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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art has been composed by myself, is entirely my own work, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Harry Weeks

12 March 2015
‘A UNIQUE EPOCHAL KNOT’
Negotiations of Community in Contemporary Art

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ABSTRACT

This research identifies the negotiation of inherited understandings of the term ‘community’ as an increasingly widespread concern within the field of contemporary art since 1989, particularly in the wake of art’s communitarian turn during the 1990s. The thesis examines these artistic investigations in connection with the work of philosophers such as Maurice Blanchot, Roberto Esposito and Jean-Luc Nancy during the 1980s and 1990s, where we find the most thorough interrogation of the term ‘community’ since the nineteenth century. Contending that art has significantly contributed to a discourse long established in philosophy, the thesis reflects on what precipitated the widespread shift from an artistic interest in ‘this or that community’ to ‘community as such’ during the 1990s, and on what art has offered to the negotiation of community that philosophy has not. These dual concerns have been developed in the two sections that comprise the thesis, entitled ‘Untying the “Unique Epochal Knot”’ and ‘Collaboration, Participation, Performance and the Negotiation of Community’.

An important issue the thesis broaches is whether art can (despite concerns about its co-optation within neoliberal institutions) constitute a potent site for the negotiation of community. The affirmative, if critical, answer given considers the unorthodox forms, logics and strategies that art is permitted to employ, art’s ability to enact material interventions into social relations and, overall, art’s operation as an alternative/complementary mode of articulation to that offered by philosophy. Through the analysis of pertinent case studies, the thesis examines how collaborative, participatory and performance practices have been particularly employed by artists including Tania Bruguera, Kristina Norman and Artur Žmijewski, seeking to scrutinise factors crucial to the rethinking of community. These factors include singularity, commonality, temporality and ethics.

Springing from interviews, research trips to key case studies, and a thorough literature review, as well as implicating a range of work from diverse geographies and spread over the past two decades, the thesis situates the move towards the negotiation of community in art both historically and theoretically. In doing so, the analysis develops an important reconsideration of contemporary art’s widely noted attendance to the social. In privileging a conceptual framework for the discussion of this tendency in art, as opposed to the more prevalent formalist model, greater critical purchase may be gained on this urgent development in contemporary art history.
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>This thesis is dedicated to the enduring memory of Jenny Gypaki, who – to borrow a tribute from Kirsten Lloyd – will be smiling and nodding in the front row of every audience I ever speak to.
INTRODUCTION

Since the pivotal year of 1989 contemporary art has undergone a significant shift towards a globalised, networked infrastructure. Within these contexts, and immanently interwoven within the narrative of the establishment of art’s new institutional forms, practices that attend to the social and the political have proliferated. Collaborative, participatory and performance practices in particular have been institutionally supported and championed to the extent that they have come to characterise the high-end mega-exhibitions and biennials that act as the most visible sites of exhibition and reception in this newly globalised art world. This thesis is intended as an art-historical reconsideration of this tendency at a crucial point at which the position of ‘socially engaged’ practices as the face of ‘biennial art’ seems to be increasingly challenged and precarious, in the wake of emergent interests into what have been called ‘new materialisms’ and the ‘turn to objects’. More specifically, this thesis proposes that an impulse towards the negotiation of inherited understandings of the term ‘community’ has become a widespread and urgent concern within this tendency in contemporary art, and that a more representative aspect onto what has been termed the ‘social turn’ in art may be obtained through a thorough analysis of contemporary art’s engagement with the concept of community. In order to characterise the manner in which community has been implicated in contemporary art, one must look beyond the realm of art for context. Although interactions between art and community have long been common – most notably in the form of the community arts movement that emerged in the 1960s – the practices at hand in this thesis share more with a particular lineage in the field of philosophy.

In 1983 French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy published his most significant intervention into the subject of community, *The Inoperative Community*. The following two decades would also witness the publication of a number of other studies, including: *The Coming Community*, written by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in 1990; sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, published in 2001; *The Unavowable

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2 This term was popularised by Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (2005).


Community, a response to Nancy’s book by French philosopher Maurice Blanchot, published in 1983; and philosopher Roberto Esposito’s Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community, published in the original Italian in 1998. Together these texts, amongst others by the likes of American philosophers William Corlett and Alphonso Lingis and political scientist Iris Marion Young, constitute the most thorough and concerted reappraisal of the term ‘community’ since the nineteenth century, a reaction to the socio-political sea changes which characterised the period immediately before and after 1989. Esposito opens his text with the following statement:

Nothing seems more appropriate today than thinking community; nothing more necessary, demanded, and heralded by a situation that joins in a unique epochal knot the failure of all communisms with the misery of new individualisms.

The fall of ‘really existing’ communism and the rise to global hegemony of neoliberalism, and its attendant privileging of a logic of rampant individualism, rendered community in the established senses of the word anachronistic. Influential formulations of community by the likes of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in his political treatise Leviathan (1651), and German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, in his Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, first published in German in 1887, have become less and less tenable or pertinent given these contemporary

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6 William Corlett, Community without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989); Alphonso Lingis, The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," Social Theory and Practice 12, no. 1 (1986). Gerard Delanty wrote that the point of departure for his critical introduction to the concept of community was ‘the recognition that community is currently in transition as a result of major social transformations that have brought with them new cultural and political experiences and forms of living.’ Gerard Delanty, Community, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), x.

7 Esposito, Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community, 1.

8 I use the phrase “really existing” communism to refer to the apparent manifestations of communism in the USSR and elsewhere during the twentieth century. The quotation marks around the first two words suggest the tongue-in-cheek nature of this phrase, which is widely used, particularly on the left, to distinguish ‘the idea of communism’ from its ‘really existing’ counterparts. As Nancy has noted: ‘the States that acclaimed it [communism] have appeared, for some time now, as the agents of its betrayal.’ Nancy, The Inoperative Community, 2.
conditions. Nonetheless, it is still in senses that originate in the work of these writers that the term has most commonly be used, including by states and corporations seeking to instrumentalise what cultural theorist Raymond Williams called this ‘warmly persuasive word.’ Accordingly, the theorists of what sociologist Gerard Delanty has termed ‘postmodern community’ – Nancy et al. – sought to liberate the concept, and reinvigorate thinking around community in a manner appropriate to their late-twentieth-century contexts and resistant to instrumentalisation and manipulation. They did so by thinking ‘community in the most abstract and general sense of the word, that is to say, not this or that community but perhaps community as such.’

It is this impulse towards an engagement with ‘community as such’ as opposed to ‘this or that community’ as a means of rethinking the concept from the ground up that also underpins the implications of community in contemporary art highlighted and discussed in this thesis. I argue that the shift towards such artistic practices – specifically those that engage in a negotiation of the term community, which destabilise established definitions and take the term as something to be questioned and challenged, rather than as an accepted and unproblematic point of departure for other concerns – constitutes a significant contribution to, and continuation of, the tendency in philosophy outlined above. I use the term ‘negotiation’ for two predominant reasons. Firstly, although much of this thesis is concerned with art’s potential to operate as a mode of thinking, parallel to philosophy, I do not view this as the only manner in which the practices in question attend to the issue of community. ‘Negotiation’ is broader and covers other manners of engagement. Secondly, the word has a dual meaning, implying both a conversation, which although geared towards the resolution of a problem or a deadlock need not result in such a conclusive outcome, and the process of passing through difficult conditions. The conversational connotations of ‘negotiation’ are crucial to the manner in which I deem contemporary art practices to have attended to


10 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 76.

11 ‘Postmodern community’ is a term borrowed from Delanty, Community, 104. Although a problematic term, I shall use it throughout this thesis as a means of bracketing the theories of Nancy, Blanchot et al. I explain the significance of the term and interrogate the links between postmodernism and the concerns of this thesis more fully in chapter 1.

community. While each practice in isolation contributes some insight with regard to the subject, it is only in their plurality, and in concert with parallel work in philosophy and other disciplines, as well as in the reflective discourse that arises from these practices, that the negotiation of community truly emerges. Accordingly, the practices discussed in this thesis must be seen as participating in a transversal conversation on the subject of community. The second definition of negotiation is pertinent given the hostile climate for thinking community precipitated by the ‘unique epochal knot’ described by Esposito. This will be discussed at greater length in chapter 3. As shall be seen, both meanings are pertinent in the contexts of this thesis.

Another important issue the thesis broaches is whether art can (despite concerns about its co-optation within neoliberal institutions) constitute a potent site for the negotiation of community. The affirmative, if critical, answer given considers the unorthodox forms, logics and strategies that art is permitted to employ, art’s ability to enact material interventions into social relations and, overall, art’s operation as an alternative/complementary mode of articulation to that offered by philosophy. Philosopher Ignaas Devisch has commented that:

> Although now, after several decades, the most strident debates [on the subject of community] have subsided, a surprising number of questions remain to be answered, nor have even all the questions been posed. This is why the question of community must be approached from another angle.\(^{13}\)

I propose in this thesis that, despite what I characterise as its compromised position, art can offer, and indeed has offered, ‘another angle’ onto the question of community. My intention is to acknowledge and advance a reinvigoration of discourse surrounding the term ‘community’ as something contestable, negotiable and politically urgent. Or rather, it is to signal that this process has been ongoing for a number of years now: in philosophy since the early 1980s and, I argue, in the field of art since around 2000. This is required because, although a negotiative attitude towards community has become increasingly prevalent in art practice, often – and this is certainly the case in the discipline of art history – community is assumed to be dead in one of two fashions. On the one hand it is a term to be avoided at all costs, one loaded with negative, anachronistic or instrumentalising connotations.\(^{14}\) On the

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\(^{13}\) Ignaas Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), x.

\(^{14}\) A collection of interviews with curators, directors and programmers from art institutions in the UK presents a number of examples of these figures stating that they avoid or refuse to use the term. Marijke Steedman, ed. *Gallery as Community: Art, Education, Politics* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012).
other it exists as a fixed referent, a term which is assumed to contain an inherent and intransigent definition to be taken at face value.\textsuperscript{15} However, such assumptions simply adhere to the concerted preclusion of criticality enacted under the aegis of advanced and entrenched forms of neoliberalism, and which centres around what the Italian theorist Franco Berardi has described as ‘the automation of language’.\textsuperscript{16}

The implication of language in the financial economy is crucial in the contemporary process of subjectivation […] The subsumption of language by the semio-capitalist cycle of production effectively freezes the affective potencies of language.\textsuperscript{17}

Berardi sees the subsumption of language as being intrinsic to contemporary forms of what French philosopher Michel Foucault described as ‘governmentality’, or the ‘art of government’ – a system of domination in which subjects are conditioned to reproduce governmental logics and structures themselves, thus perpetuating hegemony and precluding oppositionality.\textsuperscript{18} For Berardi, to accept the ‘referential-denotive links’ handed to us is to placidly submit to subjectivation and to implicitly accept our status as subjects of neoliberal capitalism. The ‘deautomation of language’, challenging the ‘referential-denotive link between the word and the world’, is crucial if any form of criticality may emerge.\textsuperscript{19} Neither can the word be abandoned regardless of the dissatisfactions one may have with how it is contemporarily defined. As Delanty has noted: ‘virtually every term in social science is contested, and if we reject the word “community” we will have to replace it with another term […] We cannot do without the terms “community” and “society”.’\textsuperscript{20} It is in this sense that I see the negotiation of the term ‘community’ as being a task of the utmost political importance at our contemporary historical juncture, in the wake of the ‘unique epochal knot’ outlined by Esposito.

\textsuperscript{15} It is in this sense that ‘community’ tends to be implicated in ‘community arts’.

\textsuperscript{16} Franco Berardi, \textit{The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance} (Los Angeles: Semitext(e), 2012), 16-20. I derive my understanding of the complex and often imprecisely used term ‘criticality’ from Irit Rogoff, “From Criticism to Critique to Criticality,” \textit{Transversal} (2003), http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en. This is discussed at greater length in chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{17} Berardi, \textit{The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance}, 16-18.


\textsuperscript{19} Berardi, \textit{The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance}, 18.

\textsuperscript{20} Delanty, \textit{Community}, xi.
Framework

The Social Turn

In his paper ‘The Global Need for Collaboration’, art theorist Nikos Papastergiadis describes ‘the shift in artistic practice from image production to the initiation of scenes for the replaying of social relations’ as ‘the first truly global movement in art.’\(^{21}\) Certainly art since 1989 has undergone a significant shift towards attendance to the social and the political, and this has taken place globally, with no one clear centre of gravity. This tendency has gone by a number of names, which will be briefly mentioned shortly, however the term that will be used most in this thesis to refer to this shift in art practice is the ‘social turn’ (used without quotation marks from here on), a term coined by art historian Claire Bishop in an article of the same title published in 2005.\(^ {22}\) It is not entirely without fault as a descriptor however, a fact Bishop herself has acknowledged. She later qualified her statement, arguing that: ‘this development should be positioned more accurately as a return to the social, part of an ongoing history of attempts to rethink art collectively.’\(^ {23}\) Nonetheless it suffices here to stand broadly for the institutional proliferation of socially engaged practices (another term I use with considerable reservations) after 1989, given the vague, open nature of the term, and its suggestion towards the fact that this was an institutional shift (the art world turning towards socially engaged practices) rather than the emergence \textit{ab nihilo} of a new form of art practice.

This thesis derives from a number of dissatisfactions I hold with the theorisation and historicisation of this social turn. Publications by historians and theorists such as Bishop, Nicolas Bourriaud and Grant Kester tended to offer an overly – if not in all cases overtly – formalist demarcation of the practices deemed to constitute the social turn, hence the rise of the term ‘participatory art’ as another descriptor for such practices – again a term promulgated, if not invented, by Bishop.\(^ {24}\) She uses this term because it ‘connotes the involvement of many people and avoids the ambiguities of “social engagement”, which might refer to a wide range of work, from \textit{engagé} painting to interventionist actions in mass


\(^{22}\) Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents.”

\(^{23}\) \textit{Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship} (London: Verso, 2012), 3.

The distinction she draws here is precisely one between a cohesive set of practices common in their use of formal structures and strategies, and a field of formally diverse practices united by a shared concern with the social.

Other terms have been proffered to collect the diverse forms of practice that have come to constitute the social turn; Bourriaud and Kester have suggested the terms ‘relational aesthetics’ and ‘dialogical aesthetics’ respectively to refer to more specific forms of socially engaged practice. Social practice’ has emerged in largely American contexts as a broader catchall. Indeed, ‘socially engaged practice’ is a recent construction and accordingly is equally critical – in the sense outlined by philosopher Peter Osborne: it includes and it excludes – and should not be seen as a neutral terminology. Each of these terminologies, and each of the theories or histories attached to them, have tended towards delimiting the social turn according to formal characteristics: people as medium; the manipulation of relations through art; the privileging of dialogue as the primary constituent of the artistic process etc. I claim that this misrepresents any social turn that can be discerned in contemporary art. Rather, what seems to characterise contemporary art’s attendance to the social has been a concern with the negotiation of the terminologies, logics and structures that regulate social and political life. Put otherwise, the social turn can be seen as a form of conceptual art, in the sense that its objects have consistently been conceptual. Artists have increasingly been concerned with such concepts as democracy, antagonism, difference, identity, citizenship and so on, and have deployed their productive capacities in the service of negotiating these. Certainly they have often utilised participatory and collaborative formal strategies in the service of this negotiation – these strategies’ necessary implication of the social makes them apt to this task – but this is by no means universal. Practices that would formally fall short of the criteria widely propagated for admittance into the social turn have been equally implicated in a concern with this conceptual negotiation of the social.

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26 Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*; Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*.


29 Here I echo the Peter Osborne’s proclamation that ‘contemporary art is postconceptual art.’ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, 3.
Accordingly, in this case, formal criteria fail adequately to collate the disparate practices of contemporary art into a coherent – if internally diverse – grouping.

In this thesis, the concept of community acts as a case in point for this wider claim. It exists as but one of many social terms, structures, concepts and ideas that have come under consideration by artists active in recent years. It is not an insignificant choice to focus on community, as shall be demonstrated throughout the thesis. However, by no means do I wish to suggest that a newly theorised social turn should be clustered around the concept of community, rather that this has been one particularly regnant concern amongst artists – as well as theorists, curators and other players within contemporary art – who have chosen to attend to the social in their work.

**Community and Contemporary Art**

This thesis contributes to what has been a lively discourse in art theory, although it has not yet been subject to sufficient art-historical attention. In order to situate my thesis, and to isolate more clearly my original contribution to scholarship on the social turn, I shall briefly survey some of the more significant interventions into the field, with a particular focus on the manner in which community has been considered in these discussions. In doing so I aim firstly to establish the dominant fashions in which contemporary art history and theory have broached the question of community, and secondly to introduce some of the core ideas of postmodern community theory through their citation in art theory. Studies by curators and art theorists including Kate Crehan, Pascal Gielen and Paul De Bruyne, Kester, Miwon Kwon, Maria Lind and Nina Möntmann have all, since the turn of the millennium, adopted a critical approach to contemporary art informed by the work of Nancy and other thinkers on community. Furthermore, writers from the fields of political theory and philosophy, such as the Jacques Rancière, Simon Critchley, Chantal Mouffe and Brian Holmes, have all entered into debates surrounding the importance of community in the context of contemporary art.

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As Critchley has noted: ‘so much art is concerned with the problem of community, of being-in-common and in particular with certain utopian experiments in community that belong to the memory and in some cases the present of radical politics.’

Kester, in his book *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), ostensibly grounds his conception of community in the writing of Nancy. He begins the final chapter of the book with a summary and critique of Nancy’s ‘inoperative community’, in which he sympathises with the notion that ‘our identities are always in negotiation, always in the process of being formed and re-formed through our encounters with others.’ Indeed, he suggests that: ‘community is produced through our recognition that we have no “substantial identity” (and our consequent realization that this lack of identity must in fact be shared by others.)’ He departs from Nancy in one key respect, equating Nancy’s desire for the ‘interruption’ of a fascistic unitary conception of community with the modernist/avant-garde tactic of shock and rupture. Nancy’s preoccupation with death as being the prompt to this interruption is critiqued by Kester as being simply ‘cliché and spectacle.’ Accordingly, and despite this engagement with Nancy’s work, throughout his analysis Kester relies far more heavily on the notion of the ‘politically coherent’ community, a construction he derives from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He describes this particular variant of community thus:

> The community comes into existence not just as an effect of the delegate’s signifying powers but as a result of a complex process of political self-definition. This process often unfolds against the backdrop of collective modes of oppression (racism, sexism, class oppression, etc.) but also within a set of shared cultural and discursive traditions [...] These “politically coherent” communities emerge not through the discovery of some a priori essence but through a process of dialogue and consensus formation.

This form of community is consistent with Bauman’s description of ‘really existing community’ and philosopher René ten Bos’s ‘this or that community’ and thus stands in direct opposition to the ‘community as such’ focus of Nancy’s writing. This is consonant

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32 Critchley, “The Infinite Demand of Art”. unpaginated.
33 Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, 154.
34 Ibid., 155.
36 Ibid., 150.
with the practices Kester studies in his book, which are largely located within the lineage of community arts and demonstrate a communitarian faith in the power of community (in its inherited definitions and manifestations). Herein lies my fundamental disagreement with Kester’s text, which although conceptually well-grounded, provides a study of works which do not depart substantially from either inherited understandings of the term ‘community’, or from artistic tactics or strategies which have long been the realm of community arts, one which, although admirable in intention and immediately ameliorative effects, has no intention towards negotiating the term ‘community’. Instead, an affirmative attitude towards the term predominates; a tacit acceptance of the ‘automation of language’ that Berardi would surely contest.

In *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective* (2011), sociologist Kate Crehan follows a similar path. She does not theorise the term ‘community’ as rigorously as Kester, indeed acknowledging that it tends towards vacuity and that it has gained the status of a ‘commonsense term that people use without feeling any need to define it.’ The limited definition she does offer is consciously vague, citing Williams’ oft-quoted description of community as a ‘warmly persuasive word’ and embarking on a brief analysis of former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair’s usage of the term in a similar manner in one of his speeches in 2001. She distances herself from these banal invocations of ‘community’, but goes no further in offering an alternative. In the final paragraph of the introductory section in which she outlines the key terms in her work she states that: “‘community’ remains an inescapable term for those wanting to work in poor neighbourhoods.” Here, she conforms to Delanty’s description of the anthropologist’s ‘community’ as having an emphasis on the downtrodden: ‘applied […] to culturally-defined groups, such as minorities.’ The focus of Crehan’s attention is, like Kester, work which falls under the descriptor ‘community arts’ – indeed, this is acknowledged by her title – and as such is equally distant from my own approach for much the same reasons as cited with regard to Kester.

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39 Ibid., 40-41.

40 Ibid., 41.

Alongside Kester’s *Conversation Pieces*, art historian Miwon Kwon’s *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002) is perhaps the most important text discussing contemporary art and community of the past twenty years. Indeed, Kwon devotes a healthy portion of the book to a response to another of Kester’s writings, ‘Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art.’ On the whole her focus, at least in the first of the two chapters in which she discusses community, lies on a narrative in which the tradition of site-specific art has been replaced by an emphasis on community specificity. Her suggestion, summarised briefly, is that while the term ‘site’ was too vague, neutral or limiting a term, ‘community’ offered artists something ‘more specific and self-determined.’ However she is on the whole critical of the manner in which artists have conceived of community and as such the ways in which they have attended to the concept. Particularly she focuses on what she perceives to be a misconception on the part of the artist and writer Suzanne Lacy, whose book *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* had been a major contributor to what I will term in the conclusions to this thesis the ‘communitarian turn’ in art during the 1990s. Kwon argues that:

Lacy rendered an image of community that is an overgeneralized and abstract projection of commonality, a *mythic* unity that gathers into its folds a range of particular persons and their experiences. While her vision of community diverges somewhat from the traditional ideal of a completely homogenous and coherent social body, diversity and difference are articulated here only to be overcome or exceeded by a universalizing common goal.

In response to Lacy, Kwon suggests that any helpful definition of community must acknowledge its inherent impossibility. She too turns to Nancy in order to support her assertion, reading into his discussion of inoperative community ‘the idea that only a community that questions its own legitimacy is legitimate.’ While she does not devote the attention to Nancy that Kester does, her reading seems more accurate and helpful. She, in contrast to Kester, acknowledges the discrepancy between discussions of postmodern community and the most oft-cited examples of community arts or ‘community engagement’, rather than attempting to shoehorn the two contradictory conceptions of community implied

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42 Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 139-47.

43 Ibid., 109.


45 Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 120.

46 Ibid., 155.
by each together. She finishes the chapter by suggesting that ‘reckoning with the impossibility of community, and consequently redefining community-based art as collective artistic praxis as sketched above, may be the only way to imagine past the burden of the affirmational siting of community to its critical unsiting.’ The word ‘imagine’ here is key, suggesting that community-specificity in art finds itself at an impasse, which may only be negotiated once current misconceptions have been questioned and resolved. This ‘unsited’ concept of community, however, very much represents an open-ended conclusion to her text.

A more recent text by writer and curator Nina Möntmann provides a more optimistic assessment of art’s possible contribution to the negotiation of community. While she too acknowledges that ‘there is a conventional notion of communities that is becoming increasingly inapplicable and hence in need of being challenged and replaced by newer models’, she proposes that art may play an active role in such a negotiation. The text appears as the introductory essay to an edited volume, *New Communities*, published in conjunction with an exhibition curated by Möntmann entitled ‘If We Can’t Get It Together: Artists rethinking the (mal)function of communities.’ The titles of both the exhibition and the book openly proclaim this belief in art’s potential as an agent in the reformulation of community, a conviction which forms the basis of her text. She states that:

Artists are not only providing images of change [...] they are also participating in new forms of collective work and are creating a temporary model situation of community – one that can be experimental, provisional, informal, and maybe prototypical.

The very premise that community must be reformulated or ‘rethought’ reveals that Möntmann’s definition of community (she devotes a relatively large amount of her text to this discussion) is necessarily broad. Indeed, while she surveys the theoretical landscape of community fairly neatly – alluding to Agamben, Georges Bataille, Blanchot and of course Nancy – she offers little concrete opinion of her own, understandably given her remit as curator of a group show devoted to a heterogeneity of interpretations of the term. Möntmann’s contribution to dialogue surrounding community and contemporary art shares much in theoretical terms with another recent addition to the field: art theorists Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen’s edited volume *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*

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47 Ibid.

48 Möntmann, *New Communities*, 11.

49 Ibid., 13.
The introduction to their volume focuses primarily on the central importance of the ‘common’ – which they refer to as the ‘life source of community’ – to any figuration of community, particularly informed Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s formulation of the term.\(^\text{50}\)

Despite the plurality of voices engaging in this discourse surrounding the meaning, politics and significance of ‘community’, certain points of convergence can be discerned. There is a shared belief amongst most of these theorists that there exists some pre-existing notion of community within society’s collective unconscious, that it is ‘commonsense’, ‘overgeneralised’ and yet now ‘inapplicable.’ The logical next step, particularly taken on by Kwon and Möntmann, is to look beyond this commonsense community, Kwon through theory, Möntmann through artistic experimentation (practice). There is also a near universal tendency to turn towards Jean-Luc Nancy (more so than towards Agamben and Blanchot or any other of the major theorists of postmodern community) as a means of overcoming the ‘fascism’ of essentialist, identity-driven community.

While I pay deference to these and other contributors to the discourse on community and contemporary art, I profoundly disagree with the manner in which the term ‘community’ has been on the whole implicated. While Nancy is often cited as a significant theoretical influence, this is for the most part a shallow citation. Art theorists have tended to work according to pre-existing definitions of community, rather than follow Nancy’s lead in attempting to reconsider community, or to place community as a variable and at stake. Kester is perhaps most guilty of what I see to be this major flaw in the theorisation of contemporary art and community. Hence, this thesis presents a unique consideration of how artists have actively contributed towards the negotiation of community, as opposed to its affirmation and reproduction; that is, how they have served to destabilise and rethink community, rather than accepting its pre-given definitions. This, alongside offering a corrective to the tendency towards a formalist theorisation of the social turn, is the primary intention underpinning this thesis. My study also offers an original contribution to the field in a number of other fashions.

Firstly, while this topic has been considered at some length in the fields of art theory and in curatorial discourse, it has not been subject to serious art-historical consideration. This thesis represents an extended art-historical response to what has been a major focus of

\(^{50}\) The question of the common, and Hardt and Negri’s use of the term, will be broached further in chapter 5. De Bruyne and Gielen, Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing, 3-4.
contemporary art practice over the past two decades. Secondly, unlike the majority of other analyses of the relationships between art and community, my research focuses predominantly on work produced since 2000, for reasons that shall become more apparent below. Thirdly, my thesis examines art and philosophy in concert, as two parallel and contributory forms of expression of a shared concern. Previous incursions into this subject matter, notably Kester’s *Conversation Pieces*, have been guilty of establishing a disconnect between the art and philosophy under discussion.  

**What is Community?**

In his entry on ‘Community’ in his study of academic language *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), Williams notes that since it entered the English language in the fourteenth century, ‘community’ has been used to designate a variety of social forms and modes of relationship. Indeed, the complex and vast history of community and its theorisations predates the term’s introduction into the English language, usually being dated back to Aristotelian and Platonic thought. This history has been notably outlined by Delanty and sociologist Tony Blackshaw in recent years. I cannot provide a comparable level of depth in stitching a history of community in this thesis, however it is essential that two factors be mentioned at this juncture.

Firstly, throughout the history of its usage, community has perpetually evolved. In Aristotle’s discussions of community (or κοινωνία in the original Greek), for instance, ‘there was no essential difference between the social and the communal.’ Now, however, ‘community is often […] seen in opposition to society.’ Accordingly, community must be seen as a concept in continual flux, not designating a fixed social form or modality of relationship, but being flexible enough to adapt to the social and political contexts of any given moment. This lesson is of the utmost importance in the context of this thesis.

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51 Kester would later criticise art theorists and critics on precisely these grounds. Grant Kester, “The Device Laid Bare: On Some Limitations in Current Art Criticism,” *e-flux*, no. 50 (2013): unpaginated.

52 Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 75.

53 Delanty, *Community*, 1.


55 *Community*, 1.

56 Ibid.
Secondly, modernity presented a series of fundamental problems for community that demanded a thorough reconsideration of the term – one which largely took place in the discipline of sociology. Delanty isolates the following as key factors in this:

The break-up of the medieval guilds and corporations, the commercialization of agriculture that came with the emergence of capitalism and the decline in the autonomy of the cities following the rise of the modern centralized state led to a disenchantment with community.\(^{57}\)

The most significant sociological response to these conditions was provided by Tönnies, who:

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\text{[\ldots]} \text{identified the relentless progression from}\ \text{Gemeinschaft} \text{ (unity based on personal and intimate social relations of family and kinship), roughly translated as community, to}\ \text{Gesellschaft} \text{ (impersonal and contractual relations of a more calculating kind).}\ ^{58}\]

Tönnies’s theory was representative of the widespread belief within the field of sociology at the time that modernity had brought about the loss of community, a form of social relation only possible in the supposedly organic contexts of the pre-modern period. Nonetheless, and as shall be discussed in chapter 1, the ‘Age of Ideology’, which Delanty dates from 1830 to 1989, was littered with political projects built upon ‘community as a largely normative ideal.’\(^{59}\) Delanty claims that community was central to the doctrines of republicanism, communism, socialism, nationalism, Zionism, to name but a few. The one exception to this rule, for Delanty, was liberalism. ‘Because of its belief in individualism, liberalism has been sceptical of the promises of community,’ he wrote.\(^{60}\)

The rise to hegemony of liberalism and its exaggerated progeny, neoliberalism, in the later twentieth century thus brought with it further challenges for community. Given Francis Fukuyama’s controversial claim that 1989 represented the ultimate victory of liberalism over all other political projects, the only doctrine of the ‘Age of Ideology’ to survive was the one which was not rooted in some ideal of community.\(^{61}\) Two theoretical reconsiderations of

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{58}\) Blackshaw, Key Concepts in Community Studies, 5.

\(^{59}\) Delanty, Community, 10.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.

community emerged from these contexts, grounded in a shared distaste for liberalism and its emphasis on the individual.

On the one hand, in the UK and the USA in the 1980s and 1990s, political philosophers including Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty and Michael Sandel turned towards what became known as ‘communitarianism’. This philosophy criticised liberalism’s focus on atomisation, and disregard for the social dimension of human life, instead advocating a nostalgic ‘return to the quotidian of a golden age that nonetheless returns concertedly in the present,’ an implementation of Gemeinschaft into capitalism. On the other hand, and arising contemporaneously to communitarianism, albeit from a continental philosophy tradition, emerged theories of postmodern community. According to Delanty:

Lying at the heart of the idea of community is an ambivalence. On the one hand, it expresses locality and particularity – the domain of immediate relations, the familiar, proximity – and, on the other hand it refers to the universal community in which all human beings participate.

Communitarianism and theories of postmodern community then may be seen as two responses to the liberal hostility towards community, that play on this internal ambivalence, privileging the particular and the universal respectively as the key to their treatments of community. It is this second reaction to liberalism that concerns me in this thesis, and discussions of postmodern community and its predominant theorists will appear throughout.

**Geographical and Temporal Frames**

This thesis is in part informed by my own background in researching the art history of Eastern Europe, and in particular the Baltic States in the period around 1989. My Masters research into art in the Baltic States during this period revealed a particular concern with the concept of community during the early years of Eastern Europe’s admittance into the Western/globalised art world post-1989. This will in part explain the slight weighting towards case studies from Eastern Europe. Further research indicated that this phenomenon was by no means localised, given the universality of what has been termed the ‘post-communist condition’. Accordingly, I do not wish to make the claim that a concern with

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63 Delanty, *Community*, 4.

community is heightened in post-communist localities, and apply no geographical parameters to this thesis.

This is responsive to the fact that the tendency in art at stake in this thesis towards attendance to the social and the political has emerged within a globalised contemporary art world, best exemplified by the international biennial. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, in their introduction to The Biennial Reader offer a sceptical description of this form of mega-exhibition as ‘a Western typology whose proliferation has infiltrated even the most far-reaching parts of the world.’ They continue to note that, although the Venice Biennial was initiated in 1895, it was more than fifty years before the term was applied to another exhibition, the São Paulo Biennial in 1951. Furthermore, ‘it would take until the nineteen-nineties, when an exponential expansion of the genre occurred […] for the term to become the household name with which we are now familiar.’ Since the 1990s, they argue, the biennial exhibition has become ‘the medium through which contemporary art comes to be known,’ and ‘one of the most vital and visible sites for contemporary art and its production, distribution, and generation of public discourse around it.’

The rise of the biennial, and the shift towards a globalised contemporary art world that this development signifies, is also a reason behind my decision to offer 1989 as the crucial chronological fulcrum of my thesis. As previously stated, the social turn did not constitute the ab nihilo emergence of a new tendency in art, but the institutional acceptance, championing and proliferation of socially engaged practices within this globalised infrastructure. Biennials, and the global network they together form, have become the barometer by which the tendencies and proclivities of the art world are measured. Another reason for my decision to take 1989 as a starting point for the remit of this thesis is outlined at greater length in chapter 3; namely, the permeation of the ‘post-communist condition’ – a global malaise that has inhibited the political and social imaginary, obscuring horizons and congealing the persistence of the status quo. As I shall argue in chapter 3 and as Esposito’s ‘unique epochal knot’ notes, this has been one of the foremost factors precipitating the impasse confronting the theorisation and thinking of community in contemporary conditions.

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65 Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds., The Biennial Reader (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 13.

66 Ibid., 14.

67 Ibid., 15.
A significant complexity arises given my decision to rest my thesis on the year 1989. While I am making the claim that the emergence of the tendency towards the negotiation of community in contemporary art can be dated back to 1989, most of the practices described in this thesis date from the early 2000s onwards. There is an important reason for this apparent discrepancy. The confluence of the globalisation of the art world and the permeation of the post-communist condition certainly precipitated a renewed interest in community in contemporary art. However, during the early years of the post-1989 period, this predominantly took the form of an affirmative engagement with community in the artistic tradition of community arts and the philosophical lineage of communitarianism. Artists turned towards ‘really existing communities’ in order to introduce an emphasis on locality and intimacy in the face of globalisation and the increasing alienation of society. It is only subsequent to this affirmative engagement, and for reasons that will be discussed in my conclusions, that a negotiative engagement with community substantially emerges. Nonetheless, this shift from affirmation to negotiation cannot be dated to a particular point in time. The shift was gradual, and despite the delay, must still be viewed in relation to the pivotal year of 1989, albeit with an initial period of latency. Indeed, as the case of Utrecht art organisation Casco’s ongoing project ‘Composing the Commons’ – discussed in chapter 5 as coherent with an affirmative, community arts tradition – attests, strict periodization is impossible. This tendency will be mentioned sporadically throughout the thesis, before being examined in more depth in its conclusions.

This delay in turn raises a further question regarding the temporal framework of this study. While I am examining art practices produced largely post-2000, I am arguing that they contribute to a theoretical discourse that began in the early 1980s (or, if we factor in Bataille, the 1930s) and – as shall be argued in chapter 1 – had largely run its course by 2000. There is a temporal dissonance here that must be addressed. I wish to suggest that this delay between what I see as the negotiation of community in theory and in art can be explained in three ways.

1) Around the turn of the millennium, a renewed academic interest in earlier theories of postmodern community emerged. New translations (an Italian edition of The Unavowable Community in 2003, most notably; a new essay by Nancy reconsidering the field in light of more recent political contexts also prefaced this) and additions to
the field appeared. Esposito’s *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* was published in Italian in 1998 and Bauman’s *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* was published in 2001. Artists were inevitably among those to be interested in this proliferation of what had initially been a relatively niche concern in philosophy.

2) As Nancy himself noted in 2001, the conditions that gave rise to his and Blanchot’s early discussions of community in 1983 had not dissipated but rather become heightened. Given the continued pertinence of Nancy and Blanchot’s work, and a dissatisfaction with communitarian approaches to community, a return to theories of postmodern community as a means of interrogating the persistence of these conditions was apt. In ‘The Confronted Community’ Nancy wrote:

> The history of philosophical texts concerning community in the 1980s deserves to be written with precision, since it is, among other histories (only more so), revealing of a profound movement of thought in Europe at that time – a movement that still carries us, although in a context that has become very different, one in which the motif of “community” now, instead of coming to light, seems to sink into obscurity (especially at the time I am writing these lines, in mid-October 2001).

3) Nina Power noted in an article of 2011 in *Frieze* that ‘Much of the early 2000s seemed to occupy itself in a quest for a new language and a new politics that would reflect the legalization of the illegal, of war as an enduring condition, and the increasing control over the biopolitical (surveillance, fingerprinting, security controls and so on).’ This desire for a ‘new language’ resoundingly echoed the desire on the part of postmodern community theory to rethink the concept from the ground up. Their goal had been the deautomation of community, to return to Berardi’s terminology, and this impulse had been taken up once again in the early 2000s by both theorists (as the cases of Esposito and Bauman attest to) and artists (as we shall see in this thesis).

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69 Ibid., 19.

Research and Structure

Methodology

Given that this thesis is both a reconsideration of art-historical and art-theoretical responses to the social turn in art, and a direct examination of contemporary art practices, two predominant methodologies have been employed in its researching and writing. Firstly, I have undertaken a thorough and extensive survey of literature produced regarding the social turn in art, its extended histories in twentieth century art, and the subject of community in art. In keeping with the very contemporary focus of my study, this has been supplemented by participation in a number of symposia, conferences and research workshops as a means of keeping abreast of what is a continually unfolding discourse. Secondly, I have engaged closely and directly with contemporary art practices in a number of fashions including: visits to pertinent exhibitions; close analysis of artworks; and informal conversations with artists and curators working in the field.

Although predominantly an art-historical treatment, this thesis also necessarily passes through the field of theory, including art theory (although these disciplinary boundaries have become increasingly porous). This is demanded by the nature of the subject matter at hand. Discussing art and philosophy as convergent, mutually contributory modes of articulation of a shared concern, community, requires that work in these two fields be examined both according to their own disciplinary histories, as well as in tandem. For instance, in order to accurately draw intersections between the writing of Nancy and the art practice of Dean Kenning, the work of Nancy must be explicated and analysed at the level of theory, while the work of Kenning requires art-historical treatment. This alone however does not suffice. The two must then be discussed in concert, using neither exclusively theoretical or art-historical terms. To adhere to one or other of these positions would be to install a hierarchy between Nancy and Kenning, one acting, as Kester has pointed out, as a ‘master discourse’ against which the other is measured.71 Instead, I follow Kester’s call for ‘a more reflective and reciprocal understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.’72

Furthermore, given that I am suggesting that art has recently contributed significantly to a discourse which had been previously predominantly the concern of philosophy, an overview of this theoretical lineage is demanded. Accordingly, in addition to my overview of

71 Kester, "The Device Laid Bare: On Some Limitations in Current Art Criticism."

72 Ibid.
theorisations and historicisations of the social turn, I also undertake a thorough review of the theories of postmodern community, as well as a more cursory examination of the wider history of community and its theorisation.

**Thesis Outline**

This thesis is in two parts, both of which are subdivided into three chapters. Following these are a final concluding section and a bibliography. Footnotes appear at the base of each page throughout. Illustrations are included at the end of chapters. However, given that many of practices under discussion are performance, participation or moving image based, and gain little from being reproduced here, I have included illustrations only when appropriate. The final conclusions section serves to summarise and to extrapolate the main significances of my research.

Part I develops the social, political, historical and theoretical contexts for negotiations of community in contemporary art. This first half of the thesis also serves to establish and review the theoretical landscape that my own analysis contributes to. Chapter 1 traces the historical lineage to which the art practices discussed in this thesis contribute. This is not a lineage in art history, but a lineage in philosophy passing through the theorists of postmodern community back to French writer Georges Bataille. It is his writings on community from the 1930s that I see as being formative of many of the concerns subsequently developed in postmodern community theory and then in contemporary art practice. Particular focus lies on Bataille’s *Acéphale* group, an experimental community founded in 1936, and a short manifesto-like text published in the same year stating the group’s foundational aims. Following a brief summary of some of the key points emerging from postmodern community theory – and in particular the respects in which this tendency in philosophy recalls the work of Bataille – I focus on three contemporary art practices that directly reference the work of Bataille: Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument* (2002); Goldin+Senneby’s *Headless* (2007-); and Dean Kenning’s *Metallurgy of the Subject* (2010). These are analysed as a means of not only demonstrating the contemporary significance of Bataille’s work, but also introducing some of the key means through which contemporary art practitioners have served to negotiate community in a manner resonant with Bataille’s theoretical interventions into the subject.
Chapters 2 and 3 are focussed around the two strands comprising Esposito’s ‘unique epochal knot’: ‘the misery of new individualisms’ and ‘the failure of all communisms’ respectively.\(^3\)

Chapter 2 considers the impact of the rise of neoliberalism on the concept of community, arguing that the abuses against community enacted during the 1930s – which precipitated Bataille’s work on the subject – have become increasingly heightened, obfuscated and dangerous under the increasingly unchallenged hegemony of what has been referred to as ‘neoliberalism’. In particular, my focus is on two hostilities towards community that have become exacerbated under neoliberalism. Firstly, I discuss the rise of the individual and the pervasion of economic logics within the social sphere, analysing the impact of what has been called the ‘real subsumption of the social’ on community. Secondly, I consider the manner in which community has been instrumentalised as a means of control and manipulation, particularly focussing on geographer Steve Herbert’s notion of the ‘Trapdoor of Community’ – the use of community by governments as an overflow for responsibilities offloaded by the state.\(^4\)

After a consideration of how art has been complicit in both of these developments, I discuss the institutional capability and suitability of art as a site for the negotiation of community given its compromised relationship with neoliberalism. I arrive at an affirmative response to this conundrum, pointing to what I term art’s ‘permitted autonomy’ as a means through which art may operate critically despite its co-optations.

Chapter 3 examines the impact of the fall of communism on the political imaginary, and by extension, on the possibility of thinking community in any respect other than according to its received definitions. Specifically I use the notion of the ‘post-communist condition’ to characterise a global post-1989 psychological state of impotence and intransigence. The second half of the chapter discusses art’s potential to work beyond the impasse of the post-communist condition, highlighting two fashions through which art may rethink community despite the inhospitable contexts afforded by the post-1989 political landscape. Firstly, I posit that contemporary art increasingly adheres to G.W.F. Hegel’s characterisation of philosophy as ‘its own time comprehended in thoughts,’ thus offering an alternative form of comprehension to that presented by philosophy.\(^5\) Secondly, I discuss art’s speculative nature through the writing of philosopher Peter Osborne on the notions of ‘anticipation’ and

\(^3\) Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, 1.


