productivist associations, revealing the collective as a mode of expedient community response to the key issue of the day. The urgency of AIDS activism streamlined the thinking around what Lucy Lippard called "activist art."[37] "What counts in activist art," said one activist artist, "is its propaganda effect; stealing the procedures of other artists is part of our plan—if it works, we use it."[38]

Group Material featured the AIDS crisis as one of the four components in their late 1980s project *Democracy* (discussed below). They developed an AIDS Timeline along the lines of the Artists Call installation
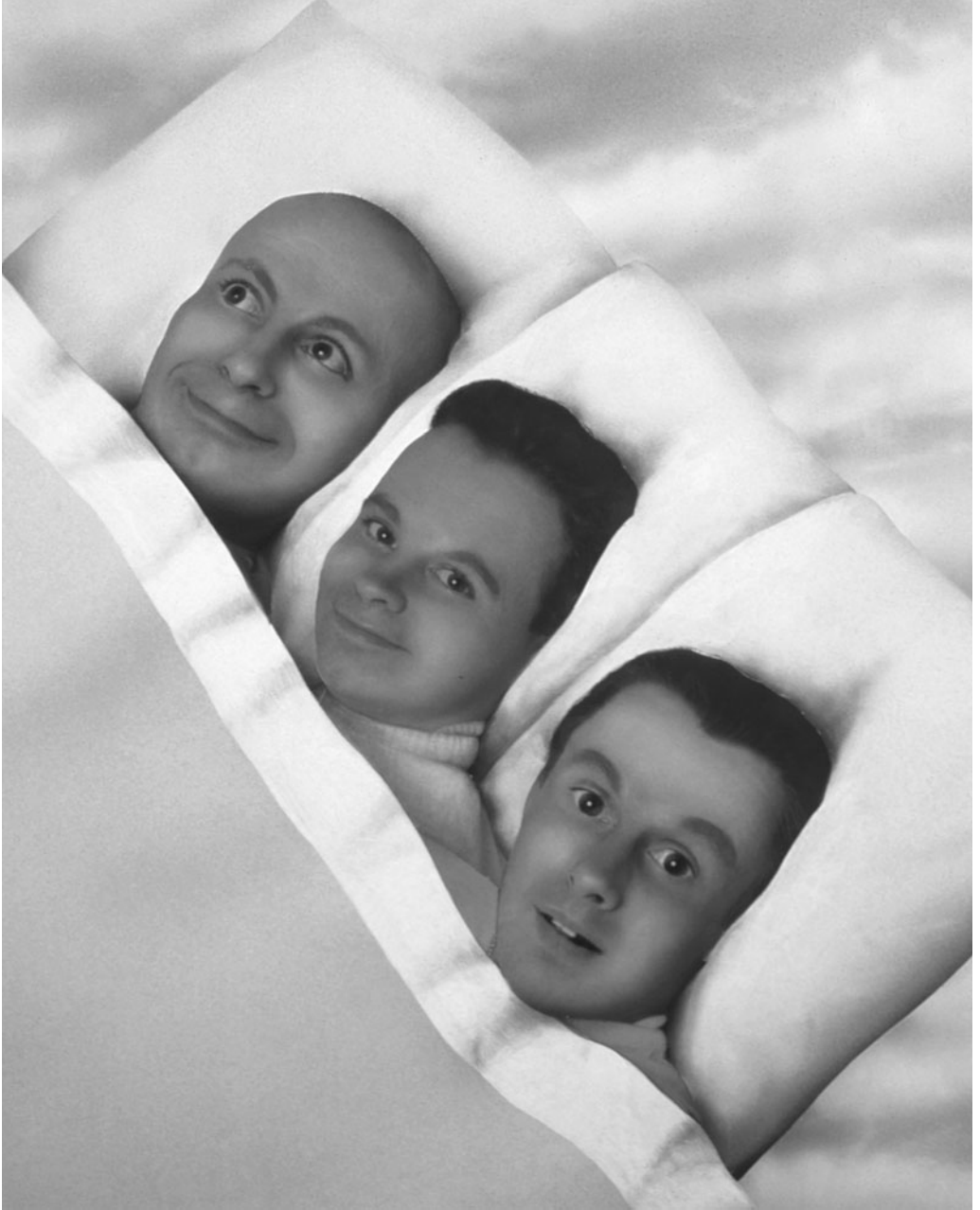
FIGURE 7.9. General Idea, *Baby Makes Three,* a self-portrait as three babies. *Left to right,* Jorge Zontal, AA Bronson, and Felix Partz of General Idea (1969–94). Chromogenic print, 763 × 635 mm. Self-published, 1984/89. Courtesy of AA Bronson.

and exhibited it in the 1991 Whitney Biennial.[39] This project, executed as gallery installations and in published form, is probably their best-known work. The chronological installations included art, documentary texts, activist videos, and culls from popular media. Each ensemble was intended to agitate and spur activism. The artworks included many by HIV-positive artists. Poignantly, Group Material member Felix Gonzalez-Torres died of the disease in 1999.

In addition to impassioned and inventive activism, the epidemic called up an extraordinary work of popular collective mourning—the AIDS quilt project. Inspired by the sight of a sea of placards carried by memorial marchers in San Francisco in 1985, the quilt is simply a collation of commemorative fabric pieces made to remember those who died. The quilt is spread in public places around the country, an exhibition practice that started with the National Mall in Washington, D.C., in 1987. Eventually some 44,000 individual remembrances have become part of the largest community art project in the world.

An incident developed through the 1980s in the realm of institutional public art commissions that had important consequences for the practice of public art. A controversy arose over Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc,* a permanent commission for a site in lower Manhattan installed in 1981. After public protests led to protracted hearings, the work was removed in 1989. The art community defended Serra for the violation of his rights. Still, the affair induced reflection.[40] Many came to believe that autonomous avant-garde art would not work well in many public contexts.

A "new public art" came into its own as went work with methods rooted in conceptual and performance art by feminists and political artists received institutional support. Among these, artists like Meirle Laderman Ukeles and Suzanne Lacy consciously staged the collective as a subject. This kind of work had been named "social sculpture" by Joseph Beuys during his U.S. lecture tours (although it could be argued that he made little of it). Suzanne Lacy began working as a feminist activist doing dramatic tableaux for demonstrations. She continued working very deliberately within the realm of the social.[41] Her 1987 work *Crystal Quilt* was a kind of mass public conversation in Minneapolis between hundreds of pairs of elderly women seated tête-à-tête at tables in a plaza.

Collaborations between artists and specific communities also include a project begun in the Heidelberg section of Detroit in 1986. Tyree Guyton and his grandfather began to paint polka dots on the sidewalks of this African-American community distressed by abandonment. They affixed toys and household goods to empty houses and signposts. Guyton was joined by others, and his enterprise of decoration became a collective creation. In

1993 curator Mary Jane Jacob put together a show in Chicago called "Culture in Action" that came to define this mode of work for municipal cultural agencies and museums.[42]

In 1989, several former members of the PAD/D *Not For Sale* group formed REPOhistory,[43] a public art collective specifically concerned with the artistic recovery of lost pasts. Their first sign project, marking sites of past conflicts in lower Manhattan like the location of old New York's slave auctions, were important in helping turn public historical representations toward a reflection of this nation's often uncomforting past.

FIGURE 7.10. REPOhistory members Ed Eisenberg and Tom Klem (on ladder) installing a counterhistorical street marker on a lamppost near Wall Street, New York, 1992. Photograph courtesy of Gregory Sholette.

Even as critical and community-based modes of work were reshaping conceptions of public art, discourse sharpened among political philosophers around erosion of the public sphere in contemporary society and the concomitant privatization of public urban spaces. Thinkers like Jürgen Habermas[44] observed that the mass media had created a simulated public sphere based solely on the manipulation of consumer desire. In response, Group Material sought to represent a kind of ideal public sphere in a project called *Democracy* produced at the Dia Foundation space in Soho, New York.

The complex event was produced between 1988 and 1989 engaging four issues: education, electoral politics, cultural participation, and AIDS. The work at Dia began with a roundtable of experts convened to frame the issue under consideration. Then Group Material mounted a multimedia exhibition that functioned as a center for meeting and discourse. Then a town meeting was held, where disparate voices could be heard on the issues. Finally, the results were published in a book.[45] In recalling this project, Doug Ashford described it as "a centering device for other kinds of cultural and social work." The format of using exhibitions as forums, he believes, was one of Group Material's principal achievements.[46] The *Democracy* meetings and exhibits also substantiated the discursive method of Group Material's work. What David Deitcher called the "friction" of diverse elements in a Group Material installation that "sparks insights into a given theme"[47] was enlarged and generalized into a process in the two-year long project at Dia (1987–89) and the 1990 book.[48] Dia's commitment to this type of work continued with a second project produced by Martha Rosler around the issue of homelessness. "If You Lived Here" included the work of a number of artists' groups: PAD/D, Bullet Space, Mad Housers, and work on issues around the United States/Mexico by the Border Arts Workshop.

The projects of Group Material and the artists commissioned to make public art were supported and administered by foundations and cultural institutions. At the same time, numerous groups were active on the radical margins of the New York art world. Among these were the squatters of the Lower East Side.[49] With its intimate link to the necessity of housing, squatted buildings are collective laboratories, and sometimes artistic ones. New York squatters were involved in the Dia exhibitions, but their primary reality was the day-to-day pressure by the city police to evict them. Successful collectivity was a cherished revelation of "people power," but triumphs, like the building seized as a community center, were short-lived. Banner art for demonstrations and political graffiti were important propaganda tools for the squatters. "Housed" artists forged links with organizers among the homeless, and squats opened galleries as cultural centers of resistance. These venues helped to soften the image of squatters who were constantly portrayed

on TV and in the tabloid press as obnoxious and riotous. Bullet Space was the most innovative of these spaces, producing numerous collective exhibitions and a tabloid called *Your House Is Mine* (1989–91).

In the United Kingdom, as in Amsterdam, Berlin, and cities in Italy, squatters had a sounder legal basis for taking vacant buildings, and the movement was older, wider, and better organized. Throughout the 1990s, the Squall collective organized squatters and ravers in England—participants in the nomadic dance and music culture called rave—against repressive legislation. A strong radical ecology movement fought against building new roads, and in the mid-1990s, spectacular art-based activism arose in the group Reclaim the Streets. RTS demonstrations were ludic occasions, styled as parties and celebrations. This reflects a theoretical current that has guided activist cultural work since 1968, an ethic of urban play based in the revolutionary urbanist theories of the Situationists (especially Constant) and their academic ally Henri Lefebvre who wrote of the social "production of space."

Strategies of cultural activism have been refined and enlarged with the emergence of a broad popular global anticorporate movement in the late 1990s. Organized against the rise of neoliberalism, new cooperative modes rely on affinity groups and central spokescouncils to organize and direct actions. International demonstrations in the early twenty-first century were carefully choreographed affairs, coordinated by e-mail lists and text messaging to cellular phones, with groups of actors differently garbed depending upon their intentions for a particular situation. A shifting array of contingent artists' collectives supported the street work with costumes, posters, banners, and performances. The emphasis was on telegenic spectacle and tactical surprise.

As the example of this activism makes clear, the Internet is a powerful networking tool that is inexorably transforming the social sphere. As access to the World Wide Web spread in the 1990s, a global movement of anticorporate activists at last became visible to its geographically separated constituents. Alternative Internet-based media was inspired by the example of the Serbian independent radio station B92 that switched to streaming its signal over the Internet after the wartime government closed its transmission tower in 1996. After the events of Seattle in 1999, new activist media like the global IndyMedia network arose helping to connect the movement by reporting on demonstrations and actions. Many of these Web sites use collaborative authoring software, so that visitors can post their own stories and photos to the site.

With the dissolution of the bipolar cold-war world—the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet Union—autonomous popular power has seemed to many the only route to global justice in the

face of states and corporations perceived as collusive partners operating through sweeping new international commercial treaties. The rise of indigenous peoples' movements has given this movement a soul and strong examples of antistatist decentralized organization. The media savvy Zapatistas of Chiapas in southern Mexico, with a charismatic thoughtful leadership, exemplify the claims of the new indigeneity.

As soon as the Internet medium arose, so did new forms of digital art and Internet art. In the 1990s artists formed groups to work in this new medium in a reprise of the sort of collectivity that marked the technology art boom of the 1960s.[50] These included groups and collaborations like adaweb, Rhizome, Etoy, and the activist oriented RTMark (properly spelled "®™ark"). What has driven a lot of the new technology art and Internet projects is broad change in the conditions of media art production. The fluid networked community of computer programmers includes "hackers" with an ethic of independence and a proprietary sense about the cyberspace they collectively created. Originally developed as a communications tool for the military, the Internet evolved from nonprofit and institutional beginnings. The ethos of what Richard Barbrook called a "high-tech gift economy"[51] pervades the development of free- and shareware programs. Many of these are written for the operating system Linux, which is an open source program (i.e., written in publicly accessible, nonproprietary code).

There is a continuous conflict between artists, many of them involved with collectives and public art, who seek to enlarge the sphere of public creativity, and an art market that requires a scarcity of artistic products. This is basically a conflict between inventive creativity and the embodied power of capital.[52] Artists' collectives regularly address questions of intellectual property that have become key legal issues in the twenty-first century. Chief among these is the issue of copyright. General Idea was sued by *Life* magazine in the late 1970s over the format of their artists' periodical *File*. The Residents, a mysterious San Francisco rock group that performed anonymously wearing tuxedos, top hats, and big eyeballs on their heads, made a collage music that was at the heart of an avant-garde rock music scene. Small in commercial terms, it evaded industry control. Negativland, another San Francisco media art group, was dramatically sued for their collage work. Like collage films and sampling music for rap recordings, questions around the proprietorship of cultural property have arisen continuously as the outcome of artistic practice in multiple media.[53] Collectives acting like corporations diffuse responsibility. They add to the traditional outlaw and revolutionary expedient of the alias. Within the "Neoist" movement, malleable artistic identities arose that could be claimed by any participant, like Monty Cantsin and Luther Blisset.[54]

In the hastily capitalized Internet businesses, entrepreneurial patterns often reciprocated artistic strategies. Pseudo.com (closed 2000) was an online entertainment business positioned to catch a posttelevision wave that did not materialize. Their promotions were more art projects than public relations, their personnel were often artists, and their office style recalled 1960s "guerrilla media" groups like TVTV more than the TV networks they sought to challenge. RTMark also mimed "dot com" business practice. These artists' Web site is essentially a corporate front. The Web site includes an investment program that networks monies for "cultural sabotage." Artists post the projects they want to build, and people all over the world subscribe to realize them. These have included building devices and engineering "pranks": RTMark itself switched the voiceboxes on Barbie dolls and GI Joes in stores, and the Velvet Strike project devised "hacks" to add antimilitary and homoerotic content to Internet-based "shooter" video games. RTMark has supported other groups of media artists who do "hacking" work, like the Electronic Disturbance Theater and the prankster Yes Men.

In recent years, collectives have become regular actors in the art world on all levels. The collective as an art idea has been mainstreamed. Many of the artists who worked with earlier groups and collectives forged successful solo careers. They often used the lessons and forms of work they had learned in the groups of which they had been a part. Tom Otterness, formerly of Colab (1978–89), took up the collective as a theme in his projects for bronze public sculpture. In his works, tiny figures squabble over giant pennies as they struggle to build a colossus. Two other artists involved with Colab, Peter Fend and Wolfgang Staehle, have continued collective engagements. Fend works regularly with others and has long maintained a collective or corporate front for his exhibitions of world-altering ecologically based energy proposals. Staehle founded the Internet service provider called The Thing, a host to numerous artists' projects. Tim Rollins left Group Material to work with the Kids of Survival (KOS), a group he formed with young people from the South Bronx neighborhood where Rollins had long taught the learning disabled. Together they produce large-format paintings on paper prepared from the pasted-together leaves of classic books. Another Group Material member, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, went on to make "gift economy" sculpture, piles of candy and printed sheets that the viewer is invited to carry away.

The ideas of new public art have been significantly refined in recent years by U.S. artists working primarily in European venues. Artists like Christine Hill and Andrea Fraser have developed work around what Fraser calls "service art."[55] In the late 1990s, much of this work was shared in a series of presentations in New York and archived under the collective name of Parasite, a project that included Group Material member Julie Ault. This

networking of advanced art in the realm of the social—still broadly denominated "neoconceptual," although it includes much new media work—is carried on in New York at this writing by the 16 Beaver Group. In Portland, Oregon, Red 76 produces socially based art projects, while the Chicago-based Temporary Services is an actively producing artists' collective.

The collective as subject and work with groups is key to several artists exhibiting in galleries and international art fairs. Rirkrit Tiravanija, Mark Dion, and Thomas Hirschhorn often rely upon groups to execute projects and provide social context for their works. In the mainstream context, the collective has been used to introduce young artists. These entrée groups include the short-lived video, music, and performance group Forcefield of Providence, Rhode Island, the group of musician/computer artists called Beige, and the object makers Royal Art Lodge of Winnipeg. One of the most complex hybrids of dispersed authorial identity was developed by Colin de Land at his American Fine Arts gallery in New York. De Land exhibited the fictional artist John Dog (him and Richard Prince), held conferences with critic Storm van Helsing (the artist Gareth James), and exhibited the art student collective Art Club 2000, some of whom took over the gallery after de Land's untimely death.

The two case studies examined in this chapter have been groups that in a sense usurped or took on the characteristics of other collective formations. The Art Workers Coalition was a sort of guild, or labor union. It came together out of a grievance, and sought to affect the art exhibition system. Group Material functioned as a kind of roving museum or pseudo-institution in its own right. Through their curatorial activity they addressed subjects that established institutions could not, while at the same time questioning the political and social position of the museums that hosted them.

To concentrate on these two groups is to emphasize the structural change that artists' groups engineered—and in a sense, reflected—within the larger frame of artistic work, exhibition, and reception. And, despite the clear political motives, declarations, and actions of these groups, it is to emphasize that the collectivity formed by contemporary artists arises out of the nature of the work of art making itself.

Artists' collectives do not make objects so much as they make changes. They make situations, opportunities, and understandings within the social practice of art. The collective mode of organization has become another strategy artists use to construct situations that work on particular social problems or sets of issues. This approach reached a kind of milestone of acceptance on the international art exhibition circuit with the multiple "platforms" of the 2002 "Documenta" exhibition and the "Utopia Station" at the 2003 Venice Biennale. That show/situation was built through meetings and

continues to travel in Europe. The new collectivism is about vision and the future. Authorship is beside the point.

NOTES

1. New York City is the site of my dissertation research. It is also inarguably the world capital of contemporary art. Despite the reluctance of galleries and museums to exhibit collective work, the city has seen continuous significant group formation by artists, and many international groups have also exhibited here.

2. Dennis McNally, *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002); Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [1968]).

3. Steven Watson, *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties* (New York: Pantheon, 2003). Warhol's was a new mode of artistic collectivity. At the same time, and in conscious opposition to Warhol, a classically avant-garde mode of collectivity arose around the March Gallery on 10th Street in New York during the early 1960s. The No! Art group produced antipatriotic and scatalogical exhibitions, inflected by images of the Holocaust. They worked collectively, according to Boris Lurie speaking in a recent film interview, like a "kibbutz," *No!art Man,* directed by Amikam Goldman, 2003.

4. The "neotribal" nature of youth culture in this period is reflected most explicitly in communes, in the plural forms of new psychotherapeutic methods, and in the drug culture that borrowed substances and rituals directly from the religions of indigenous American peoples.

5. The Communist Party spun off numerous collectives, especially print-making, film, and photography groups during the 1930s in the United States. Most of them were harassed out of existence by the FBI after the war. See Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement 1926–1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). There is a continuous tradition, then, of politicized collective work among artists that undergirds the examples discussed in the text below.

