No such thing as society: art and the crisis of the European welfare state

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No Such Thing as Society: Art and the Crisis of the European Welfare State

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in

Art History, Theory and Criticism

by

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2009
The Dissertation of Sarah Elsie Lookofsky is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Co-Chair

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University of California, San Diego
2009
Dedication

For my favorite boys: Daniel, David and Shannon
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory and Criticism
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No Such Thing as Society: Art and the Crisis of the European Welfare State addresses contemporary art in the context of changing European welfare states. Mapping a tripartite turn from Institutional Critique to Relational Aesthetics, from extensive government support of the arts towards reduced arts funding, and from the welfare state towards the neoliberal state, the study more specifically sketches a shift from “society” to “community.” The past thirty years have evidenced a substantial restructuring and, in some cases, a partial dismantling of the European welfare states. As a result, society is increasingly characterized, not in terms of a cohesive social body, but rather as a collection of disparate populations and communities. It is a central argument of this investigation that these societal changes are manifest in contemporary artworks, both in the social context they reference and the conception of “audience” they imply.
Chapter 1 is devoted to an overview of the welfare state’s impact on the arts, from its post-war formation to its crisis since the 1980s. I argue that the welfare state’s founding conception of a unified social body was put to the test, first by intellectual critiques of the 1960s and 1970s and later by neoliberal challenges during the ensuing decades. Chapter 2 outlines a turn from Institutional Critique to Relational Aesthetics. Despite being indebted to theoretical critiques of state, works by Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Artists Placement Group and Stephen Willats were deeply embedded within this very structure. By contrast, the relational practices championed by the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud, I propose, share several characteristics with “community arts.” A catch-all term for arts and cultural policy since the 1990s under New Labour in the U.K., this art-centric outreach, which was thought capable of supplanting social programs, was defined by small-scale encounters with constituencies demarcated precisely by these relational initiatives. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are devoted to case studies of specific artworks in important local welfare frameworks—France, the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom. All engaged in negotiative relationships with state-funded museums and institutions of art, I suggest that works by Thomas Hirschhorn, Superflex, Mark Wallinger, and Andreas Siekmann, among others, exhibit an operation of “institutional displacement.” While still situated within post-war structures of art, these contemporary art practices do not address these immediate enclosures, but rather take on, whether explicitly or implicitly, the category of the welfare state and its social institutions. Taking as their point of departure present social issues, these artworks reference the moment of
resistance to the state of the 1960s and 1970s as well as what preceded it, namely the post-war formation of the welfare system.

In their references to multiple “states” of welfare, the contemporary artworks discussed in the volume embody the compromise formation that characterizes the current European state model. Given that older social programs today cohabitate with recent policy initiatives in most European countries, it is not the case that one state formation has entirely taken the place of an outmoded structure; the welfare goal of providing for all is contradictorily met with new policies that narrowly focus on individualized self-help. While artists frequently want to defend post-war comprehensive social schemes, their efforts are complicated by the intervening advents of poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism. Contemporary European artworks thus demonstrate the crisis of conceiving of all, whilst attending to difference, without submitting to the prevailing forces of social fragmentation.
Chapter 1: “And, You Know, There Is No Such Thing as Society.”

It has become difficult for us to consider the social body as an organic whole. We perceive it as a set of structures detachable from one another, in the image of the contemporary body augmented with prostheses and modifiable at will. For artists of the late-twentieth century, society has become both a body divided into lobbies, quotas and communities, and a vast catalog of narrative frameworks.

In the past, renewal programmes have been imposed from above with little involvement from the community which was supposed to benefit. As was identified in the Social Exclusion Unit’s (SEU) September 1998 report on neighbourhood renewal, success depends on communities themselves having the power and taking the responsibility to make things better.

Participatory arts projects can also be empowering, and help people gain control over their lives (...). They can also play a vital role in the regeneration process, facilitating consultation and partnership between residents and public agencies. Arts projects can nurture local democracy. They encourage people to become more active citizens, and strengthen support for local and self-help projects.

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1 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Women's Own Magazine, October 31, 1987. Here it is in context: "I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. 'I have a problem, I'll get a grant.' 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation.”


4 François Matarasso, Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts (Stroud Glos.: Comedia, 1997), 8.
1.1 People vs. Population

In 2000, an artwork was installed within an interior courtyard of the German Reichstag in Berlin. Modeled in gothic letters, on a bed of weeds and wild flowers, the words Der Bevölkerung, “to the population,” were visible from the balconies above.¹ This dedication mirrored another. On the building’s façade, the words Dem Deutschen Volk, “to the German people,” are inscribed above Platz der Republik. This original 1916 interpolation was inscribed, despite the resistance of Wilhelm II, over twenty years after the building’s construction as a response to mounting public opposition to the emperor and the First World War. The words no doubt took on a different meaning during the revolutionary days of 1918 after Wilhelm’s resignation when Philipp Schneidemann proclaimed Germany a republic from one of the windows of the building, and again, in 1933, when the building was severely damaged in a fire and left unused until its reemployment in 1999. In the act of citation, as Walter Benjamin noted, the historical object is always torn from its context.² Indeed, “to the German Volk,” in the present moment, undoubtedly conjures the Second World War, despite being etched during the first. As such, the inscription functioned as a “floating signifier”—a political concept, always open to redefinition, that bears traces of old usages in its new articulations.³ The simple shift from people to population—and

¹ Hans Haacke, Der Bevölkerung, 2000.
³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (London: Verso, 1985), 113. The authors argue that meaning is never fixed. Thus the signifier is never wholly empty or entirely full.
thereby from civil society, nation state and their loaded German history to a
terminology common to sociological research, statistical data and census counts—was
not an act of erasure. Both terms were featured in structural coexistence and that is, as
I will argue, precisely the point.

Haacke has repeatedly referred to the burdens of the German word for people:
“For non-Germans, ‘people’ is an innocuous word. However, because Germany
became a unified nation only late in the nineteenth century, in the myriad principalities
and kingdoms the word Volk implied ethnic unity and a common culture. It was this
exclusive tradition that the Nazis tapped into. Blood lineage became an issue of life
and death.”

Haacke’s simple shift from people to population caused much ire and
hefty parliamentary debates before being narrowly accepted for installation in a
parliamentary vote. The artist’s motive was clearly one of inclusion, in recognition of
the demands for rights by Germany’s large immigrant populations. Also in 2000, a
coalition between the Social Democrats and the Greens spearheaded a major overhaul
of Germany’s citizenship laws, which had thus far restricted the principle of
nationality to jus sanguinis, blood lineage. In fact, the Christian Democrat MP who led
the campaign against Haacke’s project was also a fervent opponent of the
liberalization of the citizenship laws. In symbolic recognition of all and not just some,
the seedbed beneath the inscription was composed of dirt brought in from all the

5 The proposal resulted in an hour-long fervent parliamentary debate, finding opponents on all
sides of the political spectrum, and was eventually narrowly approved with 260 votes in favor
and 258 against.
6 Ibid., 284-285.
German *bundesländer* (states) by their parliamentary representatives. The dirt was to be left untended, allowing wild seeds nascent within the soil to sprout and grow. This fecund act of inclusion was a response to a history of exclusion. A term ingrained within civic society, liberal democracy, and socialism alike was here displaced due to its national socialist connotations and its frequent reiterations by neo-Nazis in the present.

The universalizing conception of *all* conscripted in the rhetoric of very few is in Europe closely linked with the significant post-war malaise of the nation state. In leftist politics, theoretical discourse and cultural policy this unease is no doubt most deeply felt in Germany, where all matters of nation, national culture and a unified people have been met with nervous trepidation. It had become obvious to postwar intellectuals that the pictorialization of the masses and the powerful idea of a unified populace, previously reserved primarily for social movements and the left, now also conjured associations of brutal exclusion and elimination. The very idea of the state had become suspicious, since the holocaust was in effect the product of an efficient state bureaucracy. Haacke’s departure from “the people” therefore mirrors a larger retreat within post-war political theory and philosophy in which the word is increasingly being replaced in favor of other privileged terms. Not only recognizing the burdens of past historical usages, recent writings have emphasized the emergence of a new political order in which “the people” no longer provides an adequate descriptive and analytical category nor a sufficient model for political action. In their 2000 book *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri emphasize that “people” is a
word too closely associated with the boundaries of the nation state: “Although ‘the
people’ is posed as the originary basis of the nation, the modern conception of the
people is in fact a product of the nation-state, and survives only within its specific
ideological context.” Hardt and Negri argue that the forces of global capitalism have
made the nation state an irrelevant category. An Empire that knows no center and
allows for no exterior position has risen in its place. Opposition to such a boundless
world order, they emphasize, cannot rely on past geographically-bounded forms of
resistance. Empire is met with the multitude, a global collectivity made up of
singulars—freed from the constrictions of nation state and party politics—that
possesses an unsurpassed revolutionary potential. Unlike the category of the people,
the multitude is capable of expressing the “needs of all.” Paolo Virno has also argued
in favor of the multitude as a useful category for analyzing the contemporary
moment. He posits that this unruly category of the multitude is not new. Favored by
Spinoza and detested by Hobbes, the multitude was confined to the domains of the
private (in liberal thought) and the individual (in social democracy), while the public
reigned as the privileged term. Virno contends that the multitude is a middle term
between the individual and the collective. Its power lies in its capacity to individualize
the universal and the generic: "Unity is no longer something (the State, the sovereign)
towards which things converge, as in the case of the people; rather, it is taken for

8 Ibid., 410.
granted, as a background or a necessary precondition." Virno attributes unity to the communal faculties of the human race, such as language and intellect; it is thus achieved outside, or in excess of, the State. For these authors, the multitude takes the place of the people, since the latter no longer is capable of describing the contemporary world nor is it proficient in meeting the needs of all.

Haacke’s choice of population seems motivated by factors similar to those which led Hardt, Negri and Virno to gravitate towards the multitude. Both terms suggest the notion of a scattered many which does not seem easily reconcilable with an ideal of unity. All of these authors acknowledge the problems of the nation state category in a world that is increasingly globalized. Haacke emphasizes the fact that European countries have become gradually more diverse during the post-war period. In nations like Britain, France and the Netherlands, minority populations largely reflect the countries’ colonial pasts, while the immigrant histories of Germany and Scandinavia are primarily tied to the importation of low-wage workers, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. Hardt, Negri and Virno’s concern with a globalized world, by contrast, mainly concentrates on the deterritorializing disposition of capitalism. This divergence in focus leads in turn to larger differences between the political statement implied in Haacke’s installation and the ideas of the multitude theorists. While Haacke’s objective appears to be to accommodate minorities into the common civic fold, Hardt, Negri and Virno would likely emphasize the futility of such

\[10\] Ibid., 25.
an attempt. It seems to me unlikely that they would applaud the artist’s habitation of the political institution of the Reichstag. They would instead most likely reiterate that it is an outmoded national enclosure, impotent when met with the pressures of a globalized capitalism. Unlike the limitless multitude, population is a territorialized term, bound to the limits of state.

In a debate arising from Hans Haacke’s piece, Chantal Mouffe problematizes population in ways that echo her criticism of Hardt and Negri’s Empire:

If Haacke were proposing to replace the inscription Dem Deutschen Volke by Der Bevölkerung, I wouldn't find this adequate. I don't think that Der Bevölkerung, ‘the population,’ is a political concept. […] ‘The population’ is not a concept that can be the locus of popular sovereignty. It's a descriptive, sociological concept. And the Reichstag must, of course, be the locus of the people in a political sense. That doesn't mean that ‘the people’ must be understood only in terms of race, or even, necessarily, in terms of the people who are at the moment German citizens.¹¹

Mouffe emphasizes the significance of the people as a term crucial to political identification that stimulates strong “passions.” She acknowledges that its current meanings are strongly impacted by its long history of right-wing appropriations, but simultaneously argues that it is a no less crucial term for mobilization on the left.

People, in Mouffe’s view, cannot and should not be replaced with other concepts, such as population, multitude or “humanity” (a word that Virno frequently employs). For Mouffe, the term people is linked to democracy and the democratic right to exercise one’s rights. Humanity, by contrast, is a category without territory which, for that

reason, cannot refer to the rights of democratic citizenship. In sum, Mouffe has a problem with the term population, since it, like other terms favored by globalization discourses, in her view constitutes an abandonment of political institutions. Efficient political struggles, she argues, cannot be waged completely outside their structures. The struggle over inclusion must therefore be held within their parameters, not outside them on a deterritorialized global stage.\(^\text{12}\) In Mouffe’s opinion, democracy is always exclusive, and the term people marks this inescapable exclusivity. Instead of attempting to overcome its inevitable divisions, important political concepts, like the people, need to be struggled over in political debates within a shared “ethico-political space,” such as the Reichstag.\(^\text{13}\)

Despite Mouffe’s problems with the artist’s choice of words, the placement of Der Bevölkerung within the quintessential structure of liberal democracy seems in harmony with the theorist’s case for the continued imperative to articulate new political claims within age-old political institutions. Haacke’s installation also appears to cohere with her insistence that “liberty and equality for all,” although never entirely fulfilled historically, is a political proposition worthy of preservation. The inherent artistic recognition of the European state as a flawed political framework, that excludes large sections of its inhabitants while claiming to include all, will become a

\(^{12}\) While Mouffe insists on geographically-bounded rights, as opposed to international human rights discourse, for example, she has noted that citizenship need not be connected to the nation state. As examples, she uses the Greek city state and the European Union.

\(^{13}\) She is particularly against views by Habermasian political theorists that argue that difference can be overcome by political consensus and she deplors the Third Way’s claim that the opposition between left and right have melted together to form a new shared center.
core focus of this study. Still more important to this investigation, I think, is the fact that Haacke articulates his artistic reflections vis-à-vis the state from a position of institutional interiority. Like Haacke, the majority of the contemporary artworks discussed in chapters to come take up concerns about the European state, while being firmly situated within its structures. Also not ignoring the impact of globalization, these works, too, do not assume a completely deterritorialized world, but instead maintain a focus on the fixture of an immediate territorial context.

I think that Mouffe’s interpretation of Haacke’s piece involves one significant misunderstanding. The installation does not, I believe, involve an act of simple substitution: shunning one word in lieu of another, as in the case of Hardt, Negri and Virno. In this instance, the meaning seems to precisely shuttle between two terms, somewhere between the pediment and the courtyard. The artwork builds a tension between the two competing definitions of everyone, thereby providing an elasticity of inclusion and exclusion, which persists in all states, while seldom being juridically recognized within its institutions. Combining the historic postulate of art’s universal address with the conceptual tradition’s penchant for undirected textual messaging, Haacke’s use of words differs from acts of political speech. An exclamation disassociated from an orator, embedded and left to flower in the Reichstag’s midst, it is as if the artist attempted to make the institution speak for itself.

Haacke’s piece is a good example of the ways in which contemporary art has the exceptional capacity to open up a political space, a buffer zone of sorts between divergent historical conceptions of the state. As I have tried to demonstrate, Haacke’s
piece addresses the European nation state. It also implicates liberal democracy. In addition, I would argue that Haacke’s piece takes on another prevalent governmental framework, namely the European welfare state. The welfare context is particularly relevant to this artwork, since it is a state model founded on the principle of universality, thus extending the liberal tradition of legal rights to also include the right to economic provision. Expanding the current definition of citizen involves more than a legal principle; the battle over inclusion and exclusion here is a matter of equal rights to social programs that immigrants often pay into via taxation, but often don’t receive benefits from in return. What is more, the act of “sticking with” the framework of state takes on particular significance at a time when the welfare structure is increasingly contested or even abandoned. Haacke’s piece sets the stage for a central dialectic at play in all of the artworks discussed in this volume. On the one hand, these artworks address the somewhat outmoded but still politically pertinent and powerful notion of the welfare state. On the other, these contemporary pieces are simultaneously fraught by the mounting difficulty of maintaining this very framework. The difficulty, as we shall see, not only involves the economic, political and social pressures of globalization on the European state; the problem also arises from the contemporary intellectual quandary of thinking social and political unity overall.

14 The welfare state is here understood as a state that provides goods and services to its citizens. In economic terms, welfare states are often defined as countries that devote at least 20% of their GDP to social transfers. James Angresano, French Welfare State Reform: Idealism Versus Swedish, New Zealand and Dutch Pragmatism (London ; New York: Anthem, 2007), xvii.
1.2 Institutional Displacements

The motivation behind this study was the perceived multiplicity of contemporary artistic practices in Europe that directly address matters of state. Initial thinking about these works has given rise to an investigation that weaves together three levels of inquiry: first, the artworks and their immediate context; second, cultural policy that in Europe persists as a framework for funding and exhibiting artistic practices; and third, the welfare state and its social policy history. The connections between these three strata are by no means straightforward and are often difficult to untangle. This three-pronged approach, however, was deemed necessary in order to adequately discuss the artworks of interest.

Consider, for example, two recent films by the Scottish artist Luke Fowler. Both are, in a sense, documentaries, in that they document real people and real places in the artist’s native Scotland. However, both also involve abstracting elements, such as ambiguous footage that bears no obvious relation to the accompaniment of fragmented soundtracks. *Bogman Palmjaguar* (2007) is a film titled after its main subject’s self-chosen sobriquet, which couples the natural murky landscape with the image of the persecuted and therefore secluded wild cat. Once employed by the national nature conservancy to document the bog lands of Scotland, Bogman now lives at a total remove from society as a consequence of being classified “paranoid schizophrenic” by the Scottish social system during the 1980s. The film is composed of 16mm footage of remote landscapes, interspersed with interviews with Palmjaguar in his isolated home. This story of symbolic state violence is absent of
bureaucratically-created case history documents; voice is in the film wholly possessed by the dispossessed victim of the system. As a result, we have no way of knowing if his accounts (of being framed by the system after visiting his mother in a psychiatric ward, having his college papers turned over to social workers, and being followed by a private detective who claimed that he had inherited his grandfather’s predisposition for committing rape) are in effect true. What is clear, however, is that these impositions of state, whether real or imagined, have produced a subject who, terrified of confirming his psychiatric label, can only meet the film camera as well as his interlocutors by staring at the floor or obscuring his face with a feathered mask. As the film progresses, it slowly becomes apparent that Palmjaguar, armed with voluminous binders of his own case files, strives to have his psychiatric label legally revoked. Towards the end of the film, he speaks with a man—it is unknown if he is a lawyer or a doctor—who tells him that he cannot hope to beat the system, but needs instead to play by its rules in order to change his psychiatric classification. When, at the end of the film, the mossy landscape fades to black, US audiences might be surprised that—rather than a scrolling list of funding bodies—only one title appears on the screen: Arts Council England.

Fowler’s *An Abbeyview Film* (2008) was produced with urban regeneration funding which, as we shall see in the next chapter, is associated with Thatcher and New Labour governments and still prevalent in the United Kingdom. According to this scheme, investment in the arts is essentially seen as capable of boosting the locality’s image and, subsequently, local economies themselves. In this case, money was
awarded for projects that would engage an area of public housing, or council estates, in the economically depressed Scottish town of Dumfermline. This art film is simple in its construction: introductory texts describe a sequence of shots filmed on a given visit to the town, followed by long takes that fulfill those initial descriptions. For example, “Visit 2, roll 4/ fuji 500d” and “bus shelter filter; Abbeyview night skyline; car lights and street lights; shrubs lit by streetlight; gable end; chippy; chinese takeaway; Whitelaw Road; bookies; Post Office; bus shelter.” The shots—that appear unmanipulated, apart from occasionally being slightly sped up or slowed down—show a supermarket, children playing, inhabitants gardening, busy intersections, sports fields at night, etc. Instead of providing a strictly positive or negative image of a local community, the series of shots constructs a place—its architecture and inhabitants—that could be situated within the outskirts of any European city. The soundtrack to the film is a lamenting song entitled “Warriors” by the Scottish singer Richard Youngs that is intermittently layered with ambient sound of inhabitants talking. The vocal reverberation of the valorous term “warriors” produces an ambiguity in the context of the images: are the inhabitants of public housing downtrodden subjects of the state or heroes of their own existence?

Both films exhibit what could be termed “institutional displacement” in European contemporary art practices. Both address the history of social policies of the welfare state. In *Bogman Palmjaguar*, the state, while claiming to protect its citizens, is in effect a system with a history of dehumanizing side effects. *An Abbeyview Film* shows how ordinary lives nevertheless continue to be lived out within state-provided
structures. It is also significant to point out that both works were funded by the cultural institutions and policies of the state, old as well as new. Hence, these films were made possible by the somewhat compromised state system that they critique. So, while situated firmly within the state-funded structure of art, contemporary European artworks like these do not so much address the immediate funding and exhibition context as they attend to its surrounding framework: the social, political, and economic context of the European welfare state—its past histories as well as the persistence in contemporary form.

In order to leave room for in-depth analysis of the artworks that are the primary object of this study, it has been necessary to narrow the vast expanses of welfare history and theory as well as the range of cultural and artistic policies. I have therefore further delimited the field by situating the three levels of inquiry described previously (artwork, cultural policy, welfare state policy) within specific historical and geographic contexts. Historically, the study takes on three moments that are central to European welfare history: the emergence of the welfare state in the post-war period; its ideological critique and crisis during the late 1960s and early 1970s; and finally, the neoliberal crisis that has constituted the primary threat to the European welfare state in recent decades. These three periods are in turn related to three moments of cultural policy, chosen because these were conceived in close association with their social counterparts: the formation of the Arts Council in Great Britain in the post-war period; the cultural policy schemes of Malraux during the 1960s in France and their contestation during ensuing decades; and finally, cultural initiatives, specifically
community arts programs, in Britain after New Labour took power in 1997. These are of course all local examples, but I will maintain that they each represent strong cross-continental policy currents.

Geographically, this investigation comprises three primary regions: Scandinavia, France and Britain, each represented by case studies in subsequent chapters. While my primary argument is that these three welfare contexts share several commonalities (a shared history of post-war formation and then, during recent decades, significant restructuring), it is important to also note some regional nuances. Scandinavia, France and Britain correspond with Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s distinction among three types of “welfare state capitalism.” He situates these three models on a quantitative continuum that ranges from the most generous social democratic systems, exemplified by the state systems of Northern Europe, to the minimalist welfare states of contemporary UK (and the US). The Nordic countries contain systems of universal welfare, which means that all citizens have the right to social services regardless of income and wealth. These also have the greatest degree of market regulation. The burdens of the family are here collectivized; most women take part in the workforce

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16 Since my research is primarily restricted to Denmark, Norway and Sweden, I will primarily use the term Scandinavia, instead of the Nordic countries (also referred to as Norden) that additionally encompasses Finland, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. A major percentage of all of these countries’ GDPs are devoted to social services—about twice the continental average. In Scandinavia, the share of national income devoted to social security rose 250 percent in Sweden and Denmark after the Second World War, while it tripled in Norway. Tony Judt, Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945 (Penguin (Non-Classics), 2006), 361
and child care, education and elder care are covered entirely or almost entirely by the
state. In the middle-range, the welfare states of France, and most of continental
Europe, are characterized by employment-linked social insurance and a greater
reliance on familial care. In these countries, the state provides fewer social services
than the Nordic countries, but nonetheless ensures a high degree of redistributive
transfers. On the “right” end of Andersen’s spectrum is contemporary Britain, which
despite beginnings as the original and most expansive welfare state, is now defined by
minimal welfare and fervent support for the market. A system of negative income
taxation provides minimal security for the poor, while allowing the better-off to
purchase private welfare. Over the past decades, Britain, like the US, has exhibited the
most dramatic shift from collective risk-pooling to individual market solutions and
has, as a result, increased income disparities. Nevertheless, several features of the
welfare state remain intact, therefore Britain cannot be considered entirely market-
orientated.

1.3 A History of Welfare with Cultural Implications

In order to properly conceptualize culture within the framework of the state, it
is necessary to first sketch a somewhat broader history of welfare in Europe. The
European post-war welfare states, which were not wholly installed until the 1950s and

17 The history of the welfare state in France is also importantly tied to post-war restoration efforts
after Vichy. This included the restoration of trade union power, widespread nationalizations and
concerted policy efforts to boost the birthrate.
‘60s, are complex formations with tangled roots in prior centuries.\(^\text{18}\) The implementation of social programs in these states can to a certain degree be credited for socialist party politics. After the war, socialist parties garnered large voting percentages and joined coalition governments in many European countries, while winning decisive victories in the UK, Norway and Sweden. While socialist parties remained largely outside of government prior to the Second World War, the socialist agenda was substantially emboldened by the depression and the fascist glorification of capitalism in its immediate aftermath. Social democratic successes in the post-war period have also been attributed to an egalitarian ethos produced by the war, solidaristic feelings resulting from a common enemy, as well as to the prestige of the USSR. In contrast to the communists, socialist parties increasingly abandoned their Marxist and revolutionary stringency in favor of a program of reformism to be achieved through electoral victory. The new task became to orchestrate a more just society under the non-revolutionary conditions of capitalism. Mass democratic politics and a definition of the working class that encompassed all working people,_____________________

\(^\text{18}\) Only in Britain were programs set up already in the late 1940s as a result of widespread unemployment during the ‘20s and ‘30s, while in Sweden the welfare state was not fully implemented until much later. Welfare state historians often point to 19\textsuperscript{th} century social programs, which arguably constitute the ideological precedents and pragmatic foundations without which the more expansive post-war programs would likely not have come into existence. These programs were often instituted as a response to industrialization, when large populations moved from the countryside into densely populated urban areas for factory work. The purpose of such policies, which were linked with poor laws and pauperization, were largely to control and regulate health and hygiene within cities. France’s first public health law came into being already in 1832, while a similar law was instituted in Britain in 1848. In Britain, a national insurance system was developed in 1911, which included old-age pensions, health and unemployment insurance systems. The Swedes were the first to introduce a compulsory and universal pension system in 1913. Donald Sassoon, \textit{One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century} (New York: New Press, 1996). Some historians assess that the origins of the welfare state date back even further (see chapter 4).
and not just a narrowly defined group, paved the way for a broader voting base. Moreover, a national focus based on an insulated national economy took precedence over the previously dominant internationalism. In turn, national symbols, flags, national heroes and narratives gradually substituted for the hammer and sickle. The welfare state became the goal, while nationalization and class conflict were marginalized. As a result, the short-term goals of the Second International, the 8-hour work week and universal suffrage, were implemented in most European nations in the post-war period. Under the welfare state, socialism was significantly warped. Particularly during the booming capitalist economy and the growing unpopularity of the Soviet Union during the ‘50s and ‘60s, social democrats came to occupy the strange position of bowing to US power and capitalism while shunning the only socialist nation.

Despite the clear influence of socialist ideology, the existence of the welfare states cannot be wholly attributed to social democratic projects. Carl Schmitt’s theorization of the friend-enemy relation has influenced historicizations that argue that

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19 Demands for an 8-hour work week and workers rights were from the beginning central to the socialist parties of Europe that had for the most been formed during the latter part of the 19th century. The first comprehensive proposal is arguably the 1891 Erfurt Programme, which became the main party program for the German SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) and more or less identically also the main agenda of the Scandinavian social democratic parties. An elaboration and simplification of Marx's theories, the program outlined a shift in emphasis away from the long-term goal of revolution to a short-term focus on workers' rights. It constitutes an early formulation of the central coordinates of western European social democracies to come: the democratization of society, the welfare state and the regulation of the labor market. Ibid., 28; 59.
the welfare state was as much a result of external pressures as of internal demands.\textsuperscript{20}

In other words, social programs are not derived from a set of norms, but rather arise during “states of exception” when the survival of the sovereign state is at stake. Such arguments hold that the threat of warfare necessitated social programs that would bind citizens to their national territory, giving them the motivation to fight for the national cause. Thus, the welfare state goes hand-in-hand with the consolidation of the nation state. Michel Foucault’s analysis of the modern state has given rise to related accounts that emphasize the disciplinary effects of programs that serve to regulate and control every aspect of the citizen’s life.\textsuperscript{21} Leftist critiques of the welfare state have charged that capitalism requires a non-hostile labor force. Welfare programs, in other words, amount to a buying-off of the working class. Since the private sector alone cannot support its work force, an elaborate support system is needed, providing basic resources, health care, pensions as well as transportation and education infrastructure. Here, the welfare state occupies the paradoxical role of stabilizing capitalism. This of course presents a dilemma, since the reform of capitalism in support of the population arbitrarily also serves to substantiate capitalism.\textsuperscript{22}

It is also frequently argued that similar if not identical state formations would likely have come into being regardless of which party was in power after the war.


Several observers maintain that conservative and liberal forces were intent on preventing the growth of the socialist parties and therefore sought to adopt their agendas in the post-war period. In any event, as most would agree, an opposition to welfare would have constituted political suicide in post-war Europe. Indeed, no liberal pro-capitalist government succeeded in becoming the main party in government between 1945 and 1950. Even Winston Churchill made a declaration advocating a strong welfare state in 1943. More importantly, it cannot be disputed that early theorizations of the welfare state occurred outside the left-wing parties. John Maynard Keynes, whose economic theories have been considered as the foundation of the welfare state, was a Liberal. In fact, Keynes was quite far from being a socialist; his plan was precisely intended to save capitalism by making it work better. Similarly, the blue-print for the welfare state, the Beveridge Report, was the work of another Liberal, William Beveridge. It is worth mentioning in this regard that the welfare state proposals that originated among Liberals were not adopted by the Labour government that had come to power in 1929. Socialists were not principal in articulating welfare programs early on due to the fact that they initially favored an overturning of capitalism and therefore could not accept its planned regulation. Public works programs accordingly had closer associations with the Liberal agenda than with

\[\text{Sassoon, One Hundred Years of Socialism, 138.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 39.}\]
\[\text{An economic strategy to counter unemployment was largely a collaboration between the Liberals, trade unions (notably by Ernest Bevin) and John Maynard Keynes. These proposals included various public works programs, an injection of cash into the economy and social benefits and pensions that would expand credit and thereby increase purchasing power. It was these early proposals that were in large part followed in Britain and throughout Europe in postwar years.}\]
socialist policy ideals. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that the welfare state absent of socialist and social democratic supervision would have taken a quite different form. Particularly, the principle of universality, the provision for all so central to the British and Scandinavian welfare states, would almost certainly not have become a fait accompli under conservative stewardship.\(26\) In conclusion, the welfare state cannot alone be considered the result of specific party political programs. Nevertheless, its existence is unthinkable without considering the long preceding history of trade union struggles, social movements and leftist political parties.

Concurrently with the formation of the welfare state in the immediate post-war period, the relationship between culture and society was formalized in a close bond. Cultural programs were increasingly conceived in tandem with social policies. Like public health care, public housing and public broadcasting, public culture was conceived in universal terms as a right associated with citizenship. Art and culture were to serve with the crucial function of cementing a national social bond. In practice, then, cultural policy was first and foremost of an educational nature, conceived as a meeting of the people with their cultural history. It is a fact often neglected that the man commonly referred to as the founding father of the welfare

\(26\)Instead of the universality born in Britain with the National Insurance Act of 1946 and the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948, a conservative government would probably have modeled a postwar welfare state on the prewar public assistance precedents. Ibid., 141 As Donald Sassoon has argued, while the legal definition of rights is clearly a product of the liberal tradition, "[t]he distinctive socialist contribution to the question of rights lies precisely in the recognition that the distribution of power in society reflects not only legal relationships, but also the uneven distribution of wealth. The great achievement of liberalism was the proposition that all are equal before the law. The great project of socialism was the construction of an economic system which made real equality possible." Ibid., 449.
state, John Maynard Keynes, also established the first public institution for funding the arts in Europe, namely The Arts Council of Great Britain. Modeled closely on the UK precedent, comparable state art structures followed in other European countries during subsequent decades (for example, in France, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Communications in 1959; In Denmark, The Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1961; in Sweden, Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs, 1969). In other words, the development of state arts support largely coincided with the development of the welfare state, and their simultaneous expansion and institutionalization resulted in a complex association that cannot be ignored when exploring the interrelationship of the artistic and the social in post-war Europe. The formation of the Arts Council in Britain will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

The close bond of culture and the state, and the instrumentalization of art at the service of the nation, was met with great skepticism during the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s that, while strongest in France, resonated across the rest of the continent as well. Partially mirroring radical left and communist critiques of the welfare state, protestors who took to the streets in many European cities rejected

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27 While state funding for the arts did of course predate the Second World War, this support was mainly focused on museums, theatres, broadcasters, etc. and not on more wide-spread policies and programs.
28 In Britain, for example, a strong critique of the systems of state culture was influentially articulated by the cultural studies theorist Raymond Williams. *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper& Row, Publishers, 1966); “The Arts Council,” *The Political Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1979): 258-72
government participation and instead advocated revolutionary action. In Holland in 1969, for example, students targeted the classical performances in public theatre houses in the Aktie Tomaat, also known as the Tomato Campaign. Two main theatres were subsequently shuttered. Counter-cultural opposition across Europe took aim at state culture, perceived as synonymous with a bourgeois culture aimed at papering over social inequalities. Artists sought to connect with workers, emphasizing the bonds between government and capitalism. Artists believed that, in an increasingly alienating society, subjects could regain control by artistic means. Creativity was in this regard seen as intimately connected to agency, and collective participation in the creative process was understood as capable of stirring revolutionary action.

A significant contribution to the ideological critiques of state during this period were Louis Althusser’s account of the Ideological State Apparatuses: “The State is a ‘machine’ of repression, which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the ‘class’ of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation).” Crucial to Althusser’s theory was the

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29 The movement which included a dissonant combination of workers, students and intellectuals was far from cohesive ideologically. While some of the protesters focused mainly on workers’ rights, some factions put a strong emphasis on individual freedom and sexual liberation, a significant departure from past collectivist party rhetoric. Thus ’68 presented a complex intermingling of collective action as well as the individual pursuit of desire.
idea that core functions of the state, ensuring the reproduction of the means of production, existed outside the repressive state apparatuses (government, army, policy, courts, prisons, etc.). Instead, these core functions exist within the Ideological State Apparatuses of religion, education, family, trade unions, communications, culture, etc. As noted above, Michel Foucault, a student of Althusser, provided the grounds for further critique of the modern state with his characterization of its insidious biopolitical methods of controlling, monitoring, reinforcing and optimizing an entire population. In tandem with such analyses that questioned the entire possibility of a non-oppressive state mechanism, Pierre Bourdieu, another student of Althusser, argued on the cultural front that artistic appreciation required “mastery of the code” and “adherence to a set of values” that were class-based rather than inherent. State culture only affirmed existing power structures, rather than raising questions that might threaten its core values. Hence the “alibis for democracy,” efforts to democratize art, really only profited the privileged classes—the converted to whom all addresses were intrinsically preached. The working classes, by contrast, experienced only alienation in the cultural institutions of the state. In recognition of this absorption of the avant-garde into state advocated culture, Bourdieu and others provocingly argued that the market, catering to as many as possible, provided a better model for

engaging the viewer’s imagination than the bureaucratically protected enclaves of high culture.\footnote{See also Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: zur Organisationsanalyse von Bürgerlicher und Proletarischer Öffentlichkeit, 1st ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972).}

In the French context, the opposition to cultural affairs of state was specifically directed at the policies of André Malraux, the Minister of Culture under Charles de Gaulle. As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, Malraux had initiated a cultural policy scheme that involved the dissemination of national arts treasures to the far reaches of the Republic. These policies were arguably a direct reaction to the perceived threats to national cohesion, such as the Algerian War and the mounting influences of American popular culture.\footnote{A history outlined in Kristin Ross, Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).} Informed by the critiques of ‘68, the decades that followed saw significant shifts within the sphere of cultural programming. In France, during the 1980s, François Mitterand retooled cultural policy schemes to involve greater decentralization and regional influence, conceiving audiences less as a unified body and more as a patchwork of different constituencies. Similarly—informed by arts practice that had been overtly critical of government policy in preceding decades—the Arts Council in Britain (along with the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Community Relations Commission) published a report in 1976 entitled The Arts Britain Ignores.\footnote{The Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian Foundation, started by the oil magnate and an art collector by the same name, funded a broad range of community-based practices during the 1970’s, among} Policy shifts, countering critiques of national

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culture, resounded throughout Europe. In 1972, for instance, Swedish cultural policy objectives were redefined to include such aims as “protecting the freedom of speech,” “offering opportunities for people to be creative,” combating “negative effects of commercialism” and giving “consideration to the experiences and needs of disadvantaged groups.” Throughout the continent, calls for democratization resulted in a greater focus on education as well as in attempts to proximate programming to everyday life and lived experience, while demands for decentralization resulted in more regional arts institutions and funding schemes.

The significances of these changes in the cultural field, however, were soon dwarfed by dramatic changes to the welfare states overall. The momentary increases in cultural funding during the seventies for the most part only lasted the decade, as welfare states throughout Europe became subject to attack and dramatic changes others an artist-in-residence scheme in which artists would work with locals in schools, etc. See, John Albert Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in the 1970s Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 136. 38 Cited in Anthony S. Keller, *Contemporary European Arts Support Systems: Precedents for Intergovernmental Development in the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1980), 93-94. This policy shift was largely informed by the recommendations of a 1973 document put out by the Swedish National Council on Cultural Affairs entitled "New Cultural Policy in Sweden," which summed up the cultural debates of the previous decade: “Cultural institutions had to be reorganized, and should work from a new concept of culture, without the prestige and curtailing effect of the traditional concept of culture based on esthetics. Contact, community and creative activity were emphasized as important. The importance of measures to counteract commercial cultural offerings was also stressed [...] As a means of reaching new groups, the demand was raised for the decentralization of cultural activities and for attempts at making it possible for audiences to have more influence.” *New Cultural Policy in Sweden (A Proposal to the Swedish Minister of Educational Affairs by the National Council for Cultural Affairs)* (Stockholm, Sweden: SNCCA, Swedish Institute, 1973), 16

39 During the 1960s and 1970s in Britain, a number of local government bodies, specialized arts clubs and other interest groups began to seek funding from the Arts Council. These later became the Regional Arts Associations. In the 1990s, these were renamed by a lesser number of Regional Art Boards. Tessa Jowell, *Government and the Value of Culture* (London, UK: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2004), 185.
during the 1980s and the decades that followed. This “crisis of the welfare state,” while attributed to many causes, is primarily one of neoliberalization—a growth strategy of deregulation, privatization, labor-market flexibilization and the elimination of welfare programs. The ideology of neoliberalism, and its forceful attack on the welfare state, has its roots in the pre-war era. Its central tenets are related to an early critique of the welfare model: Friedrich von Hayek’s 1944 *The Road to Serfdom* in which he argued that expanding governments destroyed the spirit of capitalism. In the US, similar premises shaped what is commonly referred to as the “Washington consensus,” while the Chicago School theorized welfare state retrenchment during the 1950s. These ideas remained marginal until they gained center stage during the 1970s, a decade when employment and productivity contracted, while prices rose, particularly that of oil. Birthrates decreased and cheap labor from third world countries presented significant threats to the post-war welfare model. All this propelled a renewed confrontation between left and right political parties that had been largely muted during the preceding boom-time decades. Conservatives, informed by free market thinkers, argued that the slump was the fault of the strong welfare state; its strong regulation and rigidity impeded market flexibility, while its social benefits discouraged productivity. Throughout Europe, the agenda of the day became the conservative goal of controlling inflation. The social democratic aim of full

40 Key factors are a globalized economy, an aging population and shrinking birth rates, as are the right-leaning regime changes that in many European countries came to disrupt the decade-long reigns of social democratic governments.
employment, for a long time embraced equally by conservatives, lost out. The victory of this agenda is also tied to the near collapse of its primary opponent. Socialism was repeatedly declared dead throughout the 1980s, being dealt a near coup de grâce in 1989 with the fall of communism. The waning of the left was also a result of the continual shrinkage of the European working classes and, as a result, the shift towards the center of most political parties.