‘expectation’. I conclude that art also offers a potent form of projection beyond contemporary conditions.

Part II focuses more tightly on art practices that I deem to be negotiative of community in some respect. The three chapters comprising this part look at collaboration, participation and performance respectively, and how these three strategic devices and methodologies have been employed as a means of approaching various constituent issues that contribute to the larger concept of community.

Chapter 4 is centred on the question of temporality, and the disturbance of the perceived immanence of factors such as immediacy, presence and duration to understandings of what Young has called ‘the ideal of community’. Through a reconsideration of collaborative art practices according to the various temporalities entailed by different modes of collaboration, I argue that these temporal factors no longer necessarily pertain to a contemporarily pertinent understanding of community. I note, through the discussion of works by Oda Projesi, Cyprien Gaillard and WochenKlausur, that collaborative practices have increasingly moved away from what I term ‘coeval collaboration’, that is collaboration which entails direct interaction between collaborators, and towards ‘diachronic collaboration’, collaborations occurring over a period of time in which collaboration is mediated and direct interaction need not occur. Given the imbrication of the issues of collaboration and community, this shift in collaborative art practice offers a perspective on how community may be thought without resort to immediacy, presence and duration.

Chapter 5 considers how participatory practices have served to negotiate what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have termed the ‘dynamic of singularity and commonality’, an issue of the highest relevance to community, regardless of how it is theorised. Artur Źmijewski’s 2006 work Them, and a broad study of the career of Tania Bruguera serve as case studies. Źmijewski’s work is counterpointed with Hardt and Negri’s discussions of the ‘spiral, symbiotic production of the common and production of subjectivity’, while Bruguera’s career, and in particular her long-term project Immigrant Movement International, is discussed in terms of their theorisations of ‘revolutionary parallelism’. In both cases I characterise the artists’ practices as material experiments into thinking the issues of

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76 Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference.”


78 Ibid., 189.
singularity and commonality – and by extension, community – beyond identity. In this respect a consonance emerges between the concerns of the two artists, Hardt and Negri, and Jean-Luc Nancy, whose work rejects the traditional position of identity as the cornerstone of community.

Chapter 6 examines the implication of ethics in public performance practices, particularly with regard to what I term the ethical constitution of community. By this I mean to argue that, regardless of what ‘really existing communities’ – to use the terminology of Bauman – are deemed to crystallise around, whether an ethnicity, nationality, locality and so on, they are in fact constituted by a shared, subliminal ethics that regulates behaviour and coheres the community. I argue, through the theory of Richard Schechner that the inherent antagonisms of performance have been strategically deployed by artists in recent years as a means of revealing and disturbing this ethics. This analysis will hinge upon the work of Estonian artist Kristina Norman. Following this, I discuss the case of Scottish-Croatian collective Eastern Surf, and their work *Quartermile Render Ghosts* (2012), in which they antagonistically disturb the utopian visions of community offered by architectural renderings of new urban developments. In this chapter I introduce the complex dynamic between ‘this and that community’ and ‘community as such’ – that is, between ‘really existing communities’ and community at a level of abstraction. I suggest that through material incursions into ‘really existing communities’ and the ethics that cohere them, performance practices may offer a substantial contribution to the negotiation of community at a conceptual level, or ‘community as such’.
PART I: UNTYING THE ‘UNIQUE EPOCHAL KNOT’
1: From Bataille to Postmodern Community

The mid-twentieth-century French writer, philosopher and purveyor of erotic literature Georges Bataille has been subject to a resurgence of interest in recent years. Theoretical touchstones du jour Steven Shaviro, Nick Land and Benjamin Noys all wrote extensively on Bataille during the formative stages of their careers in the 1990s: Shaviro in Passion and Excess: Blanchot, Bataille and Literary Theory (1992);¹ Land in The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism,² published in 1992; and Noys in his DPhil thesis, published in 2000 by Pluto Press under the title Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction.³ That these three constitute each author’s first published book is demonstrative of the influence of Bataille on a particular strand of contemporary theory. Specifically, it is Bataille’s ‘paralysed revolt of transgression’ – to quote Land – that constitutes a vital bridge between the nihilism of Nietzsche and what has recently been termed the ‘accelerationism’ of writers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard.⁴

In a defiantly unfashionable gesture, the focus of this chapter, and in a more circuitous fashion, the thesis as a whole, will not be this ‘paralysed revolt of transgression’ – although I will refer to Noys in his capacity as a significant critical biographer of Bataille – nor on his relationships with Surrealism, the primary focus of ‘the art historian’s Bataille’. Rather, I wish to revisit the subject of a widespread revival of interest in Bataille during the 1980s – when theorists of what Gerard Delanty has termed ‘postmodern community’, such as Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot, returned to the writings and practices of Bataille in order to reconsider the concept of community.⁵ It is within this particular lineage that I would like to locate the contemporary art practices under examination in this thesis.

By way of introducing some of the central concerns of this thesis, this chapter is structured tightly around an examination of firstly, Bataille’s own interventions into the subject of community; secondly, his legacy in theories of postmodern community; and thirdly, his

⁵ Delanty, Community, 103.
significance to the field of contemporary art. The third of these sections is in turn centred on the discussion of three examples of contemporary art practice that explicitly reference Bataille and his work: Thomas Hirschhorn’s ‘Bataille Monument’ of 2002; Goldin+Senneby’s ‘Headless’ project, initiated in 2007; and Dean Kenning’s ‘Metallurgy of the Subject’ (2010-). The reasons behind prioritising such direct invocations of Bataille are twofold. Firstly, to do so is to emphasise and acknowledge the significance of Bataille’s legacy on the sphere of contemporary art under examination, and secondly, their explicit references to Bataille serve to heighten and exaggerate the impulse towards rethinking and negotiating community in their work, an impulse that unites the otherwise disparate practices discussed in this thesis.

From Mary Jane Jacob’s germinal public art project Culture in Action (USA, 1993), to the art-as-social-activism work of groups such as WochenKlausur (Austria) and Park Fiction (Germany), those practices most commonly discussed in contemporary art theory in relation to community are those which take ‘community as context’. Grant Kester’s characterisation of dialogical aesthetics and Miwon Kwon’s discussions of a tendency away from site-specificity and towards community-specificity are rooted in practices in which community is positioned as a largely neutral and accepted backdrop against which artists operate in order to achieve some socially ameliorative outcome, a means to an end, but absolutely not an end in itself. Such a focus on community entirely downplays the wealth of examples of contemporary art that have taken the concept of community not as something to be accepted, and by extension affirmed, but as one whose meanings, politics and uses are at stake; to be challenged, questioned and rethought. Expansions upon this shift in emphasis with regard to the notion of community will recur throughout both this chapter and the remainder of the thesis. This tendency towards the positioning of community as the conceptual object of the work, as something to be rethought, is absolutely in keeping with the manner in which Bataille engaged with the subject of community. As Noys has observed, ‘Bataille’s thought of community is a practical interrogation of what is at stake in community, a rethinking of community itself.’ While the issues of ‘rethinking’ community, contemporary art’s potential as a mode of (re)thinking, and the significance of thinking to the negotiation of community,

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7 Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, 112; Kester, Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art.

are addressed briefly in this chapter – in direct relation to the work of Bataille – they are more thoroughly examined in the chapter 3.

As an adjunct to this larger concern, an additional issue will be addressed through the analysis of Bataille and his significance to contemporary art practice. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, it is my contention that the social turn has been theorised along overly formalist lines, restricting discussion on the whole to practices that are materially embedded in a social context in some way. Theorists of the social turn have tended to define the remit of their discussions according to formal criteria, and while these criteria vary from theorist to theorist, their formalist nature is consistent. For example, curator Nicolas Bourriaud described his hugely influential and widely critiqued book *Relational Aesthetics* not as a ‘theory of art’, ‘but a theory of form.’\(^9\) While many of the practices under examination in this thesis are consistent with the predominant theorisations of the social turn at a formal level, they are discussed together here by virtue of their common impulse towards the rethinking and negotiation of community, as opposed to any shared formal criteria. Certain practices mentioned, including the work of Dean Kenning and Goldin+Senneby – both discussed in this chapter – are in many respects incongruous with the social turn as it has been formally defined by the likes of Bourriaud, and yet thoroughly contribute to the tendency towards rethinking community in contemporary art. The prevalent formalist theorisations of the ‘social turn’ deny the sheer wealth and variety of forms through which the social – including the concept of community – has been attended to by art. Although to a degree secondary to my primary aim in isolating the historical precursors and contexts for the (re)thinking of community in contemporary art, this is nonetheless a contributory and essential issue to be broached in locating the research presented in this thesis against the backdrop of previous interventions into contemporary art’s social turn.

### Bataille and Community

Despite the posthumous significance of his work that has already been alluded to, Bataille never achieved particular recognition during his own lifetime.\(^10\) His greatest impact before his death in 1962 perhaps came from his various forays into the realm of erotic fiction, although these were largely published pseudonymously in order to protect his employment at

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the Bibliothèque Nationale.\textsuperscript{11} For instance, his novel \textit{The Story of the Eye},\textsuperscript{12} which became one of his most significant works, and the subject of Roland Barthes’ essay ‘The Metaphor of the Eye’,\textsuperscript{13} was published in 1928 under the pseudonym ‘Lord Auch’.\textsuperscript{14} From the mid-1930s onwards he would stray further into the realm of theory, although never losing the transgressive emphasis on excess of his earlier novels. Between 1943 and 1945 he published the \textit{Summa Theologica}, a series of three books, \textit{Inner Experience},\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Guilty},\textsuperscript{16} and \textit{On Nietzsche},\textsuperscript{17} and in 1949, his conception of excess was formalised more clearly in an economic context in \textit{The Accursed Share}.\textsuperscript{18} Throughout his life he was also involved with a number of groups, societies and journals. Having flirted with the Surrealists in the 1920s, his relationship with André Breton had collapsed catastrophically by 1930 when he was dubbed an ‘excrement-philosopher’ by Breton in the Second Surrealist Manifesto.\textsuperscript{19} In that same year, the short-lived yet influential journal \textit{Documents}, founded by Bataille and others in 1929, ceased publication. Later in his life he would form \textit{Acéphale} in 1936, a group of considerable significance to the subject of community that will be returned to shortly, and in 1937, the \textit{College of Sociology}, a group of French intellectuals who emerged from, and reacted against Surrealism.

As the title of a book edited by philosophers Andrew J. Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree, \textit{The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication}, and published in 2009, attests, the subject of community was a consistent theme across both his life and work.\textsuperscript{20} The

\textsuperscript{14} Kendall, \textit{Georges Bataille}, 59.
editors comment in their introduction that community was a problem ‘he so radically and scandalously pursued and that he opened in ways still not exhausted.’ They continue:

Community names not so much a unified field or concept for Bataille as it does an obsession, one he pursues in multiple ways, addressing differences that could hardly be said to constitute the same phenomenon. Hence we find community articulated both externally and internally, objectively and subjectively, ontologically and politically, and each of these distinctions is itself often subject to disruption and collapse by the analyses Bataille sets forth.

The heterogeneity and complexity hinted at here is typical of Bataillé’s often contradictory and obscure work. Nonetheless, it is perhaps this sheer breadth of Bataillé’s incursions into the subject of community that have precipitated the quantity of responses that have been made to his work over the intervening years, as well as the longevity of his legacy in the area. Many of his most significant interventions into the subject occur in the years around 1936, during which time he was closely associated with artist André Masson. In 1936, he wrote the first drafts of Inner Experience, formed the secret society Acéphale, published the first issue of a journal of the same name, and wrote perhaps the most crucial and powerful, albeit brief, of his engagements with the subject of community; the ‘Programme (Relative to Acéphale)’.

It is in Inner Experience that the origins of his thinking surrounding community may be discerned. In particular it is from a paradox of inner experience that Bataille sees community emerging.

Your life is not limited to that ungraspable inner streaming; it streams to the outside as well and opens itself incessantly to what flows out or surges forth towards it. The lasting vortex which constitutes you runs up against similar vortexes with which it forms a vast figure, animated by a measured agitation.

As such, the individual encounters what he calls an ‘undefined throng of possible existences,’ which constitutes itself as a loose, dismembered and liberating community vastly contradictory to the dominant modalities of community in the ascendency at the time of the book’s publication. In Acéphale the ‘vast figure’ became the central motif around which Bataille’s thought surrounding community would crystallise. Acéphale (from the Greek for

21 Ibid., 1.
22 Ibid., 2.
23 Bataille, Inner Experience, 94.
24 Ibid., 61.
‘Headless’) held their first meeting, convened by Bataille, in June 1936. The group consisted of a number Bataille’s fellow French intellectuals, many of whom would also become members of the College of Sociology the following year. Although little is concretely known of their activities, their meetings took place monthly in a forest near Bataille’s home in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, by a tree which had been felled by a lightning strike.25

Five issues of the journal Acéphale, The Review were produced between 1936 and 1939. The headless male figure on the cover of the first three issues, illustrated by Masson (fig. 1), captured the intentions of the group towards developing an understanding of community devoid of a head, and founded on the principle of freedom rather than power, one that ‘attempted to resist its co-option by various governments and social movements.’26 In ‘Programme (Relative to Acéphale’), written on April 4th, 1936, Bataille laid out some of the foundational principles of the group.27 Despite the heterogeneity and quantity of interventions into the subject of community that Bataille made, for the sake of brevity, focus and concision, it is three of these foundational principles of Acéphale that shall be primarily under consideration in this chapter.

Point 7 of the ‘Programme’ reads: ‘Fight for the decomposition and exclusion of all communities national, socialist, communist or churchly - other than universal community.’ Fundamentally, Bataille’s work on community must be viewed as a product of his historical contexts. The significance of 1936 and the turbulent political situation that was brewing during this period should not be downplayed. Only four weeks prior to Bataille having written ‘Programme (Relative to Acéphale)’ Germany had reoccupied the Rhineland on its western border with France. Bataille’s interest in the subject of community was piqued by his experience of an emergent and increasingly threatening fascism, which he saw as being underpinned by a ‘unitary conception of community’ grounded upon national or religious qualifications, intransigent and artificially constructed identities and rigid boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.28 It should be noted however, that such a conception of community was, however, not limited to fascism. As editors of many of Bataille’s English translations Fred Botting and Scott Wilson have commented:

25 Kendall, Georges Bataille, 135.
27 Ibid., 121.
The 1930s were supremely the time when certain notions of community based on some essence, idea or project, be it organic nature, racial purity, the Fatherland, the body of Christ or the dignity of labour, were being employed as the goal and guarantee of liberal democratic, socialist and national socialist repressions.\(^{29}\)

It is precisely such notions of community that Bataille sought to challenge in the ‘Programme’. As Roberto Esposito has noted, the widespread – and politically diverse – appeals for community that predominated during the early decades of the twentieth century find their root in the work of Ferdinand Tönnies. In a paper of 2009 he wrote, ‘Tönnies put community before society—according to a genealogy which was then appropriated by all the philosophies of decline, betrayal, and loss originating both from the Right and the Left at the turn of the twentieth century.’\(^{30}\) Here Esposito refers to the two units of the title of Tönnies’ hugely influential book; *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society, sometimes also translated as civil society or association), published in the original German in 1887.

In *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* Tönnies outlines and contrasts two social forms. *Gemeinschaft* is portrayed as a form of ‘real organic life’, grounded upon immediacy and face-to-face relations.\(^{31}\) Tönnies claims that: ‘in *Gemeinschaft* we are united from the moment of our own birth with our own folk.’\(^{32}\) With the arrival of industrialisation and capitalism, however, *Gemeinschaft* becomes for the most part supplanted by *Gesellschaft*, ‘individuals living alongside each other but independently of one another.’\(^{33}\) As Esposito notes, this replacement of *Gemeinschaft* with *Gesellschaft*, and the nostalgia for organic social relations in the face of the alienation of urban modernity, was widely appealed to by governments seeking to unify their populations behind a common cause. In the case of Germany during the 1930s, the banner of *Volksgemeinschaft* (Community of the People) was used as a rhetorical tool by political parties on the Left and Right, the term referencing Tönnies, while appending a specific qualifier to the nature of the community being invoked.\(^{34}\)


\(^{31}\) Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, 17.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{34}\) Michael Tymkiv has noted that Tönnies’s work represents ‘an important conceptual foundation for the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* as it gained traction during the first part of the twentieth century—
Historian David Welch notes the centrality of community to the establishment of a National Socialist German identity, arguing that ‘propaganda presented an image of society that had successfully manufactured a “national community” by transcending social and class divisiveness through a new ethnic unity based on “true” German values.’\(^{35}\) Although, as Bataille suggests, such recourse to community was not limited to National Socialism in Germany, this certainly constituted its most extreme embodiment. Welch also observes that ‘Nazi propaganda skillfully diverted public frustrations into attacks on the Jews. Discriminatory and racist feelings had, from the outset, been built into the idealism of the “national community”.’\(^{36}\) Here Welch argues that fundamental to the Nazi adaptation of a rhetoric of Gemeinschaft was the implicit insertion of xenophobia into the notion of community. This facet of the Volksgemeinschaft – and its pan-European equivalents – played a crucial role in mobilising the working classes of Europe against one another under the banners of their respective nations.

It is this use of community as a means of coercion and control that Bataille recalls in point 2 of the ‘Programme’: ‘Lift the curse, the feeling of guilt which strikes men, sending them to wars they do not want, forcing them to a labour whose fruits escape them.’ In the early 1990s, philosopher Slavoj Žižek, echoing Bataille’s words, saw this as deriving from a ‘solidarity-in-guilt’, a disinclination to impinge, or to be seen to impinge, upon the good of the community.\(^{37}\) It is this instrumentalisation of community as a means of manipulation and control over a population, and a means of making a population act against both their will and their interest, that Bataille particularly rallied against. It is this that prompted his call for a headless community, one in which a single power could not act or speak for the community as a whole, and thus divert its energies to its own ends. Blanchot directly contrasts Bataille’s vision of an acephalic community in The Unavowable Community with ‘the military or

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., 237.

fascist group where each member of the group relinquishes his freedom or even his consciousness to a Head incarnating it.  

Point 9 of the ‘Programme’ urges the reader to: ‘Take part in the destruction of the existing world, with eyes open to the world to come.’ When taken in concert with Point 3 – ‘Assume the function of destruction and decomposition, but as accomplishment and not as negation of being.’ – this reveals a facet of Bataille’s thought on community of the utmost importance. While he is for the most part concerned with the ‘destruction and decomposition’ of established notions of community – a constituent of Bataille’s ‘destruction of the existing world’ – this must by no means be read as a negative exercise. Rather it is seen in an affirmative and progressive sense. Mitchell and Winfree elaborate on this in the introduction to *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille*:

Undoubtedly, what renders this destruction an accomplishment is its unwillingness to submit to the dominant order of Western life at a time when the homogenizing forces of society were reaching a state of political and historical crisis, but for which there was no political solution. The destruction of the dominant order that dulls life and lays it to waste is thus a refusal of servility.

This contradictory impulse towards a proactive destruction and deconstruction of inherited understandings of community is also central to theorists of postmodern community working in Bataille’s legacy, and to those contemporary art practices that I see as operating in a similar manner to Bataille’s with regard to the question of community.

**Postmodern Community**

Serious attention to Bataille’s interventions into the subject of community did not arrive until the 1980s and the advent of postmodern community theory. Both Nancy and Blanchot’s books are explicitly addressed as responses to Bataille’s work. Nancy commented that ‘no doubt Bataille has gone furthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community,’ while Blanchot – a great friend of Bataille’s – begins *The Unavowable Community* with an epigraph quoting Bataille: ‘The community of those who do not have a community.’ Although the specifics of each of these two theories of postmodern

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38 Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, 7.


40 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*.

41 Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, 1.
community – as well as others similarly indebted to Bataille – vary, they are united both in their distrust of inherited notions of community, and in their exhortation towards forms of universal community. Both of these drives can be traced back to the work of Bataille.

Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*, published in French in 1983, has been largely credited with having instigated the renewed interest in Bataille’s work on community that came to predominate in sociological and philosophical environs over the coming years. In this book, Nancy elaborates on Bataille’s work, defining community principally by its ‘inoperativity’ (*désoeuvrement*). This entails that community ‘is not something that may be produced and instituted or whose essence could be expressed in a work of any kind (including a *polis* or a state).’ Any such representation of community would constitute a return to the forms of unitary community that Bataille saw as being so susceptible to instrumentalisation and abuse at the hands of hegemonic structures. Blanchot, in his response to Nancy, *The Unavowable Community*, progresses the claim that community is unrepresentable by adding that it is ‘unavowable’, that it need not avow itself. Blanchot claims that the community ‘knows itself by ignoring itself.’ Noys writes of Nancy’s use of Bataille – and this seems equally applicable to Blanchot – that:

Nancy finds in Bataille an opening of the thought of community. Not only is it the opening of community but it is also a thinking of community as open, in contrast to contemporary readings of community as relatively closed and static forms. In this way Nancy is maintaining Bataille’s resistance to the unitary conception of community.

While Bataille’s writings on the subject were notably contingent to the political and historical specificities of the 1930s, theorists of postmodern community deemed them eminently urgent to their own late-twentieth century contexts. Noys notes that this is precisely attributable to the fact that the conceptions of community challenged by Bataille have remained dominant ever since, ‘even in some of the most “democratic” or “progressive” thinking of community.’ Nancy wrote anecdotally in 2001 of the situation surrounding the

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42 This collection of essays is occasioned in part by the renewed interest in the thought of Georges Bataille signaled by Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community* and Maurice Blanchot’s response to that work, *The Unavowable Community*. Mitchell and Winfree, *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication*, 1.

43 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*.

44 Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, 47.


46 Ibid.
genesis of *The Inoperative Community* that ‘whether or not one knew it then, the word and its concept were caught in the snare of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, the “community of the people” in its well-known sense.’

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, my borrowing of the term ‘postmodern community’ from Delanty is not entirely done without reservation. Nonetheless it is a suitable term to describe the various theories emerging during the 1980s that I discuss in this thesis. It is apt for a number of reasons. It locates the origins of this field both historically and geographically. Nancy and Blanchot’s first interventions into the subject of community both came in 1983, at the pinnacle of the ‘high postmodernist’ decade of the 1980s, only four years after the first French publication of Jean-François Lyotard’s epochal text *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Furthermore, they were both working in France in the midst of many theorists commonly associated with postmodernism, including Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In the case of Derrida in particular, Blanchot and Nancy were not only geographically, but philosophically proximate. Nancy and Derrida in particular were mutual influences on each other’s thought, Derrida appearing frequently in *The Inoperative Community* and Nancy being cited throughout Derrida’s *The Politics of Friendship*. Indeed, and as Delanty has argued, Nancy and Blanchot’s work on community is profoundly postmodern in many respects, predicated as they are on a move beyond identity, certainty and other trappings of modernism.

The characteristic of postmodern community is a shift from identity to difference, from certainty to contingency, from closed to open communities; it is a community beyond unity and an embracing of liminality.

This being said, there are several issues that arise in using the term ‘postmodern community’ in this fashion. As the case of Bataille attests, theorists of postmodern community were profoundly influenced – and not in a dialectical manner – by modernist writers. Many of the underlying principles of postmodern community find their origins considerably before Lyotard announced the onset of postmodernism in 1979. Likewise, and as is argued

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50 Delanty, *Community*, 104.
throughout this thesis, the conditions described by Nancy and Blanchot continue to pertain today, long after the end of the high postmodernism of the 1980s. Indeed, using the term does raise the question of the persistence of postmodernism, one which is fraught with complexity and disagreements that cannot be fully addressed in this study. In using the term in relation to contemporary art practices I do not wish to argue that artists working since 2000 are continuing the project of postmodernism, rather that their concerns are consonant with and contributory to a discourse that emerged in the contexts of postmodernism and has endured, whether under continued postmodern conditions or not. Despite these problematic connotations, the term ‘postmodern community’ is apposite.

Further analyses of theorisations of postmodern community will be raised throughout this thesis. What is initially noteworthy, however, and perhaps most apparent in the literature surrounding community from the 1980s and 1990s is the imprecision with regard to definitions of what community might in fact mean, or of the political applicability of such definitions. The same could perhaps be said for Bataille. Indeed, far more attention is paid to what community is not than what it is. As philosopher Christopher Fynsk notes of Nancy:

> Anyone seeking an immediate political application of this thought of community risks frustration [...] Moreover, this frustration will not entirely dissipate even if one recognizes that Nancy’s engagement with the political (understood [...] as the site where a being-in-common is at stake) proceeds from an acute sense of the contemporary socio-political context and is indissociable from a political position-taking.

What this ultimately signifies is that the work of Nancy, Blanchot et al. did not make manifest a definitive and total realignment of the concept of community, but rather represented a stage in an ongoing project of deconstruction and disaffirmation. As philosopher Ignaas Devisch has argued: ‘It is not so much a new theory of community Nancy has in mind. Rather than abandoning a specific form of thought, he aims to put the ways we speak and think about the social bond into question, to break them open and exhaust all of their registers.’ Fundamentally, these theorists were concerned more with the deconstruction of the term and its pre-existing definitions, rather than the recladding of the referent with new denotation. In this sense the theorists of postmodern community must be

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51 Further discussion on the periodisation of postmodernism and its relationships to contemporary art may be found in Dan Karlholm, "Surveying Contemporary Art: Post War, Postmodern, and Then What?," *Art History* 32, no. 4 (2009).

52 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, x.

53 Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, xi.
seen to be operating in the vein of Bataille’s ‘Programme’ – notably Point 3 in which he calls for *Acéphale* to ‘assume the function of destruction and decomposition, but as accomplishment and not as negation of being.’

Furthermore, this must not preclude a reading of these theories as inherently political in intentionality. Directly relating the work of Nancy and Blanchot with that of Bataille serves to highlight the political potency of acts of deconstruction, destruction and decomposition as ‘accomplishments’. Nonetheless these are not accomplishments that may be seen as an endpoint to be celebrated, but as a project to be continued. A criticality towards the notion of community became widespread in the realm of theory in the wake of Nancy and Blanchot’s writings, thus continuing on a sustained political project towards the deconstruction and rethinking of community. Taken together, these two acts comprise what I am referring to as ‘negotiation’. It has also, I argue, gained similar urgency in the field of contemporary art.

**Legacies of Bataille in Contemporary Art**

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument, 2002*.

Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument*, executed in Kassel, Germany as part of *documenta 11* in 2002, is one of a series of four public monuments produced by Hirschhorn, each dedicated in name to a particular philosopher. *Spinoza Monument*, built in 1999 in Amsterdam, was followed by *Deleuze Monument* in Avignon (2000), and then by *Bataille Monument*. The fourth in the series, *Gramsci Monument*, had to wait until 2013 to be realised in the Bronx, New York City. *Bataille Monument*, like the others in the series, comprised a group of makeshift buildings, constructed using the artist’s signature materials of timber, cardboard, plastic sheeting and duct tape. In the case of *Bataille Monument*, these buildings housed a library, a television studio, a bar and an installation collating information on Bataille’s life and work. Accompanying this cluster of shacks was a large, rather dilapidated sculpture of the base of a tree. *Bataille Monument* was produced in Nordstadt, a suburb of Kassel several miles away from the centrally located *documenta* hubs of the Fridericianum, Hauptbahnhof and *documenta* Halle. Taxis dropping off visitors from the town centre would only return to pick up several hours later, necessitating an extended visit. Events were organised and attended by, and advertised to both residents and art tourists. The bar was staffed by residents of Nordstadt and kept cheap, thus it attracted both locals and visitors trapped at the monument by the irregular cab service.

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In many respects Hirschhorn’s practice, including this work, is utterly consistent with many of the formal criteria defining the social turn. Indeed in the article from which this term derives, Claire Bishop characterises Hirschhorn as exemplary of the social turn in contemporary art.\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Bataille Monument} is certainly materially embedded within a social context, having been consciously sited in Nordstadt, a poor, largely migrant Turkish neighbourhood, as opposed to in the more rarefied confines of central Kassel. Similarly it is a participatory work, involving and facilitating the actions of many people – to recall Bishop’s characterisation of the term ‘participatory’.\textsuperscript{56} Furthermore, Hirschhorn’s role within the project coheres adequately, if not entirely unproblematically, with Peter Dunn’s characterisation of the artist as ‘context provider’ as opposed to ‘content provider’, a shift seen by Grant Kester as being paradigmatic of the increasingly socialised role of the artist in the 1990s and after.\textsuperscript{57} Even the consciously shoddy and slapdash aesthetic seems redolent of the art-as-social-work or art-as-activism tropes that have characterised much of the social turn.

It is in Hirschhorn’s implication of community, however, that \textit{Bataille Monument} departs from the communitarian flavour of the social turn in contemporary art during the 1990s, and contradicts the predominant ways in which the relationships between community and contemporary art have been theorised. In \textit{Bataille Monument} we do not observe a ‘concern with community as context’, as art critic Eleanor Heartney has put it, but an interest in community as the conceptual object of the work.\textsuperscript{58} Bishop has noted that although ‘a work like the \textit{Bataille Monument} depends on its context for impact, it could theoretically be restaged elsewhere, in comparable circumstances.’\textsuperscript{59} It is not therefore, to use Miwon Kwon’s terminology, ‘community-specific’. Bishop continues:

\begin{quote}
The complicated play of identificatory and dis-identificatory mechanisms at work in the content, construction, and location of the \textit{Bataille Monument} were radically and disruptively thought-provoking […] Rather than offering, as the \textit{documenta} handbook claims, a reflection on “communal commitment,”
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” 181.
\item \textsuperscript{56} \textit{Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship}, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Kester, \textit{Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art}, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Heartney, “The Dematerialization of Public Art,” 45.
\end{itemize}
the *Bataille Monument* served to destabilize (and therefore potentially liberate) any notion of community identity.\(^{60}\)

I would like to pull three points out of this quotation in order to establish more precisely Bishop’s reading of Hirschhorn’s engagement with community and to ground my own interpretation of the work. Firstly, Bishop claims that *Bataille Monument* works towards a destabilisation and even a potential liberation of ideas of community. The two ‘really existing communities’ seemingly addressed in the work – the Nordstadt residents community and the community of *documenta*-visiting artworld types – are brought into a state of encounter that neither shores up the divisions, exclusions and antagonisms between the two groups, nor affirms one community’s supremacy over the other. Rather, both communities’ unifying identities are compromised, placed into a circumstance of – as Bishop says – disidentification, and by extension, destabilisation. Here, Bishop’s reading of Hirschhorn’s practice recalls Bataille’s seventh point in the ‘Programme’; ‘Fight for the decomposition and exclusion of all communities national, socialist, communist or churchly - other than universal community.’ Bataille’s ninth point - ‘Take part in the destruction of the existing world, with eyes open to the world to come’ - hints at the liberatory possibilities of such a destabilisation. Secondly, the destabilisation of existing communal identifications is not in and of itself the object of this work, rather it is enacted as, Bishop suggests, a prompt to ‘thought’. Hirschhorn himself concurs with this assessment, claiming in an interview that ‘the most important activity that an art work can provoke is the activity of thinking’.\(^{61}\) The importance of this cognitive function of contemporary art will be addressed briefly below and again more thoroughly in chapter 3. Thirdly, Bishop is at pains to emphasise that destabilisation is directed towards *any* notion of community identity, the word ‘any’ being crucial. Again, this work does not simply implicate its local community, or the ‘community’ of art-tourists (‘this or that community’ to quote René ten Bos), but community *in general*, (‘community as such’).\(^{62}\) Hirschhorn’s intention, according to Bishop, is not to remedy the social ills of Nordstadt, nor expose the art crowd to its class privilege, but to prompt an ‘ontological interrogation of the thought of community.’\(^{63}\)

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\(^{60}\) Ibid., 76.


\(^{62}\) Ten Bos, "Giorgio Agamben and the Community without Identity," 24.

\(^{63}\) Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, xiii.
I am broadly sympathetic to the second and third elements of Bishop’s analysis. It is indeed the capacity of art to act as a form of thought that aligns those contemporary art practices that I am concerned with in this thesis, with a lineage passing through both Bataille and the theorists of ‘postmodern community’. Bishop’s words recall both Noys’ comment on Bataille’s agenda - ‘a rethinking of community itself’ – and Esposito’s proclamation that ‘Nothing seems more appropriate today than thinking community.’ Likewise, the implication of community at a level of generality and abstraction also seems pertinent.

The two ‘communities’ seemingly addressed by the work are compelled into temporary coalition by conceits employed by the artist, for instance the sporadic taxi service. As curators Carlos Basualdo and Reinaldo Laddaga have pointed out, ‘the piece demanded the invention of a possible community integrated by locals and visitors. This community, while composed from certain pre-existing instances and elements, would end up incorporating elements that were, initially, foreign to it.’ They refer to this as an ‘experimental community’, and it is through this experimental community, and the ‘knowledges and actions’ that arise from its disturbances and interactions, that the thinking of community derives. The term ‘experimental’ implies two characteristics of the ‘community’ created by Bataille Monument, neither clearly articulated by Basualdo and Laddaga: firstly, that it is grounded in materiality and experience (as opposed to conjecture or hypothesis); and secondly, that it is a trial, not intended as sustainable or permanent, but as provisional and as a source of expanded knowledge around the question to which the experiment is oriented. Both of these are crucial to Hirschhorn’s work.

Despite proclaiming himself a ‘fan’ of Bataille, and despite discussing the influence of Bataille’s thinking on excess and expenditure at length in interviews, Hirschhorn never specifically alludes to his engagement with community in relation to Bataille. Nonetheless, a consonance in intention seems to emerge between Bataille and Hirschhorn with regard to community. It is particularly Bataille’s instigation of the ‘experimental community’ of Acéphale – and the parallels that emerge between Hirschhorn’s and Bataille’s experimental

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65 Ibid., 24.

communities – that appears pertinent, although as I wish to demonstrate, this comparison is more complex than it would perhaps initially seem.67

Bishop’s grounding of her analysis on the functioning of *Bataille Monument* at the level of identification and disidentification seems to overlook a rather central element of the work: its name. In doing so, Bishop vastly oversimplifies the means through which Hirschhorn engages with the subject of community through *Bataille Monument*. The central criterion for an acephalic community in the work of Bataille is its headlessness, its rejection of a sovereign, as is suggested by the word *Acéphale* itself. *Acéphale* was, at least overtly, a community established on the premise that it could not be ruled by a single figure. Is there not, then, an irreconcilable inconsistency between Bataille’s rejection of a singular head, and Hirschhorn’s implication of Bataille in a regal, almost deific, position in naming a monument – traditionally a means of celebrating a sovereign – after him?

A first reading of this contradiction would suggest that, rather than playing on questions of identification or disidentification, Hirschhorn in fact serves to rethink community through a strategy of overidentification. This Lacanian term, popularised by Žižek in his writings on the dissident Yugoslav/Slovenian art collective NSK and their musical wing Laibach,68 is described by sociologist Stevphen Shukaitis as follows:

> This approach of adopting a set of ideas, images, or politics and attacking them, not by a direct, open or straightforward critique, but rather through a rabid and obscenely exaggerated adoption of them, can be referred to as *overidentification*.69

The three objects of overidentification highlighted by Shukaitis – ideas, images and politics – can be seen to be at play in Hirschhorn’s practice, were it to be read in this terms. Hirschhorn adopts the idea of a community with a sovereign leading it, not simply in his own position as artist – he is notably intransigent with regard to his authorial position at the centre of his practice – but in implicating a mythic figurehead in the form of Bataille through the naming of the monument.70 He adopts the images associated with community through the use of materials, forms and strategies typically associated with a tradition of community arts

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70 Buchloh, "An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn,” 86.
that takes community (in the forms Bataille so resisted) as context rather than object. And, by extension of his adoption of a certain image of community, he invokes the politics attendant to it, a hierarchical community built on power rather than freedom.

A second reading of Hirschhorn’s work elaborates a further level of complexity in the artist’s strategy of overidentification, and in doing so points towards a potential reconciliation of the communities formed around Acéphale and Bataille Monument. The most famous and mythologised characteristic of Acéphale is that it was founded upon a promise of human sacrifice, that one member would be decapitated as a symbolic instantiation of the headlessness underpinning the group’s ideology. Allegedly, Bataille put himself up for sacrifice, but ‘no one in the group was willing to lift the blade that would render Bataille the headless victim of this headless community.’

One of Bataille’s biographers, Michel Surya, has noted that had a sacrificer been found, this would have constituted the ‘point of no return’ for Acéphale. This however seems to show too much faith in the seriousness of the proposition of sacrifice in the first place. As Nancy has pointed out, such an act would have in fact been precisely contradictory to the group’s principle of headlessness, the executioner having demonstrated power over the victim, and as such cannot be painted as a serious proposition by Bataille. The group’s inevitable disbanding after this impasse must then be seen as a logical and preconceived result of its initial conception.

While much of the literature on Acéphale takes it at face value as a serious attempt to constitute a radical new vision of community, this seems to somewhat miss the point. Rather, Acéphale was, like the community surrounding Bataille Monument, a consciously temporary, flawed and unsustainable community, and its import lay not in its own success or failure, but in its operation as the basis for thinking community in a more general sense. Accordingly, Acéphale itself could be read as an exercise in overidentification, disturbing established understandings of community through the creation of a community exaggeratedly beholden to a totemic sovereign. Following this reading, both Bataille and

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73 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, 17.

74 Surya in particular seems to read Bataille’s Acéphale period in a dry academic fashion that misrepresents the absurdity, insincerity, hilarity and lust for contradiction of Bataille’s own work. Surya, Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography, 247-50.
Hirschhorn serve to rethink community not through the identificatory or disidentificatory mechanisms described by Bishop, but through a tactical overidentification.

**Goldin+Senneby, *Headless, 2007-***

While Hirschhorn never explicitly references *Acéphale* in his discussions of *Bataille Monument*, despite what I see to be the crucial points of convergence between the two, the Swedish duo Goldin+Senneby position *Acéphale* at the heart of their long-term project *Headless*, initiated in 2007. Comprised of a complex and tangled web of various outputs and media, *Headless* is centred on a fictionalised investigation into an offshore finance company based in the Bahamas, named Headless Ltd. – which in the artists’ words ‘may or may not exist’ – and the possibility that this may be a contemporary incarnation of *Acéphale*. The project has been manifested in a variety of forms; a documentary film, various lectures and ‘meetings’ on the subject, exhibition installations – generally adopting something between an archival and an office-space aesthetic – a novel, written collaboratively under the fictional identity K.D. and titled ‘Looking for Headless’, and performed readings from this novel.

Typically of Goldin+Senneby’s practice, the project is consciously obscure and elusive. As in Hirschhorn’s work, tactical overidentification is central, the artists mirroring the obfuscation proper to the offshore subject of their work. Many of the project’s outputs are outsourced, the artists taking part in what they refer to as an ‘act of withdrawal’.75 Emissaries and spokespersons, often the social scientist Angus Cameron, attend lectures, interviews and artists’ talks in their stead. The documentary, also entitled ‘Looking for Headless’, was produced by artists Richard John-Jones and Kate Cooper.76 The book, which has been published in various forms, at various stages of completion, and is due for final publication through Sternberg in 2014, although purportedly written by the mysterious K.D. would seem to be primarily the work of the novelist John Barlow, yet this is far from clear. The names ‘Kelly Duncan’, ‘Kara Donnelly’ and ‘Kate Dent’ have also been used as authorial pseudonyms for other incarnations of the book, a strategy reminiscent of Bataille’s own use of pseudonyms. Numerous actors have also played the role of K.D. at various public readings from the book. Goldin+Senneby themselves, as TJ Demos writes, ‘seemingly pull...

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the strings from an undisclosed location, enhancing the project’s cloak-and-dagger murkiness.\footnote{77} The aesthetics of Acéphale permeate throughout. This is most visible in the logo used on the cover of the various books published under the auspices of Headless (fig. 2). Designed by Johan Hjerpe, the symbol is a suitably corporate update of Masson’s illustration for Acéphale.\footnote{78} Masson’s image depicts a headless man, standing firmly, arms outstretched, what Demos refers to as a ‘perverse inversion of Leonardo’s enlightened Vitruvian Man.’\footnote{79} The genitals are replaced by a skull, the outstretched arms hold a dagger and a burning heart and the abdominal cavity is exposed, revealing a sinuous curl of intestines. In Hjerpe’s illustration, the head levitates off the shoulders to form a black sun radiating upon a small abstracted island, upon which the acephalic figure casually reclines. The acephalic motif also recurs in many of the press shots for the books, the images cropped at the neck (fig. 3), a motif that was first deployed in the contexts of Goldin+Senneby’s prior project, Flack Attack, 2005-06.\footnote{80}

The suggestion underlying Headless is that the avant-garde, oppositional strategies of secrecy, headlessness and obfuscation employed by Bataille in the contexts of Acéphale today find their most compelling parallels in the murky waters of international finance. The same urge to escape the strictures and dominations of governments and states underpins both Acéphale and offshore companies, albeit for entirely different reasons. This equation of oppositional community (Acéphale) and financial body (Headless Ltd.) in many respects recalls the 1970s work of the French Marxist theorist Jacques Camatte. In his book Capital and Community, Camatte argues for an inverse correlation between the two constituents of his title, from a situation in which community beyond the logics of capital was possible, culminating in a contemporary reality in which all social relations are mediated through capital, via the process of what Karl Marx calls ‘real subsumption’ – the redefinition of the operation of the human subject according to the logics of capital.\footnote{81} This, Camatte claims,


\footnote{78} Ibid.

\footnote{79} Ibid.

results in what he refers to as a ‘material community of capital’, the only form of community conceivable in contemporary contexts. For Goldin+Senneby, the bases for what once constituted a radical and experimental community have become the bases for capitalism’s most virulent limb. In a restaging of that much discussed quality of capitalism – its ability to recuperate all its oppositions – Headless concocts a dystopian future present for Bataille’s model of community. For both Camatte and Goldin+Senneby the possibility of contemporary community seems distant, eradicated by the pervasion of capital and its colonisation of the spaces and structures of community. This complex relationship between community and capital, as well as the work of Goldin+Senneby and the writing of Camatte, will be further examined in the following chapter.