6. For an account and timeline of the Black arts movement, see Mary Schmidt Campbell, ed., *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade, 1963–1973* (Harlem [New York]: Studio Museum, 1985); for an account of the Chicano art movement, see Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, eds., *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985* (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, University of California, 1991). For an account of the Puerto Rican art movement, see Yasmin Ramirez, "Nuyorican Vanguards, Political Actions, Poetic Visions: A History of Puerto Rican Artists in New York, 1964–1984" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005).

7. Chicano or Mexican-American artists had a relation to the strong collectivist traditions arising out of the Mexican Revolution, like the great mural projects of the 1920s and 1930s under Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco.

8. In related work, a white group of muralists called the Los Angeles Fine Arts Squad produced cool, affectless trompe l'oeil murals in the late 1960s and early 1970s, architectural paradoxes made from the local streets of the bohemian Venice beach community. One (destroyed) featured an improbable snowfall on the boardwalk with well-known local characters. Another mural group that went against type was

Smokehouse, a group of African-American artists who made abstract murals in Harlem; see Michel Oren, "The Smokehouse Painters, 1968–70," *Black American Literature Forum* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 509–31.

9. Stefan Brecht, *Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen; New York: Routledge, 1988). The Bread and Puppet Theatre remains active today from its base in Glover, Vermont, and continues to march in political demonstrations. Large puppets have become standard features of recent international antiwar and anticorporate demonstrations.

10. As well as the preeminent modernist museum, the MoMA is an institution founded by the Rockefeller family. The political engagements of the family, particularly Nelson's governorship of New York and later term as vice president of the United States, opened the museum to charges of colluding in the Vietnam War.

11. Willoughby Sharp, interview with the author, 1999. A relatively apolitical curator of technology art, Sharp was organizing an exhibition of technology artists in Mexico City for the 1968 Olympics when the infamous Tlatelolco massacre of protesting students took place. For background, see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Ballantine, 2004); George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987). For the Mexican events, see Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *'68* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004).

12. Art Workers Coalition, *Open Hearing* (New York: Art Workers Coalition, 1969).

13. Faith Ringgold, Archives of American Art, interview with Cynthia Nadelman, September 6, 1989; roll 4779, pp. 130–31. Ringgold was closely involved in the parallel struggles of African American artists in groups like the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, which formed in 1968.

14. Lippard's work is the principal published source on the AWC today. See Lucy Lippard, "Art Workers Coalition, Not a History," *Studio International*, no. 180 (November 1970), and Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, ed. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

15. David Sokol, "The Founding of Artists Equity Association after World War II," *Archives of the American Art Journal* 39 (1999): 17–29.

16. Many of the technology art groups are profiled in Douglas M. Davis, *Art and the Future; a History/Prophecy of the Collaboration between Science, Technology, and Art* (New York: Praeger, 1973). The best-known art and technology partnerships were brokered by EAT (Experiments in Art and Technology), run by Bell Labs research engineer Billy Klüver. EAT paired individual artists with engineers to realize projects. The Swedish-born Klüver saw EAT as distinct from the European groups working with art and technology (personal conversation, 1999). A related project in England was the Artists Placement Group, which sought to put artists into corporate businesses and government agencies. Founded in 1966, APG included John Latham and Barry Flanagan. It has been continued since 1989 by Barbara Steveni as O+I—for Organization and Imagination. John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 54–57.

17. Conversation with Mark Pauline, 1987.

18. Deirdre Boyle, *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

19. Paul Ryan's work in "threeing" is described on his Web site and in his book,

Video Mind, Earth Mind: Art, Communications and Ecology (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), which also includes his alternative history of video art. See the texts under "Ten Lessons in Threeing" at Paul Ryan's Web site http://www.earthscore.org. For Raindance, see Davidson Gigliotti, "A Brief History of Raindance" at http://www.radicalsoftware.org/e/history.html.

20. Guerrilla Art Action Group, GAAG: *The Guerrilla Art Action Group* (New York: Printed Matter, 1978).

21. Women Artists in Revolution, *A Documentary Herstory of Women Artists in Revolution* (New York: WAR, 1971; rev. ed., 1973).

22. See Carrie Rickey, "Writing (and Righting) Wrongs: Feminist Art Publications," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s,* ed. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: Abrams, 1994).

23. A recent close consideration of this movement is in Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art, New York, 1965–1985: A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; New York: Drawing Center, 2002).

24. Barbara Moore in conversation, 2003. She ran the Bound & Unbound bookstore (now part of Specific Object). Former GAAG member Jon Hendricks, however, upholds the interpretation of Fluxus as a collective.

25. For a time line of the alternative space movement, see Ault, *Alternative Art, New York, 1965–1985;* a nationwide "art spaces archives project" is being undertaken at http://www.AS-AP.org/.

26. This work was coordinated by the Alliance for Cultural Democracy (ACD) and associated with community activists Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard that grew out of NAPNOC (Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee) founded by Eric Val Reuther (of the UAW Reuther family). Both organizations are now defunct.

27. The New York movement is discussed in contemporary books by Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper. Joe Austin and Ivor Miller have recently considered the history of the movement and government measures against it. During the 1970s and 1980s, graffiti writers were active in other major cities as well as New York, especially in Philadelphia. Today the movement is worldwide.

28. Dick Hebdige's influential book on youth movements, *Subculture,* appeared in 1979, and became a keystone in the emergent academic discipline of cultural studies. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) is the best-known account of the relationship between punk and Situationist theory.

29. Alan Moore and Marc Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio: The Story of a Lower East Side Art Gallery* (New York: Collaborative Projects, 1985).

30. Gregory Sholette, "Unnatural Speculations: Nature as an Icon of Urban Resistance on NYC's Lower East Side 1979–1984," *Afterimage,* September–October 1997, 17–20.

31. Dan Cameron et al., *East Village USA* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004); Steven Hager, *Art after Midnight: The East Village Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Liza Kirwin, "It's All True: Imagining New York's East Village Art Scene of the 1980s" (PhD diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1999).

32. Scholars who have considered these developments include Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Neil Smith, *The New Urban*

Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City (London: Routledge, 1996); and Janet L. Abu-Lughod et al., eds., *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

33. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," in *L'art conceptuel* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989); it was republished in *October* 55 (Winter 1990), and in Buchloh's 2003 book.

34. See Richard Meyer, "This Is to Enrage You: Gran Fury and the Graphics of AIDS Activism," in *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism,* ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

35. Among the New York cable TV groups active in the late 1970s and early 1980s were Communications Update, Red Curtain, and Potato Wolf. See Liza Bear, "All Aboard! A Survey of Incentives and Impediments to Public Channel Usage by New York Artists and Fellow Travelers," *Independent* (New York), March 1983, 11–15.

36. For Canadian art groups, see Luis Jacob et al., *Golden Streams: Artists' Collaboration and Exchange in the 1970s* (Mississauga: Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto, 2002). Craig Saper, in his book *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) argues that the correspondence art movement and its allies were the precursors of Internet art.

37. Activist art is discussed historically by Nina Felshin in the introduction to *But Is It Art?* ed. Felshin.

38. Douglas Crimp and [Adam] Rolston, *AIDS Demographics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 16.

39. The AIDS Timeline project was first shown at the University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, in 1989. It was initiated there by Larry Rinder, who later became chief curator at the Whitney Museum.

40. Works on the *Tilted Arc* affair include Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc: Documents* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), and a good recent discussion of the policy implications in Toby Miller and George Yúdice, *Cultural Policy* (London: Sage, 2002).

41. She has also written extensively; see Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); and Kym Preusse, ed., *Accidental Audience: Urban Interventions by Artists* (Toronto: Off-Site Collective, 1999). Grant Kester discusses Lacy in his *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

42. Mary Jane Jacob, ed., *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995). In the Chicago exhibit, the group Haha built a hydroponic garden to grow vegetables for AIDS hospices.

43. Founding member Gregory Sholette, an editor of this volume, has written and spoken extensively on REPOhistory.

44. Jürgen Habermas's key book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* first published in 1962 was translated into English in the 1980s.

45. Brian Wallis, ed., *Democracy: A Project by Group Material* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990).

46. Author's interview with Doug Ashford, 2001.

47. David Deitcher, "Polarity Rules: Looking at Whitney Annuals and Biennials, 1968–2000," in *Alternative Art, New York, 1965–1985,* ed. Ault, 21.

48. Brian Wallis, ed., *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism, a Project by Martha Rosler* (Seattle: Bay Press/Dia Art Foundation, 1991).

49. See Alan Moore and James Cornwell, "Local History: The Battle for Bohemia in the East Village," in *Alternative Art, New York, 1965–1985,* ed. Ault. Reminiscences and analyses of this period are collected in Clayton Patterson et al., eds., *Resistance: A Radical Political History of the Lower East Side* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007). Although it is ostensibly fiction, the graphic novel by Seth Tobocman, *War in the Neighborhood* (New York: Autonomedia, 2002), includes real personalities and incidents in this struggle.

50. See Rachel Greene, *Internet Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

51. Richard Barbrook, "The Hi-Tech Gift Economy," *First Monday,* March 2002, http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3_12/barbrook/.

52. This description of the conflict of interests between creativity and power was made by Christopher May, a theorist of intellectual property, at an October 2003 seminar at New York University.

53. In 1988, the British writer Stewart Home organized a "Plagiarism" convention in London where these issues were addressed; see S. Home, *The Festival of Plagiarism* (London: Sabotage, 1989).

54. Stewart Home, *Neoist Manifestos* (Stirling: AK Press, 1991). One of these Monty Cantsins (Istvan Kantor) threw blood on the wall in the shape of an X at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1988. This Monty also participated in the New York City Rivington School, a rowdy group of sculptors on New York's Lower East Side in the 1980s.

55. Andrea Fraser, "Services: A Working-Group Exhibition," in *Games, Fights, Collaboration: Das Spiel von Grenze und Überschreitung,* ed. Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, and Ulf Wuggenig (Stuttgart: Cantz, 1996).
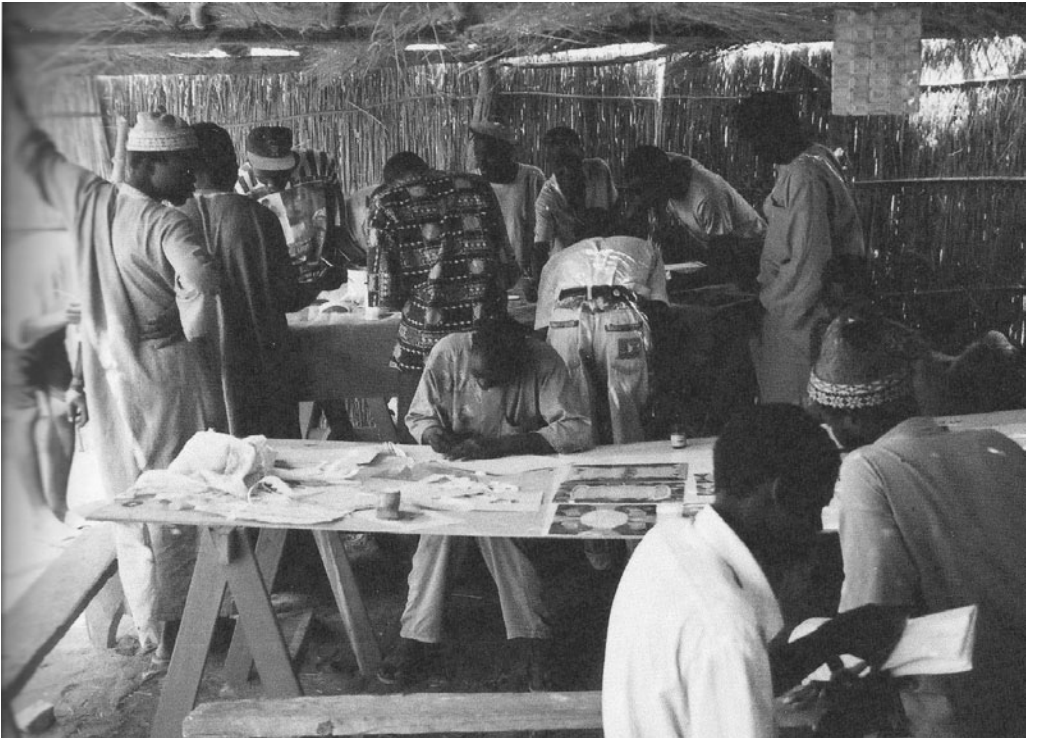
FIGURE 8.1. Huit Facettes-Interaction, workshop in Hamdallaye Samba M'baye, Senegal, February 1996.

8. The Production of Social Space as Artwork: Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes

OKWUI ENWEZOR

Recent confrontations within the field of contemporary art have precipitated an awareness that there have emerged in increasing numbers, within the last decade, new critical, artistic formations that foreground and privilege the mode of collective and collaborative production. The position of the artist working within collective and collaborative processes subtends earlier manifestations of this type of activity throughout the twentieth century. They also question the enduring legacy of the artist as an autonomous individual within modernist art. In this essay, I address the question of collectivization of artistic production first in terms of its immanence within the critical vicissitudes of modernist and postmodernist discourses, especially in the questions they pose on what an authentic work of art and author is. Second, in offering as my examples two critical positions from Africa, I shall address the question of the authenticity of the African artist within the field of contemporary art. On both levels, I would argue that the anxieties that circumscribe questions concerning the authenticity of either the work of art or the supremacy of the artist as author are symptomatic of a cyclical crisis in modernity about the status of art to its social context and the artist as more than an actor within the economic sphere. This crisis has been exceptionally visible since the rise of the modernist avant-garde in the twentieth century. For it is the avant-garde that time and again has tested the faith and power we invest in both the idealized nature of the unique artwork and the power of the artist as author.

Collective work complicates further modernism's idealization of the artwork as the unique object of individual creativity. In collective work we witness the simultaneous aporia of artwork and artist. This tends to lend collective work a social rather than artistic character. Consequently, the

collective imaginary has often been understood as essentially political in orientation with minimal artistic instrumentality. In other instances shared labor, collaborative practice, and the collective conceptualization of artistic work have been understood as the critique of the reification of art and the commodification of the artist. Though collaborative or collective work has long been accepted as normal in the kind of artistic production that requires ensemble work, such as music, in the context of visual art under which the individual artistic talent reigns such loss of singularity of the artist is much less the norm, particularly under the operative conditions of capitalism.

Over the centuries there have been different kinds of groupings of artists in guilds, associations, unions, workshops, schools, movements. However, each of these instances always recognized the individual artist as the sine qua non of such associational belonging. In fact, the idea of ensemble or collective work for the visual artist under capitalism is anathema to the traditional ideal of the artist as author whose work purportedly exhibits the mark of her unique artistry. The very positivistic identification of the artist as author leads to a crucial differentiation, one that represents the historical dialectic under which modern art and artists have been defined: the former on the basis of originality, qua authenticity, of the work of art and the latter on the authority and singularity of the artist as an individual talent and genius. To designate a work as the product of a collective practice in a world that privileges and worships individuality raises a number of vexing issues concerning the nature and practice of art.

To the extent the discourse of collectivity has been circumscribed by the above issues, debates on today's collective artistic formations and collaborative practices tend to be unconcerned with the questions of "who is an artist?"[1] and "what is an author?"[2] The current positive reception of collectivity, in fact its very fashionability, may have something to do with the historical amnesia under which its recent revival operates. While collectivity portends a welcome expansion of the critical regimes of the current contemporary art context that has been under the pernicious sway of money, a speculative art market, and conservative politics to make common cause with its counterintuitive positionality and therefore avoid participation in the cooption and appropriation of its criticality, it is important to connect collectivity today to its historical genealogy. This may mean going as far back as the Paris Commune of the 1860s, the socialist collectives of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the subversive developments of Dada, the radical interventions of "neo-avant-garde" movements such as the Situationist International, and activist-based practices connected to issues of class, gender, and race. The nature of collectivity extends also into the political horizon constructed by the emancipatory projects of the liberation movements of the

mid-twentieth century. They are registered today within the strategies of anti-globalization movements.

If we look back historically, collectives tend to emerge during periods of crisis, in moments of social upheaval and political uncertainty within society. Such crises often force reappraisals of conditions of production, re-evaluation of the nature of artistic work, and reconfiguration of the position of the artist in relation to economic, social, and political institutions. There are two types of collective formations and collaborative practices that are important for this discussion. The first type can be summarized as possessing a structured modus vivendi based on permanent, fixed groupings of practitioners working over a sustained period. In such collectives, authorship represents the expression of the group rather than that of the individual artist. The second type of collective tends to emphasize a flexible, nonpermanent course of affiliation, privileging collaboration on a project basis rather than on a permanent alliance. This type of collective formation can be designated as networked collectives. Such networks are far more prevalent today due to radical advances in communication technologies and globalization.

How do we place the history of collectivity within the history of modernism? Nearly a century has passed since that fateful turning point in the epic march toward the redefinition of the concept of the work of art. We could all chuckle today in self-satisfied bemusement and disinterest at the provincialism of the British Minister of Culture Kim Howells's castigation of the work of four artists shortlisted for the Turner Prize for the poor quality of their work.[3] Howells's review of the exhibited works reduced them to nothing more than so much "conceptual bullshit." In 1917 such bullshit was received as nothing short of heretic. Marcel Duchamp's insertion of the ready-made into the discursive frame of art has acquired its own impressive inventory of epithets and dumbstruck admiration. In fact its legacy has been called upon in the defense of so much more than the legitimacy of a number of discursive strategies that insist on the idea that they are works of art. The genealogy of such strategies (which consistently attempt an improvement of our understanding of the nature of the artistic object or statement) is fundamental to the historical discourse of modern art. It also furnishes the fundamental dialectic between modernist art and contemporary art, not least because the distinction between them remains at once porous and tendentious. Modernist art is said to have its roots in the myth of originality,[4] in the idolatry of images and objects whose very physical existence was dependent on the reified nature of their objecthood. Or, if we speak specifically about images, we tend to relate to their iconicity and uniqueness on the basis of aura as one would religious images or objects.[5]

Moreover, modernist art was said to function with an internalized awareness of the hierarchy that structures the relationship between its constitutive parts, such as how the relationship between works of art came to be conceived as distinctions across genres, forms, and mediums (a heritage, no doubt, of classicism) evident, for example, in a line that separates fine and applied art or the relationship between mediums such as the one between painting and drawing. On the other hand, contemporary art is understood to proceed from the evisceration of the idea of the authority of originality and aura of the image. Rather, through its heterogeneity and the structure of simultaneity, it has overseen the remarkable dispersal of the legacy of modernism.

One legacy of the expansion of the idea of contemporary art is the degree to which it abjures and has remained largely ambivalent to the dialectic of modernist art (between originality and aura), having taken aboard the idea that art is defined neither by its specific medium nor by the form through which it declares the very purpose of art. Of course, the two models for this cultural turn in the understanding of art in the twentieth century remain cogent. The first is the radical termination of the idea of originality that Duchamp first inaugurated through his assisted ready-mades. The implications and consequences of Duchamp's intervention are already well known, even if they have developed their own cargo cult of epistemological reification, sedimentation, and certainties as art history. However, Duchamp's mutilation of the perceptive order in which the work of art is embedded is more than the transition between the meaning of an object, whether technologically fabricated as many of his assisted ready-mades were or the *artistically* fabricated work in which originality rests on the fact that the work is singular and not repeatable by any technology of standardization. It is in the discursive domain of art's definition that Duchamp's proposition is said to generate that moment when the *history* of contemporary art is said to begin. Similarly, Walter Benjamin's conclusions in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production" has been equally deployed as the watershed theory that defines the tension between modernist art and contemporary art, between the artistically fabricated and the technologically generated.