Neoliberalization in Europe was the most dramatic in Britain, propelled by Margaret Thatcher’s victory in 1979 and followed through with Blair’s New Labour and Third Way of the 1990s (this history is further detailed in the next chapter). It was thus during the last decades of the 20th century that the welfare state met the strongest antagonism in postwar history, in many cases leading to its partial dismantling, the loosening of its grip on market forces and the sapping of trade union power. Most European states have as a result carried out dramatic cuts in benefits (unemployment, disability and health and child care), often paired with discourses espousing an end to dependency as a way of life, programs to move people from welfare to work and a shift in tax burdens from corporations to individuals. A central argument of this study is that the effects of neoliberalization were also felt deeply in the cultural field in the form of shrinking financial support for the arts. In contrast to the US, however, where cultural funding all but vanished from federal budgets over the course of these same decades, the European cultural fields have to a greater extent been marked by a move

41 Sassoon, One Hundred Years of Socialism, 448.
towards increasing governmental demands for larger visitor volumes as well as calls for demonstrable values and “effects” (a “return on investment”) as a condition of further support.\textsuperscript{42}

1.4 Death of the Social

Central to this study is the claim that the weakening of the welfare model over the course of recent decades in Europe has occasioned the emergence of a new societal organization that in turn has had an impact on artistic production—both in terms of its structure and the way in which it conceives of its audiences. Paralleling the historical development from welfare state formation to neoliberal reorganization, Nikolas Rose has outlined a dramatic discursive shift in how society and its inhabitants are characterized.\textsuperscript{43} He points to the drastic impact of globalization: the growing influences of supra-national corporations, transnational movements, rival nationalisms within a single geographical terrain, the politics of ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities as well as multiculturalism. As discussed also with regard to Haacke’s

Reichstag installation, Rose writes that this global turn has made it difficult for political thought to remain bounded by a nation, coextensive with a unified polity of social citizens. His theory also takes into account the aforementioned rise of ideological critiques that, like recent theorizations of multiplicities, have served to question the 19th century conception of “society” as the sum of economic, moral and political spheres within a more or less bounded territory. He writes that a variety of factors have thus brought about a rise of anti-political motifs within political discourse, resulting in a questioning as well as contestation of the overarching political programs conceived during the post-war period. His central argument is that, both in the praxis of government as well as in political thought, a unified conception of the social is increasingly replaced by a discourse of community:

Consider the contemporary salience of the vocabulary of community care, community homes, community workers, community safety, for example. Consider the emergence of the idea of risk communities—drug abusers, gay men, carriers of particular genes, youth at risk. Consider the prominence of the language of community in debates over multiculturalism and the problems posed for politicians, psychiatrists, police and others working in conditions of cultural, ethical and religious pluralism. All these seem to signal that ‘the social’ may be giving way to ‘the community’ as a new territory for the administration of individual and collective existence, a new plane or surface upon which micro-moral relations among persons are conceptualized and administered.44

Employing primarily a methodology adopted from Foucault’s theorization of governmentality, Rose argues that a deep-seated paradigm shift has taken place, characterized by the “emergence of a range of rationalities and techniques that seek to

44 Ibid., 197.
govern without governing *society*, to govern through regulated choices made by discrete and autonomous actors in the context of their particular commitments to families and communities."^{45} Rose writes that the category of “the social” denotes a model of collective, integrated being—an overarching single space, territorialized across a nation. Governing from a social point of view, then, involves a “single matrix of solidarity, a relation between organically interconnected society and all the individuals contained therein, given a politico-ethical form in the notion of social citizenship.”^{46} This conception of the individual vis-à-vis the social led to the development of social service programs over the course of the 20th century that became formalized under, and foundational to, the post-war European welfare states. The term “community,” by contrast, is more detached from a political conception of society. Individuals are viewed as sutured into smaller constituencies through mechanisms of marketing, consumption and lifestyle and considered in terms of relations of identification with “their community”—the particular collectivity to which each person is bound by kinship, religion, residence, shared plight or moral affinity. While social programs involved universal measures, community-based programs are reliant on more direct lines of identification through more selective and local strategies of targeting and mobilizing. Where social programs emphasized collective being and responsibilities, in acknowledgment of different social and economic determinations, such as family background, life history, urban environments, etc., the ethics of

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^{46} Ibid, 199.
community envisage an ensemble of individualized and autonomized actors, each of whom bears particular ties to her or his family or to a moral community. Programs of public schooling, housing and broadcasting, as well as systems of social insurance, were organized around the notion of a socially identified citizen who, above all, understood him or herself as one in an integrated national society. As for community, identification instead runs along the lines of personal identity and identity politics. These forms of identification are less abstract and remote, being characterized rather by spontaneity and immediacy. Communities are also characterized by being multiplicitous in nature, as individuals associate themselves with a range of overlapping and heterogeneous constituencies: moral communities, lifestyle communities, etc.

This new order of governmentality has resulted in divisions within the body of the population. Rose speaks of the “affiliated” or the “included”—people that are considered integrated as active citizens of responsible communities due to their “investment” in themselves and their families. The “marginal,” on the other hand are, defined by being exterior to these aforementioned, sanctioned communities. These groups are often deemed incapable of managing themselves and are seen as “anti-

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47 Ibid., 200.
48 As Rose writes: “Sometimes they are defined in terms of the geographical coordinates of a micro-locale. Sometimes they are ‘virtual communities’ associated in neither ‘real’ space nor ‘real’ time but through a network of relays of communication, symbols, images, styles of dress and other devices of identification: the gay community, the disabled community, the Asian community.” Ibid.
49 Ibid., 204.
communities” whose morality and lifestyle are considered a threat to public contentment and political order.

This rise of community discourse over the past decades concurs with the rise of neoliberal ideology. Rose argues that the social and the economic were seen as coextensive over the course of the 20th century, as social policy was a means of regulating the economic sphere. It was in the interest of the government to maintain its labor market; thus a range of social interventions and macro-economic management strategies were introduced in order to benefit the economic sector. The welfare state’s signature programs, then, involved a close coordination of both social and economic fields: unemployment benefits, accident insurance, health and safety legislation, schemes of taxation, interest rates, etc. In this way, the state assumed a wide range of responsibilities, to both its citizens and its industry, in the name of society as a whole. In this new globalized neoliberal order, the social and the economic are increasingly considered antagonistic, as social programs are blamed for impeding market optimization. As Rose put it: “Government of the social in the name of the national economy gives way to government of particular zones—regions, towns, sectors, communities—in the interests of economic circuits which flow between regions and across national boundaries.”

50 Rose uses the term “advanced liberalism.”
51 Ibid., 201-202.
Social assurance was before a benefit of citizenship, provided by social programs and social security. The security of one’s self and family are increasingly becoming a private matter, as citizens must now to a greater extent rely on private medical insurance, private pension plans, etc. Previously socialized guarantees are now considered part of “lifestyle management,” on a par with “free choices” regarding where to eat, live, shop, etc., all framed within a language of individual happiness, enterprise and flexibility.\textsuperscript{52} Work is no longer construed as a social obligation, enhanced by social benefits, which serves to bind the individual into the collective. Now, work has become the domain of self-promotion and, on a governmental scale, programs are now intended to enhance the capacities of the entrepreneurial individual.\textsuperscript{53} Instead of economy being regulated in the name of the social, consumption and markets are the new mechanisms that shape conduct. Affiliation to communities replaces old devices of habit formation and social responsibility, and discourses of social solidarity have all but disappeared from common political discourse. Here, in other words, the collective logics of community fit all too neatly with the ethos of neoliberalism: choice, personal responsibility, control over one’s own fate, self-promotion and self-government.

Overall, Rose paints a picture of a dramatic epistemological shift in contemporary society. Previous social programs and services, administered by professionals like social workers, saw such citizens as part of a single group with

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 203.
common social roots, and, therefore, approached these groups in a unified manner. Now, the “abjected”, marginalized and the excluded, he argues, are primarily understood as individuals with particular difficulties that need management through a variety of specialists, each being an expert in his or her own field. Serving this new purpose, quasi-autonomous agencies work on the margins, within “savage spaces” and “anti-communities” that are defined by their abjected inhabitants’ lack of capacity for responsible self-management. These schemes are often voluntary, run by inhabitant groups or philanthropists and often reliant on grants, both private and public, or a combination of the two: “Within this new territory of exclusion, the social logics of welfare bureaucracies are replaced by new logics of competition, market segmentation and service management: the management of misery and misfortune can become, once more, a potentially profitable activity.” 54 The logic here is not, as previously, so much one of reform or cure, but one of risk minimization. These new experts, associations and intermediate organizations offer their expertise “at a distance,” outside the machinery of bureaucracy to which they were bound in the past. Risk minimization also dictates that the success of these, often partially private, organizations’ actions is based on statistical analysis according to accounting metrics and cost minimization schemes, which are now increasingly demanded by the state’s commitment to fiscal austerity and efficiency.

54 Ibid., 207-208.
There is no question that Rose’s analysis is somewhat crude. After all, the charitable models favored by New Labour were undoubtedly based on Victorian precedents, just as specialization and compartmentalization were central features of the welfare state’s social programs all along. The treatment of Bogman Palmjaguar, previously discussed, underscores this point precisely. While certain mitigations of Rose’s diagrammatic polemic are in order for a properly nuanced understanding of contemporary society, his reading nevertheless provides a useful framework for regarding some of the dramatic shifts to social, cultural as well as arts policies in the post-war period.

1.5 Art as Community Service

Nikolas Rose’s theory, I would argue, is broadly applicable to the changes undergone by most European welfare states. However, it is clear that his analysis is specifically informed by the local context in which he writes: the shift from a social to a community view chronicles the discursive shifts prompted in particular by policy initiatives under Margaret Thatcher and New Labour in Britain. The Thatcher era had been dominated by a mantra of individual responsibility. During these years community care was incipiently reconceptualized from a welfare state conception of local government programs to one in which self-organized groups of citizens would

55 For a discussion of Victorian charity and its more recent conservative adaptations, as well as an account of similarities and differences between social workers and community artists, see “Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art,” Afterimage (January 1995): 5-11.
self-manage without government aid in matters ranging from health and child care to crime prevention. Following closely on Thatcher’s precedents, New Labour, during the 1990s, continued to dismantle policy schemes—only now, this disassembling was carried out in the name of community (further discussed in Chapter 2). Summing up this turn, Tony Blair wrote: “Too much has been imposed from above, when experience shows that success depends on communities themselves having the power and taking the responsibility to make things better. […] The results of all of this work will be brought together in an ambitious national strategy at the end of next year. This will set out a ten to twenty year plan to turn round poor neighbourhoods, to reduce dependency, and empower local communities to shape a better future for themselves.” Keywords like dependency and empowerment had also been central to conservative rhetoric. At the same time, the vast expansion of community discourse under New Labour that signaled a shift away from pure fiscal conservatism of the Thatcher years towards a social agenda that recalled past Labour policies. Nevertheless, leftist agendas were clearly imbued with ideas and policies from the right. Quickly, the progressive connotations of community were contradicted by the policies that bore its name, giving way to associations with liberalist focuses on

56 Thatcher initiated various schemes of local self-reliance that had community in the title. For example, reports on Community Care that led to government policy. See, Steve Illife, “The Politics of Health Care: the NHS under Thatcher,” Critical Social Policy 5, no. 57 (1985).
regeneration, tourism and profit-generation and conservative emphases on individualism and self-reliance. Moving beyond the locus of the individual, the task of government was recast as one that would inspire local initiative and harness community-led regeneration. A whole set of new departments and institutions were introduced to signal a deeper shift from the national and governmental towards the local and communal. Among others, the Community Development Foundation and the Department for Communities and Local Government reflect this paradigmatic shift towards a communitarian logic. Community in the New Labour context is often associated with the surge of third-sector companies, “community interest companies” and “community trusts” that increasingly have come to assume the administration of public programs and services. Community, in other words, has in many cases become code for the selling-off of the public sector, a defining feature of neoliberalism (discussed at greater length in Chapter 5).

Community interest companies (CICs) are defined as limited companies that conduct business for community benefit. These are subject to asset locks and dividend caps to impede profit-maximizing. Increasingly, though, private-maximizing schemes in the arena of social programs are encouraged by government. One document from the Office of the Third Sector states as one objective “to demonstrate that there are a meaningful number of investors interested in making a profit-maximising investment in the area of social enterprise [...]” Cabinet Office Office of the Third Sector, “Risk Capital Fund for Social Enterprise,” http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/funding_finance_support/risk_capital_fund.aspx. Community Trusts are the common term for charitable entities that under New Labour increasingly have come to administer public services. The argument for these companies was that they, rather than the public sector, could entice private investment and qualify for tax exemptions due to their charity status. They have been criticized for tax evasion and relying on flexible, low-wage labor. For a discussion of these public-private initiatives, see Tash Shifrin, “Government to Create New Form of Social Enterprise,” The Guardian, November 26, 2003; Patrick Butler, “A Vote of No Confidence in Social Businesses?,” The Guardian, June 17, 2008; Alison Benjamin, “State of Dependence,” The Guardian, February 21, 2007; Tony Wright, “Government Sees Voluntary Groups Offer Added Value,” The Guardian, June 6, 2007; Jim Brown, “Fatal Attraction,” The Guardian, September 12, 2007; Jim Brown, “Local Delivery,” The Guardian, September 2, 2009.
Nikolas Rose’s account of the linguistic and ideological turn from social to community proves most useful in tracing how a new discourse regarding society also can be applied to the languages of cultural policy as well as artistic practice. First of all, Rose’s account is valuable in analyzing what I will argue constitutes the prototypical example of cultural policy under the neoliberalized European state, namely the discourse and programs of “community arts” initiated by New Labour. Following New Labour’s electoral victory in 1997, the state structure of art that, like many other government institutions, had been put in place under the welfare state was substantially restructured. While no doubt most dramatic in Britain, the state arts restructuring there was widely influential in other European countries as well. Characterizing this artistic and cultural policy shift was the new provenance of the term “community.” As we shall see, this nomenclature within the field of arts and culture, and the policy methods associated with it, paralleled the usages of the term in social policy. Also cultural institutions were increasingly run by community trusts and were required to engage in public-private partnerships. Moreover, as society was increasingly viewed as a fractured landscape of disparate groups, art was seen as a valuable instrument for reaching out to marginalized and excluded communities.

At the same time, I want to suggest that the term community has also become prevalent outside the context of government-promoted and sanctioned art. As I will argue in the sections to come, the term community, and more broadly the fragmented

60 For an account of the outsourcing of culture in the UK, see “O Rose, Thou Art Sick! Outsourcing Glasgow's Cultural & Leisure Services,” Variant 29 (Summer 2007): 30-31.
view of society that Rose portrays, have crept into the mainstream as well as the margins of contemporary artistic production. Over the past two decades, artists in Europe have increasingly produced work for and with specific local communities: residents of housing projects, children in specific localities, groups of elderly citizens, etc. While such efforts have at times been conceptualized as activist or oppositional, it is remarkable how government rhetoric, gaining force in Britain in the late nineties, and then migrating to other European countries, has taken up community arts practices as part and parcel of governmental discourses of strengthening self-reliance, preventing non-participation, etc.

In the chapters to come, I will examine how “community,” whether named or unnamed, appears in a variety of different contemporary art practices. While representing very diverse strategies and methodologies of local interaction, these practices share a fragmented view of society, thus indicating a difficulty with the idea of community on a national scale, as citizens or as “a people.” These artworks conceive of smaller, localized individuals and groups, affiliated by a shared characteristic, whether residence, kinship, shared plight, etc. Artists often move from project to project, regarding each as a kind of “community service”—an encounter with a specific community within a demarcated location, often understood as marginal vis-à-vis other population groups. Chapter 2 attempts to schematize a shift from society to community in art. I will juxtapose a broad range of practices from the 1960s and 1970s that can be associated with the term Institutional Critique with a range of contemporary practices that have been subsumed under the title Relational Aesthetics.
These will set the stage for later analyses of artworks that, like Haacke’s *Der Bevölkerung*, involve a combination of social and communal perspectives.

### 1.6 The Specter of 1968

Community is, of course, not a new term. Rather, it is a term with a long history within social discourse, which has frequently appeared in conjunction with socially-engaged artistic initiatives. But the 1960s marked a shift in its connotations—from a close association with the social and collective to a greater alliance with a notion of the self-reliant, self-organized individual. Rose also outlines how community discourse gained prevalence during the 1960s, first and foremost among sociologists, as a possible antidote to the loneliness and isolation of individuals within a massified society. The idea of community was in this context deployed also as a language of critique and opposition against the faceless mass of bureaucracy. For community activists, the term was utilized to distance themselves from a welfare system that they saw as degrading, policing and controlling; in this way, activists sought to align themselves with the subjects of that system—the inhabitants of public housing, factory workers, etc. As I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 3, this tendency was paralleled in the arts, as cultural activists (*animateurs* in France), acting deliberately outside the structures of government, worked to empower communities by

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61 Rose recognizes that communitarianism is one of traditional themes of modern constitutional thought together with nationalism and liberalism.

Although community discourse was born outside of governmental institutions, it soon became part of the language of governmental policy. In 1974, for example, the Arts Council put out a report titled *Community Arts*, which led to the subsequent founding of the Community Arts Committee. The report responded to the growth of community arts during the preceding decade and, more importantly, to the accompanying surge of applications for government funds to support such activities. The report stated that community activities emphasized process over product and often leveled the discrimination between professional and amateur.

Rose also outlines how the term community was quickly adopted by authorities in order to comprehend and better identify problems within particular zones and citizen groups. In other words, according to Rose, what commenced as a strategy of resistance to the systems of the state ultimately became a means of control by that same system. Here, I think it is important to add some historical nuance to Rose’s generalized paradigmatic strokes. The impetus, for instance, of the Greater London Council to take up an enhanced community and minority focus under the stewardship of Labour in 1981—like the motivations of the Community Arts Committee during the

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63 These *animateurs* had come out of the 30’s Popular Front movement, which had advocated for working class leisure time, among other demands. For a description of this history in France, see, for example, Cacérès, *Histoire de l’Education Populaire*, Cacérès, *Le Mouvement Ouvrier*, Jeanson, *L’Action Culturelle Dans La Cité*. Britain has a related history of community arts during the 1960s and 1970s. In her 1978 study, Su Braden critiqued the Arts Council and Regional Arts Associations in favor of community artists working independently of these formal organizations. See, *Artists and People* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1978).
66 Ibid., 198-99.
mid-‘70s—is not identical to New Labour’s community discourse. Regardless of the criticism leveled against early governmental efforts of community engagement, they were arguably informed by an attempt to internalize prior decades’ critiques of cultural policy. Indeed, New Labour was undoubtedly conscious of this “policy memory” when they put the same discourse to new use a few decades later, albeit for markedly different ends. It is the similarity in language, but the difference in practice, that is my primary interest here. Whereas “community” had previously been relegated to the domains of sociological investigation, political philosophy and activist organizers, its governmental rearticulation by New Labour involved the creation of a position where powers and responsibilities that were previously public domain could be relocated. Government situated outside itself, so to speak. These new discourses have been given different names: civic republicanism, associationalism, communitarian liberalism. They are united by a notion of government and governing, not through the politically directed, nationally territorialized projects of a centrally concentrated state, but through the local, self-governing properties of the subjects of government.

Rose is quick to point out the contradiction at play when community is nevertheless still promoted as an antidote to the pressures of market forces with which

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67 For example, Rasheed Araeen harshly criticized the aforementioned report, The Arts Britain Ignores, arguing that the segmenting of arts policy along ethnic community lines was “a recipe for cultural separatism.” Cited in Walker, Left Shift, 135.
it is increasingly intertwined, exemplified in the contemporary prevalence of inner city community programs:

Here, new modes of neighborhood participation, local empowerment and engagement of residents in decisions over their own lives will, it is thought, reactivate self-motivation, self-responsibility and self-reliance in the form of active citizenship within a self-governing community. Government through the activation of individual commitments, energies and choices, through personal morality within a community setting, is counterposed to centralizing, patronizing and disabling government. Paradoxically, given their apparent ideological differences, these opposed versions of security utilize similar images of the subject as an *active and responsible agent* in the securing of security for themselves and those to whom they are or should be affiliated.68

The mobilization and instrumentalization of community discourse in the service of governmental control and micro-governance strikes a chord with Pierre Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s recent book “The New Spirit of Capitalism” in which they argue that 1968 critiques of capitalism have since been coopted by managers and business consultants as a means of making capitalism “work better.”69 In a similar diagnosis of contemporary society, though now through the narrower lens of corporate management in France, they highlight the rise of what they term “network” and “connexionist” capitalism; unlike the centralized and hierarchical management of previous decades, this new variation is marked by smaller groups of people that work flexibly and independently from project to project.

More generally, Boltanski and Chiapelli’s study traces the history of critiques of capitalism since the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. First, they characterize demands for liberation, autonomy and authenticity as well as critiques of oppression, massification and standardization as part of “artistic critique,” first developed in 19\textsuperscript{th} century bohemian milieus. Secondly, these authors connect refusals of individualism and egoism, as well as calls to respond to suffering are, with “social critique” articulated by labor and social movements. In 1968, they argue, artistic critique transcended intellectual circles for the first time and coalesced with its social counterpart, culminating in the general strike that initially led to substantial organizational changes and improved working conditions. Boltanski and Chiapello map out how social critique, along with discourses of social class in general gradually weakened along with the waning of French communism over subsequent decades, whereas artistic critique gained strength in leftist groups that saw creativity, autonomy, self-realization and fluid identity as weapons against bureaucracy, consumer culture as well as bourgeois values.

This familiar story of resistance to incorporation is, in this account, attributed to capitalism’s inherent attentiveness to critiques that threaten its process of unobstructed accumulation. Boltanski and Chiapello see capitalism as a sly beast that organically shapeshifts in order to accommodate and neutralize oppositional and subversive forces. Radical critiques of trade unionism, according to this account, only bolstered employers and companies. Crucial to their argument is the assertion that the new social organization is orchestrated by a “power elite” and business consultants who themselves were intellectually formed during ‘68. These characters absorbed
artistic critiques into new frameworks that emphasized flexibility, team-work and horizontal management structures. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, this new form of capitalism was unintelligible to past forms of social critique, which in their view explain the relative absence of social movements and critical resistance during the 1980s. In a close sociological analysis of 1990s management literature, they find evidence of increased mention of globalization, a recurring rejection of hierarchy, and a foregrounding of buzzwords like customer satisfaction, charisma, intuition, mobility and autonomy. In an argument similar to Rose’s, Boltanski and Chiapello’s description of the contemporary moment also outlines a symptomatic change from large structures to smaller, more independent and constantly shifting units without safety nets. The authors argue that the welfare state is intricately linked to the outmoded model of the large industrial company. They trace a similar movement from opposition to reification in which an oppositional clause is made to serve neoliberal laws of capital. In their analysis, the term “network”—much like community—once associated with subversion, has become the new metaphor of marketized progress and communication.

Rose, along with Boltanski and Chiapello, help elucidate the ways in which the 1960s loom large over the current moment and how forms that emerged then have gained strength and prevalence, albeit frequently with altered implications. Their arguments are of interest here, since they trace a history from the post-war moment through the 1960s into the present localized European context; histories that both explicitly and implicitly address changes to the welfare state. Like the term
community, words associated with resistance to the state from the late ‘60s and ‘70s, such as “empowerment” and “self-organization” frequently reoccur in contemporary artistic practices (discussed at greater length in Chapter 4). The mode of analysis employed by Rose, Boltanski and Chiapello helps to caution against the transposition of ’68 rhetoric to the present day context. It is crucial to remember the original context, where terms like these were seen as a means of and method for recasting the social. Words like empowerment and community were then bound to efforts to make art relevant to working class struggles, often by means of direct attack on state arts programs, as cultural policy was then considered inseparable from other forms of state oppression. In New Labour discourse, by contrast, community and empowerment constitute a rhetorical dodging of class narratives. Where class engenders cross-societal collectivities, community in this instance severs these affiliations and instead proposes localized constituencies with economic characteristics specific to that particular zone. Empowerment is not based on the interpersonal linkage of a shared work predicament, but on the reduced scale of the individual taking control of her or his own existence. Like the waning of the words “social” and “public,” the skirting of the term “class” is moreover akin to the evasion of the word “poverty” (discussed at

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As John Albert Walker has noted, community in the art context was also early on criticized for eliding the question of class. See, Walker, *Left Shift*, 132. Community then was frequently made to signify communities of place as well. According to Walker, community, in the 1974 *Community Arts* report by the Arts Council, “meant people living in a limited geographic area or neighborhood but not always. (Tenants associations, new towns, hospitals, schools, youth clubs and so forth supplied ready-made communities). Ibid., 130. In a slightly more expanded definition, Su Braden, in her report on community arts, writes: “Community,” lest I be accused of not defining my words, is here understood as a neighborhood defined by the recognition of the people within it of common environmental and economic conditions.” *Artists and People*, xvi.
greater length in the following chapter). Terms that previously connoted economic causality are avoided by neoliberal discourse in favor of words that can be made to signify individualized responsibility. Thus the community (in lieu of society), like exclusion (in lieu of poverty), is planted within a larger rhetorical scheme of flawed self-determination. It is my aim to consider how similar terms and actions are now inscribed in a different cultural, political and economic context, where communities are increasingly seen as an end in itself, a last resort amidst the palpable absence of bigger plans. In particular, I want to emphasize how the rise of community-based discourses, and their appearance in art practices, is best understood as a consequence of the diminishing role of the European welfare state.

While Rose, Boltanski and Chiapello are helpful in characterizing the present configuration of society in Europe, and the ways in which this context is evidenced in artistic practices, their theoretical frameworks prove difficult for staging a defense of the welfare state. The application of their theories in the context of this study therefore remains primarily diagnostic. They are useful in cautioning against artists unconsciously operating as contract-workers of sorts, supported, via grant-giving models of cultural support, to work, along with other hired professionals and experts, to “minimize the risk” of local communities. While often with the best intentions, such practices can end up helping citizens to “better govern themselves” by using methods of self-improvement out of a commitment, not to a greater social body, but to their immediate family and community. My aim here is not to simply condemn this effort, since some projects of this nature have no doubt served to fill gaps left when
expansive social programs were eliminated. But it is important to note the connection between these practices and the demise of expansive cultural policy programs, which along with their social counterparts, were initially conceived during the establishment of the post-war welfare state. I am not simply arguing that all artistic practices that engage communities are naïve instrumentalizations of neoliberal ideology; on the contrary, their worth should be emphasized in a social context, as deliberate acts intended to replace something that was indeed lost during the ongoing dismantling of the welfare state. Nevertheless, in order to avoid replicating neoliberal policy, I want to stress that it is crucial for contemporary community-oriented practices to be connected to a larger social view. In the absence of this greater perspective, the adverse effect is nothing but fragmentation as far, as the eye can see. It should by now be clear that my contemporary hesitation with regard to current discourses of smaller constituencies is precisely informed by a defense of the welfare state, more than it is based on an alliance with prior critiques of that system. Rather than throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, the preservational impetus of this study has prompted a mode of analysis that involves the parsing of present practices which feature the scattered remains of historical social forms.

As Haacke’s *Reichstag* installation and subsequent practices propose, it is important to remember that community has not entirely taken the place of the social, nor has capitalism succeeded in reifying all forms of critique, as these theoretical readings might seem to suggest. As the artworks to be considered should serve to illustrate, my extended argument is precisely that different conceptions of society
currently coexist in Europe. The welfare states are permeated with neoliberal restructuring that, while substantially contorting the original framework, have not yet succeeded in completely dismantling it. In order to emphasize this state of contradiction, the majority of the practices to be considered indicate a concentration on particular communities or sections of the population, but they also exist within or in close relationship to institutions of the state which have played a crucial role in welfare state history (this also serves to acknowledge that artistic practices, even if situated at a distant remove from institutions, cannot escape the pressures and influences of social context). In support of this point, the artworks discussed here do not simply reenact words and actions from the ‘68 moment, a time when critiques of state were prevalent. They instead offer complex palimpsests, as references associated with resistance to the state co-occur alongside others that are closely tied precisely to the discourses and policies of the welfare state. I will argue that the resurrection of terms and operations associated with the prior formation of the welfare state charts the current predicament of artists working in Europe who—while acknowledging its bureaucratic and exclusionary tendencies—would almost surely want to defend the welfare state from the multiplicity of threats it currently faces.

The following chapter is devoted to tracing a significant shift in artistic practices from social preoccupations to community views. In order to exemplify this shift, my analysis will counterpose two moments: neoliberal arts and culture policy and Relational Aesthetics—versus—the post-war institution of support for arts and culture and Institutional Critique. The chapter will mainly focus on the United
Kingdom, which is considered to have invented the European welfare state model, its intertwinement with cultural apparatuses, as well as its neoliberal reconfiguration in recent decades.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 each revolve around a central contemporary artwork which represents a local welfare context; at the same time, each of these works invites a discussion of issues central to contemporary welfare states. The majority of these artworks exist in relationship to major state-funded art institutions. Not only does this association involve an overt exemplification of the art-state relationship, these practices also provide instances of how contemporary artists are thoroughly engaged in negotiations with state institutions. This emphasis on negotiation and compromise often supplants the direct critiques that characterized past artistic practices’ rapports with the state and its institutions. Each artwork also represents a move towards more localized, community-based practices, although, as we shall see, this transfer in every case simultaneously articulates a position vis-à-vis the fraught history of the welfare state and its social order.

Chapter 3 focuses on Thomas Hirschhorn’s “Musée Précaire”, in which the artist borrowed key modern artworks from the Pompidou collection in Paris and displayed them in a ramshackle structure in the middle of a housing project in the largely immigrant banlieue of Albinet. Set in France—a state whose welfare model is not as extensive as those of Scandinavian countries, but stronger than the now quite limited British welfare state—the Musée Précaire also instigates a discussion of the relationship between social and cultural policies in the post-war period. Arguably, in
France this relationship was most strongly articulated, thus providing a national policy precedent that countries throughout the continent later followed.

Chapter 4 is centered around the Danish artist group Superflex’s practice. This group creates “tools”—utilitarian objects that instigate social relationships between Superflex and their intended users. This practice, I will argue, implies an inherent problematization of the expansive Scandinavian welfare states. The Superflex projects are discussed in terms of the challenges of hegemonic Scandinavian welfare states, representing the most extensive of such models, in the face of a socially and economically globalized world.

The final chapter is devoted to the neoliberal state. For his piece, State Britain, Mark Wallinger appropriated protest materials that had been confiscated by the police under a new national security law instituted by Tony Blair which prohibited protest within a one kilometer radius of Parliament. Wallinger recreated the protester’s ephemera—banners, pictures, souvenirs, etc.—inside Tate Britain. Since the one kilometer radius bisects the museum, the artist drew that line throughout the museum galleries and placed the protesters materials immediately beyond it. In this chapter, I discuss the restructuring of the British welfare state since Thatcher—a restructuring which has led, not necessarily to a diminished state, but to a weakened state in terms of welfare and a stronger state in terms of national security. The entanglement of market agendas and government under neoliberalization is also addressed with reference to Andreas Siekmann’s sculptural and visual analysis of the privatization of public space. Although positioned in Germany, the piece implicates a generalized
European predicament. In sum, the artworks discussed in this book reflect the problematic condition of the European state, while simultaneously acknowledging the difficulty of imagining a world without its confinements.
Chapter 2: From State Artist to Community Organizer

Every artist who exhibits in a public institution is, in a way, a state artist.¹

--Hans Haacke

In our capacity as workers with a political commitment to self-organisation we feel that any further critical contribution to institutional programmes will further reinforce the relations that keep these obsolete structures in place. We are fully aware that 'our critiques', alternatives and forms of organisation are not just factored into institutional structures but increasingly utilised to legitimate their existence.²

--Anthony Davies, Stephan Dillemuth, Jakob Jakobsen

2.1 Relational Aesthetics in European State Context

For Memory Dress (2005-2007), Charlotte Donovan and Marie Brett worked in collaboration with patients and staff at St. Finbarr’s Hospital in Cork, Ireland. During a series of workshops, individuals associated with different wards and departments created “memory dresses”—hand-crafted objects for sharing memories of special moments and special people in their lives. The dresses were subsequently compiled in notebooks that were exhibited at the institution, and a sculptural installation was installed on its grounds. According to the project brief, “Memory Dress afforded participants an opportunity for creative collaboration in an unlikely setting, creating a sense of community and empowerment within the

¹ Pressplay, 284.
Artistic practices that, like *Memory Dress*, involve the collaboration of artists with defined groups or communities, at times situated outside the institution of art, will be the primary subject of this chapter. This genre of practices has been prevalent across Europe, particularly since the 1990s. As I will argue, this pervasiveness should not be analyzed in a vacuum, but must be considered in connection with the institutional structures, both traditional art museums as well as the governmental policy schemes, that have encouraged and supported them, particularly in European countries. *Memory Dress*, for example, was funded with money from the Arts Council of Ireland’s “Artist in Community Scheme” in collaboration with “Create,” an Irish development agency for community arts. Their mission statement reads:

Create supports artists across all artforms who work collaboratively with communities, be they communities of place or communities brought together by interest. Collaborative arts is a dynamic and contemporary form of arts practice. Related and similar ways of working can come under the headings of participatory arts, socially engaged arts and in the theoretical realm closely linked to Relational Aesthetics. Collaborative arts practice plays with and contests notions of authorship and the idea of the artist-genius. Work that is made collaboratively often exists outside of the gallery or takes place outside the traditional theatre space. It can also be interdisciplinary and for example involve a musician working with a visual artist or an architect with a dance artist. Create seeks to foster current and future potential for collaboration between artists and communities, encouraging art projects that reflect the exciting ways in which collaborative arts represent a complex range of ideas and approaches.

The above quote is interesting for several reasons. First, it offers two definitions of community: communities of place and communities of interest. The agency’s description is clearly informed by recent theorizations (to be discussed later on) that have emphasized how collaborative arts practices complicate ideas of artistic genius, are often interdisciplinary, and frequently exist outside of sanctioned institutions of art. Of particular interest is the fact that Relational Aesthetics, a genre of art habitually confined to “high art” galleries and museums, is here brought into the fold of community development, made possible with support from a European state government.

In his 1998 book *Esthétique Relationelle*, Nicolas Bourriaud defines an international trend—which he sees spanning from the US and Latin America to Europe and Asia—of participatory and event-based artworks that “serve to link individuals and human groups together.”² Instead of preparing and announcing a future world like avant-garde and 1960s art practices did, artists of the 1990s aim to “model possible universes” by creating what he variously terms “micro-topias,” “hands-on utopias,” or “social interstices” within the exhibition space that serve to promote “inter-subjectivity” as well as the “collective elaboration of meaning.” Strategies of critique and contestation are replaced by negotiation and co-existence, as goals shift from overturning the present social order to more modestly learning “to inhabit the world in a better way” or finding “models of action within the existing

real.”³ As he further elaborates: “any stance that is ‘directly’ critical of society is futile.”⁴ So, while modernist practices were primarily preoccupied with issues internal to the artworld such as expanding the definition of art, contemporary practices now increasingly involve and exhibit interdisciplinary issues that are not imminent to the artistic field. The book begins by providing a list of such relational practices: an artist organizes a dinner in a collector’s home, another invites people to pursue his favorite activities on May Day. Other interactive art activities involve dressing twenty women identically, feeding rats fine cheese, installing an upturned bus on a city square, working as a check-out assistant in a super market, recreating the brain’s chemical formula for love, putting an ad in a newspaper to find a partner, summoning people to a casting session, making a TV transmitter available to the public…

Bourriaud initially inquires as to how contemporary art is linked to society, history and culture.⁵ The book responds to this question in the broadest terms. As he notes early on, artists take “as their theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context.”⁶ Bourriaud repeatedly invokes the word human as if to refer to an ontological predicament rather than to a historically and geographically-specific subject. The social context that is conjured is reminiscent of familiar accounts of modern alienation and social fragmentation, occasionally updated with contemporary phenomena: “The enemy we have to fight first and foremost is embodied in a social

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³ Ibid., 13.
⁴ Ibid., 31.
⁵ Ibid., 7.
⁶ Ibid., 14.
form: it is the spread of the supplier-client relation to every level of human life.”

Elsewhere, he refers to “the straightjacket of the ideology of mass communication.”

Locationally, the book refers to a geographically nondescript society governed by advanced technologies, mass communication and a ubiquitous service sector.

Reminiscent of the grandiose and generalizing literary tropes of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, which is frequently referenced throughout the book, Bourriaud’s descriptions rarely touch down to address particulars. Artworks are described in elusive terms, just as specificities of institutions remain lacking to an even greater extent. The book is clearly, though mostly implicitly, marked by a globalized world and its attendant artworld. The artists featured originate from around the globe, and their practices, it seems, similarly travel unaffected by geographical demarcations.

In my view, Bourriaud rightly recognizes the rise of a particular brand of artwork that favors inter-personal relations over the fabrication and display of objects. I would, however, offer the objection that his analysis denies the particular local, social and political backdrop without which many of these practices lose their readability. To illustrate my point, I want to briefly return to some of the artworks

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7 Ibid., 83.
8 Ibid., 44.
9 Bourriaud only once briefly, and rather elusively, mentions his particular local context: “The relative failure of May ’68 in France can be seen in the low level of institutionalization where freedoms are concerned. The widespread failure of modernity can be found here through the way inter-human relations are turned into products, along with the impoverishment of political alternatives, and the devaluation of work as a non-economic value, to which no development of free time corresponds. Ideology exalts the solitude of the creative person and mocks all forms of community.” Ibid., 84.
Bourriaud introductorily and summarily mentions in order to show how their particular geographic context might be integral to their analysis.

The French artist Philippe Parreno’s 1995 piece *Werkische I und II* (*Made on the 1st of May*) was presented at the Schipper and Krome Gallery in Cologne. According to Bourriaud’s description of the project, “Philippe Parreno invites a few people to pursue their favourite hobbies on May Day, on a factory assembly line,”

But I find that it is important to note that the people invited were his dealers and their friends and acquaintances. The unmentioned activity was sewing t-shirts in various sizes and outfitting teddy bears with them. The teddy bears were of a variety intended to record children’s conversations, although in this case the bears inadvertently recorded conversations of their Korean factory makers. Videotapes of the production along with the finished products were on displayed throughout the duration of the exhibition. I will forego further analysis of this piece, but it seems relevant to mention the obvious references to May ’68 in France. After all, this French artist specifically chose May Day to imitate working class production, while reconfiguring this activity as a leisure activity for the wealthy, since the sites of production have primarily moved elsewhere (in this case, Korea). A similar discussion is relevant for consideration of Pierre Huyghe’s *Chantier Barbès Rochechouart* (1994) in which photographs of workers at a construction site were elevated for display on a billboard above the site. As in ’68, artistic practice here served to image otherwise unseen forms of manual

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10 Ibid., 7.
labor, although in this instance the work was spectacularized through the medium of corporate advertising. Another example that can benefit from geographic contextualization is Jes Brinch and Henrik Plenge Jacobsen’s 1994 piece *Smashed Parking Ground*, a work that created the illusion that an angry mob had attacked and overturned cars and buses in one of Copenhagen’s most manicured public squares.\(^{11}\) It is, in my view, imperative to consider this piece in relation to the controlled environment of the Danish welfare state and the fact that left-wing youths had rioted in the streets a year before as a response to Denmark’s accession to the European Union, producing scenes akin to the one replicated by the artwork.

