

Periodising Collectivism

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

Karl Marx

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

The first of these new, airy forms of collectivism, the one in the forefront as we write, is the collectivism of public opinion rising and falling on the Arab street or ricocheting across Al Jazeera's or Al-Qaeda's networks or whispering in this or that secret, self-isolated cell gathered together in a cave on the Pakistani or Afghani countryside, or in an apartment in metropolitan Toronto. In this form collectivism imagines itself and conducts itself as a full-blown anti-capitalist force, as an organic community loosely but dynamically organised around beliefs and resentments, around faith and ideology and strategy, around a sense of belonging that realises itself in the name of an

ideal and against, with vitriol and spleen, the anti-idealism and immorality of the marketplace. In this sense the American televangelist (who is by nature no stranger to capitalism), or the Republican anti-gay-marriage activist share (and, indeed, thrive on) a not-so-secret bond with the Mujahidin leader: each responds to and cultivates a yearning for an absolute and idealised form of collectivity, each makes the need for communality more pressing by reconstructing the glory of an imaginary social form, a holy-of-holies with its own intoxicating, often orgiastic, groupthink and groupfeel. We may well try to stand apart from this with some genteel, nineteenth-century notion of detached critical propriety but none of us can deny its primordial appeal: to experience oneself as the glorious, all-encompassing body of Christ or God or Allah or King or Leviathan or Nation or State or Public is to experience collectivism as redemption, to experience the imagined community as an end to alienation and as a promise of eternal life. Indeed, collective social form is always first and foremost a fetish – a part that substitutes for the whole, a clerical or lordly or bureaucratic or symbolic epiphenomenon that stands in for the phenomenal reality of lived experience – and that is the way it should be: witness, for example, even such a latter-day scion of that old critical propriety as Louis Althusser, who was certainly right when he proclaimed with uncommon longing and without any of the technocrat's customary qualification or 'contempt that a communist is never alone.'

Second, if a bit recessed at the moment, there is the other face of the new collectivism, that of the once-vaunted New Economy: the collectivism of eBay, say, or Amazon, or the old Napster and its more recent offspring, or of chatrooms and flashmobs and blogospheres and listservs. This is collectivism in its minimally regulated, hyper-capitalist, DIY form, collectivism that struggles to replace the old glorious communitarian ideals of Christianity, Islam, Nationalism, and Communism with extra-idealist 'new media' and new technologies, collectivism that struggles to substitute the programmer for the ideologist. It is the collectivism of the computer geek rather than that of the holy warrior and its allegiances range from public to private, from techno-anarchist hacktivism to hippie-capitalist, pseudo-countercultural imperialism. Either way, as a private or public interest, as the this or that transnational conglomerate or as this or that netopia, this other new collectivism speaks its bond in a distinct social form: rather than addressing its constituency in modernist terms as 'anonymous citizens' (so notes one commentator), or even as a sectarian faithful, it finds its bond instead as a community of 'co-conspirators who are in on the joke'.¹ It is this language of collectivity, this imagined community integrated by the Internet that animates the entrepreneurial, neoliberal spirit and fuels the demand for capitalism's labour and managerial classes alike to – in that most mystical and most meaningful of all capitalist slogans – 'think outside the box' in order to increase their productivity and leverage their status in the name of an emergent 'creative class'. Equally, it propels virus writers squirreled away behind computer terminals around the globe to develop new worms, Trojans, and the like in order to undermine or take cover from that same accelerated productivity, to negate the instrumental drive in the economy, to give pause to the shepherding of myriad oppositional forces into

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

that creative class (a virus, feigns one such e-terrorist truthfully enough, is 'a humble little creature with only the intention to avoid extinction and survive').² In this sense, the new e-economy that we are concerned with here is not all that different from the old industrial one, our workers and managers no different from those brought forth by Frederick Winslow Taylor or Henry Ford a century ago, and our virus writers not so different from the famed Luddites still another century before them. The newness of the new e-collectivism, like the newness of the new Arab street, is only a rebirth of intensity, the welling up of spirits from the past, a recall to the opportunities and battle-lines of old.