Dean Kenning, *Metallurgy of the Subject, 2010-*

The capacity for artistic practice to contribute to the thinking of community is perhaps most visible in a third example, Dean Kenning’s *Metallurgy of the Subject* (2010–). While a more thorough analysis of this capacity for art to think appears in chapter 3, what is of interest here is the extent to which Kenning’s work references Bataille and the imagery of *Acéphale*. Another multipartite project, *Metallurgy of the Subject* has been exhibited over recent year as a video work, various illustrations and a performance lecture. The video manifestation of the work is comprised of a 15-minute animation, made up of diagrams and drawings, accompanied by the artist reading a text, philosophical in tone, on the relationships between community and the individual over a dark musical backdrop. Kenning departs from the proposition that neoliberalism has precipitated a circumstance in which the individual has become central, at the expense of collectivity and community. He proceeds by allegorically discussing the crystallisation of singularities into communities in terms of metallurgy and the formation of metals from ores.

The work is littered with direct references to Bataille, *Acéphale*, and Masson’s illustration for *Acéphale*, both visual and textual. Skulls and discussions of human sacrifice abound. Masson’s figure is redrawn more literally as the representation of community, a headless body composed of a writhing mesh of smaller bodies. The narration even quotes directly from Bataille’s ‘Programme’: ‘Take part in the destruction of the existing world, with eyes open to the world to come.’ While Hirschhorn’s work is the product of a ‘fan’, *Metallurgy of the Subject* is a far more scholarly engagement with the subject of community through the

work of Bataille and Nancy. Quotations – both textual and visual – appear in an almost academic fashion, peppering the artist’s own words and animations in order to support the work’s line of argument.

Central to this scholarly and contemplative engagement with the subject of community is Kenning’s use of diagrams. In particular a triangular diagram recurs in the video and in his illustrations, the vertices of which are labelled as ‘privatised being’, ‘common being’ and ‘being-in-common’. The latter two labels, occupying the lower two vertices, borrow terminology from Nancy, in particular his essay ‘Of Being-in-Common’, in which we find the phrase: ‘there is no common being, no substance, no essence, or common identity, but that there is being in common.’ In Kenning’s work, the Nancian distinction between ‘common being’ and ‘being-in-common’ – a distinction indebted to Bataille’s division between ‘all communities national, socialist, communist or churchly’ and ‘the universal community’ – is complicated by the addition of a third vertex – ‘privatised being’ – at the peak of the triangle. In the video, Kenning narrates this final corner of the triangle as follows:

Difference is privatised as competitive advantage. Distinguishing attributes and aspects are measured in terms of what allows one individual to rise above another. Ultimately what is made visible is position.

Kenning’s theoretical conversation with Bataille and Nancy positions his work as exemplary of the tendency in contemporary art I wish to discuss throughout this thesis. While other examples may not be as explicit in their engagement with this theoretical lineage, I wish to argue that they nonetheless contribute to an engagement with community which spans the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and to which Bataille and Nancy are central. Kenning’s particular use of the diagram as a means of contributing to this rethinking of community also affords the opportunity to clearly differentiate such practices – which take community as object – from the tendency in art described above to take community as context. Compare, for example, the diagrams used in Dean Kenning’s work (fig. 4), with those of Stephen Willats, an artist Kester portrays as exemplary of ‘dialogical art.’ In Willats’ A Socially Interactive Model of Art Practice (c.1970, fig. 5) the artist connects four circles containing the words ‘artist’, ‘context’, ‘audience’ and ‘artwork’ with bidirectional arrows in a triangular formation, with ‘artwork’ at the centre of the triangle. The object of this diagram

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83 Kester, Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art, 91-97.
is not community itself, but the formulation of a model of how art can operate in a
democratic and open fashion within a social context, or against the backdrop of ‘this or that’
community. Kenning’s diagram, on the other hand, is emphatically geared towards a
theoretical engagement with the concept of community itself. It recalls Noys’
characterisation of Bataille’s work as ‘a practical interrogation of what is at stake in
community, a rethinking of community itself’.84

Community contra Hobbes

Given the centrality of the decomposition of inherited notions of community to Bataille’s
work, and indeed the work of contemporary artists operating in his wake, it would seem
useful to conclude this chapter with a more thorough examination of the genesis of such
understandings of community. While T.J. Demos describes Masson’s illustration for
Acéphale in relation to Leonardo’s ‘Vitruvian Man’, it is more fruitful to view it as a
response to the French printmaker Abraham Bosse’s frontispiece for Thomas Hobbes’
Leviathan (fig. 6).85 Produced in 1651, Bosse’s etching consists of two sections. The lower
half shows the title and further details of the book sandwiched between two series of five
small pictures each, depicting various aspects of state power (on the left) and church power
(on the right). The upper half, which is of greater significance in the contexts of Masson’s
illustration, shows a landscape, centred on a walled town, overlooked by an enormous figure
looming over the scene. The figure wears a crown and holds a sword in his right hand, and a
crosier – a staff carried by senior church prelates – in his left. His torso is comprised of a
vast throng of figures enmeshed together to resemble chainmail who all look upwards
towards the head. Above the illustration is a quotation from the Book of Job in a Latin
translation of the Bible describing the Leviathan, a mythic sea creature. ‘“Non est potestas
super terram quae comparetur ei”’, or in the King James Version cited here, it is said of the
“Leviathan”, who rules as “king over all the children of pride”, that “[u]pon earth there is not
his like”.86 Formally, there are a number of similarities between Bosse’s and Masson’s
images, notably the conceit of two objects being carried in the depicted figures’ two hands.
However the comparison seems even more pertinent given the content of the book for which
Bosse’s etching was produced.


85 I must thank Jordan Mearns for his suggestion of this comparison, and Isabel Robinson for her input
on Bosse’s illustration.

86 Glen Newey, Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hobbes and Leviathan (London: Routledge,
2007), 27.
Central to much of Hobbes’s writing, particularly *Leviathan*, is the concept of sovereignty – briefly defined as the quality of having authority over oneself. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues that in order for a society to avoid anarchy and a ‘war of all against all’, individuals must cede their sovereignty through a ‘social contract’ to a single body, a state or a ‘commonwealth’, which would act as an absolute and unified sovereign. This absolute power would then rule over the population for the benefit of the population, introducing regulatory measures to legislate against anarchy and a ‘state of nature’. Hobbes argues that:

> For where there is no commonwealth, there is, as hath been already shown, a perpetual war of every man against his neighbour; and therefore every thing is his that getteth it, and keepeth it by force; which is neither propriety, nor community; but uncertainty.

This passage is one of the rare instances in which Hobbes uses the term ‘community’, the word not having the currency in the seventeenth century that it does now. Nonetheless, the Oxford English Dictionary records an appearance of the term in 1642 along lines similar to its usage by Hobbes.

> The same obligation of Iustice and Honour is as strong upon Kings, (and hath ever beene held more powerfull and obstrictive in them, then in any state mannaged by a Community).

Despite the relative dearth of direct references to community in *Leviathan*, its significance for subsequent theorisations of the concept is notable. In his book of 1998 *Communitas*, Esposito devotes significant attention to Hobbes. In his introduction, Esposito argues that modernity has been characterised by an increased logic of the ‘absolute individual’, in direct opposition to the community, which he argues was derived largely from Hobbes’s work. Esposito states that ‘the philosopher who first and more radically than anyone else followed this logic to its extreme theoretical consequences was Thomas Hobbes.’ For Esposito, the ‘the Leviathan-State coincides with the breaking of every communitarian bond, with the squelching of every social relation that is foreign to the vertical exchange of protection-

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obedience.'\(^91\) The Leviathan, as depicted in Bosse’s frontispiece, becomes a transcendent representation of a community, its sole and absolute arbiter and governor, ‘the person of the political community.’\(^92\)

The Hobbesian conception of community as a people who willfully devolve their sovereignty to a transcendent and benevolent power has endured and remarkably similar arguments for the absolute power of a sovereign fundamentally underpin the fascist Volksgemeinschaft, which, as Bataille observed, acted as a ‘curse, the feeling of guilt which strikes men, sending them to wars they do not want, forcing them to a labour whose fruits escape them.’ In this sense, and as Esposito remarks, Bataille is ‘the most radical anti-Hobbesian.’\(^93\) Esposito argued that:

> From the outset we have shown Hobbes to be the consistent promoter of an immunization directed toward guaranteeing individual survival. We also noted that for such a goal to be reached, in the name of the fear of death, Hobbes doesn't hesitate in theorizing the destruction, not only of every existing community that doesn't coincide with the state but also of the very idea of human community. Bataille more than anyone else dramatically opposes such a perspective.\(^94\)

At the most rudimentary level, Masson’s illustration embodies Bataille’s anti-sovereign, anti-Hobbesian conception of community by decapitating the Leviathan. Further amendments are also made. The crosier, a hierarchical designation of position and power within the church, is replaced by a sacred heart, a Catholic image often associated with compassion and familial bonds.\(^95\) Kenning also enacts a similar gesture in Metallurgy of the Subject. A striding figure, whose torso, arms and legs are composed of a writhing mesh of smaller figures – in a knowing citation of Bosse’s Leviathan – is decapitated. The headless body then falls from an upright position to lie parallel to the base of the triangular diagram described above. Verticality is quite literally here displaced by horizontality.

It is the persistence of models of community founded upon the principles underpinning Hobbes’ Leviathan that is targeted by Bataille and subsequently Esposito (as well as by other

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\(^91\) Ibid., 14.


\(^93\) Esposito, Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community, 124.

\(^94\) Ibid.

\(^95\) Erwin Fahlbusch et al., The Encyclopedia of Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 806-07.
This task has since been taken on across a variety of contemporary art practices in more or less explicit fashions, some of which have been described in this chapter. Hirschhorn’s implication of Bataille as a totemic presence reinstates the figure of the singular sovereign in an act of almost parodic overidentification, while Goldin+Senneby problematise Bataille’s alternative to a Hobbesian community, signalling the potential for its cataclysmic recuperation by capital. Dean Kenning more straightforwardly, if not less crucially, continues the work of Nancy and Bataille in postulating an anti-Hobbesian community devoid of a head, in doing so referencing the frontispiece to *Leviathan* indirectly through the appropriation of the imagery of Masson’s frontispiece to *Acéphale*. What these three examples point to is the emergence of a concern with community in art since 2000, which is simultaneously unified in its contribution to an anti-Hobbesian tradition in philosophy, and yet diverse in its forms and emphases. In the following two chapters I shall examine the historical, political, social and economic contexts that have precipitated the migration of this concern, previously predominantly the domain of philosophical reflection, into the field of contemporary art.
Figure 1: André Masson, Acéphale, 1936

Image from www.civicvirtue.info
Figure 2: Johan Hjerpe, *Illustration for Goldin+Senneby’s Headless*, 2007

*Image courtesy of the artist*

Figure 3: Documentation of Goldin+Senneby, *Headless*, 2007-

*Image courtesy of the artist*
Figure 4: Dean Kenning, *Metallurgy of the Subject*, 2011-

*Image courtesy of the artist*

Figure 5: Stephen Willats, *A Socially Interactive Model of Art Practice*, c.1970

*Image from Grant Kester, Conversation Pieces, 32.*
Figure 6: Abraham Bosse, Frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan, 1651

Image from Wikimedia Commons
2: Contemporary Art and Community under Neoliberal Conditions

As discussed in chapter 1, the tendency within contemporary art towards the decomposition and rethinking of inherited understandings of community has developed the work initiated by Georges Bataille in the 1930s, and later developed by the theorists of postmodern community in the 1980s and 1990s. Accordingly it exists within a tradition that has endured for almost a century. This however does not fully acknowledge the precise conditions and contexts under which these contemporary practices operate. As the case of Goldin+Senneby indicates, Bataille’s formulation of an oppositional mode of community is not simply transposable into contemporary surrounds. As political and social circumstances develop, so too must the strategies employed to engage with, interrogate and counter them. In this chapter, I consider the impact of capital on community – touched upon through the writing of Jacques Camatte in the previous chapter – focusing specifically on currently hegemonic neoliberal brands of capitalist governance. While, as Camatte and Ferdinand Tönnies have argued, capitalism has never provided a particularly hospitable atmosphere for community, its neoliberal form has developed increasingly intricate means of attack against community.

A further issue emerges here that must also be considered in this chapter. If, as has been widely observed, contemporary art is not only complicit within, but paradigmatic of a neoliberalism which has proved so hostile towards community, then it would appear fallacious to isolate artistic practice as a productive site for the negotiation of community. However, in this chapter I will argue that such negotiation is indeed possible, given that contemporary art occupies a privileged position of ‘permitted autonomy’ in which it is granted a degree of freedom to act in a critical fashion. Prior to considering art’s ‘permitted autonomy’, however, serious attention must be paid to explicating the relationships between capital, neoliberalism and community more fully, in doing so developing a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between negotiations of community in contemporary art and their theoretical precursors.

The first section of this chapter will address these relationships through the elaboration of two major challenges neoliberalism has presented for community. Firstly, through the principle neoliberal logic of individualism and the attendant ‘real subsumption’ of the social relation by capital, community has been concertedly precluded. Secondly, and despite this preclusion, the organs of capital have conceitedly and consciously instrumentalised the term ‘community’, invoking it and its ‘warm feeling’ as a vehicle for the devolution of social
responsibility away from the state. Following this, I shall delineate how art has been critiqued as complicit within neoliberalism and its machinations, particularly attentive to critiques implicating art in the two attacks against community outlined in the first section of this chapter. I will conclude with a detailed expansion on the concept of ‘permitted autonomy’ and its pertinence to contemporary art practices under discussion.

The Neoliberal Hostility to Community

While the term has gained significant traction in recent years, becoming increasingly intrinsic to the lexicons of feminist, Marxist, post-Marxist and poststructuralist theory, the precise definition of ‘neoliberalism’ is often either unhelpfully broad, ill-defined or indeed not at all defined. Media theorist Terry Flew has observed that:

[…] a working understanding of what neoliberalism is seems to have developed in a range of disciplines, with a strong degree of confidence about the use of the term. The term ‘neoliberalism’ has been able to move easily through the arts and humanities disciplines, in ways that terms grounded more specifically in economics, such as monetarism, or politics, such as the ‘new right’, cannot.1

He warns, however that ‘much of the usage of the term is intellectually unsustainable, particularly where it functions as an all-purpose denunciatory category for anything and everything, or where it is simply invoked as “the way things are”.’2 Similarly the anthropologist Donald M. Nonini notes that ‘the term “neo-liberal” has recently appeared so frequently, and been applied with such abandon, that it risks being used to refer to almost any political, economic, social or cultural process associated with contemporary capitalism.’3

In recognition of these warnings some care must be paid to the use of the term ‘neoliberalism’, and explication is needed as to precisely the logic behind its use in the context of this thesis.

The two most celebrated theories of neoliberalism emerge in the works of Marxist geographer David Harvey and – prior to that – Michel Foucault, particularly in Harvey’s book A Brief History of Neoliberalism (2005) and, almost exclusively amidst Foucault’s oeuvre, in his 1978-9 lecture series The Birth of Biopolitics. For Harvey, neoliberalism is:

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2 Ibid., 51.
[...] a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.⁴

He continues by emphasising both the breadth and depth of its global proliferation and infiltration. In remarking that 'there has everywhere been an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s,' Harvey acknowledges the near global profusion of neoliberalism as the single hegemonic system of economics and politics.⁵ He goes further, however, claiming that neoliberalism has not only permeated these spheres, but has become the dominant factor at play on our cognitive functions, stating that: 'it has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense [emphasis added] way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.'⁶ This seepage of neoliberalism outwith its habitual situation within the economic and political spheres is crucial and will be more closely examined below.

Harvey argues that, under neoliberalism, 'state interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum,'⁷ a point on which further clarification may be found in Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics*. ‘Neo-liberal government intervention is no less dense, frequent, active, and continuous than in any other system,’ Foucault suggests, ‘but what is important is to see what the point of application of these governmental interventions is now.’⁸ He continues:

[...] it is understood that government must not intervene on effects of the market. Nor must neo-liberalism, or neo-liberal government, correct the destructive effects of the market on society [...] It has to intervene on society as such, in its fabric and depth. Basically, it has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market.⁹

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⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., 3.
⁷ Ibid., 2.
⁹ Ibid.
This final point, that society is regulated by the market, and therefore that the market and economy constitutes the hub of neoliberalism, is crucial to my further discussion of neoliberalism and community and will also be returned to.

**The Real Subsumption of the Social Relation**

The first means through which neoliberalism has acted as hostile towards community hinges upon what has been termed ‘real subsumption’. While this concept was introduced by Karl Marx, it by no means occupied a privileged position in his writings, rather implicitly residing in the background of *Capital: Volume One* and the *Grundrisse*.\(^9\) He devotes most attention to the concept in a draft chapter, not included in the final edition of *Capital: Volume One*, entitled ‘Results of the Immediate Process of Production’.\(^10\) In this he details two phases of the subsumption of labour under capital’s valorisation process. The first of these is formal subsumption, defined as ‘the takeover by capital of a mode of labour developed before the emergence of capitalist relations.’\(^11\) In other words, ‘Formal subsumption remains merely formal precisely in the sense that it does not involve capital’s transformation of a given labour process, but simply its taking hold of it.’\(^12\) Following this initial step, real subsumption occurs when ‘the entire real form of production is altered and a specifically capitalist form of production comes into being [emphasis in the original]’; when labour is entirely reorganised according to the terms of capitalism and in its own image.\(^13\)

Marx’s brief characterisation of this binary process of formal and real subsumption became increasingly subject to attention in the contexts of 1970s Italian autonomist and workerist theory, and has been greatly expanded upon and reworked in numerous places by Antonio Negri.\(^14\) It is Negri’s reformulation of the concept of real subsumption that is particularly

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\(^10\) Ibid., 1021.


\(^12\) Ibid., 1021.


\(^14\) Marx, *Capital: Volume One*, 1024.

\(^15\) Autonomism and Workerism (Operaismo) are two interrelated leftist positions, both emerging during the 1960s and 70s in Italy and exemplified by the likes of Franco Berardi, Sylvia Federici, Antonio Negri, Mario Tronti and Paulo Virno. Both stem from Marx’s claims that the proletariat is the active participant in class struggle (the capitalist being purely reactive), and accordingly claim that the working class is in possession of a radical agency for political change. Berardi and Negri in particular have gained renewed attention since 2000.
pertinent to my discussion of neoliberalism and community. While for Marx, subsumption is crucially a specifically economic concept, Negri recasts subsumption as a process with a wider impact on the entirety of society. He formulates what he refers to as the ‘total subsumption of society’ as a situation in which, ‘everything that is produced-circulated-consumed is a mere cog in the wheel of the reproduction of the already existent.’\(^{16}\)

He elaborates:

Society appears to us as capital's society. It is through this passage that all social conditions are subsumed by capital, that is, they become part of its “organic composition.” And besides the social conditions – which present themselves in their immediacy – capital progressively subsumes all the elements and materials of the process of circulation (money and exchange in the first place, as functions of mediation) and, thereafter, all those pertaining to the process of production, so that herein lies the foundation for the passage from manufacture to big industry to social factory.\(^{17}\) [Emphasis in the original]

Given capital’s need to continually increase the surplus value extractable from a given amount of labour time, all elements of the labour process itself become transformed, imbued with the logics and needs of capital so as to become more immanently and controllably subject to capital’s domination. The widely observed shift towards immaterial or affective forms of labour – a shift resulting from a constant process of real subsumption of the labour process – has entailed a circumstance in which ‘the capitalist process of production has attained such a high level of development as to encompass even the smallest fraction of social production. Capitalist production is no longer limited to the sphere of industrial production, but rather is diffuse, and occurs across society.’\(^{18}\) As such, real subsumption implicates not only those traditional locations of production, but society in its entirety. Steven Shaviro takes up this transposition of real subsumption to the ‘total subsumption of society’ in a text of 2013 for art journal *e-flux*, in which he details the extent to which capitalism in its neoliberal guise has come to be the dominant force impacting upon society and the subjectivities which constitute it. He states that:

Under a regime of real subsumption, every living person is transformed into a capital stock that must not lie fallow, but has to be profitably invested. The individual is assumed – and indeed compelled – to be, as Foucault puts it, “an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself […] being for himself his own


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 114.

\(^{18}\) Endnotes, "The History of Subsumption".
capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.” ¹⁹

Here the link between Marxist and autonomist theories of real subsumption, and Foucault’s discussions of neoliberalism becomes clear. According to this line of thought then, “it is possible to say that with real subsumption capital has no outside, there is no relationship that cannot be transformed into a commodity.” ²⁰ This final point is crucial. The absolute totality of the reach of real subsumption has engendered a situation in which the social relation, and sociality as a whole, is neither outside of, nor in any way extricable from capital and its governing (economic) logics. Furthermore, it is not simply that sociality is expropriated by – to continue Marx’s terminology – the capitalist, rather, as Foucault states, each of us acts as ‘homo œconomicus’, an entrepreneur exploiting and valorising sociality ourselves. ²¹

Despite its shortcomings, Camatte’s Capital and Community offers an instructive and prescient perspective of the impact of the total subsumption of the social on the possibility of community under the conditions of capital. ²² Largely ignored or forgotten by Anglophone audiences, Camatte employs a close reading of Marx’s work in order to draw out the connections between the progressions of capitalism and community. In a chapter entitled ‘Capital and Material Community’ he departs from the proposition that a shift has taken place from a pre-capitalist ‘natural community’ defined by direct human relations enacted entirely within the social sphere and outwith the reach of economic interests, to a capitalist ‘material community’, in which all relations are mediated by the productions and products of capital. ²³ He introduces this shift as follows:

[…] both the autonomization of exchange-value and the production of the free labourer depend equally on the destruction of the ancient community. From this derives [...] the exposition of the formation of a material community, which replaces the pre-existing community [...] Man was separated from his community, or more precisely, the latter was destroyed. Originally this was a direct, natural community, based on aristocratic purely human relations; later of a community mediated by the land, but in which

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²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ It should be noted that, while ‘neoliberalism’ tends to be deployed in a pejorative fashion, ‘entrepreneur’ and its derivatives has been used indiscriminately as both celebratory and derogatory.

²² Camatte, Capital and Community. A detailed critique of the historicist and primitivist tendencies implicit in Camatte’s theory is provided by Endnotes, "The History of Subsumption".

²³ Camatte, Capital and Community, 97-101.
personal relations still held great importance, in which use-value - thus what is useful to man - still had a leading role. In its turn, this was destroyed by the development of money […] With capitalism, a stage now completed by the autonomization of exchange-value, the last residues of the communities were destroyed. Thus we must ask the following question: can money replace the natural community or that mediated by land; and if money does not succeed in doing this, can capital?24

The remainder of Camatte’s chapter is devoted to answering this final question. He deduces that while money failed to adequately replace the ‘natural community’, capital has become a form of ‘material community’, which has entirely and successfully eradicated all vestiges or possibilities of natural and unmediated community. Not only has community come to be constituted by relations which are necessarily mediated by the production processes and products of capital, but as men and women have become a form of fixed capital (via the process of real subsumption) even the human constituents of a given community have become simply further manifestations of capital. Thus what capitalism ultimately produces is a material community entirely embodied in or constituted by capital.

Capital has seized for itself all the materiality of man, who is now nothing but a subject for exploitation, a determined labour time […] capital has become the material community of man. There is no longer any distortion between the social and the economic movements as the latter has completely subordinated the former.25

While it is hard to follow the often reductive, primitivist sentiments underpinning Camatte’s narrative of the metamorphosis of community, his fundamental assertion – that capital has inhabited every element of the constitution of community – is persuasive, and a reading of Negri and Camatte in combination goes some way to providing a theoretical basis for the claim that neoliberalism has precluded the existence of community in any organic, natural or unmediated form – in the Gemeinschaft sense outlined by Tönnies. As is implied by both of their arguments, the central factor in this preclusion of community is not a direct exploitation from above of the individual, but the exploitations the individual enacts on itself and its social existence. The great victory of neoliberalism is that it has ‘colonized the unconscious.’26 It has compelled every individual under its dominion to think according to its logics and as such obliges the subject of neoliberalism to conceive of the social relation

24 Ibid., 97.
25 Ibid., 106-07.
primarily in economic terms. Camatte concedes that this may be the basis of a new form of (material) community constituted by capital, but this is nonetheless a community that bears little relation to the social formations commonly thought of upon use of the term. Indeed, the forms of ‘community’ brought about by neoliberalism share more with Tönnies’s concept of Gesellschaft (commonly translated as either ‘society’, ‘association’ or ‘civil society’, although none are adequate) than Gemeinschaft (‘community’).

Although presented as a largely archaic and nostalgic concept, Tönnies’s formulation of Gemeinschaft has been the most influential conceptualisation of community in the fields of philosophy and sociology since his book Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft was first published in 1887, and fairly accurately mirrors the popular conception of what community is supposed to entail even now. Conversely, his formulation of Gesellschaft seems entirely antithetical to commonly held notions of community. He defines it thus:

> Nothing happens in Gesellschaft that is more important for the individual's wider group than it is for himself. On the contrary, everyone is out for himself alone and living in a state of tension against everything else [...] Nobody wants to do anything for anyone else, nobody wants to yield or give anything unless he gets in return something that he regards as at least an equal trade-off. 27 [Emphasis in the original]

This description seems remarkably pertinent to the form of sociality engendered by real subsumption under neoliberalism; the individual, conditioned by the economic logics of the hegemonic system, existing as what Foucault has termed homo œconomicus, an atomised being for whom sociality is but another source of valorisation. However, Foucault notes that while according to its classical definition, homo œconomicus existed as ‘the man of exchange, the partner, one of the two partners in the process of exchange,’ 28 under neoliberalism he is ‘not at all a partner of exchange. Homo œconomicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself,’ whose driving impetus is provided not by exchange, but by competition. 29 The ‘equal trade-off’ of Gesellschaft is thus supplanted by a new model, even more antithetical to Gemeinschaft than Tönnies’s original formulation, in which the individual acts not only in his best interests, but also to the detriment of his competitors.

This primacy of the individual at the expense of the collective has been widely observed as a central and foundational tenet of neoliberalism. Educational theorist Michael Peters noted

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27 Tönnies, Community and Civil Society, 5.
29 Ibid., 226.
that ‘since the early 1980s neoliberalism has been remarkably successful in advancing a foundationalist and universalist reason - the philosophy of a neoliberal individualism - as the basis for a radical reconstruction of all aspects of society,’\(^{30}\) while Harvey comments that ‘the founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as “the central values of civilization”.’\(^{31}\) Gerard Delanty goes as far as to state that ‘of the major political ideologies of modernity liberalism is the only one that is not constructed around the communitarian ideal.’\(^{32}\) As has been demonstrated in Foucault’s reformulation of *homo œconomicus*, the individualism intrinsic to liberalism has become, if anything, intensified in neoliberalism. Likewise, the liberal distaste for, and distrust of community has been transformed into a unilateral and concerted preclusion under neoliberalism. The fundamental tenets of neoliberalism not only allow no space for community – barring perhaps the material community of capital described by Camatte – but cannot permit its existence or even possibility thanks to its antagonistic relationship with the competitive streak of *homo œconomicus*, engendered by the total subsumption of society and demanded by the specific needs of neoliberal capitalist production.

‘The Trapdoor of Community’

Despite this aggression towards community, as geographer Steve Herbert has noted, ‘community emerges as a regnant focus of neoliberal governance.’\(^{33}\) In 2005, the New Labour government of the UK – as archetypal a neoliberal government as any, despite its ‘Third Way’ styling – introduced a Minister for Communities and Local Government, a year later upgraded to the Cabinet role of Secretary for Communities and Local Government.\(^{34}\) In 2010, the Conservative Party launched their general election manifesto, at the centre of which was the policy of ‘The Big Society’, the first two stated priorities of which were to ‘give communities more power’, and to ‘encourage people to take an active role in their


\(^{31}\) Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 5.

\(^{32}\) Delanty, *Community*, 20.

\(^{33}\) Herbert, "The Trapdoor of Community," 851.

communities.' The Big Society’, announced in a speech made by Conservative leader David Cameron in 2009, in which the word ‘community’ was mentioned 17 times, entails, according to the Conservative Party’s website, a ‘massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities.’ In many respects the project crystallised under one banner many of the neoliberal policies described by Herbert in his 2005 article ‘The Trapdoor of Community’, in which he asserts that neoliberal governance has tended towards the devolution of responsibilities previously considered to be within the remit of the state onto local ‘communities’, formal (paid) work and care being supplanted by informal (unpaid) work and care. He argues that:

These organizations form what has been termed a "shadow state", addressing tasks formerly performed by the public sector. This is where community figures most significantly in neoliberal practice because the term carries connotations of mutual assistance among its members; it can thereby plausibly stand as a recipient of heightened obligations.

Sociologists Steve Corbett and Alan Walker have commented on ‘the extent to which [this] replicates essential elements of the Thatcherite application of first wave neo-liberalism,’ although they are keen to note the influence of the nascent ‘Red Tory’ communitarian wing of the Conservative Party on the policy. This flank of the Tory Party subscribes less to neoliberal policies in the tradition enacted in the UK by Margaret Thatcher, and more to a neoconservative and communitarian politics, which places an emphasis on the importance of what Corbett and Walker refer to as ‘over-idealised, non-evidence-based conceptions of social and community ties; devoid of a critique of these social and ideological constructions.’ In practice, as Corbett and Walker have observed, ‘the Big Society project

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36 Further details may be found at www.conservatives.com

37 Given that Herbert’s article was written in 2005, three years before the financial crisis of 2008, it would be erroneous to claim that ‘The Big Society’ and its like are simply recession-era policies of austerity. To do so would be to depoliticise devolutions of state responsibility and uproot them from the neoliberal logics which underpin them.

38 Herbert, "The Trapdoor of Community," 851.


40 Ibid., 490.
has proved so far to be mainly rhetorical cover for the biggest cuts in public spending since the 1920s.\textsuperscript{41}

This example is archetypal of a widespread surge in governmental rhetoric appealing to the idea of community, which itself is mirrored by similar usages of the term in the private sector. Energy companies and banks proudly proclaim their commitments to ‘community’, while fast-food giants responsible for the most extreme examples of exploitative employment strategies administer ‘McDonald’s Community Awards’, ‘celebrating the people who make grassroots football possible’.\textsuperscript{42} Although community may be intrinsically intolerable to neoliberalism on an ideological level, its institutions, both private and public, have been swift to incorporate it into their everyday lexicon. The renewed usage of a rhetoric of community in the public and private sectors can be explained through similar reasoning. In the private sector, uses of the term community tend to be examples of ‘reputation laundering’, a means of obscuring the ethical transgressions and exploitations enacted by corporations behind a veneer of altruism and charitable work. In state politics, community is, as previously stated, demarcated as a trapdoor or overflow valve for responsibilities the state is no longer willing or able to shoulder. In both cases, community is instrumentalised by neoliberal institutions as a means of obfuscating the less palatable elements of their activities, be that exploitative business practices or the diminution of state support.

This instrumentalisation is made possible thanks to the positive connotations the term ‘community’ holds in the public imagination. As Herbert notes, ‘community works […] to help legitimate these efforts at offloading because of the warm-hearted associations many make with the term.’\textsuperscript{43} These ‘warm-hearted associations’ are fundamental to Zygmunt Bauman’s discussions on community under conditions of what he refers to as ‘liquid modernity’.\textsuperscript{44} ‘Words have meanings:’ Bauman begins Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World by arguing, ‘some words, however, also have a “feel”. The word “community” is one of them. It feels good: whatever the word “community” may mean.’\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 487.

\textsuperscript{42} These have since been renamed the FA Community Awards, although they retain McDonalds as a sponsor. See http://www.thefa.com/my-football/football-volunteers/fa-community-awards.

\textsuperscript{43} Herbert, "The Trapdoor of Community," 851.

\textsuperscript{44} Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2000).

\textsuperscript{45} Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World, 1.
He portrays community as an impossibility, perpetually receding into the horizon of the future at the same rate as we approach it, existing only as a form of dream. He states:

‘Community’ stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess. Raymond Williams, the thoughtful analyst of our shared condition, observed caustically that the remarkable thing about community is that “it always has been”. We may add: or it is always in the future.\(^{46}\)

Bauman argues that the positive connotations associated with the word community, and the dream-status of what he refers to at various junctures as both ‘real’ or ‘imagined community’, facilitates the establishment of forms of ‘really existing community’, ‘a collectivity which pretends to be community incarnate, the dream fulfilled, and (in the name of all the goodness such community is assumed to offer) demands unconditional loyalty and treats everything short of such loyalty as an act of unforgivable treason.’\(^{47}\) He warns that such ‘really existing communities’ simply satiate desire for security, particularly at historical junctures when our security seems particularly under threat, but at the expense of freedom. He cites Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm in order to develop this point:

Never was the word ‘community’ used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life. Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain.’\(^{48}\)

The collective ambition towards community, and the security, certainty and more generalised ‘warmth’ it claims to embody, thus leaves society vulnerable. In this sense, Bauman’s thinking on community is both indebted to, and a reformulation of, Bataille’s discussions of sovereignty and community discussed in the previous chapter. Point 2 of his ‘Programme (Relative to Acéphale)’ states: ‘Lift the curse, the feeling of guilt which strikes men, sending them to wars they do not want, forcing them to a labour whose fruits escape them.’\(^{49}\) Reacting to the circumstances that precipitated World War II, Bataille saw community, particularly in the Volksgemeinschaft (community of the people) sense so widely employed in Nazi propaganda, as being a powerful and dangerous means of

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 4.


\(^{49}\) Bataille, The Bataille Reader, 121.
manipulation and control. For Bataille, community was instrumentalised as a means of crystallising a population into a malleable force who would be willing to commit untold atrocities for the benefit and greater good of the community. The form of coercion described by Bauman, although less violent than Bataille’s, nonetheless plays upon precisely the same ‘good feeling’ of community.

Institutions and individuals with the means to do so, may dress up any number of activities as ‘community’ endeavours and, regardless of the realities of what is being enacted, fully expect, on the whole, a warm reception. Given all this, it is unsurprising that ‘The Big Society’ project was accompanied by a rhetoric of the loss of community in contemporary society, and the need for this community to be rebuilt, tapping into the fear that the dream of community may never be fulfilled and thus making the forms of community offered by ‘The Big Society’ even more palatable. Architect Austin Williams, editor of a volume entitled The Future of Community, comments on the perceived threat that a void of community could potentially entail. ‘Not only are we concerned about the erosion of communities,’ he says, ‘but we are prone to paranoia about complete societal collapse or even the end of civilisation as we know it.’ He notes the manipulation of this fear by British politicians in particular. ‘Nowadays politicians and pundits alike accept that societal ties have loosened […]’ The decline of community can be blamed on everything from the arrival of Starbucks and Tesco to the use of the motor car or the aeroplane.’ David Cameron stated in his first speech as Prime Minister on 11 May 2010 that ‘the coalition will throw up all sorts of challenges, but I believe together we can provide that strong and stable government that our country needs, based on those values, rebuilding family, rebuilding community, above all, rebuilding responsibility in our family.’ Here Cameron implicitly suggests, through the need to ‘rebuild’ it, a prior disintegration of community.

It is, according to Bauman, a tendency of modern capitalism to ‘attempt to resuscitate or create ab nihilo a “community feeling”’. Cameron’s rhetoric and ‘The Big Society’ project as a whole would seem to constitute an apt example of this tendency. Bauman qualifies this by stating that this new ‘community feeling’ must exist within the ‘framework of the new

51 Ibid., 1.
52 A transcript of this speech is available via www.gov.uk.
53 Bauman, Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World, 34.
power structure.\textsuperscript{54} It is at this point that the issue of real subsumption again becomes pertinent. If one follows Bauman’s assertions that, firstly, community exists \textit{really} only as a dream, and secondly, that there is a tendency to find and incorporate ourselves blindly within anything which outwardly brands itself as a community, then those with the power to ‘build’ communities \textit{ab nihilo} also have the power to shape the form these communities may in fact take. In the case of ‘The Big Society’ project, as Corbett and Walker argue, ‘cuts in public services can be compensated for by a “renewal” of community spirit, voluntary activity and a new breed of social entrepreneurs.’\textsuperscript{55} The form of community espoused by the Conservative Party in their ‘Big Society’ project unsurprisingly takes a distinctly neoliberal form, placing the figure of the entrepreneur front and centre. Indeed, the term ‘social entrepreneurs’ is not one coined by Corbett and Walker in order to disparage the neoliberal underpinnings of the policy, rather it was a fundamental cornerstone of the Conservative Party’s initial conception of ‘The Big Society’. Much in the same fashion as real subsumption has recast all aspects of sociality according to the logics of neoliberalism, the instrumentalisation of community has, through policies such as ‘The Big Society’, recast the term and its referents along similar lines.

\textbf{The Co-optation and Complicity of Art under Neoliberalism}

After a decade or so which has seen the politics and economics of art’s production and reception come under increasing scrutiny, faith in an intrinsic and almost default oppositionality and criticality of art is no longer easily tenable, if indeed under close examination it ever was. This romantic, near-subconscious belief – that artists are somehow by definition politically progressive, revolutionary and counterhegemonic vanguardists – has been widespread both within the art world and popular consciousness since the rise of the mythic figure of the artist in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{56} It is a fiction espoused and propagated willingly and concertedly by both artists themselves, and by those through whom art is mediated to its publics (gallerists, historians, theorists, critics and so on). The contradictions between the politics advocated by artists, through their work or otherwise, and the politics underpinning the production of their work have largely been, up until the turn of the twenty-first century, underplayed. The publication of influential texts such as Luc Boltanski and Eve

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{56} This and other romantic conceptions of the artist has been widely challenged, particularly in feminist contexts. See, for example, Griselda Pollock, “Artists, Mythologies and Media — Genius, Madness and Art History,” \textit{Screen} 21, no. 3 (1980).
Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (published in French in 1999, and translated into English in 2004) prompted a flurry of examinations of the economic and political character of the art world, and as a result, engendered an increased attention to, and hostility towards, the complicities and co-optations of art within the same political systems it had been assumed to be in opposition to. Artist and writer Hito Steyerl summarises such a position succinctly.

> A standard way of relating politics to art assumes that art represents political issues in one way or another. But there is a much more interesting perspective: the politics of the field of art as a place of work. Simply look at what it does—not what it shows […] Contemporary art is no unworldly discipline nestled away in some remote ivory tower. On the contrary, it is squarely placed in the neoliberal thick of things.

Among the most problematic conundrums faced by art was that the image of the artist as a countercultural dissident had itself been recuperated by neoliberalism. Artist and art theorist Gregory Sholette commented in *Dark Matter* (2011) that: ‘When it comes to the movers and shakers of *capitalism 2.0*, the insubordinate image of the contemporary artist is their sexy *doppelgänger*. Forget about the avant-garde’s renowned defiance, the deregulated economy celebrates deviant practices and eccentric frames of mind.’

Regardless of its supposed prototypicality, contemporary art’s complicity and co-optation within the machinations of neoliberalism would appear to present a fundamental hindrance to claims for its capacity to be negotiative of community. Indeed, it would seem to preclude any form of criticality on art’s part whatsoever. In order to traverse this obstacle, I shall briefly outline some of the critiques levelled at the politics of contemporary art. My summary of these critiques will be loosely structured around two modes through which neoliberalism has proved hostile to community outlined thus far in this chapter. Firstly, I shall examine critiques of the role of art in the process of real subsumption; and secondly, accounts of art’s apparent instrumentalisation at the hands of governmental strategies of devolving state responsibility onto so-called ‘communities’.

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Kevin Daum, a writer on entrepreneurship and marketing, has described entrepreneurs as ‘the artists of the business world’ in the title of a paper in which he directly correlates the degree to which people have received arts education with their entrepreneurial success. While convergences between these two figures are nothing new – the Marxist theorist Paul Mattick concluded that artists have acted in an entrepreneurial capacity since the birth of the rhetoric of artistic ‘individual genius’ in the nineteenth century – what differentiates this history from the present situation is the degree to which this is made explicit and thrust upon the artist, as well as other workers in the art sector (curators, academics etc.). As Foucault emphasises, neoliberalism is characterised by the privileging of the figure of the entrepreneur as the base unit of economic – and, as has been established, by extension social – life. Of course, the term ‘entrepreneur’, and the figure it stands for, is not a neoliberal construction, having appeared in economic contexts as far back as the eighteenth century. Crucially, however, neoliberalism not only repositions the entrepreneur to the centre of its logics, but realigns the role of the entrepreneur as an ‘entrepreneur of the self’, ‘being her/his own capital, being her/his own producer, being her/his own source of revenue.’

Even more telling is the fact that Foucault’s ‘entrepreneur of the self’, as I shall demonstrate, has effectively come to characterise the contemporary situation of artists as atomised producers, perpetually seeking to capitalise themselves and their productions through commissioning or funding procedures. Political theorist Isabell Lorey describes a conundrum facing all cultural producers operating within the art sector, between seeking work in a permanent institutional capacity on the one hand – ensuring a regular income at the price of forfeiting certain freedoms – or what she calls ‘self-precarization’ on the other – a ‘“self-chosen” [Lorey places this phrase in quotation marks] ability to take responsibility for their own creativity and fashion their lives according to their own rules,’ but at the expense of

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economic security. In the first case, one is compelled to act according to the neoliberal structures governing the institution one is employed by. In the second case, one ‘chooses’ to escape such constraints, but in doing so is required to operate as an ‘entrepreneur of the self,’ subjectivising oneself as an ideal neoliberal citizen. Gregory Sholette notes that ‘while business embraces the shock and destruction of the avant-garde, artists adopt concepts such as niche marketing and networking from business.’ Literary theorist Nicholas Brown summarises the contemporary entrepreneurial requirements of the self-precarised artist as follows:

For once underestimating capitalism, Marx seems to think in these fragments that the arts are, by their very nature, unsuitable candidates for real subsumption. Little did he imagine that once the means of distribution were fully subsumed, whatever is genuinely inassimilable in artistic labor would cease to make any difference; that the artist, when not genuinely a cultural worker, would be forced to conceive of herself, in true neoliberal fashion, as an entrepreneur of herself; that any remaining pockets of autonomy would effectively cease to exist by lacking access to distribution and, once granted access, would cease to function as meaningfully autonomous.

The requirements of funding bodies in the arts, the main source of income for these self-precarised cultural producers, have necessitated such an entrepreneurial self-image. For example, the merger and rebranding of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen in 2010 as Creative Scotland not only brought with it a heightened rhetoric and lexicon of neoliberalism, but constituted the final stage in a shift in emphasis towards the encouragement of practices which had some discernable ‘impact’ or ‘engagement’, or those which could quantifiably provide some source of valorisation. As Grant Kester has observed, ‘the new entrepreneurial model of arts funding […] unabashedly embraces the belief that creativity is valuable – worthy of public support – solely because it can be

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65 Sholette, Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture, 38.


monetised." He continues to claim that ‘the logic of capital now enjoys an unquestioned status as the arbiter for all decisions governing the allocation of resources for art.’