At this juncture, I wish to draw attention to the contexts within which these practices were created and exhibited. Although a number of the artists mentioned in *Esthétique Relationelle* were not born in Europe (though several of them do live and work there), I find it relevant to analyze the prevalence of this genre of work in this particular part of the western world. Venturing beyond Bourriaud’s writing, I would also emphasize how related practices have been supported by cultural and artistic policy schemes in European countries. Nicolas Bourriaud would most likely not be interested in the *Memory Dress* project, since it was situated in a hospital context and thereby enmeshed with motivations exterior to the sphere of art; his interest has mainly been practices within the art institution that he thinks depart in significant ways from past practices. Nevertheless, the hospital project had much in common with

\(^{11}\) The piece was dismantled shortly thereafter due to private businesses’ claims of its unsightliness on this square that marks a major center for tourism in Copenhagen.
Relational Aesthetics. Although the project included the creation of objects, the social interaction between the artist and a defined audience was of primary concern. *Memory Dress* also addressed individuals that were associated with others by virtue of their simultaneous placement within a particular institution—for Bourriaud, the museum space or gallery; in this case, the hospital. Thus, the grouping was locationally produced, not imminent to the participating subjects or affiliated with a larger social organization. Moreover, the aspiration of the project was bounded by the immediate institution of the hospital; it did not draw up a utopian vision, but served instead to “tighten the space of human relations.”

In the broader study that follows, I will expand the view of artists and artworks beyond the limited group favored by Bourriaud. In this way, I will discuss what I see as a crucial backdrop to these relational art practices in Europe, namely the larger context of the continent’s welfare states and their contemporary recasting in a neoliberal mold. In particular, I will propose that the artistic model associated with Relational Aesthetics is related to governmentally-endorsed practices sometimes collected under the heading “Community Arts.” Although I wish to delineate a general tendency—both the move from society to community, and from a broader view of the social to a narrower vision—very few projects fit neatly within this somewhat rigid schematization. Frequently, projects tend to exhibit multiple—even conflicting—agendas, an ambivalence that can be explained by the simple fact that they involve

12 Ibid., 15.
multiple organizing parties. For example, progressive, theoretically-informed arts professionals are without doubt at the helm of instrumentalizing government programs, just as artists often are required to fulfill the specifications of particular state funding parameters. To support this point, Create, the agency begun in 1983 that funded the *Memory Dress* project, clearly came out of a specific history of community arts on the left in Britain. As noted on the organization’s website, it grew “out of a sense of commitment to the empowering potential of the arts and cultural democracy.” Like the majority of smaller arts organizations in Europe today, Create now mainly receives funds for its projects from the state, just as it increasingly relies on money from various cultural programs under the European Union. What I find interesting in cases like these is how the left-affiliated community arts tradition in later decades has, on the one hand, been met with an increase of relational and community-based practices within the more traditional sphere of art and with new right-leaning government agendas on the other.

### 2.2 Community Arts

It was during the Thatcher years that arts and culture were first bureaucratically conceived as an important driving force of the post-industrial

13 For an early history of community arts in Britain see, Braden, *Artists and People*; Owen Kelly, *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels* (Comedia, 1983); Walker, *Left Shift*
15 As this Irish case elucidates, although Community Arts is a particular British policy phenomenon, similar ideas have also been prevalent elsewhere in Europe.
economy. Of central focus in this regard was the discourse of regeneration, which argued that culture in general, and the arts in particular, could revive areas that had become blighted due to the collapse of local manufacturing. Minimizing local government, taxes and regulation and deploying public subsidies to boost infrastructure in impoverished industrial towns, it was argued, would lure global capital. During the 1980s, cities like Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool, which had seen the decline of manufacturing industries, were specifically targeted for economic restructuring with a cultural emphasis. These policies received a formal stamp of approval with the 1988 study “The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain” in which the author, John Myerscough, established an influential formula for how direct spending on the arts led to job creation, ultimately making cities more attractive to citizens, tourists and companies. Following Tory precedents, New Labour spearheaded a number of signature regeneration projects in areas marked by industrial decline (particularly well-known projects are Tate Modern in London and BALTIC in Gateshead). The recent Scottish example of regeneration in the case of Luke Fowler, see the preceding chapter, shows that such programs have continued to be a source of funding for contemporary art. But it is also important to emphasize that New Labour vastly expanded upon ideas that had remained nascent under conservative rule. In 1998, the Department of Trade and Industry Minister Peter Mandelson discredited

16 John Myerscough, The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain (Policy Studies Institute, 1988).
17 Over the course of subsequent decades, several studies backing the “indirect economic impacts of the arts” appeared throughout Europe. See, for example, European Task Force for Culture and Development, In from the Margins: a Contribution to the Debate on Culture and Development in Europe (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1997), 238.
post-war economic models which had focused on production and physical capital, instead arguing that the Britain’s leading global position lay in media, advertising, financial services, pharmaceuticals and Formula 1 race cars. The engine of the British economy was now creative.

Under the Thatcher government, funding for the arts famously dwindled to new lows. Paralleling the fiscal austerity of Thatcher’s overall agenda, arts organizations were increasingly expected to boost visitor numbers and generate greater income from the box office, while procuring private funding and sponsorship to balance budgets. Although this trend was certainly continued under New Labour, unprecedented budgets were simultaneously funneled to the cultural sector. This reorganization towards what was termed the “creative economy” was orchestrated through a dramatic restructuring of the state arts structure. Almost immediately following their 1997 electoral win, the New Labour government established the cross-

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18 This reasoning is linked with the US management discourse term “knowledge economy.” The term was first introduced by the US management guru Peter Drucker, but was later popularized in the UK in Charles Leadbeater, *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy.* (London: Viking, 1999). According to James Heartfield, Mandelson was originally more interested in heading the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. It was even planned that the latter would be subsumed into the Department of Trade and Industry. Mandelson instead largely modeled DTI policy on a cultural model. James Heartfield, “A Business Solution for Creativity, Not a Creativity Solution for Business,” in *Culture Vultures: Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* (London: Policy Exchange, 2006), 79-80.

19 New Labour increased support for the arts with “£100 million over three years on top of a £237 million base. In 2003, it topped this with an extra £75 million to Arts Council England. This included a doubling of funding for individual artists to £25 million, plus a further allocation of £45 million to the arts education scheme, Creative Partnerships between 2002-2006. And of course, one of this Government’s most popular and effective policies was free admission to the national galleries and museums. Arguably, our politicians have never devoted so much commitment to developing the arts and culture in this country.” In Munira Mirza and Policy Exchange (Firm), *Culture Vultures: Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* (London: Policy Exchange, 2006), 13.

20 The post-war state structures of art and culture, although weakened financially, had essentially remained in place during the Thatcher years.
departmental “Creative Industries Task Force,” followed by a cultural policy that became popularly known as “Cool Britannia.” According to this new government scheme, “[t]he creative industries are those industries that are based on individual creativity, skill and talent. They are also those that have the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing intellectual property.”\(^{21}\) The various “cultural industries” were united under a new institution that supplanted many of the primary functions of the post-war Arts Council: “the Department of Culture, Media and Sport” (DCMS). Mirroring other neoliberal policy shifts, money was moved from arts-specific organizations towards public-private partnerships. This reorientation was also marked by a change in language; the arts were seldom treated alone, but were increasingly linked to a broader definition of culture, which also encompassed the entertainment industry and sports. Language of funding was accordingly changed from “subsidy” to “investment,” with the implication that profits would surpass the initial expenditure. The new Secretary of State, Chris Smith, commenced his tenure by vilifying the elitism of the traditional arts:

The Arts are for everyone. Things of quality must be available to the many, not just to the few. Cultural activity is not some elitist exercise that takes place in reverential temples aimed at predilections of the cognoscenti. The opportunity to create and to enjoy must be fostered by all. Enjoyment of the arts—be it of Jarvis Cocker or of Jessye Norman, or Anthony Gormley or Anthony Hopkins—crosses all social and geographical boundaries. The arts fire the imagination and inspire the intelligence, there can be no

artificial barriers erected to prevent or discourage access to those experiences.\textsuperscript{22}

Statements like this one recall past assaults on state arts support, from both the right and the left. Evident are of course conservative claims of cultural elitism, frequently alleging the control of cultural affairs by left-wing intellectuals. Smith’s calls for democratizing creativity, creating greater access to the arts as well as his advocacy of popular culture, also recalls leftist cultural action of the 1960s and 1970s, which had advocated popular and folk culture over and against ruling class and bourgeois culture (this tradition will be explored at greater length in the following chapter).\textsuperscript{23} But, in contrast to those voices promoting working class cultural traditions, Smith’s new version of popular culture is decidedly commercial. Artists and actors are considered part of the same nation-boosting, investment-attracting talent pool. A range of other cultural programs further cemented this bond between art and business. “The Creative Economy team,” established in 1999, for example, deliberately approached “the arts as a business which can both sustain individual artists and lead to wealth creation in the economy of whole countries.”\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23} The following chapter will mainly explore this tradition in French context. However, it is important to mention also some early cultural studies precedents in Britain. See, for example, Raymond Williams’ 1958 essay, “Culture is Ordinary,” in The Politics of Culture: Policy Perspectives for Individuals, Institutions, and Communities (New York: New Press, 2000) as well as Stuart Hall, The Popular Arts (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965).
Central to New Labour’s social policy is the term “social exclusion.” In 1997, the government swiftly installed the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) to target “what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown.” In tandem with this novel social policy scheme, the government increasingly saw arts projects as “cultural services” that could carry out “the wider social, economic and environmental objectives of national and local government.” Building upon the Thatcher-initiated function of reviving regions dominated by industrial disintegration, arts and culture were now considered capable of reducing crime and promoting a healthier lifestyle as well as greater educational attainment—in short, they could combat social exclusion.

In 2004, Tessa Jowell, the new Secretary of State of the DCMS, commenced her appointment with a personal essay that began with a look back to the dawn of the welfare state and the problems it had been intended to solve:

Sixty years ago Beveridge set this country a challenge: slaying the five giants of physical poverty – want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. At the beginning of this century, in a country hugely richer than it was at the end of the second world war, it is time to

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25 Thatcher’s promised trickle-down had not seeped to the poorest areas and the gap between rich and poor had instead widened during the 1980s and 1990s. In reaction to decades of conservative rule, New Labour therefore campaigned on a platform of social change.

26 Quoted in Robert Imrie and Mike Raco, Urban Renaissance? (The Policy Press, 2003), 142.

27 The term of course also puts emphasis on the primacy of the tertiary sector in the post-industrial economy.

28 Fred Coalter, Realising the Potential of Cultural Services: Making a Difference to the Quality of Life (Local Government Association, 2001).

29 In 2000, a report focusing on the health benefits of the arts was published: Art for Health: A Review of Good Practice in Community-based Arts Projects and Interventions which Impact on Health and Well-being (London, UK: Health Education Authority, 1999).
sly a sixth giant – the poverty of aspiration which compromises all our attempts to lift people out of physical poverty. Engagement with culture can help alleviate this poverty of aspiration – but there is a huge gulf between the haves and have nots. Government must take this gulf as seriously as the other great issues of national identity, personal wellbeing and quality of life.30

It is important to point out the ways in which Jowell here departs from past welfare state objectives. She appears to first establish continuity between physical poverty and its welfare remedies, and what she terms the “poverty of aspiration.” In a curious rhetorical maneuver, however, she severs this connection by subsequently implying that this new form of poverty cannot be solved with old redistributory welfare mechanisms. It is not, she suggests, economic inequality, lack of education, etc. that perpetuates poverty; it is rather lack of desire for a better life that keeps people economically marginalized. 31 Jowell’s statement amounts to a recoding of poverty, in effect detaching it from economy; she defines “the haves and have-nots” in cultural, not fiscal, terms.

As signaled in Jowell’s rhetorical displacement, the term “poverty” was largely eliminated from New Labour discourse.32 “Social exclusion,” a euphemism for the

30 Jowell, Government and the Value of Culture, 3.
31 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello also speak of the rise of the language of “exclusion” in France “that is intended, at a theoretical level at least, to reconcile belief in the virtual disappearance of social classes (especially the proletariat), supposedly replaced by a ‘large middle class,’ and the reality of tangible poverty associated with inner-city ghettoization.” Boltanski and Chiapello, The New Spirit of Capitalism, xii.
32 It is worth remarking that, contrary to Jowell’s assessment, poverty had far from disappeared from the UK. In 1983, 14% of households lacked three or more necessities because they could not afford them. That segment had increased to 21% in 1990 and, at the end of 1999, 26% of the British population were living in poverty. Helen Jermyn, The Arts and Social Exclusion: a Review Prepared for the Arts Council of England (Arts Council of England, 2001), 4 See also Robert Imrie and Huw Thomas, eds., British Urban Policy: An Evaluation of the Urban Development Corporations,
same, instead served to relocate the social causes of material scarcity. In contrast with prior Labour discourses of economic determinism—which cast the economic standing of the individual as a result of placement within a larger hierarchical system—New Labour promulgated an individualized discourse of self-inflicted monetary predicament. Also opposing the argumentation of social democratic discourse, New Labour argued that social exclusion would remain, even if full employment were achieved. Another prevalent term that similarly sidestepped economic causality is “social capital.”

Obviously borrowed from social science, its use in this new governmental context suggests “an explanation for why some communities work better than others with resulting economic, social and health benefits.” In sum, in New Labour discourse, exclusion could not be solved with economic public relief and social programs. And this is where culture comes in. As a privatized road to aspirational self-betterment, social inclusion can be achieved through gentle public nudging and without great cost. In other words, in a completely novel cultural policy development, culture designates a shift from top-down social responsibility to bottom-up self-help. Indicatively, by the end of the Jowell’s quote, the primary objectives of government are no longer poverty, but national identity, personal wellbeing and quality of life.

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34 Jermyn, The Arts and Social Exclusion, 24.
As social programs became aimed at activating or reactivating excluded groups, arts and culture became paramount in the achievement of these community-focused objectives: “The arts have sometimes played a surprisingly important role in turning around poor neighbourhoods […] Involving the whole community in a major arts or sport project can build networks and open doors to other community activities, turn round a neighbourhood’s image of itself and combat a negative reputation, tackle youth disaffection and help to build links between different ethnic communities in a neighbourhood.” 35 The arts were not only capable of helping individuals become more self-confident, proud, creative, organized, communicative, employable, tolerant, educated and healthy and less isolated, fearful and offensively behaved; they also could “develop community networks,” “validate the contribution of a whole community,” “build community organizational capacity,” “encourage local self-reliance,” “strengthen community networking,” “involve local groups in the regeneration process” and “help community groups raise their vision beyond the immediate.” 36 Community-based projects were understood as capable of activating individuals and local groups to take charge of their own lives, thus improving

community “performance” on the four key indicators of: health, crime, employment and education.  

Artists were, according to this perspective, seen as specialists, able to communicate and activate otherwise non-participatory groups of citizens, and projects were increasingly funded on the basis of grant applications that emphasized community activation and self-realization. Arts institutions were increasingly required to set targets and produce reports stating the success rate of past programs in order to prove that they were deserving of new government subsidy. In order to assure that the investments in art and culture appropriately served their social objectives, consultants were brought in to produce strategic narratives and evaluative follow-up studies. The most influential of these arts consultants was François Matarasso of Comedia, a former practitioner of community art who was instrumental in shaping New Labour policy. In his first major report he excitedly wrote that the newly elected government was committed to tackling problems like youth unemployment, fear of crime and social exclusion is the right moment to start talking about what the arts can do for society, rather than what society can do for the arts. Unfettered by ideology, the new pragmatism can extend its principle of inclusiveness to the arts by embracing their creative approaches to problem-solving. Britain deserves better than the

38 This modus operandi was not particular to the arts, but also came to dominate procedures in science, education, industry, etc.
exhausted prejudices of post-war debates over state support for the arts.\textsuperscript{39}

In the same report, he argues for the economic calculus of art in the service of social agendas: “participatory arts project are different, effective and cost very little in the context of spending on social goals. They represent an insignificant financial risk to public services, but can produce impacts (social and economic) out of proportion to their cost.”\textsuperscript{40} One of many such reports argued that “where people became involved in the organization of events they spoke of a newfound confidence in their abilities to make things happen in the community.”\textsuperscript{41} Another stated that participation in arts activities “seemed to support and attitude of ‘what’s next?’ in individuals, which encouraged both personal development and wider involvement in the local community.”\textsuperscript{42} These, at this point still untested assertions, became the underlying principle of arts policy under New Labour.\textsuperscript{43}

As the most significant expression of cultural policy shifts under New Labour, The Arts Council, which since its inception had been understood as independent of direct political involvement, became subject to direct political interference by the

\textsuperscript{39} Matarasso, \textit{Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts}, 5.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{41} Jermyn, \textit{The Arts and Social Exclusion}, 17.
\textsuperscript{43} Following mounting critiques of the government’s social policies at the beginning of the millennium, several critics began to raise criticism about the validity of New Labour arts policy’s social claims. See, for example, Eleonora Belfiore, \textit{Art as a Means of Alleviating Social Exclusion: Does it Really Work? A Critique of Instrumental Cultural Policies and Social Impact studies in the UK} (University of Warwick, Coventry, UK: Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, 2002); Mirza and Policy Exchange (Firm), \textit{Culture vultures}; Michelle Reeves, \textit{Measuring the Economic and Social Impact of the Arts: A Review} (London: Arts Council England, 2002).
SEU, its new supervising department. In a blatant accentuation of governmental instrumentalization, one 1999 DCMS report demanded that the Council

[should recognise explicitly that sustaining cultural diversity and using the arts to combat social exclusion and promote community development are among its basic policy aims. ACE should seek to devote resources specifically to community development objectives and ensure that its funded clients and Regional Arts Boards (RAB’s) also contribute in their work to such objectives. To that end, ACE should provide a positive response to this report, showing how it plans to embed the best practice principles contained in it in its policy and funding decisions on community development work, and how it will respond to this report as a whole.]

This call for the Arts Council to answer to a government department and social policy under New Labour constitutes the most dramatic corseting of the state arts institution in post-war history.

2.3 Community Unhinged

So far, I have used New Labour arts and cultural policy to complicate the “micro-topian” vision of Bourriaud. The insistence on the immediate relational encounter, I suggest, can amount to a neoliberal social splintering in which artists become cultural service providers, patching up feelings of alienation with warm togetherness, while failing to address the real problems of the bigger picture. The purported proximity of this gallery-bound arts practice to government policy also elucidates other problems inherent in Bourriaud’s argumentation. First, the similarity

complicates his claim that the sphere of art is somehow distinct from the rest of society. While Bourriaud claims that contemporary artworks model and mimic contemporary society (as opposed to attempting to critique, even represent it), he simultaneously maintains an oddly romantic conception of the art exhibition space as a space apart from the social, which “creates free areas and times spans whose rhythm contrasts with the structuring of everyday life.” “So the exhibition does not deny the social relationships in effect, but it does distort them and project them into a space-time frame encoded by the art system, and by the artist him/herself.” When Rirkrit Tiravanija, for instance, cooks a meal in the gallery, this action, according to Bourriaud, is conceived as different and alternative to an identical activity outside the gallery, seemingly due to the fact of locational displacement alone. A certain ambivalence, between critique and complicity, difference and sameness, runs throughout Bourriaud’s analysis. Global capitalism, it is important to point out, figures in the book primarily as a means of characterizing the alienated subjects that relational artworks reach out to, but he neglects to point out how these practices might in fact be part and parcel of this very economic system. He thus not only ignores the social and political conditions of the artworld and the artists and institutions that inhabit it; more importantly, he misses how these practices might in fact reflect the

45 He claims that these contemporary practices eschew previous artistic representational modes. Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, 18.
46 Ibid., 16.
47 Ibid., 82.
48 In the book’s last section, Bourriaud, borrowing primarily from Félix Guattari, conceives contemporary subjectivity as “a lost political territory, lost by being riven by the deterritorializing violence of ‘Integrated World Capitalism.’” Ibid., 101.
contemporary orientation of capitalism. Even so, I think the European valence of Bourriaud’s argument should be accentuated. After all, the idea of the institution of art as a “safe space” of sorts would surely not have arisen in the United States, for example. This thinking is clearly rooted in a European context, where the state institution, although compromised, is still considered a safe-haven from the market-driven logics of capitalism.

Stewart Martin has noted that the practices described in Bourriaud’s theorization are not micropolitical pockets, removed from the laws of profit, as Bourriaud would have it. He takes issue with Bourriaud’s argument that these works’ social relations successfully circumvent the commodity form. Quite on the contrary, Martin suggests that Relational Aesthetics presents a naïve mimesis of novel forms of capitalist exploitation. He points out that Bourriaud’s theoretical apparatus is based on an erroneous conception of capitalist commodification, as it is precisely social labor that, according to Marx, lends the commodity its exchange value. Assuming that value lies in the object itself, Martin argues, constitutes commodity fetishism: “In these works the re-direction of our attention from objects to subjects does not produce a space of inter-subjective conviviality, but the instrumental commodification of labour that social exchange can be reduced to in capitalist societies.” Bourriaud also notes that Relational Aesthetics mimics the turn from a production-based to a service-

49 Ibid., 16.
51 Ibid., 383.
based economy. Indeed, one could extend Martin’s line of argument further, stating that Relational practices mimic the gradual shift from government social programs to localized and privatized cultural services.

In a well-known article, Claire Bishop has also critiqued Bourriaud’s theorization.\(^{52}\) She contests his formalist notion that, if the structure of the artwork includes some degree of participation, interaction and dialogue, it is democratic simply by virtue of this configuration.\(^{53}\) Her principle argument is that Relational Aesthetics, in practice and theory, relies on a faulty conception of subjectivity and, by extension, of the social *tout court.*\(^{54}\) According to Bishop, Bourriaud’s writings and the practices they describe presuppose a unified subject capable of identifying in an uncomplicated fashion with other whole subjects, thus creating harmonious relations of togetherness. Borrowing from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s theorization of democracy and the nature of politics—which melds post-structuralism, Gramscian hegemony and Lacanian subjectivity—Bishop argues instead for a conception of the social capable of addressing misidentification, conflict and antagonism.\(^{55}\) According to these authors, subjects are not unified, but precisely shaped in the encounter with other decentered

\(^{52}\) In addition to the texts discussed below, see also Walead Beshty, “Neo-Avantgarde and Service Industry: Notes on the Brave New World of Relational Aesthetics,” *Texte zur Kunst,* no. 59 (September 2005); Lars Bang Larsen, “Social Aesthetics,” in *Participation* (The MIT Press, 2006); Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

\(^{53}\) Bishop also bemoaningly argues that relational practices have displaced the evaluative parameters of the art historian. Instead of judging artworks on aesthetic terms, pieces are increasingly measured according to ethical criteria, a development that Bishop regards as highly problematic.

\(^{54}\) Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October,* no. 110 (Fall 2004): 51-79.

\(^{55}\) Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*
subjects, and, as a consequence thereof, community is always marked by exclusion. Focusing her critique on the practices of Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick—that in her view are based on naïve conceptions of togetherness—Bishop offers praise of works by Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn, which are similarly relational, but which presuppose exclusions rather than empathetic identification and non-conflictual coexistence. In sharp contrast to Tiravanija’s meals for artworld insiders, Sierra exacerbates non-inclusivity by putting politically and economically marginalized subjects, such as illegal immigrants and day laborers, on disconcerting display within privileged art contexts. Bishop’s use of Laclau and Mouffe, as I also mentioned in the first chapter here, has the virtue of reconciling democratic society with difference and dissonance. Yet Bishop’s theorization of her feeling of discomfort when faced with illegal and legal immigrants in Sierra and Hirschhorn’s works tends to make this dissonance a conclusion. The meeting between the art historian and the immigrant, then, becomes nothing but a visual face-off of pure difference. By focusing on incommensurability alone, her analysis can have the unintended effect of supporting New Labour’s conception of the population as composed primarily of incompatible groups, interspersed with pockets of complete exclusion. By focusing on exclusion and difference alone, and not mentioning, as Mouffe and Laclau subsequently have, how antagonism might be converted to “agonism,” Bishop leaves no possibility for thinking what a larger social organization might look like.

56 See, for example, Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).
Like other authors who have discussed this genre of practices, Bourriaud, Martin and Bishop often use the terms society and community, the social and the communal, synonymously. They assume that any focus on community is necessarily a social engagement—the implication being that any small gathering of people in an art context has a direct scalar relation to larger social relations. The main point of the present study is precisely to offer a distinction between these terms, and to demonstrate what they signify in the contemporary moment in contrast to past applications. While several recent writings collapse the communal into the social, I want to emphasize that many recent artistic practices in fact indicate a turn away from former understandings of the social. In other words, the rise of community can be viewed in some respects as rather a turn away from the social in contemporary art. Community, in the writings of Bourriaud and others, I suggest, connotes a departure from prior large-scale social views as well as prior conceptions of political collectivities. The term community, with regards to these artworks, typically refers to small-scale, on-the-spot groupings. While some such groups do deliberately reflect preexisting collectivities, many relational practices are predicated on the fabrication of new groupings, and often imply that these cease to exist when the lights go out or the show is dismantled.

57 Claire Bishop collects these practices under what she terms a "social turn.""The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," Artforum International, February 2006; Also blurring the distinction between social and communal, Stewart Martin encapsulates Bourriaud's theory with "the idea of relational aesthetics is that art is a form of social exchange." See, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics."
The comfort with small groupings and unease with larger collectivities is undoubtedly linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union and, with it, communism, and to a large extent also socialism. As Grant Kester has illustratively pointed out, Bourriaud and Bishop are both at pains to emphasize that they are not advocating utopian art. For Bourriaud, “[i]t is clear that the age of the New Man, future-oriented manifestos, and calls for a better world all ready to be walked into and lived in is well and truly over.” Kester also notes that Bishop underscores that she is “not suggesting that relational art works need to develop a greater social conscious—by making pin-board works about international terrorism, for example, or giving free curries to refugees.” He concludes that Bourriaud and Bishop advocate practices that attempt to “re-define collectivity and inter-subjective exchange outside of existing, and implicitly retrograde, political referents […].” Many community-centered artworks emphasize the fact that they engage an immediate and small audience in opposition to the generalized form of spectatorship associated with modernist practices that is seen as imposing and authorial. I would argue, however, that these these narrower lines of address are often also often bound up with smaller scale groupings and informed by identity politics, further contrasting the broader political alliances of past left movements.

59 Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, 45; Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 65.
60 Kester, “Aesthetic Enactment: Loraine Leeson’s Reparative Practice.”
Bourriaud’s is perhaps the most well-known account of the prevalence of people in lieu of objects in artworks of recent decades. His book is one of many that have addressed the growing presence of smaller groupings in artistic contexts. While his analysis primarily describes a select group of artists, whose work he curated in exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo, other authors have considered a broader range of practices, which have been variously termed community-based or socially-engaged practices, “new genre public art” as well as dialogic, participatory and collaborative art. In contrast with Bourriaud, most of these accounts specifically engage the political concept of community. In this regard, many have referenced Jean-Luc Nancy’s deconstructive analysis of the idiom. Nancy seeks to uncover the term’s solid rootedness in a conception of the grounded subject as well as in Western metaphysics. Under fire is the cry for small-scale community that, especially since the 1960s, has been seen as an antidote to government and modern society—a longing for a primitive and originary community that can re instituted fragmented human bonds.

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The text is, in a sense, a product of the crisis within the left during the 1980s: its parting with communism and its desire to reinstate a place of original community beyond social division and subordination. Nancy’s critique revolves around a contestation of community as one dominated by presence, fullness, immanence and immediacy. Instead, Nancy suggests that community can only exist in the negation of these characteristics—that is, through the one collectivity that all people face, namely death. A shared finitude is a commonality of the unknown and thus relies on a form of being that is devoid of presence and immanence. Community, then, is not a quality that is added to the subject in the encounter with others. Death is always a priori; it is an ontological commonality of existence—or what Nancy terms a “being in common.” In other words, community is not about togetherness and the uniting of subjects, but rather about the common condition of singularities.

Nancy’s approach is appreciated in arts discourse for offering an idea of community that is not based on identity. His discussion of community has proved useful for other authors in diagnosing how artistic practices frequently are based on problematic essentializing notions and identitarian groundings. Implicit in this disavowal are also usages over the course of the 20th century, particularly the

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64 Nancy's text thus reads as a reckoning with the academic left, which had previously been devoted to thought in the service of political change. The collapse of communism and social movements and the apparent triumph of political economy, void of a philosophical imperative, unleashed a profound soul searching and auto critique of past political commitments.

65 Miwon Kwon bases her critique of community-based art on Nancy, arguing that the identity of community is seen as “immanent to itself,” affirming rather than questioning “the notion of a coherent collective subject. The mirage of this coherence, fortified by the fact that the representation of the community is ostensibly produced with or by the same, is consumed as authenticity.” *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 154.
deployment of the communities of fatherland and race in Nazi ideology.\textsuperscript{66} Nancy’s text thus shares similarities with other efforts, previously discussed, that seek to conceive of political collectivities outside of the exclusionary boundaries of the nation state. But it also constitutes a call to rethink the political by means of a strange reliance on what would otherwise seem a rather apolitical concept: death. Community is only possible in the wake of larger organizations, springing from rupture and dispersal. Ethics in this account only occurs when one sees another’s ending and understands it in relation to one’s own eventual finitude.

To the extent that, in concurrence with Rose’s analysis, community is capable of existing within neoliberalism in an almost post-political sense, Nancy’s deconstructive unworking is beneficial. However, since his being-in-common as shared finitude exists prior to political decisions and commitments, it is difficult to relate his inoperative community to specific histories and policies. Moreover, the deconstruction of community in turn seems to necessitate perpetual deconstruction of all other political associations and solidarities as well. While cognizant of Nancy’s theorizations, some scholars have importantly sought to salvage community from both essentializing and neoliberal employments, arguing that a non-essentializing use of the term is crucial for considering collective artistic practices that refute traditional conceptions of individualized artistic production. Grant Kester notes that “collective identities encourage us to break our defensive isolation and fear of others” and serve

\textsuperscript{66} Nancy, \textit{The Inoperative Community}, xxxviii.
“to honor and sustain a shared consciousness shaped by common experiences of life and labor.” He also asserts that “[i]t is impossible to overestimate the significance of community as an organizing principle for resistance and political identity in struggles against the increasingly sophisticated synchrony of global capital […]”.67 Here, the aim is to solidify the bond of community discourse to social collectivity and solidarity.

In a related vein, I consider it imperative to retain some notion of the collective and the social as a constructive counterpoint to the neoliberal organization of society. Since Nancy would most likely find the social an inoperative category as well, and because the primary aim of this study is to differentiate between different terms of political affiliation in historical context, Nancy’s analysis is not particularly useful in this instance.

2.4 The Arts Council and the Welfare State

So far, I have suggested a kinship between Relational Aesthetics’ modus operandi and neoliberal views of society and arts policy, here exemplified by the British case of New Labour. They have in common, I proposed, the waning of a social perspective. Since this association is principally defined by loss, it requires recognition

67 Kester, Conversation Pieces, 15, 130. In the book, Kester offers a careful discussion of practices that engage communities in a variety of ways. He contests Miwon Kwon’s assertion that “good” community-oriented practices must necessarily entertain a self-reflexive critique of the wholeness of community (see footnote 131). Kester advocates for the non-essential idea of a “politically coherent community” that emerges “through a process of dialogue and consensus formation rooted in specific historical moments and particular constellations of political and economic power.” Ibid. 150.
of a moment when the social was more ingrained in political discourse, the system of
the state and the cultural structures it installed. Now, I want to discuss how this state
system might be evidenced in artistic practices of that time.

Immediately after the war, John Maynard Keynes said: "I do not believe it is
yet realized what an important thing has happened. State patronage and the arts has
crept in. It has happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way—half baked
if you like."68 However half-baked, Britain established a model in which culture held a
strong and privileged position within the post-war nation state. It was also the
development and shifts to this UK precedent that many European countries would
subsequently follow in the decades to come. Keynes clearly saw the welfare state as an
enabling framework that could generate enough wealth to allow sophisticated
Europeans to carry on with other, more important issues: “The day is not far off when
the Economic Problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the
heart and the head will be occupied, or re-occupied, by our real problems—the
problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behaviour and religion.”69

The Arts Council England was a continuation of CEMA, the war-time Council
for the Encouragement of Music and Art, which was initiated to “prevent cultural
deprivation on the home front.”70 CEMA operated programs in drama, the visual arts

68 Cited in Nicholas Pearson, The State and the Visual Arts: A Discussion of State Intervention in the
69 Quoted in Ibid., 67.
70 Keller, Contemporary European Arts Support Systems: Precedents for Intergovernmental
Development in the United States, 18.
and music and opened offices throughout the country to facilitate the accessibility of British Culture throughout the nation. During the 1930s, CEMA organized a series of traveling exhibitions entitled “Art for the People.” Keynes had been the Chairman of CEMA and subsequently became the chairman of the Arts Council—a position he held until his death in 1946. No doubt, the goal of summoning national pride and cohesion through a collective culture was residual in the post-war format. After the war, public funding for the arts also became central in the rebuilding efforts. Art was closely tied to beautification projects in the public realm and maintained a strong symbolic function as a sign of good financial times. The memory of the War, of course, was still vivid, and it was therefore imperative for post-war bureaucrats not to reproduce the official art-state relationship evidenced in Germany and Italy.

But we do not intend to socialise this side of social endeavor. Whatever views may be held by the lately warring parties, whom you have been hearing every evening at this hour, about socialising industry, everyone, I fancy, recognises that the work of the artist in all its aspects is, of its nature, individual and free, undisciplined, unregimented, uncontrolled. The artist walks where the breath of the spirit blows him. He cannot be told his direction; he does not know himself.71

Present in this quote by Keynes is no doubt a romantic notion of the creative subject, unable to control himself, and thereby even less receptive to state directives. The citation also reveals how Keynes by no means was a socialist. Like all other matters of government, art was to maintain a certain operational independence. “Arm’s length” became the corporeal image of structural detachment evoked in this

71 Pearson, The State and the Visual Arts, 55.
regard. The Arts Council consisted of an elaborate committee structure, involving professional arts administrators employed by the Council and a set of “lay panels” that were made up of private individuals with amateur or informal interests in the specific arts. This was intended to secure a structure that facilitated rather than dictated production. As such, the Arts Council was a “quango,” a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization that received public funding, but had operational autonomy, free of political interference, guaranteed via royal charter.\(^{72}\) This separation was for the most part upheld. For its first twenty years of operations, no government produced a cultural policy and no minister had functional control of the arts.\(^{73}\) Apart from appointing, under the advice from panels, the members of boards and councils, and determining the amounts of money allocated to them, there was no direct interference with the arts in the first decades of the Arts Council’s existence.

As several historians have since pointed out, like other institutions, the Arts Council was not absent of ideology,\(^{74}\) nor was it bereft of the power structures that pervade other societal frameworks. I argued above that arts policy was instrumentalized under New Labour. But the idea that art could support social policy


\(^{74}\) Andrew Brighton argues that the autonomy of the arts and sciences were used to satisfy the intellectual left during the cold war period due to the fact that governments were afraid of losing the educated classes to the attractions of the communist cause. Thus left-wing arts practice was officially tolerated, indeed supported, to a certain extent. This motive, however, quickly dissipated after the fall of the Soviet Union, as the battle for the hearts and minds of the educated declined in importance, replaced instead by conservative, populist claims to elitism. Ibid., 114
was also central to the founding of the welfare state’s cultural structures as well. Lord Goodman, the chairman of the Arts Council during its glory years from 1965 to 1972 under Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson, had argued that British youth lacked values, certainties and guidance. And further: “I believe that once young people are captured for the Arts, they are redeemed from any of the dangers which confront them at the moment.”

Art had, since the dawn of the welfare state, been cast as a kind of social medicine, capable of curing a variety of societal ills. The class dynamic implicit in Goodman’s statement, indicating a policy rationale in which art could serve to civilize the “uncultured,” became a central node of criticism by the left. In 1979, Raymond Williams delivered a sharp critique of the Council, of which he was a member, refuting its prided arm’s length removal from political process: “It is politically and administratively appointed, and its members are not drawn from arts practice and administration but from that vaguer category of ‘persons of experience and goodwill’ which is the State’s euphemism for its informal ruling class.” Despite this early criticism, it is important to note that—when confronted with later threats to the welfare state and its cultural institutions—Williams, like other intellectuals on the left, devoted himself to a vocal defense of this system.

75 Quoted in Frances Borzello, *Civilising Caliban* (Routledge, 1987), 133.
76 Williams, “The Arts Council,” 166 In his article, he goes on to recommend several ways to better the workings of the organizations in order for it to better deliver on its independent promise. Among other suggestions was the call for greater transparency and decentralization. 77 See, for example, Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (Verso, 2007).
2.5 Institutional Critique and the Welfare State

If Relational Aesthetics can indeed be interpreted in tandem with widespread restructuring of the welfare state—in addition to neoliberalization, marketization and policies of economic self-reliance in both spheres—which artistic practices, then, could be said to reflect a prior social view and hence a tighter alliance with the original welfare state and its institutions? Consider, for instance, the Artists Placement Group (APG) that emerged in Britain during the late 1960s. From 1968 to 1971, they situated artistic practices within various nationalized industries (British Airways, Steel and Rail, among others), private companies, as well as placements within various governmental departments. In 1975, for example, the artist Roger Coward was situated within the Department of Environment in Birmingham. Later that year, Ian Breakwell undertook a placement with the Department of Health and Social Security. APG considered art a “social strategy”; its arena was the institutions and organizations of the state. Another artist that I would argue is affiliated with a socially-grounded artistic practice is Stephen Willats, who wrote in 1976: “In common with other areas of activity, art practice operates within an environment of institutions and

78 APG was started by John Latham and Barbara Stevini and has over the years included other artists, like Keith Arnatt, Ian Breakwell, Stuart Brisley, George Levantis and David Hall. Peter Eleey, “Context is Half the Work,” Frieze, December 2007, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/context_is_half_the_work/

79 The artists became involved in the everyday of the organization and were paid an equivalent salary to other employees, but maintained the autonomy to work independently. The work produced was mainly conceptual in nature; some of APG’s members also came out of FLUXUS. David Hall in 1970, while working within the British European Airways, produced a film of unique cloud formations. During his 1974 placement with the shipping company Ocean Fleets, George Levantis produces an art installation that was thrown overboard as well as a book of poetry.

groups of people which effectively maintain it as an identifiable activity within society. This defines what can be called the territory of art in society, and I shall refer to it as ‘art’s social environment.’”81 One artistic practice is connected with others and all are firmly rooted in a broader social view. Both APG and Willats chose to work mainly outside the institutions habitually consecrated to artistic practice. Nevertheless, their practices were firmly devoted to other institutions and organizations of the state. While often referenced as important historical precedents for contemporary community-based practices, their view of the social, it should be emphasized, is strikingly different from many contemporary methodologies and their societal backdrops. Needless to say, the then-pioneering act for an artist like Breakwell to approach the Department of Health is striking when considered from a contemporary vantage point. These days, when New Labour puts out reports, such as: Art for Health: A Review of Good Practice in Community-Based Arts Projects and Interventions which Impact on Health and Well-being,82 the political instrumentalization is hard to miss when accompanied by statements like: “Poor health is closely associated with social exclusion. The variety of cultural services enables them to make an unique contribution to psychological health and well-being, to physical fitness and health and to the dissemination of health-related information.”83 Clearly, the artistic practices

82 Art for Health: A Review of Good Practice in Community-based Arts Projects and Interventions which Impact on Health and Well-being.
83 Coalter, Realising the Potential of Cultural Services: Making a Difference to the Quality of Life, 6.
within the frameworks of government today bear much different connotations than those of the ‘60s and ‘70s.