That this all seems the same as it ever was does not mean it has not changed, however. Indeed, it is our working premise that the desire to speak as a collective voice that has long fuelled the social imagination of modernism – in the desire to speak as a nation, for example, or as a transnational class, or as the voice of some unfulfilled universal human potential – underwent a distinct and significant transformation after the Second World War. Our argument is that collectivism can be and should be periodised, that we can gain from giving collectivism itself greater definition as a history, and that we occupy a distinct position and face a distinct opportunity now as a new period in that history emerges. Of primary interest is the collectivism particular to the Cold War – hence the phrase 'Collectivism After Modernism' given below and as the title of our forthcoming volume (for which this is a précis) – but only in so far as it exists as a prehistory, as a pivot point, for this moment now, that is, for a collectivism following 'collectivism after modernism'.³ There is another turning point already indicated as well – that is, the one forced by the events of 9/11 – and we will need to give it its due in the history we are trying to sketch. Likewise our brief and broad overview will need to pay appropriate respect not only to the big players, the Al-Qaeda and the eBays, but also to what Michael Denning calls the 'intellectual shanty towns' of globalisation – the autonomous zones temporarily created in Seattle, Genoa, and Quebec, for example, or the provisional and often fleeting communal forms and community work developed by artists' groups such as Wochenklausur in Austria, Le Groupe Amos in the Congo, or Temporary Services in Chicago – in order to recognise that, whether by deliberation or by unconscious reflex, any historically emergent force is always a hybrid, always a happenstance reorganisation and reworking of available social forms and forces, always a fortuitous unleashing of sociality from its instrumentalisation as a commodity form.⁴ By reimagining existing technologies and developing new ones that might breathe new life into the darkened archives of failed rebellions and feeble art organisations, new forms of collectivisation might emerge out of those incomplete ruptures and alternative histories, even if only as one more displacement or pause or negation as partial and scrawny as the first, as little returns of the vast repressed past, as humble little creatures with the sole intention of avoiding extinction and to survive within the horizon established by the dominant historical forces and tendencies of our day. It is here, in this space of thought outside the box, where the action is or where it ought to be and it is here where the truth and beauty and consequence of our collectivist fetish is to be found.

2. Quoted in Clive Thompson, 'The Virus Underground', *New York Times Magazine*, 8 February 2004, p 33.

3. *Collectivism After Modernism*, to be published by University of Minnesota Press with contributions by Irina Aristarkhova, Jesse Drew, Okwui Enwezor, Ruben Gallo, Chris Gilbert, Brian Holmes, Alan Moore, Jelena Stojanovic, Reiko Tomii, and Rachel Weiss.

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

MODERNIST COLLECTIVISM

Modernist collectivism, as we will have it here, was the first real effort to develop a sustained alternative to commodified social life by cultural means and it was full of the spirited and sometimes foolish ambition of youth. Modernist artists understood the collectivisation of their professional roles, functions and identities to be an expression of and, at best, a realisation of the promise and/or pitfalls of social, political, and technological progress. In this capacity they acted as either agents or symptoms of supra-individual forces – sometimes on behalf of political parties, for example, or the working classes, but more generally in the name of more wide-ranging forces of social, political, and technological modernisation. Their task as artists was either to envision a radically new society, often in terms that resembled a monumental social design problem, or to represent the psychical consequence of the loss of a premodern collective human bond caused by the emergence of mass culture and new technologies. The mandate for such artistic collectivism, in sum, was to give expression to modernity. The modernist adoption of the form of collective voice had different local ambitions and self-conceptions, of course – to speak in the name of a nation, or a class, or humanity was driven by very different intentions and had very different consequences – but, in one way or another, it maintained a consistent aim to give form to some variety of group being. Malevich's insistence that collectivism was the path to 'world-man' and that the self had to be annihilated was consistent with Mondrian's aim to struggle 'against everything individual in man'. This was in turn consistent with Magritte's *L'invention collective* that was likewise consistent with the Italian Modigliani introducing himself in Paris with the bold greeting 'I am Modigliani, Jew'. ('His ethnically diverse subjects lose their individual personalities in a collective portrait of the socially marginal', writes one art historian about his work, for example, 'Modigliani's faces represent the hybridisation of the European tribe.')