If we take Duchamp's intervention and Benjamin's theory as the immediate ancestors for the proposition of what Thierry de Duve identifies in Duchamp's gesture as the shift from *here is art* to *this is art*,[6] we would, nonetheless, still remain very much preoccupied with what the object of art as such is after the reelaboration of its plasticity. There is, of course, a second horizon through which we can read some of the conclusions that, since the 1960s, have continuously questioned both the nature and status of the work of art. The struggle as such is not so much how does art generate its

meanings through its many objects, forms, and mediums that can now be extended to activities or nonactivities, be they technologically fabricated or not, indexically structured, or programmatically schematized. But can art now go beyond embedding itself in *specific objects* of minimalism's phenomenological posture, or move to a truly radical position that is its complete reduction into nothing more than a linguistic description?

The severe deretinalization that such a reduction proposes is part of the legacy of *conceptual art* in which recourse to language carries the seed of Duchamp's original idea, except now the model of *this is art if I say so* has produced a moment of deep fecundation in which social ramification has tended to open up the space of contemplation to that of speech or just simply the exchanges that inhere from a range of social relations, thereby transporting the experience of art into sites of the multiple activities that today generate art as an extended field of many types of transaction. Part of this synthesis or fusion of the contemplative and the linguistic, the formal and the social at any rate led conceptual art to attempt also to abduct the traditional role of the historian and critic for its cause. Conceptual art was not simply content with destabilizing the traditional categories within which art functioned, it sought to also inaugurate and propagate a philosophy for such destabilization as the basis for an ontology of advanced contemporary art. Joseph Kosuth especially made this part of his credo, as witnessed in his *Art after Philosophy* model.[7]

If contemporary art as inaugurated by Duchamp in 1917 was already impatient with modernist claims of the uniqueness of vision as the prerequisite for judging correctly what a work of art is, modernist critics were no less dismissive of the claims of certain contemporary styles, seeing them as either fraudulent or ideologically compromised. From cubism onward, and throughout the twentieth century, modernist art has had to grapple with the constant pluralization of the concept of art and its forms and mediums (e.g., the cubist collage and film montage) and the hybridization of the art object (e.g., from the ready-made and Dada). At every turn in the shift toward pluralization and hybridization, modernist art has tried to prove its own staying power and is not devoid of its own spectacular weapons against the impudent assaults of Duchampian contemporary art, as witnessed in its attempt every decade since the first ready-made to storm the barricades and seize back the space of representation that painting and sculpture represent for classical art. In a sense, the historical debate between modernist art and contemporary art rests on a single philosophical tension, namely the issue of the authenticity of the work of art. For example Benjamin observed that "The revolutionary strength of Dadaism consisted in testing art for its authenticity."[8]

The issue of the authenticity of the work of art, and by extension that of the artist (who in a typical postmodernist term became the author), has a sociocultural basis beyond the art-historical questions it generates, especially as the basis for conceptual art becomes more and more dissociated from the polemics of statements about art to the politics of that statement and, finally, the politics of representation. The legacy of Duchamp in the formulation of the theory of conceptual art produced consequences beyond his original intent, to the extent that at a certain juncture, Duchamp ceases to be a useful avatar for the range of heterogeneous strategies and statements that have devoted themselves as expressions of artistic intention outside the framework of objects and images.

Benjamin Buchloh has rightly observed that in "Confronting the full range of the implications of Duchamp's legacy . . . Conceptual practices . . . reflected upon the construction and role (or death) of the author just as much as they redefined the conditions of receivership and the role of the spectator."[9] Although Buchloh's historical claim is in part correct, in relation to the spectator, the historians of conceptual art have been largely silent. What I mean is that in the postwar transformation of the global public sphere, the traditional construction of the spectator within both Western and modernist understanding had experienced a radical rupture with the emergence of postcolonial discourse. Postcolonial and civil rights discourses put under the spotlight a new kind of spectator. This spectator would construct, during the postwar period, new subjective relations to institutions of Western democracy and economics. For example in the United States, desegregated institutions needed also to rearticulate the philosophy informing their work as public spaces. The appearance of the subject within the framework of the experience of art was a new phenomenon that hitherto was unacknowledged, insofar as the concept of the institutions of art experienced pressures to be more attentive to the publics toward which it directed its undertakings. It was not just the primacy of the art object that demanded new consideration, but the primacy of the social exclusions that purportedly were built into the way institutions of art mediated the history of those objects. The postwar democratic public sphere repositioned the spectator in ways that would only become much clearer with the emergence of certain politically centered interpretations of subjectivity, models of subjectivization that were dependent on a number of socially bounded identifications (gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, etc.) of which multiculturalism today functions as the dark specter of the politics of the subject. While conceptualist paradigms may have opened a space for the considerations of some of these shifts, surprisingly the operation of conceptualism still predicated itself on the hinge of the modernist dialectic of the object and the gaze. As such, the shift in

the role of the traditional spectator within the structures of hegemonic institutions of power such as museums and Western gallery systems were not substantially articulated in the operations of conceptual art. Already in 1952, a decade before conceptual art purportedly began the redefinition of the role of the spectator, Frantz Fanon had called this homogeneous spectator into question in his classic psychoanalytic study, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon's study of subjectivity drew from the master/slave relationship of the self and other in colonial discourse, in which he foregrounds the importance of language whereby "to speak is to absolutely exist for the other."[10] Therefore, the fact of conceptual art's interpellation of language into the field of artistic vision cannot simply be adopted, in toto, as the radical critique of language, for its own action of critique is called into question with regard to the self-sufficiency of its own language games. Let me elaborate.

Though the terms, idioms, and forms of conceptual art are fully integrated within the site of institutionalized production of artistic discourse, as one of the legacies of high modernism and a bridge between modernism (including the hybridization performed on it by postmodernism) and contemporary art, the residual issues surrounding the authenticity of its statements is yet to be fully resolved. One astonishing fact of early conceptual art was its retrogressive awareness of and interest in politics of representation. Though a lot of large claims have been made for conceptual art in terms of its radicality, its critique of visuality seems mostly structured by a formalist rereading of modernist art. On the other hand it entirely bypassed the more problematic consequences for the non-Western conception of art posed by the grand narratives of *art history*. And where politics seems to intrude into its strategies, it was immediately contained within its polemics against the institution of art as the arbiter of meaning and authority. Working with certain worn-out clichés of Marxism, the most advanced elements of the movement were interested in the critique of capitalism, but never really interested in the formation and relations of power and citizenship that question the role of the spectator (for example, in the segregated context such as South Africa). Many of its chief proponents were interested in critiques of the consumer economy but never truly interested in the question of a radical opposition to political injustice. Throughout the 1960s conceptual artists operated with a surprising disinterest, and one could even say suspicion, of the political, opting instead for the more opaque notion of criticality, something with which many of its orthodox historians today have yet to come to terms.

   The degree to which many elements of conceptual art claimed a position of reflexivity by involving themselves in arguing with outmoded ideas of the bourgeois order is still difficult to reconcile with their purported

radicalization of the concept of art. Of course, there were radical exceptions to this orthodoxy such as the Situationist International, South American conceptualists such as Hélio Oiticica, Cildo Meireles (Brazil), Tucuman Arde collective (Argentina), Laboratoire AGIT Art (Dakar), and, in the United States, Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, and feminist-derived interventions. It is through them that the nature of critique (e.g., commodity, race, gender, power, the public sphere, art object, spectator) extended beyond the framework of art institutions. The South American artists actually raised very important questions concerning the entire relationship of art to the public sphere and shifted the emphasis from dematerialization to the production of social space. This came about as a consequence of the artists' awareness of the dictatorial power wielded by forces of the neoconservative military apparatus that ruled much of Latin America from the 1960s to the 1980s. In Senegal, Laboratoire AGIT Art moved beyond the philosophizing of art or the debate about the status of the art object by making the critique of the postcolonial state and the social context of their activities the object/subject of their critical inquiry. Guy Debord's critique of spectacle remains today more far-reaching than the formal gestures and instrumentalization of criticality of so-called institutional critique. Similarly Adrian Piper, Judy Chicago, Mierle Lederman Ukeles, and others brought into the frame of American conceptual art that most unspeakable of all hegemonic practices: race, identity, and gender.

One could say that the idea of institutional critique produces a certain form of tautology in the stylistic conventions it has adopted vis-à-vis the institution as such, all the more so because it has remained parasitic to the institution rather than predatory.[11] Consequently, it is easy to understand why museums not only have been able to vitiate the forms of institutional critique but have successfully absorbed them into the museum's legacy of bourgeois ideas of art through its collection. In a remarkable way then, institutional critique today comes off as an antique object of a utopian rebellion, reduced to nothing more than radical chic. Its reliance on the discursive opacity of the institution that not only sanctioned the efficacy of its procedures but also certifies the institution as the very medium of such procedures is a disturbing effect of its bizarre critical currency, which hitherto is yet to be fully explored.[12]

If the dialectic between modernist and contemporary art has been caught in attempts at elucidating, within each field, what the authenticity of the work of art and artist (author) is, the unexplored political consequences of this question take us now to the important question of identity formation, the

politics and crisis of the subject, and the processes of homogenization and assimilation of non-Western cultural economies into the framework of late capitalism. Because most non-Western artistic contexts lack power it is often easy to either dismiss their importance or altogether ignore them. The history of modernism in relation to African art is well known in this regard. Africa fulfills a role in which it could be absorbed as an astonishing example of a certain ethnographic turn toward which modernism's fascination with alterity has always tended—or in the very worst case as embarrassing cases of an impossible mimesis. In whatever epistemological mode the African artist is grounded, in the larger discussions of modernism or contemporary art it is first on the basis of a pure disavowal, what the critic Hal Foster calls a process of disidentification.[13] Another way this disidentification occurs is through appropriation and assimilation of Africa as an effect of certain tropes of authenticity and cultural purity invested with the power of ethnographic realism. Most notably, for the African artist authenticity has become a congenital condition. Authenticity, because it partially hosts in its ambiguous carapace the kernel of the stereotype, is a burden unsupportable by the practical, conceptual, and historical forms through which it is represented in contemporary cultural discourse. Authenticity, rather than affirming the continuities of a cultural past (based on nineteenth-century Western romanticism[14] as a general signifier for an African tradition) in fact comes off more as the antithesis of such continuities. Authenticity's primary structure is the fiction that reproduces it as the figure of a unitary, homogeneous belief in the particularism of an African essence.

Authenticity as an idea toward the standardization, hence banalization, of the complexity of contemporary African identity appeals to certain romantic notions of African uniqueness that have been promoted for so long. Authenticity therefore must be understood as the handmaiden of an ethnocentric discourse blind to the complexity of the modern map of African social reality, and doubly blind to the multiplicity of identities forged in the crucible of colonization, globalization, diaspora, and the postcolonial social transformation of insular cultural worlds. Authenticity is not only a vague notion with ambiguous features that no one can possibly identify, let alone describe its practicability in the context of African artistic procedures, but also a code for fixity, absolutism, atrophy. Writers such as Wole Soyinka and artists such as Issa Samb and the members of Laboratoire AGIT Art in Dakar were correct in questioning the efficacy of the ethnocentric model of negritude in the 1960s.[15] In the same manner in which their critique of negritude as a universal of the African world functioned, so did their rejection of the false claims of Eurocentric universalism over the territory of other

cultures. To say this much is not to be beholden to the relativism that governs what passes today as cultural exchange, but to point to the difficulties that reproduce dichotomies that ground themselves in the discourse of power.

In its attempt to arrest the African social imaginary, one could impute that the denotative idea behind the construct of authenticity is its primordialism, that is, as an a priori concept that determines and structures the bonds of the self to the other; the other as always unchanging, arrested, bound to tradition, tethered to the supernatural forces of nature; the other whose social temporality is governed by an innate world and its systems of kinship, beliefs, and symbols, all of which remain beyond the reach of any structural or material transformation of reason and progress, except in superficial circumstances, after which he/she returns back to an originary state. Therefore authenticity as primordialism conceives of the other in a vacuum of history, locates him/her in the twilight of origin, fixed in the constancy of the unchanging same. Or on the other hand it conceives of the other as an excess and spectacle of history, as a cycle of repetition, mimicry, demonstration, performance, habitation, expression, and practice.

This latter idea of authenticity as primordialism in Michael Taussig's terms could be called part of its mimetic faculties,[16] that is, in its tendency to quote, copy, and imitate that which is believed to be the original. So in a paradoxical sense, the authentic is always false. According to such a logic, the mimetic faculty allows for the inexhaustible permutations of quoting, copying, and imitating an idea of African authenticity: for example, real Africa is traditional rather than modern; rural rather than urban; tribal and collective rather than individual and subjective; black rather than hybrid; timeless rather than contingent.[17] Taken to its most absurd level these meaningless binarisms and conjectures take on a facticity and truth that then govern and aid all relations of production in art, literature, film, music, and other spheres of modern knowledge production. Yet in the same logic we witness the contingency of the destiny of the African artist in the face of various instruments of modern subjectivity, one of which concerns his/her liberation from the determinism of race. We may pause here to pay attention to the full emergence of a crisis: the crisis of the subject.[18] The politics of the subject[19] is an important one in relation to how this crisis is critically engaged. For the African subject, this crisis is paradoxically engaged through the instrumental rationalization of the idea of free will. Achille Mbembe captures this succinctly:

> The triumph of the principle of free will (in the sense of the right to criticize and the right to accept as valid only what appears justified), as well as the individual's acquired capacity to self-refer, to block any attempt at absolutism and to achieve self-realization through art are seen as key attributes of modern consciousness.[20]

For those Africans who disavow the *fiction of authenticity*—the mimetic excess par excellence—what choice do they have beyond the violence of the dichotomy between the fake and real,[21] authentic and inauthentic, primordialism (backwardness) and modernity (progress), the universal and the particular? If we are to hypothesize authenticity what else could it mean beyond its interpretation as an act of constant self-repetition, self-mimicry, and self-abasement in the stew of origin? Shouldn't we begin the quest for the authentic in African cultural discourse first by ridding ourselves of all illusions that it can be conjured by a simple appeal to the past and tradition? Second, should we not be insisting that the most meaningful place to seek the figure of the authentic is not in the swamp of fantasies in which Africa has been caught as the true historical opposition between reason and unreason, between the West and the rest, but elsewhere: in the politics of the subject? The quest for the authentic it seems to me is in the search to locate the African subject, not simply as African (for that is already a given), but as a universal subject endowed with capacities far beyond the lure of authenticity. Such a subject is neither a mere fantasy of overdetermined cultural theory nor a fanciful postmodern caricature. We can therefore present the case of the African subject in the following manner:

> the constitution of the African self as a reflexive subject . . . involves doing, seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, and touching. In the eyes of all involved in the production of that self and subject, these practices constitute what might be called *meaningful human expressions*. Thus the African subject is like any other human being: he or she engages in *meaningful acts*. . . . the African subject does not exist apart from the acts that produce social reality, or apart from the process by which those practices, are so to speak, *imbued with meaning*.[22]

If the speech of the African subject is *imbued with meaning* at the moment he/she speaks (whether as an artist or not), cultural subjectivity for the modern African artist opposes itself to the binary violence of either/or, universalism/particularism. The complexity of such a speech extrudes from the dynamism of multiple traditions and is transformed in the aleatory patterns of juxtaposition, mixing, and creolizations that define the contact zone of culture, especially after colonialism.

As I have tried to show, the discourse of crisis[23] is not only endemic to the political and social formation in Africa, it also concerns the crisis evident in the processes of subjectivization, that is, the ability to constitute a speech not marked by the failure of intelligibility and communicability. The process of subjectivization, which I will also define as the ability for a given subject to articulate an autonomous position, to acquire the tools and power of speech (be it in art, writing, or other expressive and reflexive actions), is connected to the idea of sovereignty. This sovereignty operates around the

ethical-juridical territory of power relations, namely, between the recognition of the given fact of natural rights and that right regulated and legitimized by the law: here the individual is "subjectified in a power relationship."[24]

The idea of the sovereign subject as it concerns Africa is important if we are to rethink questions of authenticity in cultural practice. I want to do so by turning to the position of the artist as producer in a time of crisis,[25] the crisis of the postcolonial state.[26] There is also the crisis of development discourse that has been the bedrock of the democratization and liberalization of the postcolonial state and economies since the 1960s. Here it is important to note that the postcolonial state has been exacerbated in the last two decades by the brutal macroeconomic Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the 1980s and 1990s. Though there are disputes among experts about the actual causes of the kind of congenital underdevelopment we see today in Africa, it is generally agreed that SAP deepened the crisis and weakened the capacity of the state to manage and respond effectively to its effects. SAP put into place the inability of a host of African subjects to properly conceptualize and formulate their own futures, that is, to speak as true social subjects. All through Africa, institutions and citizens are vulnerable to the rapacious calumny of the industrial forces of economic and political rationalization. Rather than reform as was promised, the shock of the experiment at liberalization produced stagnation, structural atrophy, collapsed economies, deep poverty, failed institutions, and loss of state autonomy from donor institutions and markets. Liberal reform of the economy (devaluation of currencies, the imposition of austerity measures, privatization of state assets) set in motion a deepening crisis and further underdevelopment and dependency. Only recently have liberal economists, the World Bank, and IMF begun to acknowledge the failure of these economic shock therapies.[27] As a test case the neoliberal ideology of free market capitalism not only failed in Africa, it also produced a wave of disenchantment, instability, and erosion of social networks.

If as Foucault claims "the theory of sovereignty assumes from the outset the existence of a multiplicity of powers . . . [imagined as] capacities, possibilities, potentials,"[28] the grim assessment of the postcolonial state and the postcolonial subject within the developmental discourse of neoliberal market ideology introduces a series of antinomies. But here we need a critique of crisis as always the logical outcome of the neocolonial transformation of the modern African state. Indeed, crisis not only situates the subject, it mortifies the subject. The chief and primary effect of this is traumatic. This trauma compels a complete rethinking, if not necessarily the overhaul, of the forms, strategies, and techniques of everyday existence as well as the

devices through which cultural production occurs and in the places where it is grounded. Because this crisis affects the effectiveness of institutions, conditions of production, and the visibility and quality of discursive formations, the position of the artist and intellectual within the public sphere is constantly called into question. Furthermore, the coercive power of the state to force artists and intellectuals to adapt their practices according to an official dictum of the state apparatus forces attempts at disclosing the autonomy of the artist and intellectual under such force.[29] Many intellectuals, researchers, and nongovernmental organizations working in the area of African political economy in recent years have focused on different strategies of strengthening civil society, governance, democracy, and informal economies as a way of boosting the sovereignty of the subject in a time of crisis.

This has given rise to a number of responses. Though much of the focus has been concentrated around the work of NGOs, community associations, social science think tanks, and multilateral global institutions, very little attention has been given to the dimension of culture. I do so here by examining the work of two distinctly different groups of practitioners who have made the analysis of the conditions of production under this crisis the sine qua non of their reflexive activities since 1989 and 1996, respectively. The two groups, Le Groupe Amos in Kinshasa and Huit Facettes in Dakar, were each formed as specific responses to (1) the crisis of the public sphere under the long dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko in the former Zaire and its further deterioration under the late Laurent Kabila who overthrew the regime of Mobutu in 1997; (2) the erosion of the link between the state and formal institutions of culture; (3) the collapse and disappearance of the public sphere; and (4) the crisis and alienation of the labor of the artist working within the forced bifurcation of social space between the urban and rural contexts of Senegal. All of these responses, the first in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and the other in Senegal, are positions specifically articulated toward the production of a common social space and the development of protocols of community as the first condition for the recognition of the sovereign subject.

It is by this insight that we can situate the work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes, especially in light of their direct engagement with the politics of crisis in African social, political, and cultural discourse in order to produce new networks that link them to local communities. Each, in their conception of the social and community, calls for evaluative procedures in the construction of a reflexive practice within their given context.