The language of ‘impact’ and ‘engagement’ has also gained substantial traction in the realm of art theory and history, with terms such as ‘social engagement’ and ‘community engagement’ becoming ubiquitous. This is not to say that art theory itself has directly taken a neoliberal turn – that is another argument altogether – rather that the works being written about have increasingly tended towards these same concerns. Concurrently to the process outlined above of the real or total subsumption of society, and to neoliberalism’s emphasis on immaterial and affective forms of labour, contemporary art has likewise been characterised by a tendency to implicate sociality at its core; an art in which, in Claire Bishop’s words, ‘people constitute the central artistic medium and material.’

Nicolas Bourriaud’s formulation of relational aesthetics constituted one of the earliest and most influential theorisations of the social turn. Almost inevitably then, it has also become the focus of a great deal of critical consideration, with particular attention paid to the labour practices and forms of sociality it propagates. As philosopher Stewart Martin comments, ‘Relational Aesthetics can be read as the manifesto for a new political art confronting the service economies of informational capitalism – an art of the multitude. But it can also be read as a naïve mimesis of aestheticisation of novel forms of capitalist exploitation.’ For Bourriaud, ‘the moments of sociability that are created by these works […] are an attempt to escape mass communication and its ideology.’

It is easy to make comparisons between what is delineated as immaterial labour and Bourriaud’s ideas about relational aesthetics. These comparisons are not without validation: the emphasis on human relations rather than

68 Steedman, Gallery as Community: Art, Education, Politics, 14.

69 Ibid., 15.

70 Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, 1.

71 Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics.

72 Care must be taken to differentiate critiques of the works described by Bourriaud, and of Bourriaud’s theory in and of itself.


object-production; the creation of an immaterial cultural product; communication and the “manipulation of affect that involves human contact”.

Although she problematises the comparison between relational aesthetics and immaterial labour, pointing to the differing attitudes to technology implied by each, the similarities cannot be quickly overlooked. This, however, does not inherently suggest a neoliberal ideology underpinning either Bourriaud’s theory or the intentions of the artists he cites. Rather it alludes to the fact that real subsumption, its reach and the degree to which it encompasses everyday existence has become a prime area of interest for artists, curators and theorists, and this has been reflected in the forms of practices which have emerged concurrently to the shifts precipitated by neoliberalism. Child summarises that ‘art does not live in isolation from the political and economic climate; on the contrary, art adapts to and adopts the dominant modalities of the neoliberal workplace.’

A more serious accusation can, however, be levelled at the practices espoused by Bourriaud, as well as many of the other practices gathered up by the term ‘social turn’; namely, that participatory practices which encourage or demand forms of sociality or relationality to be enacted within the designated spatial and durational boundaries of a work of art enact a form of exploitation of the labour-power of the participants. Child argues that, ‘despite the omission of a traditional art object, artists still make money through selling and exhibiting the relational artworks: in reality, are these artworks not commodified social relations?’

In such works, the artist establishes a framework within which participants act according to certain explicit or tacit criteria set by the artist. Given that in such works there is no ‘object-production’, rather ‘the creation of an immaterial cultural product’, the only source of valorisation available to the artist is the labour of the participants.

In many ways, such an economic model is redolent of that employed by enterprises such as Facebook. Media theorists Mark Coté and Jennifer Pybus describe the political economy underpinning Facebook as ‘immaterial labour 2.0 – a more accelerated, intensified, and indeed inscrutable variant of the kind of activity initially proposed by Lazzarato or within the

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75 Ibid., 157.
76 Ibid., 203.
77 Ibid., 156.
78 This point is discussed further in relation to the work of Artur Żmijewski in chapter 5.
pages of Empire. Coté and Pybus characterise this as a form of unremunerated biopolitical and cultural labour, in which the user of Facebook unwittingly participates in the production of surplus value through ‘corporate mining and selling of user-generated content’. Like the relational artwork, a space is constructed and designated, within which the user/participant is invite to act – that is, to contribute content to. Their participation, whilst not initially seeming to be labour in any sense the participant may be used to, fulfils the same ultimate purpose as Marx designates that of labour power under a capitalist economy in Capital: Volume One, namely, the production of surplus value. In both cases valorisation is derived precisely from the sociality of the participant. Curator Helena Reckitt has astutely attributed Bourriaud’s oversight of this exploitative tendency to a lack of appreciation for feminist discourse surrounding neoliberalism and the domestic labour of social reproduction – i.e. labour which does not appear, according to classical criteria, to be directly contributory to capitalism. She notes that:

> The absence of feminism is especially problematic in this context given how closely Bourriaud’s projects emulate forms of affective and immaterial work that have long been areas of female activity and feminist analysis. Bourriaud thus reiterates the classic capitalist exploitation of not only those who work directly for capitalism, by creating surplus value, but also domestic labourers of social reproduction who don’t.

Thus, at the very least, the social turn in contemporary art constitutes a mirroring of the process of the real subsumption of the social and shifts towards immaterial and affective forms of labour. To its harshest critics, it encompasses a range of practices that go beyond mimesis, exaggerating the worst excesses of neoliberal exploitation.

Furthermore, the exploitations intrinsic to relational aesthetics recall the wider economics upon which the infrastructure of the art world is founded, as described by Sholette. He compares the ‘unseen accretion of creativity’ that constitutes the bulk of cultural production in the art world with dark matter in an astrophysical sense, which while undetectable and

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80 Ibid., 90.


invisible, makes up ‘as much as 96 per cent’ of the universe.\(^8^3\) This creative dark matter, comprised of ‘makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices – all work made and circulated in the shadow of the formal art world,’ represents ‘an essential pillar of the elite art world whose pyramidal structure looms over them eternally out of reach.’\(^8^4\) It is the dark matter that purchase glossy art magazines, visit exhibitions, symposia, conferences, lectures and in doing so prop up the economy of the art world. And, asks Sholette, ‘why consider only […] amateur participation […]? What about the dark matter at the heart of the art world itself?’\(^8^5\) Arts institutions are amongst the worst abusers of the normalisation of the unpaid internship as a respectable and acceptable form of labour. Hito Steyerl comments of the figure of the intern that, ‘she is supposed to be on the inside of the system, yet is excluded from payment. She is inside labor but outside remuneration.’\(^8^6\) The economic functionality of arts institutions is on the whole reliant on such unpaid labour fulfilling tasks ranging from invigilation to archival work and graphic design. Furthermore this is inculcated at the earliest opportunity in the form of the pressure exerted on art college students to intern and volunteer if they wish to (eventually) develop a career in the arts. Despite normalisation, such employment practices embody the same form of exploitation inherent to practices of relational aesthetics to a remarkable degree.

Art as ‘Soft Social Engineering’

The socially engaged, relational, community-engaged and participatory practices constituting the social turn in art would seem have been the prime beneficiaries of the aforementioned shift in emphasis on the part of funding agencies in recent years. Precisely the forms of participation at play in such practices that are the source of claims of exploitation and emulation of the dominant tropes of immaterial labour are also those that are deemed to provide the ‘impact’, ‘engagement’ and ‘social inclusion’ so prized by galleries, museums, art schools and other arts organisations. In a sense, interaction with one’s audience seems to be fetishised, regardless of the politics inherent to this interaction.


\(^{84}\) Ibid., 1-2.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 1.

In the contexts of the UK, the shift towards socially engaged practices in art is often spoken of in parallel with the cultural policy of New Labour. Architect Markus Miessen has written extensively on the manner in which New Labour ‘turned everything into inclusion and everyone into a “participant,”’ a canny new rhetorical structure designed to perpetuate the ‘nice party’ image of Labour after the removal of Clause IV from the party’s manifesto in 1995.\(^{87}\) Claire Bishop among others has noted the similarities between this language and that surrounding socially engaged practices in contemporary art.\(^{88}\) New Labour’s intelligent use of the cultural sector as means of extending the breadth of their positive branding – think of Cool Britannia and the invitation of Oasis, the YBAs and other members of the cultural glitterati to 10 Downing Street – certainly entailed a particular form of cultural policy promoting art which espoused similar ideals of participation and inclusion. Writing in the midst of the New Labour government of 1997-2010, Bishop states that, ‘reducing art to statistical information about target audiences and “performance indicators,” the government [prioritized] social effect over considerations of artistic quality.’\(^{89}\) Bishop continues her assessment of the entanglements of politics and culture in the UK by making a bolder claim.

New Labour have for the last nine years instrumentalised art to fulfill policies of social inclusion – a cost-effective way of justifying public spending on the arts while diverting attention away from the structural causes of decreased social participation, which are political and economic (welfare, transport, education, healthcare, etc.). In this context it is crucial for art practices to tread a careful line between social intervention and autonomy, since demonstrable outcomes are rapidly co-opted by the state.\(^{90}\)

The accusation here is one which has been made widely, and beyond the UK; namely that community arts or socially engaged practices are complicit within the process of increased devolution of social responsibility away from the state. It has already been demonstrated that ‘community’ has become a recipient of much of this responsibility, however one may now add that art has been instrumentalised as a vehicle for this devolution.

In October 2005, a collaborative project between Iaspis (Sweden), eipcp (Austria) and åbäke (UK) entitled ‘European Cultural Policies 2015: A Report with Scenarios on the Future of

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\(^{87}\) Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation (Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality)* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 51. Clause IV of the Labour Party Manifesto outlined the foundational socialist aims of the party. It was removed as part of the ‘modernisation’ of Labour in 1995.

\(^{88}\) Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," 180.

\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) Jennifer Roche, "Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop," *Community Arts Network* (2006), No longer available online.
Public Funding for Contemporary Art in Europe’ was launched at London’s Frieze Art Fair. It comprised a publication, edited by Maria Lind and Raimund Minichbauer, which collected speculative scenarios regarding the future of cultural policy and funding in the arts in Europe in the year 2015. Lind begins her introduction to the publication with the words ‘It is 2015. Art is almost completely instrumentalised.’ Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt contributed a text to the publication in which she focussed on the situation of funding in Scotland. She traces the development of cultural policy in Scotland up until the year 2005 as a means of extrapolating its potential direction in the ten years following. She focuses on the stated aim of Scottish cultural policy towards art as a means of facilitating ‘social inclusion’, which she defines as ‘a catch-all term for using the arts to improve health and wellbeing, while targeting minority ethnic communities and disabled people for participation in arts activities.’ This, she claims, exempts ‘governments from tackling the root causes of inequality.’ Her appraisal of the situation in 2015 seems remarkably accurate.

In kowtowing to regressive, market-driven policies like social inclusion, the ‘arms-length’ funding bodies rendered themselves indistinguishable from Government and will have ceased to exist, replaced by bureaucrats, with no specialist arts knowledge, intent on instrumentalising culture to neo-imperial ends.

The formation of Creative Scotland in 2010 constituted the actualization of Gordon Nesbitt’s fears five years ahead of schedule. Such forms of the instrumentalisation of art have been widely acknowledged within the artworld itself. In the introduction to a book entitled Gallery as Community: Art, Education, Politics, published by the Whitechapel Gallery and featuring interviews on institutional community engagement with a number of British curators and arts programmers, Grant Kester summarises that ‘many of the commentators here […] fear that their organisations will be relegated to filling the gap in de-funded social services by offering elderly care, craft classes and youth programmes.’ The editor of the volume, Marijke Steedman, elsewhere comments that ‘we are perfectly placed to provide

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93 Ibid., 20.

94 Ibid., 27.

95 Steedman, Gallery as Community: Art, Education, Politics, 10.
some of the services that are now being chopped away from local authorities." Austrian art collective WochenKlausur, often seen as archetypal of the form of ameliorative, activistic, socially engaged practitioners demanded by this new tendency in cultural policy, are so accustomed to such criticisms of their work that they address the subject in an FAQ on their website.

Does not WochenKlausur encourage the trend in government toward abandoning responsibility for social issues? Are WochenKlausur's interventions not simply "Band-Aids" that fight the symptoms but do nothing to change the status quo, or maybe even support it?

In answering these questions, they allude to one of the predominant reasons for art’s role in the devolution of social responsibility.

In society, we are used to delegating certain tasks to certain experts, but there are tasks that cannot be delegated to politicians, social workers or experts. Artists go in for other tasks than they used to do, and it could also be their responsibility to find solutions to problems in our society.

Art, at least after its assumed deskilling, has been characterised by a jack-of-all-trades amateurism, a willingness to enter into any other sector of activity, without necessarily having any expertise in that field. This form of entropic behaviour means that art is, as Steedman states, ‘perfectly placed’ to fulfil tasks outwith its traditional area of practice or expertise, providing an artistic aspect different from that provided by the native experts of that field. Yet, much in the same fashion as invocations of community and its ‘warm feeling’ distract from swathing and aggressive retractions of state support, a modest investment in forms of art, which have some (however small or temporary) demonstrable social impact disguise cuts in funding and support elsewhere. Indeed, a given amount of funding directed through the usual channels may provide sustained and effective care or support in a particular area, but it will not bring with it the level of exposure that a temporary art project costing a quarter the amount can, even if the art project does not provide the same degree of care or support. Again, valorisation is the key determiner in funding the arts under

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96 Ibid., 11.


99 ‘After all, what is the expertise of a contemporary artist? Perhaps a certain type of passionate hobbyism, a committed amateurism, is okay: after all, we still live in a reality largely shaped by talented amateurs of the nineteenth century, like Thomas Edison and so many others.’ Anton Vidokle, "Art without Market, Art without Education: Political Economy of Art," e-flux, no. 43 (2013): unpaginated.
neoliberalism. Regardless of art’s suitability or otherwise to ‘find solutions to problems in our society’, it is inarguable that socially engaged art in recent years has become inextricably intertwined with cultural policy, and by extension the ideology underpinning neoliberal governance.

This is not however to state that the social turn in art can be entirely attributed to this shift in cultural policy. As Bishop recognises in her book *Artificial Hells* the term ‘social turn’, which she coined several years earlier, is something of a misnomer, ignoring as it does the long history of social engagement in art throughout the twentieth century. Indeed, community arts in the UK arose as a defined field of cultural activity in the 1960s. A document published during this decade by the Greater London Arts Association, which proposed ‘the use of art to effect social change,’ still pertains as a working description of a great majority of socially engaged practices to this day.\(^{100}\) The document suggests that the community arts movement did indeed spring from a political position – ‘Community arts […] encompasses the expression of political action.’\(^{101}\)

The politics of the community arts tradition were rooted in, or perhaps more accurately, found their theoretical analogue in, theories of communitarianism. Art historian Arlene Raven, characterised this strand of art as ‘that which attempts to draw together a community and to participate with its audience in the definition and expression of the whole physical and social body in both its unity and diversity.’\(^{102}\) Here, the faith in the transformative and activist power of community and community-building that came to characterise much of the socially engaged practices of the 1990s is clear. It is this faith that aligns such practices with communitarian philosophy and politics. Miwon Kwon indeed later directly described the community arts tradition, and those tendencies which spawned from it – most notably ‘new genre public art’ – as ‘activist and communitarian in spirit.’\(^{103}\) Communitarianism, despite having been in the lexicon since the nineteenth century, gained particular ground during the 1980s and 1990s (concurrently, although in vastly different disciplinary, political and geographical environs, to theories of postmodern community, it should be noted). Reacting against liberalism’s conviction that ‘what people consider right or wrong, their values,

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\(^{100}\) Crehan, *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective*, 80.

\(^{101}\) Ibid.


\(^{103}\) Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 105.
should strictly be a matter for each individual to determine,’ communitarianism proposed that ‘we require shared (“social”) formulations of the good.’ Accordingly, communitarianism was grounded upon a faith in communities, and in the ‘community of communities’ – society – as being the essential core units of politics. To borrow the title of a section of an essay by Sociologists Phillip Selznick outlining the comparisons between communitarianism and religious belief, central to this philosophy is ‘affirming the principle of community’.

While the politics of communitarianism emerged initially in opposition to liberalism’s privileging of the individual, under New Labour – as well as other governments internationally during the 1990s – it became incorporated and interlaced with neoliberalism. Political sociologists Stephen Driver and Luke Martell argued in 1997 that ‘New Labour sell community as the hangover cure to the excesses of Conservative individualism.’ Indeed political theorist William Davies has suggested that, since 2008, an ‘emerging neocommunitarianism’ has come to characterise the policies on both Labour and Conservative sides of the UK’s economic spectrum. Accordingly, an alignment in politics emerged between this once-oppositional lineage in art, and the party politics (in the UK and beyond) in the 1990s and after. The same concern towards an affirmation of community that was once a reaction to the individualism of liberalism and neoliberalism, has become over the past two decades absolutely compatible with dominant models of political thought. Thus, community arts and its descendants have come to perform a function, and embody an ideology, which is entirely acceptable and encouraged by the political establishment.

The progression of cultural policy leading to New Labour’s emphasis on participation and inclusion can be read at least in part as an example of capitalism’s capacity to subsume everything outside its own reach, or more concretely, a realisation that socially engaged artistic practices could operate in the service of the state, as opposed to at a position of critical distance, regardless of the political intentions of the artists themselves. Irrespective of

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the positive intentions towards oppositional politics underpinning community arts’ genesis, its current manifestations and descendants must be critiqued on the basis of their current historical and political contexts. These contemporary contexts entail a situation in which socially ameliorative artistic practices are compromised at worst by their instrumentalisation in the service of a neoliberal agenda governed by a dominating financial logic, and at best on the basis of the degree to which the logics, forms, language and intentions of socially engaged practices resemble those espoused by policy makers.

**The Permitted Autonomy of Art**

Evidences of art’s complicity and co-optation within neoliberalism, which has proved intrinsically to be preclusive of community, pose a vital question: how can such a compromised field as art house the practices that I deem to be negotiative of community? This in turn raises a second broader question that requires interrogation before the first may be examined, namely, how can art claim any degree of criticality in the face of its apparent total subsumption under the hegemonic system of neoliberalism? In asking this question, I recall the definition of ‘criticality’ proposed by art theorist Irit Rogoff initially in a paper written in 2003, and then refined in a further piece from 2006. In the former, Rogoff argues that a shift has taken place in cultural practices and theory ‘from criticism to critique to criticality’. Criticism – ‘the application of values and judgements’ – was surpassed by critique – ‘examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to appear as a convincing logic.’ Critique, for Rogoff ‘has sustained a certain external knowingness, a certain ability to look in from the outside and unravel and examine and expose,’ which no longer seems pertinent to our contemporary contexts. Instead, she sees the project of contemporary critical practices to be one which, although informed by critique, goes beyond external observation. She proposes criticality, which she acknowledges is not an ideal term, as the solution to this.

In ‘criticality’ we have that double occupation in which we are both fully armed with the knowledges of critique, able to analyse and unveil while at the same time sharing and living out the very conditions which we are able to see through. As such we live out a duality that requires at the same time both an analytical mode and a demand to produce new subjectivities that

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108 Rogoff, "From Criticism to Critique to Criticality". unpaginated.

109 Ibid.
acknowledge that we are what Hannah Arendt has termed ‘fellow sufferers’ of the very conditions we are critically examining.\textsuperscript{110}

In her later text, “‘Smuggling’ – an Embodied Criticality,” she specifies that she perceives this duality as essential in turning ‘the latent of hidden conditions and unacknowledged desires and power relations into a cultural manifest.’\textsuperscript{111} It is in this sense that negotiations of community in contemporary art must operate; neither value-based, ethical or dogmatic, nor condescendingly detached; instead participating actively in a transversal reformulation of inherited terminologies and logics, while fully self-aware of their own position in the belly of the beast. In the remainder of this chapter, I posit the notion of ‘permitted autonomy’ as being central to the production of cultural manifestations of criticality given the socio-economic conditions of neoliberalism, and art’s complicities and co-optations within such conditions.

**Symptoms of Permitted Autonomy**

Despite the aforementioned shift in attention in theory towards the politics of art and its production, Steyerl suggests that this is merely a veneer, distracting from a multiplication of ethically and legally dubious activities systemic in the art world that largely go unspoken.

Addressing the intrinsic conditions of the art field, as well as the blatant corruption within it—think of bribes to get this or that large-scale biennial into one peripheral region or another—is a taboo even on the agenda of most artists who consider themselves political. Even though political art manages to represent so-called local situations from all over the globe, and routinely packages injustice and destitution, the conditions of its own production and display remain pretty much unexplored. One could even say that the politics of art are the blind spot of much contemporary political art.\textsuperscript{112}

Indeed, the corruptions described by Steyerl extend to all corners of the art sector. From relatively small-scale manipulations of state funding, which often see artists, institutions and funding bodies operating in cahoots in a less than transparent manner, to employment practices which privilege nepotism above expertise, there is an inordinate amount of activity in the art world which transgresses the ethical and even legal boundaries expected of any industry, particularly one so reliant on state support.\textsuperscript{113} Yet while those ‘in the know’ within

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{112} Steyerl, "Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Postdemocracy."

\textsuperscript{113} Gordon Nesbitt, "Don’t Look Back in Anger," 23.
the art world may be privy to the existence of such practices, the wider public on the whole are not granted full disclosure. Those outwith the art world’s confines are largely oblivious to what amounts to a degree of permitted and normalised informal deregulation and institutional corruption comparable with that which riddled the banking sector and was exposed by the fallout from 2008 and the global economic crisis. While on the face of it this would seem to present evidence of art’s exceptional status, some functioning of art beyond hegemonic structures, or ‘outside’ of the standards the status quo, I shall argue, on the contrary, that such corruption and unscrupulous business practices are indications of the death of any viable conception of the inside/outside binary, which has been so dominant in theories of the politics of art. What is evidenced here is art’s ‘permitted autonomy’.

The subject of autonomy has been central to art history and theory for more than a century. However, with the lessons of the historic and neo-avant-gardes having been taken on board, it had been widely assumed that discourse surrounding this topic had been fully played out. Indeed, it has been said that we exist in an era of ‘post-autonomous’ art, given the apparent emersion of art within capital. However, a renewed dialogue surrounding the term has emerged, in part a direct result of the pervasion of neoliberalism, and in part due to the increased importance placed upon thought emerging from the radical Italian autonomist tradition. It is in acknowledgement of the theoretical history of the term, as well as in the most literal and etymological of senses that I use the word in this instance.

As philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis has noted, the term derives from the two Greek sources of auto and nomos – literally, giving law unto oneself. He elaborates that autonomy:

[…], does not consist in acting according to a law discovered in an immutable reason and given once for all. It is the unlimited questioning of oneself about the law and its foundations, and the capacity, in the light of this interrogation, to make, to do and to institute (therefore also, to say).

Castoriadis’s formulation of autonomy then shares common ground with Rogoff’s definition of criticality, privileging as it does a binary of interrogation and, ‘in light of this interrogation’, action. Brian Holmes further developed Castoriadis’s definition of the term in

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117 Ibid., 288.
his influential text ‘Artistic Autonomy and the Communication Society’, in which he characterised the word as intrinsically political, thanks to social and linguistic systems and the relations they necessarily implicate.

Autonomy means giving yourself your own law. But men and women are social beings; we only exist as "ourselves" through the language of the other, through the sensations of the other; and what is more, this shared language, these transiting sensations, are bound up in the uncertainty of memory and forgetting, the incompleteness of perception, the willfulness of imagination. Thus the attempt to give oneself one's own law becomes a collective adventure, as well as a cultural and artistic one.\textsuperscript{118}

The term ‘permitted’ is altogether less encumbered with such a wealth of historical theorisation and dispute, yet it is absolutely key to note in my usage of the term the form of relation connoted by the word. To permit means to allow or consent to something happening, but the power in this relation remains with the party permitting. It suggests that the permission may elapse, or may be withdrawn at any time, with or without notice. It suggests that the permit is issued according to the wishes and the benefit of the party issuing it, and that there may be qualifications attached. It is neither a simple allowance, nor a begrudging toleration. In using these two words in concert, my intention is to highlight a form of autonomy historically specific to current conditions, one which problematises the dichotomy of inside/outside traditionally associated with autonomy, and which suggests a means for a critical art practice to persist despite the hegemonic status of neoliberalism and the narrative of real subsumption outlined above.

With these linguistic clarifications in mind, I suggest that the ethical and legal transgressions considered acceptable within the art world are symptomatic of art’s permitted autonomy; that is, the conditional permission granted to art as an industry to self-regulate and self-administer in certain areas, without direct answerability to centralised standards of practice. Permission is not granted directly by the state or any other single pivotal institution, rather it is the product of what Foucault refers to as governmentality, or the ‘structural entanglement of the government of a State and the techniques of self-government’ that characterise the administration of neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{119} In other words, it is produced by an interplay of official institutions and the more complex of system of conditioned mentalities, logics and techniques held by neoliberal subjects in order to perpetuate and administer neoliberalism.

\textsuperscript{118} Holmes, "Artistic Autonomy and the Communication Society," 548.

\textsuperscript{119} Lorey, "Governmentality and Self-Precarization: On the Normalization of Cultural Producers."
The normalisation of questionable practices within the art world is a manifestation of this second element of governmentality.

Permitted autonomy is neither granted out of simple good will, nor is it an oversight on the part of the hegemonic system; rather, it is intrinsic to the process of the production of surplus value required by capitalist economics. While the official and overt mechanics of neoliberalism are geared towards both the increased efficiency and spread of valorisation, a higher yield may be derived from practices outwith stated ethical and legal norms. These practices are accordingly overtly overlooked, or tacitly permitted, in order that a particular industry, in this case art, may become more profitable than would be the case according to a strict regulatory structure. The evidences of permitted autonomy thus far raised do not themselves constitute permitted autonomy, but are instead symptomatic of its existence. The source of permitted autonomy in art will be discussed shortly.

**Arguments against Artistic Exceptionalism**

While this may seem to suggest a privileged position of exceptionalism for art as a ‘tolerated enclosure’ to a degree outwith the economic logics of neoliberalism, precisely the converse is in fact the case. The past decade has been riddled with examples demonstrating permitted autonomy in any number of industries or sectors. As already mentioned, the rogue practices of bankers prior to 2008 presents an exemplary case. The recent furore surrounding cases of phone-hacking in journalism uncovered another such instance. Indeed, the panopticon initiated by the NSA, among other government bodies, and brought to light by Edward Snowden in 2013 demonstrates that even state institutions are subject to permitted autonomy.

Perhaps the clearest example can be seen in the most spectacularised and capitalist of global industries, football. Given the exorbitant levels of spending surrounding the sport – a fee of €100m was recently paid for a single player – legislation has been brought in over recent years to supposedly regulate financial activity. The ‘Fit and Proper Person Test’ was introduced in 2004 as a means of ensuring that directors and owners of football clubs in England and Scotland were legally and financially suitable to hold such positions. Despite the strict rules delineated in the terms of the test, only a tiny minority – entirely in cases regarding small lower-league clubs - have been deemed unfit or improper for ownership or

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directorship of a football club. Thaksin Shinawatra, business tycoon and former Prime Minister of Thailand, has faced numerous corruption charges in his home country but this did not prevent him from being allowed to buy Manchester City Football Club in 2006. Russian businessman Vladimir Antanov was denied permission to open a branch of the Lithuanian bank Bankas Snoras – of which Antanov was majority shareholder – in the UK by the Financial Services Authority and the Swedish car manufacturer Saab was refused a loan by the European Investment Bank because of Antanov’s involvement with the company. Again Antanov was allowed, in 2011, to purchase Portsmouth Football Club. Within six months of this purchase, a Europe-wide warrant was issued for Antanov’s arrest, and two months later, Portsmouth went into administration. While of course, clubs falling into administration is not profitable for football as an industry, such gambles are necessary in order to attract investment on the level witnessed over the past few years. The vast lump sums deposited into football by the super-rich allow a higher stakes financial game to be played, which of course allows for the collection of higher winnings. Thus, the acceptance of potentially unsavoury characters in football club boardrooms is the symptom of permitted autonomy. Its root is the heightened level of valorisation possible thanks to the vast wealth of international businessmen, whose increased upfront investment allows for a higher return to be obtained in the long run, notably through sponsorship and television rights sales.

These examples of permitted autonomy amount to a form of technocracy, similar to that seen in governments in southern Europe in recent years. Each sphere of production is permitted a number of freedoms in certain areas on the understanding that specialists within the sector know best how to valorise their own variant of production. Such freedoms may contravene centralised ethics, laws or both, but as long as they continue to valorise capital effectively – and with greater efficiency than would otherwise be possible – and as long as the degree of permitted autonomy remains out of public knowledge, these transgressions are overlooked.

If we have established its symptoms, what, then, can be described as the root of art’s own permitted autonomy? As financial motivations, most notably valorisation, are the fundamental criteria for permitted autonomy, the source of art’s economic value must be considered. For curator Charles Esche, art is singular in its exemption from dominant economic logics.

The field of art remains a tolerated enclosure within global capital in which non-productive, dysfunctional and pointless experimentation can still take place. Even though much has been commodified, there is no other field so free of the economic logic that defines our contemporary world. Try doing
what art does in business or in democratic politics to understand the difference.\textsuperscript{121}

However, as Marxist art historian Paul Mattick has suggested that ‘it is precisely its distance from market considerations, its “non-economic” character, that gives art its social meaning— and its market value.’\textsuperscript{122} Counter-intuitively it is the non-economic character of art that acts as the source of its economic value. In contexts in which ‘the deregulated economy celebrates deviant practices and eccentric frames of mind,’ the experimentation and dysfunctionality of art is prized.\textsuperscript{123} Funding bodies encourage the irrational and alternative solutions to problems of social inclusion offered by socially engaged art, regardless of their actual effect, as a means of increasing the visibility of such efforts, while corporations and wealthy individuals demonstrate their humanity by supporting, sponsoring and buying practices which seem contradictory to their own economic interests. It would be naïve to believe that recent interest, particularly at an institutional level, in the work of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei is entirely the result of some solidarity with his political circumstances and intentions. But what the case of Ai demonstrates is that art’s experimentations with and espousals of oppositional politics are not only permitted by the structures that govern art and its market, but encouraged. Art’s permitted autonomy, then, derives from the valorisation – either on the market, or as money saved through state funding – that may be derived from its oppositionality. Thus, a curious position for art emerges, at once inside and outside neoliberalism’s structures and logics. It is allowed to extend beyond them, but only in the service of a valorisation process intrinsic to neoliberal economics. It is venerated by neoliberal institutions precisely because of the contradictions it presents to these self-same institutions.

\textbf{The Death of the Inside/Outside Dichotomy}

Esche, in typically positive fashion, does not see art as having been entirely consumed by the process of real subsumption definitive of neoliberalism.

\begin{quote}
Art is not entirely instrumentalised for other purposes, nor entirely excluded from influential commentary on the world outside itself. It sits on the edge of things without being detached, constantly negotiating with historical change […] The field of art can be seen (potentially) to occupy an ambivalent space and status apart: potentially autonomous and potentially
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.


engaged, potentially commodified and potentially critical, a double position that is increasingly rare in a world where so much is purified in order to sustain the core system of capital exchange. Indeed, it is this multiple, paradoxical potentiality that could be its unique characteristic.\textsuperscript{124}

In many respects, Esche’s outlook on the present situation of art is apt. Operating as he does as the director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, he is able to see the exceptions to the more totalising rules presented by art theory and thus proposes a more nuanced position for art in relation to ‘the world outside itself’. Of particular note is his characterisation of art occupying an ambivalent, in-between space, at once inside and out. However, his desire to see art as being unique in occupying this inside/outside position veers towards artistic exceptionalism, an all too common tendency amongst denizens of the art world to seek a privileged position for art. In fact, as we have seen, it is a characteristic of all sectors under the dominion of neoliberalism, that they at once occupy an inside and an outside position, due to their permitted autonomies. A more apropos appraisal of this curious paradoxical position of art is put forward in another text published alongside Esche’s in a publication accompanying the Autonomy Project, a collaboration between numerous institutions, but whose major manifestation was a symposium held at the Van Abbemuseum. John Byrne, one of the conveners of the Autonomy Project, opens his discussion of the possibility for a contemporary form of autonomy by boldly proclaiming that:

Any lingering notion that an artist can somehow effect a kind of critical distance from mediatised culture, or that art can still offer some kind of autonomous sanctuary from digital exchange, can now only be sustained within an art world that flatly refuses to come to terms with its own condition.\textsuperscript{125}

Indeed, he sees the potential for a contemporary critical autonomy to derive precisely from the impossibility of ‘art occupying a special place outside of a neoliberal economy.’\textsuperscript{126}

One argument would then be to say that there simply is no longer an inside or outside to this new form of spectacular society […] What if one simply accepts that there is no longer any possibility of stepping outside the world of the commodity form? What if we are all encoded to our roots by its language and discourse?\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{124} Esche, “Art and Artists,” 7.

\textsuperscript{125} Byrne, “Critical Autonomy: "Inside out" and "Outside In",” 14.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 18.
While this may initially appear to tread ground already covered, Byrne makes a key step in deriving from the situation of the total subsumption of society a landscape in which the old binary of inside and outside ceases to exist. It is a simple logical step, of course, but a crucial one nonetheless. Once it has been established that nowhere is beyond the reaches of capital, then, without an outside to define itself against, there ceases to be an inside. Instead, what emerges is a more complex and variegated landscape. It is from the acknowledgment that there is ‘simply no outside left, no other place to go’ that Byrne sees new forms of criticality emerging.

Artists, critics, curators, writers, thinkers and radicals need to find new forms of autonomy within the structures of a globalised art industry, to carve out spaces which will allow us to rethink ourselves radically, imagine ourselves differently and re-configure our collective futures.\textsuperscript{128}

The 2013 Istanbul Biennial, held in the wake of the protests centred around Gezi Park and Taksim Square, which began earlier in the same year, would seem perhaps, albeit with an unsatisfactorily short period of reflection, to have constituted a key turning point in this debate. Both the death of the inside/outside dichotomy, and acknowledgments that what is left is a far more complex and variegated landscape of complicity and criticality have emerged in discussion surrounding the event. While Byrne and Esche were making their claims in specialist art contexts, in a publication almost exclusively read by members of the art world, two years later, similar sentiments have emerged in mainstream press coverage of the Istanbul Biennial. \textit{The Guardian} published an article on 15 September 2013, four days after the opening of the Biennial, tackling the problematic retreat enacted by the curators away from the contested public spaces, which had been the focus of protests, and into the established galleries and arts institutions of the city. This retreat has been all the more controversial given the conceptual framework delineated by the biennial’s curator Fulya Erdemci, which proclaims that ‘The notion of the public domain as a political forum will be the focal point of the 13th Istanbul Biennial.’\textsuperscript{129} \textit{The Guardian} article quotes German artist Christoph Schäfer, one of the founders of the Park Fiction project in Hamburg, and one of the artists exhibiting at the Biennial.

For me, it’s quite clear art cannot assume a position of critical distance any more. If a space like the biennial is polluted – there's no clean money in the

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{129} For further information on the Istanbul Biennial see http://13b.iksv.org/en
For Schäfer, critical distance is an impossibility – suggesting that he would agree that there is no longer any outside to capital – and the art world is polluted by the dirty money circulating through it. And yet, he believes that being ‘inside the system’ bestows upon artists some form of power. I would suggest that this ‘certain power’ derives from art’s permitted autonomy. More specifically, the primacy of economic logics under neoliberalism presents for art a collateral blindside that may be productively exploited. Such is the focus on valorisation that the by-product, or indeed source, of this valorisation – art’s oppositionality or criticality – is overlooked. Furthermore, neoliberal governmentality underestimates the potential that this ‘tolerated enclosure’ of criticality may offer, particularly given the preclusion of criticality offered elsewhere under neoliberalism. Art, by dint of these circumstances, constitutes a rare and valuable forum for critical discourse and thought, and it is this function of art that I see as being crucial to its capacity to act as negotiative of community, as shall be developed in the following chapters.

**Exploiting Art’s Permitted Autonomy**

I have thus far briefly characterised the work of WochenKlausur as being typical of the tendency for art to fulfil responsibilities vacated by the state. However, this perhaps undervalues their practice to a degree. Specifically it is the exemplary manipulation of art’s permitted autonomy that underpins their practice that I find to be particularly productive with regard to thinking surrounding community’s relationships with capital. Indeed, they raise a very similar question to that which has been at stake in this chapter in the FAQ section of their website: ‘Can WochenKlausur's activity be effective as a critique of the art business when it still plays along with the art game?’

The group formed in 1993 after founding member Wolfgang Zinggl had been invited by the Vienna Secession to produce a work tackling a particular local social issue. Zinggl invited eight other artists to contribute to the project, the establishment of a mobile healthcare clinic in Vienna, under the collective name ‘WochenKlausur’ (roughly translating as ‘weeks of closure’, although this is an inadequate translation). Over the past 21 years the group,

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131 One of the Istanbul Biennial’s main sponsors is the defence company Koç Holdings, who are responsible for arming the Turkish police and army.
consisting of a fluctuating membership of artists, have enacted various interventions, always at the invitation of a particular arts institution, always geared towards a particular ‘concrete goal’, and always with a strictly defined time frame. Although they are often dismissed as being emblematic of an aesthetically vacant and uncritical trope of art-as-social-activism, it is these stringent criteria that complicate any attempt to easily dismiss them as such. In this case, it is their insistence that each project be tied to an arts institution, thus ratifying the project ‘as art’, that is of particular interest.

Their FAQ page asks the question: ‘Why must a sociopolitical intervention be art? Can it not simply remain what it is?’ Implicit here is the assertion that, while their work could be social activism, to frame it as art provides certain benefits. In answering this question, and outlining these benefits, they allude to art’s permitted autonomy and their own strategic usage of this. The second point they make in answering the question refers to a project orchestrated by Patricia L.A. Paris in 1989, in which she installed floodlights in a subway in Whitechapel that had seen a spate of recent muggings. WochenKlausur highlight how the installation of these lights was lubricated by their status as art.

As an average citizen she might also have achieved that, only she would have had to place an official request for better lighting, like eighty others before her. With forms, waiting lists and fees. Months later she would have received a letter in which it would be called to her attention that at the moment circumstances make it impossible to.

WochenKlausur regularly highlight in interviews the fact that they are permitted to perform certain actions, or achieve outcomes more quickly, by virtue of the freedoms granted to art, most notably the circumvention of standard protocol and bureaucracy raised by the example of Paris. They cite the fact that, in the Austrian constitution, art is afforded freedom of expression according to article 17a of the Basic Law on the General Rights of Nationals of 1867, allowing WochenKlausur to sidestep other legal barriers, such as planning law, by framing their actions as art.

One further point from their answer to this question is worthy of note, alluding as it does to the focus of the next chapter. Having established that the framework provided by the signifier ‘art’ permits them to perform actions they would otherwise be incapable of, they

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132 WochenKlausur, "Frequently Asked Questions".

claim that an ‘artistic’ disposition and methodology might be beneficial when engaging in social interventions.

Experience from the completed projects shows that in many fields an unorthodox approach opens doors and offers usable solutions that would not have been recognized in conventional modes of thinking, such as those of science, social work or ecology.

The implication here is that art offers a more ‘unorthodox’ alternative to ‘conventional modes of thinking’, and that this may in certain circumstances bring with it benefits unavailable to these ‘conventional modes of thinking’. Although WochenKlausur are here referring to a process more practically oriented than many of the other practices under examination in this thesis, it is this emphasis on art as a mode of thinking that I would like to highlight as being crucial to the negotiation of community through art. Having established how art is capable of criticality despite its institutional and economic co-optation and complicity at the hands of neoliberal governance, I would like in the following chapter to examine what form this criticality may take.
3: Post-Communism, Post-Community?

In their preface to the 2002 French edition of Gilles Deleuze’s *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, philosophers Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin ask the following question: ‘Who is the philosopher, and who is the painter? We mean: Who is thinking, and who looking at thought?’

They coin two clunky neologisms – ‘philopainting’ and ‘pictophilosophy’ – in order to describe the hybridity and confusion of roles, tasks and intentions they see in Deleuze’s and Bacon’s work. Such confusion between art and theory has become somewhat embedded in contemporary art. As the twentieth century gave way to the twenty-first, art has increasingly borrowed idioms and forms more traditionally at home in the realm of theory, academia or the social sciences. Video essays, archival work and research-driven practices have predominated, while art is talked of more and more as a form of pedagogy or knowledge production. These tendencies have cumulatively rendered art an increasingly fertile site for thought and thinking. As artist Peter Dunn has observed, artists over the past thirty years have redefined their function as ‘context shifters rather than as content providers.’

Indeed the boundaries between the fields of art practice, curatorial practice, research, academia and theory have become blurred to the point of near invisibility over the past twenty years. Anton Vidokle, for example, defines himself as an artist, and yet he writes for and edits *e-flux journal* and often acts as curator (frequently it is deliberately obfuscated as to whether his exhibitions constitute an artistic or curatorial practice). It is through art’s development as a mode of thinking, and by extension a potent form of negotiative strategy or tool, particularly of social or political terminologies and theories, that I wish in this chapter to chart the interrelationships and imbrications of contemporary art and the concept of community with regard to the socio-political context which has come to define the decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, namely the ‘post-communist condition’. In doing so, I wish to demonstrate two things. Firstly, alongside the issues raised in the previous chapter...

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2 This was the focus of an extensive edited collection published in 2013. Mara Ambrožič and Angela Vettese, eds., *Art as a Thinking Process: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2013).

3 Quoted in Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, 1.

regarding neoliberalism, the fall of communism in the 1980s is the most significant factor in the resurgence of recent interest in the subject of community. Secondly, it is the post-communist condition that is largely responsible for a concern with community at a conceptual level having migrated from the field of philosophy to occupy a prominent position in the field of contemporary art.

One of the most visible manifestations of the collapsing of art into theory, and theory into art, has been the long-term curatorial research project, a widely proliferated form over the past decade especially, in which exhibitions, conferences, seminars, lectures, publications and a variety of other forms of dissemination are gathered together to form a network of inputs and outputs of critical and theoretical discussion under the auspices of art. One expression of this form has been FORMER WEST, established by curators Charles Esche, Kathrin Rhomberg and Maria Hlavajova in 2008. FORMER WEST is a notably ambitious project, with the self-proclaimed, and rather open-ended, aspiration to seek ‘to understand the possibility of art to observe and shape a response to what is happening.’

