COLLECTIVISM AFTER MODERNISM

The Art of Social Imagination after 1945

BLAKE STIMSON & GREGORY SHOLETTE EDITORS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS • LONDON

"Calling Collectives," a letter to the editor from Gregory Sholette, appeared in *Artforum* 41, no. 10 (Summer 2004). Reprinted with permission of *Artforum* and the author.

An earlier version of the introduction "Periodizing Collectivism," by Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, appeared in *Third Text* 18 (November 2004): 573–83. Used with permission.

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Published by the University of Minnesota Press
111 Third Avenue South, Suite 290
Minneapolis, MN 55401-2520
http://www.upress.umn.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Collectivism after modernism : the art of social imagination after 1945 / Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, editors.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-8166-4461-2 (hc : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-8166-4461-6 (hc : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-8166-4462-9 (pb : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-8166-4462-4 (pb : alk. paper)
1. Arts, Modern—20th century—Philosophy. 2. Collectivism—History—20th century.
3. Art and society—History—20th century. I. Stimson, Blake. II. Sholette, Gregory.
NX456.C58 2007
709.04'5—dc22 2006037606

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

The University of Minnesota is an equal-opportunity educator and employer.
12 11 10 09 08 07 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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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

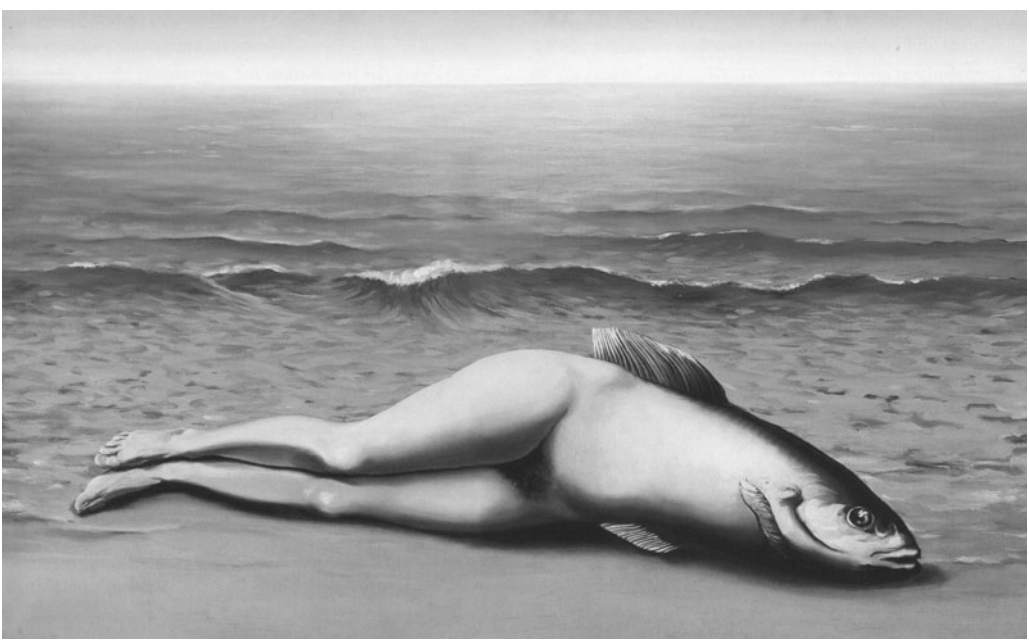


FIGURE 1.1. René Magritte, *L'invention collective*, 1934. Courtesy of Artists Rights Society.

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 1.2. 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 1.3. 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.



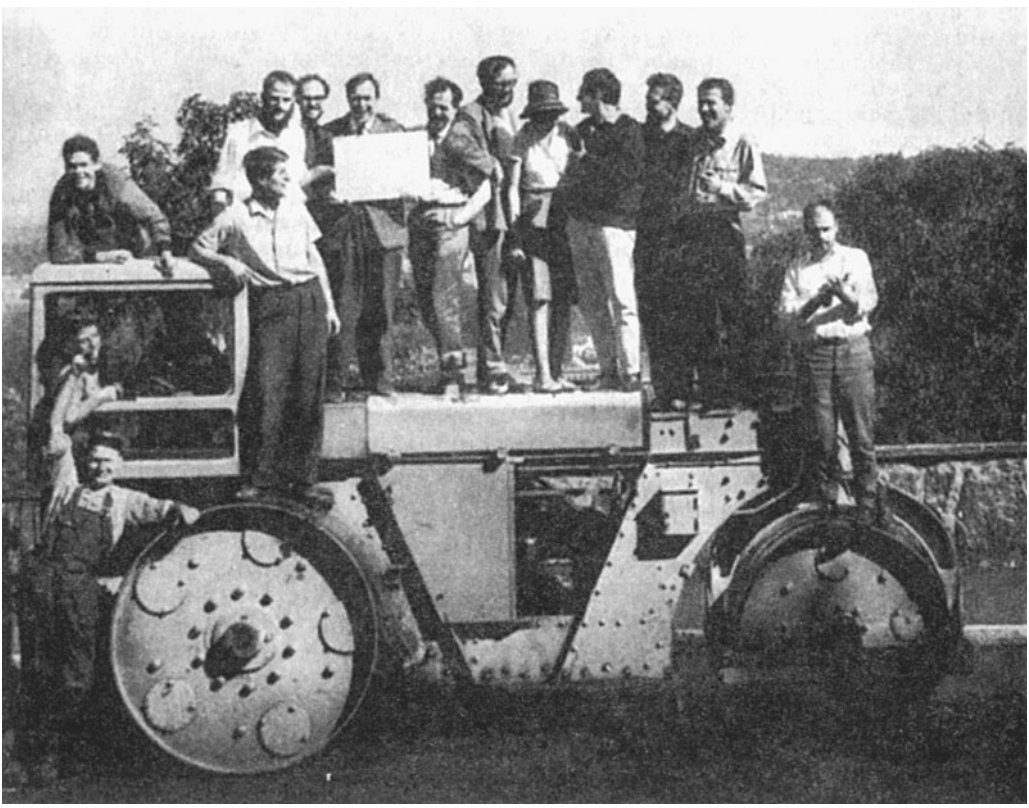


FIGURE 1.1. Internationale Situationniste members with workers in Göteborg, Sweden, 1962. *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 7 (April 1962). Copyright Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1997.