Le Groupe Amos was founded in 1989 by a group of writers, intellectuals, activists, and artists in Kinshasa. It emerged out of the political

and economic crisis of the last decade of Mobutu's corrupt, dictatorial mis-
rule as Congolese civil society began a process of realignment. Taking its
name from the biblical prophet Amos who in the Old Testament is iden-
tified with the struggle for social justice, the grassroots activist movement
initiated by members of Le Groupe Amos evolved, in the context of the
Democratic Republic of Congo, an extension of the tactics found in Latin
American liberation theology, infusing their activism with the ethics of civil
disobedience and "creative non-violent action"[30] inspired by Ghandi's phi-
losophy and Martin Luther King Jr.'s work. As a collective, one of their
principal quests was how to deal with the crisis of legitimation facing mil-
lions of disempowered Congolese silenced by the venality of a brutal regime.
In a way there was an idealism surrounding this quest, especially when it
concerns the choice to offer a different critical option to the Congolese
public beyond the armed rebellion being waged against Mobutu in order to
free the subjective force of their repressed society by means of direct action.
Four points are important in the work and conception of Le Groupe Amos.
The first is its identification with the political, social, and cultural aspira-
tions of the ordinary Congolese. This means that all its works, which often
take a didactic format, are produced both in French—the official lingua
franca of the state—and in the vernacular, Lingala, the language of every-
day discourse among ordinary people in Kinshasa. The second aspect of the
group is its relationship to the sphere of politics and institutional power. Here,

FIGURE 8.2. Le Groupe Amos installation, "Documenta 11," Germany, June–September 2002.

FIGURE 8.3. Le Groupe Amos, *Peuple en action* (Kinshasa: Editions du Groupe Amos, 1994).

CAMPAGNE SUR LA VIOLENCE FAITE A LA FEMME
EDITION 2000

L'ORGANISATION DES FEMMES POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT INTEGRAL ET
COMMUNAUTAIRE (OFEDICO)

PRESENTE

CHEMIN DE CROIX DE LA FEMME CONGOLAISE

Idée originale de Victorine Neka & Thierry Nlandu
Réalisation
Artiste peintre Katasi Mbelo et le poète Thierry Nlandu (Groupe Amos)

FIGURE 8.4. Le Groupe Amos, *Campagne sur la violence faite a la femme* (Kinshasa: Editions du Groupe Amos, 2000).

the group foregrounds a critical, discursive activist relationship to the res pub‑
lica in the conception and organization of its projects. To do so it translates
its intellectual ideals into a series of programmatic activities, broadening its
network among neighborhood associations in order to organize and harness
those aspirations operative in the field of power. Third, the field of its actions
and techniques of dissemination, production, and media are carefully fused
as part of the social production of the public sphere. And fourth is its defini‑
tion of its relationship to the public sphere in the manner that Antonio
Gramsci defined the role of the intellectual in the context of culture. For Le
Groupe Amos this is principally formulated on the ethics of self‑governance.
Here the work of the intellectual is both in the activity of particular forms of
praxis and in the functions that require a certain minimum intellectual dis‑
pensation "within the general complex of social relations."[31] In the field of
social relations in which Le Groupe Amos has positioned its work, the targets
of its actions are the state and those institutions and organizations—the
church (especially the Catholic church), political parties, rebel movements,
multinational global institutions linked to powerful economic interests—

FIGURE 8.5. Le Groupe Amos, *Campagne éducation à la démocratie*, performed by Theatre Mama
OFEDICO (Women's Organization for Development, Integration, and Community), video still, n.d.

Groupe Amos

16 FÉVRIER 1992 - 16 FÉVRIER 2002

Dix ans après ...

Ensemble,

continuons
la marche de l'espoir !

Editions du Groupe Amos
Kinshasa, février 2002

FIGURE 8.6. Le Groupe Amos, *Dix ans après . . . Ensemble, continuons la marche de l'espoir!* (Kinshasa: Editions du Groupe Amos, 2002).

generally regarded as complicit in suppressing the subjectivity of the Congolese people.

Working with a variety of grassroots organizations, Le Groupe Amos employs a number of devices, such as pedagogy for its projects on literacy and nonviolence. With regard to politics it uses public interventions in various media to transmit its message within the urban neighborhoods of Kinshasa and more broadly beyond the immediate locus of the city. These interventions manifest themselves as forms of direct action targeting specific deficits within the political, social, and cultural economy. The actions can be in the form of a theatrical production organized with local actors (housewives, workers, young students). Other activities of the group involve didactic teaching material, essays, commentaries, and cartoons published in newspapers, pamphlets, posters, and magazines. Along with these it publishes books, teaches clinics, and organizes workshops on democracy and democratization, governance and citizenship, tolerance, civil disobedience, and gender equality. The group also produces radio broadcasts, theater, and audio and short video documentaries taking advantage of the endless reproducibility of the media works as a way to reach communities in other parts of the vast country. This form of direct intervention into public discourse is unique and in many ways novel. Its most recent work has increasingly focused on the work of reconciliation among warring factions of different Congolese rebel movements. In this capacity it was invited as a participant/observer from forums of the Congolese civil society organizations to the peace conference on the Congolese civil war hosted by the South African government in 2002 in Sun City, South Africa. One could rightly say that there is a proselytizing dimension in the way it employs dominant media strategies to reach a wide variety of publics in its work.

Previously, I pointed out the degree to which language plays a formidable role in the activities of the group. With a large segment of the population being illiterate, Le Groupe Amos is aware that for its work to have a direct consequence within the field into which it intervenes, it would need to be conscious of the language of its discourse. In this case their work maintains a critical awareness of the social and class divisions perpetuated through the mastery of the colonial language. Its tactic is not to disavow French, which is the language of official discourse, but rather to empower the vernacular languages (e.g., Lingala, Swahili) as a tool of popular discourse. In so doing the group seeks to decapitate the class distinctions between those who occupy the space of power and therefore are perceived to possess discursive authority and those on the margins of power who lack a voice. Of the latter class, women are the most vulnerable to the distortion of power relationships that define the chaotic and impoverished character of the Congolese. Thierry

N'Landu, a professor of American literature in the University of Kinshasa and founding member of the group, describes some of their projects, stating:

> Groupe Amos's commitment to changing Congolese society through nonviolent strategies is evidenced by numerous inspirational and informative projects. In particular, Amos has focused on the plight of women in short video documentaries such as *Congo aux deux visages; L'Espérance têtue d'un peuple,* 1997; *Femme Congolaise: Femmes aux mille bras,* 1997; *Au Nom de ma foi,* 1997. *Et ta violence me scul ta Femme* ("Your Violence Made Me a Woman"), 1997, is a video in Lingala, a vernacular language from Kinshasa, which celebrates the power of Congolese women who struggle for rights in a context where traditions, customs, religion, and even existing laws do not facilitate equality.[32]

Two things are noteworthy in N'Landu's statement. The first concerns the form through which Le Groupe Amos undertakes its work as a sociocultural activity rather than specifically as a visual art activity. This would lead one to see the group's work in the broader context of knowledge production than in that of artistic or visual production. The effectiveness of direct communication to its audiences leads the group to pursue its work through the discursive utility of linguistic identification with each of its specific and general audiences. The second point concerns the relationship of power to the social reproduction of agency and sovereignty, particularly with regard to women. Here, specific critiques of the patriarchal structure of Congolese society are directed at the customs, traditions, and existing laws that place women in subservient positions of power. Again, the serviceability of the figure of the authentic has a far more limited purchase than the idea of the subject, insofar as the status of women is concerned in the Congolese context. This, again, is articulated as one of the stated intentions of the role of citizenship and author in the development of new forms of social discourse of civil society in the Democratic Republic of Congo. José Mpundu, another member of Le Groupe Amos, in an essay on the future of democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, writes:

> Civil society in the situation of this crisis and in view of the resolution of the conflict will have to reconnect with its primary vocation: to educate the people in order for them to be able to take charge of themselves on all levels. Civic, political as well as moral education will make of our people the authors of their history and the masters of their destiny. Civil society is asked to play a role of primary importance in the process of liberation of the people. . . . Political liberation, economic liberation, cultural liberation, social liberation: that is the true struggle of civil society. In order to do so, it will have to help the people organize in an efficient manner and to elaborate strategies of social struggle.[33]

Having elaborated this quasi-Marxist view of class struggle, Mpundu, a few sentences later, makes clear the idea that the liberation imagined by Le Groupe Amos was not just a liberation from the despotism of the state and its rulers (including the surrogates of Rwanda and Uganda who occupy the eastern part of the country) but the hegemonic power identified

with European and American interests. Throughout the discourse of the crisis in Africa, the identification of the mendacity of forces of production with external powers has become deeply entrenched and not without foundation. These forces in the name of a number of abstract concepts connected to the great liberal trinity of democracy, free market, and human rights are often believed to be a kind of third force that has to be fought before the sovereign African subject can emerge.

Huit Facettes was formed by a group of eight individual—hence its name—artists in 1996, in Dakar, Senegal. It is different from Le Groupe Amos in that it is self-identified as an artistic collective, using the means of art and

FIGURE 8.7. Huit Facettes-Interaction, two shots of installation, "Documenta 11," Germany, 2002.

its corollary, creativity, to probe the relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical, the social and cultural. However, the task Huit Facettes set for itself was first a confrontation with the impotency, immobility, and disempowerment that the artists in the collective perceived in the artistic context of Senegal. The second question that concerned members of Huit Facettes was the increasing social stratification that defined the relationship between the elite and the poor in the city, a stratification that also had impoverished the relationship of their individual work to the society in which it was produced, leading it inexorably toward becoming a code for its own alienation. This stratification and alienation is even more acute in the lines that separate rural and urban communities in Senegal. In the city, the terms of dwelling and perceptions of social agency are often aleatory. While the urban economy is governed by a tendency toward informality and improvisation within the capitalist economy, the rural community is entirely tethered to a preindustrial agrarian past. In the city social networks that bind one community to another have not only exploded, producing scattered trajectories, they have also become implacable, diffuse, and difficult to organize. The urban material consistency, having succumbed to obsolescence, is now shaped by growing spatial distortions that collapse into fleeting temporalities.

On the vast outskirts of the urban rim, forgotten communities in the villages that are the historical link between the past and the present, the local and global, live on the edge of official amnesia, on the dark side of a politics of invisibility.[34] Though massive in population and visible through the meager, deracinated social amenities that can barely cope with their demands, the poor in Africa have become the disappeared of globalization. In broad daylight Africans are short-circuited between development and underdevelopment, between the *third world* and the *first world*. The poor are invisible because official discourse long ago stopped seeing them. Instead they have become a blind spot in the neoliberal catechism of the move toward market economy. They have become ghosts in the political machine[35] of late modernity. Deracinated by structural adjustment policies, the rural and urban contexts in Africa have become manifestations that produce their own structure of fecundation, a fertile soil for new possibilities of being. Urban and rural inhabitants have increasingly begun working with new kinds of experimentation contra the logic of development modernity. They are involved in inventing new subjective identities and protocols of community.

All these issues coalesce in the activities of Huit Facettes. Its principal project since its formation is the Hamdallaye project, a long, extended collaboration with the inhabitants of the village of Hamdallaye, some five hundred kilometers from Dakar in the Haute Cassamance region near the Gambian border. Huit Facettes perceives its work exactly as the inverse of

the logic of development strategies through the utility of art. In so doing, its central mission has been to "disentangle modernism's historical contradiction between art's claim to aesthetic autonomy and its ambitions for social relevance."[36] The sustained ongoing project at Hamdallaye attempts, through collaboration between the members of the group and the villagers, to concentrate on the circulation of not only the symbolic goods of artistic skills but also on the strategic transfer of vital skills from the artists to the village community. However, this transfer of skills is directed to ensure that the villagers retain creative control of their artistic labor. To empower the isolated villagers and thereby increase their economic capacity through artistic skills not only profits the villagers, it also helps them bridge the social distance between them as artists and the villagers who perceive artists from the point of view of being a privileged urban elite identified with elements of the state. According to Kan Si, one of the founding members:

> Huit Facettes in rural Senegal is much more the story of a procedure or process which, as it unfolds, has given us (contemporary Senegalese artists living in the city) a point of anchorage or reconciliation with the part of society that feeds us and from which we were cut off. One particular elite rejoins its roots in the same sociocultural (Senegalese) context.[37]

Each year since 1996, the project with the villagers in Hamdallaye begins with a series of public discussions that then move into the phase of workshops. The workshops are designed to transform basic skills into professional skills—for example, in under-glass painting, ceramics, batik dyeing process, carving, weaving, embroidery. Depending of the level of work needed to accomplish the training at hand, the workshops are normally conducted over a period of one to two weeks. The concentration on specific kinds of skills is arrived at based on their utility and creativity, but also on dialogue with members of the community. Women are especially targeted as a group who can profit from the link with the artists. For Huit Facettes the planning of each workshop is connected to the utility of certain creative systems (they have to be accessible, inexpensive, skillful, sustainable over a long period, and draw from the exchange of knowledge between the two groups). What the artists offer, in addition, are access to material, advertisement of the results, and access to the urban market. Above all, the autonomy of the Hamdallaye residents in deciding what is most useful for them in the collaboration is important for the critical discourse of Huit Facettes. The group tries to avoid the hierarchical structure of NGO development work. This is partly to stimulate the agency and subjective capacity of each participant in the workshop, to help them establish an individual expression. But above all it is to avoid at all cost the possibility of dependency. By paying critical attention to the idea of subjectivity Huit Facettes works in the interstices of

development and empowerment, whereby "in the end the participants are able to set up self-sustaining practices as non-dependent citizens."[38]

This approach is attempted as a subtle contradiction of the development discourse, which recently has been the dominant vehicle for addressing many African crises. The top-down, donor–client model of NGOs and development agencies from wealthy Western countries has been perceived as undermining Africa's ability at nondependency. Oftentimes, development organizations, through donor institutions, operate on the assumption of economic and sociopolitical templates that can be domesticated within an African context, transforming the templates as it were into substrates of an authentically African ideal. As such there is the preponderance of support for an aesthetic of recycling, the make-do, makeshift, and bricolage rather than invention, sophistication, and technologically sound transfer of knowledge.[39] In short, development has given rise to the spectacle and excess of *Tokunbo*[40] culture, whereby discarded and semifunctional technological objects and detritus of the West are recalibrated for the African market. From used cars to electronics, from biotechnology to hazardous waste Africa has become the dumping and test ground for both extinct Western technology and its waste.[41] All of these issues come up in the analysis of the political-social-cultural economy of Senegal by Huit Facettes.

On a certain level, this approach may in certain quarters be perceived as naive. However, Huit Facettes is under no illusion that its work makes any difference beyond its ability to establish a particular type of social context for communication between itself and different communities in Senegal, be it in its other campaign to raise public awareness on the AIDS pandemic or in their participation as individual artists in the urban renewal project of Set Setal during the early 1990s in Dakar. The conception of art on the basis of activism is one in which its statements have been soundly equivocal. According to Kan Si, in the view of Huit Facettes:

> Artistic work that aspires to engage with social issues . . . contributes in one way or another to the development of the "real world," only much will depend on the nature of that work. Such contribution will have to be perceived differently and in a wider sense, just as the notion of a work of art can be understood more in terms of process than as finished cultural object, to be instantly consumed (seen, appreciated, or indeed judged). Society's concerns become the medium for an intervention, if only suggestively, for a formula through which we may engage with and seek solutions to problems encountered in everyday life.[42]

By forcing themselves to confront the incommensurable in the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic, between the subject and the state, Huit Facettes and Le Groupe Amos operate in the vanguard position of a new type of debate within the contemporary global public sphere. As we know, all activities, events, and practices of art are grounded in specific paradigm

FIGURE 8.8. Group Material, *Democracy,* Dia Art Foundation, New York, 1990.

formations; that is, all activities, events, and practices of art are determined by a history and the structure of the formation of that history. It is also important not to analyze the complex manifestation of this practice from the perspective of an aesthetics of political action that today is not only problematic, but has increased the dialectical tension between notions of ethics and aesthetics. Whether it is possible to address ethical questions through the vehicle of aesthetics seems, for now, not only overdetermined but also subject to deep ideological appropriation by both liberal and conservative forces. In fact, the combination of the political and the poetic, the aesthetic and the ethical has often led to an unhappy conflation of power and morality.

Consequently, the conjunction of ethics and aesthetics in certain forms of institutional critique have tended to view artistic practice through the lens of a simplistic analysis of the politics (between good and bad, proper and improper, virtuous and cynical) rather than the more critical notion of the political, which to my mind grounds all relations of power and discourses between artists, activists, and institutions. Ethics today have a high currency in the field of contemporary art, all the more so because of the kinds of surprising prohibition placed on the political in relation to art.[43] Contemporary discourses in many areas, be it in the conduct of war, medicine (euthanasia and abortion being two examples), biotechnology (the

recent debates around the ethics of cloning), law (capital punishment), or human rights (child labor, slavery, racism), have engaged further explorations of the ethical as that which sutures certain complex conducts in the political, scientific, and cultural sphere. And here artists have been at the forefront of an interdisciplinary response to the debates that have grown out of them. However, the relation between the ethical and the aesthetic, the aesthetic and the political, the poetic and the social has increasingly brought the philosophical value of ethics before us in an unresolved form. This is where I believe that the discourse of authenticity as the force that gives positive content to the work of the African artist is not only misguided, but deeply problematic. Therefore, to understand that which animates the world-view of the African artist, we must do well to invent a new politics of the subject.

NOTES

1. In a famous statement Joseph Beuys provocatively proclaimed the point of view that everyone is an artist and therefore we are all artists. Such judgment no doubt can equally be conceived as part of the hubristic simplification with which some critics often associate Beuys.

2. With regard to the question "what is an author?" Jean-Paul Sartre, in a series of essays written after the Second World War, asked a similar question. *What is Literature and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

3. In an interview in *The Guardian* of October 31, 2002, Mr. Howells described the work of the artists thus: "If this is the best British artists can produce then British art is lost. It is cold, mechanical, conceptual bullshit." The artist Martin Creed, who presented an installation of lights going on and off in one of the galleries of Tate Modern, London, as part of his presentation for the Turner Prize, was especially marked out for excoriation. Suffice it to say that the minister's reaction was not about the work as much as it was about a prestigious award being conferred on something that displays a minimum of artistic originality or labor.

4. Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avantgarde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; 1985).

5. Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production," in *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), has remained a classic and the most penetrating analysis of the contingency of the nature of aura as what determines the uniqueness in the work of art. The transfer from uniqueness to reproduction inherently marks the end of the idea of aura insofar as the question of the nature of art was concerned.

6. Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

7. See Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990,* ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

8. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorism, Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1989), 229.

9. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," in *October: The Second Decade,* ed. Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson, Hal Foster, Benjamin Buchloh, and Silvia Kowbolski (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 119.

10. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markham (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 17.

11. One unfortunate example of the museological integration of institutional critique as a museum object and paraphernalia is the 1999 exhibition "Museum as Muse: Artists Decide" organized at the Museum of Modern Art by Kynaston McShine. Nowhere was the idea of institutional critique more disarmed and artists more complicit in the game than this exhibition. More disappointing in this case was Michael Asher's take in the exhibition on the deaccessioned artworks from the museum's collection.

12. Hal Foster is one of the few critics to have offered a most scathing reflection of this critical turn in his magisterial text "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 171–203.

13. Ibid.

14. See Sydney Kasfir, "African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow," in *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace,* ed. Okwui Enwezor and Olu Oguibe (London: INIVA [Institute for International Visual Arts]; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 88–113.

15. See, for example, Wole Soyinka's critique of negritude in *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

16. See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London: Routledge, 1993).

17. Yinka Shonibare and Chris Ofili are but two of the most well-known African artists who have made the critique of authenticity central to their work. In the case of Shonibare, he has used the idea of excess as a strategy to undercut the power of the authentic as a marker of cheapness and lack of sophistication.

18. See Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman, "Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis," *Public Culture* 7, no. 2 (1995): 323–52.

19. See Cornelia Klinger, "The Politics of the Subject—the Subject of Politics," in *Democracy Unrealized,* ed. Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002), 285–301.