APG’s 1960s practices seem a continuation of the traditional belief of art as discrete sphere of activity distinct from other social domains. It was precisely this conceived division that informed a methodology in which artistic forms of expression (poems, paintings, photographs, etc.) were brought in to contrast the bureaucratic operations of government. This conceit of separation between the artistic and the social were complicated by a group of practices during the 1960s and 1970s that in later historizations became known as the first examples of Institutional Critique. I would, in this context, like to propose an expanded definition, capable of encompassing a broader range of works than the term habitually embraces. While Institutional Critique frequently refers to a defined group of artists that directly address the institution of art, I think the term can be extended to other artworks of that period that engage other social institutions (such as the work of APG and Willats, for example). Adopting Rose’s distinctions, I would argue that these practices embody a social view that sharply contrasts with the splintered societal conceptions espoused by many contemporary practices. As practices frequently seek to create self-organized “microtopias,” Institutional Critique was by contrast shaped in a close relationship with state-bolstered institutions. Emerging from a conceptual art tradition characterized by a turn away from avant-garde authorial autonomy and authorship

84 My use of the term here has the capacity to encompass artists not normally associated with Institutional Critique.
towards repetitious production and structural validation, Institutional Critique signifies a brand of artistic practice with a decidedly social backdrop.  

Institutional Critique was clearly influenced by contemporaneous theoretical models that delineated the influence of institutions on subjectivity. In Althusser’s prominent account, Ideological State Apparatuses interpolated subjects into the reproduction of the dominant modes of production. In continuation, Foucault saw the institutions of modernity, not as beacons of rationality, but as mechanisms of discipline. In another related and influential theorization, Bourdieu presented the concept of habitus as the internalization of the social. Like these theorizations, Institutional Critique was shaped by the prevailing state model of that era. As a dispersed cluster of practices, it emerged in various European countries at a time when the post-war welfare state had been solidified—and as the relationship between art and state, commenced in the 19th century, had reached the greatest level of entanglement. Culture was in the decades immediately after the war articulated as part and parcel of the welfare state, promoted as a common heritage that would supplant class divisions along with other state-supported domains, such as subsidized housing, health care, etc. The museum, which began as the bourgeois public sphere par excellence (representing the ideals of rational, critical thought and the representation of the bourgeois class and its values), was increasingly cast in social democratic discourse as an instrument of

civic education. Informed by recent theorizations as well as the welfare state system, Institutional Critique was based on an idea of structural contextuality in which the art system was but one institution among many within a hegemonic social system. The artworld was in turn a network of social and economic relationships integrally determined by that prevailing societal order.

In 1955, the first documenta was held in Kassel, Germany. In an obvious attempt to sever the country from its immediate past by cultural means, this international art exhibition showcased German abstraction—which had been labeled entartet and thus forbidden by the Nazis—in the context of the international avant-gardes. Kassel, which had been a central city within the Reich and had been almost entirely destroyed during the war due to its major arms construction plants, had become marginalized in the subsequent division of Germany. Documenta can therefore be partly attributed to a cold war political scheme to recast Kassel as a central West German city. “In this ‘borderland situation’ against the East” and “as a badly damaged, yet revived cultural city,” H. Lemke, a member of the board, wrote in a persuading letter to the state Magistrate that Kassel “could perhaps prove the

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87 As Simon Sheikh has periodized, the first wave of Institutional Critique in the 1960s and 1970s focused particularly on the art institution, while later decades saw a greater preoccupation with other social institutions. See, “Notes on Institutional Critique,” European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (January 2006), http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/sheikh/en.
primacy of the spirit more effectively than Venice or Paris.”

Literally rising from the rubble of the war, *documenta I* was staged within the set-like and war-ravaged Fridericianum, the first public museum on the European continent. The art exhibition was timed with the popular *Bundesgartenschau* (state garden show) in the city and was proposed as the artistic branch of a showcase of other modern achievements. One declaration stated that the show would allow the “connection of artworks to the social and scientific life of our time to be contemplated and clarified”; in order to fulfill this aim, it suggested that the larger exhibition, which included the garden show, could also feature “modern furniture, lamps, wall paper and commodities.”

*Documenta* is perhaps the post-war art organization that best illustrates the welfare state’s frequent politically-motivated support of art via institutions that made every effort to suppress all political references. Avoiding direct mention of the recent war, the show presented pre-war artworks as the historical precedents of the contemporaneous art. Illustrating this displacement, one reviewer in an article entitled “On the Road of Triumph” wrote: “After having traversed the road through Expressionism, Futurism and Cubism, one follows the triumphant road that is abstraction […] Painters representing almost all peoples are united in this great hall.

One palpably senses how liberating this road to victory is for all the contributors:

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victory is ours!” The traumatic loss of the war was replaced by an artistic genealogy within which German artists triumphed in international context. Followed by a series of photographs depicting archaic, early Christian and “primitive artworks,” along with portraits of great avant-garde artists at the exhibition’s entrance, abstract artworks by 148 artists from six countries were mounted in a manner that favored international comparisons as well as isolated contemplation.

For the second Documenta in 1959 (that brought the works of several American artists, among them Jackson Pollock, to Kassel), the 23-year-old art student, Hans Haacke, photographed the show while working as an exhibition guard. In this photographic series, which the young painter did not then consider part of his art practice, the artworks are mere backdrops for scenes that include curators, visitors and cleaning staff, before, during and after the show’s hours of operation. The individual expression represented by the paintings is here replaced by a broader, social view that would later consume Haacke’s career. In one image, two cleaning ladies are busy at work, while completely ignoring the stacks of framed canvases that surround them. In another, an older couple, that apparently dressed up for the occasion, sit with an open catalogue and a mixed look of bewilderment and exhaustion, adjacent to an only partially-visible Mondrian. The tightly cropped photographs create an enclosed sense of space in which people seem oddly out of place, heightened by the fact that they are

for the most part staring out of the frame at unseen works of art. Those depicted are not art connoisseurs and rich patrons but middle-class citizens that are clearly grappling with the social codes of art viewership—the appropriate attire and contemplative expressions silently demanded by modern art. Foreshadowing his later work, Haacke here seems to incipiently question the supposed universal communicability of art. Haacke elaborated upon his clandestine pursuits during the first iteration of the exhibition, when he returned as a featured artist to *documenta IV* in 1972. For the show, he conducted a visitor profile (*Visitor Profile*, 1972), which included questions such as: “What do you think about the influence of the unions in the Federal Republic?”; “Do you think the interests of big industry are generally compatible with the common good?” and “Are you in favor of the City of Kassel, the State of Hesse and the Federal Republic financing *documenta 5* with your tax money?” The responses were processed by computer, printed and posted within the exhibition.

In 1969, another artist who has been associated with Institutional Critique, Jochen Gerz, had similarly asked workers at the Hoffmann La Roche Corporation in Basel about their conceptions about art. Emulating sociological studies and similar research conducted a few years prior by Pierre Bourdieu, Haacke’s survey, like

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93 In the years between the two exhibitions, Haacke had worked with sculptural pieces that were formally shaped by their immediate context. For example, in *Condensation Cubes* (1963-65), a small amount of water sealed within a transparent cube responded to the microclimate of the exhibition setting. Similarly, the frozen shape of *Ice Stick* (1966) was dependent on the art space’s temperature and moisture levels.

Gerz’s, addressed the relationship between art appreciation and social class. In addition, by devoting many questions to matters of state, it clearly sought to connect the art exhibition to federal and local politics. Questions addressing Ostpolitik and the relationship between private interests and the public good were indicatively followed by a tongue-in-cheek final question that pondered the use of public funds for cultural purposes. Conceptual art had broadened the perception of the aesthetic object beyond contemplative specularity to encompass the tactile and the cognitive; Haacke took a step further, emphasizing that all such experiences were bracketed by social institutions and hence conditioned by economic determinants and ideological systems of power.

The indebtedness of Institutional Critique to a social view of society—and perhaps ultimately its imbrication with the institutions associated with the post-war welfare state—becomes even clearer when examining works of later decades. During the 1980s and 1990s, as most Institutional Critique followed Hans Haacke from Europe to the US, the primary locus of critique increasingly became the neoliberalization of art and the influences of corporations and power elites on the artworld. This shift, of course, mirrors the greater changes to the welfare state and the structure of cultural funding discussed in previous sections. Following these developments, it is not surprising that Institutional Critique artists began to defend the very institutions that they had targeted, as the legitimacy and function of art and

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culture within society increasingly became subjected to attacks by conservative critics. Hans Haacke’s later work has thus largely consisted of a defense of the state museum (and other welfare institutions, such as the Reichstag) against its instrumentalization. For his first retrospective in his home country, for example, Hans Haacke insisted that he would only mount the exhibition if it was entirely funded by public means. In the seminal conversation between Hans Haacke and Pierre Bourdieu, it becomes clear how the state, with all its pitfalls, is understood as exceedingly better than the looming alternative. In the words of Bourdieu:

> There are a certain number of conditions for the existence of a culture with a critical perspective that can only be assured by the state. In short, we should expect (and even demand) from the state the instruments of freedom from economic and political interests—that is, from the state itself. When the state begins to think and to act in terms of the logic of profitability and return in relation to hospitals, schools, radios, televisions, museums and laboratories, the greatest achievements of humanity are threatened: everything that pertains to the order of the universal—that is, to the general interest, of which the state, whether one likes it or not, is the official guarantor.⁹⁶

This allegiance to the systems of the state, and a social conception of society, seem to have faded from view in the practices that I have so far referred to as relational. In its intense preoccupation with the social, Institutional Critique can at times seem to result in a complete absenting of authorial voice in an almost unpersonifiable objectivity—one might be tempted to call it a moral high-ground of sorts. Relational and community-oriented contemporary practices, in comparison,

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often revolve around individual narratives of artists as well as participants. Institutional Critique artists frequently refer to their audience as “the public,” a term deeply indebted to a social conception of society. The majority of locally-based practices imagine no such cohesive collective body. Mirroring a greater shift within art institutions from education to marketing, audiences are increasingly conceived as “visitors,” which indicates, by contrast, a multitude of singulars. While Institutional Critique is defined by an address to a social collectivity that is seen as unanimously interpolated by the prevailing hegemonic system, community-oriented practices address particular identificatory groups. This segmenting of society into smaller constituencies arguably mirrors recent political developments. Nancy Fraser has argued that economic discourses of exploitation and “redistribution,” which were central to prior political mobilizations, have largely been replaced in the post-socialist era by cultural discourses of identity, difference, cultural domination and “recognition” under the identificatory banners of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality. Similarly, many relational practices specifically engage culturally-defined groups, thereby strongly departing from the broad, socioeconomic perspective that obviously lies behind works like Haacke’s Visitor Profile.

97 One could mention several examples. In one document by Marcel Broodthaers associated with his Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles entitled “Eagle. Public Ideology,” for instance, he writes: “To what extent does information regarding contemporary art succeed in reaching the public conscience? The public, it is you, it is me, it is the others.” Translated from French by this author from Marcel Broodthaers, Marcel Broodthaers par Lui-Même (Gent: Ludion/Flammarion, 1998), 87.

98 Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age,” New Left Review, no. 212: 68-93. As the universal claims of socialism have been put into question, she argues, cultural politics of difference risk displacing a social politics of equality.
The intricate intertwinement of the art institution with a cohesive understanding of the social field is in relational practices replaced by a conception of an unintelligible network absent of a center of power that therefore cannot be challenged. The discourse of community-situated practices often speaks of dodging power and authority by existing exterior to institutions, in close affiliation with specific constituencies. It is a similar rationale that undergirds Bourriaud’s claim that everyday activities, such as cooking and socializing, become subversively abstracted precisely within the institution of art. In both instances, the distance traveled from the conceptual framework of Institutional Critique is evident. Daniel Buren, another artist frequently named as a pioneer of said genre of practices, was from the outset occupied with the structural frame of the artworld: “A clear eye will recognize what is meant by freedom in art, but an eye which is a little less educated will see better what it is all about when it has adopted the following idea: that the location (outside or inside) where a work is seen is its frame/its boundary.”

Clearly informed by structuralism and emergent post-structuralism, he mounted his signature striped (and unframed) flags and posters inside as well as outside institutions of art, thus grounding the central idea of Institutional Critique in which the frame necessarily shadows the artwork, no matter how deep into the “outside world” it ventures. This idea clearly resonates with Jacques Derrida’s remarks on deconstruction a few years later: “The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and

effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures.” All works of Institutional Critique from then on can seem almost slavishly bound to their institutional framework, as if any social critique could only take wing if the immediate artistic housing was first addressed.

The contemporary efforts of forming close alliances with communities recall the work of cultural animators of the 1960s that sought to break with the bourgeois institution of art. In what way do they then differ from the artists associated with Institutional Critique that clearly were shaped by the radical politics of the 1960s and attempts to democratize the institutions of the state—hereunder universities and museums, in particular—which were seen as reproducing dominant ideology? Marcel Broodthaers had been involved in occupying the *Palais des Beaux Arts* in Brussels in 1968, protesting the historical museum’s political instrumentalization. These events were undoubtedly central to the creation of his own fictitious and roaming museum, the *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (*Modern Art Museum, Department of Eagles*) and its various sub-sections with intermittent openings between 1968 and 1972. Interestingly, this famous work of Institutional Critique was also bracketed by *documenta*, when Broodthaers ceremoniously terminated the museum’s existence with a document that commenced with the words: “This is a fictitious museum. It both plays the role of a political parody of political affairs as well as an artistic parody of

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political events. This is indeed also what official museums and organs like the *documenta* do. However, the difference is that a fiction allows us to seize reality along with that which reality conceals. Founded in 1968 in Brussels, under the pressures of the political views of the moment, this museum shuts its doors with *documenta.***102 It is indicative that this artist-created museum began with the ‘68 revolts against the state and its institutions and returned to die within a state-supported institution of art—an institution in the shadow of which it had been conceived from the very beginning.103

The invention of the *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*—a heap of nothingness—initially expressed in an arrangement of boxes, postcards and inscriptions, was connected to the events of 1968, i.e. to a kind of political event familiar to all countries […] a change of consciousness happened, particularly among the youth that was inevitably repeated in the artistic field. It let the questions emerge: What is art, what role does the artist play in society. I took the reflection a bit further: What is the role of that which represents artistic life in society, namely the role of the museum?104

Institutional Critique, in its early iterations, was clearly informed by the cultural upheavals of ‘68. As discussed in Chapter 1, Boltanski and Chiapello conceive of this critical moment as a moment of convergence in *gauchisme* of two forms of critique: social critique (of the social movements, responding to working class suffering) and artistic critique (of the bohemian avant-gardes, opposing

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102 Translated from French by this author from a pamphlet distributed at Documenta 5 in 1972 entitled *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Sections Art Moderne et Publicité* in Ibid., 92.  
103 He once stated that "the museum of course also involved a critique of the Beligan state, its museum politics, its cultural authorities." Translated from French by this author from 1969 interview with Freddy de Vree in Ibid., 72.  
massification and calling for liberation and autonomy). According to this analysis, I would argue that Institutional Critique is informed by, and in turn could be characterized as embodying exactly the uneasy union between these two forms of critique. Such a methodology further allows us to think about how Institutional Critique involves a peculiar combination of determinacy, which is indebted to the Marxist tradition, and an autonomy which is directly continued from the artistic avant-gardes. This would account for the familiar critical distance of the artist from the social and political context laid bare by the artwork—all the while emphasizing their inescapable imbrication within that very system. Boltanski and Chiapello’s study characterizes a gradual conversion over recent decades to an information and service-orientated society in which most people operate as independent contractors, without the forms of security that previous full-time contracts afforded. Hence, as these authors argued, artistic practice and other creative professions, which were formerly assumed as an exception to wage work, are increasingly prided as new entrepreneurial models of productivity in a post-industrial society in step with the dismantling of state accountability. The multiple government-initiated programs in Britain during the 1990s that were set up to connect individual artists with private business and which were subsequently copied throughout Europe as novel forms of privatized state assistance serve as a case in point. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, 1990s

105 In the UK, ABSA, the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts, now Arts and Business. As another example, in Denmark Nyx Forum for Kultur og Erhverv helps establish connections with artists in order for businesses to “be more innovative and exercise new methods in developing products, working methods and marketing initiatives.” Translated from Danish from
management literature preached “lean firms working as networks with a multitude of participants, organizing work in the form of teams or projects, intent on customer satisfaction, and a general mobilization of workers thanks to their leaders' vision.” It is pertinent to consider how this reading might pertain to the ways in which self-organized artists increasingly are called upon to mobilize local communities in discrete community-oriented projects. Even so, some caution should be used when employing Boltanski and Chiapello’s arguments in a discussion of actual artistic practices. The authors argue that social critique waned after ‘68, while artistic critique—centered on the values of autonomy, authenticity, creativity and flexibility—blossomed in its cooptation by corporate management. I would argue that Relational Aesthetics, and similar community-based practices, can in fact help to complicate this picture, since the direct lines of influence so neatly laid out in their argument here quickly become blurred. While seemingly continuing the artistic critiques of ‘68, as pioneered by the Situationists and others, my argument has here been that these practices in fact are more informed by the ways in which recent models of corporate management have shaped a reorganization of the European welfare state. Boltanski and Chiapello’s accounts have undoubtedly sparked interest within the field of art, since they confer more power of art upon society than our field traditionally gives itself credit for.

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NyX Forum, “NyX,” http://www.nyxforum.dk/index.php?id=25. In the New Labour strategy Creative Britain, Chris Smith wrote: "Increasingly, the qualities demanded for business—such as communication skills, flexibility of approach, improvisational and creative thinking, working as a team so that the parts add up to a whole—are precisely those that can be inculcated through exposure to the arts." Chris Smith, *Creative Britain* (Faber and Faber, 1998), 54-55.

However, the authors’ account of how art uni-directionally came to influence management is somewhat wooly. In addition, the characterization of art as a field independent of influences from the broader sociopolitical context comes across as rather naive. Their readings of actual art practices are sketchy at best, with oblique references to Baudelaire, Duchamp and the Situationists as one cohesive sphere of production. Their repeated references to artistic autonomy seem ignorant of the divergent and often contradictory history of the term in art practice and theory. Their reading could be easily contradicted in a closer analysis that notes how the Situationists, the Frankfurt school and, particular to this study, Institutional Critique offer examples of more complex entanglements of artistic and social critiques. Despite the overly schematic characterization of artistic practices and their supposed impact on the world of business, Boltanski and Chiapello’s study can be useful in helping to describe the relative absence of critique from recent artworks and thus their difference from prior practices like Institutional Critique:

[O]ne cannot fail to be struck by the contrast between the decade 1968-78 and the decade 1985-95. The former was marked by a social movement on the offensive, extending significantly beyond the boundaries of the working class; a highly active trade unionism; ubiquitous references to social class, including in political and sociological discourse, and more generally, that of intellectuals who developed interpretations of the social world in terms of relations of force and regarded violence as ubiquitous […] The second period has been characterized by a social movement that expresses itself

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107 As in this vague reference to Duchamp and his legacy: “Workers sequestering their employer, homosexuals kissing in the public, or artists displaying trivial objects transferred from their usual context into a gallery or museum—when it comes down to it, were not all these forms of one and the same transgression of the bourgeois order?” Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 39.
almost exclusively in the form of humanitarian aid; a disoriented trade unionism that has lost any initiative for action; a quasi-obliteration of reference to social class (including sociological discourse), and especially the working class, whose representation is no longer guaranteed, to the extent that some famous social analysts can seriously assert that it no longer exists [...].

Boltanski and Chiapello attribute the recoil, even crippling, of social critique and all references to social class since the mid-1980s to multiple sources. In France, where social critique had been historically tied to the communist movement, mounting opposition to communism led to a splintering of the left that ultimately weakened trade union power. Adding to this dispersion, they contribute influence to the flowering of new social movements (feminist, homosexual, ecological and anti-nuclear) and the rise of Foucauldian critiques of power, along with theoretical models that argued that the welfare model, like fascism, had sought to incorporate capitalism into the state. All these factors were compounded by the fact that capitalism, in these authors’ view, had produced displacements through a dispersed system of organization that could not be interpreted with prior tools of critical opposition.

The lack of alternatives has had two results—one practical, the other theoretical—that chime with one another. The practical result has been to displace the wish to act, prompted by indignation in the face of poverty, on to a charitable or humanitarian position, centred on direct encounters, the present situation (as opposed to some remote future), and direct action aimed at alleviating the sufferings of the needy. On the theoretical level, this has corresponded to the abandonment of macro-sociological and macro-historical approaches, and to a retreat into micro-analysis of actions or

108 Ibid., 167-168.
judgments *en situation*, often interpreted as indicating ‘the end of critique.’

To the extent that, according to the authors, reflexive, argumentative critique constitutes the creation of connections between individual suffering and a universal idea of collective good, most relational practices cannot be considered critical. While still occupied with individual suffering, many community-oriented works add a new focus on the *rights* of the individual. Derived from humanitarian and charitable aid, this new emphasis indicates a broader shift from social justice to justice *tout court*. Furthermore, the discourse of class seems to have vanished from most contemporary artworks. Departing from Institutional Critique, with its consistent concentration on the individual in institutional and class context, whether in the format of the survey (Gerz, Haacke, Willats), the housing project (Willats) or the museum (Haacke, Broodthaers and Buren), these later works largely refrain from making universalizing extrapolations with the individual as a point of departure. Note the resemblance of Boltanski and Chiapello’s notion of concentrating on a “present situation (as opposed to some remote future)” with Bourriaud’s idea that it seems “more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbors than to bet on happier tomorrows.” The recurring focus on direct encounters in the present in artistic practice that refrain from addressing remote futures concurs neatly with what Boltanski and Chiapello have referred to as “the end of critique.” Taking this argument a step

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109 Ibid., 325.
110 Ibid., 36.
further, and gloomier, one might argue that, rather than lending new spirit to capitalism, these artistic practices replicate its most dominant forms.

The remaining chapters will present case studies that parse contemporary artworks in context in ways that complicate this somewhat schematic reading of the turn from a social to a community-based view of society. In these works, instead of representing a view of society that is either cohesively social or community-based, different “states” of the European welfare state reappear in condensed, uneasy juxtaposition.
Chapter 3: Containing Cohesion and Difference: Cultural Policy from the Maisons de la Culture to the Musée Précaire

3.1 Museal Patrimony

On May 18, 1968, the continuous protests of students, artists and workers outside the Musée National d’Art Moderne culminated with the temporary closing of this grand institution of French national culture. Pierre Restany, one of the main figures advocating a shutdown declared: “The Museum of Modern Art is the symbol of the museum-cemetery, we request its closing *sine die* while waiting for a recasting of our cultural structures.”¹ Borrowing from Adorno’s 1953 pronunciation that “the museum and the mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association,”² Restany blamed the institution for representing and perpetuating an ossified bourgeois culture, falsely inscribed as “la patrimonie”—a national culture belonging to all—since the holdings of the Louvre palace were made available to the citizenry of France in 1793 during the French Revolution.

May ’68, its critique of museal patrimony and the temporary closing of the national modern art museum, is the initial backdrop against which I would like to discuss the temporary opening of a local, modern art museum in 2004, almost 40 years after the cultural upheavals of 1968. In 2004, *Le Musée Précaire Albinet*, opened its doors in the housing block section of Landy in Aubervilliers. One of the most densely

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populated municipalities of Europe, Aubervilliers is a low-income industrial suburb (banlieue) north of Paris with a large immigrant population. The museum, a rickety structure of particleboard, plastic and copious amounts of tape, was an artwork envisioned by the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, himself a resident of Aubervilliers, and constructed with the paid labor of youths from the surrounding housing blocks. While the outside of this graffitied structure appeared as a visual renunciation of high culture, the inside housed a rather conventional six-week program of works on loan from the Centre Pompidou in Paris—a collection perhaps best described as an abbreviated canon: eight signature practices by white, male, mostly European artists—in order of appearance: Marcel Duchamp, Kasimir Malevitch, Piet Mondrian, Salvador Dalí, Joseph Beuys, Le Corbusier, Andy Warhol, Fernand Léger. Hirschhorn’s museum was ushered into existence with bold statements, such as “art can change life,” recalling previous avant-gardes’ aspirations of inserting art into the everyday in order to transform it. But contrary to these earlier visions that involved a particular style and set of strategies deployed in a contemporary social situation, Hirschhorn’s project took the form of an art historical potpourri of multifaceted practices—some of them with revolutionary political agendas; several had none whatsoever. These works were placed in an oddly conventional enclosure: a highly protected white cube with adjoining café. This other museum was declared in opposition to what the artist named

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3 The population is mostly working class with a minimal level of education attainment and high rates of unemployment and poverty. Harvard University, “Community Based Development,” http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/research/research_centers/cuds/Saint-Denis/Paris%20Descriptions_final.pdf.
the artworks’ habitual “museal-patrimonial” context, thereby acknowledging the long history of art at the service of patrimony and its key role in the construction of national culture.⁴

Hirschhorn’s indictment of the French patrimonial institution of art certainly reminds of rhetoric from May ‘68, as does the aim to “democratize” culture in the broadest sense; his declared aim to engage a marginalized population with art is also reminiscent of similar efforts of that period. However, Hirschhorn’s scheme reveals a multiplicity of discrepancies, which cannot finally be reconciled with the ideological underpinnings of ‘68. Perhaps most glaring is the fact that the Musée Précaire involved a pact with one of the prime suspects of that infamous month; the piece featured key works on loan from the very Musée National d’Art Moderne that had been forced to shutter its doors.⁵ So, instead of focusing solely on 1968, a year that is often referenced in socially-engaged projects like Hirschhorn’s, my ambition is to discuss how Hirschhorn’s piece can be more aptly interpreted as a recycling of several French cultural policies past—a rather contradictory mélange that evokes some central dialectics in the relationship between art and state over the past half century. The

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⁴ The patrimonial status of the artworks on loan led to several complications during the planning phase of the project. The loan of the pieces for the MPA required permission from the minister of culture. In a letter, Allison Gingeras, curator at the Pompidou, writes: “We were reminded that these works belong to the government. The Centre Pompidou does not own this collection, but uniquely guards it.” In Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, Thomas Hirschhorn, Musée Précaire Albinet: Quartier du Landy, Aubervilliers, 2004. (Paris; Aubervilliers: X. Barral; Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, 2005). Paris: Editions Xavier Barral, 2005, June 4, 2004. The project also met resistance from employees at the Centre Pompidou who did not think the project merited putting at risk the “national patrimony.” See, Yvane Chapuis’ commentary, Ibid., June 24, 2003.

⁵ The Musée National d’Art Moderne is today situated in the Centre Pompidou.
paradigmatic shifts of center vs. margin, dissemination vs. representation, cohesion vs. diversity and the universal vs. the singular have arguably found their clearest policy articulations in France, but have equally met their parallels in other European countries as well. By relating the piece to procedures of earlier historical periods, it is my ambition to discuss this contemporary structure within the precarious historical matrix of art, art museum and national culture.

3.2 Cohesive Dispersal

The defining feature that set Hirschhorn’s temporary museum apart from its established lender, then, is not to be found in the practices it displayed, but rather in its operation of geographical displacement. Instead of bringing new audiences into the museum, the artworks in this case went in search of “another” public. The piece’s central operation of displacement is in dialogue with a particular moment in French history when cultural policy specifically involved an emanation of high culture from the national capital towards the outlying regions of the republic. In 1959 the aim to “democratize culture”—that is, to make culture more accessible to people at large—was the articulated goal of the state. That year, a publicized statement pronounced an official government policy “to make accessible to the largest number of French people possible the major artistic works of humanity, and above all else those of France; to ensure the widest possible audience for our national heritage.” The voice articulating this statement was that of André Malraux, the head of the newly instituted Ministry of Culture under President Charles De Gaulle and the 5th Republic. In order to make
widely available “the major artistic works of humanity,” Malraux spearheaded a grandiose plan to construct *Maisons de la Culture* throughout the nation.⁶ Often monumental works of architecture, these regional cultural centers were not showcases of regional culture; their main purpose was to exhibit major works of art that otherwise largely had been confined to the institutions of the capital.

Interestingly, this highly intricate intertwinement of artistic and social policy in European history was not initiated under the stewardship of a Social Democratic or Labor government. In other European countries, the expansion of cultural support schemes have historically been largely tied to left-leaning governments, but France’s extensive arts policy was begun by the conservative president Charles de Gaulle. This arts and culture policy aberration should be interpreted as connected to France’s particular welfare state history and structure. French post-war history departs noticeably from that of other European countries, as France was the only country (along with Italy) in which the left did not gain power immediately after the war. Throughout most of the post-war period, left-wing parties remained outside of government, only once entering in coalition from ‘51-‘52. However, despite decades of conservative rule until the 1980s, the fiscal involvement of the French government in the economy has asymptotically been among the greatest in the advanced

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⁶ For an overview of the *Maisons de la Culture* policy, see André Baecque, *Les Maisons de la Culture.* (Paris: Seghers, 1967). This scheme involved several different types of institutions, museums as well as theatres. In fact, a municipal theatre was situated in Aubervilliers.
capitalist world. Thus, in historical parallel to the establishment of welfare programs on the rest of the continent, most of France’s welfare programs were initiated under conservative rule. The fact that the French welfare state was cast according to a conservative mold, however, has arguably had a structural impact on its programs, social as well as cultural.

The accounts vary as to why French conservatives established welfare programs in the first place. Some argue that since union power was weaker in France than in other European countries, the social imperative was largely founded on

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8 Unlike the processes of socialist welfare state development, France's history is more one of extensive economic planning. Many of these plans were devised by Jean Monnet who was not a socialist. After rigorous public relations efforts by Monnet, all sides of the political spectrum wound up supporting his policy. In the words of Donald Sassoon: “Far from being any kind of attempt at socialist reconstruction, the plan was devised by Monnet as the best way to use American aid to renovate the economy. Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 164.

9 Some have even argued that the term "welfare state" is not appropriate in the case of France, since many of its programs (particular its insurance schemes) rest outside the state. See, Daniel Béland and Randall Hansen, “Reforming the French Welfare State: Solidarity, Social Exclusion and the Three Crises of Citizenship,” *West European Politics* 23, no. 1 (January 2000): 47-64. The French welfare system unlike other European examples that focused mainly on social security was particularly focused on nationalizations. Rather than the outcome of socialist reasoning, de Gaulle’s motive was arguably one of post-war French nationalism. Furthermore, as Douglas Ashford has pointed out, the French welfare state is different from those of Britain and Scandinavia, for example, since it hardly distributes between social classes. The first social security schemes focused on payments for illness, maternity, temporary disability and family allowance rather than on unemployment. As Donald Sassoon has pointed out, unemployment was never emphasized in France, since the country, unlike Germany, had not experienced bouts of mass unemployment. Douglas Ashford, *British Dogmatism and French Pragmatism: Central-Local Policymaking in the Welfare State*, 1st ed. (London, UK: Allen & Unwin, 1982); Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14; Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 143.
catholic notions of solidarity. Others have pointed out that conservatives initiated the programs for electoral gains. From a Marxist perspective, it has been asserted that various security schemes were introduced to pacify workers. In addition, the left-wing ethos of the post-Resistance climate is another probable cause for the creation of social programs in post-war France. The curious figure of Malraux, and his cultural convictions that echo both extremities of the political spectrum, should be considered in this light. In fact, Gaullist cultural policies took inspiration from the popular culture movements in France that had emerged with the Popular Front in 1936 and spawned a number of popular culture initiatives and organizations in the postwar years, such as “Peuple et Culture” and the movement of “theatrical decentralization.” Linked with the Popular Front’s demands for vacation and leisure time (loisir) for workers, as well as the socialist tradition’s calls for cultural emancipation, these early examples aimed primarily to reunite daily life with culture. The organizational structure of the movement relied heavily on the role of individual cultural animateurs and militants, educators whose task it was to both bring culture to the culturally deprived as well as

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10 To this point, despite its revolutionary tradition, France has a long history of organizational divides between left political parties and unions. As Donald Sassoon has argued, French politics have been strongly influenced by the revolutionary tradition, favoring direct democracy and distrusting of organization. The unions rejection of party politics resulted in further splits on the left. Ibid., 13.


12 Due to the threat of fascism in the 30s, the previously splintered left was realigned under the Popular Front that included socialists, communists and trade unions. Massive strikes by the Popular Front in 1934 had led to gains, such as legislation on the work week, paid holidays and arbitration power. See, Sassoon, One Hundred Years of Socialism, 54-55. Also, Cacérès, Histoire de l’Education Populaire; Brian Rigby, Popular Culture in Modern France: A Study of Cultural Discourse (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 39-95; Maurice Larkin, France since the Popular Front: Government and People, 1936-1986 (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1988).
raise appreciation and understanding of working class culture proper: “A living culture raises a genre of man. It supposes methods for transmitting knowledge and shaping personality. In the end, it trains the creation of educational institutions. Thus, la culture populaire needs a humanism, a technique, a real organization. Otherwise it risks staying prisoner to an outmoded form of instruction.”\(^\text{13}\) This post-war movement involved making personal contact with people in order to help them cope in a social context defined by cultural dispossession, massification and alienation: “To teach men languages, those of the heart as well as those of the spirit, those of art as well as those of science, to end analphabetism that renders blind to the world of images and deaf to the world of sounds, to teach them to inhabit this world in which they have been inserted and not to make them strangers, these are the functions incumbent on la culture populaire.”\(^\text{14}\) As minister of culture, Malraux came to draw heavily on the animators who had come out of the popular culture movement, and he in fact recruited several of these cultural activists to head Maisons de la Culture.\(^\text{15}\)

Malraux’s cultural policy—and its particular implementation in the Maisons de la Culture—to some extent mirrored convictions espoused in his seminal 1947 essay “Musée Imaginaire.” Malraux understood that his was an age defined by mechanical reproduction. He saw an opportunity to make technologies of mass cultural dissemination servile to high cultural ends. Contrary to other accounts of auratic loss

\(^\text{13}\) My translation from French from January 1946 “Manifeste de Peuple et Culture.” Quoted in Cacérès, Histoire de l’Éducation Populaire, 159.

\(^\text{14}\) My translation from French of Paul Lengrand’s 1962 “Assemblée Générale de Peuple et Culture” in Ibid., 185.

\(^\text{15}\) Rigby, Popular culture in modern France, 44.
In an age of France’s waning global and colonial political influence, the culture of France was regarded as a powerful ideological instrument for uniting disparate generations, regions and classes. A lineage—or perhaps “archive” is the more appropriate term—of images had the capacity, not only to embody, but also to bolster a shared history and common values. As modern cathedrals of sorts, they would provide a secularized public with safe havens from the temptations of a US-generated consumer culture.

\[16\] Hal Foster compares counterpoises Malraux with Walter Benjamin and writes: “For Malraux mechanical reproduction not only erodes originality; it can also locate it, even construct it. And though the reproduced art work loses some of its properties as an object, by the same token it gains other properties, such as ‘the utmost significance as to style.’ In short, where Benjamin saw a definitive rupture of the museum forced by mechanical reproduction, Malraux saw its indefinite expansion.” In Design and Crime, and Other Diatribes (London: Verso, 2003), 77-78.

\[17\] While Malraux in his youth was a vocal critic of imperialism, in his ministerial position he adopted the conservative approach of extending the diffusion of high French culture beyond the country’s borders. See, Herman Lebovics, Mona Lisa’s Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
There are obvious parallels between Hirschhorn’s *MPA* and earlier cultural policies. Here, as in 1959, we encounter a building, situated at a distance from the country’s capital. Both the *Maisons de la Culture* as well as the *Precarious Museum* have as their stated goal: not to explore the cultural particularities of their regional locale, but precisely to bring masterpieces validated from a position of cultural centrality to regional outliers and to an audience to whom they have remained largely unknown. Interestingly, Hirschhorn’s venture also seems to involve features of the antecedent popular culture movement, when the task of bringing culture “to the people” was individually orchestrated rather than institutionally implemented. For does Hirschhorn not precisely resurrect the role of the cultural animator or militant, singularly bringing artwork “to the people” and letting the success or failure of this mission rest on his capacity to sufficiently connect with these citizen-neighbors that are, for the most part, of a different class and educational background than his own? And, does the artist’s faith in art’s ability to ameliorate life, and its capacity to come to life in the eye and mind of the beholder, regardless of educational background, not also echo prior humanist convictions? Finally, do some aspects of Hirschhorn’s project not in fact appear even more technologically retrograde than the relative progressivism of Malraux? While Malraux embraced the advances of mechanical reproduction of his time, Hirschhorn instead resurrects the museum as shrine, seemingly devoted to a cult of authenticity. In some respects, Hirschhorn’s museum serves to concretize the contradictions of Malraux’s vision. The imagined global infinity of images were contradictorily bracketed by national boundaries and confined
by museal ordering. It seems apt to test Hirschhorn’s program that, not so much represents an idea of Mankind, as an ensemble of masculine creativity. As Douglas Crimp wrote: “Art as ontological essence, created not by men in their historical contingencies, but by Man in his very being. This is the comforting ‘knowledge’ to which the *Museum Without Walls* gives testimony. And concomitantly, it is the deception to which art history, a discipline now thoroughly professionalized, is most deeply, if often unconsciously, committed.” In almost every way, Hirschhorn’s project conforms, rather than attempts to depart from the normative artistic canon and its institutional enclosures. Considering the similarities with ideologies and policies past and contested, how are we to understand Hirschhorn’s project? What is the motivation for, and effect of, resuscitating these retrograde techniques in a contemporary moment? And finally, can a gesture, so similar in scope, produce effects other than a masculine ideal of cultural cohesion, orchestrated from above and achieved through a close encounter with a work of art?

It could be argued that Hirschhorn’s program of a few artworks and clusters of pieces plucked from the history of art conforms to the story of adjudicated modern masterpieces. However, the project seems marked by disjuncture. Although Hirschhorn’s argumentation frequently reverts to the affective registers of love and affection, one is tempted to ask: why precisely these and not others? In his book

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Farewell to an Idea, T. J. Clark takes on the history of modernism. Foregoing a contiguous telling, he examines seven artworks or clusters of pieces, plucked, as were Hirschhorn’s, from the history of art without regard for continuities of time and place (Jacques-Louis David, Camille Pissaro, Kasimir Malevitch, El Lissitsky, Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock). For Clark, modernism parallels the histories of socialism and Marxism—trajectories that both ended, hence his farewell, with the fall of the wall. He considers modernism as a set of operations that sought to negate the social world that produced it. Each artwork signifies a crisis of representation in which the artists struggled to image collectivity and social realities without submitting to the bourgeois traditions of narrative illusionism. The ultimately irreconcilable paradox was that modernism, and abstract painting in particular, dreamt of an “immediacy” of sensation that would counter capitalist experience with a production of meaning based on the most pared down of visual signs: “a marvelous shuttling between a fantasy of cold artifice and an answering one of immediacy and being in the world.” Clark introduces his project with the words: “I wanted to imagine modernism unearthed by some future archaeologist, in the form of a handful of disconnected pieces left over from a holocaust that had utterly wiped out the pieces’ context.” This holocaust is modernity, which in Clark’s vocabulary means modernization, the driving force of capitalism’s economic, social and political

20 Ibid., 253, 9-10.
21 Ibid., 1.
expansion. Modernism is from the contemporary vantage point unreadable, incipient representations of a prophesied modernity that now surrounds us.

Clark’s unearthing of modernism’s artifacts seems evocative of Hirschhorn’s disjointed museology. Each chosen artist and artwork in Hirschhorn’s project exemplifies the effort of representing a contemporaneous social reality, although not necessarily one so devoted to socialist ideals as in Clark’s exhumations. And despite the fact that Hirschhorn’s project included some efforts of nurturing readability, the act of placing these abstractions of past social realities in a contemporary social situation marked by a failure to produce socialist collectivities, ultimately, it seems, is a project permeated by impenetrable unreadability. Although infused with similar dreams of immediacy, the project seems predisposed to fall short of its most fundamental aim.