More specifically, FORMER WEST ‘aims to speculate about possible futures through a critical reinterpretation of recent, post-1989 global histories, and in so doing cast new light on contemporary art in relation to developments in society and politics.’ It is through the lens of FORMER WEST and its activities that I shall argue that the global malaise variously referred to as the ‘post-communist condition’, the ‘post-Soviet condition’, and ‘capitalist realism’, has rendered the idea of community unthinkable; that is, unable to be conceived of in a sense either pertinent to contemporary conditions, or outwith its inherited, and, as I described in the previous chapter, anachronistic and instrumentalised meanings. Specifically, I allude to the titles and remits of the first two ‘research congresses’ organised under the banner of FORMER WEST – ‘What Impact Did the Events of 1989 Have on the “West” and its Art?’ and ‘On Horizons: Art and the Political Imaginary’ – as a framework for the first part of my analysis. Following this, I shall return more concretely to the subject of art, suggesting that artistic practice at the very least has come to sit alongside philosophy as a primary negotiative strategy for rethinking community in such inhospitable circumstances. It may indeed be suggested that the question of community has in recent years in fact found greater currency in art contexts than in philosophy.

5 Maria Hlavajova and Charles Esche, "Introductory Notes," (delivered at 1st FORMER WEST Congress, Utrecht, 2009).

Horizontality after the End of History

The Post-Communist Condition

On January 16 1989, the ruling Polish United Workers’ Party voted to legalise Solidarity, the first independent trade union in Poland, and indeed the entire Soviet bloc. A month later Soviet forces retreated from Afghanistan after 9 years of occupation. On February 24, the Estonian flag flew over Tallinn for the first time in 44 years. By March, the Soviet regime had permitted the leasing of state-owned farmland by farmers for life and had held its first contested elections, while further East in April, May and June demonstrators gathered in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Meanwhile, Hungary removed 150 miles of barbed wire fencing along the Austrian border and future President Boris Yeltsin won a seat on the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. On the same day as the protests in Tiananmen Square culminated in the infamous massacre, Solidarity achieved victory in the Polish elections. On August 23 two million Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians joined hands, forming the Baltic Way, a human chain extending 600 km from Tallinn in the north to Vilnius in the south. In September, having opened its borders with Austria, Hungary allowed refugees from the German Democratic Republic to travel through the country and into Western Europe. A month later, the ruling communist Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party became the Hungarian Socialist Party, a left-of-centre social-democratic party. On October 18, the Hungarian government voted to restore a multiparty democracy, and five days later the Hungarian Republic was declared. November saw the resignation of the GDR government followed two days afterwards, on November 9, by the fall of the Berlin Wall. Less than two weeks later half a million peaceful protesters gathered in Prague as part of the Velvet Revolution, succeeding on December 29 in overthrowing the communist regime. In early December, Lithuania became the first Soviet Socialist Republic to reject the Communist Party.

Taken in isolation, the individual events of 1989 were without question of great consequence. Taken together, they form a narrative of revolution, rebirth and upheaval, which impacted directly upon the political and social existences of the 400 million or so inhabitants of the Eastern Bloc, and indirectly on substantially more across the globe. But it would be a vast simplification to identify 1989 as a singular and isolated turning point in recent history. To do so would ignore the significance of the policies of glasnost and perestroika enacted by former Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid 1980s, or of the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., or of the more evolutionary impacts of the creeping
advancements of globalisation, communication and technology. Rather, 1989 must be seen as metonymic of a broader narrative and as symbolic of the vast transformations that occurred in the final decades of the twentieth century. As philosopher Susan Buck-Morss has argued, the most profound significance of 1989 was ‘not so much its political effects - the replacement of "really existing" (state) socialism by "really existing" (capitalist) democracy - as the fact that this fundamental shift in the historical map shattered an entire conception of the world, on both sides [emphasis added].’

Mirroring Buck-Morss’s isolation of 1989 as the symbolic and metonymic date which has defined contemporary social and political existence of the past two decades above all others, FORMER WEST was founded upon the suggestion that 1989 marked a fundamental shift, not only in a wider social and political sense, but also in the history of art, acting as the starting point for ‘Contemporary Art (with a capital C and A) as an art historical period in its own right.’ The project’s approach to the year is slightly more empirical than that of Buck-Morss, highlighting particular events that constituted a paradigm shift in contemporary history, a shift, which they claim has been mirrored in art practice. The organisers, in an introductory lecture to the first FORMER WEST research congress, listed various events which took place during that year – the birth of the World Wide Web, the introduction of a Fatwa against Salman Rushdie, the first meeting of Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk, the first reality TV show, the ‘Magiciens de la Terre’ exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Paris etc. – however, they consciously privilege the fall of the Berlin Wall and the revolutions in Eastern Europe as the most crucial of all developments. This is both implicitly suggested (in the choice to use the name ‘FORMER WEST’, replete with its Cold War-era connotations, for example) and explicitly stated (the concise text occupying the ‘about’ section of the project’s website describes 1989 as ‘a critical landmark in our recent history and a catalytic moment in the move away from the three-world partitioning of the Cold War and towards the “new world order”.’).

Buck-Morss, in an essay of 2006, stated that the most significant result of 1989, and the shifts it has stood as metonymic of, has been the global permeation of a ‘Post-Soviet

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Condition.”¹⁰ Theorist and curator Simon Sheikh mirrored Buck-Morss’s use of the term in 2008 in describing the ‘post-socialist, or more concretely, the post-communist, condition,’¹¹ a state ‘characterized by the lack of any overarching project of social justice and redistribution: in other words, the lack of any discernable horizon.’¹² The medical connotations of the word ‘condition’ are by no means accidental, and the definition of the contemporary post-communist psyche according to medical terms has been widespread. Art theorist John Roberts has characterised the contemporary moment as being subject to a non-revolutionary ‘post-Thermidorian condition’, referencing a period of conservatism following the upheavals of the early portion of the French Revolution.¹³ In 2009 cultural theorist Mark Fisher discerned another condition, ‘capitalist realism’, which intersects considerably with Sheikh’s description of a post-communist condition. Fisher elaborates his diagnosis of contemporary society from the widely quoted remark usually attributed to Fredric Jameson that ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.’¹⁴ Fisher suggests that ‘in the 1980s... there were still, in name at least, political alternatives to capitalism. What we are dealing with now, however, is a deeper, more pervasive sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility.’¹⁵

Fisher attributes this condition not only to the impact of the end of ‘really existing’ communism in Europe, but also to the prevalence of a certain form of triumphalist rhetoric deriving from the ‘former West’ around and after the year 1989.¹⁶ In the summer of that year, only a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, neoconservative philosopher Francis Fukuyama published the first iteration of his text ‘The End of History’ in the international affairs journal The National Interest. His argument, prolonged and expanded in a more commonly cited book form, published in 1992, has had a profound influence and has been,


¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.
amongst great swathes of academia, wildly unpopular. In the earlier iteration of this text, he claims that:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.17

Such opinion was not limited to academics on the right. Theorists from across the political spectrum were swift to declare the end of history in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, albeit in most cases less triumphantly than Fukuyama. Historian and central figure of the New Left Perry Anderson entitled a chapter of his 1992 book *A Zone of Engagement*, ‘The Ends of History’, 18 while sociologist Jean Baudrillard made the grandiose and rather miserable proclamation in 1998 that:

The Year 2000 would not take place: quite simply because the history of this century has already come to an end, because we are reliving it interminably and because, therefore, metaphorically speaking, we shall never pass on into the future.19

These assertions of the end of history have been widely criticised both at a theoretical, abstract level,20 and, perhaps more cuttingly, as a form of neoliberal propaganda. Sheikh states in his essay ‘Vectors of the Possible’ (2011) that ‘history did not end - by contrast new conflicts and antagonisms arose immediately after 1989, both identarian and economic.’21

The spectre of 9/11 and the subsequent characterisation of a new ‘Other’ for the West in the form of Islam, as well as the Arab Spring and the pan-global movements of indignation at the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures would seem to corroborate his claim. He goes on to assert that ‘the idea of an end of history, then, can no longer be viewed as simply a naive, over-optimistic representation by the right, but something much more

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17 Fukuyama, "The End of History?," 4.
21 Sheikh, "Vectors of the Possible: Art between Spaces of Experience and Horizons of Expectation," 156.
sinister, a falsification of our view of the world.\textsuperscript{22} Jean-Luc Nancy echoed this in a text published in 1992, questioning:

...the ridiculous belief that floods in on us from all sides: the idea that we are done with Marxism and communism, that it is simply over. As if history, our history, could be so inconsistent, so phantasmic, so flaky to have carried us along for one hundred and fifty years on clouds that dissipate in a moment. As if error, pure, simple, and stupid, could thus be corrected, regulated, mobilized. As if thousands of so-called “intellectuals” were simply fools, and especially as if millions of others were even more stupid as to have been caught in the delirium of the first.\textsuperscript{23}

If the claim for the end of history is indeed a falsification, then it has certainly been a successful one. While Nancy challenges the truth of this ‘belief that floods in on us from all sides’, he nonetheless accepts, both in this essay and across his other writings, that to the vast majority, communism in any real or tangible form died in 1989, if not earlier. Indeed, even the durable bastion of communist thought Badiou seemed to display symptoms of a capitalist realist resignation to the hegemony of ‘Western liberal democracy’, remarking that:

Socialisms, which were the communist Idea’s only concrete forms, failed completely in the twentieth century. Even they have had to revert to capitalism and non-egalitarian dogma. That failure of the Idea leaves us with no choice, given the complex of the capitalist organization of production and the state parliamentary system. Like it or not, we have to consent to it for lack of choice.\textsuperscript{24}

It is worth noting that Badiou made this statement in 2008, in the initial stages of the global economic crisis, which seemed to constitute the first serious challenge both to the claims of historical stasis made by Fukuyama and indeed to capitalism itself post-1989. Badiou reassessed his appraisal of the end of history in 2012.

It is certainly not capitalism and its political servants that are bringing about the rebirth of History, if by “rebirth” is understood the emergence of a capacity, at once destructive and creative, whose aim is to make a genuine exit from the established order. In this sense, Fukuyama was not wrong: the modern world, having arrived at its complete development and conscious that it is bound to die […] no longer has anything to think about but ‘the end of History’. […] If there is to be a rebirth of History it will not come from the barbaric conservatism of capitalism and the determination of all state

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 157.


\textsuperscript{24} Alain Badiou, The Communist Hypothesis, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2010), 5.
apparatuses to maintain its demented patter. The only possible reawakening is the popular initiative in which the power of an Idea will take root.25

Despite Badiou’s faith in ‘the popular initiative’ it has been commented that the various activist responses to what economist Christian Marazzi has referred to as the ‘violence of financial capital’ have not only done little to suggest the reappearance of historical progression, but have been absolutely indicative of the contemporary inability to perceive positively of any potential future.26 Fisher, in an article of 2012 assessing the Occupy movement, criticised the protests as endemic of capitalist realism’s preclusion of radical political imagination. He stated that ‘Occupy’s neoliberal critics have pointed out that the movement remains fundamentally negative: it is against capitalism, but what is it for? While there’s something cheap about this dismissal, it does point to a major problem within anti-capitalism as a whole.’27 Regardless of whether one sides with Badiou or Fisher with regard to the efficacy of new social movements since 2008, it is clear that Jameson’s slogan was as eminently pertinent to the contexts of the years prior to 2008 than it was during the period of high postmodernism during the 1980s. If one follows Fisher’s argument then this claim may be extended to the present day.

Thus the claim for the end of history must be viewed not as a sound diagnosis, but as an historical artefact of a certain form of (successful) post-communist propaganda, which has effected a pan-global inability to think beyond the present and the established political order. It is, though, not quite a self-fulfilling prophecy. It has not brought about the end of history itself. Such a claim, as Nancy argues, is surely agnostic of the inevitabilities of unforeseen change, development and altered circumstances, which constitute and permit the progression of history. Rather it has helped to cement a belief in the end of history, a psychological and ideological manipulation of subjectivity on an enormous scale, with the aim of precluding the ability to conceive of society in temporal terms. Somewhat curiously given the neoliberal preference towards the term, it has been geared towards the prevention of projecting the potential for future political or social change. Returning to Sheikh’s diagnosis of the post-communist condition cited earlier, what the end of history discourse has effected is a lack, at

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the level of the global political unconscious, to borrow a term from Jameson, of the ability to perceive ‘any discernable horizon.’

**Post-Communism and the Horizon**

The question of horizons, and their conceptual relevance in the analysis of contemporary subjectivity in the face of the post-communist condition was the subject of the second FORMER WEST congress, ‘On Horizons: Art and the Political Imagination’, held in Istanbul in 2010. While none of the contributors to either the congress, or the edited volume published in its wake, spoke specifically on the subject of community, the notion of the horizon is essential to thinking community and much of the thought and discussion arising from the congress is applicable and helpful in characterising community in post-communist contexts. Community, as shall be demonstrated through an analysis of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s writings on the subject, is an essentially horizontal concept (by which I mean to say that it takes the form of a horizon – ‘phenomenologically imminent but infinitely receding’) and as such a brief understanding of horizons and their significance in the fields of philosophy, politics and art is helpful in foregrounding my discussion of community and the post-communist condition.

Though the horizon, as curators and theorists Nancy Adajania and Ranjit Hoskote state, is ‘a fiction’ and ‘an orientational construct,’ it is, according to political theorist Jodi Dean, ‘a necessary condition for shaping our actuality.’ Spatially, it describes a delimiting circumference encompassing the total area, which, from one’s position at the centre of this circumference, not only is currently accessible, but is currently known. The horizon marks a limit of knowledge. Beyond what is visible within its circumference one can only project what is expected, anticipated or hoped to exist. In order to project beyond the horizon, one must hypothetically or artificially situate oneself at or beyond the horizon, or move within it, in order to generate a new circle of accessibility and knowledge. Thus there is a temporal dimension inherent to the horizon, alongside its obvious spatial dimension. If one is to

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project oneself at the horizon, or if one is to move to a point on the horizon, hypothetical or real time must elapse.

As Peter Osborne has discussed at length, the temporal metaphor of the horizon is essential to German continental philosopher Martin Heidegger’s conception of Being. Heidegger argues in Being and Time for an ontology defined by temporality, stating at the outset of his treatise that his ‘provisional aim is the Interpretation of time as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being.’ He claims that at any point of Being there is a ‘whither’ to which that point is oriented. ‘This “whither”’, he suggests, ‘we call the “horizontal schema”’. Heidegger continues, arguing that: ‘With one’s factical Being-there, a potentiality-for-Being is in each case projected in the horizon of the future.’ It is in this temporal sense that the metaphor of the horizon pertains eminently to the subject of the contemporary political impasse presented by the post-communist condition. Osborne summarises Heidegger’s position by stating that the ‘“horizon of the future” is ontologically fundamental,’ that without the horizon, there can be no Being. Or, more pertinently, as Osborne stated in an aside during his keynote at the second FORMER WEST congress, which forms the basis of his essay ‘Expecting the Unexpected’, the horizon provides the ‘politicisation of the subject, via the concept of time.’ Thus a circumstance in which the horizon is either absent or obscured entails the depoliticisation of the subject, the denial of any agency in effecting change.

Hito Steyerl wrote two texts in 2011 entitled ‘In Free Fall’, the first appearing in the publication following the second FORMER WEST research congress, the second published in e-flux. A year earlier she produced a half-hour long video work of the same name, in which she traced the life of one specific Boeing 707-700 4X-JYI aircraft. The final moments of the video intercut images of Steyerl and the actor Imri Kahn, styled as aircraft pilots, performing a dance routine made up of actions associated with pre-flight safety

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32 Peter Osborne, “Expecting the Unexpected: Beyond the "Horizon of Expectation"," ibid.


34 Ibid., 416.

35 Ibid.

36 Osborne, "Expecting the Unexpected: Beyond the "Horizon of Expectation"," 118.

demonstrations, and found footage of a man freefalling to earth while skydiving. Steyerl discusses the condition of free fall in the FORMER WEST iteration of her text:

Imagine you are falling. The horizon will start to swirl around you. It will become unmoored, start dancing, and break apart. In the state of free fall the horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines […] Paradoxically, while you are falling, you will probably feel as if you were floating. It may actually feel like perfect stasis. As if history and time had ended and you couldn’t even remember that time ever moved on. In part, this disorientation is due to the loss of a stable horizon. 38

The video of the skydiver corroborates this characterisation of free fall, the camera – presumably held by a fellow skydiver – shakes, swivels and pans, without the viewer ever being presented a stable horizon through which to orientate themselves. It becomes uncertain as to whether the video is being shot from above, below, or from the side, to the point that the direction of fall is not even clear. Indeed, in relation to the infinite blue backdrop of the sky, no movement is evident at all. It is this disorientation, this disconnect from the horizon which characterises the post-communist condition, a point Steyerl relates eloquently. If, as Osborne comments, the horizon constitutes the politicisation of the subject, then – in another testament to the ideological success of the end of history discourse – the post-communist condition was the state characterised by a concerted evacuation of political orientation and agency.

The Horizontality of Community

Zygmunt Bauman dedicates the opening chapter of his book Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World to the myth of Tantalus, son of Zeus and Pluto, condemned to eternal punishment for his act of ‘acquiring/sharing knowledge which neither he nor other mortals like him should have.’ 39 His punishment, Bauman writes, was as follows:

Tantalus was stood up to his neck in a stream - but when he lowered his head wishing to quench his thirst, the water flew away. Over his head hung a luscious branch of fruit - but whenever he stretched out a hand wishing to satiate his hunger, a sudden gust of wind blew the appetizing titbits away. 40


39 Bauman, Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World, 7.

40 Ibid., 8.
‘Contemporary seekers of community,’ Bauman warns, ‘are doomed to share Tantalus’ lot,’ because of a fundamental trait he sees in the concept of community. Realigning Raymond Williams’s appraisal of community (‘that it has always gone’), Bauman lends the concept a curious, perpetual futurity, declaring ‘that it is always in the future.’ Thus, regardless of the steps one takes towards community, it always remains at a distance. In this sense it constitutes a horizon; phenomenologically imminent, ever-receding and never reachable.

An important clarification must be made then regarding community’s horizontal nature. Community is not on a horizon, rather it is a horizon itself. A point on the horizon will, as the subject perceiving the horizon moves, dislodge from the horizon. If one were to walk directly towards it, eventually the point would be encountered and even surpassed. The horizon would however remain as a horizon, perpetually unreachable. Giorgio Agamben, in a short book of the same name, speaks of the ‘Coming Community’. Although he does not substantially elaborate on this phrase, the implication – through his use of a present participle – is that we will, at some point, encounter community. ‘Coming’ implies that the relative distance between subject and object is diminishing, and that the gap will be breached. This would suggest, returning to the horizontal metaphor, that Agamben would see community as being on the horizon. French philosopher Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, in Specters of Marx, outlines his concept of democracy as being ‘a democracy to come, not of a future democracy in the future present.’ Derrida, in contrast to Agamben, utilises the infinitive form of the verb, ‘to come’, in order to connote what he calls the ‘infinite promise’ of a democracy that will ‘never present itself in the form of full presence.’ Here Derrida is not equating democracy with a point on the horizon, rather with the horizon itself; something visible, yet infinitely distant and which will remain infinitely distant regardless the movement of the subject.

This may appear to be semantic pedantry, however the apparently minute distinction between the phrases ‘coming’ and ‘to come’ snowballs quickly into two thoroughly different
conceptions of what community might mean. To mistake the two is to present a thoroughly cacophonous, confused and thus politically impotent idea of community. Artist Paul Chan, for example, writing in *e-flux journal* about his 2007 performance piece *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* uses the phrases ‘community to come’ and ‘the coming community’ interchangeably.\(^{47}\) His inference seems to suggest he subscribes to the ‘coming community’ model, but his terminology makes this unclear. Are we to read that he sees community as being a quantifiable outcome of his work? Or is it simply something that his practice is oriented towards?

Likewise, John Roberts employs the Derridean ‘to come’ future tense in the title of a special issue of the journal *Third Text* he edited in 2009, ‘Art, Praxis and the Community to Come’, citing Jean-Luc Nancy’s use of the phrase ‘communion to come’, alongside Agamben’s ‘coming community’.\(^{48}\) While Nancy utilises the phrase ‘to come’ in a similar fashion to Derrida (‘The communion to come does not grow distant, it is not deferred: it was never to come; it would be incapable of coming about or forming a future,’ says Nancy)\(^{49}\), for reasons stated above I would deem the citation of Agamben’s text to be incongruous given the contradictory temporalities employed. Roberts, however, makes the form of community he is attempting to express clear. “‘Community’”, he writes, ‘is not something the proletariat possesses or works towards in its liberated completion, but rather is a continuous, unfolding space of possibility.’\(^{50}\)

Given art’s long relationship with the horizon, a moment of visual analysis may elucidate this difference between *on the horizon* and the *horizon itself*, or ‘coming’ and ‘to come’, more clearly. British artist Julian Opie’s series of paintings and screenprints entitled *Imagine You Are Driving* (fig. 7), produced throughout the 1990s, depict abstracted landscapes with a road extending into the distance at their centre, the tarmac, grass and sky all reduced to single planes of grey, green and blue respectively. The horizon bifurcates the canvas just below the midway point, with the grey of the tarmac and green of the grass forming triangles, the upper apexes of which converge at a point in the centre of the canvas. The only spatial reference points the viewer is offered are the broken white road markings receding towards

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\(^{49}\) Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 13.

the vanishing point. Although the image is static, the title instructs the viewer to render the work mentally as if it were a video. If one were to do so, the grey and green triangles, and the blue sky would remain fixed, as would the horizon line dividing the canvas. The only suggestion of movement would derive from the broken white lines moving gradually towards the viewer, before disappearing underneath the suggested vehicle and off the canvas’s lower edge. One of the road markings that in the initial image appears at the horizon would then at a certain juncture be repositioned directly underneath the viewer’s implied position, and yet the horizon would remain entirely unaltered. Indeed there would be new markings which would appear at the horizon that would then disappear underneath us again.

While Opie’s work certainly does not partake substantively in the tendency in art under examination in this thesis – nor is he politically coherent with the practitioners in question here – in purely formal terms it is a succinct artistic exegesis of horizons. Here the distinction between quantifiable points on the horizon and the horizon itself becomes clear. The horizon – and thus also community – is, as Peter Osborne states, ‘phenomenologically imminent but infinitely receding.’ While the infinitely receding nature of community dictates that it can never be reached, its phenomenological imminence means that it can be perceived. As such it is from the subject’s ability to perceive community from its current position that community derives its significance. It looms as a spectre positioned infinitely ahead of us, yet conditioning our contemporary existence by virtue of its perceptibility. It is a ‘whither’ to Heidegger’s Being.

This is, however, to ignore the obfuscation and obstruction of the horizon which has come to constitute the post-communist condition. Introducing this, and the disorientation experienced as a result, alters the relationship between the contemporary subject and the conceptual horizon of community. Phenomenological imminence must be removed from the equation in our contemporary contexts. While Bauman’s analogy of community with the myth of Tantalus would seem to hold historically, its reliance on perception means that it is less pertinent to the particularities of the post-communist condition, despite Bauman’s specific relation of the myth to ‘contemporary seekers of community’. Community, while still constituting a horizon encircling the subject’s position, is no longer perceivable, or perhaps rather, given the theoretical or conceptual nature of community, no longer thinkable. The post-communist imperceptibility of horizons manifests itself as an inability to think of

51 Osborne, "Expecting the Unexpected: Beyond the "Horizon of Expectation"," 115.
community in any cogent, pertinent or applicable fashion. Its ability to condition contemporary existence through its phenomenological imminence has been suspended.

**Thinking Community through Contemporary Art**

Mark Fisher’s criticisms of the Occupy movement are tempered by one significant concession:

> Occupy’s ultimate importance may be that it was a start to the process of rebuilding social imagination. Before 2008, we couldn’t imagine an alternative to capitalism. But Occupy showed that we can now at least imagine imagining it.  

Here he privileges the importance of a secondary, artificial or meta form of imagination, an ability to imagine imagination, in repealing and traversing beyond the so-called end of history. It is in this sense that art, I shall argue, may be seen to contribute actively, if indirectly, towards the reimplementation of horizons, and by extension, towards thinking community.

My characterisation of negotiative contemporary art practices recalls two discrete definitions of the verb ‘to negotiate’. The OED defines these two definitions as ‘To communicate or confer (with another or others) for the purpose of arranging some matter by mutual agreement; to discuss a matter with a view to some compromise or settlement,’ and ‘To find a way through, round, or over (an obstacle, a difficult path, etc.).’

It is the second sense of the word, which hints at the relationship between negotiative practices and the concept of the horizon – or more accurately, the contemporary disconnect from horizons. Contemporary negotiative practices serve to ‘find a way through, round, or over’ the obstacles presented by the post-communist condition in two fashions. Firstly, artistic practices after conceptualism have increasingly tended towards exercises in comprehension in a Hegelian sense, borrowing from and encroaching into the realm of philosophy, and building research and theoretical discourse directly into the artistic process. Secondly, contemporary art deals extensively in possibility, projection, anticipation and the generation of potential futures beyond horizons.

In the second half of this chapter I shall interrogate these two modalities of the negotiative function of contemporary art with reference to practices which are specifically negotiative of community.

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52 Fisher, “One Year after Occupy”.

The first modality of negotiative practice may be explicated through a comparison of art with the field of philosophy. Specifically my claim is that a transposition of Hegel’s characterisation of philosophy as ‘its own time comprehended in thoughts,’ with one important qualifier, provided by Simon Critchley, serves to isolate the artistic faculty for comprehension as a vital means of conceiving horizons through contemporary art practices.  

In order to further understand what bearing this Hegelian position may have on art and horizontality let us separate his famous statement into its two constituent elements and examine each in isolation. The first element of philosophy’s character is that it must respond to ‘its own time.’ The expanded context for Hegel’s statement in his Philosophy of Right is as follows:

As far as the individual is concerned, each individual is in any case a child of its time, thus philosophy, too, is its own time comprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overlap his own time or leap over Rhodes.  

It is largely in this respect that theorists of ‘postmodern community’ have operated, serving to comprehend community specifically as was relevant at the moment of their intervention into the subject. Jean-Luc Nancy was urged to write The Inoperative Community by what he saw as the persistence of a fascist model of totalising community – the same model that had provided the impetus for Bataille’s interventions into the subject, discussed in chapter 1 – that had outlasted its political proponents and embedded itself more deeply into the logics and structure of contemporary life.

In a sense, it is precisely this direct response to contemporary conditions that defines contemporary art, as its moniker suggests. While it has often been used in a remarkably uncritical and generic sense, in recent years the temporal implications of the term ‘contemporary art’ has been interrogated more closely. E-flux journal published two issues devoted to the question ‘What is Contemporary Art?’, while the Fall 2009 issue of October featured an extensive ‘Questionnaire on “The Contemporary”’ comprising responses to the

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54 Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right, 21.
55 Ibid., 21-22.
term from around 70 theorists, art historians and curators. Common to most responses to
the questions posed in these publications has been an acknowledgment that, as Osborne has
put it, “‘Contemporary’ is, at base, a critical and therefore a selective concept: it promotes
and it excludes.” That is to say, it does not mean simply art produced since a certain year.
Rather, the consensus amongst the predominance of respondents defines contemporary art
according to its direct response to present conditions. Osborne refines this further, specifying
that to respond to the present means to respond to contemporary international social and
political conditions:

If art is to function […] as a construction and expression of the
contemporary […] it must relate directly to the socio-spatial ontology of its
own international and transnational sites and relations.

Contemporaneity, Hegel continues in the second half of his characterisation, must be
‘comprehended in thoughts’ by philosophy. The shared faculty of thinking and
comprehension has long been isolated as a connective tissue between the fields of art and
philosophy. Russian philosopher Alexander Spirkin, wrote of art (in a broad sense) and
philosophy in 1983:

An indispensable feature of art is its ability to convey information in an
evaluative aspect. Art is a combination of man’s cognitive and evaluative
attitudes to reality recorded in words, colours, plastic forms or melodically
arranged sounds […] A common feature of art and philosophy is the wealth
they both contain of cognitive, moral and social substance. Science is
responsible to society for a true reflection of the world and no more. Its
function is to predict events. On the basis of scientific discoveries one can
build various technical devices, control production and social processes,
cure the sick and educate the ignorant. The main responsibility of art to
society is the formation of a view of the world, a true and large-scale
assessment of events, a rational, reasoning orientation of man in the world
around him, a true assessment of his own self.

58 “Questionnaire on ‘the Contemporary’,” October, no. 130 (2009).
59 Osborne, Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art, 2.
60 ‘Contemporary art deserves its name insofar as it manifests its own contemporaneity—and this is not
simply a matter of being recently made or displayed.’ Boris Groys, “Comrades of Time,” e-flux, no. 11
61 Osborne, Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art, 27-28.
62 Despite the scientific connotations of the term ‘comprehension’, and the attendant claim to objectivity
it would seem to suggest, Hegel pointedly relates comprehension only to ‘its own time’. It is therefore
historically specific in Hegel’s formulation and as such appeals only to subjectivity.
63 Alexander Spirkin, “Philosophy and Art,” in Dialectical Materialism (Moscow: Progress Publishers,
1983).
What is clearly stated here is that the function art performs is not simply a neutral form of representation of its contemporary conditions. If we examine art historically it does not perform an evidential function, rather it in some way permutes its social contexts through a process of cognition, evaluation, comprehension and thought. Spirkin’s appraisal is continued in certain fashions by Critchley. In his accounts of collaborations and discussions with French artist Philippe Parreno, Critchley describes the meeting of their two fields as follows:

The issue here is with different modes of articulation, or different modes of thinking. My conviction is that art thinks, just as film thinks and music thinks. Philosophy as a largely conceptual enterprise or meta-practise is thinking about thinking […] When I talk to [Parreno] or look at what he does, it is clear that it is not what I do, that is, his mode or articulation is very different, but our concerns are tightly related and we’re reading the same books and looking at the same things.64

While Critchley bestows upon philosophy a secondary level of thinking, he nonetheless sees both art and philosophy as modes of thought. He likewise acknowledges shared concerns and interests, but emphasises the discrepancy in ‘modes of articulation’ as being the key difference between their practices. In many ways Critchley echoes the sentiments of Badiou and Cassin as quoted at the outset of this chapter, and his insistence on art’s potential as a mode of thought is particularly resonant for contemporary art, which has increasingly blurred the previously more distinct boundaries between art and theory. As philosopher Jean-Marie Schaeffer has observed:

Not only has theory never been as prominent in art as it is in contemporary art, but more importantly, theory has never been as strongly tied to art-making as it is today. I know of no other period of art where the distance between art-making and art theory has come so close to vanishing. And as contemporary artworks themselves often contain a theoretical aspect, the difference between art and theory tends to become blurred.65

Contemporary concatenations of art and theory, as described by Schaeffer, by no means form a homogenous or formalised set of artistic practices; rather, they are manifested in a variety of fashions, including the long-term curatorial research project form already mentioned. Three briefly described examples may demonstrate the breadth of practices encompassed by this heightened tendency to fuse or confuse elements of art and theory. The

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64 Critchley, “The Infinite Demand of Art”. 3.

work of Bosnian artist Nada Prlja is an especially clear example, in particular a 2013 performative round-table discussion commissioned by Calvert 22 in London entitled *Subversion to Red* (fig. 8). The work comprised a pentagonal red table with an opening cut into the centre, which was used as the setting for a round-table discussion between theorists Mark Fisher and Nina Power, art historian Gail Day, artist Hannah Black and artist/curator Dave Beech on the subject of the contemporary applicability of Marxism. Positioned in the aperture at the centre of the table, and wielding a white marker pen, theorist and curator Vlad Morariu furiously scribbled notes directly onto the surface of the table as each of the discussants gave short 4-minute presentations. Here art and theory modify each other, the established academic format of the roundtable discussion being radically altered by various artistic gestures, not least the literal positioning of the chair in the centre of the table.

The output of Russian art/theory collective Chto Delat?, founded in 2003 in St Petersburg and comprised of a fluctuating membership of artists, philosophers, poets, writers and critics, is reflective of the heterogeneity of figures making up the group. Their practices take the form of learning plays, video pieces, installations and, crucially, a regular publication and web platform in which members of the collective, as well as other writers, publish texts ranging from more overtly theoretical essays, to interviews, polemics and forms of experimental or art writing. Indeed, they themselves do not see a clear division between their artistic and theoretical outputs, instead viewing them as contiguous and overlapping elements of one coherent practice. In answer to the question ‘What is the use of theory and philosophy for you?’, asked by another member of the collective in an interview printed in an issue of their publication, the de facto leader of the group, Dmitry Vilensky replied: ‘I would note that we shouldn’t separate discourse (theory) from artistic practice and political innovation. My answer is simple: knowledge should be/is unified. Theory—the concept—is an organic element of art, and aesthetic experience is a necessary component of theoretical reflection.’

His call for the conjunction of art and theory is redolent of Critchley’s statement that ‘Art needs a theory that needs art. It’s a two way street with all the traffic in the middle.’

I would like to return to a work already discussed in chapter 1 as a final example of a hybrid art/theory practice, one which is explicitly oriented towards a negotiation of the concept of

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67 Critchley, “The Infinite Demand of Art.”
community, Dean Kenning’s *Metallurgy of the Subject* (2010). Art’s heightened potency as a mode of comprehension rests on two qualities intrinsic to art, both evidenced in Kenning’s practice. Firstly, art is singular in its malleability. The autonomy it is granted to adapt its form, function, production and reception according to the desires or requirements of the artistic practitioner or to the necessities of a particular historical or social circumstance has long been a defining characteristic of art. It has, increasingly throughout the twentieth century, been permitted, or even expected, to transgress its own disciplinary boundaries and temporarily camp in the fields of other disciplines. Architectural historian Marco de Michelis has described contemporary art as ‘a new “asymmetric” space, characterized by the expansion and revision of the traditional fields of activities of […] various disciplines.’

Secondly, while it may visit other disciplines, and in some cases seem for all the world to be exemplary of these disciplines, artistic production is not evaluated according to the same criteria as these disciplines. In fact, despite its transgressions beyond the established realms of ‘art’, artistic production necessarily carries with it its own evaluative criteria and rubrics, or indeed its lack thereof. It is rare, for example to see Complaints Choirs, initiated by Finnish artists Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta Kalleinen and comprised of groups of amateurs singing complaints put to music, criticised in any serious manner on the grounds of their musical ineptitude. As such, while artists may increasingly gesture towards the realm of theory, their practices cannot be mistaken for it, nor do they operate in the same fashion or according to the same criteria of evaluation.

While Kenning has briefly engaged in discussions of community in his capacity as a theorist and writer, most notably in an article published in *Third Text* in 2009, *Metallurgy of the Subject* constitutes his most thorough intervention into the subject. His choice to do this through his artistic practice is instructive. The voiceover text borrows much from Kenning’s experience as a writer. It is sober, structured into subsections, presents a coherent and developing argument, and references a range of theoretical precursors. However, the theoretical conceits inherent to the work are modulated by their use within the contexts of an artwork. The text is obscure and allegorical, considerably moreso than Kenning’s theoretical writings, and it is this which the artist himself sees as being both a quality specific to art, and the predominant manner in which art may operate as a mode of thinking. In a text written by Kenning in 2011 he describes art’s utility as follows:

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Art will only be specifically useful if it maintains its strangeness, its darkness, its ability to disturb, to tap into the unconscious; if it maintains, that is, its character of producing something we don’t recognize – that moment of blockage and dumbfoundedness which acts as a sign to lead us beyond ourselves – which is, more or less, how Deleuze describes thinking.  

Art therefore offers, as Critchley states, ‘different modes of articulation’ than those available to theorists, even when it aligns itself so closely to theory. Artists may borrow from theory in order to heighten the capacity for comprehension in their work, they may blend theory into the artistic process and indeed the artwork itself, but they nonetheless offer an entirely different aspect onto the contemporary than theory in and of itself can. A discussion of the potentialities immanent to this hybrid art/theory position is prominent in Polish artist Artur Żmijewski’s 2007 manifesto ‘The Applied Social Arts’. He introduces a question posed by critic Dorota Jarecka, ‘Whom should art serve today, and for what purpose? [Should it] engage in political discussion that will always be inadequate when placed against the discourse of philosophers and sociologists?’ Żmijewski answers, ‘Yes, it should engage in such discussion. Art will enhance that discussion with its ability to use different strategies, its familiarity with intuition, imagination, and premonition.’

This first horizontal function of art may then be taken as a transposition of Hegel’s definition of philosophy (‘its own time comprehended in thoughts’) with a further qualifier provided by Critchley; ‘with different modes of articulation.’ Hegel however claims that anything beyond the comprehension of actualities moves from philosophy to opinion. This would seem initially to preclude it as a model for the horizontality of art, given that, as has been described, the horizon is not an actuality but a speculation, an abstract division between what is discernable and what is not yet discernable. However, if philosophy (and therefore art) may serve to comprehend our present actuality (what lies within the perimeter of the horizon) then by extension it allows us the opportunity to speculate on firmer grounds both where the horizon may be and what form it may take, given the fuller understanding we may possess of what the horizon serves to delimit.

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Puncturing the Horizon

The final chapter of Peter Osborne’s philosophical intervention into contemporary art, *Anywhere or Not At All* (2013) expands upon deliberations on the concept of the horizon initiated in his 2011 essay ‘Expecting the Unexpected’, specifically relating his discussions of horizontality to the field of contemporary art practice. Through a Heideggerian lens he debates the relative potentialities inherent in the temporal modes of expectation, anticipation and projection as means of situating the present in relation to the future through art. His fundamental claim is encapsulated in the final sentence of the book. Osborne states that ‘at its best, contemporary art models experimental practices of negation that puncture horizons of expectation.’

The arguments laid out in Osborne’s chapter form the basis of my characterisation of the second mode of negotiative art practices that serve to counter the obfuscation of horizons entailed by the post-communist condition. While I have already examined how art may allow us to speculate with greater accuracy the nature of contemporary horizons through comprehension, I now wish to focus on practices which serve to puncture horizons through experimental excursions outwith the bounds of the contemporary.

Osborne’s discussion hinges upon a crucial differentiation between the concepts of ‘expectation’ and ‘anticipation’. ‘Expecting’, he states, ‘is not just an occasional looking-away from the possible to its possible actualization, but is essentially a waiting for that actualization’ [emphasis in the original]. Conversely, for Osborne, via Heidegger, anticipation constitutes ‘being-towards a possibility as a possibility’ [emphasis in the original]. In other words, while expectation assumes that future events will occur, anticipation simply accepts that they might or could. Contemporary art, for Osborne, operates (‘at its best’) at the level of anticipation, postulating possible realities, situations and relations as possibilities.

Such appraisals of the potential for contemporary art to act as anticipatory have gained significant traction in contemporary art practice and theory in recent years. As curator Nina Möntmann has observed, ‘while the early 1990s witnessed increased interest in the politically serviceable value of artistic work, a focus of interest in current art production lies

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72 Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, 211.
73 Ibid., 205.
74 Ibid.
in the social imagination. Examples abound. Charles Esche and Will Bradley’s *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader* was produced with the intention of isolating artistic activities which have ‘suggested or even generated alternative social models.’ This is mirrored by a question posed by Sheikh in which art’s horizontal function is directly addressed. ‘Can aesthetic experience […] not only posit or represent a certain horizontal line, but also cross this line in some way?’

In her appraisal of the 2002 mega-exhibition *documenta 11*, art historian Angela Dimitrakaki introduces the sculptural terminology of ‘negative space’ when discussing art’s ability to ‘imagine a dialectical relationship with the future.’ While this metaphor is not expanded upon, it is worth elaborating on its significance here as a means of demonstrating precisely what the anticipatory function of art entails. In the contexts of sculpture, the term ‘negative space’ defines a void encompassed by elements of the sculpture’s form; the area between the torso, left arm and right knee of the *Discobolus*, for example. When observing the sculpture from any given position, an area behind the sculpture will be framed by the same forms which delineate the negative space, this negative space becoming occupied by a partial image of what lies beyond the sculpture. However, with every minute movement made by the subject in relation to the sculpture, the image that is framed will alter, thus occasioning an infinite number of possible images which may inhabit the negative space. It is in the position of the subject that the artistic practitioner operates in this anticipatory mode, establishing an aspect from which a *possibility* may be observed which, while in its partiality does not constitute a total or accurate image of what lies beyond, contributes to a fuller understanding of what *might* lie beyond.

A radical imaginative or anticipatory impulse, akin to that prescribed by Osborne, underpinned the curatorial thesis behind Möntmann’s 2008 group show ‘If We Can’t Get It Together: Artists rethinking the (mal)function of communities’. Shown at The Power Plant in Toronto, the exhibition brought together the work of eight artists, who, according to Möntmann, were engaged in ‘creating a temporary model situation of community – one that


77 Sheikh, “Vectors of the Possible: Art between Spaces of Experience and Horizons of Expectation,” 164.

can be experimental, provisional, informal, and maybe prototypical.\textsuperscript{79} While the direct solicitation of community, and the rhetoric of ‘provisional’ and ‘prototypical’ social structures implemented by artistic practice is initially reminiscent of relational aesthetics, it is important to note some key differences between the forms of practice championed by Nicolas Bourriaud, and those selected by Möntmann. Curator Binna Choi, writing of South Korean artist Haegue Yang – one of the artists shown in ‘If We Can’t Get It Together’ – stated that, ‘breaking with the ostensible invocations and instrumentalization of this or that community in “relational” art, Yang dislocates and allocates a space for a seemingly self-contradictory and elusive community.’\textsuperscript{80} Indeed, the works comprising the exhibition were united by a distinctly abstract quality, quite incongruous with the dominant modes of representation associated with socially engaged practices. As Möntmann has put it, ‘the “relations” are not as immediate as in the participatory projects of the early 1990s that were directly engaged with the public sphere.’\textsuperscript{81} Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely because of this level of abstraction, the exhibition constitutes perhaps the most profound ‘puncturing of horizons’ with regards to community visible in the recent history of contemporary art.

Yang’s brand of conceptual abstraction, manifested in a variety of media including video, painting and installation, is significantly informed by her theoretical engagement with the writings of Maurice Blanchot on community, particularly his formulation of a ‘community of absence’ as an impossible and infinite community beyond membership, identity and utility.\textsuperscript{82} While the practices associated with, for instance, what Suzanne Lacy termed ‘new genre public art’ in the early 1990s specified a precise community at stake within whichever work, Yang eludes such specificity.\textsuperscript{83} Instead, as is the case with her 2008 work \textit{Domestics of Community} (fig. 9), she arranges mute and discreet objects such as freezers, Venetian blinds and fans into what she terms ‘an associative field’ triggering ‘various sensory experiences’ which, she claims, ‘allegorize and visualize […] an alternative notion of community that

\textsuperscript{79} Möntmann, \textit{New Communities}, 13.


\textsuperscript{81} Nina Möntmann, “Transforming Communities,” ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{82} Blanchot, \textit{The Unavowable Community}, 3.