20. Achille Mbembe, *On the PostColony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 10.

21. Sydney Kasfir has made the important observation that questions of authenticity of African art were first a value of connoisseurship of the Western collector for whom the importance of authenticity depended on the establishment of what is valued as real and what is not valued as a copy or a fake. Therefore, the science of authentication is no more than a fantasy of projection through the *construction of "tribal style"* whereby "authenticity as an ideology of collection and display creates an aura of cultural truth around certain types of African art (mainly precolonial and sculptural)." Kasfir, "African Art and Authenticity."

22. Mbembe, *On the PostColony,* 6; emphasis in original.

23. Throughout, I have pivoted my idea of crisis around Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman's exceedingly important text "Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis."

24. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at Collège de France,*

1975–1976, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 43.

25. In 1934, during an address to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, Benjamin raised the issue of the "Author as Producer." His insights made over seventy years ago remain remarkably prescient even today. Under the threat of the looming political crisis in Europe at the dawn of fascism, Benjamin averred that the context of production—here he was speaking specifically about literature—must be set in a "living social context," namely, the social context of production. Conversely he observed that, "Social conditions are . . . determined by conditions of production. And when a work was criticized from a materialist point of view, it was customary to ask how this work stood vis-à-vis the social relations of production of its time." The second point made by Benjamin in this direction is that "Rather than ask 'what is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time?' [one] should . . . ask 'What is its *position* in them?' This question directly concerns the function the work has within the literary [artistic] relations of production of its time." Benjamin, "Author as Producer," 222; emphasis in original.

26. See also Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture," in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press; Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963). On the role of intellectuals in the postcolonial emancipatory project, see also Sekou Touré, "The Political Leader as a Representative of His Culture," in *Expérience Guinéenne Unité* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962).

27. See Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), one of the more prominent critics of the World Bank and IMF.

28. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 43.

29. A typical response throughout the onset of the crisis is an attempt at delegitimizing the artist and intellectual, forcing many into prison, dissendency, or exile as in the case of Nigeria during the period of political repression by the Abacha regime. When artists and intellectuals are forced to go to exile, many experience an anxiety of the *authenticity* of their work.

30. Thierry N'Landu, "Le Groupe Amos," in *Documenta11-Platform 5: Ausstellung/Exhibition, Kurzführer/Short Guide* (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 102.

31. Antonio Gramsci, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: Schocken, 1988), 304.

32. See the introduction of "Le Groupe Amos: Reader," a compilation of writings of the group presented as part of a reading/media room dedicated to its work in "Documenta11-Platform 5," Kassel, Germany, June–September 2002: *Documenta11-Platform 5*, 116, trans. (French to English) Muna El Fituri-Enwezor.

33. José Mpundu, "What Future for the Democratic Republic of Congo?" in *Documenta11-Platform 5*, 148.

34. Abdou Maliq Simone, "The Visible and Invisible: Remaking African Cities," in *Under Siege: Four African Cities; Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*, ed. Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

35. Ibid.

36. Nadja Rottner, "Huit Facettes," in *Documenta11-Platform 5*, 114.

37. Kan Si, "Dimensons Variable: Reply from Kan Si," in *The Metronome, or Backwards Translation: (No. 4–5–6)*, ed. Clementine Deliss (Frankfurt: Bielle, 1999), 126.

38. Exhibition statement, "Documenta11-Platform 5," Kassel, Germany, 2002.

39. Artists such as Georges Adeagbo, Kay Hassan, Antonio Olé, Romauld

Hazoumé, and Pascale Marthine Tayou have thoroughly dismantled the randomness and poverty of the bricolage aesthetic by elaborating new sculptural and pictorial devises with recycled material: Olé with his painterly and monumental refabrications of urban architectural fragments; Adeagbo with his mnemonic recontextualizations of archives of colonial and postcolonial history in his sculptural and sign painting appropriations; and Hassan with his arresting collages of masks, portraits, and crowds fabricated out of torn surplus billboard advertising prints that manifest an unusually raw festishistic power. Hazoumé's plastic masks fashioned out of cut-out plastic jerry cans on the other hand reside uneasily between genuine sculptural experiments and afro-kitsch. The larger and more critical question is why has the bricolage aesthetic persisted for so long all across Africa, and in fact seems to be acquiring an even greater acceptance in the work of even younger artists. The upshot is that for some reason recycling as an aesthetic option strangely continues to be seen by many artists as a proper artistic choice for making art. This perhaps owes to the erroneous notion that using recycled, impoverished material in clever ways somehow transforms and elevates the assembled oddities into innovative, albeit uncanny artistic products that raise local curiosity and please benevolent development workers.

40. *Tokunbo* is a Yoruba term that literally means "second child," but in the typical wry humor that accompanies responses to bleak socioeconomic conditions in most African countries, the term has come to stand for the vast secondhand market in objects of Western technological products such as cars, computers, electronics, and assorted machines that have been reconditioned and made suitable for export to Africa. The scale of the *Tokunbo* trade far outstrips that in new technological products and increasingly has come under state scrutiny for the effects on the environment, productivity, and safety.

41. In fact it seems unimaginable that there could be any other reason for this response to secondhand, recycled commodity-fetish products of the developed world beyond the survivalist strategies of people caught in the grips of brutal global economic restructuring. It is also to such survivalist strategies that artists and intellectuals have turned in order to protect their autonomy as critical producers of culture.

42. Kan Si, "Dimensons Variable," 122.

43. A number of the critiques that accompanied the reception of "Documenta11-Platform 5," which devoted a strong part of the exhibition to exploring the relationship between representation and the domain of social life, were based on abjuring the political and ethical in the conception of the work of art. Typical of such responses were criticisms from neoconservative writers such as Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times,* Blake Gopnik of the *Washington Post,* and Christopher Knight of the *Los Angeles Times*.

FIGURE 9.1. A. Osmolovsky (concept), *The Barricade: Devoted to the Events in Paris of 1968*, action held on Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street, Moscow, May 23, 1998. Copyright A. Osmolovsky, 2004. Printed with permission. Participants included A. Osmolovsky, A. Ter-Oganyan, D. Pimenov, O. Kireev, K. Preobrazensky, D. Model.

9. Beyond Representation and Affiliation: Collective Action in Post-Soviet Russia

IRINA ARISTARKHOVA

When "a thinking political subject" looks around today, twenty years after the official end of the cold war and a few years since the beginning of the war on terrorism, two basic questions once resorted to by the Russian intelligentsia come to mind: "Who is to be blamed?" and "What is to be done?" But these questions sound rather old-fashioned to our ear now and, really, they are from the nineteenth century. Consistent with the mood of today they may more accurately be reframed as "Who cares?" It seems as if now we have never been further away from the old ideal of collective action and collective responsibility, and every attempt to organize such actions seems counterproductive. This essay will survey the decade of the 1990s in post-Soviet Russia, focusing specifically on two politically marginal efforts to go against the grain of political apathy: the art movement known today as Moscow Actionism (Moscovcky Akzionism), presented here through the works and ideas of the artist, theorist, and curator Anatoly Osmolovsky, and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers (CSM, Komitet Soldatskikh Materei), today properly called Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (UCSMR). My main focus will be to raise some general questions about the efficacy and ethics of political action within the larger crises of political apathy and political representation in post-Soviet Russia. Toward this end, the awareness and treatment of heterogeneity in pursuing such actions and the role of experimentation, using various theories of "the political," will be critically evaluated. I will argue that what I call "maternal politics" embodies a different notion of the political subject that in turn opens up new ways of thinking about political action in relation to recent experiences in post-Soviet Russia.

THE EGOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL APATHY IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

The initial years of perestroika (1986–91) were a very exciting period as a real opportunity opened up for self-reflection and redefinition of Russian national identity, particularly in relation to its own violent past. However, reflexivity and critique were soon silenced by demands to not "dig too deep"— not be too critical—and the promise of redefinition turned instead to be a mandate for reconciliation with the (largely Orthodox religious) past and a return to "true Russian roots and traditions," albeit often as a modern political or artistic strategy.[1] The Russian Orthodox Church became arguably the single most influential social force of the 1990s, uniting political and cultural leaders in adopting a collective amnesia.

In the context of these changes, Russian intellectuals and artists were overwhelmed, and not only by the problems of everyday life. After seventy years of physical and intellectual isolation, it became clear that large portions of so-called contemporary thought, art, and action were not part of Soviet discourse, training, or life. The international political and artistic legacy of the 1960s, for example, was to play a limited role. This was a very difficult situation for cultural workers—artists, writers, intellectuals, academics, students—who had long yearned to engage with that broader cultural climate. At the same time, tourists as well as specialists in the Russian and Soviet past came to visit the hollow spectacle of post-Soviet society and often to take away souvenirs of the Soviet past. Much of the cultural exchange that took place during this period—in art, academic circles, or civil society—(with notable exceptions, of course) was experienced as dissatisfying. There are numerous and different reasons for this—one day someone should write on this subject—but here I will only point out that such contacts often resulted in profound misunderstandings, not only in terms of reference (linguistic or otherwise) but also in emotions and intentions. We Russians were often asked to confirm existing "truths" on the issues of Marxism, gender, politics, democracy, Russian character, etc., in ways that seemed to miss the point from the beginning. Reaction followed on our part—the only reaction that seemed available: "defending our way of life," even though it was not clear what that had come to mean. In this respect, the 1990s could well be called a "defensive decade" in Russian intellectual and artistic history as Russians were asked to confirm whatever their new friends thought had happened to us under Soviet rule with the visitors often assuming a higher ground with more advanced approaches and methods in both art and thought. Even when the situation was more complex than this, the feeling of inadequacy and lack of ability to respond led to a feeling of closure and voicelessness.[2]

This defensiveness, in many cases coupled with the larger refusal to address Russia's past, led to a situation when many Russian artists and intellectuals turned to themselves as subjects of their study—certainly not something unheard of in the history of art or ideas. Their own personal grievances and feelings were often expressed as symptoms of Soviet and post-Soviet life, and something that "the West" would not be able to understand fully. Of course, such works can be successful both aesthetically and commercially, but they may well be based on an "egological" foundation. In other words, such works can be protective of a self that feels threatened from encountering something or someone foreign, and we should be careful not to naturalize and hence neutralize this question and instead look to their social and political genealogy.

MOSCOW ACTIONISM AND THE CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION

Arguably, Moscow Actionism as represented by its conceptual formulator, Anatoly Osmolovsky, was the only art movement in post-Soviet Russia that articulated itself as derivative from "the left"—be it Marx, Lenin, and Russian and Soviet history, contemporary antiglobalization theorists, the Frankfurt School, or "1968" French intellectuals. It is interesting that this leftism created a certain agenda that made the connection between art and politics seemingly natural with art being positioned as activism, as direct public action. The other two well-known representatives of Moscow Actionism—Alexander Brenner and Oleg Kulik—were different in this respect. Their strategy was also direct public action in line with the social and economic chaos of the 1990s but without Marxist or leftist underpinnings. Alexander Brenner's actions included drawing a green dollar sign on Malevich's painting *White Cross on White* in Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and walking into the Kremlin to claim state power from Yeltsin. Oleg Kulik is most known for his performance *A Mad Dog or the Last Taboo Guarded by a Lonely Cerberus*, with A. Brenner (Guelman Gallery, November 23, 1994, Moscow), subsequently repeated in other cities, in which a naked Kulik barked and threw himself on passersby. Such gestures are usually explained as corresponding to the "chaos of the 1990s" and according to various theories of transgression and abjection. For our purposes here we will focus on one political action and movement: *Nongovernmental Control Commission (Vnepravitil'stvennaya Kontrol'naya Komissiya)*, 1996–2001, organized by Osmolovsky together with several other Moscow artists, theorists, and activists including A. Ter-Oganyan, O. Kireev, D. Pimenov, I. Chubarov, D. Gutov, and others.

At various points in his writings, Anatoly Osmolovsky has tried to address this crisis of representation without throwing out the idea of politically engaged art altogether. For him, "the absence of true knowledge of the world, the collapse of homogenous social structures and subcultures, and the impossibility of developing a logical behavior inevitably make us deny one of the main political principles of social governance—the principle of representation." He continues thus in his influential 1998 article:

> The whole democratic parliamentary and party system is based on the principle of representation. Their profession is to express our opinion! But isn't it the main goal of a modern leftist to create the social conditions through which each would have his own opinion and thus would be free from the totalizing state machine? Maybe Lenin's famous catchphrase "Every kitchen-maid will be able to rule a country" was the establishment of every ordinary member of society having his own personal opinion within Communism? Moreover, this very presence of personal opinion can be the warranty and the carte blanche for any pretension to any kind of governance.
>
> Don't be afraid of insane ideas—they are never clinically insane! Singularity and the intensive "drive" of thinking is the sign of modern competence! Did anyone think why Zhirinovsky won the 1994 election (and in 1996 proved that his success was not an accident)? Only due to that competency![3]

Such reflexivity and vigilance to not speak for others is something that was, and still remains, an ill-articulated issue in Russian contemporary art, and it is often disguised as a response to Western superficial political correctness. According to many hasty critics, such singularity disables politics—it puts the artist in a situation of silence and impotence, with no basis for action or its justification. "And what are we to do now," such critics ask, "nothing?" Even though we might disagree with Osmolovsky's transfer of the question of representation from politicians to artists, his insistence that reflexivity is the most important question for politically engaged art had a unique vitality in an era of apathy.

The main action the group is known for and that made their work significantly distinct is one that is directly connected to the Russian elections and leftist thought—the *Against All Parties Campaign*, a project that included street actions, publications, and exhibitions. The *Against All Parties Campaign* work exploited the typical election process. In addition to the actual standing political candidates and party affiliations, the Russian ballot has one further line that reads "Against All Parties, Groups, and Candidates." As such, if a voting person strongly feels that none of the candidates satisfy his or her demands in elections, he or she can express this by choosing the vote option "Against All." Osmolosvky's project made a political campaign advocating for this particular option. Additionally, according to the current Russian election law, if other candidates or parties receive less votes than the "Against All" candidate (as they term such a ballot option

in Russia, personalizing it—*kandidat protiv vsekh*), or this candidate takes more than 50 percent of the votes, the elections are annulled, and the other candidates or parties cannot stand in the same election again.

In the 1990s Russian voters at first did not broadly exercise this option against all. Those who were unhappy with other choices could simply destroy their ballot or not vote at all. In such cases the electoral process was not influenced very much. Candidates would generally prefer voters not to come to elections, rather than choosing the "Against All" option that provided a further statement of disapproval (and, of course, we know that apathy and bad turnout can be exploited, sometimes by ultraright or extremist candidates to win an election). However, as the number of votes cast in favor of "Against All" increased over the course of the 1990s, indicating people's desire to show their strong disapproval of the representational failures of the elections by voting against all, this became an increasingly self-conscious expression of public opinion. In one way or another, action "Against All" drew attention to this option too. There are no statistical data to assess how instrumental artists were in raising popularity of the "Against All" option, but we can assume that the street actions that you can see in Figure 9.2, held in the center of Moscow, had an impact. They were mentioned in the press, as well as noticed by FSB (home security agency), which later questioned some of the participating artists. Today this option is so popular across the country that election authorities are seriously considering the removal of the "Against All" box from future ballots.[4]

At the end of the 1990s it became clear that the Russian artistic and larger intellectual environment was not compatible with issues of responsibility, representation, or political experimentation. With the lack of networking with so-called ordinary people, modern politically engaged artists such as Osmolovsky seemed to be "terribly far removed from the people" (Lenin's expression) as well as from the existing mood of the art world where the "Who cares?" question persists more often than the revolutionary question of "What is to be done?" When the social situation in Moscow changed, Osmolovsky changed his strategy too; a more recent exhibition he curated was titled "Art without Justifications" (Iskusstvo bez opravdanii). In the curatorial essay he writes, "After multiple and rather painful clashes with the repressive state apparatuses and private social organizations, art had to admit that there are limitations to its actions. Understanding of its own *social* limits unavoidably leads to a search of *aesthetic* ones. . . . Tensed efforts of art to become politically important in a society, its desire to be able to influence society politically in an immediate way, are mostly pitiful and laughable. Here art is an obstacle to itself. It is impossible to be both artistically and politically effective."[5]

FIGURE 9.2. A. Osmolovsky (concept), *The Barricade: Devoted to the Events in Paris of 1968*, action held on Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street, Moscow, May 23, 1998. Copyright A. Osmolovsky, 2004. Printed with permission.

Osmolovsky was arguably the most politically engaged artist of the 1990s in Russia, not only as an artist-activist but, more important, in terms of his artistic innovations and constant search for the place of art in a changing society. In relation to our larger question of political engagement, its ethics, strategies, responsibility, and social relevance, his position seems to have become more and more general and metatheoretical. In his most recent views, cited above, about art and politics where he generalizes the artists' experience into art itself, the art-into-life ambitions of the 1990s seem to have been displaced by the certainly important, but by no means oppositional, question of aesthetics. The situation in the 1990s in Moscow was very specific, and at the time not many were interested in the question of politically engaged art to start with. As I tried to show in an earlier section, politics was credited with "everything bad" that happened to art under Soviet rule or for formalist misunderstanding of the 1920s avant-garde. With the lack of support from the Russian art world, as well as increasing state control of public life, Osmolosvky and other members of the group had to move on, so to speak. And they did. Or did they have to? In the next part of this essay I will try to outline the main problem of politics based on affiliation vis-à-vis representation followed by an introduction to a different kind of politics that forgoes both affiliation and representation as models of political action, practiced by the Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia.

BETWEEN AFFILIATION AND REPRESENTATION

Traditionally the notion of the state has been defined through its opposition to civil society. Foucault, among others, has shown that this opposition is no longer useful for carrying out effective political struggle: the moment of the "state no more than in any other moment of its history, does not have such unity, individuality, strong functionality, and, frankly speaking, importance; at the end, the state may be nothing more than an imagined reality, mystified abstraction, which importance is much more limited than many of us think."[6] His notion of "governmentality" serves as an alternative to state in the analysis of the political sphere. And indeed, governmentalization of the state is probably more significant today than what Foucault calls "stateization" of society. Another related point from Foucault's political analysis is that power cannot be presented anymore in repressive terms only, as something that is exercised top-down.[7] Today politics is characterized by a situation in which the distribution and exercise of power undermines the survival and growth of large and stable political bodies.

The crisis of the state manifests itself in, among other areas, the proliferation of NGOs, or so-called third sector organizations. This kind of

social formation seeks to fill the space freed as a result of the process of governmentalization of the state, and they promote group interests. Such organizations usually face the same problem as the state or political parties based on it—the problem of representation. If state represents the interests of the people, as in classical political discourse, then the weakening of the state shakes the ground of the notion of representation as such. Representation was the function of the state proper, and when state becomes just another member of government, NGOs find themselves in urgent need to respond to the crisis of representation: even though they might participate in and grow as a result of the weakening of the state, they also need it to carry on filling in the space or function left by its withdrawal. The crisis of the state thus leads to a more general representation crisis.