3.3 Representing Diversity

From a contemporary vantage point, it is especially the events of May ‘68, and the post-structuralism that followed in its wake, that make Hirschhorn’s project seem somewhat quaint. During that now famed month, fifties’ cultural policy, and the Maisons de la Culture in particular, came under vicious attack. The sorties came from several fronts. Sartre and Marxist critics argued that the universalist, humanist values of “Culture” served to mask working class labor conditions. The Situationists and other “enragés” declared that the Maisons de la Culture “had become the alibi for the
regime,” even “supermarkets of culture.”\textsuperscript{22} The institutions of art were accused of merely disseminating bourgeois values and thereby enforcing a culture that was considered complicit with the oppressive domination of mass culture. In addition, sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu argued that the assumption that people of all classes would intuitively and without specialized education understand a work of art was simply naïve. He specifically criticized the popular culture movement’s animators: “As if they believed that it is only the physical inaccessibility of the paintings that prevents the great majority of people from wanting to see them, and savor them. Those in charge of galleries and the ‘animateurs’ seem to think that if one cannot bring the people to the works, then it is enough to take the works to the people.” \textsuperscript{23}

The assault on these regional centers of culture resulted in a dramatic event when the directors of the \textit{Maisons de la Culture} — many of whom had themselves come out of a movement to democratize culture — came together to produce a striking document of auto-critique. “The mere ‘diffusion’ of works of art,” it read, “even when supplemented by a little ‘animation’ has come to seem less and less capable of producing a real encounter between these works and the vast numbers of men and women who are struggling with all their might to survive in society, but who, in many respects remain excluded from it (…) Whatever the purity of our intentions, in reality our attitude appears to a considerable number of our fellow citizens to reflect the preference of a privileged few for a culture that is hereditary and particularist — that is

\textsuperscript{22} See, Lebovics, \textit{Mona Lisa’s Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture}, 142-143.  
\textsuperscript{23} Bourdieu, Darbel, and Schnapper, \textit{The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public}, 151.
to say, for a bourgeois culture.”\(^{24}\) The cultural inclusion fraudulently provided via these cultural policies and institutions, it was admitted, only papered over greater, deep-seated political and economic exclusions. In sum, the mere diffusion of cultural masterpieces was not sufficient.

As mentioned previously, French welfare state history diverges from those of other countries on a number of fronts. Of particular significance for this discussion is the fact that a socialist president was elected at a time when the tide in most European countries was shifting to the right. While the Swedish labor party was in opposition, the German SPD time in office was ending, and the British Labour party seemed increasingly unelectable, Francois Mitterand won a striking victory. The French cultural policy of the 1980s under Mitterand and his Minister of Culture, Jacques Lang, sought to take the critiques of the 60s and 70s to heart. Yet Malraux’s cultural policies were not regarded as total failures; their flaws were seen to be pedagogical rather than structural in nature. Mitterand doubled the arts budget in 1982, from 3 billion to 6 billion francs,\(^{25}\) and initiated a policy scheme that involved the establishment of the *Fonds Regionaux d’art Contemporain* (or *FRAC*)—regional centers of art, much like the *Maisons de la Culture*—but this time these local institutions were devoted to local, not national, culture.\(^{26}\) As Rebecca DeRoo has

\(^{26}\) The FRACs were paired with funding schemes that increasingly supported regional productions instead of mainly supporting creations within the capital. This new support structure met much opposition from both the left and the right.
argued, a policy of dispersion was coupled with an ethics of representation in an attempt to include new audiences and histories (women and working classes in particular). Under Lang, the state definition of culture was broadened to *cultures*, including also popular music and graffiti. Private images and everyday objects, de Roo argues, increasingly found their way to museological display. However, as she notes, this new approach still assumed a shared point of identification rather than constituting a proper embrace of difference that would allow tensions and disaccords to shine through. Thus this new policy sat uneasily between the representation of specific identificatory groups and the accessibility to all. The museum that best embodies the incorporation of '68 critiques is, for DeRoo, the Pompidou Center which opened its doors in 1977. Situated in a working class neighborhood, its design overtly opened the art institutional enclosure to the street. The museum’s program sought to incorporate popular culture and, among other innovations, included a varied schedule of activities, a café and a store.

Learning from the critiques of '68—and recognizing the subsequent attempt at correcting past policy blunders—how should we understand Hirschhorn’s contemporary museum that peculiarly resurrects pre-'68 cultural strategies? Does his reliance on hegemonically arbitered masterpieces not equally displace, even deny, the

real conditions of the banlieue’s social, political and economic exclusion? Moreover, does it also not smooth over difference by continuously insisting on a shared point of identification? How does his museum fall on DeRoo’s spectrum from representing particular groups to being accessible to all? To help find answers to these questions, I will refer to one of the prominent voices of the MPA, Yvane Chapuis, Director of the Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, who invited Hirschhorn and secured the necessary outside institutional support and funding for the museum. In a letter describing the MPA, she writes:

This project is grounded on the love of art and the desire to share it with people who for essentially social, economic and cultural reasons do not have access to it. Thus, in displacing major artworks to a cité, Thomas Hirschhorn intends (...) to illustrate that art is a question that can concern every individual. The MPA hereby distinguishes itself from the democratization of culture as it has been thought in France over the course of the last twenty years. It is in fact not a question of attracting the biggest number to the museum, thinking that the museum can constitute a social bond, but to make art exist beyond the spaces that are consecrated for it in order to act in a localized fashion (...).  

This statement is intriguing since it recalls several of the cultural policy discourses mentioned previously. The displacement of major artworks to a low-income neighborhood and its insistence that art can address and be understood by everyone is reminiscent of aspirations of the popular culture movement and its later formalization under the auspices of Malraux. Her mention of people who are excluded socially and economically from the domains of culture is reminiscent of the mea culpa

29 Letter from Yvane Chapuis, the codirector of the Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, to Isabelle Condemine, the responsible of the Mission Mécénat de la Caisse des dépôts et consignations. In Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, Thomas Hirschhorn, Musée précaire Albinet, January 13, 2004.
of the directors of the *Maisons de la Culture*. However, these initial parallels give way to an instance of misrecognition, since “democratization of culture”—a phrase so familiar to fifties and sixties cultural policy discourse—denotes something very different from the historical usages previously discussed. For Chapuis the term is an articulation belonging to a much later moment. Over the course of the past twenty years, the otherwise positively encoded “democratization of culture” has become synonymous with the later development of the museum as entertainment complex—an institution that attempts to entice as many people as possible to cross its threshold. Democratization now means demagoguery, and popular culture has been voided of political potential, abbreviated to a mere “pop.” Hirshhorn’s project is considered as a response to this recent institutional history and its libratory potential, then, lies in the uncoupling of artworks from their reified institutional housing.\(^30\) To this extent, Chapuis disregards the long history of cultural policy in France and sees the *MPA* as a new museum without walls that seeks out viewers on a singular and localized level, thereby countering the domination of a massified and undifferentiating commercial culture.

As previously described, while the *MPA* on the outside looked nothing like a traditional art museum, the inside in fact was not much different from what one might encounter in any modern art museum in Paris. Primarily for reasons of preservation

\(^30\) Chapuis continues to write that Hirshhorn’s museum “offers to place at a distance the surrounding world” and a contemporary culture that “refuses the right of certain people to glimpse other values than those conveyed by commercial culture, which cracks down all the more severely in certain areas where art is completely marginalized.” Ibid.
and security, the precarious museum was for the most part yet another climate-controlled, heavily guarded white cube. Furthermore, its program of talks, workshops, children’s activities and museum café invite comparisons with the contemporary museum as entertainment and “experience” complex. Reading over the correspondences that preceded this project, one also notes the desire expressed by museum officials in Paris, such as the director of the Pompidou, “to reach publics often left at the margins of our activities.” One wonders if this director’s interest in Hirschhorn’s project was born out of a truly democratic conviction, a Malrauxian desire for spreading “la patrimonie,” or a corporate logic of forging new markets and spreading the museum brand. If the latter is true, Hirschhorn’s project does not, as Chapuis hoped, counter current market-driven museum culture but instead merely expands its reach—a Pompidou Albinet akin to the Guggenheim Bilbao…

Thatcher-style neoliberalism, radical individualism and the idealization of the market were for a long time poorly received in mainstream French political debate. Only with the election of Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 did the neoliberal turn—including the familiar reductions of labor rights and tax cuts to the wealthiest—properly arrive in

32 Letter from Alfred Pacquement, Director of the Musée National d’Art Moderne, to Bruno Racine, President of the Musée National d’Art Moderne. Ibid., April 25, 2003.
33 As neoliberal conservatism was gaining traction in most right-of-center European parties, the right in France argued, not for a scaling back of welfare programs, but for a nationalist agenda of social provision.
France. However, while it could be argued that the neoliberal reworking of the welfare state was delayed in France, its economic difficulties coincided with those of the rest of Europe. From the end of the war until the oil shock, France was marked by strong economic growth and healthy tax revenues that funded generous social insurance and welfare programs. By contrast, the last decades of last millennium were characterized by low economic growth, rising unemployment and budget deficits. The gradual orientation of the state toward the market—which was part of the French welfare model since its very inception—was therefore set in place decades before Sarkozy’s victory. In short, 2004 is indeed at a distant remove from eras that fostered movements for popular culture and state-sponsored Maisons de la Culture. The call for bringing as many people as possible into the museum is no longer a progressive end in itself, nor has it proved necessarily to be democratic. Popular culture, once considered a tool of oppression, has become the all-inclusive lingua franca that museums use to sell tickets and procure sponsorships. The notion of a common humanity, so pervasive in cultural policies past, has been replaced by the undifferentiated interpolation of mass media and entertainment. It is in this cultural policy environment that Hirschhorn dusts off a few old masterpieces and puts them on

35 From the end of the war until the oil shock, France was marked by strong economic growth and tax revenues that funded a generous social insurance and welfare programs. By contrast, the last decades of the past millennium were characterized by low economic growth, rising unemployment and budget deficits.
36 While in government during the late ‘90s, Lionel Jospin initiated widespread privatizations. This process was continued under the presidency of Jacques Chirac.
restricted display. Instead of offering to better represent the population within it, as subsequent policies have attempted, this museum solely insists on the address of a specific, local audience, not a generalized public-turned-market. Instead of seeking to exhibit difference, so to speak, it presents the same to “difference”—the marginalized, large immigrant populations of France. Thus, the star-studded selection of works, and the massive budget that backed it, merely served to further emphasize the gravity of this address.

3.4 Conjuring Past Universals

In conjunction with the temporary museum, Hirschhorn repeatedly referred to past declarations of modernism’s universal address. While the artist in some respects leans on the constructivist conception of the revolutionary potentiality of art, humanist cultural policies of the early French welfare state, far from revolutionary, provide a more relevant point of historical reference for the project. Whether derived from revolutionary artistic ambitions or the compromise socialism of the welfare state, the memory of socialist universals formed a strong backdrop to the Musée Précaire. In the immediate context, the mayoral and city council posts of Aubervilliers are continuously dominated by socialist and communist party members.37 These historical political affiliations were apparent also in the language of the cultural workers of Aubervilliers who spoke of a project “with the ambition of addressing everyone” in

public space, “understood in the broadest sense, in all its geographical social and human dimensions.” This unifying vision of people and the spaces they inhabit clearly is imbued with the socialist ideals, but it also echoes the humanist convictions mentioned previously. In addition, the museum’s setting, in the green space of a social housing unit (or HLM, habitation à loyer modéré), served as another reminder of the fraught history of past unifying visions. The chosen site is characteristic of the Aubervilliers landscape, where, according to a 1999 census, 42 percent of the population lives in social sector housing.

The clusters of high-rise towers, or grands ensembles, in Aubervilliers are distant cousins of the Ville Radieuse and Le Corbusier’s functionalist urban visions. The architect’s ideas had been met with skepticism prior to the World War II, but became widely influential in the decades following its end. The “Athens Charter,” penned in conjunction with the International Congress on Modern Architecture in 1943, provided a manual of sorts for creating new cities, composed of “machines for living,” at a remove from old city centers. The complex processes of filtration from vision to construction and international dogma to national policy no doubt influenced the ubiquitous construction of grands ensembles in the post-war period in France, as

39 Harvard University, “Community Based Development.”
part of the government’s belated response to the catastrophic housing crisis. The new dwellings that were built in parallel rows on cheap agricultural land played a central part in the founding of the French welfare state, pronounced as vast improvements on pre-war working class housing stock. The majority of Aubervilliers’ housing blocks were constructed during the 1950s. During subsequent decades they were conjoined with others as part of De Gaulle’s 1965 master plan for Paris, which involved creating new centers in preexisting suburbs as well as entirely new towns. By 1960, the French were building more than three hundred thousand housing units per year, more than four times the number constructed just ten years prior. While the provision of public housing for workers and lower-middle classes had been a popular selling point for De Gaulle, by the late ‘60s, inhabitants of public housing, increasingly dissatisfied with poor quality housing stock, mounting crime and the absence of shops and green space,

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largely voted in support of socialist and communist candidates.\textsuperscript{44} The HLMs of Aubervilliers, as in the rest of France, were mostly inhabited by middle-class and working-class people of French origin until the 1970s, when improved living standards enabled them to move into single-family homes. It was during the 1970s that immigrants increasingly took up residence in the grands ensembles.\textsuperscript{45}

Since the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Aubervilliers and neighboring St. Denis have been marked by waves of immigration. First nicknamed “Little Spain,” the area was dominated by slums inhabited primarily by Spanish workers. The housing situation for immigrants notoriously worsened in the post-war period as laborers were brought in from France’s African colonies. In 1966, Île-de-France had 120 shantytowns, accounting for 50,000 people.\textsuperscript{46} On December 31, 1969, five African immigrants died in an Aubervilliers slum blaze, causing public outcry and a visit by the Prime Minister. As a reaction to the deaths, the 1970 Vivien law was passed, initiating an extensive scheme of slum clearances.\textsuperscript{47} In fact, Landy, the section of Aubervilliers in which the Musée Précaire was erected, was one of the last to be cleared, in 1972. The once Nouvelles Villes, now housing marginalized immigrant and unemployed populations, never obtained the independence that De Gaulle had advocated. Instead of providing

\textsuperscript{44} This discontentment is largely explained for the nationwide defeats of Gaullist candidates in the 1973 elections. Due to their growing unpopularity, Pompidou scrapped their construction altogether.
\textsuperscript{45} Open Societies Institute. EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, Muslims in the EU: Cities Report, France, 2007.
jobs for its citizens, they exist as enclosures segregated from the urban centers. The now-crumbling new cities exist only for the inhabitants of housing blocks who, if employed, commute to the historic urban centers that persist as the site of power. The *grands ensembles*, which continue to house five million French citizens, are now characterized as immigrant ghettos in the French media, despite having begun as domiciles from which non-natives were excluded. Their history, and the near example of Aubervilliers, reveals how grand welfare schemes were by no means holistically inclusive. Public housing, like national culture, left many out. The modernist housing block and the modern art museum are brought into juxtaposition with the *Musée Précaire*, and it is around their inclusions and exclusions that the project turns. While emerging as inclusive residences, the *grands ensembles* wound up as excluding enclosures. As modern housing projects contained spatially, the modern museum excluded ideologically. In a curious gesture, the artist brings in one fraught

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48 Since 1973, and particularly during the 1980s, French unemployment increased steadily, making the unemployment rate among the highest in the OECD. The unemployed in France are composed of a disproportionate number of immigrants and the poorly educated. Those born into these disadvantaged ranks are unlikely to leave them. Béland and Hansen, “Reforming the French Welfare State: Solidarity, Social Exclusion and the Three Crises of Citizenship,” 54.

49 In the early history of the *grands ensembles*, immigrants were often placed on interminable waiting lists. When more than half a million immigrant laborers were regularized in France between 1962 and 1966, most of them crowded into shantytowns or strictly supervised hotels. After the *Vivien* law, a task force was set up to tackle the problem of the shantytowns. Before being relocated to the housing blocks, immigrants were housed in dormitories or *cités de transit*. They served as observational quarters for social workers to evaluate the “Frenchness” of immigrant families. After an observation period, which included house calls and scrutiny of domestic skills, it was determined whether families were eligible for social housing. Even then, the government imposed a fifteen percent tolerance threshold in each of the *grands ensembles*. Plouin, “Chicken Coops and Machines of Interminable Errors: A History of the Grands Ensembles in Parisian Suburbs,” 52-53.
modernist construction to compensate for the failings of another. The question is whether it is possible to remedy ideological exclusion by means of spatial inclusivity?

Hirschhorn’s temporary construction of the *Musée Précaire* brings to mind another artist-as-museum director, Marcel Broodthaers, and his various also-temporary modern art museums. The one-year installation of his 1968 *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXième Siècle* in his Brussels apartment consisted largely of shipping crates stenciled with warning signs, such as “fragile” and “handle with care.” These outsized containers were a poor match for the artwork on display: postcard reproductions of 19th-century French paintings. The museum was inaugurated with a speech from a real museum director; windows were inscribed with the words “museum” and doors, labeled as entrances to galleries, let to none. In an accompanying press release, Broodthaers wrote that the exhibition “shared a character connected to the events of 1968.” As discussed in the previous chapter, Broodthaers’ museum was one that probed the role of the museum and art in society. Indeed, it questioned the political efficacy of art overall in light of the uprisings of that year: “It is also important to experience whether the fictitious museum sheds new light on the mechanisms of art, artistic life and society,” he said. Such thoughts were evidently influenced by the work of theorists like Althusser which examined the power of institutions as authorial apparatuses that shape subjectivity.

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52 My translation, from 1972 conversation with Johannes Cladders in Broodthaers, Marcel Broodthaers, 95.
Reminiscent also of Foucault’s institutional analysis, Broodthaers equated the museum with the hospital and the prison. The *Musée d’Art Moderne* and its sub-department, *Département des Aigles*, was exhibited in various guises until 1972. Of particular relevance, is one of the museum’s latter iterations, the *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, der Adler vom Oligozan bis Heute* (*Museum of Modern Art, Eagle Department, Figures Section, The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present*) at the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf in 1972. The installation consisted of nearly 300 objects that all bore some relationship to eagles: iconographically, indexically as well as symbolically. Commercial objects, ancient artifacts and esteemed artworks were borrowed from 43 real museums, private collections and dealers: West Berlin’s Antiquities Museum; the Museum of Islamic Art; the Museum of Applied Art; Frankfurt’s Federal Postal Museum; the Ingres Museum in Montauban; the Museum of the American Indian in New York; Vienna’s Museum of Military History; the British Museum, etc. Apart from the persistence of a common theme, the exhibition dismembered the habitual procedures of museal categorization; no history was traced and no overarching meaning was gleaned from the ensemble of things. Each object was numbered and coupled with the statement “This is not a work,” in German, French and English. Coupling Duchamp’s conferral of art status to random things with Magritte’s textual negation of representation, the statement indicated a ubiquitous leveling. This leveling, for some objects, in fact constituted a

53 Broodthaers, *Marcel Broodthaers*.
54 Borgemeister, “Sections des Figures: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present,” 137.
reversal of Duchampian principles, since this idiosyncratic collection involved borrowing famous paintings by artists like Ingres, Magritte and Richter—now related unspectacularly with a plastic kite, cigars, wine bottles, t-shirts and stamps from the Third Reich. The image and symbol of the eagle, traversing all these objects, recalls Malraux’s fantasized museum: “In our Museum Without Walls, picture, fresco, miniature, and stained-glass window seem of one and the same family. For all alike-miniatures, frescoes, stained glass, tapestries, Scythian plagues, pictures, Greek vase paintings, ‘details’ and even statuary have become ‘color-plates.’ In the process they have lost their properties as objects; but, by the same token, they have gained something: the utmost significance as to style that they can possibly acquire.” While Malraux’s asserted that photographic reproduction afforded stylistic equations between objects separated in time and place, Broodthaers reveals the absurdity of this task by precisely using actual things for a one-liner investigation of the ideological implications of a symbolic image. The museum—perpetually coupled with the image of the eagle, and a world history of its associations with power—was thus consistently cast as an institution of authority. Broodthaers’ museum therefore performed the curious operation of, on the one hand, illustrating that the modern art museum has the capacity to render all things art, while simultaneously denying this process by stating in the instance of every object that it was not.

Broodthaers and Hirschhorn both take up the position as curator, borrowing works from official art museums for inclusion in temporary modern art museums of their own devices. All similitude ends there. Broodthaers’ museum was marked by structuralist and poststructuralist theory and ideas of inevitable institutionalization, authorial power as well as the luxury status of the artwork. This stance prohibited him from constructing a real museum as this would only perpetuate prevailing systems. His was thus intended as a from-the-outset flawed simulacrum; a museum with doors that led nowhere; an institution of persistent questioning. In its five years of spotty exhibition, the museum existed mainly as a figment of an ideological idea. Hirschhorn’s project, by contrast, seems like a willed subjection to the forces of institutionalization. The ongoing relationship with various institutions of the state, from the federal to local level, was initiated in order to erect finally a legitimated institution. The insincerity of Broodthaers is sharply contrasted by Hirschhorn’s unrelenting sincerity. While Broodthaers’ museum in all its iterations was a sustained parody of the auratic original, Hirschhorn’s museum bestows superpowers upon the modernist artwork.

The falling away of ideological critique from Broodthaers’ to Hirschhorn’s modern art museum is, I think, symptomatic of a broader shift in contemporary art practice in Europe. The motives for this transformation are complicated and merit nuanced consideration. Broodthaers museum, I would propose, conceived of a social

56 Other geographically-specific studies, I suspect, would yield a similar tendency, although this remains beyond the scope of my project.
conception of society, where Ideological apparatuses of the state, such as the museum, hegemonically interpolated its citizen-subjects. Hirschhorn’s museum consisted, in part, of an imagistic recreation of the institutional society Broodthaers set out to critique.

Svetlana Boym has split nostaligia into nostos (home) and algia (longing), arguing for a distinction between “restorative” and “reflective” backward glances.57 Her discussion takes up the quandaries of one historical site in Berlin, namely the debates surrounding the reconstruction of the eighteenth-century Prussian Stadtschloss on the site of the GDR Palast der Republik:58 For Boym, this site is of interest since it problematizes leftist nostalgia for the time before the wall’s fall (while of course also signifying the cultural manifestations of capitalist triumphalism). Restorative nostalgia, represented by the “transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home,” is connected with reactionary sentiments, such as nationalism, fundamentalism, etc. Nostalgia is here remedied by bringing copies of the past into the present. Reflective nostalgia is, by contrast, a recognition of the “impossibility of homecoming” that does not ignore the contradictions of modernity. Rather than banishing it completely, Boym argues that a self-aware form of nostalgia is a useful response to the contemporary moment. It is also necessary in guarding against the dangers of authoritarian projects that frequently reference fixed conceptions of lost origins. Boym’s preferential

58 The castle was badly damaged during WWII allied bombings and was subsequently blown up by the GDR.
nostalgia therefore shies away from technocratic reconstructions in favor of more mentally-lodged reconsiderations.

Applying Boym’s model, Hirschhorn’s reconstruction could be charged as resulting precisely from the technocratic urges of restorative nostalgia. The project’s crude claims of universal address mirror a conception of an audience in equally universal terms. The resurrection of the modern art museum as a past ideal not only is an operation of nostalgia; it also risks being tinged with nationalism and authoritarianism. The project could in fact be accused of relying on a distinctly uncritical form of nostalgia, one blind to the powerful mechanisms of exclusion that this modern structure involved. In this respect, the project echoes Boym’s invocation of the Berlin construction site and socialist nostalgia. The precarious museum seems infused with the desire to reconsider the potential of the state and state culture at a time when both risk extinction. This partially explains why Hirchhorn’s project nostalgically invokes the founding of the cultural program of the French welfare state—a time prior to the voicing of critiques of state, which Broodthaers’ museum contrastingly exemplified.

Hirschhorn’s museum involved a reanimation of an art structure associated with the nation state and the more recent institution of the welfare state. Simultaneously, though, the project seemed closely affiliated with a newer brand of art practice in which the artist, often with financial backing from the state, seeks out local communities that are perceived to constitute a risk to society. Hence the universalizing propensity of the Musée Précaire received pairings with less encompassing,
fragmentary views. Rather than enacting the welfare state institution’s address to the population as a whole, Hirschhorn’s museum was overtly addressed to a small, local community of inhabitants. The project that gestured towards humanist utopianism contraditorily, then, conformed to Bourriaud’s small-scale and temporary microtopias that favor conversational encounters over any aspiration to think big. The dialogue between Hirschhorn and the local inhabitants was also considered at a safe remove from the economic, social and political structures that might complicate the direct transmission from uttered to understood. To reemphasize the difference between this contemporary relational understanding and that of past artistic moments, Broodthaers, when asked whether his museum could be regarded as a place for discussion, responded the following: “Yes, but a discussion of a totally different character. In the sense that this time the debate cannot develop in full liberty. The visitor is interpolated, but he does not take an active part in the discussion. In other words, this does not correspond to what we understand by a discussion.”

For Broodthaers, the museum was considered so powerful a structure as to overpower, indeed impede, all forms of dialogue within it. While this view of structural domination might be too heavy-handed, Hirschhorn’s project seemed to almost entirely ignore such power

59 Miwon Kwon addresses the difficulties of artists addressing local communities as either a “sited insider” or an “unsited outsider.” This project is difficult to align with either category, since Hirschhorn as a white artist, despite living and working in the area, differs from the project’s immigrant participants. Nevertheless, the project recalls Kwon’s problematization of the artist as “sited insider” who “engages in an ongoing process of describing and enacting his/her alliance and commitment, constructing and maintaining a dual identity (as artist here, as community member/representative there.” One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, 135-136.

60 Translated from French from discussion with Jurgen Harten and Katharina Schmidt in Broodtheurs lui-meme in Broodthaers, Marcel Broodthaers par Lui-Même, 83.
dynamics. In a view that correlates with Bourriaud’s conceptions, Hirschhorn’s notion of unmediated face-to-face dialogue is as uninhibited by interpersonal difference as it is unencumbered by institutional power structures.

To return to one of my arguments in the previous chapter: despite the first impression of reenacting a social past, Hirschhorn’s museum risks approximating the neoliberal cultural project, which conceives of the population as splintered into disparate communities; and which seeks to remedy the “exclusion” of certain groups with locally-deployed projects. So, instead of bringing inclusion, Hirschhorn’s efforts served to emphasize the prevailing mechanisms of exclusion. Highlighting the contradiction of such gestures is the fact that, in the neoliberal state, small-scale provision is frequently coupled with aggressive state responses to “communities” that are cast as problem zones. The government crackdown on the cités before, during and after the riots of October, 2005, sixteen months after Hirschhorn’s museum’s dismantling, provides one French example of the aforementioned Anglo-Saxon theorization. Thus the role of the state, characteristic of neoliberalism, was here primarily one of force rather than welfare, as a primary root of the protests—namely

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61 The riots were first sparked when two teenagers were electrocuted after allegedly fleeing the police. The police subsequently denied that such a chase had taken place. In response to the violence, the government, under the supervision of then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, authorized a range of emergency powers (constituting the first implementation in mainland France of a law that was passed in 1955 to combat unrest in Algeria during the war of independence). These included allowing local authorities to impose curfews, letting police perform raids without warrants and banning gatherings. Prior to his Presidency, Sarkozy was known for his harsh methods in the banlieues. He became known for his notorious crack-down on illegal immigration, including the controversial practice of sending police into schools to arrest and deport students without citizen papers. See, for instance, “Police, Immigration, Laïcité: Les Projets de Sarkozy,” Le Monde, October 25, 2005; “Nicolas Sarkozy Fixe un Objectif de 25,000 Immigrés en Situation IrrégulièrExpulsés en 2006,” Le Monde, November 29, 2005.
the chronic unemployment within the banlieues—was trumped by a rhetoric of unruly youths sited in unmanageable communities. Then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy famously named the youths “racaille” (variously translated scum or rabble) and “voyoux” (thugs or punks), necessitating “pressure-hosing” of the cités, on “behalf of good people who want their peace.” He also stated: “Clearly, if the criminals and thugs do not like our security policy, the French support it.”

Interestingly, while “exclusion” in Britain was famously taken up by New Labour, the term in France has mainly figured among socialist politicians and leftist intellectuals. During the socialist government of the late ‘90s, for example, reform aimed at expanding coverage was proposed under the banner of “la loi de lutte contre les exclusions” (the law of the fight against exclusion). As Daniel Béland and Randall Hansen have pointed out, l’exclusion and les exclus have additionally been used by French intellectuals to describe the crisis of unemployment in France since the 1970s. Since social insurance in France is largely linked to employment, increasing sectors of the population, large percentages of which are immigrants, are deprived of basic securities. Béland and Hansen argue that the growing number of people that are more

or less permanently outside the labor market has led to a crisis in French republican thought, since participation, in this tradition, is considered crucial to citizenship. In other words, growing sectors of the population in France are doubly excluded: from the labor market and thereby also from being considered as proper citizens. In addition to these factors, racism of course adds a third barrier to the segregation of the banlieues’ inhabitants.

Adding to the preexisting crisis of unemployment in France is the fact that employment itself has become increasingly unstable. As previously discussed, Boltanski and Chiapello—in a French analysis that suggested an international predicament—outlined how capitalism increasingly relies on a flexible labor force. Consequently, not only is work increasingly hard to get, the securities provided by this work are on the wane. This situation is made only direr when the state also fails to provide benefits. Several authors have in fact precisely used the term “precarious” to refer to the subjects of neoliberal capitalism; victims of volatile labor markets, on the one hand, and the simultaneous decrease of social securities on the other. It is not

only the institutions of the welfare state, but also its citizens, that have become increasingly precarious under neoliberalism.

As I have attempted to illustrate, the local siting of art has historically been connected to divergent cultural policy allegiances. Under Malraux, it was the manifestation of national culture on the local level; Under Lang, a similar scheme intended to promote and celebrate local specificity. The first arguably was more the symptom of conservative notions of national cohesion, while the latter made attempts to make this cohesion, if not entirely open to difference, than at least tolerant of diversity. The two, I would argue, exemplify the central paradigms of the welfare state’s involvement with culture—and the paradigmatic ways in which cultural policy was conceived to serve society as a whole. While France exhibits the most clear-cut example of these cultural paradigm shifts, variations of these themes can be found in the cultural policies of Europe’s other welfare states as well.\(^\text{65}\) Uniting the conservative policy of cohesion with the socialist one of diversity are the facts that both were orchestrated from a strong position of centrality and that both were clearly influenced by the humanist conviction that culture is universally beneficial. This center from which the welfare state’s other signature programs also emanated had lost its distributory force by the time of the *Musée Précaire*’s arrival in the

Aubervilliers. Hirschhorn’s museum, brimming with universals, in the end appeared void of social and political dimensions. As a cultural policy of dissemination, absent of its social and economic counterparts, it accentuated contemporary ideological efforts to characterize the *banlieus’ grands ensembles* as problem zones without social cause.
Chapter 4: Empowered and Self-Organized: Considering Global Welfare

4.1 Foreigners

“FOREIGNERS, PLEASE DON’T LEAVE US ALONE WITH THE DANES!” A poster with words in black on a bold orange background was pasted throughout three cities in Austria, Sweden and Denmark. In Denmark, the poster was placed throughout Vollsmose, a housing project outside the third-largest Danish city of Odense known for its large immigrant population and often fearfully portrayed in the Danish media as a lawless, violent ghetto. While Hans Haacke’s Reichstag project, first considered, entailed an effort at semiotic enclosure by expanding “the people” to the more encompassing “population” in which non-citizen immigrants, too, could be circumscribed, this poster-statement orchestrated by the Danish artist group Superflex was contrastingly exclusionary. Setting up a sharp binary between the apparently malicious “Danes” and the “Foreigners” (begged for salvation) the utterance was spoken from a panic-stricken third position of impossibility: an anonymous “us” neither foreigner nor Dane—perhaps a group of disaffected nationals? The slogan, situated in a city belonging to a state, and thereby a nation state, evoked a haunting spatial imaginary in which the only remaining people are national citizens, while the foreigners are all in exodus, ostensibly voluntarily and seemingly resolutely.

This 2002 artwork coincided with the growing popularity of the right-wing Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti)—whose “logo” is the Danish flag—which
in November of 2001 enjoyed unprecedented electoral success, advancing to become
the third largest party in Danish politics. The election, mirroring similar developments
in other European countries, signified a clear move to the right, securing the leadership
of the Liberalist party Venstre. It was the biggest electoral loss since 1973 for the
Social Democrats who for first time since 1920 no longer possessed the largest
parliamentary representation. The campaign of the Danish People’s Party centered on
the perceived threat of immigrants within the country’s borders. Superflex’s
exclamation turns populist logic on its head, as here “foreigners,” contrary to prevalent
xenophobic rhetoric, becomes the privileged term. The artistic interpellation addresses
people of non-Danish heritage, living in Denmark, as the foreigners they are construed
to be—as if resigned to the fact that Danish and foreign heritage constitutes an
irreconcilable contradiction of identitarian terms.

Vollsmose, like Hirschhorn’s Albinet, is a suburb defined by its immigrant
population. But Superflex’s piece did not revolve around the intercultural meeting
between a left-wing white artist and an immigrant community. While Hirschhorn
proposed an encounter on equal terms between the artist and his neighbors, with the
artwork as their point of communion, Superflex emphasized that such a rendezvous
cannot take place on level ground. Their piece underscores the idea that immigrant and
native are imbalanced and deeply discursive constructions, accounting for a
disembodied piece that regurgitated mediated, essentializing platitudes. The absurdity
of this nationalist rhetoric was only highlighted by the fact that the posters were
exported to other European nations, without adaptation or translation to suit new
national contexts, thereby inserting naturalized rhetoric in Denmark into another country where identical labeling, albeit with different national markers, might already exist.

The Nordic states are internationally recognized as having the most expansive welfare systems. According to Esping-Andersen, these welfare states are characterized by the principle of universalism: entitlement is based on citizenship, irrespective of income or wealth.\(^1\) These welfare states have further been characterized by high growth rates, a skilled workforce, high public expenditure, official neutrality during times of war, centralized and powerful trade unions (and their close liaisons with political parties) as well as decade-long dominance of social democratic parties. For example, in Sweden, often considered a welfare state *par excellence*, 1976 marked the first year a non-socialist government was elected in 44 years. The particular brand of universalism which forms the basis for the Nordic welfare states, is reliant upon high confidence in the state and a widespread belief that the welfare of the individual is the responsibility of the social collective. It is indicative, for instance, that the words for state (*stat*) and society (*samfund*) often are used synonymously in the Scandinavian languages.

As many welfare historians have argued, the legitimacy of these extensive welfare states was not established overnight on the eve of the Second World War; these systems are the result of centuries of social practices—thereby further

\(^{1}\) Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. 
explicating the variations in welfare systems across Europe. Several recent welfare histories have traced the roots of this Nordic “exceptionalism” to the 16th century, when the Lutheran church established quite expansive poor relief and literacy programs. These scholars argue that the hegemonic Nordic welfare model is firmly rooted in the particular fusion of church and state that has existed in these countries since the reformation. The early collaboration between church and state differs dramatically from the struggles between these two powers that persisted for centuries in much of southern Europe. Welfare historians have furthermore emphasized the distinctive egalitarian social patterns in Scandinavian societies in which peasants, already prior to industrialization, maintained a relatively independent status compared to their counterparts to the south.² Universal social programs were not novel concoctions, but followed closely the examples of 19th century redistributive policies. For example, Denmark became the first country to institute a universal public education act in 1814. Two years later, industrial accident insurance followed. Sweden instituted an old age and disability pension law in 1913. In most cases, though, the flat-rate benefit systems—based on citizenship and independent of means testing—which now distinguish the Nordic welfare schemes, were predominantly post-war constructions (established in Sweden in 1946; Norway in 1957; Denmark in 1964 and Iceland 1965).

The particular stronghold of the welfare systems in the Nordic countries is also frequently attributed to the small size and relative homogeneity of its populations. Contrary to other European nation states, the Nordic countries were not significant colonial powers and thus remained relatively homogenous until the late 1960s when an importation of manual workers was initiated to make up for a labor deficit. In the decades that followed, particularly since the 1980s, populist nationalist rhetoric gained force, characterizing immigrants as a threat to the nation, and to the welfare state as a whole. Immigrants were portrayed as reaping the benefits of a welfare system they had not themselves contributed to constructing. As a result, over the succeeding decades, legislation was passed throughout the Nordic countries, curbing the entitlements of immigrants and making the path to citizenship increasingly difficult. Hence, for the first time, a significant exception was presented to the principle of universalism, as the entitlement inherent in welfare for “all” now only pertained to a select group of nationals.

Marianne Gullestad has argued that the resistance to diversity within the population is not a novel right-wing construction. She claims that this resistance is imbedded within the core principles of the Nordic welfare states. In her view, the Nordic brand of universalism is bound to a particular kind of egalitarianism that is closely tied to homogeneity. She points out that equality in these countries connotes

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“sameness”—accentuated by the fact that *lighed/likhed* in the Nordic languages means equality, but also likeness or sameness. It follows that people have to be more or less the same in order to be considered of equal value. And therefore, people who are not the same cannot be equal. According to this view, Nordic exceptionalism is premised on exclusionism, as the core tenets of the welfare state imply a homogenous conception of national identity—people of a common culture, ancestry and origin—thus integrally denying the inclusion of immigrants from the outset.

In a related account of the normative underpinnings of the welfare state, Lars Bo Kaspersen has argued that this particular state formation is not, as many socialist historians have proposed, the result of negotiations between political parties or economic classes—nor has it arisen from a particular religious discourse. He outlines how external rather than internal factors provided the basis for the Danish welfare state.  

Adopting a Foucauldian line of reasoning, Kaspersen argues that the state is first and foremost intent on its own reproduction. It is thus external threats from other nation states that in this account led to internal centralization in an effort to bind inhabitants to their national territory. Kaspersen constructs a parallel history of external threats intertwined with internal social programs. For example, 19th century civil rights and incipient social programs coincided with threats from Britain and Prussia. In the post-war period, the consolidation of the welfare state was, in his view, a response to the fear of the spread of communism, a deal struck between the Social

Democrats and the US.\textsuperscript{5} This decidedly darker version provides further basis for Gullestad’s view that the welfare state is premised on internal sameness, marking its boundaries against a difference from without.

Paralleling these recent critiques of the Nordic welfare states, several artists have over the past two decades increasingly taken on the relationship of the until recently rather homogenous Scandinavian populations and their uneasy relationship to citizens of foreign heritage. Jens Haaning’s \textit{Turkish Jokes} (1994) and \textit{Arabic Jokes} (1996), for example, were both premised on an inversion of the Nordic principle of inclusion. These pieces, installed in northern European cities, consisted of jokes communicated solely in Turkish or Arabic, the native languages of the majority of Scandinavian immigrants. Also written on posters or spoken via loudspeakers these works engendered a public space similarly marked by separation in which the address of one group was tied to the exclusion of another. Like Haaning’s jokes, Superflex’s \textit{Foreigners} seems to concur with Gullestad’s analysis. The piece establishes two unified groups: the Danes—portrayed as a homogenous whole, as is common in right-wing political rhetoric and, increasingly, mainstream media discourse—are presented as being at irreconcilable odds with another cohesive entity, the foreigners. The piece should also be considered in light of the fact that, in Scandinavia, the word immigrant is often used pejoratively, implicitly denoting working class people from the third world. Right-leaning politicians and the media alike sometimes refer to people of

\footnote{Ibid., 65.}
foreign heritage as immigrants, even if they have lived for the majority of their lives in the country. The immigrant, then, is characterized, not as someone who once entered, but as someone who is linguistically confined to the status of perpetual entry. This predicament is emphasized in the now broadly accepted term “second-generation immigrant,” which further protracts the immigrant status to the generation born and raised in the country. As Superflex’s and Haaning’s works accentuate, immigrants are predetermined to remain forever foreign.