\textsuperscript{83} This comparison is expanded upon in chapter 5. Lacy, \textit{Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art}.
isn’t bound by traditional limits.’ Möntmann asserts that ‘this relation of imaginary communities of absence and the “places they inhabit” is crucial as a counter-concept to the capitalist notion of the public as a mass of consumers, as well as to the populist, political idea of a unitary group.’ In resisting the forms of instrumentalised communities at stake in community-engaged practices of the early 1990s, Yang asks the spectator to speculate or imagine the community to come, community beyond membership and identity, opening up a negative space to be occupied by these speculations. In this sense she posits the possibility of this future community ‘as a possibility’, in an anticipatory mode, presupposing no concrete actualisation or occurrence.

As is the case with a great deal of post-conceptual practice, such intentions only become apparent through context, including the titling of the work, texts written to accompany it, and its position within an exhibition which is ostensibly oriented towards speculation regarding experimental or anticipatory modes of community. The work in and of itself does not necessarily grant the spectator such license for imagination and as such must be examined within its contexts of exhibition. It is here that the curatorial gains particular significance to the question of contemporary art’s negotiations of community. Möntmann’s curatorial strategy is of course indebted to relational aesthetics. This is perhaps an inevitability given the shared interest in community. As Choi has remarked, ‘so-called participatory projects or “relational aesthetics,” marking a pronounced shift in the contemporary art sphere for the last ten or fifteen years, cannot be explained without the notion of community.’ Instead of the invited gallery-going public constituting the community at stake in, for example, a work by Rirkrit Tiravanija, Möntmann continues Yang’s insistence on implementing communities devoid of a populace throughout the exhibition. As opposed to the communitarian microtopias of relational aesthetics, let alone the more utopian aspirations of modernism, community is only ever broached ‘as a possibility’. The exhibition is not conceived of, as Bourriaud put it, a space outside hegemonic structures that ‘creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and […] encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the “communication zones” that are imposed upon

84 Möntmann, *New Communities*, 127.

85 “Transforming Communities,” 51.

86 Whether this is a shortcoming of contemporary post-conceptual art is a matter of some debate.

87 Choi, “Gymnastics of Community — Asymmetrical Movement,” 35.
us.' Rather, the gallery is conceived of as a site of reflection, anticipation and thought, ‘offering a mechanism by which people will invent anew the communities as well as the places they inhabit.’ This is by no means a universally held faith in the radical potential of ‘small gestures in the actual exhibition space,’ but it nonetheless suggests a renewed belief amongst certain artistic practitioners in the ability of art to contribute actively to a critical political process without seeking to somehow exist outside of the overarching regulatory structures which govern society.

Thinking the Unthinkable

Two modes of art’s ability to negotiate the post-communist condition – and by extension the concept of community – thus emerge; comprehension and anticipation. These are by no means mutually exclusive categories, indeed, there is a great deal shared between the two. Both, fundamentally rest on a faith in art’s ability to act as a form of thinking. Möntmann explicitly states this in the title of her exhibition, ‘Artists rethinking the (mal)function of communities’, while Kenning speaks of art’s use as being analogous with Deleuze’s conception of thinking. Looking more closely at this Deleuzian conceptualisation of thought offers a further insight into how something that has been rendered unthinkable – as is the case with community – may paradoxically be thought, and how this thought may be enacted through art. Deleuze writes of:

>a new image of thought: a thinking that no longer opposes itself as from the outside to the unthinkable or the unthought, but which would lodge the unthinkable, the unthought within itself as thought, and which would be in an essential relationship to it […] a thinking that would of itself be in relation to the obscure.

If we accept that this ‘new image of thought’ hangs upon a ‘relation to the obscure’, then art occupies a privileged position to act as a form of thinking particularly helpful in thinking the unthinkable. Kenning’s transposition of Deleuze’s theory onto art – in which he emphasises art’s predisposition towards the obscure – is persuasive and his artistic practice would seem eminently to support this. And, it is presumably this same understanding of thought that

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88 The inside/outside dichotomy regularly spoken of in debates surrounding art’s autonomy has been addressed with a great deal more rigour in chapter 2. Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, 16.

89 Philip E. Wegner quoted in Möntmann, "Transforming Communities," 51.

90 Ibid., 50.

Badiou and Cassin had in mind when consciously blurring the lines between thinker/philosopher and artist in their discussion of Deleuze and Bacon. Similarly, it is on the basis of this understanding that I deem art to have become a vital constituent of a transversal project of thought essential in negotiating the post-communist condition.
Figure 7: Julian Opie, *Imagine You Are Driving*, 1998

Image from www.julianopie.com

Figure 8: Documentation of Nada Prljka, *Subversion to Red*, 2013

Image from www.calvert22.org
Figure 9: Haegue Yang, *Domestics of Community*, 2008

*Image from www.thepowerplant.org*
PART II: COLLABORATION, PARTICIPATION, PERFORMANCE AND THE NEGOTIATION OF COMMUNITY
4: Temporality, Community and Collaboration

The issues of collaboration and community have become fundamentally entangled in contemporary art theory over recent years. Rarely has the issue of collaborative art practice been spoken of without a more or less explicit reference to, or implication of, community being made. Curator and critic Maria Lind wrote in her essay ‘The Collaborative Turn’ that ‘current ideas about collaboration in art are intertwined with other contemporary notions of what it means to “come together,” “be together,” and “work together,”’ before continuing to discuss Jean-Luc Nancy and political scientist Benedict Anderson’s theoretical engagements with the subject of community during the 1980s.¹ Grant Kester equated contemporary collaborative art practices with the tradition of ‘community art’, stating in 2011 that:

Collaborative work has gained increasing legitimacy in the mainstream art world, as evidenced by the visibility of figures such as Alÿs, Gillick, Hirschhorn and Tiravanija, who employ methodologies (video collectives, workshops, public meetings, etc.) that would have been identified, and possibly dismissed, as “community art” only a generation ago.²

Artist Paul Chan has gone as far as to intimate that collaboration necessarily produces some form of community, arguing that community is:

[…]

what happens when we complete ourselves […] From the smallest collaborative project to the grandest nation-state, the concentrated pursuit of a common cause is what draws individuals into being members, and members into becoming a more perfect union, of and through themselves [emphasis added].³

While there are undoubtedly points of intersection between the two subjects, Chan’s equation seems overly crude. Such a direct and causal positioning of community in relation to collaboration has potentially treacherous ramifications, most notably the reduction of both concepts to the status of ‘ideology’ in the Marxist/Althusserian sense described by Dave Beech as ‘isolated and abstracted as something valuable in itself.’⁴ This potential for


² Grant Kester, The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 9. To further illustrate the entrenchment of the interrelationship between collaboration and community, Kester writes ‘See also community art practices’ in the index entry for ‘collaboration and collective experience’. Ibid., 298.

³ Chan, “The Unthinkable Community.”

collaboration and community to be reduced to ‘ideology’ derives largely from the supposed ‘good feeling’ – as Zygmunt Bauman has put it – that is associated with both concepts. As discussed in chapter 2, Bauman observes that this good feeling, the presumed warmth of community, often cloaks its more problematic characteristics and thus stands as a hindrance to the development of a more critical conception of the term. The same is broadly true of collaboration, as has been argued by Claire Bishop in her 2006 article for *Artforum*, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents’, in which she criticised an ‘ethical turn in art criticism’ that fetishizes the supposed goodness of collaboration. She states that ‘there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond.’

In his essay ‘The Ideology of Duration in the Dematerialised Monument’ Beech places ideology in an oppositional relationship to politics. For Beech, paraphrasing French Marxist thinker Louis Althusser: ‘ideology separates ideas from social life, whereas politics reconnects ideas with social life. Ideology is both pleasurably affirmative and opposed to politics.’ In this chapter, I question conceptions of collaboration and community at the level of the political, reinvesting both ‘ideas’ with an intricacy reflective of the complexity of their manifestations in ‘social life,’ in doing so developing a less affirmative, more critical understanding of their interrelationships. Ultimately, the goal of this analysis is to point to the sheer diversity of (often contradictory) meanings and forms that the word ‘community’ connotes both in contemporary art discourse and beyond, or as Miwon Kwon has stated, the extent to which ‘“community” remains highly ambiguous and problematic’ in the contexts of contemporary art.

In order to highlight the complexity of collaboration, community and their interrelationships in the contexts of contemporary art, I shall focus my attention on the temporalities inherent to various contemporary collaborative practices. Specifically, I wish to isolate two forms of collaboration common within the field contemporary art yet entirely distinct in terms of the temporalities entailed by each. Firstly, there are those practices that are most commonly

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8 Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 6-7.
invoked when collaboration is discussed in the contexts of contemporary art, in which participants interact directly with each other within a shared time and space. These practices — exemplified by examples of what Grant Kester has termed ‘dialogical’ art — privilege presence, shared experience and collective activity as being central to the collaborative process. Secondly, an increasingly common collaborative strategy has emerged in recent years in which direct interaction between participants is not necessary, collaboration instead deriving from the cumulative interventions of isolated and atomised individuals over a given period of time. I term these two forms ‘coeval’ and ‘diachronic’ collaboration respectively, in order to emphasise the intrinsic importance of temporality to both as well as for other, more nuanced reasons that will be developed during the chapter.

I wish to argue that these two temporalities of collaboration, and in turn the forms of community appealed to by each, can be paralleled with two modes of community deemed to exist in ‘social life’, similarly distinguished by their fundamentally opposing temporalities. While it has been understated in the preponderance of theoretical engagements with community, the concept and its manifestations have long been predicated upon issues of presence, immediacy and duration. As political scientist Iris Marion Young has argued, the notion of ‘face-to-face’ community, for example, presupposes that participants within the community interact according to a shared time. It is this mode of community that is at stake in examples of coeval collaboration. The advent and multiplication of online communities, however, has entailed the emergence of a parallel conception of the temporality of community. Examples such as the ‘Wikipedia community’ are not constituted by contemporariness, but by the cumulative and isolated actions of their individual members, and can accordingly be equated with the mode of community at stake in diachronic collaborative practices.

After an initial elaboration on the intersections between time and community, this chapter will develop these temporal parallels between artistic collaboration and community, comparing firstly the temporalities implicated in ‘face-to-face’ communities and examples of coeval collaboration in art, and secondly those implicated in online communities and diachronic collaborative practices.

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9 It is this form of collaboration that is the focus of Lind, “The Collaborative Turn.”


11 Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,” 2.
Time and Community

It is a somewhat unusual step to approach the subjects of collaboration and community through temporality. Questions of time and temporality are rarely broached by the theorists of ‘postmodern community’, with the exception of William Corlett, who in his book *Community Without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance* devotes significant space to a reading of time and community through the writing of Jacques Derrida.  

Nor does time play any substantial role in the more noteworthy nineteenth-century theorisations of community by, among others, Ferdinand Tönnies. However, as Michelle Bastian has argued in an unpublished doctoral thesis, the concepts of community and temporality are immanently interwoven, each informing the other. Accordingly, prior to broaching the question of collaboration in contemporary art, I shall briefly interrogate the relationships between community and temporality, focussing initially on the sociality of time, and then on the temporality of community.

Social Time

Bastian’s thesis, entitled ‘Communities out of Joint: A Consideration of the Role of Temporality in Rethinking Community’, departs from the proposition that ‘in seeking to reconceptualise “community”, one also needs to reconceptualise “time.”’ She argues that ‘Time is not a simple fact of existence, but is a socially mediated experience that shapes, among other things, the way we construct and manage our experiences and understandings of community.’ Through a feminist critique of what is portrayed as a ‘neglect [on the part of continental philosophy] of the role of the social in shaping the experience and conceptualisation of time,’ and a ‘failure to recognise that objective or linear time are not natural or universal’, Bastian positions the social at the heart of her intervention into the philosophy of time. This accusation of the existence of a blind spot on the part of philosophy is not shared by Peter Osborne, who, in 1995, in *The Politics of Time* isolated what he saw at

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12 Corlett, *Community without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance*.
14 Ibid., 24.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 31.
the three ‘conventional’ philosophical perspectives on time. He lists these in an article of the same name published in 1994 as:

[…] the objective or cosmological perspective (concerned with the time of nature); the subjective, lived or phenomenological perspective (concerned with duration or individual time-consciousness); and the intersubjective or social perspective (associated with a historical multiplicity of forms of time-consciousness which together make up the time of history or ‘historical time’).

He continues to state that this third ‘intersubjective or social perspective […] is generally taken to come in some disputed way between cosmological and phenomenological time. He notes the examples of calendars and clocks as manifestations of this form of intersubjective time, in that they ‘objectify subjective, phenomenological forms of time in collective, institutionalised forms.’ Osborne and Bastian’s logics here converge. Such collective and institutionalised forms of intersubjective time regulation and management must be seen, according to both writers, as what Bastian calls ‘specific cultural representation[s]’, and accordingly are wholly social products. In developing this point both reference sociologist Emile Durkheim, who observed that a ‘calendar expresses the rhythm of collective activities while at the same time its function is to assure their regularity.’ This understanding of time was dubbed ‘social time’ by Pitirim Sorokin and Robert Merton in a 1937 article in the American Journal of Sociology.

While Bastian, Osborne and Durkheim see social or intersubjective time as one particular variant of or perspective on time, in interaction and coexistence with other forms, media theorist Robert Hassan goes further. He notes that while ‘everything has its own time, the time of duration, of cyclicality, of growth or ageing, of birth and death […] we move

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 5.
through these and create connections between them with hardly a thought.'

He concludes: ‘Time is social [emphasis added].’ Hassan’s argument would uproot ‘social’ from the position of a qualifying adjective designating a singular form of time among many, to a position of equivalence. Whether one follows Hassan’s step or not, what is crucial to take from discussions of sociality and time in the fields of philosophy and sociology is their fundamental imbrication. Time, as we experience it through clocks, calendars and so on, cannot be dissociated from both its social construction (it ‘expresses the rhythm of collective activities’) and its subsequent determination of the social (‘its function is to assure their regularity’).

Accordingly, there are necessarily intersections between the concepts of time and community. Their relationship does not, though, flow in one direction, as Durkheim’s dialectical description of the calendar suggests. In order for a fuller understanding of the relationships between time and community, and their theorisations, to be reached one cannot look simply at social time, but also at the temporalities of community.

The Temporalities of Community

Although, as stated above, theoretical examinations of community that have implicated the question of time in their analysis are rare, there have been, over the past 20 years, demonstrations of a heightened awareness of the import of temporality to community. Sociologists Graham Crow and Graham Allan have noted that ‘even those writers who have attempted to analyse the different dimensions of “community” have tended to neglect the dimension of “community time”.’ In an article published in *Time & Society* in 1995, they argue that, although the issue of community had recently been subject to more nuanced attention than that provided by Tönnies’s prevailing analysis, the disregard for the question of time has been a major oversight.

The distinction between communities as places, social structures and meanings has gone some way to rehabilitating the concept of community, but insufficient attention has been paid to the dynamic interconnectedness of these three dimensions. Recognition of community time as community's fourth dimension allows processes of community development and change

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25 Ibid.

to be analysed more effectively and promises to provide a firmer foundation for new typologies of community.\textsuperscript{27}

By way of an example, he notes that, although locality is deemed to be central to conceptions of community, the two do not immediately equate. In order for locality to engender community, time must be considered. ‘Time is part of the reason why physical proximity is not always associated with sociability, since it takes time for social contacts to develop and, conversely, for community traditions to die out.’\textsuperscript{28} This privileging of the question of time within the contexts of a discussion of community is echoed by theorist Jack Petranker, writing in 2007.

To function as a community is to share a similar sense of time. A community is bound together by a similar history of events in time, a similar vision of the future, and similar temporal rhythms. In addition, a community is bound together by a particular understanding of time and temporality, one in which each new generation […] must be socialized.\textsuperscript{29}

While Crow and Petranker emphasise the significance of time in the functioning of community, other interrelationships have also been discussed elsewhere. The influence of Tönnies’s concept of Gemeinschaft, mentioned by Crow, on theorists over the intervening century since the publication of Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft in 1887, precipitated what Raymond Williams saw as a curiosity of community – ‘that it has always gone.’\textsuperscript{30} Indeed, Tönnies is unequivocal in associating this form of community with a pre-capitalist existence, capitalism entailing a shift towards Gesellschaft. It has, therefore, ceased to be a possibility, given contemporary political contexts. As such, the desire for an organic, pure community – as discussed by Williams, and elaborated by Bauman – is necessarily nostalgic and retrospective. Jean-Luc Nancy argued in The Inoperative Community that ‘until this day history has been thought on the basis of a lost community - one to be regained or reconstituted... always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds.’\textsuperscript{31}

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 162.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 152.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, 277.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Nancy, The Inoperative Community, 9.
\end{enumerate}
Conversely, and as I have argued in chapter 3, futurity also plays a significant role in the conception of community, as Bauman’s reconfiguration of Williams’s characterisation of community from ‘that it has always gone’ to ‘that it is always in the future’ attests.\textsuperscript{32} For Bauman, community is an impossibility and an abstraction that is perpetually worked towards, but never reached. It exists as an ever-receding horizon. John Roberts makes the same point through his description of community as ‘a continuous, unfolding space of possibility.’\textsuperscript{33} In all three of the respects described here, community and temporality are fundamentally intertwined, and as Crow argues, to overlook the question of time is to engage in an incomplete interrogation of the question of community.

**Coeval Collaboration**

Central to Ferdinand de Saussure’s structural linguistics is the binary opposition of synchrony and diachrony. In his *Course on General Linguistics* he remarks that ‘everything that relates to the static side of our science is synchronic; everything that has to do with evolution is diachronic.’\textsuperscript{34} In their most elementary senses, the two terms denote simply ‘in time’ and ‘through time’ respectively. It is thus, for instance, that Janet Kraynak uses them in ‘Art History’s Present Tense’.\textsuperscript{35} However, as Peter Osborne has argued, the precise meaning of the terms in the wake of their usage by Saussure is somewhat more complex. Of particular difficulty for Osborne is synchrony.

Synchrony is not con-temporality, but a-temporality: a purely analytical space in which the temporality immanent to the objects of inquiry is repressed […] Structuralism explicitly excludes the actively constitutive phenomenological present, the durational ‘now’ from its framework.”\textsuperscript{36}

Synchrony implies, according to Osborne, an abstracted, a-temporal space. Diachrony, by extension, ‘orders synchronic relations one after the other.’\textsuperscript{37} For the purposes of the distinction between modes of collaboration that I wish to make in this chapter, diachrony –

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\textsuperscript{32} Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, 3.


\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
despite the shortcoming that it refers back to an abstract synchrony – will suffice. It adequately connotes the accumulation of individual events through which I wish to discuss both online community and certain forms of artistic collaboration. Synchrony on the other hand seems insufficient, for the primary reason that it denies duration. As shall be expanded upon later, duration is essential to an understanding of the temporality of community. Accordingly, I follow Osborne’s argument in arriving at the concept of the coeval as a more adequate term for the forms of collaboration at stake. Osborne defines this as:

The concept of the coeval, through which Fabian registers the co-existence of different temporalities without either reducing them to a con-temporaneous present or removing them from time altogether. Times which are coeval co-exist chronologically in a way which is determined by the social dimension of their spatial relations.\textsuperscript{38}

Anthropologist Johannes Fabian, to whom Osborne refers in this passage, argued in 2002 that social interaction is predicated upon a coeval conception of time.

Social interaction presupposes intersubjectivity, which in turn is inconceivable without assuming that the participants involved are coeval, i.e. share the same Time. In fact, further conclusions can be drawn from this basic postulate to the point of realizing that for human communication to occur, coevalness has to be \textit{created}. Communication is, ultimately, about creating shared Time.\textsuperscript{39}

It thus seems doubly pertinent to depart from the structuralist synchrony-diachrony dichotomy in favour of the more suitable pairing of coevalness and diachrony. It is to the former that I shall first turn.

\textbf{Presence, Immediacy, Duration and the ‘Ideal of Community’}

In an article published in 1986, entitled ‘The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference’, Iris Marion Young claimed that:

Radical theorists and activists often appeal to an ideal of community as an alternative to the oppression and exploitation they argue characterize capitalist patriarchal society. Such appeals do not explicitly articulate the meaning of the concept of community, but rather tend to evoke an affective value.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{40} Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,” 1.
In a subsequent revision of this article, she observed that while the ‘ideal of community is an abstraction, it is most commonly embodied in the form of ‘small, face-to-face, decentralized units.’ She characterised this ideal of community as being grounded upon the interrelated temporal concepts of presence and immediacy. In focussing her critique on these two concepts, she recalls the focus of Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction; namely, the metaphysics of presence. Following Derrida, we may define presence as ‘the privilege of the actual present, the now.’ For Young, immediacy – that is, an absence of mediation, or ‘a co-presence in which persons experience a simultaneity of speaking and hearing’ - is essentially imbricated with presence. It is, according to Young, in the form of face-to-face communities that the presence and immediacy central to the ideal of community are most embodied, in that they are seen to constitute ‘a model of social relations that are not mediated by space and time distancing.’

Young, though, is strongly critical of this ideal of community and its practical manifestations. ‘This ideal of immediate presence of subjects to one another,’ she argues, ‘is a metaphysical illusion. Even a face-to-face relation between two people is mediated by voice and gesture.’ She does however acknowledge that the ideal of community is an ‘understandable dream,’ and that this understanding of community has become dominant, in large part due to a desire to escape the alienation attendant to industrialisation and urbanisation.

Similarly, it is alienation deriving from the shift to industrialised capitalist society that, according to Tönnies, precipitates the move from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft as the dominant form of social relation. It is in Tönnies concept of Gemeinschaft that a third temporal factor at play within Young’s ‘ideal of community’ emerges: duration. Tönnies states that ‘in Gemeinschaft we are united from the moment of our birth with our own folk

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43 Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," 231.
44 Ibid., 228.
45 Ibid., 231.
46 Ibid., 228.
47 Tönnies, Community and Civil Society, 19.
for better or for worse.’\textsuperscript{48} It is from this durational quality, Tönnies argues, that the nostalgic appeal of \textit{Gemeinschaft} in industrialised society emerges. ‘Community means genuine, enduring life together, whereas Society is a transient and superficial thing.’\textsuperscript{49} Duration makes \textit{Gemeinschaft} seem more ‘real’ and ‘organic’ than the ‘mechanical aggregate’ of \textit{Gesellschaft}.\textsuperscript{50} It is these three temporal qualities – presence, immediacy and duration – which together constitute the coeval nature of the ideal of community and, by extension, the face-to-face manifestation of this ideal.

\textbf{Dialogical Art and Cœval Collaboration}

As Grant Kester has noted, ‘we can identify many modes of collaborative practice, many ways of being together, in contemporary art.’\textsuperscript{51} Following the extended refutation of issues of artistic autonomy and the modernist myth of artistic genius, collaboration (particularly with participants from beyond the realm of the ‘art world’) proliferated over the second half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{52} Likewise, it diversified. Even without taking into account artist-artist collaborations, collaborative practices have taken a great variety of forms, and vary according to a number of different criteria (number of collaborators, location, forms of labour entailed etc.). It is, therefore, a difficult term to strictly define. In her text ‘The Collaborative Turn’, Maria Lind sources her definition from the ‘collaboratively-compiled Wikipedia’ as follows: ‘collaboration refers abstractly to all processes wherein people work together.’\textsuperscript{53} She comments that it is, ‘as the above definition, suggests, an open-ended concept […] Collaboration becomes an umbrella term for diverse working methods that require more than one participant.’\textsuperscript{54} She offers more specificity in outlining the focus of her text: ‘collaboration where some form of conscious partnership takes place, whether interaction, participation, group activity or another sort of intended exchange and process of ‘working together’.\textsuperscript{55} It is roughly this form of collaboration, that I am here referring to as

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} Kester, \textit{The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context}, 2.


\textsuperscript{53} Lind, "The Collaborative Turn," 17.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 16.
coeval collaboration, which I argue, in its privileging of presence, immediacy and duration, shares a great deal with the forms of community outlined above.

The category of coeval collaboration refers to practices in which collaboration is enacted according to a shared temporality. That is to say, participants collaborate directly with one another over a given time as a constituent component of the process of artistic production. This encompasses the majority of collaborative practices comprising what Lind has called ‘the collaborative turn’ (which she dates back to around 1990). This categorisation is not, however, an attempt to homogenise what is, as stated above, a vastly diverse and heterogeneous field of practice, rather it is a temporal categorisation, denoting specifically the temporal structures common to these works. I do not deny that according to any number of other criteria, the works I classify as coeval collaboration differ greatly.

Coeval collaboration is intrinsic to what Grant Kester has termed dialogical art – ‘site-specific collaborative projects that unfold through extended interaction and shared labor.’ Kester’s description of an example of the Austrian collective WochenKlausur’s work, Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women (1994-95) that opens his book Conversation Pieces aptly summarises this particular temporality of collaboration.

The first project began on a warm spring day in 1994, as a small pleasure boat set off for a three-hour cruise on Lake Zurich. Seated around a table in the main cabin were an unusual gathering of politicians, journalists, sex workers, and activists from the city of Zurich. They had been brought together by the Austrian arts collective WochenKlausur as part of an “intervention” in drug policy. Their task was simple: to have a conversation.

In the case of WochenKlausur the process of conversation can be viewed as a form of collaboration due to its essential orientation towards specific goals. WochenKlausur member Pascale Jeannée has explained that ‘if we do not define a concrete goal we will not succeed in bringing about any real change.’ Given the ‘unusual gathering’ of people, it must be presumed that the artists deemed that their concrete goal would not be achievable through their own isolated action, or by the isolated actions of any one set of participants in their

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56 Ibid.
57 Kester, The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context, 9.
58 Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art, 1.
project. Rather, their goal could only be realised through this conjunction of constituencies. Accordingly, the outcome of their work is collaboratively produced.

**Presence and Immediacy**

Kester’s description of the work highlights the centrality of presence to the collaborative process of WochenKlausur’s practice. The ‘unusual gathering’ of participants are seated at a table, ‘brought together’ by the artists. It is thus implied that the direct interaction of the participants is crucial to the functioning of the project. As WochenKlausur member Wolfgang Zinggl states: ‘This type of art does not need the [artist as] prophet or priest […] Instead it arises from intersubjective communication and reflection on the possibilities of taking part in a changing world.’

While Kester focuses on the spatial implications of this process – ‘it was necessary for WochenKlausur to create a discursive space that was to some extent insulated’ – the temporal presence of their actions must not be overlooked. It is explicitly stated that this was a three-hour cruise, thus the artists consciously generated a discursive time as well as a discursive space within which collaboration took place. Furthermore, while spatial insulation derives from the choice to stage the event on a boat, this also precipitates the creation of temporal insulation. The artists manufactured an artificial three-hour window of uninterrupted presence during which the participants could work towards the concrete goals of the project, a process which it is presumed could not have happened had the participants’ standard temporalities not been interrupted. As Young would have it, a face-to-face community is created, albeit temporarily, that is ‘not mediated by space and time distancing.’

The heightened institutional and critical interest garnered by WochenKlausur’s practice during the late 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century – particularly in the wake of its positioning at the forefront of Kester’s influential book – is consonant with a shift observed by Kwon in *One Place after the Other* from a broad tendency towards site specificity in art to a drive towards community specificity. She argues that:

> [...] the move away from site specificity is a logical step toward a more intimate and meaningful relationship between the artist and his/her audience, a way of shrinking the distance between the traditionally separate poles of production and reception.

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60 Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, 101.

61 Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,” 228.

The shift outlined by Kwon here is precisely one towards a privileging of presence and immediacy as being considered vital constituents of a more authentic form of collaboration. Although this claim seems to correctly portray the proclivities of the institutions of art at the point of her writing, Kwon’s claim that the shift to ‘community-specificity’ entailed a shrinking of the distance between artist and audience, or production and reception, seems flawed. WochenKlausur’s work, like that of other artists described by Kester (Park Fiction, Stephen Willats and Suzanne Lacy, among others), is invariably exhibited through carefully selected, edited and curated layers of documentation. These obfuscate and distance the collaborative process from what is – despite the democratic claims of such practices – the primary audience, who receive the work at a level of considerable remove (temporally, spatially and affectively). While the exponents of dialogical aesthetics certainly privileged presence and immediacy as guarantors of authenticity, this presence and immediacy operated between artist(s) and a non-art group of collaborators, rather than between artist and audience.

This complex point may be elucidated further via comparison with the fetishisation of presence and immediacy that accompanied the rise of performance and body art during the 1960s and 70s. Of particular currency is a long-running debate between artist and writer Catherine Elwes and art historian Amelia Jones. In a footnote from her paper ‘The Artist is Present’, written in 2011, Jones quotes Elwes as follows:

Claims of presence and authenticity are extremely common in discussions of performance art both from art-historical and performance studies points of view. For example, film and art history scholar Catherine Elwes noted in 1985, “[p]erformance art offers women a unique vehicle for making that direct unmediated access [to the audience]. Performance is about the ‘real-life’ presence of the artist […]. Nothing stands between spectator and performer”. One may read from Elwes’s position that the guarantor of authenticity in performance practices was the presence and immediacy of audience to artist. This in turn usurped the

63 Claire Bishop makes a similar distinction between what she calls ‘first-hand participants and secondary audience’. I am consciously using the phrase ‘primary audience’ to accentuate the fact that these practices are in the first instance oriented towards reception by an art audience in gallery contexts. Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, 19.


65 I here amend Elwes’s use of the phrase ‘presence of’ to the less natural ‘presence to’. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues in The Birth to Presence, presence should be conceived of as relational: presence to
more traditional model, which placed the art object between artist and audience, operating as
indexical of the touch (presence) of the artist. In the case of dialogical aesthetics, mediation
is once again introduced, the document replacing the art object. This does not though remove
presence and immediacy from the equation. The authenticity of the dialogical artwork – and
it is the promise of authenticity upon which the power of dialogical aesthetics rests – is
predicated on a reported presence and immediacy of artist to non-art collaborators in more
‘real’ and social contexts away from the compromised spaces of the gallery and the museum.
Although Jones correctly observes that the perspective offered by Elwes disregards the levels
of representation and mediation inherent to performance – the body acting as
representational, for instance – this perspective has nonetheless been widespread and
foundational to performance practices. Indeed, she echoes Young in recalling Derrida,
accusing Elwes of falling into the trap of a ‘a modernist investment in the metaphysics of
presence.’ Arguably, dialogical aesthetics is likewise beholden to such a metaphysics.

Duration

Central to Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women is the three-hour duration of the boat
journey. As discussed earlier, coevalness does not entail an abstracted and instantaneous
present, but a durational one. Indeed, this emphasis on duration defines WochenKlausur’s
wider practice. Their website outlines the normal procedure for their projects as taking place
over ‘a strictly limited timeframe - usually eight weeks – [which] gives rise to an unusual
concentration of the […] participants' energies, allowing the planned interventions to be
realized very quickly.’ While significantly longer than the three hours of the boat journey,
WochenKlausur are at pains to emphasise that they do not consider eight weeks to be a
considerable amount of time. It is hard though, given that in comparison with the
predominance of contemporary art practices this constitutes a substantial period of
engagement, to not view this, to a degree, as an act of false modesty. Nonetheless, this
extended durational element does not impinge on the coevalness of their collaboration,
particularly given that the period is defined by the presence and immediacy – and as they
state, ‘concentration’ – afforded by the extended present of the work.

rather than presence of something or someone. Jean-Luc Nancy, The Birth to Presence, trans. Brian


67 Amelia Jones, Body Art/Performing the Subject (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998),
36.

Kester notes that ‘the relative integration of the artist within a given context, site, or milieu over time can result in projects that precipitate creative, counter-normative insight.’ Although Kester seems to refer to site specificity more than he does community specificity – to return to Kwon’s language – the same belief in durational presence as offering the source of some ‘counter-normative insight’ pertains in either case. A heightened, and rather artificially constructed, example of this can be seen in the work of Artur Żmijewski, who commonly employs an exaggeratedly durational presence as the basis for collaboration in his practice. His 2007 video work Them – discussed at greater length in the subsequent chapter – is exemplary of this. Them documents a series of three workshops in which four small groups representing various politically or religiously affiliated communities first create, and then subsequently modify artworks embodying each group’s identification. As in WochenKlausur’s Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women, the artist constructs a spatially and temporally isolated present in which collaboration takes place, the groups meeting in a disused office block in Warsaw. The antagonisms and unlikely coalitions that emerge can certainly be deemed to provide some ‘creative, counter-normative insight’, despite lacking the orientation towards a ‘concrete goal’ of WochenKlausur’s work. In both cases, duration is crucial.

It is the faith in a durational form of collaboration that Beech, alluded to above, criticises as ‘ideological’. He argues that ‘in contemporary thinking around art’s relationship with its publics, duration is ideological because it is isolated and abstracted as something valuable in itself.’ For Beech, duration has become detached from its ‘social life’ manifestations, and as such is no longer critically engaged in any pertinent manner. Rather, a tendency has emerged which positions duration as an essential constituent of any positive, or authentic, collaboration. The same could be said of both immediacy and presence. Together these three criteria both characterise the vast preponderance of contemporary collaborative practices commonly discussed in art theory and history, and constitute the most prized qualities of the collaborative process, despite the objections of the likes of Jones and Beech. It is also these three criteria that align coeval collaboration with the face-to-face and ideal communities outlined by Young, both insisting on a certain form of immediate, present and durational encounter as constituting the base unit of their functioning. However, due to various technological and social factors, an adherence to the notions of community outlined by

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69 Kester, The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context, 115.

Young has become increasingly problematic. Central to this shift has been an alteration in the way that time is both experienced and theorised. Beech concludes his article as follows:

Duration is problematic because it is presented as a solution for art’s social contradictions, whereas the only viable political solution must be to problematise time for art [...] Let’s think instead about delay, interruption, stages, flows, of instantaneous performances and lingering documents, of temporary objects and permanent mementos, of repetition, echo and seriality.\(^1\)

It is precisely this task on which my attention will now be focussed.

**Diachronic Collaboration**

**Temporality under Accelerated Conditions**

At the outset of Petranker’s essay, two quotations from Vint Cerf and Tim Berners-Lee, two of the foundational figures in the history of the Internet and the World Wide Web, are analysed. Cerf is quoted as saying that ‘[the internet] is not merely a technology but a new way of cooperating, sharing and caring,’ while Berners-Lee states that ‘the vision I have for the Web is about anything being potentially connected with anything. It is a vision that provides us with new freedom.’\(^2\) Petranker summises that ‘although the point is not always made explicit, the shift being celebrated here is a shift in the very nature of time and space.’\(^3\) The grandiosity of this claim is not entirely misplaced. The Internet, as Petranker mentions, constitutes the most profound intervention into our social existence since the invention of the telegraph in the nineteenth century. While he is at pains to also recognise more pessimistic appraisals of the possibilities and impacts of the Internet, he emphasises that both celebratory and apprehensive camps freely acknowledge the gravity of the societal changes entailed by the invention of the Internet. The impact of the growth of ‘network society’ on temporality is perhaps most concisely summarised anecdotally by Swiss watch manufacturer Swatch’s attempt to popularise InternetTime, a product launched in 1998 with the aim of unifying the disparate time zones of the world, and thus better reflecting the globalism and interconnectedness entailed by the internet. Media theorist Geert Lovink recounts the birth (and death) of InternetTime at length in his book *Dark Fiber*.

\(^1\) Ibid., 325.


\(^3\) Ibid., 174.
As we enter the third millennium, there has been an implosion of time into real time, and an emergent global consciousness that is reshaping the ways we have come to think about time. The legacy of our inherited 19th-century temporal model segmenting the planet into 24 separate time zones (and two simultaneous dates) increasingly no longer fits well with our nascent third-millennium global temporal perceptions.  

‘If the Internet was unifying the globe through a common electronic space,’ wrote digital media theorist Tiziana Terranova in 2004, ‘then Swatch thought of itself as the most obvious candidate to provide the single time to match.’ Their plan comprised the division of the day into 1000 ‘beats’, each equivalent to 1 minute 26.4 seconds. This system would be centred on a meridian running through Swatch’s Swiss headquarters in Biel. Swatch’s press releases proclaimed that InternetTime ‘represents a completely new global concept of time: No Time Zones. No Geographical Borders.’ Although Lovink correctly dismisses Swatch’s inevitably doomed attempts at a reconstitution of global time management as a marketing ploy, and an example of the ‘late 1990s corporate takeover of the net,’ it is nonetheless exemplary of a pervasive sense of a fundamental shift in time and how it is experienced in the wake of the Internet. Swatch’s failure, perhaps, was its insistence that the invention of the Internet would have a unifying effect on temporality. In reality the opposite has been the case. Rather than the unified space of the Internet precipitating a correlative unified time, temporality has become increasingly fractionalised in light of what sociologist Carmen Leccardi has referred to as ‘high-speed society.’

Leccardi argued that, while acceleration – as a necessary impulse of capital – has characterised the last 200 years, ‘contemporary modernity’ has witnessed an explosive boost in the rate of this acceleration. Franco Berardi has explained this by correlating it with the shift from material to cognitive labour as the dominant mode of production (at least in the

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76 Lovink, *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture*, 151.

77 Ibid., 153.

78 Ibid., 152.


80 Ibid., 25-27.
This hyperacceleration in turn has effected a widening schism between what Peter Osborne defined as ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ time. Accordingly, our experience of ‘intersubjective’ time has become destabilised. Leccardi observed that the ‘while the process of acceleration spreads […] the feeling of a lack of time increases, meaning that the time saved through technology has been swallowed up by the process of social acceleration.’

Although technologies permit us to act more promptly and more efficiently, the speeding up of our ‘rhythms of life’ nullifies the productive effects of this acceleration. This in turn leads to a perpetual contraction of the present, a diminishing of the time available for current action.

When the accelerated sequence of social changes chained to the speed of technological innovation, ties itself to the acceleration of the rhythms of life in a globalized space, the temporal dimension of the present will also contract.

It is from this process, according to Leccardi, that the schism between objective and subjective temporalities emerges. ‘The contraction/reduction of the present makes the present as temporal aggregate disappear and reduces its existence to a cloud of moving (but not ordered) particles.’ This disturbance of the ‘temporal aggregate’ by the acceleration of ‘high-speed society’ is neatly exemplified in the reception of news via online outlets. Prior to the widespread availability of the Internet, news was primarily received through either television or radio news reports, or the printed press. While newspapers represent a more complicated example, comparing the reception of news on television with its reception through online sources demonstrates a profound alteration in the social experience of time.

Although news reports occurred (and continue to occur) sporadically throughout the day, real social significance in the UK in the years preceding the popularisation of the Internet was bestowed upon the BBC’s 6pm and 9pm (later 10pm) news broadcasts. A large proportion of the population received the news at these standardised and set times. Of course, this means that news was received at a significant delay (by our current standards). An event

81 When Marx speaks of relative surplus value, he’s speaking about acceleration: if you want a growth in productivity—which is also a growth in surplus value—you need to accelerate work time. But when the main tool for production ceases to be material labor and becomes cognitive labor, acceleration enters another phase, another dimension, because an increase in semicapitalist productivity comes essentially from the acceleration of the info-sphere—the environment from which information arrives in your brain.’ Franco Berardi, “Time, Acceleration, and Violence,” e-flux, no. 27 (2011): unpaginated.

82 Leccardi, “New Temporal Perspectives in the ”High-Speed Society”,“ 27.

83 Ibid., 30.

84 Ibid.
which took place at 8am would not be able to be reported in the morning newspapers and would not appear on a widely watched news bulletin until 6pm, thus engendering a 10-hour latency in reception.

The advent of 24-hour rolling news channels such as BBC News 24 in 1997, and online news services such as the BBC’s website (also launched in 1997) instigated an alteration in the social reception of news, which has continued to develop through the growth of social networks and the smartphone, each new innovation decreasing the latency period between an event occurring and it being received. Perhaps the most significant recent development in this narrative has been the growth of Twitter. The same event, taking place at 8am, may now be relayed within seconds via Twitter, decreasing the latency period hypothetically to the amount of time it takes to input the 140 characters of a Tweet. However, it is this contraction of actual latency time that counter-intuitively accentuates the experience of latency. Watching the 6 o’clock news constituted a shared social and temporal experience in which the news was received through a ‘temporal aggregate’. In the case of Twitter, by the time you have refreshed the page, a major story may already be trending, it may have engulfed the newsfeed, and each individual tweet may have received hundreds of ‘retweets’ and replies. Without any mutual and shared sense of ‘now’, temporality becomes fractured and the seamless conjunction of the isolated and the social disturbed.  

85 As Jacques Derrida stated in 2001 – and it is still eminently pertinent now – ‘our time is perhaps the time in which it is no longer so easy for us to say “our time.”’  

86 Online Communities: The Case of Wikipedia

Changes in sociality and communication effected by the advent and popularisation of the Internet had a profound impact on the theory of community. Cultural theorist Linda Carroli noted in 1997 that ‘clearly, the traditional unitary construct of community cannot be simply transposed into a virtual environment.’ 87 The ‘consensus, rationality and collectivity’ Carroli equates with ‘the traditional notion of community’ is displaced online by ‘irony,

85 T.J. Clark, in his review of Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities, similarly argues that the decline of the shared temporal rituals, such as the morning reading of the newspaper, in the age of ‘screen capitalism’ has engendered a destabilisation of the imagined community of the nation. T.J. Clark, "In a Pomegranate Chandelier," London Review of Books 28, no. 18 (2006): 7.


fragmentation, and multiplicity. While Carroli is correct to note that the Internet presents a number of obstacles for the continued pertinence of traditional notions of community, her claim that, ‘in a virtual environment, collaboration displaces community,’ seems difficult to accept for a number of reasons. Firstly, and as has been demonstrated at length above, collaboration and community cannot simply be substituted for one another, rather their relationship is more complex and interwoven. Secondly, and here we benefit from a hindsight not afforded to Carroli writing in the first decade of the World Wide Web’s existence, and prior to the advent of the more socially oriented era of Web 2.0, the term ‘community’ has proliferated online. Self-identifying communities abound, and while of course they cannot be characterised according to a ‘traditional unitary construct of community’, their identification must not be dismissed. The Wikimedia entry for ‘The Wikipedia Community’ – an exemplary self-identifying online community – defines it as follows:

At the essential level, community occurs anytime two or more people come into harmony (not necessarily agreement) around any subject. Community arises as a function of interest and participation. At some point beyond two participants, a community is actually a community of communities. In a larger sense, the Wikipedia community includes all casual and/or anonymous editors, ideological supporters, current readers and even potential readers of all the language versions of Wikipedia-the-encyclopedia. This covers a majority of the earth’s population.