Representation, especially in its current political form, implies homogeneity of shared values, goals, or convictions. Often it is based on claims that not everyone has an opportunity to express and fight for their convictions, needs, and interests, and therefore they need to be represented by someone on their behalf. However, after a short while problems occur as different and uncompromising needs and convictions by separate individuals cannot ground political programs and struggles and get subsumed under one leading ideology that levels differences.[8] Ideology cements party politics. Fixed and written into a program or manifesto, it provides a basis for a principle upon which to choose strategies, tactics, actions, and the boundaries of representation for the party, that is, who belongs to it and who does not and based upon which parameters. The crisis of representation and ideology leads to the crisis of party politics or any politics based on affiliation, as they are interdependent. Common goals and principles are failing; dissent is spreading and still seen as something dangerous to ruling ideology; representatives encounter serious objections to their representational claims. Foucault's call for micropractices to substitute metaideology meets considerable fear and anxiety of identity loss and even dissolution of political action as such.[9]

Issues of representation and ideology in turn must be supported by the situation of political affiliation—that is, of acceptance of some ideology as a basis to become a part of, or on the side of, a party, a group, etc. Sometimes it is phrased as a "giving of oneself" to the party, that is, giving all one's energy to struggle with fellow party members for the same ideals and goals. Of course, affiliation is directly related to the notion of "philia"— love and friendship that would divide the world into party friends and party enemies. Logically, it seems that the lack of an enemy means the lack of any basis for political struggle. This classic formulation of Carl Schmitt has been critically analyzed by Derrida in the book *The Politics of Friendship:* "the loss of enemy would imply the loss of political 'I,'" he writes. "Today it is possible

to give a few examples of this disorientation of political field, where the main enemy already seems unclear."[10] While Derrida offers a political alternative based on reformulation of the notion of "fraternal friendship" beyond the opposition friend/enemy, I would like to trace an alternative that is far from either of these models and instead is based on what could be called a "maternal politics."

THE UNION OF THE COMMITTEES OF SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF RUSSIA

Such is the mandate of artists and intellectuals in times of crisis and radical change: to redefine what "political subject" means and can be. Against the failure of the artistic and intellectual class typically charged with this undertaking, the Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (UCSMR), or in short, CSM, arose as an exemplary effort that transcended the crisis of representation, ideology, and politics of party affiliation. Founded in 1989, CSM works in several directions, more or less connected to the military and other political bodies—specifically working to reform them. It provides legal support and finds financial help for families of dead soldiers, consults on legal aspects of compulsory national military service, develops publications on death cases in the army, and lobbies at parliamentary hearings on amnesty laws and military reforms. The CSM was one of the very few organizations, and the singularly most active and visible one, to oppose the Russian war in Chechnya. The Soldiers' Mothers carried out direct actions in Chechnya to bring attention to the war and to stop certain military offenses. Besides human rights issues related to the army, they demanded that women be included in military decision making. In 1995 they were awarded the Sean MacBride Peace Prize for the actions during the war. Altogether more than ten thousand people came for help to the CSM office in Moscow alone. Moreover, almost 100 percent of individual complaints on human rights violations were resolved successfully. The total number of visitors to all regional CSM offices to date is about forty thousand people.[11]

In order to fully understand the success and consequence of this initiative we need to consider the political implications and ethical force of the notion of "mother" and "motherhood" in Russia. In particular we need to consider the ways that the notion of motherhood plays on and breaks apart the logic of separation into "us" and "them." Tradition insists that a mother comes from a caring and intimate sphere. Under this convention the figure of the mother views any adversary as a potential friend before it is cast as other (as will be exemplified in the ideas of Levinas, among others, and supported in the Russian cultural imagination by literature that even brings this

FIGURE 9.3. Photographs showing national servicemen engaged as free manual labor, provided at the Press-Conference. Photograph by Irina Aristarkhova.

FIGURE 9.4. Photograph from the Press-Conference showing UCSMR members and the Foundation of the Right of the Mother members speaking to Moscow reporters. Photograph by Irina Aristarkhova.

maternal indiscriminate love to serve revolution, such as in Maxim Gorky's seminal novel *Mother*, written in 1907). Through this extrapolation of the intimate (homely) into the public (community), as I will analyze further, Soldiers' Mothers surpass the problem of collaboration with other groups and organizations that are based on codes of affiliation. The loss of "enemy" does not limit or reduce their political activism as the notion of mother is ambivalent toward such dilemmas—every enemy has (had) a mother. Maternity and motherhood (though not necessarily connected) allow for care to be expressed toward others without any proof or need of any confirmation of one's sincerity. The idea of political, ideological affiliation does not make any sense within the context of motherhood. Correspondingly, the validity of a mother's interests and convictions does not need a Program, a Code, or a Law.

LEVINAS, IRIGARAY, AND THE POLITICS OF MOTHERHOOD

For the past few decades the notions of mother and motherhood have been actively discussed in feminist literature, especially through the works of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. The ethical implications of maternity and motherhood have been explored by Drucilla Cornell, among others. In addition to the fact that their ideas are meant to transform the contemporary discourse on ethics and subjectivity, they have direct relation to engendering alternative political strategies and concepts. Unfortunately, this political dimension that relates to direct political action often remains unexplored, producing an all too sanitized split between theory and practice, rendering both of them unproductive and frustrated.

By definition in our communal and philosophical tradition, the mother is, as Levinas puts it, "a being for the other, and not for oneself."[12] The idea of care, developed by a friend and early mentor of Levinas—Heidegger—was taken up with negative anxious implications by Sartre, though for Levinas care, based on the maternal, has always been a possibility, a welcoming of positive ethics, of ethics as such. Obviously, this connection between friend and other without implying other as a potential enemy first is a possibility of a different kind of politics that has been developed by Soldiers' Mothers in a radically activist and embodied form, and without "forgetting the mother" (as is the case of writings by Levinas).

Levinas uses the maternal relation as a door that opens onto ethical and religious dimensions. However, maternal relation is only a passive possibility, though the one that opens itself up to allow the appearance of the realm of the social and cultural. Similarly, for Kristeva the experience

of motherhood is preoedipal, that is, it exists outside the establishment of culture and society. It is in this sense the origin of both ethics and politics, both of which come *after*, as a result of leaving a mother behind. Just as for Kristeva, the maternal is presocial and precultural for Levinas. The main function that the mother serves for Levinas, the one that is fundamental to our analysis, is its alternative relation to others. With the mother's help, Levinas argues, one can relate to others outside the enemy/friend opposition, making the impossible possible—overcoming the ontological situation of singular Being thrown into the world by no one. In the case of Levinas, it becomes even more general—the mother is situated so as to highlight that ethical relation, although the mother herself is not placed anywhere within the realm of the ethical but instead as its ground or origin.

When the maternal is left behind we have to ask ourselves, why? Why is the mother left behind, why has that home to be locked away from the world around it? And why is the mother positioned within/as home in the first place? The maternal function, as Irigaray puts it, serves as a basis of social and political order, the same for the order of desire, but the mother herself is always limited by the necessity. As soon as necessity—individual or collective—is fulfilled, often there is nothing left over from the maternal function. There is also nothing left from this mother's energy to fulfill her own desires and needs, especially in its religious, political, and social dimensions.[13] It is clear that in some sense claiming the political as maternal and vice versa is to go against the grain of all traditions, political and philosophical, as tradition itself is based on leaving the mother behind in the first place. Since traditionally mothers are eased out of civil and military societies, from culture as such, what remains of them is *an idea of mother*, translatable into Motherland and Homeland. She herself is welcomed only as a metaphor.

Rendered as both anterior and interior to the public realm, the mother must remain outside the social and religious fields and cannot be a political activist herself without references to masculine political subjectivity. Mother represents the unspoken and the precultural; everything that is before the self is articulated politically. This Levinasian position undermines his claim to achieve a new ethics of difference (against the ontological tradition of sameness), since it starts from acknowledging and then subsuming the difference of the mother. It exiles mother from the realm of political, social, and cultural, and especially theological. It appropriates maternal experience to go onto another level—the level of ethics and the proper relation to the other.

Irigaray has argued that the Western tradition is really a matricidal tradition[14] where the figure of the mother is symbolically annihilated for

reproduction of our cultures and where reproduction itself becomes a political metaphor. Therefore, the active embodied presence of mothers simultaneously as mothers and political activists is indigestible by a political realm that is based on the disavowal of motherhood. This *coming back* of mothers into the political—not as literary or philosophical genres but as embodied political actors—constitutes a unique phenomenon. This works especially well in post-Soviet Russia, where it is possible to capitalize on and incorporate fragments of two strong, albeit competitive, formations that used the image of the mother: Old Orthodox Christian and Soviet.[15]

CSM POLITICAL INNOVATIONS AND EFFECTS

On the one hand, the success of maternal politics is boosted by a particular sociocultural importance that "motherhood" and "mother" enjoy under the influence of the Russian Orthodox Christian tradition. (I would stress here that CSM is hijacking these formulations for their own political struggle rather than taking them uncritically as valid definitions of motherhood. It is one of the many tactics they employ from the existing cultural context, and the question whether participants actually believe it or not is irrelevant to their action.) On the other hand, "governmentalization" of women's position in Soviet times introduced the formulation of the Soviet woman as an active political subject. For example, Kristeva noted that Eastern European socialist countries recognized women as social-political subjects, which allowed women there "to grow up without slave mentality and a sense of submission and rejection."[16] Despite the problems with Kristeva's statement (any political recognition in Soviet times was a problematic concept and could be treated rather as a wish, not to mention that being named subjects, on par with male subjects, does not really change the status quo of sexual indifference), it is clear that no more nor less but *symbolically, on paper,* Soviet female citizens were assumed to be active political subjects under this process of governmentalization.[17] And indeed, the CSM model borrowed heavily from their Soviet female predecessors in many ways.

At the same time, we should acknowledge the existence of other cultural forces that insist on maternal silence in the social domain, and it makes CSM's injection of maternal experience into the political activist sphere transformational for political activism. According to Chalier, in Levinas the "maternal body knows subjectivity" only "by its blood and flesh."[18] It seems ethics for women, if it exists at all, can only be drawn from "being mother" and nothing more. Mothers from CSM made this "nothing more" into the resource of politicization of the maternal position and a means for finding a way out of a political crisis of representation and affiliation.

Maternal politics does not rely on the typical political subscription to a united ideology, as the notion of mother allows "some mothers" to enact corporeal identification with each other without elimination of their differences. It provides a platform for their political activism without a need to sign or claim anything common "through conviction." Mothers do not need to sign a maternal constitution or program. Therefore the question of affiliation is not an issue; it is only a question of embodied politics. Their code is "ideal" and "beyond" political ideology, since most ideologies try to reach the impossible—ethical force and justification of motivations as only mothers have (by definition, love and care for others, not oneself). It is common for political parties and groups to mimic the caring, sacrificial image of the preoedipal fantasy (as in Soviet slogans such as "the party cares for you as a mother").

When one represents another, he positions himself on the same level as that other. Sameness is the basis of representation and the experience of difference usually undermines representational politics. The more one is the same as those whom he represents (in class, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, disability, age, etc.), the more he assumes the right to represent others. All of this changes with the Soldiers' Mothers. They do not represent other mothers who love their children, they represent those who are radically different from them, but with whom they are connected through the *symbol* of motherhood—any actual or potential soldier.

They claim all of them as their potential children, though they might differ from those whom they represent in any socially and culturally meaningful aspect—ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, age, etc. Kin relations usually are not even included in the political realm proper as they belong to family law, but in any case most of the time they represent someone else's children. That's why in their case the question and problem of representation and its crisis does not undermine their struggle and activism (though it has to be negotiated every other day; it is not something that comes with the name, but through embodied action, and adjustment of its tactics and strategies). Maternal politics seems to take upon itself traditionally passive maternal function, through dissolving itself actively in maternal love, making it a source of its political struggle. In this way, maternal love proves itself as a political origin for political subjectivity, usurping the traditional role of artists and intellectuals.

Many have criticized this engagement of motherhood as a source of any kind of politics. Many feminist political writings, especially Western ones, considered motherhood to be an obstacle to a woman's political activism, especially in its current social and cultural forms. CSM in this case undermines the view under which the traditional notion of motherhood is

rejected as social, religious, or cultural construct or stereotype. CSM actually does the opposite—it puts it into the center of its political agenda without defining it or discussing it. It gives updates and corrects the traditional notion of motherhood that had been stripped of all communal meanings and confined to the silence of the preoedipal Home, Heimat, house, dwelling, intimacy, and gives it its rightful place in the middle of political struggle within the state-military machine. Indeed, Soldiers' Mothers ground their politics in the embodiment of maternal experience, and they place such "reductive" singular function upon their action. They take the risk. They show how effective this tactic is, as a new political strategy, if it is used in a situationist manner. By trial and error they are constantly fine-tuning their tactics. Who, when, and how is doing maternal politics brings as much to the result as full understanding of its limitations and dangers, and one's preparation to face them.[19]

In order to be effective, maternal politics draws from its specific context, being extremely mobile and flexible in responding to it. As a result, their political actions question universalist sweeping generalizations in discussions of maternal practices in Western and Russian theories of motherhood—be they psychoanalytic post-Lacanian, post-structuralist, Marxist, or Russian Orthodox. In a post-Soviet predominantly Orthodox context that is still blind to its own ethnic and religious heterogeneity, CSM is not desubjectivizing mothers (an alternative suggested by Irigaray and others within the Catholic context), but resubjectivizing them (since they were already made into subjects by Soviet government). Embodying motherhood with its body politics, Soldiers' Mothers unsettle the force of reproductive and maternal metaphors used within the political sphere (especially in Russia where reproductive terminology of Marxism with its laws and spirals of reproduction and self-birth is so widespread). They enact and use structures traditionally positioned far away from embodied motherhood, though based on it; for example, army and economy have always been in need of the "young."

CSM actions place the problem of position and place of mother/hood at the center of political, legal, and ethical questions, shifting it from family-planning issues into the questions of government, citizenship, military practices, and the law itself. By putting themselves into the center of these spheres, displacing attention from "mothers" onto "children—all citizens," they avoid family/community dualism radically and productively. Without question, CSM creates new forms of political subjectivity that open up a possibility of the ethical relation to the maternal from others and the maternal toward others. It is well known that Irigaray, Cornell, and others work on reformulating the notion of mother/hood in terms of maternal ethics and in law. However, maternal politics embodied in the form of CSM forces

us, theorists, to constantly localize our conceptions and negotiate them with existing innovations of political activism and its practices. Only then can we radicalize the process of building up alternatives to existing political crisis grounded in the friend/enemy paradigm.

No doubt it is possible to pose other criticisms to CSM and its activity, and to my notion of "maternal politics" born out of their work. One can claim that their actions reproduce sacrificial norms of motherhood, when mother is defined through altruism and self-denial. One might also claim the opposite: their work reveals that motherhood has always been "sadistic" and "egoistic" (phallic?), as mothers need their children to validate themselves, using them as property or exchange value. It is possible to claim that it is political reactionism, and such organizations are not stable. Certainly, what they do is unique and cannot be seen as a simple exercise of a few people. What is important is that it has worked effectively and ethically since 1989 in a situation of political stagnation and the crisis of the Russian political system, and Western party politics or left politics as well. While many activists resort to old types of representational politics or "no exit" pessimism, these acts of political innovation and the success of Soldiers' Mothers allow us to widen our own horizons of political resistance, both practically and conceptually.

It is interrogation of the ethics of politics itself through the position of the "mother" that complicates the "self-other" division by using it for political subject position. There is no other subject position that is defined *and experienced* in such "selfless" terms, such nonpolitical and nonsocial terms (outside of the social realm) as parental position. And though the paternal aspect, more specifically, the male aspect of the parental couple (father and son), is often cited as the foundation of religious, missionary, literary, political, and other types of social structures, the maternal aspect is rarely represented outside its subjective, psychological, presymbolic, biological, or psychoanalytic trappings. "Becoming a mother" in this sense is not a gesture of radical literary or artistic experimentation, identity swapping, transgression of sexual character, or medical or biological miracle most often related to womb envy. It is an open and silent *invitation* to join, facilitate, help, get help, partake in an on-going political struggle of a group of a few women with the military and state apparatus of Russia.[20]

NOTES

1. Some of the representatives of this tendency are A. Solzhenitsyn, influential film director, actor N. Mikhalkov, and artist and founder of the neoacademism art movement T. Novikov.

2. A leading Russian philosopher expressed this feeling and refusal to succumb to

it through the following words: "Susan Buck-Morss examines the work of the Moscow artist Faibisovich, and we hear that this is 1970s technique, that things have moved on. And indeed you can say that, but the artist disappears. He is lost in the technique of the representation of his own image. It turns out that his system of representation is so hackneyed that all images coming from this technique have long lost their value. So what are we to do now?

"I too work, and I too know what has already been done and thought. But what if I have not thought about it yet for myself! America has been reading and writing dissertations on Georges Bataille for thirty years, but I am only now planning to write something on him. What am I to do? Not to write on Bataille? Or de Sade, just because there is already an entire tradition of thinking on him, is he closed to me? It is ridiculous to talk like this. I am in my own time, in my own spot, and in that time I speak, reason and think. I am a live thinking, writing, drawing being. I live and I do. We move and live. It seems to me this is where freedom is." Valery Podoroga, *Fresh Cream: Contemporary Art in Culture* (New York: Phaidon, 2000), 41.

3. A. Osmolovsky, Mail-Radek Text 37: 05.03.98, trans. by Alexey Kovalev. Formerly available at http://www.anarch.ru.

4. In June 2006 the Russian DUMA–Parliament voted 347 to 87 and abolished the "Against All" option from all future ballots. See O. Kireev Mailgetto #181 at http://www.getto.ru/mailgetto.html#.

5. A. Osmolovsky, ed., *Iskysstvo bez opravdanii: Katalog vystavki. 10–26 Mai 2004* [Art without justifications: exhibition catalog] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi nauchno-issledovatel'sky musei arkhitektury imeni Schuseva, 2004), 6–7, translation mine.

6. Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (London: Harvester Press, 1991), 103.

7. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 81–102.

8. Here I mean by "ideology" a number of ideas and convictions that are written in Party Programs, art manifestos, or Codes. It is a "party ideology" and does not refer here to a Marxist notion of ideology or its derivatives.

9. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999) is one example of this "no exit" argument, a highly convincing attitude toward a political action that is not grounded in common shared principals.

10. "Tradition of politics that is rooted in differentiation and careful search for friends and enemies can be traced to Aristotle. Following this tradition, Schmidt makes a conclusion that: 'Special political distinction (*die spezifisch politische Unterscheidung)*, to which we can reduce all political action and notion, is a distinction *(Unterscheidung)* between friend and enemy.'" Cited in Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 84–85.

11. Here and in other places the sources are UCSMR Annual Report, 2002, at http://www.ucsmr.ru, as well as in V. D. Melnikova, ed., *II International Congress of Soldiers' Mothers "For Life and Freedom" 2000: Presentations and Documents* (Moscow: Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, 2000); *III International Congress of Soldiers' Mothers "For Life and Freedom" 2002; Presentations and Documents* (Moscow: Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, 2002); and personal correspondence.

12. Levinas, cited in C. Chalier, "Ethics and the Feminine," in *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley (Bloomingdale: Indiana University Press, 1991), 126.

13. Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," in *The Irigaray Reader,* ed. M. Whitford (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 178–90.

14. For example, ibid.; Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accomodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law* (London: Routledge, 1991); and K. Oliver, "The Crisis of Meaning," in *After the Revolution: On Kristeva,* ed. J. Lechte and M. Zournazi (Sydney: Artspace Visual Arts Centre, 1998), 79–96.

15. Irina Aristarkhova, "Women and Government in Bolshevik Russia," in *Comparative Labour Studies Working Papers 4:1995* (Coventry: University of Warwick, 1995). Full text available at http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/complabstuds/russia/irawp.doc.

16. Julia Kristeva, "Talking about *Polylogue:* Interview with Francoise van Rossum-Guyon (1977)," in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader,* ed. T. Moi, trans. S. Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 110–17.

17. I have argued elsewhere that this process started long before perestroika, under Bolshevik rule. See Aristarkhova, "Women and Government in Bolshevik Russia," chapter 3.

18. Chalier, "Ethics and the Feminine," 127.

19. In 2004, Russian authorities under Putin's directive started systematic sabotage of CSM's work. It has included, among other actions, IRA (tax) investigation; legal charges against individual members across Russia for spying and treason; changes to political parties law, making it virtually impossible for the newly formed Soldiers' Mothers party to stand in elections; coaching mass media outlets, especially television stations, not to give Soldiers' Mothers air time and coverage of their work; and the assassination of Anna Politkovskaya, a rare journalist known for her open support for and collaboration with Soldiers' Mothers as well as continuing critique of the Chechen war, on October 7, 2006, in Moscow.