The focus of the rest of the present chapter will mainly be the practice of Superflex. As illustrated above, the group explicitly addresses the presence of immigrants within Denmark, often highlighting the xenophobic and racist undercurrents that persist in Danish political discourse. Works like Foreigners suggest that Danishness gains definition, in fact comes into being, in the encounter with the foreigner. What is particularly interesting about Superflex’s practice is that they acknowledge that this mechanism of mutual identity construction is not simply an operation confined within the country’s borders, between the native population and the country’s immigrants; the construction of Denmark and Danishness also relies heavily on the country’s relationship to other nations.

Superflex, who frequently refer to themselves as a company rather than an artist collective, has carried out several projects in third world countries. For their first major project, the group developed Supergas, an inexpensive natural gas system that converts human and animal waste into energy. The solution was intended for rural inhabitants in specific regions of Africa where firewood is sparse and deforestation is
an imminent threat. In conjunction with the production of the unit, Superflex established an independent public company and a loan program that allowed residents to borrow funds to acquire the unit. Superflex emphasize that their projects, unlike much Scandinavian-based humanitarian aid, are based on independent financing rather than gifts, thus, according to the group, instead of passive recipients, the African inhabitants are active participants in the betterment of their conditions.\(^6\)

Humanitarian and economic aid has always been formulated in terms of giver and receiver. It is always implied that they have to become a little more like us. (...) Usually these approaches don’t work, that’s the whole irony. If you look at the success rate of Danish aid projects, the rate of failure is quite remarkable. (...) But that is never particularly emphasized in the public discourse. Rather, the point is to sustain an understanding that our culture is superior, which is established through public manifestations of aid. It is a power relationship. (...) We have been interested in shooting ourselves in the foot, so to speak. (...) Most developmental aid work repeats age-old colonial patterns. In that way, it is not about Africa but about Denmark, or the West. We thought it would be more ‘straight’ if we were the ones criticized... an implied schizophrenia of sorts.\(^7\)

Superflex’s practice is often included in exhibitions as an example of the benevolent activist artist group whose practice consists of providing help to third world citizens. These accounts often reproduce the popular discourse on humanitarian aid by conveying the act of giving from the first to the third world as a unanimously good thing, thereby ignoring the implicit power relationships involved. Contrary to

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\(^6\) The project was in part influenced by the Nobel Prize-winning micro-loan program, Grameen Bank, developed by Mohammad Yunus in Bangladesh, which lent small amounts to women under the poverty level.

\(^7\) All quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from interviews conducted with Rasmus Nielsen of Superflex during the summer of 2004. Transcribed and translated from Danish.
these facile descriptions, it is clear that Superflex are intent on exacerbating this very problem, offering up projects that insert themselves into the messiness that is humanitarian assistance. *Supergas* established a working method that the group has since continued in several other projects: Superflex goes to a specific location, often one marginalized by the forces of capitalism and colonialization, where they carry out an action or intervention. These exterior locations and activities are subsequently brought back for representation within art institutions, where objects, photographs, and diagrams of the activity are displayed. In the case of *Supergas*, the orange dome structure was accompanied by a range of explanatory images and diagrams that would be familiar to Scandinavian audiences in their similitude to the visual language common to national foreign aid programs. Photographs of the unit’s installation and use included Superflex—three white men clad in safari-like garb—installing the dome in proximity to happy African villagers. In a similar vein, diagrams illustrated how the input of animal feces, with the intervention of the orange dome, led to energy output for cooking and other household practices. According to Superflex, this type of visual language, produced expressly for the exhibition setting, is meant to over-exaggerate a predominant form of representation found in Danish aid organization brochures, instructional materials for schools, etc.

Denmark is one of the countries that contributes the highest ODA (Official Development Assistance) in relation to its GNI (Gross National Income), ranking third
worldwide in 2005, according to OECD. Superflex have contended that the ways in which this help is distributed and represented have never been properly questioned or evaluated. Rather, humanitarian aid has come to play a defining role in the public image of Denmark, extending the principles of universalism beyond the limits of the national territory. This self-perception, according to the artists, is internalized very early on as a component in the standardized school curriculum. Superflex engages in a sustained investigation and critique of the European nation state’s values and preconceptions, continually attempting to lay bare how it is, and arguably always has been, defined in opposition to outsiders, whether internal or external. As we have seen, the group has taken on the hostile attitude towards immigrants within the country’s borders. The other major issue tackled by their practice, the administering of foreign aid globally, should also be understood in its paradoxical relationship to the former.

In my view, Superflex’s practice is firmly rooted in the Nordic welfare state and addresses the so-called crisis which has hit the welfare state since the 1980s, and that their critique, therefore, must be considered within this local context. In effect, Superflex’s practice can be interpreted as enacting contradictions within contemporary welfare states. Assuming an unclear identity, between NGO, corporation and small activist entity, the group, I would argue, continually pinpoints the role of the wealthy European welfare state in a globalized world, addressing the complex interplay of

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8 See, OECD, “ODA Data for 2005,” http://www.oecd.org/document/7/0,2340,en_2649_201185_35397703_1_1_1,00.html.
9 This analysis, then, also serves as an account of why their projects can be seen as problematic when travelling the world for international art exhibitions.
national identity, international relations and market forces, which increasingly has come to define it. Superflex’s practice engenders the hands-on performance of social services and redistributionist agendas familiar to collectivist welfare states. Mirroring the ambivalence of the contemporary European welfare state vis-à-vis third world countries, however, social agendas are never absent of an economic dimension. One of the main practices of Danida, the primary foreign aid NGO in Denmark, for example, involves commissioning Danish companies to carry out aid projects in the third world.\textsuperscript{10} Clearly referencing this prevalent form of public-private partnerships that benefit the donor country financially, \textit{Supergas}, Superflex’s quintessential foreign aid project, was eventually sold to a Thai company, which has continued the production and distribution of the unit. In latter projects Superflex have toyed with the thinning line between state-administered welfare and market logics. The bulk of this chapter will concern a closer analysis of how Superflex’s recent pieces might specifically tackle the heightening conflict between capitalist forces and social responsibilities within present Nordic welfare states.

\textbf{4.2 Branding Social Engagement}

“We have always been oriented towards the market. We want our projects to be able to function according to market standards. It is not because we think

\textsuperscript{10} In a related debate, the Danish liberalist government is currently accused of entering the Iraq War and the "Coalition of the Willing" in order to secure contracts for Danish companies.
corporations are particularly sympathetic; it is rather out of an attempt to avoid the giver–receiver relationship established by NGOs (…).” While other European countries have been marked by the partial and, in some cases, quite extensive dismantling of the welfare state system since the 1980s, the Nordic countries underwent more of a compromised restructuring, adopting neoliberal agendas while still maintaining the central pillars of the post-war welfare model.

The Nordic countries have by no means been immune to the economic crises that have hit the world economy, and the European welfare states, since the 1970s, including the global economic downturn of 2008-2009. Denmark suffered from high unemployment in the 1970s as well as chronic deficits. Finland and Sweden underwent dramatic recessions during the 1990s. These economic slumps led to the introduction of means-testing regarding certain benefits for the wealthiest segments of the population. The changes became particularly pronounced during 1990s when, like in much of Europe, right-leaning parties assumed the leading positions in government, thereby ending the decade-long dominance of the Social Democratic parties in Scandinavia.\textsuperscript{11} The new parties and their leaders were clearly marked by these international shifts, particularly the pro-market, deregulatory agendas of Thatcher and Reagan in Britain and the US. In Scandinavia, however, the victories of the Liberalist parties could only be secured by promising to maintain the welfare states—although such guarantees were often coupled with the rhetoric familiar to Thatcherism of

rooting out abuse of the system. In Denmark, for example, Anders Fogh Rasmussen who became the Prime Minister in 2001 (and remained until 2009 when he was appointed as the Secretary General of NATO), had clearly positioned himself in opposition to the Social Democratic welfare state with his 1993 book *Fra socialstat til minimalstat* (from *Social State to Minimal State*). Largely following the trend of New Labour in Britain, the new right-leaning liberalist governments started instituting welfare-to-work programs, greater user financing, decentralization, privatization and an overall reorientation towards the market. With regard to the present discussion, it is also worth noting that in most cases the electoral victories of the liberalist parties in Scandinavia could not have been secured without the collaboration with nationalist parties, running on the familiar European right-wing platform of a hard-line anti-immigrant stance, accompanied by a subdued pro-market economic agenda.\(^\text{12}\)

Within the field of the arts, the shift towards the right in Scandinavia, also closely following British precedents, resulted in dramatic shifts in funding structures, particularly since the end of the 1990s.\(^\text{13}\) The government bodies devoted to individual art forms, which had been established in the 60s, were increasingly brought under the same agency. The Scandinavian countries also all underwent a shift away from

\(^\text{12}\) In a pattern familiar in other European countries, the success of Scandinavian nationalist parties can in part be attributed to the fact that they successfully lured voters who previously supported Social Democratic parties.

\(^\text{13}\) Following closely upon the victory of the Blair government in 1997, the DCMS (Department of Culture, Media and Sport) replaced the previous Department of National Heritage. The new agency emphasized the economic promise of the “Creative Industries” in which Fine Art, Advertising, Design, the Performing Arts, Music Publishing, Publishing, Television and Radio were fused into one.
supporting a living wage for artists towards a grants-based system awarded for specific projects. As some have argued, this resulted in the average quality of life being dramatically lowered for artists, while big-name international artists were increasingly awarded state funding. Another significant new development was the creation of several agencies to foster more interaction between arts and business.

Drawing directly from *Arts and Business* in Great Britain, *NyX forum for kultur og erhverv* (Forum for Culture and Business), established by the liberalist government in 2002 in Denmark, became the most elaborate of such combinations, overtly attempting to cultivate creative alliances in which arts professionals advance creativity in companies.\(^\text{14}\) Partly drawing on US theorizations of the “experience economy”, these initiatives advocated an integration of the visual arts within the greater cultural economy, as arts and entertainment increasingly were regarded as a profit-generating “cultural industry.”

Art institutions throughout Scandinavia are now to a greater extent under the direct influence of ministers who frequently select board members from the fields of law and business, replacing the traditional makeup of arts professionals.\(^\text{15}\) In addition,


\(^{15}\) Most recently, in 2009 the Cultural Minister in Denmark fired the directors and board of *Charlottenborg Kunsthall*, a state-funded museum of contemporary art and installed a new board with appointees from the law and business sectors. See also, Ibid.
these new cultural policies conceived the arts as a powerful tool for branding the nation. Superflex, one of the most internationally recognized artists groups in Denmark, benefited from the shift in funding towards established arts producers. Several of their recent projects, in turn, deliberately dealt with the conflation of art and the national brand.

Superflex’s practice relies upon a constant negotiation between their actions outside the gallery and the representation of these events within an exhibition context. As opposed to some socially-engaged art practices that seek to resist completely the conventions of museum or gallery exhibition—often by limiting the parameters of the piece to the specific time and place of the event or action—Superflex have maintained a practice of performing site-specific interventions and subsequently going back to represent this activity within an art context. Moreover, while several activist or socially-engaged practices have favored more ephemeral activities, such as interventions, actions, or interpersonal relations over the production of a discrete art object, Superflex’s projects mostly revolve around the creation of things. This fixation on objects presents a significant departure from the strategies of subtraction and dematerialization, long advocated as ways of circumventing the commodification of artistic practice. By creating objects, Superflex not only produce an object to be

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16 Some of these practices are discussed in Kester, *Conversation Pieces.*
17 The shift from object-based works to more immaterial practices have been discussed in several recent books. In Nicolas' Bourriaud's writings it is through the locus of "Relational Aesthetics", while it in Miwon Kwon’s recent book takes the form of site-specific interventions and actions. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*; Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity.*
used, they also produce an object to be exhibited—and an object that can potentially be sold. Superflex is an artist collective that produces artworks, but they also repeatedly present themselves as a company that manufactures products. The establishment of Superflex’s corporate guise is concurrent with the Liberalist and neoliberal turn in Danish politics. The objects produced by Superflex, visually pleasing in design and shrouded in marketing hyperbole, appear to satisfy the government’s demands that art be a profit-seeking sector. However, the peculiar nature of Superflex’s things simultaneously presents an obstacle to such effortless consumption. Within the exhibition setting, these objects exist uneasily as aesthetic objects. Their ambivalence is further amplified by the discursive mishmash of language excerpted from humanitarian aid discourse and marketing speak, peppered with references to the aesthetic avant-gardes. While obviously nodding to the long-time cohabitation of art and commerce, and the evident intensification of this relation in recent decades, Superflex’s work seems more invested in examining the effects of market forces on social practices than on a strictly art-centric critique.

Superflex use the term “tool” to describe nearly all of their creations. According to the group’s Rasmus Nielsen, the term tool was appropriated for its non-hierarchical nature:

Tools are schematic structures that create a means of explaining immaterial processes. One of the main purposes of using the tool metaphor is that it lends itself to things that only become meaningful when they are put to use. (…) Supergas is very concrete – there is a machine there, creating gas, but the tool category also becomes a means of thinking about and discussing international relations: the relationship between North and South and, first and foremost,
discussing foreign aid in a Danish context (...) It [Supergas] is not a metaphorical critique of the North-South relationship... that is one of the reasons for making something concrete. You can hold the tool, be involved. Formulating a critique by being involved...

In the collective’s practice, the tool presents a link between the material and the immaterial, between passivity and action. It represents a discrete object that opens onto larger, immaterial issues. In Superflex’s writings, the tool is described as a “concrete cultural intervention” that can be used, for example, to “investigate communicative processes” (my emphases). First of all, the tool serves as the instigator of inter-personal relationships. Secondly, the tool presents a means of articulating a concrete response to large, otherwise intangible questions. In the rhetoric of Superflex, human actions are described within the realm of “operationality”—people relate to their world by using tools. The two-component relationship (man/woman and tool) is treated as a unit, a controllable space that designates the parameters of the artistic project. This particular type of artwork, unlike most works describe under the moniker of Relational Aesthetics by Nicolas Bourriaud, consists not solely of an immaterial interaction or conversation, since the interaction between human and tool possesses a materiality that a conversation does not. The tool is a self-sustaining object until it is put to use. When the object is utilized, its properties shift; it serves to perform a function and can be evaluated in terms of the efficiency of this execution. The tool can be located and described; the user can be identified. However, the tool also implies all kinds of uncertainties—the tool might be misused, or not used at all.

For the purpose of exhibition, the tool can be isolated as the remnant or residue of people’s ephemeral relationship to the world. It is a migratory object, which has the
virtue of being able to function both in the “field” as well as in the exhibition space.

Its aspirations are dual; it has to at once exhibit social commitment as well as aesthetic proficiency. In this way, it is reminiscent of a Duchampian readymade, inviting different usages and modes of perception depending on the given context. Besides the mobile biogas system, Superflex has over the years created several other “tools,” such as the portable sauna (Supersauna), a system for independent radio broadcasting (Superchannel), musical tracks that can be used for mixing (Supermusic), etc. The entire practice of Superflex is united under one umbrella term, which serves to unite a sauna with a lamp, a radio station and a biogas production unit. Almost as a visual exemplification of this fact, Supergas, the biogas unit, bares striking resemblance to Supersauna, the portable sauna, fabricated by the group as well. In this visual sense, the African ecosystem is related to a vehicle of Scandinavian pastime enjoyment, sharing at once dome shape, orange color and plastic material. Clearly referencing the standard operating procedures of companies, Superflex have produced a visually recognizable brand. Their project Supertool, a set of design parameters that the group consistently uses to represent their interventions within exhibition spaces, only overstates this fact, further emphasizing how contemporary artists increasingly are marketed as a desirable brand in blockbuster exhibitions. The tool in many ways parallels the commodity. As objects that anyone potentially can use, they are presented as objects to be ubiquitously desired. The universal qualities of the tool and its

capacity to be taken up and used widely are paradoxically reminiscent of the tenets of
the modernist art object. It too was imagined to have a universal impact, general rather
than particular in scope.

In recent years, Superflex’s practice has moved away from the concrete object
that easily doubles as an exhibitable object towards a more ungraspable type of
creation that they nonetheless insist on discussing within the tool category. In 2003,
Superflex received an invitation to create a project in Mauès, a city in the Brazilian
Amazon, where the largest cultivation of guaraná in South America takes place.
Guaraná, a highly caffeine-rich berry, was traditionally used by the indigenous
population of the area for its medicinal and energy-giving properties. In recent years,
however, the crop became of interest to multinational beverage corporations as an
inexpensive source of caffeine for the worldwide market of caffeinated soft drinks.
While in Mauès, Superflex was contacted by a local guaraná farmers’ cooperative,
which had recently formed to organize in response to a cartel of soda production
companies (including Ambev and PepsiCo), whose monopoly on the purchase of
guraná berries had driven the price of the crop down by eighty percent, even as the
price of the beverages had dramatically risen. Superflex organized a workshop with
the farmers’ cooperative in order to discuss different possibilities and strategies of
resistance. Partially informed by Superflex’s earlier projects, which included the
copying of brand name products, the final result of these discussions was the creation of a counter-product to PepsiCo brand’s Antarctica, one of the largest caffeinated soft drinks on the South American market. The intension of the project is to give ownership and control of the crop to the farmers, a group that otherwise exists as insignificant and underpaid links in the global beverage market. Part of the soda label on the green bottle reads: “Guaraná Power employs global brands and their strategies as raw material for a counter-economic position while reclaiming the original use of the Mauès guaraná plant as a powerful natural tonic, not just as a symbol.” According to Superflex, the farmers are attempting to regain what was lost when the multinational corporations took the symbolic meaning of their crop and appropriated it as a marketing ploy.

The end product of the collaboration, Guaraná Power, adopts the visual appearance of Antarctica and thus becomes the leading brand’s almost indistinguishable twin. The beverage comes in a green bottle with a label that reads Guaraná Power in white letters on a square, black background. This monochrome brand name has been graphically superimposed onto the pre-existing red, white, and green Antarctica label, thereby rendering the original’s lettering unreadable, while making it apparent that this product hijacks the dominant brand’s visual identity. The

19 Under the heading Supercopy, Superflex have created copies in their projects Biogas PH5 Lamp, Open Market and Social Pudding. The project was also inspired by the Mecca Cola, a soda, sold throughout Europe, which was created by French muslims in support of the Palestinian cause. See, Mecca Cola, “Mecca Cola,” http://mecca-cola.com/
20 Other beverages that openly display their guaraná content often play up the exotic association of the Amazon by displaying tribal imagery or referring to a non-specific shamanistic mystique. “Kuat,” Coca Cola’s guaraná product, for example, derives its name from an Amazonian sun god.
*Guaraná Power* bottle resembles the Antarctica bottle to the point of confusion. Although the original Antarctica bottle was not appropriated, the original logo has been subversively defaced by a new counter-identity. It is therefore not a competitive product that exists to rival a dominant brand—as when a generic copy mimics an original product in packaging and content, but sells it for half price. *Guaraná Power* functions as an anti-product rather than a double or a competitor. It plays the impossible game of adopting the rule-set of capitalism, while attempting to subvert the very game. *Guaraná Power* will never hold its own, its method is erasure—it does not build up its own image, but instead seeks to destroy the dominant counterpart. As repeatedly stated in relation to the project, Superflex and the cooperative do not possess the financial means to topple the prevalent systems of production, create a dominant brand or properly enter into competition with multinational corporations.21

The main goal of the project, then, is first and foremost symbolic; it raises awareness of existing conditions of production and exploitation in the beverage market, while also instantiating a momentary utopian instance, indicating that relations of production and consumption *could* be more equitably configured. This project, like *Supergas*, is suffused with internal contradictions. On the one hand, it relies on familiar socialist principles of worker resistance. On the other, this resistance is articulated through the logics of advertising, marketing, and competition.

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21 *Guaraná Power* is now produced at a small brewery in northern Denmark. An organic beverage company (Søbogaard) distributes the drink to some restaurants, cafés and most major art institutions in Denmark and it is sold in a store adjacent to the Superflex headquarters in Copenhagen. Superflex say that the project is still just barely financially self-sustaining.
In its various sites of exhibition, the group transformed the gallery into a makeshift soda-production facility. The gallery installation included crates filled with empty, unlabeled green bottles and a cluster of unmarked kegs in the corner. A stack of caps and labels, a keg with a tube attached, and a device for capping bottles, made up a provisional bottling plant in the center of the room. A refrigerator, replete with freshly tapped bottles of Guaranà Power, was prominently positioned mid-gallery. The walls of the gallery were green and red, repeating the signature colors of the drink’s labels. Overall, only very little text was present in the gallery. A few pamphlets describing the project were littered on tables and one large wall-text read: “Self-organize. For energy and empowerment.” In the context of Superflex’s other works, it is obvious to question how the tool category relates to a bottle of Guaranà Power. What does it mean when the tool that embodies objecthood and use value is translated into a beverage?

The Guaranà Power exhibition much resembled previous exhibitions by Superflex, featuring large slogan-like text, loud iconic colors and a signature object—in this case, the bottle. In the gallery, the bottles bore the weight of material presence otherwise variously inhabited by items such as a biogas unit or a radio studio. The drink, however, is clearly a different sort of object than the ones so far produced by Superflex. It is not an object to be taken up and used. Supergas was an independently engineered product, designed to benefit specific types of communities with particular

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22 The project was exhibited at Herning Kunstmuseum, at the REDCAT gallery in Los Angeles and was also included in the 2003 Venice Biennial.
living conditions. The beverage, on the other hand, is a well-established product that can be bought and sold worldwide with no use value besides a transient fulfillment of thirst (complimented by a momentary kick of caffeine). The *Supergas* system was designed to alter people’s lives, bettering their conditions, while *Guaraná Power*, as a product, does no lasting good. Where the *Supergas* system operated contradictorily within a market logic, *Guaraná Power* comparatively could be argued to represent a full-blown embrace of consumer capitalism. In contrast to a bottle of guaraná soda, the *Supergas* system was intended to last. It was based on a common ecological idea of sustainability whereby a family saves to purchase a lasting system and thereby avoids a considerable accumulation of waste, both economic and ecological. It fulfilled a crucial function for the betterment of the individual without creating an unnecessary surplus of stuff to be repeatedly desired, consumed and thrown away. The *Guaraná Power* “tool” is in its essence incapable of instigating a lasting relationship as it incessantly strives to create the desire for its own frequent and continual replacement. Inevitably, when considering this project, one begins to ponder that the world hardly needs another beverage, more guaraná to be farmed, more glass to pile up in landfills, etc.

Superflex’s bipolar practice, of field work on the one hand and gallery exposition on the other, often produces a sense of displacement in the gallery. In the case of *Guaraná Power*, the impromptu bottling apparatus and the descriptive, but far from exhaustive, wall text created a sense of void, or an impression that something was clearly missing from the site. This was clearly an exhibition space and not the
scene of some nitty-gritty production process. In a sense, the exhibition site became a
site of non-access, a place where the viewers were made aware of a place quite
noticeably absent from view. This place, however, was not completely gone; it was
repeatedly invoked and implied. So much of the exhibition was about being neither
here nor there, about a site unseen. All the viewer was left with was a bottle and a
refrigerator, replete with the drink in question. This was clearly not sufficient
information to fully comprehend the project. The viewer was repeatedly reminded of
this other place, although insufficient clues were provided to properly construct what
this other space was like. The wall texts and the labels on the bottles referred to the
distant Amazonian village of Mauès and farmers’ cooperative that was central to the
creation of the project. As visitors sipped the drink, there were no signs of these
farmers, nor any tangible evidence that documented the initial stages of production
that led to the product so thirstily consumed. Only one piece of photographic evidence
bore visual witness to the Brazilian connection. The background image of the bottle’s
label showed a group of people, the members of the cooperative, positioned as in a
group photo, looking straight into an unseen camera that, once transferred to the label
of the drink, matched the sightline of the about-to-consume viewer. The farmers were
represented as a smiling group, a backdrop for the brand.23

23 Since this exhibited version of the project, Superflex has added a video component, where the
farmers describe their ideas for a commercial in which Guaraná Power saves the day (a girl gets
power to finish her homework, a man stops a plane from crashing, a man defeats a bull). This,
however, is a continuation of mechanisms already present, in which Superflex reproduce common
tropes of soda marketing.
The Guaraná Power project, and Superflex’s practice in general, begs the question of whether the exhibition context is capable of conjuring the site of origin as well as the practice that took place there. What does it mean to create an exhibition where so much of its value lies beyond the gallery, in a place that is inaccessible to the viewer of the exhibition? Why create an exhibition that creates a pertinent sense of absence rather than presence? The pertinent absence of the gallery space appears conceptually coherent with the beverage market. The first point of conflation concerns the transformation of guaraná to the anonymous property of caffeine. The site of primary importance to the project is the village of Mauès, the principal agricultural site of guaraná for beverage markets worldwide. The berry is thus fairly firmly rooted in a specific locale, with a culturally specific identity. Once the berry leaves that particular site of origin, it is transmuted into an anonymous chemical property, thus dramatically effacing sense of partial ownership from the farmer’s perspective. The product no longer references the grown ingredient at all, as the local berries enter at one end and an indistinguishable syrupy liquid flows out the other. The label and the logo in turn perform the function of attaching a chosen identity to the anonymous fluid. The production phase is transformed into a logo; the product emerged clean and clear from its complicated and multifaceted production history in a cacophony of call-phrases and slogans.

*Guaraná Power* mimics the common mechanisms of desire common to the soda industry. As Slavoj Žižek has noted: “So, when the slogan for Coke was ‘Coke is it!’, we should see it in some ambiguity—it’s ‘it’ precisely insofar as it’s never IT,
precisely insofar as every consumption opens up the desire for more.” \(^{24}\) The bottle is half full; the bottle is half empty. Slavoj Žižek has repeatedly discussed Coca Cola as an example of commodity fetishism \textit{par excellence}. Employing the Lacanian notion of surplus enjoyment, he outlines a perpetual cycle of unfulfillment: \(^{25}\) “We search in vain for it in positive reality because it has no positive consistency – because it is just an objectification of the void, of a discontinuity opened in reality by the emergence of the signifier. It is the same with gold: we search in vain in its positive, physical features for that X which makes of it the embodiment of richness; or, to use an example from Marx, it is the same with a commodity: we search in vain among its positive properties for the feature which constitutes its value (and not its use-value).” \(^{26}\) Coca Cola, according to Žižek, brings a surplus of enjoyment, while, at the same time, embodying sheer nothingness. The drink does more than satisfy nutrition and taste, it overrides standard necessities. \(^{27}\) Coca Cola signifies an insatiable desire that does not correlate with thirst. The consumption is compulsive: the more you drink, the more you thirst. The more you possess, the more you are missing, the more you crave. As Žižek writes, the drink renounces “pathological” empirical use value. Consuming Coke becomes drinking nothing in the guise of something, as absolute pleasure is eternally conferred.

\(^{25}\) A term that Lacan initially might have modeled on the Marxist notion of surplus value. In Žižek’s writing the two are definitively bound together in a melding of the Marxist notion of commodity with the Lacanian conception of the fetish.
\(^{27}\) As he remarks, this is especially apparent with Diet Coke, where the main value, caffeine is extracted, justifying the absolute nothing that is constantly craved and consumed. “All that remains is pure semblance, an artificial promise of a substance that never materialized.” Žižek, “The Superego and the Act.”
and suspended. Coke holds the semblance of a property, thereby leading its consumption, like all other types of capitalist expenditure, to spiral out of control.  

By again and again referring to the signature slogan that has outlasted decades—“Coke is It!”—Žižek argues how Coca Cola is at once the object as well as the cause of desire; the commodity of all commodities.  

In what seems to be a marketing campaign designed for psychoanalytic analysis, Coke is also presented as “The Real Thing.” Coke is it, the real thing, *Guaraná Power*. Superflex’s drink, like its precedents, is equally an anonymous fluid striving to embody its positive properties, guaraná. *Guaraná Power* is the drink that refers back to its principle ingredient, just like Coca Cola refers back to its, once present, cocaine. It points towards its pure state as power ingredient. We also have a potentially more complicated product than the Coca Cola (Antarctica) bottle. The super-commodity that always keeps you wanting more has switched its ingredients and properties to become the socially aware beverage, resisting the capitalist logic of Antarctica. *Guaraná Power* attempts at conscious, sustainable consumption. With *Guaraná Power*, we are not supposed to drink for nutritional value or taste, nor are we asked to drink the product because it is impossible not to. Rather, the choice to drink *Guaraná Power* is a choice marked by

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28 As Žižek argues elsewhere, “It is not a surplus which simply attaches itself to some ‘normal,’ fundamental enjoyment, because enjoyment as such emerges only in this surplus, because it is constitutively an ‘excess.’ If we subtract the surplus we lose enjoyment itself, just as capitalism, which can survive only by incessantly revolutionizing its own material conditions, ceases to exist if it ‘stays the same’, if it achieves an internal balance.” Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 52.

29 “The only possible answer to the question ‘What is Coke?’ is already given in the advertisements: it is the impersonal ‘it’ (‘Coke, this is it!’) – ‘the real thing’, the unattainable X, the object-cause of desire.” Ibid., 96.
the renunciation of Antarctica. One subliminal use is supposedly rectified by a conscious choice. Borrowing from Žižek’s logic, it could be argued that Guaraná Power is in the end not of an entirely different order than Superflex’s other tools. This project only realizes an underlying condition of Superflex’s practice in general. In fact, their tools might all function as commodities par excellence, striving to signify beyond their positive properties. A car promises freedom, a perfume procures love, etc. The guaraná instance is only, as Žižek has helped illustrate, a more glaring example. According to this line of reasoning, all of Superflex’s tools are given to hold more weight than they can actually bear. Undoubtedly motivated by aspirations of a more equitably distributed society, these objects seem incapable of breaking free of the trappings that today constitute the primary means of propelling imaginaries into reality: the dual forces of branding and advertising.

“Guaraná Power contains original Mauès guaraná for energy and empowerment”. These words constituted the central marketing slogan of Guaraná Power. Like other projects of Superflex’s, this one employs rhetoric familiar to the history of leftist political engagement, particularly the social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. “Empowerment” has played a central role in political discourse since the 1960s. It is an especially interesting term since it has been mobilized in the service of wildly divergent political agendas. Initially used in the context of anti-poverty programs started by the left in the US during the 1960s, “empowerment” was appropriated by the opposite end of the political spectrum in the 1980s when Thatcher in Britain and the neo-conservatives in the US used the same idiom to bolster their
agendas of individualism and self-reliance. As Barbara Cruikshank has written, the term straddles the problematic line between power and powerlessness, subjectivity and subjection, resistance and oppression and operates at the interstices of activity and passivity.\textsuperscript{30} Paradoxically, empowerment often suggests that subjectivity and agency is precisely and necessarily induced by outside intervention. In a strange way, then, empowerment is neither truly liberatory nor truly repressive. Despite being coined in an effort to restore power to underprivileged citizens, the term does not circumvent power relationships. It relies on a familiar cycle, where the subject’s consciousness leads to knowledge, which, only then, can lead to action.

Empowerment embodies a historical arc by now familiar to this analysis. Initially deployed to promote a collective agenda, its subsequent use marks the previously mentioned broader shift from the larger order of the social to the fragmented unit of the individual and his/her immediate community. This change also marks the political shift towards the right, as the matrix of social welfare has been successively dismantled, replaced by the self-reliant entity of the economically independent individual. Empowerment is today synonymous with small-scale community mobilization, as individual citizen groups connect to promote their particular identity-based agenda.

It is evident that there is something odd about Superflex’s interjection of “energy” into the otherwise familiar language of empowerment and political action. Playing up the parallels between physical invigoration and political energizing, the Guaraná Power slogan reiterates Superflex’s recurring practice of combining collectivist and capitalist vocabularies. Similarly, the group have repeatedly used the phrase “All humans are potential entrepreneurs” to headline all their projects that involve tools. This type of language ultimately begs the question of Superflex’s political stance. Should slogans such as these be comprehended as evidence of the group’s cynicism, as indications that all political agency is fruitless, extinguished by the unstoppable forces of total reification? There are many indications that this is not the case. Exaggerating the contradictions of social action in the contemporary welfare state, between collectivism and individualism, capitalism and socialism, agency and subjection, Superflex explore the terrain of political agency that inevitably must employ the molds cast by 1960s social movements, while at the same time recognizing their trouble in properly containing the elements of a fundamentally-altered contemporary social fabric.

4.3 Self-Organization

All tools share the aspect of empowerment: e.g. having their own energy supply, becoming an independent producer of energy supply, having their own Internet TV channel, joining a political/economic discussion. Taken in this sense, artistic praxis means a concrete cultural intervention that mediates between different interests or at least, makes them visible. In their tools Superflex attempt to create conditions for the production of new ways of thinking, acting,
speaking, and imagining (...) The tool can be taken over and put into operation by various users. The tools invite people to do something: to become active.\(^{31}\)

Superflex’s rhetoric around the tool, its capacity to promote self-reliance and agency, also resonates with an earlier political moment, namely political emancipatory theory of the late sixties and early seventies. In 1973, Ivan Illich wrote *Tools for Conviviality*—a book that proposes a reorganization of society by restructuring what he, with an abstract, all-encompassing term also called *tools*.\(^{32}\) In this radical manifesto-like treatise, Illich sets forth a plan for reverting the ills brought about by the industrial revolution. In his view, this moment of major technological advancement did not, as promised, liberate workers. Instead, his main claim is that it brought about dependence and quasi-enslavement to the machine. By contrast, Illich proposes a model of “conviviality,” which opposes industrial productivity by emphasizing the creative intercourse of ideas between individuals.\(^{33}\) For this, only very few tools are needed. A tool, according to Illich, is a hand tool, not a power tool. It is a simple instrument, independent of a larger network of tools. Of equal importance to Illich’s category is the issue of propriety; it is of utmost importance that people are in control of their own tools instead of being in control of only one minute part of a larger production process, and thereby subjected to an economic elite.

Moreover, Illich sets the tool apart from the commodity in that the tool can be

\(^{31}\) Steiner, *SUPERFLEX/TOOLS BOOK*, 5.
\(^{33}\) The term conviviality has in recent years also found its grounding in artistic discourse. It plays a central part in Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*. 
evaluated according to its use and function and therefore measured in proportion to its efficiency at executing a given task in contradiction to the commodity, which is evaluated according to a different set of standards.\footnote{Illich's use of these terms differs from Karl Marx's definition in which any labor-product has a value and a use value. Additionally, if traded as a commodity in markets, is has an exchange value.}

Illich also emphasizes how tools can be both material and immaterial: “I use this term because it allows me to subsume into one category all rationally designed devices, be they artifacts or rules, codes or operators, and to distinguish all these planned and engineered instrumentalities from other things such as basic food or implements, which in a given culture are not deemed to be subject to rationalization.”\footnote{Ibid., 13.} Illich’s writing bears striking resemblance to the wording of Superflex. For both, the tool is clearly secondary to the human relationships it is capable of instigating.\footnote{Superflex, however, have not read Illich’s writing.} Illich wrote: “Tools are intrinsic to social relationships. An individual relates himself in action to his society through the use of tools that he actively masters, or by which he is passively acted upon. To the degree that he masters his tools, he can invest the world with his meaning; to the degree that he is mastered by his tools, the shape of the tool determines his own self-image.”\footnote{Ibid., 36.} According to Rasmus Nielsen: “Guaraná Power is more metaphorical, a meta-construction, of sorts. It is a more conceptual tool. It was first conceived within the framework of a several year old project, Supercopy, in which we copied things and modified them. It is of course nothing we invented. (...) One of the main ideas with Supercopy began during a

\footnote{Ibid., 13.}
stay in Bangkok. A large part of Thai economy there is based on copying of anything from clothes to electronics, to sunglasses. It can be viewed as a subversive move, a means of countering cultural and economic pressure from the West. It is an economic strategy but is also interesting as an identity strategy—the Western item is copied but given a culturally specific twist before it is put back on the market.”

Superflex utilize the tool category to denote a material object capable of generating a breadth of less material effects. Depending on the project in question, these have been independence, political dialogue and empowerment. The tool is, in the case of both Illich and Superflex, first and foremost conceived as a political device, capable of promoting independence for social actors otherwise shackled to the system of capitalist exploitation. For Superflex—Supergas is perhaps the tool par excellence in this respect—people obtain dignity, self-determination and self-sufficiency when operating the tool themselves. Users are free to formulate their own relationship to the tool, and thereby, for this is clearly the implication, also their relationship to larger social and economic systems.

Self-organization was a term frequently invoked as part of the Guaraná Power project. The farmers’ organizing, independently of the global soda corporations, was exhibited as a model of resistance to any form of neoliberal subjugation. Highlighting this relationship to acts of resistance by other disenfranchised groups, the Brazilian project was, in several sites of exhibition, coupled with a film program in the exhibition space that featured different narratives by other film-makers relating to the theme of self-empowerment. Superflex also recently put out a book entitled Self-
in which they included examples from around the world of art as well as non-art projects that were created independent of, and often in direct opposition to, larger hegemonic systems.\footnote{Will Bradley et al., eds., \textit{Self-Organisation/ Countereconomic Strategies} (Berlin; New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2006).} Self-organization, which has become a central word in much of Superflex’s work, first and foremost connotes economic self-sufficiency and thus a means of freeing oneself from the exploitative systems of global capitalism. In the context of this study, self-organization, as a concept, is interesting since it also seems to connote untangling oneself from the larger framework of society and state in order to form smaller, community-oriented bonds. Not solely an invention by Superflex, self-organization has come to constitute a new central preoccupation within contemporary art in the Nordic Countries. As Maria Lind has remarked in another Scandinavia-centric book focusing on self-organization, \textit{Taking Matter into Common Hands}, "It is still easier to nourish self-determination when you are self-organized. If the 1990s in art were marked by a wish to dissolve borders and the melding of previously separated fields, the new millennium has revealed a form of "neo-separatism."\footnote{\textit{Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices}, 29} It is curious that this term has gained such currency in the Nordic countries, since these northern nations still constitute quite substantial state systems and therefore, contrary to similar movements in the US and the UK, self-organization does not happen in an environment marked by a complete evaporation of public welfare. Rather, it seems, these examples have arisen in parallel to the advent of

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\textit{Relational Aesthetics was also the subject of several Scandinavian exhibitions, particularly in Sweden.}
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conservative governments around the year 2000 and thus are in sync with the most
dramatic reconfigurations of the state in the postwar period. In partial
acknowledgement of waning public arts funding, coupled with the recognition of the
increasing alliance between arts and business advocated by the market-oriented new
governments, artists have formed smaller, collective units in order to pursue a practice
free of these new bureaucratic constraints.