5. Emily Braun, 'The Faces of Modigliani: Identity Politics Under Fascism', in *Modigliani: Beyond the Myth*, ed Mason Klein, The Jewish Museum, New York, 2004, p 39.

Renée Magritte, *L'invention collective*, 1934, © 2004 C Herscovici/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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

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

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

7. Natan Altman, "'Futurism" and Proletarian Art', trans, in *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*, ed William G Rosenberg, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1984, pp 400–1.

8. Quoted by Mark R Beissinger, in *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline and Soviet Power*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1988, pp 33–8.

putting into words the peculiar logic of cold-war cultural politics and its relentless march towards global hegemony.

COLLECTIVISM AFTER MODERNISM, OR, THE CULTURAL TURN

The collectivist dream darkened immediately following the Second World War. In the US media and its Western European counterparts collectivism was portrayed as a colourless pastiche of state-run unions, collective farms, rows of indistinguishable housing projects, and legions of look-alike Young Pioneers all busily working to build socialism in the USSR and its client states. Underlying these grey on grey, beehive-like representations was the barely hidden claim that collectivism represented a loss of individual will: the very thing Madison Avenue was quickly learning to regulate, homogenise, and commodify. At the same time, under pressure from the conservative, anti-Communist, and pro-business Truman administration, the once-powerful organised union movement began its downward plunge. Despite an impressive strike wave in 1945–46, American unions were put on notice to purge left-wing radicals from their ranks and most did. Collective and militant modes of working-class dissent, including walkouts and mass strikes, were not the only targets of anti-union legislation. Communists, Trotskyites, anarchists, and fellow travellers were routinely denounced while the few progressive cultural organisations held over from during or before the war such as The Artists League of America and Artists Equity also fell victim either directly or through innuendo to the anti-communist campaigns.

Ironically, it was the direct repression of working-class resistance as well as attacks against international collectivist politics that gave birth to an ingenious and reified mode of capitalist collectivism. Home



Zero Dimension in performance of 'Ritual' at *Anti-Expo Black Festival*, Ikebukuro Art Theater, Tokyo, 1969, photo: Kitade ('Tonbo') Yukio, courtesy: Kuroda Raiji, Reiko Tomii

ownership, stock options, retirement plans, and other company benefits helped stave off lingering worker unrest even as the various disciplines of worker production were being radically deconstructed and hierarchically reorganised. In effect, traditional divisions of labour were intensified to such a degree that a qualitatively new form of worker control emerged. As Harry Braverman once put it, it was a process in which worker sovereignty is increasingly compartmentalised, thereby delimiting the potential of the collective form:

The novelty of this development in this past century lies not in the separate existence of hand and brain, conception and execution, but the rigour with which they are divided from one another, and then increasingly subdivided, so that conception is concentrated, in so far as possible, in ever more limited groups within management.⁹

This in turn provided the groundwork for a new and supple type of worker supervision by a rising managerial class as well as the internalisation of systems of control by the workers themselves. In Sartre's terms a new, 'serialised' collectivity emerges exemplified by random groupings, urban queues, and perhaps most vividly by the legions of 'company men'. Decked out in striped suit and tie, stripped of any overt class-consciousness and organised into the patriarchal benevolence of the corporate body they appear to gladly exchange individual control over skilled production for a modest share of the capitalist's wealth and a volume on the latest motivational management theory tossed in for the bargain.