20. I would like to thank Valentina Melnikova, CSM Moscow branch, Anatoly Osmolovsky, and Oleg Kireev for their kind assistance in preparing this text.

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FIGURE 10.1. *Carnival against Capitalism* by Reclaim the Streets and others creates traffic chaos and extensive damage at the Liverpool Street Station, London, June 18, 1999. Performed at the time of the G8 summit in Cologne to protest against third world debt. Photograph copyright Andrew Wiard, 1999, http://www.reportphotos.com.

10. Do-It-Yourself Geopolitics: Cartographies of Art in the World

BRIAN HOLMES

> What interests us in the image is not its function as a represen-
> tation of reality, but its dynamic potential, its capacity to elicit
> and construct projections, interactions, narrative frames. . . .
> devices for constructing reality.
>
> —Franco Berardi "Bifo," *L'immagine dispositivo*

Vanguard art, in the twentieth century, began with the problem of its own overcoming—whether in the destructive, Dadaist mode, which sought to tear apart the entire repertory of inherited forms and dissolve the very structures of the bourgeois ego, or in the expansive, constructivist mode, which sought to infuse architecture, design, and the nascent mass media with a new dynamics of social purpose and a multiperspectival intelligence of political dialogue. Though both positions were committed to an irrepressible excess over the traditional genres of painting and sculpture, still they appeared as polar opposites; and they continued at ideological odds with each other throughout the first half of the century, despite zones of enigmatic or secret transaction (Schwitters, Van Doesburg, etc.). But after the war, the extraordinarily wide network of revolutionary European artists that briefly coalesced, around 1960, into the Situationist International (SI), brought a decisive new twist to the Dada/constructivist relation. With their practice of "hijacking" commercial images *(détournement)*, with their cartographies of urban drifting *(dérive)*, and above all with their aspiration to create the "higher games" of "constructed situations," the SI sought to subversively project a specifically artistic competence into the field of potentially active reception constituted by daily life in the consumer societies.

The firebrand career of the Situationist International as an artists' collective is overshadowed by the political analysis of the *Society of the Spectacle*, a work that deliberately attempted to maximize the antagonism between the radical aesthetics of everyday life and the delusions purveyed, every day, by the professionalized, capital-intensive media. The SI finally foundered over

this antagonistic logic, which led to the exclusion of most of the artists from the group. But with the notion of subversive cartography and the practice of "constructed situations," it was as though something new had been released into the world. Without having to ascribe exclusive origins or draw up faked genealogies, one can easily see that since the period around 1968, the old drive to art's self-overcoming has found a new and much broader field of possibility, in the conflicted and ambiguous relations between the educated sons and daughters of the former working classes and the proliferating products of the consciousness industry. The statistical fact that such a large number of people trained as artists are inducted into the service of this industry, combined with the ready availability of a "fluid language" of *détournement* that allows them to exit from it pretty much whenever they choose, has been at the root of successive waves of agitation that tend simultaneously to dissolve any notion of a "vanguard" and to reopen the struggle for a substantial democracy. And so the question on everyone's lips becomes, how do I participate?

"This is a chord. This is another. Now form a band."[1] The punk invitation to do-it-yourself music supplies instant insight to the cultural revolution that swept through late-1970s Britain. And the hilarity, transgression, and class violence of public punk performance comes surprisingly close to the SI's definition of a situation: "A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a play of events."[2] The relation between punk and Situationism was widely perceived at the time.[3] But there was something else at stake, something radically new by comparison to the disruptive tactics of the 1960s, because the DIY invitation had another side, which said: "Now start a label." The proliferation of garage bands would be matched with an outpouring of indie records, made and distributed autonomously. In this way, punk marked an attempt at *appropriating the media,* which in a society dominated by the consciousness industry is tantamount to *appropriating the means of production.*[4] Punk as productivism. There's a constructive drive at work here: a desire to respond, with technical means, to the recording companies' techniques for the programming of desire. The punk movement in Britain was an attempt to construct subversive situations on the scales permitted by modern communications.

Something fundamental changes when artistic concepts are used within a context of massive appropriation, amid a blurring of class distinctions. A territory of art appears within widening "underground" circles, where the aesthetics of everyday practice is lived as a political creation. The shifting grounds of this territory could be traced through the radical fringe of the techno movement from the late 1980s onward, with its white-label records

produced under different names every time, its hands-on use of computer technology, its nomadic sound systems for mounting concerts at any chosen location. It could be explored in the offshoots of mail art, with the development of fanzines, the Art Strike and Plagiarist movements, the Luther Blissett Project, the invention of radio- or telephone-assisted urban drifting.[5] It could be previewed in community-oriented video art, alternative TV projects, AIDS activism, and the theories of tactical media. But rather than engaging in a preemptive archaeology of these developments, I want to go directly to their most recent period of fruition in the late 1990s, when a rekindled sense of social antagonism once again pushed aesthetic producers, along with many other social groups, into an overtly political confrontation with norms and authorities.

This time, the full range of media available for appropriation could be hooked into a world-spanning distribution machine: the Internet. The specific practices of computer hacking and the general model they proposed of amateur intervention into complex systems gave confidence to a generation that had not personally experienced the defeats and dead ends of the 1960s. Building on this constructive possibility, an ambition arose to map out the repressive and coercive order of the transnational corporations and institutions. It would be matched by attempts to disrupt that order through the construction of subversive situations on a global scale. Collective aesthetic practices, proliferating in social networks outside the institutional spheres of art, were one of the major vectors for this double desire to grasp and transform the new world map. A radically democratic desire that could be summed up in a seemingly impossible phrase: do-it-yourself geopolitics.

J18, OR THE FINANCIAL CENTER NEAREST YOU

Does anyone know how it was really done?[6] The essence of cooperatively catalyzed events is to defy single narratives. But it can be said that on June 18, 1999 (J18), around noon, somewhere from five to ten thousand people flooded out of the tube lines at Liverpool station, right in the middle of the City of London (Figure 10.1). Most found themselves holding a carnival mask, in the colors black, green, red, or gold—the colors of anarchy, ecology, and communism, plus high finance, specially for the occasion. Amid the chaos of echoing voices and pounding drums, it might even have been possible to read the texts on the back:

> Those in authority fear the mask for their power partly resides in identifying, stamping and cataloguing: in knowing who you are. But a Carnival needs masks, thousands of masks. . . . Masking up releases our commonality, enables us to act together. . . . During the last years the power of money has presented a new mask over its criminal face. Disregarding borders,

with no importance given to race or colors, the power of money humiliates dignities, insults honesties and assassinates hopes.

On the signal follow your color / Let the Carnival begin.[7]

The music was supposed to come from speakers carried in backpacks. But no one could hear it above the roar. Four groups divided anyway, not exactly according to color; one went off track and ended up at London Bridge, to hold a party of its own. The others took separate paths through the medieval labyrinth of Europe's largest financial district, converging toward a point that had been announced only by word of mouth and kept secret from all but a few: the London International Financial Futures & Options Exchange, or LIFFE building, the largest derivatives market in Europe—the pulsing, computerized, hypercompetitive brain of the beast. The trick was to parade anarchically through the winding streets, swaying to the samba bands, inviting passing traders and bank employees to take off their ties or heels and join the party, while a few smaller groups rushed ahead, to dodge tremblingly into alleyways and await that precise moment when a number of cars would inexplicably stop and begin blocking a stretch of Lower Thames Street. The sound system, of course, was already there. As protestors shooed straggling motorists out of the area, larger groups began weaving in, hoisting puppets to the rhythm of the music and waving red, black, and green Reclaim the Streets (RTS) flags in the air. The Carnival had begun, inside the "Square Mile" of London's prestigious financial district—and the police, taken entirely by surprise, could do nothing about it.

Banners went up: "our resistance is as global as capital," "the earth is a common treasury for all," "revolution is the only option." Posters by the French graphic arts group Ne Pas Plier ("do not fold") were glued directly on the walls of banks, denouncing "money world," proclaiming "resistance-existence," or portraying the earth as a giant burger waiting to be consumed. The site had also been chosen for its underground ecology: a long-buried stream runs below Dowgate Hill Street and Cousin Lane, right in front of the LIFFE building. A wall of cement and breeze blocks was built before the entrance to the exchange, while a fire hydrant was opened out in the street, projecting a spout of water thirty feet into the air and symbolically releasing the buried river from the historical sedimentations of capital. The protestors danced beneath the torrent. In a historical center of bourgeois discipline, inhibitions became very hard to find. This was a political *party:* a riotous event, in the Dionysian sense of the word.

The quality of such urban uprisings is spontaneous, unpredictable, because everything depends on the cooperative expression of a multitude of groups and individuals. Still these events can be nourished, charged in advance with logical and imaginary resources. The six months preceding

J18 overflowed with an infinitely careful and chaotic process of face-to-face meetings, grapevine communication, cut-and-paste production, and early activist adventures in electronic networking. An information booklet on the global operations of the City was prepared, under the name "Squaring Up to the Square Mile." It included a map distinguishing ten different categories of financial institutions. Posters, stickers, tracts, and articles were distributed locally and internationally, including fifty thousand metallic gold flyers with a quote from the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem saying "to work for delight and authentic festivity is barely distinguishable from preparing for general insurrection." A spoof newspaper was handed out massively on the day of the protest, for free, under the title *Evading Standards;* the cover showed a dazed trader amid piles of shredded paper, with a headline reading "GLOBAL MARKET MELTDOWN." But most importantly, a call had been sent round the world, urging people to intervene in their local financial centers on June 18, the opening day of the G8 (Group of Eight, leading economic nations) summit held that year in Cologne. A movie trailer had even been spliced together, with footage from previous worldwide protests and a cavernous, horror-flick voice at the end pronouncing "June 18th: Coming to a financial center near you."

This event was imbued with the history of the British social movement Reclaim the Streets, along with other activist groups such as Earth First!, Class War, and London Greenpeace (a local ecoanarchist organization). RTS is a "dis-organization." It emerged from the antiroads movement of the early 1990s, fighting against the freeway programs of the Thatcherite government. The protestors used direct action techniques, tunneling under construction sites, locking themselves to machinery. It was body art with a vengeance. References to earlier struggles emerged from this direct experience, including a 1973 text by the radical French philosopher André Gorz denouncing "The Social Ideology of the Motorcar."[8] The year 1994 was a turning point for this movement, in more ways than one. It saw a summer-long campaign against the M11 highway link, which involved squatting the condemned residential district of Claremont Road and literally inhabiting the streets, building scaffolding, aerial netting, and rooftop outposts to prolong the final resistance against the wrecking balls and the police. But it was also the year of the Criminal Justice Act and Public Order Act of 1994 (UK), which gave British authorities severe repressive powers against techno parties in the open countryside, and politicized young music-lovers by force. After that, the ravers and the antiroads protestors decided they would no longer wait for the state to take the initiative. They would reclaim the streets in London, and party at the heart of the motorcar's dominion.

The first RTS party was held in the spring of 1995 in Camden

Town, where hundreds of protestors surged out of a tube station at the moment of a staged fight between two colliding motorists. Techniques were then invented to make "tripods" out of common metal scaffolding poles: traffic could be easily blocked by a single protestor perched above the street whom police could not bring down without risk of serious injury. News of the inventions spread contagiously around Britain, and a new form of popular protest was born, along with a politicized performance culture. Later protests saw the occupation of a stretch of highway, or a street party where sand was spread out atop the tarmac for the children to play in, reversing the famous slogan of May 1968 in France, *sous les pavés, la plage* (beneath the paving-stones, the beach). Ideas about the political potential of the carnival, influenced by the literary critic Mikhail Bahktin, began to percolate among a generation of new-style revolutionaries. From these beginnings, it was just another leap of the imagination to the concept of the global street party—first realized in 1998 in some thirty countries, within the wider context of the "global days of action" against neoliberalism.

London RTS was part of the People's Global Action (PGA), a grassroots counterglobalization network that first emerged in 1997. Behind it lay the poetic politics of the Zapatistas, and the charismatic figure of Subcomandante Marcos. But ahead of it lay the invention of a truly worldwide social movement, cutting across the global division of labor and piercing the opaque screens of the corporate media. For the day of global action on June 18, videomakers collaborated with an early autonomous media lab called Backspace, right across the Thames from the LIFFE building. Tapes were delivered to the space during the event, roughly edited for streaming on the Web, then sent directly away through the post to avoid any possible seizure.[9] Perhaps more importantly, a group of hackers in Sydney, Australia, had written a special piece of software for live updating of the Web page devoted to their local J18 event. Six months later, this "Active software" would be used in the American city of Seattle as the foundation of the Independent Media project—a multiperspectival instrument of political information and dialogue for the twenty-first century.[10]

As later in Seattle, clashes occurred with the police. While the crowd retreated down Thames Street toward Trafalgar Square, a threatening plume of smoke rose above St. Paul's cathedral, as if to say this carnival really meant to turn the world upside-down. The next day the Financial Times bore the headline: "Anti-capitalists lay siege to the City of London." The words marked a rupture in the triumphant language of the press in the 1990s, which had eliminated the very notion of anticapitalism from its vocabulary. But the real media event unfolded on the Internet. The RTS Web site showed a Mercator map, with links reporting actions in forty-four different countries

and regions. The concept of the global street party had been fulfilled, at previously unknown levels of political analysis and tactical sophistication. A new cartography of ethical-aesthetic practice had been invented, embodied, and expressed across the earth.[11]

CIRCUITS OF PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

J18 was clearly not an artwork. It was an event, a collectively constructed situation. It opened up a territory of experience for its participants—a "temporary autonomous zone," in the words of the anarchist writer Hakim Bey.[12] With respect to the virtual worlds of art and literature, but also of political theory, such events can be conceived as *actualizations:* what they offer is a space-time for the effectuation of latent possibilities. This is their message: "ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE," to quote the slogan of the World Social Forum movement. But what must also be understood is how these discontinuous political mobilizations have helped to make another world possible for art, outside the constituted circuits of production and distribution.

The simplest point of entry is the Internet. E-mail lists and Web sites have opened up a new kind of transnational public sphere, where artistic activities can be discussed as part of a larger, freewheeling conversation on the evolution of society. Some of the early players in this game were the New-York based Web site and server called The Thing, the Public Netbase media center in Vienna, and the Ljudmila server in Ljubljana. From the mid-1990s onward, these platforms were all involved with the development of "net.art," which could be produced, distributed, and evaluated outside the gallery-magazine-museum system. The do-it-yourself utopia of a radically democratic mail art, which had been evolving in many temporalities and directions since the 1960s, suddenly multiplied, transformed, proliferated. In 1995 the transnational Listserv Nettime was constituted, in order to produce an "immanent critique" of networked culture.[13] Such projects could appear as intangible and ephemeral as the "temporary autonomous zones." But they helped give intellectual consistency and a heightened sense of transnational agency to the renewed encounter of artistic practice and political activism that was then emerging under the name of "tactical media."

The concept of tactical media was worked out at the Next 5 Minutes (n5m) conferences, which have taken place in Amsterdam since 1993, at three-year intervals.[14] David Garcia and Geert Lovink summed it up in 1997: "Tactical Media are what happens when the cheap 'do it yourself' media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider

culture."[15] The key notion came from Michel de Certeau, who, in Garcia and Lovink's reading, "described consumption as a set of tactics by which the weak make use of the strong."[16] At stake was the possibility of autonomous image and information production from marginal or minority positions, in an era dominated by huge, capital-intensive media corporations and tightly regulated distribution networks. But de Certeau spoke primarily of premodern cultures, whose intimate, unrecorded "ways of doing" could appear as an escape route from hyperrationalized capitalism; whereas the media tactics in question are those of knowledge workers in the postindustrial economy, much closer to what Toni Negri and his fellow travelers would call the "multitudes."[17] With their DVcams, Web sites, and streaming media techniques, the new activists practiced "an aesthetic of poaching, tricking, reading, speaking, strolling, shopping, desiring. . . . the hunter's cunning, maneuvers, polymorphic situations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike."[18] This was very much the spirit of n5m3, in the spring of 1999, just as the counterglobalization movement was about to break into full public view.

The confidence of tactical media activism represents a turnabout from the extreme media pessimism of Guy Debord, whose work describes the colonization of all social relations, and indeed of the human mind itself, by the productions of the advertising industry. Antonio Negri's theory of the "real subsumption" of labor by capital, or in other words, the total penetration of everyday life by the logic and processes of capital accumulation, appears at first to echo that pessimism, but in fact, it marks a reversal. *Empire* develops the theory of the real subsumption through a reflection on Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, defined as "a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it."[19] Biopower is "an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord." But this internalization of the control function has the effect of offering the master's tools to all the social subjects, and thus it makes possible the transformation of biopower into *biopolitics:*

> Civil society is absorbed in the [capitalist] state, but the consequence of this is an explosion of the elements that were previously coordinated and mediated in civil society. Resistances are no longer marginal but active in the center of a society that opens up in networks; the individual points are singularized in a thousand plateaus. What Foucault constructed implicitly (and Deleuze and Guattari made explicit) is therefore the paradox of a power that, while it unifies and envelops within itself every element of social life (thus losing its capacity effectively to mediate different social forces), at that very moment reveals a new context, a new milieu of maximum plurality and uncontainable singularization—a milieu of the event.

Faced with the conditions of real subsumption, or total physical and psychic colonization by the directive functions of capital, one of the

paradoxical temptations for artists is to use the cooperative field of the event to directly represent the globalized state—to show its true face, or to become its distorted mirror. This is what the Yes Men have done, by launching a satirical mirror-site—gatt.org—as a way to pass themselves off as representatives of the World Trade Organization (WTO).[20] Appearing before a lawyer's conference in Austria, on a British TV news show, at a textile industry convention in Finland, or at an accountant's congress in Australia, always at the invitation of unsuspecting functionaries, the Yes Men reverse the usual activist's position of "speaking truth to power." They speak the truth *of* power, by complying with it, assenting to it, overidentifying with it, exaggerating and amplifying its basic tenets, so as to reveal the contradictions, the gross injustices. And in this way, they bring the critical distance of art into the closest possible contact with political life. By miming corporate codes with precise and sophisticated writing, and by infiltrating the virtual and real locations of transnational institutions, they carry out what Fredric Jameson called for long ago: the "cognitive mapping" of "the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects."[21] So doing, they act like a miniaturized version of the counterglobalization movements themselves, whose participants have restlessly "mapped out" the shifting geography of transnational power with their feet. But the Yes Men are very much part of those movements; they are immersed in the world of punctual collaboration and deviant appropriation of professional skills for the creation of the political event. The collaborative process is clearly symbolized by the project-table drawn up by their earlier avatar, ®™ark, which lists interventionist ideas and the material and human resources needed to carry them out; readers are invited to contribute time, money, equipment, or information, or to propose a project of their own.[22]

Bureau d'Etudes is another artists' group that has followed the mapping impulse to the point of producing a full-fledged representation of tremendously complex transnational power structures, which they call "World Government."[23] They carry out "open-source intelligence," where the information is freely available for anyone willing to do the research. The artistic aspect of their project lies in the graphic design, the iconic invention, but also in the experimental audacity of the hypotheses they develop, which try to show the impact of farflung decision-making hierarchies on bare life. Like the Yes Men, they engage in multiple collaborations, exchanging knowledge, participating in campaigns, distributing their work for free, either in the form of paper copies or over the Internet. And like many contemporary artist-activists, they are extremely dubious about the kind of distribution offered by museums; they only appear to consider their own production significant when it becomes part of alternative social assemblages, or more precisely, of

FIGURE 10.2. The BBC interviewed a member of the Yes Men who was impersonating an executive of the Dow Chemical Corporation on the twentieth anniversary of the Bhopal tragedy in India, December 3, 2004. Dow had assumed Union Carbide's assets but rejected responsibility for the disaster and has made minimal efforts to compensate the thousands of victims. The ersatz executive informed a stunned BBC reporter that Dow was now ready to compensate victims even if this meant liquidating the entire company. Later Dow publicly rejected any such offer. Courtesy of the Yes Men, http://www.theyesmen.org.