Self-organization, whether named or functioning as an unspoken *modus
operandi*, has different implications for the relationship of artistic practice to the
welfare state framework. One order of practices could be termed *state-supporting*, in
that they operate in a supplementary fashion to the preexisting systems of the state. In
these cases, artists highlight blind spots of current or past social programs, indicating
how these systems could function better in the service of their publics. In sum, these
practices have faith in the welfare state system as the most trusted provider of welfare
to its citizens. Power relationships are not integrally examined or criticized and arts
producers are not shy to collaborate with politicians and bureaucrats in a reinforcing
attempt to grease the wheels of the established system. Kenneth Balfelt, to name one
Scandinavian artist whose practice could be termed state-supporting, has repeatedly
addressed the failings of preexisting state programs for marginal sections of the
population: immigrant teens, the homeless, drug addicts, etc. He has invoked the term
“self-organized projects,” which he deems capable of solving “problems in society.”40

40 Kenneth A. Balfelt, “Kenneth A. Balfelt's Homepage,” http://www.a-r-d.org/.
For the project *Protection Rooms* (2001), also coinciding with the conservative turn in Danish politics, Balfelt installed an illegal injection room on Halmtorvet—a square in the red light district of Copenhagen infamous as a hub for prostitution and drug abuse. According to Balfelt, World War Two bomb shelters (protection rooms in Danish, giving the project its name) on the square were the main site for illegal drug abuse, primarily heroin injection. The municipality of Copenhagen had installed bins for discarding used needles but did not otherwise provide for the addicts, occasionally even fining them for injecting in the area adjacent to those very bins. The artist argued that the uncommonly high fatality rate among drug addicts, compared to other European countries, could be drastically reduced if safe using conditions were provided. In collaboration with an architect, Balfelt built a structure on the site that offered private rooms and volunteer nurses. The piece was overtly intended as a precedent, a temporary service-provider meant to garner sufficient media and political attention with the intent of triggering state-sanctioned equivalents. Balfelt here, in opposition to the publicly advocated arts-business liaison, adamantly establishes a bond between the arts and the domain of social services. The piece involved consultation with authorities and invitations to the appropriate politicians to tour the shelter. In a manner similar to Superflex’s strategy, the project exploited the open-endedness of the arts category, allowing the otherwise illegal injection room to exist in disguise as a work of public sculpture. This artistic proposal is undoubtedly cast in the mold of previous social services. However, the self-organized piece could also be interpreted as a shift away from the social toward a more fragmentary understanding
of the population as made up of disparate community groups. The project therefore could be construed as comparable to newer governmental programs that, rather than providing large-scale welfare schemes for the entire people, increasingly target only “problem communities” that are considered to be cogs in the wheel of a market-optimized state. Whether aligned with the systems of the traditional social welfare state or its more recent market and community-oriented counterpart, practices like Balfelt’s are essentially state-supporting as they serve, not to break with the functionalities of the state, but rather as auxiliary practices that sustain its core principles.

Another genre of self-organized practice that has come to play a central role in the Nordic countries could be termed *state-oppositional*. Instead of seeing the welfare state as basically sound and decrying only the weakening of its stronghold, self-organization is in a distinct set of practices considered a critical strategy of withdrawal from this post-war structure, here regarded as integrally corrupted. Particularly, these artists target the state’s collusion with capitalism. One notable example in the Scandinavian context is *Copenhagen Free University*, an institution founded (also in 2001) in a private apartment in Copenhagen by the artists Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen. In the words of Heise: “I guess the initial thing that started it was our desire to create small institutions where we can work with every kind of presentation of art and whatever. (…) self-institutionalizing is something that we like to do very much, that we need very much. Building institutions is where our primary practice is
materializing. It is here we can decide everything for ourselves.”

Openly drawing upon Situationist teachings, *Copenhagen Free University* sees a society dominated by capitalism that has engendered a deeply alienated existence for its citizens. Contrary to the “real” Copenhagen University—which of course like all universities in Denmark is a public institution with free tuition—this independent university aims at de-alienated “free” knowledge production that, according to the artists, counters the other’s pre-formed authorial indoctrination of information. This self-organized institution furthermore intends to break down the barrier between public and private in an attempt to reconnect knowledge with everyday experience. The project considers all public institutions to be integrally bound up with capitalism. In their view, the present post-industrial Denmark is a knowledge economy (here discussed in Chapter 2) in which the university serves the central function of manufacturing knowledge as commodity:

> Our idea of making the university was in a way based on the fact that the economy is nowadays very often described as a knowledge economy and we can see knowledge becoming the order of capitalist production now. And in a way this knowledge that is being spoken about is productive knowledge within that system and in a way we thought ‘ok, if we're living in a knowledge economy we would like to open a university which could valorize other kinds of knowledge that wouldn't fit into that system, knowledges that are excluded from, or not of any use to that system.

Heise and Jakobsen have created a project ambiguously situated between institutions and anti-institutionalism. Acknowledging that it is impossible to exist

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42 Ibid.
completely outside institutional structure, the *Copenhagen Free University* is simultaneously a deliberate attempt at breaking free of one of the primary institutions of the state. This university, like *Guaranà Power*, takes the form of mimicry; mirroring a preexisting structure while simultaneously attempting to debunk its core principles. In the context of this investigation, the project is interesting since it attempts to hybridize two conceptions of society: both the large-scale social view, which the university framework undoubtedly represents, and the small-scale, community-orientation that the colloquial nature of this institution undoubtedly also implies. Fusing the two divergent conceptions of the social fabric proves a futile exercise. The overt Situationist influence on *Copenhagen Free University* is in this regard illustrative. Although the Situationists could be criticized for similarly only operating in small units of actors, it is clear that the aim of Debord and his cohorts was to create a *collective* transformation of society. It seems that this goal has faded from the horizons of this contemporary institution. Seemingly content to confine its operations to the apartment in northern Copenhagen, *Copenhagen Free University* implicitly subscribes to a view of society as composed of disjointed communities. Thus education, here, ultimately is no public matter, but the substance of a private conversation among friends, and friends of friends.

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43 Jakob Jakobsen also states: “So, instead of being anti-institutional we’re saying ‘we are building an institution’ and in this way we aren’t maintaining the romantic notion of an outside of institutions, because institutions are in language and minds and in desire as well. I think that the DIY strategy of setting up 'grand' institutions, like a university, according to your own passions, are productive, and we try to engage in this kind of discussion in both a serious and a playful way.” Ibid.
Taking a step further towards complete independence from the perceived bankruptcy of preexisting social systems, N55, another Danish artist collective, create objects that aim at complete autonomy. The group has created a multiplicity of objects that are openly available for property-free reproduction and dissemination via a manual that is free for download on N55’s website. These objects include **SNAIL SHELL SYSTEM** (2001), a mobile unit for living anywhere; **CITY FARMING PLANT MODULES** (2003), a system for planting a garden for growth of food in urban spaces; **LAND** (2000-ongoing) a structure to be constructed on private property that can be located via geographical coordinates and accessed anytime by anyone, etc.: 

The whole welfare system and, what is even worse, the basic will to work together in symbiosis instead of competing is destroyed, from the education system to hospitals and basic relations between persons. It's happening because of the neoliberalist movement starting in the eighties in the Western part of the world. (...) For a long period of time, the surplus in the Nordic countries was used to improve the social conditions for persons. The irony here is that the USA now is the role model for the Nordic countries concerning healthcare and so forth. The concept of profit is dominating everything. 

Once again, the state is seen as having become inextricably bound to capital over the course of recent decades, thus the only option is to live within “as small concentrations of power as possible”—a phrase repeated by N55 in different contexts but first articulated in protest to the Danish conservative government’s participation in

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44 http://www.n55.dk/
the Iraq war in 2003. The dictum directly addresses the perceived failure of all forms of large-scale social organization. The objects available for reproduction in the manual are therefore intended as aids in breaking free from the larger social system in order to live autonomously in as small community constituencies as possible. In this respect, N55’s projects much resemble Superflex’s tools. Both generate creations that reflect the increasing conflation of state and capital. However, there is a significant difference between the discourses that surround these objects. While N55 seems to subscribe to the possibility of breaking entirely free from the capitalist system, Superflex relate to its ubiquitous logics, adopting, for example its core mechanisms of branding and advertising.

At this point, it is necessary to consider the potential differences between the various modes of self-organization. When comparing the objects of Superflex with those of N55, for example, it becomes clear that N55’s things are much more in line with Illich’s emancipatory theorization of the tool. His model implied an almost nostalgic longing for real tools that in some undefined, preindustrial past served to create a natural relation of (wo)man to her/his environment—a relation that later became the subject of capitalist profiteering and, in turn, profound alienation. N55 propose a similar mode of reconstituting a comparable bond, perceived to have been eradicated by contemporary capitalist society, within small groups of people with the help of a few key objects. It seems questionable that such a natural state of operational

46 For the project MOVEMENT (2003).
independence, without exploitation, existed, and even more doubtful that such a world could be (re)established. Hence self-organization as a political strategy, I would argue, is flawed on several fronts. It is difficult to conceive of how self-organization, frequently coupled with withdrawal, might address larger social matters, instead becoming a form of escapism. Moreover, self-organization habitually also presupposes that it is possible to exist completely outside existing institutions and power structures in the first place, in a naturalized relation with others in a union with the immediate environment. The strength of Superflex’s practice, I believe, is that their projects exist within an environment already contaminated by capitalist logics. Supergas, while claiming to create operational independence, is deeply embedded within the preexisting systems of humanitarian aid and fraught by power relations. Similarly, Guaraná Power positions itself in the complexity of already existing systems, in this instance widening the scope to the structures of global capitalism. By situating their social practices within the logics of this system, they acknowledge that no act of giving can completely sidestep the inequality integral to the overall system and that every such involvement risks contributing to its perpetuation. In the context of Guaraná Power, for example, it is a well-known fact that the majority of the world overproduces raw material and products for a small percentage of global consumers. Superflex situates their practice in such a world instead of running full-speed ahead in the opposite direction.

Despite their differences, the self-organizing schemes of Superflex, Kenneth Balfelt and Copenhagen Free University all generally respond, whether explicitly or
inexplicably, to the restructuring of the welfare state in Denmark since 2001. In this context, the contradictions engendered by the move toward self-organization are hard to miss. Self-organization seems paradoxically bound up with the inherently capitalist ideals of individualism and self-sufficiency. Looking back to Boltanski and Chiappello’s argument, discussed in Chapter 1, flexibility and independence were seen as integral to the current spirit of capitalism—operational virtues that they claim were initially lifted from the artistic fields. Thus, in a strange way, these self-organizational projects could be argued as exemplary instances of capitalist self-reliance. As feats of ingenuity and creativity, they serve as illustrations of living independently of the welfare state and its services. While intended as a break with the growing influences of capitalism on the welfare state, these projects paradoxically constitute a mode of independence propagated and advocated by capitalist ideology.

Although Superflex repeatedly toy with the ideal of self-organization, it is worth noting that their projects almost always end up being exhibited in state-funded institutions. *Guaranà Power*, for example, was first shown in Herning Kunstmuseum, one such art institution in Denmark. Here it is relevant to point out that the exhibition involved the installation of a shop for selling soft drinks within a state-funded art museum. In response to dwindling cultural support over recent decades in Denmark, most museums have added cafes and restaurants, increasingly promoting the museum as a space to come and relax, while sometimes even failing to mention the institution’s primary function. Marketed to the highly-educated, well-to-do and health-conscious segments of the population, these gourmet establishments typically serve quality
products and organic fare. In a curious parallel to these developments, Superflex moved the sale of sustainable goods from the café to the gallery space proper.

Superflex are openly ambivalent about exhibiting their practices within the spaces of art. However, due to the less-saleable nature of their work, state funding structures and museums provide the primary institutional support for their projects. A central prerequisite for receiving state funding today in Denmark is that projects are subsequently exhibited in a recognized art institution. These bureaucratic determinates are inextricable from Superflex’s practice. Almost every one of their projects is from the outset closely bound to the apparatuses of state funding and state-funded museums. In the projects that reference third world aid programs, this provides for a strange institutional displacement. Superflex’s actions could just as well have been carried out under the rubric of foreign assistance, and thus supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, Superflex completely circumvent the government agencies which administer foreign aid by instead negotiating with the state’s arts departments. One might ask what the effect is of creating a parallel aid program that goes bureaucratically unchecked, since it falls under the state-funded designation of art.

While not entirely comfortable with the artworld context, Superflex emphasize that the category of art simultaneously affords them a certain freedom. It allows them to receive artistic monies for projects that, according to fiscal evaluative parameters, would be considered untenable and therefore fundamentally unfundable. In addition, by mimicking the state’s aid practices, while exaggerating its forms, Superflex’s artistic state-funded practice frequently engages in critiques of the state—a circuitry
that often escapes the institutional committees that grant them the funding in the first place.

4.4 Art and the National Brand

As we have see, the existence of artwork within the state-funded art institution in some respects implicitly tackles the ambivalent position of art practices with regard to the welfare state, which to a certain extent still serves as the primary manager of institutions for funding and exhibiting art in Denmark. While these conditions are by no means new, the recent schemes of Nordic governments for funding and exhibiting the arts have instantiated novel institutional connections, namely connections with the “cultural industry” and national branding. Superflex’s practice has also found itself embedded within this recent, and vastly more problematic, structural rapport between art and state. Spearheading a novel approach to national branding, the Danish government funded a large-scale project entitled Superdanish—Newfangled Danish Culture in Toronto’s Harbourfront Centre in 2004. The name curiously drew upon Superflex’s titling, though this time the self-conscious invocation of corporate marketing was seemingly lost on the organizers. Part tradeshow, part art exhibition, Superdanish featured famous Danish products, such as bacon and butter cookies, but also included Danish design and notable Danish artists.47 Satisfying the category of

47 Again, this idea by the government in Denmark most likely was directly inspired by New Labour precedents. The first such exhibition devised by New Labour to “re-brand Britain as a dynamic and diverse economy” was the similarly titled Powerhouse:uk in London in 1998, which interspersed works by young artists like Damien Hirst with design, fashion, engineering and
internationally-acclaimed cultural producers, Superflex installed a piece within this
dubious juggernaut of national promotion. Their contribution, also called Superdanish,
featured a large photo-realistic mural that depicted the participation of Danish soldiers
in the Iraq war. The piece was a copy of another mural, Iraqi Freedom, set in the
Californian desert of Twenty-nine Palms, which depicted the invasion of Iraq by US
soldiers. Superflex’s copy was identical, apart from the fact that the uniforms were
now Danish and the tablet-like inscription here addressed Danish involvement in the
war:

ON 20 MARCH 2003, THE U.S. LED COALITION FORCES
BEGAN “OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM”. AS A MEMBER OF
THE COALITION FORCES DENMARK INITIALLY
CONTRIBUTED A SUBMARINE, A CORVETTE,
HEADQUARTERS STAFF AND A MEDICAL TEAM.
FOLLOWING THE OFFICIAL TERMINATION OF
HOSTILITIES DENMARK ALSO CONTRIBUTED TROOPS.
THIS MURAL IS DEDICATED TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF
THE DANISH ARMED FORCES.

“What we do is right—right for Denmark and right for the
international community. One day people will look back and realize
that what we did was right.”

--Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Prime Minister of Denmark

Superdanish, the tradeshow, represented an extreme example of national
marketing in a globalized world: branding the nation state (a subject I will return to in

science. Held in conjunction with the Asian Europe Summit, the exhibition presented, according to
Stanley Clinton-Davis, Minister of the Department of Trade and Industry: "an opportunity to
demonstrate, to an influential audience, how British creativity has led to world class products and
services (...)" Lord Clinton-Davis and Lord Wigoder (UK Parliament, 1998),
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1998/mar/30/powerhouseuk-
exhibition; “Cool Britannia hits the street,” BBC, April 3, 1998, sec. Special Report,
Chapter 5). Here, the country was presented exclusively in terms of saleable goods that were defined as uniquely Danish. It seems significant that, in this instance, Superflex, the purveyor of artistic products, did not exhibit one of their signature branded objects. Their artwork-products, *Supersauna*, *Supergas* and *Guaranà Power*, were nowhere to be found. The signature Superflex “look” was strikingly lacking; the recognizable logo, colors and typeface were absent. Presented as a heroic portrayal of Danish military might, this artwork undoubtedly comprised an odd presence within the context of other Danish super-products. Superflex painted an image of Denmark, not as a country unto its own, neutral and peaceful, as often portrayed, but as nation state militarily associated with a much-maligned superpower. Compared to the projects previously discussed, which offer messy combinations of humanitarian aid and marketing tropes—along with ill-defined imperatives of participation, empowerment and self-organization—*Superdanish* offered a contrastingly crude image of the nation state, sharpened to the point of iconic spectacle.

In recent years, and with greater frequency since the most recent economic crisis, Danish national branding schemes have marketed Denmark as a socially-

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48 In a more recent project that also overtly addresses branding Denmark, *Rebranding Denmark* (2007) is a LED display that continually presents the burning of the Danish flag. Created after the Mohammed cartoon crisis in 2006, during which the burning of the Danish flag became a recurring image in the news, it presents another less-rosy image of Denmark under the pretext of promotional branding, here at the Basel Art Fair. The piece also references a quote, addressing the crisis, by the international branding guru, Tyler Brule: "Denmark subsequently appears as the small country that the big international players unreasonably attempted to whip into line. That is an image worth millions to the brand Denmark. If I was a member of the ministry of foreign affairs I would print huge adds in the leading medias in the world with the words: We want to thank our allies—buy Danish."
conscious welfare state, “the land of the happiest people in the world.” This is of course ironic, since such slogans are peddled by a government that has orchestrated the most substantial restructuring of the welfare state in post-war history. This explicit scenario of national branding in which Superflex willingly participated casts an illuminating light back on the rest of their work, particularly their tools. It becomes clear, I think, that Superflex’s tools, unlike the other featured commodities, are not intended as objects for globalized, ubiquitous branding and consumption. Superflex’s social tools that gesture towards the distribution of aid are first and foremost intended as vehicles for self-examination within the context of the Nordic welfare state—predominantly for its citizens who comprehend and recognize its dominant imagery and rhetoric. Tools like Supersauna and Guaranà Power play the part of social assistance, administered from the first to the third world. Their paradoxical guise as commodities highlights the fact that the movement of goods is fundamentally determined by economic inequality. More importantly, Superflex’s objects are tools intended to address global questions, albeit always from a national vantage point. Always referring back to their immediate local context, the Danish welfare state, they simultaneously insist that social issues cannot, and should not, be confined to this nation state. Eschewing the branding of Danish redistribution abroad, Superflex’s practices that explicitly reference welfare and aid are adamantly global, not immanently national. In the contexts where these projects are primarily exhibited, such

as the state-funded or not-for-profit institution of art, Superflex’s practice allows us to imagine the prospect of equitable distribution not confined within the Northern European welfare states; in other words, a properly global welfare.
Chapter 5: Site-specific Plop Art: Towards a Theorization of the Art-State Nexus under Neoliberalism

5.1 Bears, Horses, Cows and the Privatization of Public Space

At the center of the courtyard in Erbdrostenhof’s Baroque palace stood two strange structures: on the right, a large multi-colored sphere, the height and width of two upright grownups, revealed itself to be composed of mangled Fiberglass animal bodies in muted colors; on the left was a massive cobalt blue trash compacter, with the likenesses of small animals stamped in orange paint covering its sides. Upon closer inspection, the crushed animal parts in the sphere were covered with drawings resembling pictograms. Stepping back, one noticed that these drawings were repeated in a cartoon-like frieze that ran the length of the courtyard wall. Trickle Down, Public Space in the Era of Its Privatization read the title of the piece by Andreas Siekmann that was exhibited in 2007 as part of Skulptur Projekte, the sculpture show that occupies city spaces in Muenster, Germany every ten years. While the title could be faulted for summing up everything, and thereby foreclosing the riddle-like decoding that so much contemporary art demands, the jump from distorted pastel corpses to the privatization of public space was not so straightforward. Substantiating this link will be the first concern of this final chapter.

The heads, arms and legs protruding from the plastic sphere that seemed to have snowballed its way into this majestic courtyard in Muenster referenced the plastic figures, mostly in the shape of animals, which can be found throughout
hundreds of city spaces the world over. Described as “urban art” by city marketing departments, and frequently used in connection with different private and public events, the sculptures are marketed by entrepreneurs and business owners who claim to produce a “consumer-friendly environment.” The mass-figures that are mass-produced in factories are subsequently painted with images particular to a given place by local artists. The whole scheme began with a cow in Zurich that was piloted as part of an urban beautification project. This creature triggered a worldwide franchise of animals. A bear for Berlin, a horse for Dresden, an elk for Toronto. A winged rhinoceros from Dortmund? Each city is represented by a figure chosen from local history or lore. The multitude of municipalities means that several are unfortunately represented by the same animal; the cow, for example, has become the sculptural trademark of seven cities worldwide, big and small. To give but one national example, 650 cities and municipalities in Germany have been littered with iterations of similar creatures.¹ They appear in parades, are animated in events and talk shows, and are auctioned off to benefit a variety of charities. In Berlin, there are 2800 bears; worldwide, over 6800 bears have been exhibited, from embassies to Mercedes-Benz dealerships. Andreas Siekmann has seemingly rounded up all these creatures and forcefully crushed them with the trash compactor also present within the installation, rendering them once again incorporated, like the singular marketing mold from which they all initially sprung.

Siekmann’s project is a visual representation of neoliberalism. “Trickle down,” in the artwork’s title, is of course a common synonym for neoliberal economics. It refers to the idea that, rather than provide economic assistance to the poor through social programs, the generation of great wealth, even if concentrated in the hands of a few, will necessarily trickle down to the lower levels of society. In another common analogy: “the rising tide lifts all boats.” Also referred to as “Chicago school” or “supply-side” economics, neoliberal theory is based on the principle that human well-being and maximum economic prosperity are best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms, aided by private property rights, free markets and trade, as well as minimal government intervention. Thus, the welfare state’s compromise between capitalism and socialism, the social and political constraints on markets and, in some countries, state planning and ownership of industry, were the primary targets of the neoliberal doxy. First theorized in the 18th century by the philosopher and economist Bernard Mandeville who famously wrote that “private vices are public virtues,” the politico-economic doctrine was further developed during the 1940s and 1950s by thinkers such as Friedrich von Hayek, Ludvig von Mises and Milton Friedman. However, these ideas remained largely isolated in the think-tanks where they were developed until the oil crisis of the 1970s when the movement was first seriously considered as a viable alternative to Keynesianism. Margaret Thatcher was, 

2 Their thoughts were in part founded on late 19th century economic theory of Alfred Marshall, William Stanley Jevons and Leon Walras, as well as on the hidden hand of the market as conceived by Adam Smith. David Harvey, The New Imperialism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
as noted in previous sections of this book, the first to adopt these ideas into state policy after her 1979 electoral victory. It was therefore also in its country of origin, Britain, that the welfare state met its most significant challenge, as the redistributive model was argued to produce the opposite of its intended effect: economic failure. Thatcher’s target was ultimately to dismantle what she termed “collectivist society.” “Economics are the method,” she declared, but “the object is to change the heart and soul.” But the welfare state proved difficult to dismantle in one sitting. It was thus only after a supposed return to social democratic politics, after New Labour’s 1997 victory, that many of the processes and legal changes that Thatcher had initiated were fully realized, resulting in further chipping away at Keynesian interventionist measures in a widened embrace of the market.³

The plastic animals in Siekmann’s piece are presented as actors of the seeping commodification and privatization of public space. Allied with local businesses and city marketing and revitalization campaigns, they have increasingly come to pass as “public sculpture” throughout the world. Therefore, on the one hand, these animals figure as literal representations of commercial culture: mass-produced, corporatized, depoliticized and alienated. On the other hand, Trickle Down, Public Space in the Age of its Privatization simultaneously backgrounds these figures within a much larger schema of economic transformations. Here, as an economic Powers of Ten, the piece

³ This was brought about in part by what has been referred to as the “Washington Consensus” between the U.S. and Britain with the formation of the WTO and NAFTA. See, for example, Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 93.
telescopes from individual animals to thousand of animals; from relatively small local economies to situating these within a map that attempts to chart the ebbs and flows of a massive global system. This story was told in the frieze that ran the length of the inner-wall of the baroque courtyard and in a series of posters within the palace aula. They served to embed the animals in a holistic storyline and provided the narrative backdrop for the compactor/compacted sculpture. Adopting the visual language of pictograms, Siekmann deployed the iconography of gendered bathroom signs and the symbology of toxic matter to represent a pared-down story of neoliberal capitalism. In this cartoon-like sequencing of frames, the signature animals were starkly highlighted in orange. In the very first image, a politician, sporting a Bernard Mandeville lapel pin, is guarded by bodyguards and filmed by a cameraman. He stands in front of two orange horses while facing an apparently jubilant crowd. One audience member holds a sign that also bears the horse image on which is printed: “my home is my state.” That initial frame is followed by a cavalcade of four-leggeds alongside the city name and the year in which they were first presented. In between, are black and white city scenes in which the orange animals appear in situ: bears being admired by tourists in Berlin and figures being guarded by police officers with dogs and walkie-talkies in Hamburg. Another image shows a similar man-on-podium-in-front-of-crowd situation, although this one seems to be a charity auction in which the orange figure from the previous street scene is being hawked for 3500 Euros. The podium reads “My charity benefits the public.” Subsequent frames show city marketing campaigns, the homeless rummaging through trash containers, and a bevy of youths being arrested. Then:
surveillance cameras; surveillance cameras surveilling spaces with orange sculptures; a collection of names of security companies; followed by security guards watching screens surveilling the aforementioned city scenes dappled with orange animals. A man displaying a sign that reads “business improvement district” and a team of men and women holding documents printed with orange animals with the heading “Council for the Prevention of Crime and Violence.” A series depicting London and “The Digital Bridge” that a glossary available at the exhibition site describes: “A television programme in London where private citizens can watch the recordings of a surveillance camera from their own homes and report suspicious events directly to the police through a hotline.” These are followed by a “big brother awards” ceremony.

The next panel contains a city mapped with orange dots denoting the location of artsy animals. It is followed by iterations of a familiar ideogram from public space. The circle, bifurcated by a diagonal line, superimposed over the forbidden activity or possession. Included in the list of taboos are no ice cream, no helmets, no drinking, no reading, no roller-blading, no smoking, no begging, no guitar-playing, etc. These are succeeded by depictions of a “city branding company” and a “city promotion tour” and a series of images subtitled “Trickle-down from marketing.” The latter includes a rhinoceros with wings; said creature with wings within the mind of a human head; said creature reflected in sunglasses and on a broach; and a series of business men with graphs charting a menagerie of orange animals. A row of people titled “Private

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Partner” are followed by people labeled “Public Partner,” followed by yet others called “Private Public Partner.” Then comes the “Start-Up Cities” branding conference, then—under the heading “Mc Jobs (Service & Delivery)”—pictogram-resemblances of a cook, a cleaning lady, a police officer, a telemarketer, etc.

In subsequent panels, the orange animals retreat to the background. One section reads “Privatization (Example),” which the glossary reveals as a reference to the selling-off of the Aachen Municipal Refuse Incinerator to the Aldi Corporation. The characters appear to be lawyers, a mayor and a banker that, in ensuing frames, shake hands in all possible combinations and configurations. Enter a man with a binder that reads “Aachen Nein” and appears to hold 13452 signatures. The cartoon then circles back to the politician orating about trickle-down in front of a crowd, then protesters, followed again by rows of different people shaking hands.

Then come “Protagonists of Privatization” that, among other images, feature representatives from consulting groups, law firms, business fronts and investment banks seated at the same table as mayors and city officials, who are then engaged in a series of covert handshakes and meetings behind closed doors. “Direct Privatization of Public Property” follows, which include familiar icons for housing, subway, power plant, wind mill, telephone company, postal service, sewage plants, recycling, airlines, all interspersed with images of orange figures. Up next is “Contract Signing in New York” which, according to the Glossary, is where contracts are often signed for tax
purposes, “especially in cases of cross-border leasing, in part because it is illegal to sell public property in Germany.”

Illustrations of the selling of public assets are then accompanied by the signature sculptures of the cities in which the sales took place: Municipal trams pass a cow in Zurich (1998); a drinking water system and a bear in Leipzig (2004); a wastewater treatment works and elephants in Hamm (2004)...

Subsequent panels jump to a macro-view of globalization, depicting the international credit agreement in Basel between the “Groups of 10” and investment banks. “New Financial Products,” such as the recurrently vilified credit default swaps are also featured. The story then touches down on the site of exhibition with the sale of thousands of flats in Muenster represented by a cavalcade of identical housing icons and the subtitle “each symbol = 250 flats sold.” The next panel reads “The Government Compensates for the Sale of Its Power of Decision with Posters.” Enter again the orange animals, on posters, podiums, ties, key chains, followed by politicians in talks with communications firms. Then, government campaign posters with the small orange creatures that proclaim “More Jobs,” “No Position is Relative,” “Stop Illegal Labour.” Then, “The Production of Meaning” and a series of

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5 Ibid., 10. Cross-border leasing is also defined in the glossary, with a quote from the economist Werner Rügemer: “In cross-border leasing situations, two banks safeguard each other; one lends money and the other borrows, but in reality these two banks are one and the same. Today's investors hardly have any equity capital–rather, they raise most of what they need in order to buy apartments, public services, etc., by borrowing it. Therefore, very high-earning banks are brought into these contracts to grant loans if they are able to lend the majority of a billion-dollar purchase price, say, for a large apartment complex to investors over the course of twenty to thirty years. Then, to expand the enterprise, another bank is engaged to settle the thirty-year repayment of credit. Thus, on the basis of what seems to be a real enterprise, channels of money are created that take on much larger dimensions than the public is able to perceive.” Ibid., 4.
communications firms and advertising agencies that produce national branding schemes. A stack of books inscribed with the names Luther, Kant, Hegel, Schiller, Hesse, Mann, Goethe, etc. are surrounded by the orange beasts.

The very last series of images depicts “The Production of Plastic Figures.” First, a series of paint-splattered workers, then toxic iconography and “keep out” signs, followed by the same workers assembling different animals in large factories, then the names of companies that produce fiberglass reinforced plastic. The loading of the products into shipping containers, then the marketers who market them, and the publicity people who publicize them—and, finally, the artists who paint them, followed by a space-suit clad man who, in the very last image of the series, cleans them.

Cities that borrow from banks, investment firms that invest in cities and banks that borrow from other banks, which are in turn supported and bolstered by national economies. City spaces recast as business-improvement districts; private consulting firms streamlining and effectivizing the public sector; and the selling-off of public assets in hushed financial deals that transcend national boundaries. The commercially-conceived plastic sculptures that originated in city spaces throughout Europe are Siekmann’s MacGuffins that set off an exploding narrative on the privatization of public space and, ultimately in more general terms, of the European nation state. In his writing on neoliberal globalization, David Harvey has named the privatization of
public assets the primary motor of neoliberalism. The most clean-cut example of this divestiture in the European context was when Thatcher, under the influence of economic advisor Keith Joseph, set about dismantling the British welfare state and its institutions that had been consolidated after 1945. In addition to cutting taxes, reducing social benefits and curbing trade union power, the Thatcher government initiated a comprehensive sweep of privatizations, from formerly public industries to utilities (water, coal, gas, steel, railway, automobile, airlines, aerospace and telecommunications) and, famously, also public housing. Often state-run companies were prepared for privatization by reducing debt and shedding labor power, and their sales were incentivized with valuations that were purposely below their actual worth. The German examples of similar sales from the late ‘90s and early 2000s in Siekmann’s piece elucidate how the phenomenon spans the continent and has only accelerated since the early precedents of the Thatcher era. The pictogram narrative sets out to illustrate that these public fire-sales generate quick money for impoverished cities, but typically depend on profit guarantees and promises of public backing in the event of losses. According to Siekmann’s story, these often shady deals, ultimately, depend upon long-term binding contracts that deplete public coffers and result in an overall reduction in the quality of public services. Siekmann’s piece also gestures towards the global implications and imbrications of privatization. Naomi Klein and

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6 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.
8 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.
9 Siekmann, “Glossary: Trickle down. Public Space in the Age of its Privatization.”
David Harvey have both recently illustrated that the frequently violent US-backed privatizations in Latin America, and other marginal areas of the global economy, served as test-cases for subsequent restructurings in the west.\(^{10}\) Both argue that the 1973 coup in Chile was the first experiment with neoliberal state formation, as Pinochet—aided by Chicago-trained Chilean economists, US politicians and the IMF—reversed nationalizations, privatized public assets and social security, opened natural resources to private and unregulated exploitation and facilitated foreign investment and trade.\(^{11}\) Throughout the 80s and 90s, examples of drastic neoliberalization followed in Mexico, Argentina and South Korea, with various degrees of international involvements from the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and NAFTA. In all of the above instances of neoliberal theory put into practice, from Europe to Latin America, unprecedented wealth was indeed generated. However, as these cases also show, this affluence was largely concentrated within the very top percentiles of society; no money in fact trickled down, as the poor, quite to the contrary, only got poorer. Updating Marx’s “primitive” or “original” accumulation, David Harvey has summarized the neoliberal redistribution from public to private assets as “accumulation by dispossession.”\(^{12}\) Effectively a redistribution that reverses the principles of Keynesianism, it involves the commodification and privatization of


\(^{11}\) Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 8.

\(^{12}\) Harvey, The New Imperialism, 145. Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation described 17th century European states, the discovery of gold and silver in America and colonial conquest in the East Indies and Africa. It concerned the taking and enclosing of land and the expulsion of the resident population to create a landless proletariat. Karl Marx, Capital; a Critique of Political Economy (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 3.
land; the conversion of property rights into exclusive private property rights; the suppression of rights to the commons; the commodification of labor power; colonial, neocolonial and imperial processes of the accumulation of assets, including natural resources; monetization and taxation, particularly of land, etc. Harvey charts how the privatization of public assets is a new form of imperialism, as investors and speculators in the financial capitals of the west, and increasingly also Asia, benefit from the assets of impoverished countries. Siekmann shows that these developments are staggered globally, as the privatization of public space in Europe continues to generate private profits. In what Fredric Jameson has termed the “end of civil society,” “what used to be public is reprivatized, that is, what used to be spaces or places marked by government, and therefore by the public, somehow revert to faceless forms of private control. So that some new kind of thing comes into being that is neither the place of one’s private life nor the monumentalization of collective powers.”¹³

Reprivatized space is not identical to the experience of private architecture. In Jameson’s famous account of the Bonaventure Hotel, for example, private forms of security prevail.¹⁴ By contrast, reprivatized space continues to assert a publicness over which, however, the supervising authorities have become opaque. The opacity of controlling powers are in Siekmann’s oeuvre represented by a multiplicity of surveillance cameras that often appear unconnected to a viewing capacity, and by a

constant presence of policing officers identified only by the private company logos on their uniforms.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to the privatization of public assets, David Harvey argues that a defining characteristic of Neoliberalism is the capacity to commodify almost everything.\textsuperscript{16} While the narrative panels in Siekmann’s installation outline the detrimental effects of reducing people and natural resources to commodity status, the piece clearly also revolves around the commodification of art.\textsuperscript{17} But his is not a conventional critique of the “high art” market and its similarities and differences with respect to other kinds of products. Rather, he takes on objects that connoisseurs in the field would flinch at, things that nonetheless qualify as “art in public space.” Under this privileged denomination granted by city officials, the sculptures circumvent advertising restrictions and, when combined with compassionate agendas of art and charity, constitute tax write-offs for their donors. Dwarfing the amounts associated with the buying and selling of individual works of art, Siekmann’s focus is here the much larger sums of money at stake in marketing campaigns, public sell-offs and corporate tax evasion that bear a relationship to art, if only by name.

\textsuperscript{15} In conjunction with a 1999 exhibition at Portikus in Frankfurt, billboards around the city were covered with Siekmann’s Piece \textit{Fake Freedom Frankfurt}, which depicted security officers suspended as inflated balloons, hovering above recognizable city spaces, shopping malls, etc.

\textsuperscript{16} He writes: “Commodification presumes the existence of property rights over processes, things, and social relations, that a price can be put on them, and that they can be traded subject to legal contract.” Harvey, \textit{A Brief History of Neoliberalism}, 165.

\textsuperscript{17} According to Polanyi: “For the alleged commodity ‘labour power’ cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this particular commodity.”\textit{The Great Transformation}, 1st ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 73.
Art in public spaces can be summarized in crude terms as having undergone a shift from so-called “plop-art” that holds limited regard for the specificity of location, of which Richard Serra’s monumental sculptures arguably are one example, to site-specific practices during the 1990s that were defined by more careful attention to neighboring places and people.\textsuperscript{18} During \textit{Skulptur Projekte} of 1987, two decades before Siekmann’s installation, Richard Serra placed twenty-four tons of steel in the very courtyard that later would house \textit{Trickle Down}. Siekmann’s fiberglass figures, as embodiments of art under the condition of a privatized public sphere, could be interpreted as a hybrid of past sculptural iterations: a site-specific plop-art of sorts. As mentioned previously in the context of Superflex, in global capitalism, individual places, cities and countries are inversely and simplistically delineated in image-driven marketing campaigns aimed at attracting international business. The German writer Joachim Hirsh, with whom Siekmann appears familiar, has dubbed this reconfiguration of state, initiated by Thatcher and subsequently followed throughout the continent, “the national competition state.”\textsuperscript{19} The plastic figures embody the forced materiality and reified identity of locational marketing and thus perhaps serve also to problematize art and architecture’s attempts to encourage regional specificity as an antidote to the generic monotony of globalization. In fact, in emphasizing both the aesthetic quandaries of global repetition \emph{as well as} individual character, the piece

\textsuperscript{18} Serra’s \textit{Tilted Arc} serves as a case in point. While the artist claimed that it was created specifically for the square in lower Manhattan, the piece met large local opposition and was subsequently dismantled. For an in-depth discussion of shifts in site-specific practices, see Kwon, \textit{One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity}.

seems to propose a dramatic narrowing, if not the complete impasse, of circumventory aesthetic tactics. As Fredric Jameson once remarked, “the autonomous languages of separate cultures are themselves the very mechanisms by which the world system reproduces itself and spreads its form of economic standardization. So it’s unclear even now whether the fight for stylistic autonomy in these various regions is really a struggle about autonomy, or not rather of pluralism that the system itself, in its forms of postmodern marketing and international export, business, and so forth, can accommodate not only perfectly well, but indeed, with enthusiasm.”

5.2 Sculpting Neoliberalism, Picturing the Social

Benjamin Buchloh has repeatedly addressed the status of art under conditions of totalizing commodification, recently charting the problematic position of sculpture within advanced capitalism, and spectacle culture in particular. He has sketched the sculptural form’s demise as a result of a tripartite assault of overproduction, digitization and specularization. Rather than seek out a sculptural form that formally opposes these conditions, the plastic figures in Siekmann’s piece precisely embody the form’s demise as a result of the “collaboration with the forces of spectacle culture” so demonized by Buchloh. I would argue that the sculptural form serves another

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22 Ibid.
purpose in *Trickle Down*. In addition to representing the condensation of identity for marketing purposes within the “competition state,” the sculptural form here strives to give materiality and place to an increasingly immaterial and placeless system. In David Harvey’s account, global capitalism subsists in a constant push and pull between territorialization and deterritorialization; between cities, countries and borders, on the one hand, and the apparent placelessness of capital flows on the other. Despite immaterial tendencies, neoliberal capitalism, through Harvey’s geographic lens, has a distinctly spatial dimension:

Fluid movement *over* space can be achieved only by fixing certain physical structures *in* space. Railways, roads, airports, port facilities, cable networks, fibre-optic systems, electricity grids, water and sewage systems, pipelines, etc., constitute ‘fixed capital embedded in the land’ (as opposed to the forms of fixed capital, such as aircraft and machinery, that can be moved around). Such physical infrastructures absorb a lot of capital, the recovery of which depends upon their use *in situ*. [...] While fixed capital invested in the land facilitates spatial mobility for other forms of capital and labour, it demands that spatial interactions follow the fixed geographical patterning of its investments in order for its own value to be realized. The effect is for fixed capital embedded in the land—and this includes factories, offices, housing, hospitals, and schools as well as the capital embedded in transport and communication infrastructures—to act as a significant drag upon geographical transformations and the relocation of capitalist activity.  