If, especially in the US, collectivism – as a recognisable and self-conscious identity – was forcibly banished from the world of actual production and organised political activity, then not surprisingly it returned in mutated and often contradictory form within the cultural realm. This re-emergence was especially striking in postwar popular cinema where collectivism typically took on a devious, even monstrous visage with all the repulsive pleasure that only suppressed and forbidden activities can summon. From Hitchcock's secret societies whose murderous conspiracies percolated just beneath the surface of normal life to the cold, vegetable consciousness of the alien invaders in various cold war science-fiction classics, collectivism was depicted as aberrant contagion with a mixture of fascination and dread. Despite an average income five times that of other nations and the largest standing military in history, middle America, white America, expressed a relentless fear about alleged communist infiltrators all the while harbouring deeper anxieties about the socioeconomic encroachment of other races and peoples. Such post-war trepidations also reflected what was an already shifting collective identity as the stirring nationalism that peaked during the war, and which helped give birth to the Popular Front, was rapidly being replaced by a new dynamic collectivism, that of mass consumer culture. In this regard, both the promises and fears that collectivism provoked in the early part of the twentieth century were crystallised into distinctly cultural forms during the massive reorganisation of political, geographic, and economic boundaries that followed the Yalta Conference. Right on up until the collapse of the Soviet Union and its client states in the late 1980s it was the politics of culture – from bigger

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

cars, better gadgets and appliances to freer intellectuals and experimental music – that remained at the forefront of social transformation during the Cold War. Collectivism after modernism, as Michael Denning argues for the period of the cultural turn more broadly, was marked by a shared experience:

... suddenly ... everyone discovered that culture had been mass produced like Ford's cars: the masses had a culture and culture had a mass. Culture was everywhere, no longer the property of the cultured or cultivated.¹⁰

Between 1945 and 1989, culture took on a definite political heft in the undeclared war between capitalism and socialism. And reciprocally, politics took on a cultural cast of its own. From the struggle for civil rights graphically captured in *Life* magazine, to the surrealist-inspired slogans of May 1968, to the emergence of the New Left itself, entwined as it was with an emerging, youthful counter-culture, the range of transformations and contradictions making up the presence of the cultural turn was reshaping the everyday lives and struggles of the subaltern classes: 'As a result, the cultural turn raised the specter of a cultural politics, a cultural radicalism, a cultural revolution.' It was a spectre, Denning adds, that haunts the period of the Cold War.¹¹ Still, something new was already beginning to stir near the end of this period even as the bitter, structurally unemployed offspring of a fast failing Keynesianism screamed 'anarchy' in the UK and a musical pulse from Jamaica inspired the youth of the southern hemisphere.

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

Like modernist collectivism, collectivism after modernism was well intentioned and thoroughly of its own historical moment. It marked a shift within the practices of visual artists from a focus on art as a given institutional and linguistic structure, to an active intervention in the world of mass culture. At the same time it recognised that the modernist's collective vision had failed to materialise. Therefore if the earlier ambition was, as Mondrian once put it, to struggle 'against everything individual in man', then the aspiration of collectivism after World War Two rarely claimed to find its unity as the singularly correct avant-garde representative of social progress but instead structured itself around de-centred and fluctuating identities. Rather than fighting against the inevitably heterogeneous character of all group formations, collectivism after modernism embraced it.

Yet if collective social form during the Cold War became political this was still a form of cultural politics or cultural radicalism. That is, its medium and its concerns were cultural; its fetish was the experience of collective political autonomy in and through culture, art, communication. It assumed that the ideal of collectivism was to realise itself not in the collective model or plan but in the to and fro of cultural

10. Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, Verso, London and New York, 2004, p 1.

11. *Ibid*, pp 5–6.

exchange. From the Situationists to Group Material to the Yes Men, postwar cultural politics was most clearly realised within informally networked communities of artists, technologically savvy art geeks, and independent political activists who embraced the plasticity of postwar political identities while turning directly towards the spectacle of mass commodification, tentatively at first and then with increasing enthusiasm, in order to make use of its well-established network of signification, amplification, and distribution. But most of all it is precisely because collectivism concentrates – inevitably, uniquely – the broader social and economic conditions of production, which are themselves always collective despite appearance, that it is capable of returning again and again to haunt both past and present.