While the universal claims of The Wikipedia Community strongly echo those of postmodern community, what is of particular interest in the present argument are the forms of temporality and collaboration inherent to the functioning of this particular community, the primary purpose of which is ‘in helping Wikipedia-the-project make Wikipedia-the-encyclopedia.’

‘Wikipedia-the-encyclopedia’ is comprised of over 4 million individual articles (in the case of the English language version). Each of these articles is the result of the collaborative labour of The Wikipedia Community, who contribute to, edit, modify and structure its contents. This collaboration, however, does not occur in the sense described in relation to

88 Ibid., 359.
89 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
face-to-face community; rather it is constituted by the amalgamation and consolidation of the individual labours of each contributor to the article, working in isolation both spatially and temporally. At the time of writing, the three most recent contributors to Wikipedia’s article on ‘Community’ (excluding bots) were ‘Grantbow’, ‘Airplaneman’ and ‘M0rphzone’. Each other these members of The Wikipedia Community’s interactions with Wikipedia are logged on their own Contributions pages. In isolation, each of these pages acts as an archive of the user’s individual and atomised temporality. However, the cumulative, collaborative results of their labour is registered on the Revision History section of the article on ‘Community’. Although this page would appear to constitute – returning to Leccardi’s language – a ‘temporal aggregate’, it is not representative of how time is experienced by each member of the community at the moment of their interaction. It is a post-hoc order, the superimposition of a rationalised, constructed temporality onto the ‘cloud of moving (but not ordered) particles,’ which contributed to the page. This is to say that The Wikipedia Community does not collaborate coevally, but diachronically. The same can be said for the vast majority of self-identifying online communities. Although video conferencing innovations such as Skype and Google Hangouts have attempted to reintroduce a level of presence and simultaneity into online communication, on the whole the temporalities intrinsic to the structures of the Internet preclude the possibility for community to operate on a coeval basis.

Oda Projesi, Cyprien Gaillard and Diachrony

In recent years an analogous mode of collaborative practice has become increasingly visible in the field of contemporary art. Although by no means intentionally mirroring the forms of collaboration inherent to Wikipedia and other online communities, a number of parallels may be drawn, most notably the diachronic temporality upon which collaboration is based. French artist Cyprien Gaillard’s The Recovery of Discovery (2011, fig. 10), despite eschewing many of the more recognisable trappings of collaborative art practices, is


94 It should be noted that my intention here is not to venerate Wikipedia. It is merely to suggest that Wikipedia offers an example of a self-identifying community which neither requires nor permits the coeval temporality of traditional or ‘face-to-face communities’. From many other perspectives, not least the question of labour, the model of Wikipedia is problematic at best. See, for instance, David Hesmondhalgh, “User-Generated Content, Free Labour and the Cultural Industries,” ephemera 10, no. 3/4 (2010): 278.
exemplary of this form of diachronic collaboration. Initially comprised of a large pyramid constructed from 72000 bottles of Turkish Efes Pilsner, the monument was, at the instruction of the artist, dismantled and drunk over the course of the three months it was on display at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin. Art historian Hal Foster relates the work’s evolution as follows:

You entered KW through a courtyard, then walked down a narrow corridor to a viewing platform. Below you, in a basement gallery, was a large pyramid of blue boxes perfectly stacked — if, that is, you happened to be the first one to the opening. By the time I got there, the pyramid was still intact but its contents had been ransacked, for the boxes held seventy-two thousand bottles of beer free for the taking and giving, drinking and disposing. By the end of the show, the ziggurat was a ruin, a mound of soggy cardboard with a perimeter of broken glass.95

While the opening of the exhibition gathered together a large group to take part in the ransacking of the pyramid in a coeval state, for the remainder of the period of exhibition the individual audience member’s involvement in and experience of the project was isolated and atomised. As is suggested by Foster’s description, the experience of entering the gallery space was singular to each visitor, the installation being encountered at various points along a progression from formal structure to soggy ruin. Furthermore, the invitation to partake in the destruction of the pyramid meant that each visitor played an active role in conditioning the experience of subsequent visitors, having pushed the work further towards entropic chaos. This second factor demarcates the work as collaborative in a manner similar to the example of Wikipedia.

In the contexts of The Recovery of Discovery, destruction is an act of production. The ruin is being made. It is indeed the object of the artist’s intention, the initial pyramid merely functioning as a point from which to depart in the direction of entropy. The act of removing a bottle and subsequently drinking it, in the contexts of the exhibition, is a productive act. However, an isolated, individual intervention into the installation is insufficient to carry the work on its journey from pyramid to chaos. Rather, it is the accumulation of these interventions that produces the eventual ruin, and accordingly it is the collaborative action of the participants that is implicated in the work, despite the structural preclusion of any presence, immediacy or durational encounter. Although the work could be read as an invitation to sociality or conviviality, offering the opportunity for an encounter in the tradition of, for example, relational aesthetics, this seems largely incidental to the work.

While vastly different in temperature and tone, Turkish collective Oda Projesi’s collaboration with German artist Nadin Reschke, *Tongue* (2009-2013), displays a similar temporality to that of *The Recovery of Discovery*. Exhibited across numerous galleries, museums and biennales over a period of four years, in a variety of forms, the common element across all aspects of *Tongue* was an invitation for the viewer to participate in the construction of a new dictionary of neologisms by stencilling a manufactured word of their choice onto an A5 piece of card. These cards were then displayed on one wall of the installation, with the viewer invited to take away a neologism in return for that which they had just offered to the project. Given the inequivalence of deposits into, and withdrawals from, this linguistic bank, neologisms accumulated over the course of each exhibition. The collected words were then published in a series of dictionaries, culminating in the final manifestation of the project, a book collating the many submitted neologisms received over the course of four years.

Again, this final manifestation of the project is constituted by the engagements of temporally atomised individuals over an extended period, and yet can only exist once these engagements are treated collaboratively. The written nature of this collaboration allows closer comparison with the case of Wikipedia. In both examples a text is produced through a prolonged process of the accumulation of atomised actions. Like Wikipedia, the invitation for viewers to take away a card as well as contribute one allows the participant to moderate and modify the pre-existing content of the text and to add to its final form.

Given the claims on the part of Wikipedia that it is collaboratively produced by a community, and given the similarity by which *Tongues* and *The Recovery of Discovery* are produced, could similar claims not be made for these two examples of artistic collaboration? It is reasonable, although not entirely unproblematic, to suggest that these similarities would allow us to describe the collective of individuals engaged in both projects as a community. Perhaps the two biggest barriers to this claim come in the form of the sustainability of The Wikipedia Community in contrast to the two examples of artistic collaboration discussed, and the investment that members of The Wikipedia Community have in the products of their actions. Yet, if technological and social developments have disturbed the aura surrounding presence, immediacy and duration as criteria for community, then one could make a similar claim for these two further, potentially disqualifying, factors.

There are two solutions to this conundrum. On the one hand, were one to argue in the affirmative, then these two examples of artistic collaboration could be viewed as constitutive
of communities beyond the established face-to-face ideal of community. Accordingly, they constitute a destabilisation of inherited and accepted conceptualisations of community in a practical context. On the other hand, one may argue that these two factors constitute a barrier to the claim for the establishment of community through this form of artistic collaboration. In this case, the prevalent coupling of collaboration and community becomes disturbed. In either case, the rise of diachronic collaborative practices in art can be seen as in some fashion taking part in a rethinking and repudiation of the concept of community as it has been inherited, and demonstrate the necessity for the incorporation of the question of temporality when considering the contemporary meaning and politics of community.

**Negotiating the Temporalities of Community**

Perhaps the most elucidatory examples of contemporary collaborative art practices in the contexts of this discussion are then those that in some manner occupy a space in between these two poles of coevalness and diachrony. The case of Artur Zmijewski, mentioned above, seems exemplary of this. While I initially described his process as conforming to a coeval model of collaboration, this does not take into account the centrality of the artist’s conceit in running the workshops across three different days. Nor does it acknowledge that the modification process intrinsic to the work takes place in a consecutive manner, each artwork being approached one at a time by one group, or a coalition comprising multiple groups. The process is thoroughly cumulative, and as such takes on elements of what has been described here as diachronic.

It is not my intention here to advocate one of either a coeval or a diachronic model of collaborative practice over the other. Both make claims to community that are simultaneously problematic and insightful in their own ways. The coeval practice of a group such as WochenKlausur seems overly invested in a model of community built upon the increasingly shaky fundamentals of presence, immediacy and duration, while the diachronic practices of Gaillard and Oda Projesi possibly fall short of manifesting anything that may be deemed a community by virtue of their disinterest in constituting a sustainable or invested collectivity. Rather, what emerges from the comparison of such practices is the confusion and complexity of the twin concepts of collaboration and community, and their interrelationships. With regard to the issue of collaboration, in demonstrating that its temporal character may vary wildly between different examples of what may legitimately be called collaborative practice, an emphasis on the centrality of the issue of production to collaboration emerges. In terms of community, the necessity of presence, immediacy and
duration to the constitution of community, given contemporary technological and social contexts, falls under question, as does, by extension, the notion that the ideal of community as described by Young may be pertinent to contemporary conditions.
Figure 10: Three installation views of Cyprien Gaillard, *The Recovery of Discovery*, 2011

*Images from KW, Berlin*
5: Participation and the ‘Dynamic of Singularity and Commonality’

However it is conceived of, the questions of singularity and commonality – and their interrelationships – are of the utmost import to the concept of community. Despite the divergent definitions and meanings of the term ‘community’, many of which have been touched upon in this thesis, there is a necessary implication of the coming together, or being together, of singularities. Roberto Esposito engages in an etymological analysis of community through its Latin root *communitas* in the introduction to his book *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*. He defines *communitas* as ‘what belongs to more than one, to many or to everyone.’¹ Gerard Delanty delves a step further in breaking down *communitas* into its two components ‘com (with or together) and unus (the number one or singularity)’, in doing so emphasising the internal tension between the common (*com*) and the singular (*unus*) intrinsic to the word itself.² Jean-Luc Nancy, in *The Inoperative Community*, argues that ‘community means […] that there is no singular being without another singular being,’³ while feminist theorist Luce Irigaray positions the question ‘How to articulate singularity and community?’ as the crux of her short book *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*.⁴

The term ‘singularity’ gained significant traction in French theory during the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, as political philosopher Luca Basso noted in his book *Marx and Singularity* in 2012. He explains its emergence as a result of a dissatisfaction with the concept of the individual, and in particular its denial of the relational.

In its use in contemporary French theory, the notion of singularity does more than refer to a recognition of individuality. First of all, insofar as it points to the irreducibility of the individual to identity, it entails a powerful appreciation of the realm of difference […] Prioritising the question of individual difference does not lead to a form of atomism. On the contrary, a reference to the realm of relations is a distinctive trait of singularity: relations are primary over individuals, insofar as the latter do not exist prior to the social nexus that constitutes and transforms them. To note this tension, the category of singularity can productively be related to that of ‘trans-

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¹ Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, 3.
² Delanty, *Community*, x.
individuality’, which tries to make the opposition between ‘individualism’ and ‘holism’ redundant. Central to this question is neither the individual as absolutely independent, nor the community as ‘whole’, but what lies ‘in between’ individuals.\(^5\)

Alongside Alain Badiou, Basso’s primary theoretical touchstone is Nancy, and in particular his 1996 book *Being Singular Plural* in which Nancy argues that ‘being-with’ (*Mitsein*) precedes ‘being’.\(^6\) In a later essay more consciously directed towards an articulation of his thoughts on the question of singularity, Nancy writes:

> What is a singularity? It is that which occurs only once [c’est ce qui n’a lieu qu’une fois], at a single point (out of time and out of place, in short), that which is an exception. Not a particular, which comes to belong to a genre, but a unique property that escapes appropriation – an exclusive touch – and that, as such, is neither extracted or removed from, nor opposed to, a common ground.\(^7\)

The emphasis on relationality that differentiates singularity from the individual is crucial in the context of my discussion of the subject of community. Accordingly the definitions of singularity outlined by Basso and Nancy must be kept in mind throughout.

The social turn in art has likewise precipitated an interest in the relationship between singularity and commonality, a point perhaps most succinctly demonstrated by the title of Grant Kester’s book of 2011, *The One and the Many*. Central to Kester’s book is an analysis of the inevitable tension between these two poles, and the manner in which this has become a regnant concern in contemporary art given its move towards collaborative and participatory practices that consciously reject modernist preoccupations with the ‘solitary genius’ of the artist in favour of various permutations of plurality or commonality.\(^8\) In his introduction Kester asks:

> Is the identity of the many based on coercive consensus or radical plurality? Is the one defined by narcissistic projection or an opening out to alterity?

These are some of the most pressing political and ethical questions of our

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\(^7\) “Banks, Edges, Limits (of Singularity),” *ANGELAKI* 9, no. 2 (2004): 41.

\(^8\) Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, 3.
day, and they are also central to the collaborative practices I’ll be exploring here.³⁹

While Kester’s book is explicitly geared towards the issue of collaboration in art, I wish to frame the artistic practices at stake in this chapter within the broader rubric of participation. Collaboration, as described in the previous chapter, connotes a more concerted act of co-production. Issues of work, labour and production are intrinsic to collaboration. Participation, on the other hand, is a less specific term, indicating, according to Claire Bishop ‘the involvement of many people (as opposed to the one-to-one relationship of ‘interactivity’).’¹⁰ She operates around a ‘definition of participation in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material.’¹¹ Although Bishop often collapses collaboration and participation into one, I would like to emphasise their fundamental difference. While collaboration implicates ‘many people’ at the level of production, participation casts participants as a ‘medium and material’. This is a slight but crucial differentiation that points towards the amended power relations at stake in the practices discussed in this chapter, in contrast to those described in the previous chapter.

Here I will examine the practices of two of the most visible artists operating within this tendency, Artur Žmijewski and Tania Bruguera, in relation to one of the most significant – and certainly one of the most influential and widely read – recent theoretical interventions into the relationship between singularity and commonality; American literary theorist Michael Hardt and autonomist Marxist political philosopher Antonio Negri’s Empire trilogy. It is my contention that not only is the ‘dynamic of singularity and commonality’ implicated in Žmijewski’s and Bruguera’s practices as collateral to their use of participatory forms and methodologies, but that this dynamic is consciously placed at the absolute centre of these two artists’ work.

**Hardt and Negri on Community**

Although Hardt and Negri use the term ‘community’ sparingly in the three books that comprise the Empire trilogy – Empire (2000), Multitude (2006) and Commonwealth (2009) – community is implicated in their work in a number of fashions. On those occasions that the term is used, it tends to refer more specifically to quantifiable communities, such as national,

³⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰ Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, 1.

¹¹ Ibid., 2.
religious or business communities; the authors declining to employ the more abstract sense of the word used by the likes of Nancy or Esposito. Nonetheless the issue of community, as it is related in theories of postmodern community, is at stake throughout their work. Their chosen terminology to describe the social formation at the heart of the trilogy, the ‘multitude’, is seen by Esposito in Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy to designate a new model of community without wishing to name it as such in order to avoid the numerous connotations of the term. This is inferred by Esposito’s translator, Timothy Campbell, through pronouncements such as ‘unlike every previous form of community, the multitude no longer has any need of immunizing itself from the perils of communitas.’ The implication here is that the multitude is a replacement for ‘every previous form of community’ and is thus a new form of community itself, or at least of perceiving community.

This consecutive relationship between community and multitude is corroborated in the second book of the series, Multitude. Hardt and Negri argue that the ‘passage from Fordist to post-Fordist labor arrangement, with the rise of service labor and “flexible”, “mobile”, unstable types of employment, has destroyed these traditional forms of work [factory labor and craft work], along with the forms of life they create.’ The authors are specifically referring here to community. Here they echo the discussion of community in relation to economics seen in the work of Ferdinand Tönnies and Jacques Camatte. They state that, on both the right and the left a ‘tone of nostalgia and regret for lost community dominates a series of popular studies about recent changes in work […] One should do away with this nostalgia, which when not actually dangerous is at best a sign of defeat.’ In its stead, Hardt and Negri offer the ‘multitude’, a more ‘chaotic and incoherent’ social form and one more pertinent to contemporary economic contexts. Nonetheless, this multitude is conceived of as a rethinking of community, a means of formulating social form in a historically specific

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12 For instance, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 73.


14 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 191.

15 Although community is often thought of in cultural terms, it has more commonly been theorised in relation to economic factors. Tönnies, Community and Civil Society; Camatte, Capital and Community.

16 Ibid., 190-92.

17 Ibid., 192.
fashion. Furthermore, Hardt and Negri implicate the etymological cousin of community, the ‘common’, at the heart of their conception of the multitude. They state that:

The multitude designates an active social subject, which acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common. The multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common.\textsuperscript{18}

In part, the resistance to name this social form as ‘community’ seems to arise from the term’s association – despite the best attempts to destabilise this association by theorists of postmodern community – with a privileging of identity over difference, and enforced unity over internal heterogeneity, characteristics that Hardt and Negri would presumably dismiss as being irrelevant given the conditions of ‘empire’ they see as characterising the contemporary socio-economic sphere. They expand on this as follows:

The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity-different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences.\textsuperscript{19}

It is the reconciliation of the ‘multiplicity of all these singular differences’, and what this reconciliation may offer to the subject of community, that is the focus of the two case studies comprising this chapter. In particular, I shall relate each case study to a different point in the \textit{Empire} trilogy. Firstly, I would like to return to Artur Žmijewski’s \textit{Them} (2007), discussed briefly in the previous chapter in terms of the temporalities entailed by the work. Here I shall relate the work to Hardt and Negri’s claim that ‘the production of subjectivity and the production of the common can together form a spiral, symbiotic relationship.’\textsuperscript{20} Following this I shall take a broader aspect onto the career of Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, examining a recurrent tension throughout her career between the location of herself as artist in a position of atomisation and singularity, and a desire to deploy her productive capacities as part of a plural ‘multitude’, in particular in the contexts of Hardt and Negri’s discussions of ‘revolutionary parallelism.’\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., xiv.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 189.
Artur Żmijewski: The Production of the Common

While it is conceivable that Żmijewski had read *Multitude* – it having been published three years prior to the work’s production, and having had a considerable impact upon a great number of theorists and practitioners within the art world – I do not wish to portray *Them* as illustrative of Hardt and Negri’s theory. Rather, I wish to suggest that both works, having been produced under comparable socio-economic conditions within a few years of one another, constitute parallel interventions into the question of the common, its production, and the ‘dynamic of singularity and commonality’ under such conditions. As Kester has noted, the social turn has precipitated a consonance in concern between discourses on ethics and politics on the one hand, and contemporary art on the other. On both sides, the negotiation of singularity and commonality is of the utmost urgency, and accordingly each must be discussed in concert with the other. In an age of alienation and rampant individualism – as I have discussed in chapter 2 – the question of commonality is a particularly salient one, and it should not be surprising that people working in different fields have endeavoured to work towards its examination. Kester cogently argued in an article published in *e-flux* in 2013 that so much writing on contemporary art takes the form of:

[…] a straightforward exegesis, in which a given theory, reduced to a set of notional principles, is simply juxtaposed with a given work of art, as if their sheer coexistence within the space of the essay constitutes meaningful evidence of their analytic co-relevance.

He continues to note that the theoretical side of this juxtaposition is rarely challenged in any meaningful manner, operating as ‘a kind of master discourse’ and ‘a self-contained and self-evident apparatus.’ My juxtaposition of Hardt and Negri on the one hand, and Żmijewski on the other, should rather be seen in a manner that recalls Simon Critchley’s thoughts surrounding the relationship between his own work and that of artist Phillipe Parreno as ‘different modes of articulation’, as discussed in chapter 3.

Accordingly, both Hardt and Negri, and Żmijewski depart from comparable positions of expertise and fallibility. Neither provides a ‘master discourse’ through which the other is to be read, rather they intermingle and mutually contribute to one another as differently articulated, yet equally merited conjectures into a shared concern. This juxtaposition then


23 “The Device Laid Bare: On Some Limitations in Current Art Criticism.”

may be seen as particularly productive, rather than in any way gratuitous or illustrative, offering as it does two ‘different modes of articulation’ of one particular concern. Indeed, it is largely in this sense, as I have argued in the introduction to this thesis and in chapter 3, that I see the interrelationships between art and theory as operating with regard to the larger question of community that this study is concerned with.

Subjectivity and the Common(s)

Central to Hardt and Negri’s account of the constitution of the multitude is what they refer to as the ‘spiral, symbiotic relationship’ between ‘the production of subjectivity and the production of the common.’ In order to grasp more fully what this entails, the constituent productions of this spiral must be more fully described. For Hardt and Negri, subjectivity – a commonly used, but often ill-defined term – is both a singular and a plural phenomenon. While at one point they refer to ‘singular subjectivities’, at another they state that ‘the multitude is the subjectivity that emerges from this dynamic of singularity and commonality.’ They succinctly define their usage of the term, in reference to both its singular and plural permutations as ‘who we are, how we view the world, how we interact with each other.’

‘The common’ is arguably an even more evasive term. Its pluralized sibling ‘the commons’ has become particularly ubiquitous in the field of contemporary art since the publication of Multitude and perhaps more crucially, its follow-up, Commonwealth. This has been particularly notable in institutional, curatorial and pedagogical contexts. Casco, under the directorship of Binna Choi, has taken the theme ‘Composing the Commons’ as a ‘guideline’ for their programming from 2013-15, while New York experimental arts education collective 16beaver group run an ongoing ‘collective enquiry’ programme entitled ‘A Common(s) Course’. Hardt and Negri are keen, however, to distance themselves from this term.

We are reluctant to call this the commons because that term refers to pre-capitalist-shared spaces that were destroyed by the advent of private property. Although more awkward, "the common" highlights the

25 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 189.
26 Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, 308-12.
27 Ibid., Commonwealth, x.
28 Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 198.
29 Ibid., 66.
philosophical content of the term and emphasizes that this is not a return to the past but a new development.\textsuperscript{30}

‘The commons’, tied as it is more strictly to certain historical forms of land ownership, does not, Hardt and Negri argue, allow enough leverage for it to be used in a fashion pertinent to contemporary conditions under which the pre-capitalist commons cannot unproblematically be said to exist. Much akin to their rejection of the term community, their use of ‘the common’ in place of ‘the commons’ is an exercise in distanciation from a nostalgic or primitivist veneration of the past. Furthermore, as they suggest, the singularisation of the term lends it a level of abstraction that they deem to be more suited to the task at hand; namely, their characterization of the formation of the multitude. In defining the term, however, they do not entirely dispense with the meaning associated with its pluralized relative. They state that ‘the common is not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships and so forth.’\textsuperscript{31}

Despite their usage of the pluralised ‘commons’, the concept underpinning Casco’s programming displays considerable debt to Hardt and Negri’s work. They define the commons as ‘not only material commons but also knowledge commons, aesthetic commons, affective commons, and so on,’ a move reminiscent of Hardt and Negri’s expansion of the term beyond its origins in land ownership. Nonetheless, Casco’s programme – and the same could be said of many other recent artistic interventions into the commons – falls perilously close to succumbing to the nostalgic implication of the commons condemned by Hardt and Negri. A statement of 20 August 2013 announcing their new programming quotes Italian autonomist theorist Silvia Federici, citing one of the primary impulses underpinning the project as ‘undermining the ways in which we've been divided.’\textsuperscript{32} While Federici’s work is by no means in and of itself nostalgic for a pre-capitalist commons, Casco’s positioning of this particular quotation at their heart of their thesis lends the programme a marked reactive or reactionary quality.

This is matched by the peculiar and widespread adoption of a very specific aesthetic in many art projects attendant to the commons, exemplified by Casco’s ‘New Habits’ exhibition held as part of ‘Composing the Commons’ in 2014. Plywood furniture, bookshelves and beanbags

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., x.

\textsuperscript{31} Commonwealth, 139.

are joined by various implicit or explicit invitations to use the exhibition space as a meeting place, a work place, and a place to eat or to read. As in the case of Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument*, discussed in chapter 1, there is a conscious citation of the consensual, well-meaning aesthetic of the community arts tradition at play here. A DIY and anti-spectacular appearance acts as guarantor of the organisation’s aim to create a space removed from the trappings of capital. However, while Hirschhorn deploys such an aesthetic as the basis for a complex entanglement of over- and disidentifications, Casco’s appropriation seems more straightforward, serving as a visual signifier of the institution’s intentions towards the elision of difference and antagonism in favour of a unitary and unified togetherness. Accordingly, Hirschhorn’s practice implicates community in a progressive, negotiative fashion, toying with preconceptions of what being-together may be, while Casco’s project seems to yearn for a pre-capitalist form of commons, and by extension gestures towards a form of community in keeping with the *Gemeinschaft* model offered by Tönnies.

Casco’s project also seem in many respects to present something of a return to relational aesthetics and concerns. In both cases there is an affirmation of the gallery space as being the site of a microtopian coming together. Bourriaud’s famous claim that the nature of the exhibition space is that it ‘creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life’ readily characterizes the approach adopted by Casco and others. Accordin_gly many of the critiques levelled at relational practices are equally applicable. Claire Bishop’s assessment of the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija seems particularly pertinent. In ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’ Bishop remarked that Tiravanija’s practice ‘is considered good because it permits networking among a group of art dealers and like-minded art lovers, and because it evokes the atmosphere of a late-night bar. Everyone has a common interest in art.’ She argues that his practice ‘falls short of addressing the political aspect of communication’ because ‘it is still predicated on the exclusion of those who hinder or prevent its realization.’ The communities implicated in both Tiravanija’s work and in Casco’s programme enter into the gallery united by their shared status as denizens of the art world and undergo little transformation over the course of their participation. That is, there is no emphasis on destabilising or negotiating the implicated

33 Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 16.


35 Ibid., 68.
communities inherent to these practices. In this respect, I see this and other contemporary projects concerned with the commons to cohere more with a communitarian affirmation of community than with the impulse towards the concept’s negotiation that underpins the practices in question in this thesis.

Common Space / Individual Space

Hardt and Negri’s account initially appears to follow a similarly comfortable and consensual formulation of the common(s). Two passages in Multitude together outline the relationships they see as existing between singularity, commonality, subjectivity and the multitude.

Singularities interact and communicate socially on the basis of the common, and their social communication in turn produces the common. The multitude is the subjectivity that emerges from this dynamic of singularity and commonality.36

Subjectivity, in other words, is produced through cooperation and communication and, in turn, this produced subjectivity itself produces new forms of cooperation and communication, which in turn produce new subjectivity, and so forth. In this spiral each successive movement from the production of subjectivity to the production of the common is an innovation that results in a richer reality.37

It is the complexities of the ‘dynamic of singularity and commonality’, and the ways in which this may incorporate, rather than elide, difference and antagonism, that differentiates this formulation of the common – and by extension the multitude and community – from that at stake in projects such as ‘Composing the Commons’. This may be more clearly demonstrated when viewed in light of Artur Żmijewski’s practice.

In Them, originally exhibited at documenta 12, Żmijewski invited four ideologically distinct groups – a right-wing Polish nationalist youth group, a Catholic women’s organisation, members of left-wing youth movements and young Polish Jews – to enter into a disused industrial building, set up as a makeshift artist’s studio, replete with a plethora of art materials. The artist then asked them to produce artworks which they believed represented the identities and values of their particular faction in symbolic or aesthetic form. Each was asked to spend time initially creating their own artwork discretely from the other groups, and so, for instance, the nationalist group created a grand-scale depiction of the Szczerbiec – the coronation sword of the former Polish monarchy, and the symbol of the ‘All-Polish Youth’

36 Hardt and Negri, Multitude : War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 198.
37 Ibid., 189.
movement – entwined with the red and white colours of Poland. Following this, each group was asked to respond to, modify or correct the others’ creations. The left-wing group proceeded to cut the sword out of the original image, leaving a negative space where it had initially stood. Increasingly the groups’ actions became ever more violent and vitriolic, until finally the studio was engulfed in flame and smoke after one canvas was doused in petrol and set alight. Żmijewski announces to the participants at the outset:

If you feel like you don’t like something about this situation, you can change it. You can re-edit it, rewrite it, draw it again, destroy it or add something. There are no restrictions.

The spiral nature of Them is evident in the basic infrastructure of the work. We begin with four groups, each presenting a subjectivity, a political or religious viewpoint which in itself is produced through, as Hardt and Negri state, ‘cooperation and communication’ both within the discrete groups and within society as a whole prior to their entry into Żmijewski’s studio. The art workshop process then not only allows these subjectivities to be relayed, but to become sources of yet more ‘cooperation and collaboration’ through the encouragement of the artist for the groups to adapt and modify each other’s works. Each modification represents the negotiation of subjectivities, both individual and collective, through a common production process into more advanced – if we are to follow Hardt and Negri’s spiral motif – subjectivities, informed by another level of ‘cooperation and collaboration.’ The workshop takes place over four sessions, each utilising this same format and so what emerges, to mix spatial and temporal metaphors, is both a horizontal motion – the modifications and collaborations which occur within each session – and a vertical motion – the movement from session to session. This simultaneous horizontal and vertical movement generates an infrastructural temporal spiral intrinsic to the formal properties of the piece, which necessitates a perpetual motion away from pre-existing subjectivities, concurrently around and upwards. Here one can discern a clear point of intersection between Żmijewski’s work and Hardt and Negri’s theory. As Hardt and Negri state, ‘in this spiral each successive movement from the production of subjectivity to the production of the common is an innovation that results in a richer reality.’ Of absolute importance here is the notion of ‘innovation.’ This infrastructural spiral dictates that the same ground is never covered twice.

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 200.
40 Ibid., 189.
all cooperations and collaborations are innovative, the products of another circuit of the production of subjectivities and the production of the common.

In an interview published in Flash Art in 2009, Žmijewski describes his view of the underlying political significance of Them as follows:

What may appear as destruction is in fact a means of carrying out a debate, and ultimately results in the removal from the ideological landscape of content or identifiers that block development — rigidly defining the boundaries of the participants’ political capacities […] We shouldn’t extinguish this political passion by calling its effects destructive. Instead, we should fuel it by inventing and handing over to people new instruments of political expression, by enfranchising people politically, turning them into political subjects.41

One moment where this becomes absolutely apparent is the seemingly destructive action of each group cutting each other group’s t-shirts — each emblazoned with the image they initially produced — in two. Rather than resisting this, almost all the participants allow it. The process of cutting the t-shirt becomes a site of discussion, where the cutter relates the reasoning behind the cutting, while the cutted responds with their reasoning as to why this action is wrong. To dismiss such actions as destructive is to overlook their deeply performative nature, and the degree to which the action of cutting is meant as a provocation to communication, debate and perhaps conflict.

The act of cutting the t-shirts is particularly evidential of the two forms of communication, or the two registers of language, that are at play and interact throughout the work. On the one hand, much of the communication that takes place is enacted in primarily aesthetic terms. This, in the form of the production and modification of the artworks, is the central conceit of the work. On the other hand, these instances of aesthetic communication are often followed or accompanied by a spoken explanation or contextualisation of the action. At another point an image of a church, produced by the Catholic women’s group is initially depicted on a flat canvas, the doors of the church painted on in black outline. The left-wing youth group proceed to cut open the doors of the church, generating a pair of operational doors for the painted church. Discussion follows. One member of the Catholic group announces ‘I like the idea of opening the church door very much.’ Later, the nationalist group protests about the scrawling of a pro-choice slogan on their work, stating ‘But why on the symbol of the All-Polish Youth? None of us speaks about murdering women.’ A debate ensues where it

becomes apparent that the All-Polish Youth group are in fact all anti-abortion, and thus side with the equally anti-abortion Catholic group in order to counter the arguments of the pro-choice left-wing group. A new coalition is formed and a new collaboration produced, which, however temporary, constitutes what could be seen as a produced common.

Each debate and discussion forms new alliances, new understandings of what rhetoric, tone and vocabulary to employ with different people and different groups, thus language itself is being actively ‘produced in common.’ As Hardt and Negri outline, language ‘is never the product of an individual, but rather is always created by a linguistic community in communication and collaboration.’ Language in Them acts as both the source of production of the common and the product of this production itself. ‘Singularities interact and communicate socially on the basis of the common and their social communication in turn produces the common.’

The carefully orchestrated infrastructure of Them is heavily influenced by the pedagogical methodologies of Źmijewski’s former tutor at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, Grzegorz Kowalski. In particular, one exercise central to Kowalski’s teaching is invoked. Entitled Obszar wspólny / Obszar własny (Common Space / Individual Space), this practice entailed students and tutors each having:

[... at his/her disposal “a space of their own” [...] where they could build elements of their own visual language, and the “common space” open to everyone where they would conduct simultaneous dialogues with the other participants. All without using words.]

A focus on Kowalski’s method, and in particular its clear implication of ‘common space’ and ‘individual space’ in interconnection, emphasises the points of intersection between the infrastructure designed by the artist in Them, and the narrative outlined by Hardt and Negri. For both Hardt and Negri, and Kowalski – and by extension Źmijewski – the crucial site in their investigations of the formation of collective subjectivities is the ‘dynamic of singularity and commonality.’ However, as curators James Hutchinson and Lesley Young noted in a

42 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 189.
43 Ibid., 198.
45 Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, 357 fn37.
46 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 198.
publication accompanying a show of Żmijewski’s work at Cornerhouse, Manchester in 2009-10:

Żmijewski has a fundamental and ongoing disagreement with Kowalski’s method, namely that his teacher created an “isolated enclave” limited to the art school context – “where people seek refuge from the oppression of reality.” Żmijewski, on the other hand, believes that art must operate in the real world and address real problems, saying that it must “achieve a connection with reality by producing useful tools: tools for the implementation of power and knowledge”, and only this way will it “learn how to become socially useful.”

In transposing the pedagogical methods of Kowalski into a less rarefied social context – although the degree to which Żmijewski’s film and the workshops that it documents do indeed operate ‘in the real world’ is contestable – Żmijewski aligns, or attempts to align, his practice closer to the explicitly political impulse underpinning Hardt and Negri’s writings. In this respect, Żmijewski’s practice also demonstrates his indebtedness to Kowalski’s own tutor, architect Oskar Hansen, and his theory of Open Form. Hansen described Open Form theory as follows:

The artistic convention of Open Form consists of shaping the cognitive space, which is construed as a background highlighting the ever-changing events in the life of nature and of man. The idea is to harmoniously integrate Earth's biological life forms with the space of human activity. Respecting the recipient’s individuality, Open Space art creates a spatial atmosphere conducive to reflection, thus opposing the art of a dominant object in space – the cult of dogmatic dictates.

In a conversation following the first public screening of Them in Warsaw in November 2007, Żmijewski acknowledges the significance not just of Kowalski, but of Hansen, stating that “the idea of meetings, or games, in which four groups of differently minded people participate originated in the academy studio of Grzegorz Kowalski, or perhaps even that of Oskar Hansen.” Indeed, Hansen had been the subject of Żmijewski’s 2005 video piece A Dream of Warsaw in which the artist documents the lead-up to the architect’s final exhibition. Hansen died before the film was completed. If Kowalski’s methods were too rooted in the ‘isolated enclave’ of the art school, Hansen’s theory and practice offered a

47 James Hutchinson and Lesley Young, Artur Żmijewski (Manchester: Cornerhouse, 2010), 2.
precedent equally concerned with the tensions between singularity and commonality, yet located within and directed towards the social sphere first and foremost.

I have, however, thus far ignored the one element of the work which seems most of all to contradict, or at the very least problematise, any attempt to draw comparisons between the models offered by Żmijewski and Hardt and Negri; namely, the question of exploitation. Accusations of exploitation on the part of Żmijewski are by no means new. In 2009, the New York Times published a review of a Żmijewski show at New York art space X Initiative. It focussed especially on one particular work, ‘80064’ (2004), in which the artist persuades an Auschwitz survivor to have the identification number tattooed on his left forearm refreshed. The reviewer, Ken Johnson, asks the question, ‘was this hackneyed lesson worth the price of an old man’s peace of mind?’ before going on to describe Żmijewski’s practice as ‘morally troubling’ and ‘sociologically provocative.’ Indeed the artist himself claimed in 2008 that ‘I like to be able to say openly that I made something bad, immoral or unethical.’ While the question of ethics will be discussed in the following chapter, I would like to conclude my discussion of Żmijewski here by factoring the question of exploitation into the analysis of singularity in Them.

Hardt and Negri discuss exploitation in the chapter of Multitude concerned with the production of the common, arguing that ‘exploitation today tends to act directly on our performances through the control of the common by capital.’ Elsewhere they make the connection between exploitation and the common more forcibly, arguing that we must ‘try to conceive exploitation as the expropriation of the common.’ Given that, as Hardt and Negri also make clear, ‘exploitation must be based on the theory of value,’ it is essential that an analysis of potential exploitation in Żmijewski’s practise is considered in economic terms.

In the publication accompanying Claire Bishop and Mark Sladen’s co-curated show ‘Double Agent’, held at the ICA in London in 2008 – in which Them was exhibited – a transcript of a

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50 Hardt and Negri, Multitude : War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 198.


53 Hardt and Negri, Multitude : War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 201-02.

54 Ibid., 150.
public discussion following the first public screening of Them in Warsaw in 2007 was published. In the introductory note the curators wrote:

As in many of Żmijewski’s videos, the artist adopts an ambiguous role and it is never clear to what degree his participants are acting with their own agency or being manipulated to fulfill the requirements of his pre-planned narrative.\textsuperscript{55}

Throughout the video documentation of the workshops Żmijewski appears consistently, briefly and subtly intervening in proceedings, never far away from the action. His claim that ‘I am supposed to be invisible in the film’ does not tally with the video itself. Of course, he also intervenes in a number of other fashions, most notably in his role as editor of the footage of the workshops. Many of the participants take particular exception to this element of his production of the work, one stating:

I can’t really see myself in the film. Perhaps I wasn’t photogenic enough? You edited the film according to your own concept; you didn’t show the image presented by the Catholics at the end. Why? Well, because you disagreed with what I did. You imposed your own concept and cut out the most interesting parts. [applause]\textsuperscript{56}

Żmijewski indeed concedes that ‘the selection and the narrative presented here are absolutely my choice as an author and that it was me who decided the ultimate shape of this story.’\textsuperscript{57}

Could one not view the incessant appearances of Żmijewski himself in the piece, and his postproduction of the obtained footage not only as a form of ‘control of the common’ – the artist intervenes in production, indeed he even established the conditions of production – but also as ‘control […] by capital’? Let us for a moment examine the relationship between artist and participants. The artist exhibits worldwide, his reputation and value growing. He curated the 2012 iteration of the Berlin Biennale and is regularly asked to produce what essentially amount to variations, if not absolute recreations, of Them. And yet this success is predicated on an artistic practice in which unpaid volunteers devote labour – one cannot even say surplus labour in this situation, given the lack of payment – to the artist in a relatively unquestioning and numb fashion. Comparisons with the ‘Immaterial Labor 2.0’ of relational aesthetics, discussed in chapter 2, are compelling. There is little suggestion within the work that the participants appreciate the financial gains heading Żmijewski’s way as a result of


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 100.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
their efforts. These participants are the ‘dark matter’ discussed by Gregory Sholette in his book of the same name, ‘hidden producers’, ‘invisibles’. He asks the question:

What would happen for example if the hobbyists and amateurs who purportedly make up a billion-dollar national industry in the US simply stopped purchasing art supplies or no longer took classes with ‘professional’ artists, or ceased going to museums to see what bona fide artists do?

To this list, let us add ‘or denied their labour to artists who stand to make a fortune from it without remunerating them sufficiently and fairly.’ Thus, while one could view his interventions as attempts at prompting and furthering dialogue, discussion and the production of the common amongst participants, it is hard to ignore this suggestion of ‘exploitation’. For one thing, the action takes place in an artist’s studio setting, and by extension on the artist’s terms. Furthermore, Žmijewski says at the outset ‘the game begins here,’ a hint at the power relations between dominant artist and subservient participants.

The accusation of exploitation has not simply been directed disparagingly towards Žmijewski however. Claire Bishop, one of Žmijewski’s most fervent apologists, wrote in her article ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents’ of the work of Žmijewski, alongside that of Phil Collins and Santiago Sierra, that:

It is to this art – however uncomfortable, exploitative, or confusing it may first appear – that we must turn for an alternative to the well-intentioned homilies that today pass for critical discourse on social collaboration.

Her insinuation in the contexts of her broader argument is that we must in fact embrace the artist’s exploitative relationship to his participants as a necessary constituent of a critical contemporary art practice that is demonstrative of the exploitations inherent to contemporary political realities. I would not go as far as Bishop’s totalising statement in proclaiming exploitation to be a required constituent of efficacious socially engaged practice, however it must be noted that Žmijewski is by no means attempting to create a utopian, experimental community. Rather, his work must be seen as an investigation into the complexities of the relationship between singularity and the common. To deny the centrality of exploitation in this dialectic would be to misrepresent it. In this respect, a comparison with Thomas Hirschhorn’s work, discussed in chapter 1 and also mentioned by Bishop in relation to

58 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, 150.
60 Ibid.
 Żmijewski’s work is clear. As I have argued, Bataille Monument is not conceived of as a simple exercise in the creation of an idyllic community beyond difference, nor must it be seen, as Bishop sees it, as an act of disidentification of the two communities at stake in the work. Instead, it operates at the level of overidentification, positioning Georges Bataille as a totem at the head of what appears to be an otherwise egalitarian temporary community. Likewise, Żmijewski implicates himself as the expropriator of the common, as the great barrier standing in the way of the simple and peaceful ‘spiral, symbiotic’ relationship between subjectivity and the common.

**Tania Bruguera: Between Identity-Difference and Singularity-Commonality**

Tania Bruguera, alongside Żmijewski, has become one of the most prominent figures amidst the contemporary turn towards participatory and socially engaged practices. Indeed her performance Tatlin’s Whisper #5 (2008), in which two mounted policemen arbitrarily herded visitors around the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, graces the cover of Claire Bishop’s Artificial Hells, one of the most significant art-historical interventions into participatory practice. Her own biography, however, and the trajectory of her career from her early performance practices of the late 1980s and early 1990s to grand-scale quasi-institutional projects such as Immigrant Movement International (2010-) and Museum of Arte Útil (2013-14), sets her apart from her contemporaries. In this second case study, I would like to acknowledge the significance of this, and offer a radically different aspect onto her practice than that deployed in the contexts of Żmijewski. Rather than focussing tightly on a specific work, it seems more productive, particularly in the context of this chapter, to examine her career more broadly. Again relating artistic practice to the theory of Hardt and Negri, I wish to suggest that when taken as a whole Bruguera’s career can be defined according to a continuous and unfolding negotiation of the relationships between what Hardt and Negri refer to as the ‘exclusive and limiting logic of identity-difference’ and the ‘open and expansive logic of singularity-commonality.’ While it is certainly tempting to discern a clear chronological development from one concern to the other, this would constitute an oversimplification and abstraction not reflective of the complexities of her practice.