*Trickle Down, Public Space in the Age of Its Privatization* outlines a dizzying and paranoid map of worldwide corporations, investment companies and banks, along with international law, consulting, marketing and advertising firms and corporations with *pro forma* addresses and off-shore tax havens. While outlining a highly complex

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macro picture, however, *Trickle Down* maintains a micro plot that is driven by the local mascots of Hamm, Pforzheim, Neumuenster, Berlin, Freising, Hamburg, Dresden, Hameln, Aachen, Niedersachsen, Munich, Dortmund and Buhl. Despite being conceived as site-less and mediated logos, the mascots rely upon material production and subsequent maintenance by sited low-wage workers. They then act as commodity fetishes in Marx’s sense, although here the superimposition of the cultural capital of the western artist on the mass-produced object is interestingly what seems to aid this very process of fetishization, as one type of esteemed production whitewashes and renders invisible an unsightly counterpart. 24 Along with the pictograms’ depictions of the subjection of local infrastructure to international investment and speculation, the sculptural objects of the installation can be interpreted as expressions of global capitalism’s fixity. They are thus comprehended as enacting the monopoly, rootedness and stagnancy of capitalism that are in constant tension with its persistent striving for their opposites: competition, motion and dynamism. Faced with constant frustrations of immateriality, such as the decimation of national economies as a result of unfettered counter-lending absent of a traceable point of origin and the elusive connection between financial speculation and the citizen-victim, the focus on the plastic animals is the result of an urge to visualize capitalism—and, perhaps more accurately, it is borne out of a desire to punch it. At a time when the relationship between the non-sites and sites of capitalism increasingly demands definition—such

as the recent case of global speculation in sub-prime lending that left neighborhoods deserted and multitudes homeless—Siekmann recasts art as a practice capable of rendering plasticity to these otherwise intangible connections.

*Trickle Down’s* pictograms are a continuation of the artist’s similarly diagrammatic works. These imagistic diagrams produce an effect of repetitive sameness across the panels; apart from stereotypical markings (homeless, punk, politician, etc.), faces are void of individualizing markings. Too generic for private experience, too categorized for collective imagination, the combination of resonant sameness and personal absence conjures neither the image of unity, nor does it open up a possibility of singular identifications. While widely recognizable from generic signage, Siekmann consciously refers to the specific history of these forms. Developed at the beginning of the last century in Germany by the Cologne Progressives, August Tschinkel and Heinrich Hoerle, and at the Institute for Statistics in Vienna, Austria by Gerd Arntz, Otto Neurath and Franz Seiwert, they were inspired by socialist and communist ideals with the aim of developing an iconography through formal reduction and a method of pictorial statistics that could illustrate the reality of social relations and capitalist exploitation. In 1934 Seiwert noted: “With this pictorial form I attempt to represent a reality stripped of all sentimentality and contingency, to make visible its function, its laws, its relations and tensions with the frame of the picture and the laws
defining it.” With the utopian ideals of transcending cultural and linguistic barriers, thereby forging international socialist solidarities, chimneys and factories signified the inhumane world of work, while heads and bodies represented deindividuated workers. The attempted objectivity of this newfound style clearly stands in direct opposition to the individualized forms of artistic expressionism prevalent at the time. At the Vienna Institute of Statistics, Arntz and Neurath created the International System of Typography Pictorial Education (ISOTYPE), which included all social groups and professions that were considered relevant at the time: farmer, salaried employee, employer, worker, unemployed person, etc. It is essential to consider that Andreas Siekmann charts contemporary society with what reasonably could be considered the most socially-grounded form of representation, one that combined the fields of social studies and economics with artistic aspirations. However, some notable changes to the signifieds (workers, industries, etc.) have resulted in symbolic innovation since the precedents of the 1920s and 1930s. While Arntz depicted the unemployed worker with arms in his pockets, the out-of-work subject is now rendered with his pockets turned out by Siekmann. In the pictograms of *Trickle Down*, Siekmann additionally introduces new subjects and professions. United under the category of McJobs, he outlines a flexible and low-paid workforce, frequently of immigrant origin, which

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27 In the work *From: Limited Liability Company*. This installation consists of a row of pictograms, continued across tables and walls, in which the early history of the pictograms in Germany and Austria is specifically referenced, see Portikus Gallery, *Andreas Siekmann.*
typically performs service-oriented jobs like cleaning, cooking and telemarketing.

Lumped together in one category, in lieu of being schematized hierarchically according to identifications of class and specific professions, Siekmann now envisions a society where affiliations are based primarily on consumption. Unemployment is now signified by pockets-turned-out, hence the inability to consume. The unemployed, the punk, the homeless person, and the weight-bearing immigrant are all unable to buy. Bringing this point further, Siekmann has juxtaposed pictograms for another new group: L.O.H.A.S. Coined by city sociologists and planners, it is an acronym for “Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability” that characterizes a group of urban, well-heeled, ecology-minded professionals.  

Defined not by what they do, but by their eagerness to buy, they are a target group of development schemes within privatized city spaces. The effect of deploying this essentially socialist form of representation to depict a new form of social organization serves to illustrate how former class-based identifications have symptomatically given way to identitarian and lifestyle-driven affiliations of consumption. The definition of the middle class, for example, has vastly expanded in the popular imaginary to include almost everyone who owns a cell phone, a new pair of sneakers, etc. In other words, this new deployment of an old representational form fails in updating prior partitions of the “the people.” The failure, I would argue, is akin to the frequent critiques of Marxism’s class determinism and its

28 The LOHAS website reads: “LOHAS consumers, sometimes referred to as Lohasians, are interested in products covering a range of market sectors and sub-sectors, including: Green building supplies, socially responsible investing and "green stocks", alternative healthcare, organic clothing and food, personal development media, yoga and other fitness products, eco-tourism and more.” LOHAS ONLINE, “Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability,” http://lohas.com

related incapacity to adequately address contemporary social organizations. However, while admittedly falling short on one front, I believe that Siekmann’s reuse overtly asserts the continual validity of this methodology on another. In this way, his works depart from many other recycling procedures in contemporary art that have taken up forms associated with former social movements. This, I would suggest, is also what makes Siekmann a social artist—indeed, in the tradition of Institutional Critique, also a critical one—as discussed in Chapter 2 of this book. The pictograms are here almost identically conceived as capable of laying bare an otherwise elusive economic reality. Just as the historic pictograms crafted a way of concretizing vast economic sums and transactions, in an attempted visual quantification of capitalism, Siekmann charts how, for example, thousands of formerly public apartments are privatized in Muenster. Although Siekmann departs from the traditional class-types of Marxism and socialism, their economic analysis of society and its effects on the population remain intact in *Trickle Down*. The pared-down depictions of the 20s and 30s had the utopian aspiration of revealing the dynamics of capitalist exploitation within industrial societies. Siekmann’s intent is a no less lofty one of revealing the hidden machinations and connections of neoliberal global capitalism. The social aspect of this, in other words, is to show how neoliberal capitalism has unanimously destructive social effects on a people that cannot be constructed in essentializing terms.

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30 This procedure is, for example, what unites the artists and artworks described by Nicolas Bourriaud in *Postproduction*.
5.3 Salvaging the Public from Space

In a familiar characterization of art in the face of advanced capitalism, Benjamin Buchloh has written that a radical practice must reflect “its status within a larger visual apparatus under the regime of the spectacle. It deconstructs rather than abides by this regime, trying to find—even if only provisionally—precisely those spaces in which the hegemony of spectacle has yet to be fully established.” When compared to this prescription, Trickle Down, Public Space in the Era of Its Privatization performs a curious operation. The installation acknowledges the total reification of the art object, embodied by the plastic mascot, and the participation of art in the mechanisms of capitalism, represented by the artists who cover over the real conditions of production with local decorations. The piece also sketches a society where what formerly passed as public space has been entirely privatized. While Buchloh speaks of a critical sculptural practice that constantly seeks out, even if only metaphorically speaking, fleeting spaces that have not thus far been gobbled up by capitalist spectacle culture, Siekmann’s artwork contrarily asserts that no such spaces remain. The multiplication of cameras and monitors through which spaces are frequently depicted, serve as illustrations of this fact, as if public space itself had been rendered spectacular. At the same time, the artist also clearly stakes out a critical autonomy, a stance from which capitalism’s dynamics can be laid bare. While aiming its oppositional guns at art as marketing and art as promotion, the piece concurrently

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31 Buchloh, “Cargo and Cult: The Displays of Thomas Hirschhorn.”
32 In a familiar pattern of global capitalism, the figures are produced in sites where labor is cheap and are subsequently finessed by local artists.
carves out a position for a critical artistic practice. Unlike Buchloh, however, this stance of criticality is not conceived in spatial terms.

Rosalyn Deutsche has discussed the relationship of art to democratic notions of space. Faced with the spaces of advanced capitalist urbanization, she argues, leftist cultural theorists have sought to dispel uncertainty by appealing to an origin and essence of civic life and its spaces. As mentioned previously, some art historians have suggested that the longing for community and unreified social relations in recent art practices might constitute a related “homecoming.” Following Claude Lefort, Deutsche argues that democracy and democratic power precisely are defined by indeterminacy and uncertainty. In Lefort’s theorization, under monarchy, power was embodied in the person of the king who, in turn, derived his power from a transcendent source (God, Supreme Justice or Reason). Society and its people were under this state formation represented as substantial unities, their hierarchical organization resting on an absolute basis. With the democratic revolution, however, state power was dislocated from a legitimizing outside force and instead derived from the “people” of no substantial identity and unity—thus something purely social, or what Lefort calls “the image of an empty place.”

34 Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity; Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.”
relation to this empty place, Deutsche, like several other theorists, argues that it is fruitul to think not in terms of space at all, but rather in terms of a *public sphere*.\(^{37}\)

Transgressing the boundaries that conventionally divide public from nonpublic art—divisions drawn, for example, between indoor and outdoor art, between artworks shown in conventional institutions and those displayed in ‘the city,’ between state-sponsored and privately funded art—the public sphere excavates other distinctions that, neutralized by prevailing definitions of public space, are crucial to democratic practice. By differentiating public space from the realm of the state, for instance, the concept of the public sphere counteracts public art discourse that defines the public as state administration and confines democracy to a form of government. The public sphere idea locates democracy in society to which state authority is accountable. […] Since any site has the potential to be transformed into a public or, for that matter, a private space, public art can be viewed as an instrument that either helps produce a public space or questions a dominated space that has been officially ordained as public. […] Art that is ‘public’ participates in, or creates, a political space and is itself a space where we assume political identities.\(^{38}\)

Public space seems to remain a mere figure of speech in Siekmann’s work. While asserting that no space today can be considered properly public, the piece appears to remain faithful to the political ideal of publicness. With a concentration on a hopelessly privatized spatiality, his is an address that assumes a *discursive* public sphere in which democratic demands can be voiced. As if to illustrate this critical unsiting, for *Sonsbeek* 93, Siekmann blocked off a bland city square (which included a parking lot, a roofed structure, a fountain and a sculpture) in Arnhem, Holland with a

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\(^{37}\) Deutsche references Jürgen Habermas’ famous theorization of the public sphere, but summarily concludes “that there are other conceptions of the public sphere less hostile to differences or conflict, less eager to turn their backs on critiques of modernity, and more skeptical about the innocence of either reason or language and note the strong impact that any conception of a public sphere exerts on conventional assumptions about public art.” Ibid., 287-288.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 288.
fence typical of the construction sites of urban transformations. As people approached, 152 small holes in the otherwise solid fence became visible. Peering through the holes revealed, not the square that remained untouched for the installation, but drawings that effectively flattened perspectival viewing to a pictogramic representation of that space, and others like it, occupied by a range of people and a diversity of usages. Subverting the familiar demands of on-site exhibitions that serve to market and beautify cities, Siekmann closed off the site in order to stage a broader problematization of the notion of publicness in general terms.

Andreas Siekmann’s *Trickle Dow* could be summed up as an illustration of the gradual change over the course of recent decades from the welfare state to the neoliberal state in Europe. The pictograms’ depictions of endless meetings and handshakes between public officials and representatives of private companies reveal that the turnover from public to private hands does not result in an absenting of the state; it in fact precisely depends upon direct state supervision and intervention. As several theorists have pointed out, far from the emergence of a post-state scenario, we are witnessing dramatic shifts in their role and nature. In the words of R.B.J. Walker, these changes

40 The images were based on conversations with local residents about possible alternative usages of city space. The blockade became quite unpopular and was subject to vandalism. The artist left this opposition visually intact and subsequently included it in representations and discussions of the piece. Ibid.
“reflect both the rise of regional and global market forces and a neoliberal ideational consensus. This consensus has generated support for minimizing the regulatory, entrepreneurial, and social roles of the state, while underscoring its role in generating facilitative frameworks for the new geopolitics of economic globalization. This internationalization of the state, along with the impacts of IT on the deterritorializing of commerce and finance, has changed the nature and role of the state, but does not necessarily imply the obsolescence, or even decline, of the state.41

David Harvey has outlined that there has been “a radical reconfiguration of state institutions and practices (particularly with respect to the balance between coercion and consent, between the powers of capital and of popular movements, and between executive and judicial power, on the one hand, and powers of representative democracy on the other.)”42 The neoliberal state is therefore, as many have argued,43 a highly contradictory formation: while it is defined by taking the back seat in order to cede control to markets, the neoliberal state must also enact a variety of activist measures in order to ensure a “good business climate” and financial solvency.44 The European state, in this case Germany, is in Trickle Down portrayed as entirely devoted to neoliberal economics. Since capitalist hegemony in Siekmann’s spatial analyses is already everywhere, critiques can only be articulated from a place of interiority. Hence, there is an absence of spatial specificity in the piece and no references to the

42 Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 78.
44 While state intervention in markets is to be kept to a minimum, the neoliberal state must guarantee the quality and integrity of money; it must set up military, defense, police and legal structures to protect private property rights; and it must ensure that land, water, education, health care and environmental pollution controls are supervised to best support market demands. Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 2.
public or private orientation of the particular place of exhibition. It is as if this generic ball of animals could just as well have been occupied by a generic one. While largely departing from a spatial notion of public, the Trickle Down upholds a social notion of the term. Giving up on public space, but insisting on a public sphere, the piece appears not to have entirely abandoned the European nation state, but, rather, demands that it conform to its democratic claims. The public sphere is conceived by the piece precisely in the meeting with an art public that, addressed in the most generic of visual languages, needs no locational foundation. It is from this placeless space, it seems, that democratic demands are to be voiced. Trickle Down, Public Space in the Age of Its Privatization does not take the form of a site-specific piece for a particular locality under protection by a state-funded arts organization. Under the neoliberalized nation state, site-specific art is lumped together in a permanent state of crisis.

5.4 The Limits of the State

“Hallelujah! Christ is risen indeed!,” "You Lie Kids Die BLIAR," “Pensioners want a slice of the cake, not just crumbs.” A scattershot array of what might appear as mutually contradictory utterances of no coherent agency—on frayed posters, hand-painted banners and crumbled notepaper—were interspersed among a random assortment of grubby stuffed animals, papier-mâché renditions of reviled politicians and horrific images of war. These were but some of the over 600 components in a 40 meter-long ramshackle display which occupied the majestic Duveen galleries of Tate Britain in 2007, the same year as Siekmann’s Trickle Down. State Britain by Mark
Wallinger was a meticulous replica of the anti-war activist Brian Haw’s protest materials, which he had created as well as received from sympathizers over a six-year period. A fervent Christian, Haw had begun his round-the-clock encampment in June of 2001 in front of the British Parliament to protest the economic sanctions imposed on Sadam Hussein’s government and specifically, in his view, their devastating effects on the country’s children. Following the cataclysmic event just months later in New York, and its militaristic responses by the UK and “coalition” nations in Afghanistan and later Iraq, the demonstration grew into a permanent anti-war shrine. The city council of Westminster attempted from the outset to have the display removed. In the first court case in 2002, the presiding judge, referring to article ten of the European convention on human rights that guarantees freedom of speech, allowed Haw to carry on. In 2005, however, the Blair government introduced the “Serious Crime and Police Act,” which included measures that criminalized “anti-social behavior;” expanded police power to make all offenses, no matter how minor, arrestable and extended DNA retention, even after a suspect is cleared of any wrongdoing. In addition, and obviously in direct response to one persistent oppositional presence, it restricted the right to demonstrate within an exclusion zone of up to one kilometer from any point on Parliament Square. The measure was assertively enforced on the morning of May 23, 2006, when 78 police officers carted off the prohibited effects in

containers in an operation that later was revealed by critics to have expended 27 thousand pounds.\textsuperscript{47} Haw was left with three meters of materials, the new metric allowance for dissent.

As we have seen, under the neoliberal state strong state support of individual freedoms, such as property rights, are contradicted by state suppression of other arenas of independence, such as the right to protest, organize in unions, etc. The exercise of state force on the part of the state in order to secure freedom for the market has primarily been felt in Latin America and the so-called third world. However, Margaret Thatcher’s police crackdown on the miner’s strike in England in 1984 has frequently been named an example of similar tendencies by the European nation state. While these examples remained few and far between in Europe, since 9/11 and the rise of the “war on terror,” several political theorists have characterized an increasing use of force in European states, leading one scholar to describe a turn from the welfare state to the security state.\textsuperscript{48} Gilles Deleuze, elaborating on the theorizations of Michel Foucault, conceptualized a similar turn from a disciplinary society to a society of control.\textsuperscript{49} While disciplinary society operated primarily through containment by a variety of apparatuses and disciplinary institutions (the school, the military, the

\textsuperscript{49} Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Control Societies,” \textit{Negotiations} (1995).
hospital, the prison etc.)—which fixed the limits of accepted and unacceptable behavior and effectively structured the boundaries and parameters of thought and practice—the mechanisms of control have become imminent in the new societal order. Power is exercised in the infinitesimal through machines and networks that directly organize the brains and bodies of the citizens. The disciplinary invasion of power corresponded to resistance of the individual as a distinct entity, whereas, in the new regime of biopower, control extends throughout the depths of the consciousness and bodies of the population and across the entirety of social relations.\textsuperscript{50}

Considering Deleuze’s characterization of the society of control, Haw fell victim to a rather unsophisticated and untechnological implementation of state power. Nevertheless, the prohibition of the very presence of the body in protest does recall Deleuze’s outline of new biopolitical controls. \textit{State Britain} specifically takes on the erosion of civil liberties, involving sophisticated surveillance technologies and unsophisticated exercises of brute force alike, which in Britain and the rest of Europe, have found their way into countries’ legal frameworks with accelerated frequency during the past decade.\textsuperscript{51} As Nikolas Rose has remarked, European countries are increasingly marked by an “intensification of direct, disciplinary, often coercive and

\textsuperscript{50} In Deleuze’s periodization, the shift from disciplinary to control societies is instituted and accelerates after the Second World War, thus these mechanisms of control are conceived as products of the capitalist state. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} For a description of the escalation of anti-terror measures in Britain and the rest of Europe, see Maurice McCahill, “Globalisation, Surveillance and the "War on Terror," in \textit{Globalisation, Citizenship and the War on Terror} (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2007), 216.
carceral, political interventions in relation to particular zones of persons […]”.\textsuperscript{52} As summarized in Chapter 1, the population is increasingly conceived as grouped in smaller affiliations, according to lifestyle, consumption patterns, etc. This has brought about the parallel problematizing of certain nonparticipating groups (i.e. “the excluded” and “anti-social” in New Labour rhetoric) to which reformatory programs are devoted and at which, if deemed ungovernable, punitive measures are ultimately enforced. The targeting of Brian Haw is but one British example of excessive use of force that enacts post-9-11 legal measures. The 2005 fatal shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, an innocent man mistakenly identified as a suicide bomber and killed according to a new “shoot to kill policy” that required no prior warning, is another infamous example.\textsuperscript{53}

According to Rosalyn Deutsche, violent actions against marginalized groups are increasingly performed in the name of democracy. Such absolutist deployments of the term, she argues, effectively crush the inherent indeterminacy that theorists like Lefort claim characterizes it.\textsuperscript{54} Urban spaces are in these implementations endowed with substantive sources of unity and their uses are deemed self-evident and—with references to totalizing foundations, such as eternal human needs, the organic development of cities, objective moral values, etc.—uniformly beneficial. It is also these claims of false unity that are used to authorize the exercise of state power in city
spaces and the eviction of undesirable groups and people like Brian Haw. Following Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau’s theorizations of antagonistic nature of politics, and Slavoj Žižek’s analysis of the ideological figure of the “Jew,” Deutsche writes: “The element thwarting society’s ability to cohere is transformed from a negativity within the social itself into a presence whose elimination would restore social order.”

The overly aggressive eviction of protest in the UK similarly casts public space as an organic unity which the protester has come to disrupt from an exterior position. As such, the excessive targeting of Brian Haw involved creating a positive representation of the element that prevented society from achieving closure—in this case, democracy and security during the looming threat of imminent terror. He is the “element thwarting society’s ability to cohere,” here the idea of a united patriotic nation supporting its troops which is “transformed from a negativity within the social itself into a presence whose elimination would restore social order.”

This account also brings to mind previously-discussed examples, such as Nicolas Sarkozy’s statements that the thugs and scum of the cités disrupted the peace of the French who supposedly collectively supported his security policy. Superflex’s repetition of common populist discourse that pits the minority “Foreigners” against the majority “Danes” also illustrates a similar binary construction. The British case against Haw and his protests materials, like so many recent repressions, was argued from a standpoint of saving democracy and its public space from the threat of hostile entities harbored within.

55 Ibid., 278.
56 Ibid.
Anne Larason Schneider and Helen Ingram have outlined how degenerative policy designs construct target populations according to “deserving” and “undeserving” groups. They outline a policy-making system in societies in which wealth, status and power are unequal. Here, “policy makers seek to define the issue and borrow or create designs so that they can confer benefits on powerful, positively constructed targets or burdens on powerless, negatively constructed targets; and keep other issues off the agenda.” Subsequently policy designs are implemented that “depend on the power and social construction of the target population as: advantaged, contender, dependent, deviant.” In turn, “policy makers, target populations, media, scientists and professionals, and others […] define the issue in terms that will enable them to rationalize policy designs that will serve their own narrow interests.”

This course of policy arguably confers with Deutsche’s analysis of a democracy that is faultily characterized as a coherent unity, legitimated by an underlying moral foundation, which is under threat by narrow groupings of subjects who threaten this stability. This schema is arguably similar to the British New Labour model that framed Haw as “deviant,” relying on what Deutsche referred to as the “image of positivity” of negatively-coded groups of nonparticipants within the population. Such a characterization is conveniently ungrounded in policy analysis, but rather politically constructed to benefit particular narrow interests. The twist is that, under New Labour, some images of positivity of negatively-coded groups of “the excluded”—while being

57 Anne L. Schneider, Policy Design for Democracy (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).
58 Ibid., 103.
punished with a lack of social services and excessive police force in some instances—were simultaneously targeted with a slew of reports that argued that art was capable of reincluding them within the proverbial fold of societal participation (illustrated in Chapter 2 of this volume). The bitter pill of art was in this case cast as an award for the deviant. *State Britain* situates itself at a strange nexus within this policy context: while concentrating on one example of state force against one such deviant, it serves up art as a free space capable of cradling dissent.

Wallinger’s exhibition at Tate Britain, which was based on the artist’s careful documentation of the protest that had fortuitously taken place just days before its removal, also involved a black line that ran throughout the building:

It first appears under a display of wrapping paper in the Tate Britain shop, crossing the floor and disappearing under a display of art-technique manuals. It crosses a room currently dominated by a bust of TE Lawrence, hitting the wall beneath Jacob Kramer's Jews at Prayer; it passes Jacob Epstein's alabaster Jacob and the Angel, and speeds beyond Nicholas Hilliard's portrait of Elizabeth I. It slides past a vitrine displaying the first English translation of the Qur'an, published in 1649, just four months after the beheading of Charles I. Finally, the line hits the wall under George Stubbs's 1785 painting of Reapers, his immaculately turned-out peasants decorously working the farm. 59

The line was a visual enactment of the one-kilometer diameter around the parliament, which serendipitously bisects Tate Britain. The objects that made up *State Britain* were provocatively positioned both within and outside the government’s zone of prohibition. The Tate is, like many European museums, based on a private-

collection-made-public—in this case, the industrialist Henry Tate who had donated his artistic holdings, and the money to construct a building to house them, to the British state in 1889. With a deft positioning of an “S” in front of the museum’s name, and thus also the moniker of its private patron, Wallinger’s near-obsessive recreation plainly references the continued affiliation of the institution with the state. The continuous marking throughout this famous state institution of art seemed a deliberate attempt precisely to draw the ever-elusive boundary separating the safe zone of art from the surrounding social domain. As such, Wallinger carries on a long tradition of testing artistic autonomy by means of targeted placement of artwork within alternately public and private settings.

Wallinger’s act of bringing non-art objects into the museum is of course by no means new. The placement of a specifically political manifestation inside the exhibition space is reminiscent of actions by art students during ‘68 in Paris and elsewhere as well as subsequent practices of Institutional Critique, such as Hans Haacke’s 1969 News, in which teletype machines spurted updates from international wire services—documenting, among other events, the mounting opposition to the Vietnam War—onto the gallery floor. Artworks like these sought to, on the one hand, reveal the ideological coding of the white cube’s supposed neutrality and, on the other, articulated that social and economic realities do not fall away upon entering the museum, as if its entrance were some contingency-zapping force-field. Wallinger’s act of making tangible otherwise invisible relations of power within the art institution is also familiar from Institutional Critique. Take, for example, Haacke’s Manet-
PROJEKT 74 (1974) in which the artist listed the biographies and economic details of prior owners of Manet’s *Bunch of Asparagus* (1880) alongside the painting itself. Another instance would be the aforementioned *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (1968-1972) by Marcel Broodthaers where the ideologically-imbued image of the eagle was presented within the sterilizing conventions of museum display. However, while these practices commonly targeted the impact of bourgeois culture, state influence and corporate interests on the sphere of art, revealing that the institution is determined and thus also somewhat crippled by these powers, the museum is in State Britain positioned as an unusual free space of sorts within the greater complex of state institutions. As if a literal litmus test of the fraught autonomy of art, the state museum here becomes the only governmental institution, let alone the only “public” arena, capable of staging protest against the primary institution of the state, namely the Parliament. This random and somewhat artless display, then, could seem a triumphant declaration of art’s, and this artist’s, autonomy. Moreover, it is indicative that this protest is not one that, in the voice of Institutional Critique’s signature dry objectivity, dissects specific culprits and the economy of war in general terms. It is a sprawling and incongruous mishmash of religious fervor, sardonic jabs and factual statements, articulated by few marginalized, and seemingly crazed, oppositionists. The artwork, then, exists as a kind of visual face-off of one individual, and a few likeminded, against an imposing yet invisible “state power.”

*State Britain* can be interpreted as a resounding affirmation of the state institution of art that, despite all of its failings, persists as an almost magical zone,
capable of nurturing acts that elsewhere are forcefully suppressed. It thus turns on its head frequent assertions by activist artists who seek refuge outside what is perceived as the bankrupted (economically, politically and otherwise) institution of art. *State Britain* could even be construed as a revolt against postmodern theorizations, which assert that no space or relationship evades the debilitating and corrupting forces of power. By crudely drawing the line of law and placing forbidden objects well into the prohibited zone, the piece reads as an emperor’s new clothes-in-reverse; a triumphant “I told you so!” After decades of rebuttals, in this privileged sphere at least, the reign of the state proves continually capable. *State Britain*, ultimately then, can be summarized as a showdown—not so much of art versus the social counterpoised, as between the two faces or stages of the state: the redistributive and protective welfare state, on the one hand, and its punitive, neoliberal and controlling counter on the other.
Conclusion

The Universal Question

The last twenty years have evidenced a multi-dimensional crisis of the welfare state in Europe. The rise of neoliberalism has caused economy to take precedence over politics and the regulatory state to give way to a new brand of sovereign state. These changes have occasioned a mounting defense of the post-war welfare state. Desires of historical return, however, are complicated by the advents of poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism that have served to destabilize the enlightenment idea that a unified subject lays the foundation for the cohesive social body. These theorizations have shifted the focus towards difference and plurality (of race, ethnicity, sex, etc.), making the bureaucratic definition of welfare, the provision of basic needs, appear insufficiently attentive to such multiplicities. These hesitations are in turn met with others. The history of the welfare state, as we have seen, is also a history of exclusion. As small boats arrive clandestinely to the southern coasts of the continent, while more and more sadly sink during the attempt, and as many are constantly turned away at border controls, Europe has increasingly come to resemble a tightly-guarded fortress, rather than a universally-founded welfare network. The individual’s entitlement to a share of the social product has over the past fifty years revealed itself

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to be inextricably bound up with citizen status within a particular political
confinement; democracy, then, is inherent to the nation state, while other states and
communities necessarily take up an exterior position. These divisions are only
compounded by new turns to the right and regurgitations of “one people” and other
slogans formerly associated with social democratic foundations.

The crises of the welfare state have produced a crisis among theorists and
artists. While indebted to a history of statist critique, cultural producers have sought to
retain notions of welfare, social responsibility, solidarity as well as a conception of a
public sphere; a desire to conceive of everyone is met with attempts at accounting for
singular differences. Central to this paradox is the question of universality with which
this state model is so deeply imbricated. The question is whether the fundamentals of
the welfare state are too irredeemably bound to the much-contested notions of
essentialism, foundationalism or an a priori “human” condition. In a conversation with
Slavoj Žižek and Ernesto Laclau, on the topic of universality, Judith Butler remarks:
“To the extent that universality fails to embrace all particularity and, on the contrary,
is built upon a fundamental hostility to particularity, it continues to be and to animate
the very hostility by which it is founded. The universal can be the universal only to the
extent that it remains untainted by what is particular, concrete and individual. Thus it
requires the constant and meaningless vanishing of the individual […]” 2 In other
words, universality is an innately contradictory formation that cannot proceed without

2 Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality:
suppressing or eradicating that which it purports to include. Despite its violent exclusions, though, Butler, Laclau and Žižek insist on a retention of the category of universality, not as a static presumption or an a priori given, but as an ever-evolving proposition, irreducible to any of its determinate modes of appearance. The universal is not a substantive category; that is, it is not a space defined by its positive properties or a combination of key ingredients. Quite to the contrary, universality is always marked by negativity. The universal is here proposed as at once impossible and necessary. For it is on the basis of this perpetually-deferred stipulation that new claims for inclusion are necessarily made by those excluded by preexisting formulations. As such, new demands to be encompassed by the universal simultaneously expose the exclusionary proclivities of a current system. The universal, according to this theorization, operates through a peculiar performative and temporal logic that continually shifts backwards and forwards. It is never static, but continuously in flux.

At the outset of this book, I proposed that Hans Haacke’s Der Bevölkerung opened up a political space between the people and the population, or two states of the welfare state, as it were. On the one hand, the preexisting people, while presently exclusionary, held out the promise of universal enclosure. To compensate for current omissions, the artist installed the population as a blossoming aspiration for all-encompassing inclusivity. Yet, it was clear, population—many as many alone—could

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3 As Judith Butler writes: "What is universal is therefore what pertains to every person, but is not everything that pertains to every person." Ibid., 17.

4 For example, the liberal democratic ethico-political principles of liberty and equality can serve to articulate future demands for subaltern subjects, such as slaves and post-colonial populations, etc. Ibid., 39.
not stand on its own; it was coupled with the institution of liberal democracy, the Reichstag within which debates around inclusivity and exclusivity continue to be staged. Like the above theorization of the universal, the piece at once performed an imaginary of an unrealized state formation while, at the same time, being firmly anchored upon an actual historical foundation. It is a pattern familiar to all of the works I have here discussed.

**The Persistence of State**

As previous sections have made clear, the state has far from imploded or vanished. It remains as a problematic framework that artists in Europe inevitably relate to, not least in applications for funding, exhibition opportunities, etc. Most contemporary artists have a strong memory of the welfare state and its programs and, in some cases, deliberately relate to its dismantling. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the artworks discussed in the above chapters, the relationship to the state and its history is often complex and very seldom clear cut. It is important to keep in mind that at issue are artworks, and not cultural policies, which means that layered and conflicting references to social and cultural agendas, past as well as present, often take the place of unified, procedural stances. In light of the shifting state terrain, the field of culture has come to occupy an intensely compromised and complicated position. It is thus difficult to conceive of artistic autonomy in a context where the sphere of culture historically has been and continues to be deeply affected by matters of state. New
artistic actions, then, necessarily take up a silhouetted position in relationship to this complex history of arts and culture as state policy.

In light of its recent dramatic restructuring, the “specter” of the post-war welfare state seems important to revisit, invoking it as a counterpoint to contemporary practices in order to question what the social function of art might be today. I set out to inquire how artistic methodology, strategy and tactics reflect current changes to the state and capitalism. Do they set up modes of resistance to the new order or merely reflect its structure? Over the course of recent decades, art practices have increasingly turned toward local contexts and social and political issues pertaining to these sites and communities. Taking the form of small-scale relations, actions and events, these works have involved a shift away from more passive forms of viewership towards direct interactions with localized audiences. In this context, artists often come to serve as mediators or providers of a service to local communities. Repeatedly, too, emphasis is predominantly on this social interaction or, otherwise put, the mechanism of provision rather than on the objects or substance of the provision itself. It has been my overall goal to consider the fact that these practices arose alongside the crisis of the European welfare state. I proposed that these works seem to correspond to a greater paradigmatic shift of European welfare states during recent decades. Drawing from writings in social and political theory, I argued that the turn towards community-based artistic practice mirrors a larger political move away from realm of “the social” and toward an emphasis on “the community.”
Several theorists have pointed to the fact that the discourses of community that were developed by activists during the 1960s have gradually resurfaced within neoliberal rhetoric, corporate as well as governmental. Community, which was initially seen first and foremost as a means of resistance to the state, has increasingly become adopted as a technique of the state, as people are increasingly expected to rely on their immediate family and communities in lieu of state provisions of social services and securities. The population is more and more seen as fragmented and, consequently, problems are tackled by experts in a local and specialized fashion. While some of these accounts argue for total reification and instrumentalization of all forms of artistic resistance and critique, I am more interested in interpreting how the turn towards community in art practice might play into, or resist, this significant societal shift. Among other benefits, I hope the above analysis will prove useful in providing a means of analyzing the relationship between contemporary practices and 1960s cultural activism with which they have often been associated. While that utopian moment certainly has been both directly and indirectly referenced throughout art practices of the 1990s and early 2000s, I have suggested that such discourses necessarily read differently in contemporary context. As made evident by the projects discussed, contemporary practices are difficult to view as direct continuations of oppositional artistic actions of the 1960s and 1970s—and even of artistic modernism overall. The difficulty pertains not to events immanent to the aesthetic, but in the historical rise of neoliberalism during the intervening decades. Its advent has put such issues as aesthetic autonomy, self-organization, institutional relations and community
in a dramatically new light. Therefore, analysis of works that involve these themes today is meaningless without sociopolitical and economic context.

Following this discursive shift, it is relevant to question whether the recent turn towards community in artistic practice within the European context can be viewed as “community services” that take the place of what came before, namely social services. In view of policies past, I question how artists and artworks engage groups and what model of sociality do they presuppose?: do they consider a unified national body, a population composed of diverse groups, or, a market to be reached? Are these groupings conceived as preexisting or precisely produced by the artwork? Accordingly, is the function of culture to educate, represent or entertain? Furthermore, it is worth asking whether artworks, which function primarily as relations and services, can evade the historically debilitating distinction between “deserving” and “undeserving” groups. Whether or not the welfare state was explicitly addressed in the artwork, the intention of this study was to regard artistic practices in social context, illustrating how societal shifts are a necessary backdrop for understanding contemporary art in Europe.

Relational and community-oriented practices have so far been approached mainly from art historical and critical standpoints, often involving an analysis of the internal relations that these pieces imply.5 These practices have also often been

5 This was the primary focus of prior engagements with these and similar works. See, for example, Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics; Bishop, Participation.
inscribed in global context as exemplifications of a growing international trend. Analysis of artistic practices has the tendency to slip all too easily into the logics of neoliberal globalization. Artists and artworks are conceived irrespective of the places in which they exhibit and their audiences are consequently, and rather arbitrarily, comprehended with another universal category: the undifferentiated “viewer.” In Bourriaud’s analysis, for example, relational artworks, which are argued to arise from a political impulse, lose their political charge, since they could be anywhere, addressing anyone. Such universalizing interpretations can serve to mask precisely the exclusionary nature of the nation state. For who can and cannot travel to see art fairs, biennials and triennials? This is not only a problem pertaining to the art theorist or critic; it is also highly relevant for artistic practitioners to consider what type of address their work involves and to whom it is intended. Such reflection can hopefully support practices that don’t just reproduce neoliberal operations, but attempt to actively engage or critique them.

In contrast to prior relational studies, which proved a fruitful point of departure for this analysis, my intention has been to focus more narrowly on the prevalence of these practices within Europe. This specificity is relevant for several reasons. First of all, an underlying assumption of this study is that, in spite of a globalized (art) world, art still to a great extent operates within the framework of the nation state. The prevalence of these practices in Europe, for example, can be partially explained by the fact that governments often actively welcomed and supported such community-based and “educational” efforts. To this point, I think it can be safely assumed that none of
the practices I have considered could have come into being within the framework of US state arts funding. Adding to this fact the particularity of their subject matter, they therefore exist as properly European creations. Like these works, too, much artistic production on the continent involves a direct negotiative relationship with European state institutions.

**Redistribution under a Critical Statism**

As I have tried to make clear over the course of this study, the welfare state cannot, and perhaps should not, be resurrected in its post-war form. Ritu Vij has emphasized a deep-seated theoretical quandary associated with the traditional conception of the welfare state. As the welfare thinker T.H. Marshall argued early on, followed by many other theorists and practitioners of redistribution, the provision of welfare was from the outset considered an instrument for building civil solidarity among citizens, otherwise strangers to one another. Put differently, it is the mechanism of redistribution within a preexisting group that creates a sense of community and not a social nature intrinsic to the individual. Such an understanding, he asserts, makes it impossible to conceive of a sociality capable of transcending already formalized political communities. Vij points out that this conception is reliant on an economistic conception of the individual that is coterminous with, rather than contradictory to, the

notion of the unitary self that underpins the edifice of neoclassical economic theory.\textsuperscript{7} As a result, the author calls for an urgent need to delineate a “non-economistic conception of welfare and individual well-being that can better realize the ideal of welfare as a social right.”\textsuperscript{8} Although Vij takes aim at European welfare in general, his claim of economistic rationality seems particularly exacerbated in recent neoliberal policy programs. No longer even serving to construct a broad sociality, the basic rationale of neoliberal society has become entirely refocused on the individual serving her or his own needs. And even though it is argued that the individual is also interested in providing for surrounding individuals—family members, friends, and an immediate community—this purely economistic model in the end does not seem capable of accounting for such an impetus. Returning to what I have argued is the artistic corollary of neoliberal policy programs, is it not the case that Bourriaud similarly assumes that relational artworks can serve to install a sociality otherwise absent? Furthermore, is this sociality not always construed as confined to a given event rather than proposed as a preexistent and fundamental condition? Since few artworks actually enact a purely neoliberal communitarianism, I explored the more common phenomenon of artworks that exhibit not just one, but a combination of social positions. These often ambivalent cultural products reflect the fact that it seems progressively more difficult to consider art from a universal vantage point in light of post-structuralist critiques of the state—only made more apparent by Europe’s

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 16.
diversifying populations. At the same time, many artists, who consider themselves on
the political left in Europe, have resisted the growing market-oriented pressures and
have defended welfare state institutions and the value of state arts funding. In order to
address this contemporary predicament, I sought to set up a methodology that
considers and complicates the still-strong category of the nation state, under the
influence of globalization, in an analysis of artworks that is locally contextual, while
not becoming myopically focused. Though often exhibiting tendencies of splintering
and fragmentation, the majority of the artworks addressed, importantly, contained
traces of a social view. Most, I think, evidenced also a sociality preexistent in the
social, and not its momentary artistic production. Akin to the above debates on the
welfare state, the social challenge faced by contemporary artists is to think the
culturally-specific and the international, the boundary and the boundless, at the same
time.
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