"resymbolizing machines." One of their goals is to create a "map generator," which would be "a machine allowing everyone to generate the maps they need for their actions, by entering data concerning the business or administration in which they work, or about which they have found some information."[24] There is a double aim here: to identify the spatial organization and ownership hierarchy of the long, fragmented production lines of the global economy, and at the same time, to suggest the possibility of alternative formations that could articulate different publics. As they explain: "A production line is heterogeneous and multilinguistic from the very outset. It has no border, even though it has relative limits. It constitutes a republic of individuals, in other words, a non-territorial republic, which emerges in the face of the increasingly real perspective—confirmed by the gradual application of the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)—of a privatization of those functions which still remain the monopoly of the State (justice, education, territory, police, army)."

The World Government
Post-national states, influence networks, biocracy

property Rock+Roth
employees 40 000
count usa rank x

J. P. Morgan Chase

prop. Abig. Johnson 25%
prop. Edw. C. Johnson 12%
count usa rank 1 st

Fidelity

admin. Robert M. Gates

Peter S. Lynch
vice-chairman

adm

advisor

cap. x
employees x
count usa rank x

Warburg Dillon Read

cap. x
employees x
count usa rank x

Goldman Sachs

4

4,8

6,2

2,2

cap. x
employees x
count usa rank x

State Street Corp.

2,3

mellon financial corp

Lord Roll of Ipsden

12

cap. x
employees x
count gb rank x

citigroup Inc.

1,53

cap. x
employees 40 000
count usa rank x

Merrill Lynch

sir Andrew Large

3

Louis R Hughes

3

former director of the Bank of England

covers count
16,824 m.£
count gb creq. 1694

Bank of England

cap. x
employees x
count gb rank x

Barclays Plc

Alex Bauer

Sir Keith Whitson

cap. x
employees x
count usa rank x

Crédit Suisse First Boston

Lord Simon of Highbury CBE

Chairman

Sir John Bond

cap. 1530 milliards$
employees 69 000
count swis rank x

Union des Banques Suisses UBS

Chairman

capital x
employees x
count gb rank x

HSBC Holdings
(Hong-Kong & Shangai Banking Co)

Lord Marshall

Sir Mark Moody-Stuart

summary

République helvétique
Swiss state
FISCAL PARADISE
prop. 318 6,6
median age 40,2
Catholic 46%
Protestant 40%
rent low

W R P Dalton

Mastercard

text
synoptic
outline of world
government

Index
of names

private bank
creq. 1796
count swis rank x

Lombard Odier Darier Hentsch

private bank
creq. 1805
count swis rank x

Pictet & cie

cap. x
employees x
count swis rank x

Union Bancaire Privée

Rockefeller
Exxon
(esso,mobil)
cap. 179 milliards$
employees 82 000
count usa rank x

2001
Chevron Texaco
cap. 104 milliards$
employees 55 700
count usa rank x

Flowchart
60 x 84 cm

2002
Ford Motor Company
cap. 163 milliards$
employees 350 000
count usa rank x

2002
BP Amoco plc
cap. 174 milliards$
employees 110 000
count gb rank x

Royal Dutch Shell
cap. 135 milliards$
employees 91 000
count neth/ rank x

Pennz Quaker
cap. x
employees x
count usa rank x

Ford family

?

2002
General Motors Company
cap. 186 milliards$
employees 350 000
count usa rank x

40

Jeroen van der Veer

?

count usa
Ford Foundation
creq. ?

spec. diplomatie/str.
orientat. x
count gb/sw x

Baker Institute for Public Policy

Liberalization of Trade in Services

Tu Invest

flowchart
2004

Baroness Thatcher, LG OM FRS

Lord Harris of High Cross

spec. regulation
orientat. neo-liberal
gb/sw 1947

Mont Pelerin Society
ex-chairman

spec. regulation
orientat. neo-liberal
count gb

Adam Smith Institute

FIGURE 10.3. Detail of Bureau d'Etudes geopolitical map project, Paris, 2004.

The virtual freedom of Net-based distribution, the concrete experience of temporary autonomous zones, and the analytic project of critical mapping all come together in this reflection on the circuits of production and distribution. The problem that emerges from an artistic engagement with geopolitics is no longer just that of "naming the enemy," or locating the hierarchies of global power. It is also that of revealing the political potential of world society, the potential to change the reigning hierarchies: "If we think of a production line as a republic, then each object becomes a flag, a global sociopolitical assemblage: in other words, a symbol. But this symbol needs to be resymbolized, its meaning must be extracted, the relations of production must become visible. Only then would the most ordinary supermarket catalogue appear for what it really is: a world social atlas, an atlas of possible struggles and paths of exodus, a machine of planetary political recomposition." For artists, the resymbolization of everyday life appears as the highest constructive ambition. But what does it entail? What kind of work would it take to help transform society's gaze on the relations of production?

COLLECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

The construction of global brands in the 1980s and 1990s entailed the integration of countercultural and minority rhetorics, as well as the direct enlistment into the workplace of "creatives" from all the domains of art and culture, a process denounced by North American critics like Thomas Frank or Naomi Klein.[25] A more sophisticated theoretical approach, emerging from the Italian theorists of Autonomia, has recently shown how corporations build "worlds" not only for their consumers, but also for their employees—that is to say, imaginary systems of reference, both ethical and aesthetic, as well as architectural environments, communications nets, security systems, etc., all aimed at maintaining the coherency of the firm and its products under conditions of extreme geographic dispersal.[26] The imposition of these worlds as a set of competing frames for everyday life requires a cultural and psychic violence that can lead to different forms of rejection: in this sense, the trashing of Niketowns and McDonalds by anticorporate protestors or the "Stop-pub" movement that defaced hundreds of advertisements in the Paris metro in 2003 are direct, popular expressions of the critical stance taken in a book like *No Logo*. Echoing these destructive acts, many of today's media artists seek symbolic disruption or "culture jamming": *détournement* as a formalist genre, Photoshop's revenge on advertising.[27] But a deeper question is how to initiate psychic deconditioning and disidentification from the corporate worlds—contemporary equivalents of the Dadaist drive to subvert the repressive structures of the bourgeois ego.

The constellation of artists' groups and subversive social movements operating in the city of Barcelona has taken some audacious steps in this direction.[28] The galvanizing effect of the Prague protests against the IMF and the World Bank on September 26, 2000 (the first big European convergence after Seattle), was particularly strong among these circles, which constantly evolve in a net-like or rhizomatic structure, making any attempt to identify them ultimately fruitless—and that's part of the idea. An early collective known as Las Agencias, working with another group called Oficina 2004, launched a subversive tease campaign in the streets, announcing *Dinero* (money), then completing a week later *Dinero Gratis* (money for free). The idea, it seems, was to short-circuit the advertising promise of instant gratification and to subvert the demands and deferrals of labor, while at the same time pointing toward a utopian economy of free time and creative possibility. Other projects went on to bring pop fashion to the protest campaigns, introducing the *Prêt-à-révolter* line of defensive clothing, offering all kinds of accessorized option-slots for the latest in tactical media gear, then the *New Kids on the Black Block* poster campaign, which made ridicule out of the heavily moralized discussion of violence or nonviolence that followed the protests against the G8 in Genoa, Italy, in July 2001. The Yomango project—

FIGURE 10.4.
Yomango "countermarketing" advertising the group's theme "It's either you, money, or Yomango." Barcelona, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Rosario, Argentina. Image courtesy of Yomango, http://www.yomango.net. Creative Commons License.

which has spread to become an international network—associates an omnipresent fashion brand, Mango™, with a Spanish slang expression meaning "I shoplift" (the British translation is "Just nick it"). Performances involved stealing clothing items and putting them on display in museums; and these evolved, in a very interesting way, to the practice of "Yo Mango dinners," where participants used specially outfitted clothing to lift generous collective meals from participating supermarket chains. The aggressivity toward any kind of integration to corporate-backed cultural institutions is obvious.

Another ephemeral collective, known as "Mapas," took aim at the 2004 "Universal Forum of Cultures" in Barcelona, a corporate-sponsored municipal extravaganza of debate and multicultural entertainment, widely perceived by locals as a manipulation of the Social Forum movement for the ends of political consensus-building, real-estate speculation, and boosterism of the tourist economy.[29] For this campaign a map of the city was made, showing the sponsorship links between the Forum and temporary employment services, consumer-product distributors, arms dealers, polluting industries,

FIGURE 10.5. *Yomango Tango*, Barcelona, December 2002. The group stages a performance in a grocery store, dancing tango with a mobile sound system, and stealing bottles of champagne. The next day they brought their "booty" into the branch of a bank commonly believed to be part of the Spanish neoliberal "invasion" of Argentina. The action took place one year after the meltdown of the Argentinean economy. Image courtesy of Yomango, 2004, http://www.yomango.net. Creative Commons License.

etc. The idea was to produce a menacing atmosphere, then bifurcate in un-
expected directions. An action was undertaken against the weapons man-
ufacturer Indra: several dozen white-suited "arms inspectors" surged up the
stairway of the firm's Barcelona office and began disassembling the commu-
nications equipment, which was placed into boxes marked "Danger: Weapons
of Mass Destruction." Even more effectively, a photographic *Forumaton* was
set up in various locations, allowing grinning residents to "pose against the
Forum," with signs that said "The Forum is a business," "The Forum is for
real-estate speculation," "The Forum is a piece of shit," and so on. A crescendo
was hit with *Pateras Urbanas*, a sea-going invasion of the Forum on precar-
ious rafts like those used by immigrants crossing the Straits of Gibralter.
Hundreds of participants, outlandish costumes and pirate flags, four hours
in the ocean with the Coast Guard everywhere, and a wild landing on the
grounds of the tourist spectacle that wanted to turn its back on anything
real. The action was all over the Catalan newspapers, and the deflation of
the "Barcelona logo" provoked resounding peals of laughter from the peo-
ple that have to live in it.

     Could this kind of subversion go further, deeper, involving broader
sections of the population and producing positive effects of resymbolization
and political recomposition? The Chainworkers collective in Milan thought

FIGURES 10.6A AND 10.6B.
Protesting beneath World Forum fireworks and
in the streets of Barcelona, Spain, 2004.
Images from http://www.forumbcn2004.org.

so.[30] Acting as labor organizers without any particular artistic pretensions, they sought to build an iconic language that could reach out simultaneously to kids doing service jobs in chain-stores, temp workers, and freelance intellectual laborers, the so-called cognitariat, who are sometimes better paid but face similarly precarious conditions. They did illegal demonstrations and banner-drops inside shopping malls where all rights to assembly in public are curtailed. Their Web site, www.chainworkers.org, was conceived as a legal information resource and a way to create collective consciousness. But their best tactic proved to be a reinvention of the traditional Mayday parade, around the theme of casual labor conditions. The event quickly outstripped anything the unions could muster; by the third year, in 2004, it brought together fifty thousand people in Milan and had also spread to Barcelona. What you see in the streets at these events is a new kind of mapping, not just of power but of subjective and collective agency, which means affects, ideas, life energy. It is a popular, militant cartography of living conditions in the postmodern information economy, created by the people who produce that economy on a day-to-day basis. This cartography is conveyed in living images: dancers in pink feather boas disrupting the fashion trade in a Zara store; African workers wearing bright white masks that say "invisible" on them; a giant puppet representing different kinds of burnout temp jobs (call-center slaves, pizza ponies, day-labor construction workers). A huge green banner drapes the side of a truck hauling a sound-system through the crowd: "THE METROPOLIS IS A BEAST: CULTIVATE MICROPOLITICS FOR RESISTANCE." One of the posters for the event shows a contortionist from an old-fashioned circus— an allegory of the flexible worker in the spectacle society.

The Mayday parades are an assertion of biopolitics, against all the sophisticated methods currently employed for physical and psychic control. They develop an aesthetic language of the event for its own sake, as a territory of expression. But the same event formulates a political demand for the basic guarantees that could make a flexible working existence viable: an unpolluted urban environment; socialized health care and lodging; high-quality public education; access to the tools of information production, but also to the spaces and free time necessary for social and affective production, or what theorists call the production of subjectivity.[31] This last is vital for psychic health, because otherwise one will fall prey to all the consumer and professional worlds that are explicitly designed to vampirize the isolated individual and feed on his or her desire. In this sense, the political struggle is directly artistic; it is a struggle for the aesthetics of everyday life. The pressure of hyperindividualism, or what I have called "the flexible personality,"[32] is undoubtedly what has given rise to the widespread desire to construct

FIGURE 10.7. Poster for Euro Mayday Parade, 2004. Designed by Zoe Romano for the Chainworkers collective.

collective situations, beyond what was traditionally known as the art world. The indeterminacy of the results, the impossibility of knowing whether we are dealing with artists or activists, with aesthetic experimentation or political organizing, is part of what is being sought in these activities.

FUTURES

Innumerable artist-activist collectives could have been described here, along with other social movements, local and national contexts, inventions, and consensus-breaking events; but I preferred to stick as closely as possible to personal experience. What matters, at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, is the slow emergence of an experiential territory, where artistic practices that have gained autonomy from the gallery-magazine-museum system and from the advertising industry can be directly connected to attempts at social transformation. The urgency, today, is to reinforce that territory with both words and acts, and to use it for further constructive projects and experiments in subversion. The appropriation of expressive tools from the information economy—from the schools, the training programs, the workplace, and the practices of consumption—opens up an enormous

FIGURE 10.8. Steven Kurtz of the Critical Art Ensemble at the *Free Range Grains* installation, 2004. Kurtz and his group are under investigation by the FBI and state attorney general for alleged bioterrorism. Photograph courtesy of Steve Barnes, Critical Art Ensemble.

field of possibility, where artists, alongside other social groups, can regain the use of political freedom.

A few questions, to close. Can the tactics of the early counterglobalization movements be thoroughly discredited and repressed by the abusive equation of direct-action practices and terrorism? This has been attempted, in both the United States and Europe; but the repression itself has made the fundamentally political nature of the informational economy crystal clear; and the outcome may still depend on the ability to combine the communicative value of humor, invention, and surprise with the force of ethical conviction that comes from putting one's body on the line. Can the Internet be normalized, to become a consumer marketplace and a medium of passive reception or carefully channeled "interactivity"? It's an important public space to protect, through unbridled use and free exchange as well as better legislation; and the chances for entirely muzzling it, and thereby totally voiding the First Amendment and similar constitutional rights to free expression, look relatively slim. Do events like the Mayday parades, with their focus on urban living and working conditions, represent a fallback from the early ambitions of the counterglobalization protests—a retreat from the utopias of do-it-yourself geopolitics? The fundamental issue seems to be finding concrete political demands that don't block the transversal movement of struggles across an unevenly developed world. The work of cartography, on both the spatial and subjective levels, may contribute to a continuing extension of the new experiential territories, in search of a deeper and broader process of resymbolization and political recomposition, able to link the scattered actors and construct the situations of social change. It's hard to think there could be any other meaning to the word "collectivism."

NOTES

1. From a cover of the early punk fanzine *Sniffin' Glue* (1976–77), reissued in the anthology edited by Mark Perry, *Sniffin' Glue: The Essential Punk Accessory* (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 2000).

2. From "Definitions," by the Situationist International (1958), available online at Ken Knabb's excellent *Bureau of Public Secrets* Web site: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/1.definitions.htm; translation slightly modified.

3. See Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

4. On punk appropriation politics, see Dan Graham, "Punk as Propaganda," in *Rock My Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 96–113.

5. For the Art Strike and Plagiarist movements, see the books and sites by Stewart Home, particularly *Neoism, Plagiarism & Praxis* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995) and *Mind Invaders* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997). For the Luther Blissett Project, see http://www.lutherblissett.net, or a collectively written novel like *Q* (Arrow, 2004).

6. What's written here is mainly based on participation, retrospective conversations (especially with John Jordan), the Web sites of Reclaim the Streets (http://rts.gn.apc.org) and People's Global Action (http://www.agp.org), photos by Alan Lodge at http://tash.gn.apc.org, and a superb text entitled "Friday June 18th 1999" in the ecoanarchist journal *Do or Die*, no. 8 (1999), online at http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no8/index.html.

7. The full mask text can be found in the *Do or Die* text cited above; the last two sentences reproduced here are in fact from the famous "First Declaration of La Realidad" by Subcomandante Marcos, online at http://www.eco.utexas.edu/Homepages/Faculty/Cleaver/firstrealidad.html.

8. André Gorz, "The Social Ideology of the Motorcar," can be found on the RTS Web site, at http://rts.gn.apc.org/socid.htm.

9. At least one video, *J18, First Global Protest against Capitalism*, is distributed at http://www.cultureshop.org.

10. See active.org.au and the diagram where one of the programmers sketched a chain of cooperation in the invention and use of the software, online at http://www.active.org.au/doc/roots.pdf.

11. For a record of the direct-action side of the counterglobalization movement, see the illustrated book *We Are Everywhere* (London: Verso, 2003).

12. See Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia Anti-copyright, 1985, 1991), online at http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html.

13. See the Nettime Mailing Lists at http://www.nettime.org and the book *ReadMe: Ascii Culture and the Revenge of Knowledge* (New York: Autonomedia, 1999).

14. See the Next 5 Minutes Web site at http://www.next5minutes.org.

15. David Garcia and Geert Lovink, "The ABC of Tactical Media," quoted from http://thing.desk.nl/bilwet/Geert/ABC.txt.

16. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

17. See Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotexte, 2004).

18. Garcia and Lovink, "ABC of Tactical Media."

19. This and the following two quotes are from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 23–25, online at http://www.angelfire.com/cantina/negri.

20. Sources for all the material in this paragraph can be accessed at the ®™ark Web site, http://www.rtmark.com.

21. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July–August 1984).

22. See http://rtmark.com/new.html.

23. Bureau d'Etudes produces multiples, including the map "World Government" in English (2000). Extensive documentation can be found at http://utangente.free.fr/index2.html.

24. This and the following two quotes are from Bureau d'Etudes, "Resymbolizing Machines: Art after Oyvind Fählstrom," *Third Text* 18 (June 2004): 609–16.

25. Thomas Frank, Matt Weiland, et al., *Commodify Your Dissent* (New York: Norton, 1997); Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2000).

26. See Maurizio Lazzarato, *Les révolutions du capitalisme* (Paris: Les empêcheurs

de penser en rond, 2004). English excerpt at http://www.republicart.net/disc/representations/lazzarat001_en.htm.

27. See the Adbusters Web site at http://www.adbusters.org and Mark Dehry "Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs," online at *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium*, http://www.levity.com/markdery/culturjam.html.

28. Sources: Las Agencias, http://www.lasagencias.org; Dinero Gratis, http://www.eldinerogratis.com; Oficina 2004, http://www.sindominio.net/ofic2004; Yomango, http://www.yomango.net; and friends in Barcelona.

29. Sources: http://www.forumbcn2004.org, http://www.sindominio.net/mapas, http://www.moviments.net/resistencies2004, http://www.paterasurbanas.net. The Mapas group included members from Conservas, Rotorr, Asamblea de Insumisos, Boicot preventiu, Espai en blanc, Infoespai, Miles de Viviendas, and others, all of whom came together through the Assemblea de Resistències al Fòrum 2004, with about seventy different collectives.

30. Sources: http://www.chainworkers.org and the video by Marcelo Expósito, "first of may (the city-factory)"/"primero de mayo (la ciudad-fábrica)," 61 min, 2004; not yet distributed.

31. See Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), chapter 1.

32. Brian Holmes, "The Flexible Personality: For a New Cultural Critique," in *Hieroglyphs of the Future* (Zagreb: WHW/Arkzin, 2003), available online at http://www.geocities.com/CognitiveCapitalism/holmes1.html.

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