COLLECTIVISM NOW

Evidence that recent and profound mutation in the neoliberal agenda has occurred in the period since 9/11 is everywhere abundant. Likewise, collectivism is undergoing a radical transformation of its own. As we write this, Steven Kurtz, a founding member of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), is facing dubious criminal charges connected to the group's public critique of the biotechnology industry that were levelled by a federal grand jury empanelled to reveal the artist's involvement in bio-terrorism.¹² Underlying the state's investigation, however, is the CAE's anarchist-inspired writings on tactical media and the creation of radical, collective cells for carrying out, 'molecular interventions and semiotic shocks that contribute to the negation of the rising intensity of authoritarian culture'.¹³

All at once it seems that an era has transpired since the risk-taking, experimental approach embodied by contemporary art was being held up as the sexy doppelganger of the new economy. Ounce for ounce, art's cultural capital also paid dividends of another type. According to John Murphy, a former vice-president of Philip Morris Inc, art harbours an essential ingredient that 'has its counterpart in the business world. That element is innovation – without which it would be impossible for progress to be made in any segment in society.'¹⁴

But what appears to have set Kurtz and the CAE apart – at least for the moment – from other, similar artistic endeavours is most apparent by a question FBI officers posed to one of Kurtz's academic colleagues: why is the CAE 'listed as a collective rather than by its individual members?'.¹⁵ No longer mere symptom but now fully suspect, the innovative groupthink common to both unbridled corporate entrepreneurialism and a certain electronic vanguard sensibility will henceforth be required to take a loyalty test or face the consequences. There is only room for one collective enterprise now and that is state-sanctioned marketplace fetishism as imagined community. And with it comes the ethereal image of commingled youthful blood, always purposely kept off-screen yet always fully present. It is as ghostly a form of collectivism as that of Vicksburg, Normandy, Iwo Jima, and countless other mnemonic points of reference cynically mobilised by a new cult of communal sacrifice and blindly administered by a swarm of embedded media, grey-haired talking heads, and evangelical party leaders.

12. See *The New Standard*, 9 July 2004: http://newstandardnews.net/content/?action=show_item&itemid=646

13. <http://www.critical-art.net/>

14. Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*, Verso, London and New York, 2002, p 125.

15. Reported in *The Washington Post*, 1 June 2004.



An audience member at a Critical Art Ensemble performance, a promotional event for the fictitious company GenTerra, helps spread transgenic E coli on petri dish, 2003

In other words, what was only very recently a primarily *cultural* battlefield waged over modes of representation, manifestations of identity, and even choices of lifestyle has abruptly shifted into increasingly direct confrontation that, as Brian Holmes argues, is constituted by ‘decentralised collective action that propagates itself via every means: word-of-mouth and rumour, communication between political groups, meetings of social movements, and broadcasts over specialised and mass media – above all the internet’.¹⁶ Cultural politics may have ended, but in a world all but totally subjugated by the commodity form and the spectacle it generates the only remaining theatre of action is direct engagement with the forces of production. This re-politicisation of the economy brings with it the ghosts of collectivism past. In this respect, we cannot help but recall the words of El Lissitzky: ‘The private property aspect of creativity must be destroyed all are creators and there is no reason of any sort for this division into artists and nonartists.’¹⁷

Nevertheless, in so far as collectivism after modernism remains rooted in difference rather than its attempted neutralisation, it is constituted within what Antonio Negri has described as a ‘multitude’ consisting of creative workers, community and environmental activists, radical labour, and NGO administrators but also urban garden builders, house workers, and mothers. From puppet makers busted by the Philadelphia police to radical hip hop artists on Chicago’s South Side, from rural peasants facing down agri-business giants like Monsanto or the PRI in Chiapas, to techno-geeks who dream of turning the very tools of global capital into the means of its destruction, the new collectivism at once resembles the tentative unity of the United Front in the 1930s while simultaneously counterpoising the universal consumer to the romance of world man. When the Carnival Against Capital occupies urban space, when the group Yomango seizes merchandise simply ‘because you can’t buy happiness’ or when the Critical Art Ensemble creates home testing

16. Email correspondence with the authors, 10 August 2002.

17. El Lissitzky, ‘Suprematism in World Reconstruction’ (1920), in El Lissitzky, *Life, Letters, Texts*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1967, p 333.

kits for identifying transgenic foods purchased at the local grocery store they move within and are literally constituted by the same, nearly global force of capital they aim to disrupt.

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