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62 Hardt and Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, 225.
Nonetheless, a degree of chronology is helpful. Indeed, the artist herself is keen to periodise her career into clearly demarcated temporal subdivisions.\textsuperscript{63}

**From Performance to Participation**

Throughout her career Bruguera’s work has retained a strident political character. The nature of her practice, the subjects she deals with, her means, modes and strategies, the positioning of herself as artist, among many other aspects have, however, all altered drastically over the course of her career. Her early work was predominated by an eleven-year ‘long-term project’ entitled *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* (1985-1996). Between 1985, the year of Ana Mendieta’s untimely death, and 1996, Bruguera enacted a series of performances, delivered lectures, gave interviews and wrote texts meticulously recreating the practice of Mendieta. The first re-performance was of Mendieta’s work *Blood Trace*, conducted in Iowa by Mendieta in 1974, and then by Bruguera in Havana in 1986. RoseLee Goldberg describes the two performances thus:

Dipping her forearms into a bucket of pig’s blood, Mendieta raised both hands above her head and then dragged them to the floor, leaving a V-shaped stain on the wall. Bruguera would perform this same work at the Fototeca de Cuba, in Havana, in front of an audience of approximately 70 artists and student friends.\textsuperscript{64}

Utilising a catalogue from a Mendieta retrospective at the New Museum, New York in 1987 as reference, Bruguera went on to re-enact many more of Mendieta’s performances over the course of the next decade or so. Bruguera used the names of Mendieta’s works as the names of her re-performances, and indeed Mendieta’s name in place of her own as the designated artist (e.g. Ana Mendieta, *Blood Trace*, 1986). The only detail amended by Bruguera was the date of each performance, in the first case 1986 rather than 1974. Bruguera has described the project as an attempt to reanimate Mendieta, ‘bringing her back to life through her work.’\textsuperscript{65} Elsewhere she has spoken more precisely about the importance of the geographical location of the reperformances, ‘bringing Mendieta back to Cuba’, the country of her birth, yet one

\textsuperscript{63} This is clear from the chronological manner in which her personal website is formatted.

\textsuperscript{64} RoseLee Goldberg, “Regarding Ana,” in *Tania Bruguera, La Bienale Di Venezia*, ed. Prince Claus (Chicago, IL: Lowitz and Son, 2005), 8.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 12.
that rarely saw her mature artistic practice within its borders, Mendieta having emigrated to the USA at the age of 13 in 1961.⁶⁶

The question of identity lies at the heart of Mendieta’s practice. Art historian Jane Blocker chose the term as one of a triumvirate of key concepts relating to the artist’s practice in the title of her book of 1999, Where Is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile. However, Blocker is keen to distance her position from what she saw as the prevailing attitude towards Mendieta’s practice at the time of writing, one which essentialised her identity. Instead, Blocker reframes Mendieta’s work according to the work of gender theorist Judith Butler, arguing that throughout her practice identity is in a perpetual state of flux and negotiation.⁶⁷ In re-performing Mendieta’s work, Bruguera implicates the question of identity in a similar register. On the one hand she resuscitated a figure with whom she shared at least three identifications – Cuban, artist, woman. On the other hand, each of these identifications is consciously complicated through the conceit of re-performance.

Despite the broader politics implicated in bringing Mendieta ‘back to Cuba’, the early stage of Bruguera’s career is characterised by an intense communion between Bruguera and Mendieta. In these early performances she casts herself as an exilic and atomised subject – artificially disconnected from others and presented in isolation. Bruguera said of these early performance works that ‘spectators had a very passive role, they were observers.’⁶⁸ Curator Roberto Pinto echoed this statement:

"It is Tania Bruguera who is the protagonist and the subject of most of her work, and, even when it seems that there is an apparent distance, on a closer look it is clear that the narratives are always coupled with personal stories."⁶⁹

Works such as Blood Trace, despite the obvious dialectic with Mendieta, were introspective, introverted, and even narcissistic. The primary object of Bruguera’s productive and investigative capacities as an artist during this period is herself. Subsequent to Tribute to Ana Mendieta, however, Bruguera’s practice underwent a significant shift. This is perhaps most succinctly encapsulated in the change in relationships forged between artist and audience.

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⁶⁶ Ibid.


Bruguera herself notes that ‘as the time passes, in a natural communication process, they [the audience] have started to become part of the creation, either as interactive participants, "taking away," "saving" and "distributing" the work saved in their memories, or as those creating it.’

Curator Helaine Posner, in 2013, saw this shift as deriving from Bruguera’s own move from Cuba to the USA in 1997:

Since relocating to the United States in 1997 the artist has become a world citizen, living and working in such cities as Chicago, Paris, Havana, and New York, and traveling regularly and extensively to create her art and to teach. This transition is reflected in a body of work that remains rooted in and connected to her Cuban experience but has expanded to embrace a global perspective [...] The artist's international installation work and self-defined Behavior Art and Useful Art (Arte de Conducta and Arte Útil), created from 2000 to the present, challenge the audience to consider their personal relationship to power, creating situations that attempt to transform passive spectators into an engaged citizenry.

Bruguera has, during this later stage in her career, opened an unofficial art college in her home country of Cuba (Behavior Art School, 2002-2009) and employed former KGB agents as psychotherapists at the service of the Russian public (Trust Workshop / Untitled, Moscow, 2007). Among the materials listed in the production of her recent works are included ‘audience participation, news on the General Strike [in Spain in 2010]’, ‘one minute free of censorship per speaker’, and ‘public gathering.’

In a work of 2008 entitled Trabajo Socialmente Útil, Bruguera reconstructed the cells of a prison housed in the building in which the exhibition ‘7+1’ took place. ‘The visitor must enter any of the ten cells and remain there in the gloom reading a book written by a political prisoner. The duration of the confinement is related to the time the prisoner spent in jail.’ In other works, such as her one-minute open mic events (Tatlin’s Whisper #6, 2009, for example), this decentralisation of control is even more apparent. Here the artist merely initiates and orchestrates a scenario in which the audience become the predominant active creative players, providing them with a microphone through which they are free to speak for one minute on whatever they choose. Moreover, the documentation of the event was conducted by the audience. The artist handed out 200 disposable cameras to participants so they could act not simply as performers, but documenters. In basic terms, the object of the performance is no longer Bruguera in isolation from an audience, but the audience itself.

Ledo, "Intimate Traces," 52.


For the artist's own descriptions of her work see www.taniabruuguera.com
In this respect, Bruguera’s practice has moved significantly closer to the concerns and forms commonly associated with the social turn, according to the definition provided by Claire Bishop: ‘participation in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material.’

Indeed, Bishop highlights a shift in artist-audience dynamic as having been formative in the development of the social turn in the 1990s. She claims that ‘the audience, previously conceived as a “viewer” or “beholder”, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant.’

*Immigrant Movement International and Revolutionary Parallelism*

The apotheosis of this development in the relationships implicated by Bruguera between artist and audience is her long-term project *Immigrant Movement International (IMI)*, initiated in 2010 and currently ongoing, and described by the artist herself as:

 [...] an artist initiated socio-political movement. Bruguera will spend a year operating a flexible community space in the multinational and transnational neighborhood of Corona, Queens, which will serve as the movement's headquarters [...] Engaging both local and international communities, as well as working with social service organizations, elected officials, and artists focused on immigration reform, Bruguera will examine growing concerns about the political representation and conditions facing immigrants.

Among the materials listed for this particular work are included ‘immigration policies and laws, Immigrant Population, Elected Officials, Politicians, Community Organizations, Public Pressure, Media.’ The project’s physical iteration (its community centre in Queens) and the numerous events, protests, workshops etc. that have been enacted in its name have been accompanied by several texts written by Bruguera and other collaborators. Most prominent amongst these is a ‘Migrant Manifesto’, listing ten principles upon which *IMI* has been founded. This manifesto marks *IMI* as being not only the formal apotheosis of Bruguera’s artist/audience dynamics, but of a concern with identity and its negotiation that has persisted from *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* onwards. In order to draw out the significance of this manifesto with regard to the subject of identity, again it is helpful to derive the various

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74 Ibid.


76 Ibid.
points of intersection between Bruguera’s concerns and the writing of Hardt and Negri, in particular the final chapter of *Commonwealth*. Entitled ‘Revolutionary Parallelism’, the first section of this chapter examines the legacies of identity politics and their potential input into a contemporary radical political programme. As was the case with Żmijewski, it is likely that Bruguera was aware of this passage at the time of writing ‘Migrant Manifesto’, although again it matters little whether she was or not. Bruguera has been particularly engaged with a realm of art theory that welcomed Hardt and Negri with open arms during the first decade of the twenty-first century, and *Commonwealth* itself was published only two years prior to Bruguera’s drafting of the manifesto. Regardless, consonances emerge, and again they may be attributable to the shared concerns and conditions that underpinned both theoretical and artistic practices.

Hardt and Negri’s passage on revolutionary parallelism outlines what they described in *Multitude* as the move from the ‘exclusive and limiting logic of identity-difference into the open and expansive logic of singularity-commonality.’ They note that ‘identity politics has had a lot of bad press lately […] Many on the radical Left […] critique identity politics for creating obstacles to revolution.’ And yet, they also claim that ‘all revolutionary movements are grounded in identity […] Revolutionary politics has to start from identity but cannot end there.’ Accordingly they define three tasks that any ‘identity domain’ must face in order to progress from an identity politics to a revolutionary politics. The first, they say ‘is to reveal the violence of identity […] to make visible the subordinations of identity.’ They suggest that identity serves the purpose of a ‘veil’, cordoning off ‘the subordinated from the view of dominant society.’ They refer to this as ‘demystification’. The second, then, is liberation, ‘to proceed from indignation to rebellion against the structures of domination using the subordinated identity as a weapon in the quest for freedom.’

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77 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, 225.
78 *Commonwealth*, 325.
79 Ibid., 326.
80 Ibid., 327.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 330.
and final, is the ‘self-abolition of identity.’ In order to ‘keep the rebellious function of identity moving forward, and carry identity politics towards a revolutionary project.’

The first task, demystification, pertains particularly to point 5 of the Migrant Manifesto: ‘We affirm that being a migrant does not mean belonging to a specific social class, nor carrying a particular legal status.’ The purported nature of the identity of the migrant is here questioned, debunked, and thus the status of the migrant demystified. Furthermore, the positioning of IMI as a self-professed art project, rather than an activist group or a social-work centre, alters the register at which the project speaks. While IMI has a drop-in centre, a ‘flexible community space’ and organises events, demonstrations and workshops in order to help the local immigrant community, it nevertheless was initiated as artwork. As such, the weighting shifts from being purely concerned with the improved wellbeing of those the project represents to a certain level of abstraction. Posner emphasises that IMI is both a ‘social intervention […] and an extended work of conceptual art.’ Bruguera suggests that ‘by engaging the local community through public workshops, events, actions, and partnerships with immigrant and social service organizations, Immigrant Movement International will explore who is defined as an immigrant and the values they share, focusing on the larger question of what it means to be a citizen of the world.’ Thus the work expands its remit beyond the immediate community of migrants implicated in the work and onto a larger plane of engaging, explicating and demystifying the nature of immigration and immigrants themselves.

The second task, liberation, can be seen in Bruguera’s rhetoric in point 9 of the manifesto: ‘We understand the need to revive the concept of the commons, of the earth as a space that everyone has the right to access and enjoy.’ Hardt and Negri emphasise that self-determination and a negation of identity as essentialised property are key to this second step of liberation, and in Bruguera’s reference to a revival of the commons both are inferred. However it is at the point of Hardt and Negri’s exhortation to rebellion in favour of indignation where comparisons begin to falter. IMI’s own activities could hardly be construed as anything beyond indignation. Furthermore, there is a world of difference

83 Ibid., 332.
84 Ibid.
between manifesto and action. What Bruguera sets out here is in a sense an ideology, and while *IMI* is an attempt to act upon that ideology, it is subject to the pragmatisms, compromises and stumbling blocks, which any actual action necessarily encounters. While its status as artwork allows it to function on a discursive, quasi-philosophical level, it also implicates it within the sometimes restrictive framework of a post-Fordist art economy, itself arguably a ‘structure of domination’ which Hardt and Negri propose rebellion against. A concrete example of this could be seen in the failure of Bruguera’s attempts to form a political party out of *IMI*. Art historian and theorist Martha Buskirk wrote of *IMI* on *Artnet*, ‘Bruguera's initial idea of attempting to foment something akin to a political party ran up against restrictions on direct political activity governing the nonprofits that have sponsored the project's New York incarnation.’

The third task, abolition, which Hardt and Negri see as necessary to forward and progressive revolutionary movement, is to a degree evident again later in the fifth point of the manifesto: ‘To be a migrant means to be an explorer; it means movement, this is our shared condition.’ It also recurs in point 2. ‘We are all tied to more than one country.’ The emphasis on the shared nature of migration and the status of migrant as a universal category serves to break down the inclusive/exclusive barriers surrounding this particular identity and instead open it up to a wider logic. Hardt and Negri’s emphasis on parallelism, a simultaneously common yet autonomous coordination of struggles on different fronts, likewise pertains. This is mirrored by point 6 of the manifesto: ‘We identify with the victories of the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, the advancement of women’s rights, and the rising achievements of the LGBTQ community.’ Given that radical feminism has recently been dogged by accusations of separatism, Bruguera’s conscious implication of parallelism is significant.

The parallels between Hardt and Negri’s writing and the intentions underpinning *IMI* (I have not here examined their materialisations), while not conclusively pointing towards the influence of Hardt and Negri on Bruguera, certainly suggest a distinct consonance of interests between the two. In this work, more than in any other of Bruguera’s projects, there is a clear interest in formulating a radical, political art practice that while springing from

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88 See for example the furore surrounding ‘RadFem2012’ and its exclusion of all participants who were not “women born women and living as women.” Thanks to Victoria Horne for making this point. Roz Kaveney, “Radical Feminists Are Acting Like a Cult,” *The Guardian - Comment is Free* (2012), http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/may/25/radical-feminism-trans-radfem2012.
feminist and postcolonial identity politics, attempts to go beyond the ‘limiting logic of identity-difference’. In doing so, it contributes to understandings of how community may likewise be thought without recourse to being grounded in identity.

**Reappraising the Career of Tania Bruguera**

Given the distinctly linear and causal progression described in Hardt and Negri’s discussion of identity politics, and the convergences between their own concerns and those demonstrated in *IMI*, a temptation emerges to draw comparisons with the trajectory of Bruguera’s career. One argument would have it that *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* constituted Bruguera’s ‘identity politics’ phase, after which she developed through the stages of demystification, liberation and self-abolition of identity as she moved closer to an art practice informed by and espousing a revolutionary politics. However, as can be seen in *IMI*, the concern with identity has persisted even into her later work. Likewise, we have noted that in *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* there is no simple presentation of identity as immutable. Instead, the more persuasive reading of Bruguera’s career positions identity as something perpetually at stake, problematised, negotiable and indeed marketable. In Hardt and Negri’s terms, the greatest consistency across Bruguera’s work has been her playing with the relationships between the logics of identity-difference and singularity-commonality. Certainly though, *IMI* constitutes the work in which this concern is most evident. This then points towards one aspect of her practice that can be reasonably argued to have developed in a more linear and chronological fashion over the course of her career; namely her articulation of this concern with identity, difference, singularity and commonality. Over the course of her career, one may discern a distinct move towards practices that more fully and coherently articulate identity in its complexity, and in its vital role – as Hardt and Negri argue – in the formation of a ‘revolutionary parallelism’.

Three explanations present themselves with regard to the fuller articulation of this concern as her career has progressed. Firstly, one should not underestimate the development of Bruguera as an artist, and the manner in which she has honed a more conceptually sound and coherent art practice over the course of her career. It is absolutely vital to note that Bruguera was 18 years old when she reperformed *Blood Trace*, not yet out of art college and very much in the midst of the formative stage of her career. She claimed in an artist statement from 1992 that ‘art […] models new attitudes in my own life.’[^89] In a later interview she

describes *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* as ‘a learning process.’\textsuperscript{90} While the subject of identity, and the problematisation of the fixity of identity was clearly a regnant focus of Bruguera’s practice even at this early stage it was by no means rationalised or conceptually developed. Rather, this early interest in the subject can be seen as something of a pre-rational response to her circumstances during this period.

This then leads onto a second explanation. Bruguera has been, as I have alluded to, consistently and consciously engaged with the realm of theory, often speaking at conferences, symposia and so on, less in her capacity as an artist than in a capacity as a theorist of art. Her practice has become increasingly informed by her thorough awareness of, and interactions with, both theory and the history of art. Accordingly the pre-rational concern with identity and its complexities has been modulated and rationalised through a theoretical and historical lens. This is not a qualitative judgment, but a point of great significance with regard to the increasingly coherent articulation of her concerns in more recent works. Indeed, it could be (and has been) suggested that her engagement with theory has led to an overly rationalised and dry art practice.\textsuperscript{91}

Thirdly, in the wake of Hardt and Negri’s discussions of singularity, communality and the problems faced by identity politics – as well as interventions into these issues by other theorists, as described by Basso – the theoretically informed spectator to Bruguera’s work is more acclimatised to her concerns, and may more readily view her work in light of them. Likewise, with the rise of the social turn, and given the degree to which participatory and socially engaged practices – and the theoretical touchstones they have been discussed in relation to – have become normalised within the art world, there is an increasing attunement to such concerns in recent art practices.

**Community between Theory and Practice**

Hardt and Negri’s determination to supplant the ‘exclusive and limiting logic of identity-difference’ with the ‘open and expansive logic of singularity-commonality’ is shared by Nancy.\textsuperscript{92} As was mentioned at the outset of this chapter, he too consciously uses a language

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\textsuperscript{90} Ledo, "Intimate Traces," 50.


\textsuperscript{92} Hardt and Negri, *Multitude : War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, 225.
of singularity and the common in his discussions of community, and like Hardt and Negri, this decision is at least in part informed by a desire to think beyond identity, and therefore beyond the normative grounding of community formation in identity. As has been discussed, the singular presupposes the relational, and denies the connotations of individuality and property associated with identity. In Nancy’s case, this conceit is central to his rethinking of community away from inherited forms, given the importance of identity in the predominance of theory surrounding community prior to Nancy’s intervention. Andrew Norris explains this connection thus:

Communities and forms of life provide the context in which any practical judgment can be seen to be either reasonable or unreasonable. But at the same time, those communities are themselves constituted by patterns of such judgments. The tendency here is to think of this symbiotic relation as one of identity. My judgment reflects my community because I identify myself with it. As a set of standards and forms of behavior – in short, of judgments – my community is the essence of which I am an instance or expression. I embody my community.93

Marxist philosopher Sean Sayers, in a 1999 article entitled ‘Identity and Community’ traces the historical relationship between the two concepts.94 Succinctly, the most significant role that identity has played in relation to community has been its positioning as either a foundation myth or guarantee for a particular community. That is, it serves as either a supposed common origin of the membership of a community (an ethnicity, religion etc.) or as a point towards which the community is oriented. Indeed it may serve as both. If one takes the case of the Volksgemeinschaft in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, the origin can be seen as the Aryan race, or the German Volk, while the community is oriented towards the establishment of a German nation-state, a Großdeutschland, that would be reflective of this identity.

Norris continues to outline his reading of the import of Nancy’s theory:

Jean-Luc Nancy’s contributions to political philosophy are relevant here because they constitute one of our most comprehensive arguments against this understanding of politics as a form or expression of identity. Nancy is adamant that community is our native state, and that individualistic or “atomistic” political philosophies and the worldly relations they both reflect and encourage do violence to this.95

Other thinkers of postmodern community likewise rejected traditional associations of identity and community. Iris Marion Young argued:

I criticize the notion of community on both philosophical and practical grounds. I argue that the ideal of community participates in what Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence or Adorno calls the logic of identity, a metaphysics that denies difference. The ideal of community presumes subjects who are present to themselves and presumes subjects can understand one another as they understand themselves. It thus denies the difference between subjects.96

Elsewhere, René ten Bos has argued that the defining feature of Giorgio Agamben’s thinking on community is its rejection of identity.

He thinks that current concepts of belonging, togetherness, and community are misguided, and he develops a plethora of concepts and terms that all serve the purpose of finding new articulations of a community without exclusion and inclusion, without violence and negativity, without substance and identity.97

Accordingly, we may characterise the rejection of identity and its significance to thinking community as being at the heart of postmodern community in general. Likewise, in this chapter we have seen that precisely this motivation underpins the practices of Artur Żmijewski and Tania Bruguera. The question then arises: what do these artistic interventions into this subject add to what was already a thriving theoretical discourse? In order to answer this, one must return to one of the most debated themes surrounding philosophy; namely, the relationship between theory and practice.

The social relevance of philosophy has long been held with scepticism, often by philosophers themselves. Theorists of postmodern community, despite the political claims of the likes of Nancy, have similarly been subject to criticism regarding the applicability of their theory. Christopher Fynsk addresses this in his foreword to *The Inoperative Community*:

Anyone seeking an immediate political application of this thought of community risks frustration […]. Moreover, this frustration will not entirely dissipate even if one recognizes that Nancy’s engagement with the political (understood, once again, as the site where a being-in-common is at stake) proceeds from an acute sense of the contemporary sociopolitical context and is indissociable from a political position-taking. One does not have to read


97 Ten Bos, "Giorgio Agamben and the Community without Identity," 20.
far to recognize the political character of Nancy's thought (even when he does not thematize political issues), and it is not difficult to see where Nancy might be situated in the spectrum of political choices. But it is exceedingly difficult to define. For example, how one might move from his definition of a nonorganic, differential articulation of social existence (which he illustrates via Marx in chapter 3) to any currently existing politics. For once again there is a point at which this move becomes properly unthinkable in the terms of any traditional conception of the relation between theory and practice: one cannot work to institute or realize this thought of community.98

The question of theory and practice has been a conundrum that has dogged philosophy since Plato and Socrates.99 It became particularly reinvigorated by the work of Karl Marx and Marxist thinkers including Karl Korsch and Antonio Gramsci. For Marx, theory must be conjoined with practice, lest it have no practical value.100 Flewelling summarises this position, noting that for Marx, ‘without philosophy, praxis will not be purposeful, and only a philosophy that recognizes the value of practices can be social relevant.’101 Korsch develops this, arguing in *Marxism and Philosophy* that in any revolutionary political project ‘all these forms [the structures of bourgeois society] must be subjected to the revolutionary social criticism of scientific socialism, which embraces the whole of social reality. They must be criticised in theory and overthrown in practice.’102

As Fynsk notes, Nancy’s theory – and one could say the same for Blanchot and Agamben in particular – cannot be instituted or realised. Indeed, Nancy’s assertion that community cannot be worked towards essentially precludes such realisation. From a strictly Marxist position, then, it fails in its bifurcation of theory and practice. And yet, the theoretical claims of Nancy et al. must not simply be discarded, rather they should be seen as philosophical propositions to be developed and applied through other forms and modes of articulation. As ten Bos notes, the focus of Agamben’s writing is ‘to think community in the most abstract and general sense of the word, that is to say, not this or that community but perhaps community as such.’103 This is a conscious decision. If community in its ‘really existing’ forms had become subject to crippling manipulations and instrumentalisations, and if the

98 Christopher Fynsk, ‘Foreword’ to Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, x-xi.


100 Ibid., 41.

101 Ibid., 42.


103 Ten Bos, "Giorgio Agamben and the Community without Identity," 24.
only cure for this could be derived from a systemic reconfiguration of the term at a level of philosophical abstraction, then the work of the theorists of postmodern community is invaluable. Nevertheless, it must be supplemented by practical interrogations of community on similar terms. It is at this point that art may offer considerable benefit to the discourse of postmodern community in theory.

In a 2011 article for *The Guardian* newspaper entitled ‘Arabs are democracy’ s new pioneers’, Hardt and Negri wrote of the recent Arab Spring, ‘our hope is that through this cycle of struggles the Arab world becomes […] a laboratory of political experimentation.’ There is a danger that such events in countries deemed ‘Third World’ may become what literary theorist Hamid Dabashi, in response to remarks made by Slavoj Žižek on Iran, called ‘theoretical entertainment,’ a distant crucible of unrest to be analysed by academics with suitable detachment for it to be merely a conceptual consideration. The biopolitical impact of this unrest gets somewhat obscured behind a veil of intellectualisation. Art, perhaps, provides an alternative ‘laboratory of political experimentation,’ in that paradoxically its lack of agency may in fact be the source of its agency. By this I mean to suggest that art generally deals with more diminutive biopolitical currencies than ‘real life.’ The stakes are on the whole considerably lower, thus art may provide a site for political experimentation where ‘theoretical entertainment’ does not veil great biopolitical tragedy, rather it replaces it.

In the case of community, participatory art practices have emerged as a laboratory environment, with low stakes, that necessarily implicates social relations and their attendant politics. The work of Bruguera and Žmijewski can thus be seen as a practical analogue to the theories of the likes of Nancy and Agamben, and indeed Hardt and Negri, despite their refusal to use the term ‘community’. We have noted their shared concerns, and the similarity in the conditions that precipitated their respective productions. They differ in their modes of articulation, and only when taken together, transversally, may community in the sense proposed by the theorists of postmodern community come closer to political application and materialisation.

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6: Public Performance and ‘Really Existing Community’

As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the focus of theories of postmodern community – and indeed this study – has been ‘community in the most abstract and general sense of the word, that is to say, not this or that community but perhaps community as such.’ Indeed, postmodern community theory has been defined by a profound distaste for ‘this or that community’, stemming from Georges Bataille’s call to ‘fight for the decomposition and exclusion of all communities national, socialist, communist or churchly - other than universal community.’ The likes of Giorgio Agamben, Maurice Blanchot, Roberto Esposito and Jean-Luc Nancy, in keeping with the methodologies of the discipline of philosophy to which they adhere, chose consciously to interrogate ‘community as such’ at the abstract level of philology and theory.

While I am broadly sympathetic to this, two problems arise from this limited approach. Firstly, given that the common-sense definition of community tends to coincide with ‘this or that community’ rather than ‘community as such’ – for instance, when one refers to communities defined adjectivally such as ‘the Jewish community’ or ‘the black community’ – the work of these writers may come across as philosophical pedantry. There is a sense that ‘the public’ is being scolded for their improper use of the term. Secondly, and more urgently, to focus specifically on a theoretical approach to ‘community as such’ is to shut down a particularly productive line of enquiry in the negotiation of community. That is, the study of ‘community as such’ through the examination of ‘this or that community’; encountering the universal through the particular.

In a passage already quoted in chapter 2, Zygmunt Bauman offers the phrase ‘really existing community’ as a tongue-in-cheek alternative term for ‘this or that community’. He defines it as ‘a collectivity which pretends to be community incarnate, the dream fulfilled, and (in the name of all the goodness such community is assumed to offer) demands unconditional loyalty and treats everything short of such loyalty as an act of unforgivable treason.’ While he shares a distaste towards this form of community with his fellow postmodern community theorists, he does not ignore or bypass ‘this or that community’ in the same way. Rather, in

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1 Ten Bos, "Giorgio Agamben and the Community without Identity," 14.
keeping with his sociological background, he devotes considerable attention to deconstructing the falsities and ambiguities of ‘really existing community’ in order to glean further insight into what ‘community as such’ may be.

In this final chapter, I wish to follow Bauman’s lead, focussing on art practices that have implicated ‘this or that community’ not in a communitarian and affirmative sense, but in a sceptical and critical light, as a means of reaching the more universal question of ‘community as such’.4 We have already seen examples of this in the work of Thomas Hirschhorn (in chapter 1) and Artur Żmijewski (in chapter 5). Here, however, my focus lies specifically on what I see as having been the most productive site for such an impulse in art over recent years, that is, the resurgence of public performance practices. After an initial contextualisation of this tendency, my analysis will again hinge upon two case studies: Estonian-Russian artist Kristina Norman’s installation After-War (2009) and Scottish-Croatian artist collective Eastern Surf’s project Quartermile Render Ghosts (2012). The first of these studies analyses Norman’s interest in monuments and the roles that they play at the heart of what she has called ‘communal rituals of intensification’. The second returns to the subject of the instrumentalisation of community by capital, discussed in chapter 2, examining the way in which a rhetoric of community is cynically employed in the contexts of new-build urban developments.

**Performance and The Ethical Turn**

‘Ethical Delirium’

As art has undergone its well-documented and much-debated shift in emphasis away from representation and towards materially embedded practices – or as Nikos Papastergiadis puts it, ‘from image production to the initiation of scenes for the replaying of social relations’ – ethics has become an increasingly contentious issue in contemporary art history and theory.5 Artists’ desires to do something, as artist Dan Graham demanded, ‘more social […] and more real than art’ have led to the adoption of increasingly collaborative or collective modes of production as a means of bringing a desired sociality directly into artistic processes.6

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4 While I have on the whole avoided using the word ‘community’ in its more common-sense form (‘this or that community’) for much of this thesis in order to avoid confusion, it is necessary in this chapter to do so. It is clear to what form of community I am referring to in individual instances through context.


6 Dan Graham, quoted in Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” 179.
Claire Bishop suggested in 2006 that, due to this paradigm shift, it is no longer the artwork which is the site of critique; rather it is the ‘working process – the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration.’ Art historian Anthony Downey elaborated upon this observation in a text of 2009, suggesting that it is the ‘ethical efficacy’ of the collaboration between artists and participants, which provides the basis for much of the criticism of collaborative and participatory practices. Increasingly, working processes in art have tended towards a field-work-based model of practice – leaving the studio and entering into public space – long-established in the arenas of sociology, anthropology and ethnography. Art differs substantially however in that it is not governed by a self-regulatory code of ethics and conduct according to which this entry into public space may take place. As I shall demonstrate, this relative lack of regulation has been productively exploited by artists seeking to question the status of ‘really existing communities’.

It is not however possible to characterise, as Bishop does, the ‘ethical turn’ in criticism as simply an inadvertent side-effect of the structural introduction of collaborative and participatory forms of engagement and anthropological methodologies in art. Grant Kester, whom Bishop has implicated in this supposed subjugation of the aesthetic to the ethical, has suggested that many exponents of the ‘collaborative turn’ deliberately take ethics as their subject matter, purposefully instigating the ‘strategic production of shame or guilt in the viewer (in order to awaken a presumably dormant ethical sensibility).’ Curator Kirsten Lloyd has commented of Dutch artist Renzo Martens and Żmijewski that they ‘apparently relish the shock induced when they substitute the ultra-ethical artist-as-social worker with the deliberately provocative artist-as-sociopath model.’

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7 Ibid.
9 Organisations such as the American Anthropological Association and the Association of Social Anthropologists publish extensive statements of ethics on their websites.
As such, it seems irrefutable that the increasing currency of ethics in the contexts of discussions of contemporary art is not merely the result of theoretical exegesis, rather it is a desired effect of a concerted effort on the part of a great number of contemporary practitioners, of which Martens and Żmijewski are arguably the most visible, to probe via artistic means what Alain Badiou has described as the ‘ethical delirium’ of the contemporary condition. For Badiou ‘ethical delirium’ names a state in which ‘the presumed “rights of man” were serving at every point to annihilate any attempt to invent forms of free thought.’

Although writing during the early 1990s, other writers, most notably French post-Marxist philosopher Jacques Rancière, have noted the persistence of this state. One of the primary means through which this ‘ethical delirium’ has been punctured in order to generate ‘free thought’ has been the reintroduction, or as I wish to demonstrate, the smuggling of performance into contemporary art practice.

**Performance is Dangerous**

Because performances are usually subjunctive, liminal, dangerous, and duplicitous they are often hedged in with conventions and frames: ways of making the places, the participants, and the events somewhat safe. In these relatively safe make-believe precincts, actions can be carried to extremes, even for fun.

As performance theorist Richard Schechner has noted, performance can be a dangerous practice. It is provisional and experimental, the institution of an artificial set of rules and norms, contrary to those governing ‘normality’, on a particular circumstance or people (if such a thing as normality exists. Indeed, plenty has been written on the performativity of our daily existence). Thus it needs to be ‘hedged in with conventions and frames’ (such as those of television, film and theatre) in order to neutralise two traits in which, I wish to suggest, the inherent danger of performance is rooted: ambiguity and extremity. Firstly, it must be framed, to clearly demarcate, designate and signpost the performance. Without such framing performance is ‘liminal’ or ‘duplicitous’. It may not be clear what is performed and

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14 Ibid.


what is not. The innocent bystander may justifiably, yet incorrectly, believe that they are witnessing or interacting with someone on standard terms, according to the norms of everyday existence. Secondly, performance requires conventionalisation in order to regulate activity and counteract the license granted to the performer—on the basis that performance is simply ‘make-believe, in play, for fun’—to act outside of societal norms, to transgress ethical boundaries and to carry actions to extremes.18

In the 1960s and 1970s artists capitalised on the potential available through the release of performance from its frames, eschewing conventions and unleashing its inherent danger. Vito Acconci exploited an unsuspecting public, transforming the audience into oblivious players in his sexualised games, while Marina Abramović coaxed the gallery-going classes into incongruous acts of savagery and brutality. But, as performance was admitted into the canon of art history, it once again became constrained by new sets of conventions and frames. In a telling parallel with capitalism’s tendency to incorporate all forms of dissent, these were modelled upon the initially transgressive works of this first wave of performance art. Once more performance had been made safe. Accordingly, for a considerable time during the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century, performance largely faded from view in the contexts of the newly globalised post-1989 international art world.

Where it persisted, it did so denuded of the danger that had been at the heart of its early manifestations in art. On the one hand performances designed to be pleasant, consensual and inclusive emerged. The cookery work of Rirkrit Tiravanija, for instance, is utterly bound by convention and an awareness of the rules of the game being played.19 On the other hand, a tendency towards what Bishop refers to as ‘delegated performance’ emerged. She notes that ‘in the early ‘90s, particularly in Europe […] artists started to pay or persuade other people to undertake their performances.’20 Regardless of the ethical implications of hiring participants to perform as part of an artwork, the process of hiring itself sets in place a

18 Schechner, Performance Theory, xviii.
19 Like the work of Martens and Żmijewski, Tiravanija’s practice is often spoken in relation to participatory, rather than performance, art. These two categories are however notably porous, and as Helena Reckitt has argued, relational aesthetics and participatory practice are thoroughly indebted to the longer history of (largely feminist) performance art. Reckitt, “Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics.” Recent art-historical interventions into the subject have increasingly recognised this. Jen Harvie (2013) and Shannon Jackson (2011) both consciously discuss relational and participatory practices (and indeed the work of Tiravanija) within this lineage. Jen Harvie, Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Shannon Jackson, Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
system of conventions and frames by which the performance is neutralized. The participants are aware that they are partaking in a performance and know largely what kind of performance is broadly being enacted. Furthermore they are remunerated for their service and thus render themselves willing to be subjected by the artist, albeit by potential exploitative means, in the service of the artwork. Even central figures from the first wave of performance have been guilty of such neutralisation. Artist Yvonne Rainer recently commented on the decreased impact of Abramović’s reperfections at her 2010 MoMA retrospective ‘The Artist is Present’, in which she procured the services of performers to play roles originally fulfilled by the artist, stating her displeasure at Abramović’s ‘obliviousness to differences in context (and to) the implications of transposing her own powerful performances to the bodies of others.’

However, with the advent of the new millennium performance increasingly returned to currency. Performance historian Shannon Jackson, in her book Social Works, and Kester, in The One and the Many, have both commented on just how prevalent the performative is in contemporary artistic practice, citing the examples above, as well as a plethora of others including Superflex, Paul Chan, and Elmgreen and Dragset. Elsewhere, theorists such as Jan Verwoert and Sven Lütticken have commented on the increased requirement implemented by neoliberalism towards an everyday affective labour of ‘general performance.’ Verwoert claims that ‘one thing seems certain: after the disappearance of manual labour from the lives of most people in the Western world, we have entered into a culture where we no longer just work, we perform.’ In a wide variety of contexts, both artistic and otherwise, Jackson’s recognition of a ‘performative turn’ seems most apt.


22 Ibid.


24 Lütticken, "General Performance."


26 Jackson, Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics, 2.
What has particularly characterised this resurgence of performance has been the manner in
which, to borrow a term from Irit Rogoff, it has been smuggled into art practices. 27
Zmijewski, for instance, is most often spoken of in relation to discourses surrounding
participation in art. As has been seen in chapter 5, however, performance is central to his
practice. Similarly, fellow ‘bad boy’ of contemporary art, Martens, cloaks his work in the
sombre veil of the documentary mode, concealing – if only barely – the performance of the
artist that lies at the heart of his work Episode III: Enjoy Poverty (2008). 28 In this 90-minute
film, Martens ostensibly acts as a documentary filmmaker surveying the ongoing civil war in
the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He, however, is the central character in proceedings,
routinely turning the camera onto himself and performing a variety of roles: from colonial
exploiter; to human rights activist; to journalist; to teacher; at one point entirely shattering
the illusion that this is a straight documentary by performing a rousing rendition of Neil
Young’s ‘Man Needs a Maid’ while walking through a swamp.

As art theorist Ruben de Roo has noted of Episode III: ‘The ambiguous feeling that the film
leaves us with may be attributed in no small measure to its documentary format,’ or more
precisely the tension between its documentary format and the performance strategies
enclosed within. 29 Martens himself has identified his practice with performance, stating of
his work Episode III: Enjoy Poverty (2008) that ‘the film is a performance of the discourses
of the white man (Renzo Martens) taking responsibility for everything we in the West are
and do.’ 30 In both of these cases the concealment and smuggling of performance serves to
reintroduce danger to the medium by doing away with the safe-making conventions and
frames that had neutralised it. As Rogoff notes of the concept of smuggling: ‘it is a form of
surreptitious transfer […] from one realm into another. The passage of contraband from here
to there is not sanctioned and does not have visible and available protocols to follow.’ 31 The
smuggling of performance into artistic practice is central to the practices of both Kristina
Norman and Eastern Surf, and is key to the negotiations of community in both.

27 Rogoff, “‘Smuggling’–an Embodied Criticality”.

28 Angela Dimitrakaki, Gender, Artwork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique

29 Ruben De Roo, "Immorality as Ethics: Renzo Martens' Enjoy Poverty," in Art and Activism in the Age
of Globalization, ed. Lieven De Cauter, Ruben De Roo, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck (Rotterdam: NAI,
2011), 144.

30 Frances Guerin, "Interview with Renzo Martens," ArtSlant (2009),

31 Rogoff, “‘Smuggling’–an Embodied Criticality”.
Kristina Norman, *After-War*, 2009

Much of the work of Kristina Norman has, since 2006, dealt with the subject of Estonian-Russian relations, in particular focussing on the ‘Bronze Soldier of Tallinn’ in its capacity as the focal point of much of the recent conflict between Estonian and Russian communities in Estonia. ‘The Bronze Soldier’, originally entitled ‘Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn’, before being renamed ‘Monument to the Fallen in the Second World War’ was erected in 1947 by the then occupying Soviet regime. It stood in the Tõnismägi area of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, marking the site of war graves until April 2007, when the Estonian government relocated the monument and graves to a military ceremony outside the city. The hasty and unannounced nature of its removal exacerbated the already controversial nature of the statue in Estonia, sparking riots in Tallinn, commonly referred to as ‘Bronze Night’.

In 2007 Norman made a fifteen-minute documentary video work entitled *Monolith*, which presented a mixture of found footage and video recorded by the artist of the Bronze Soldier and the Bronze Night riots. This formed the basis for *After-War* (2009), an installation exhibited at the Estonian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009. *After-War* consisted of, amongst other objects and videos, a two-metre tall, gold-painted replica of the monument hanging from the ceiling, almost parallel to the ground; a rotating advertising hoarding displaying on its faces the site of the monument before and after its removal; and a video documenting a performance the artist had undertaken on 9 May 2009, the former Soviet ‘Victory Day’ commemorating the entry of Soviet forces into Tallinn after the retreat of the Nazis from the city in 1945. This video and the performance it documents are the elements of *After-War* requiring particular attention in this context.

The video (fig. 11) shows the artist arriving at Tõnismägi, the site of the Bronze Soldier prior to its relocation, amidst a crowd of gathering members of the local Russian community, to whom 9 May still represents a day of huge historical import. Despite the relocation of the monument two years previously, the park it had previously occupied has retained significance for Russians in Estonia, many of whom still gather there on 9 May every year. Norman brought with her the gold replica of the Bronze Soldier and proceeded to erect it in the spot of the original monument. Those gathered expressed a near universal gratitude and admiration for the soldier and artist. Some took photographs, while others lay flowers around its feet. Within half an hour, however, the police arrived, toppled the statue, placed it on the back of a police van and removed it and the artist from the scene, to the protesting shouts of those gathered in Tõnismägi and the artist herself.
Perhaps inevitably, given the high-profile location and subject matter implicated, and the work’s status as Estonia’s 2009 Venice Biennale commission, Norman’s performance garnered a great deal of media attention, much of it highly critical of the artist. Estonian Interior Minister Juhri Pihl observed ‘I don’t know whether it is art. It is a provocation though,’ while commenters on Estonian online news services left posts such as ‘It is anti-state activity and the “artist” Norman should be sent to prison for a long time.’\(^{32}\) The Council of Europe even published a report on the Bronze Soldier which claimed that the reopening of hostilities in 2009 were a result of Norman’s actions.\(^{33}\) The reasons for this widespread disapproval of Norman’s practice are clear. Norman wins the gathered crowd’s trust, a result of her installation of this statue being seen as a pro-Russian statement, corroborated by the fact that she speaks Russian. They presume, fairly enough, that she is ‘one of them’ and that she is motivated by the same beliefs and goals. However, writing of her intentions behind this performance retrospectively, Norman stated that:

> For the Russian community, taking a small replica of the monument to its previous location was kind of an attempt to return “confiscated instruments” to their comrades, so that they could, in a dignified manner, celebrate the **victory** of the Great Patriotic War. I am demonstrating that the community needs such instruments in order to practise their communal and national identity rituals of intensification.\(^{34}\)

While her specific intentions will be discussed below, what is immediately pertinent is the dissonance between these intentions and her perceived intentions according to ‘the Russian community’. While for ‘the Russian community’ her installation of this gold soldier may have been seen as a patriotic act, for Norman it was a theoretical exercise. In a subsequent interview, the artist acknowledged: ‘I took advantage of this situation.’\(^{35}\) In effect the Russian crowd were appropriated as tools in the artist’s grander game. It is this dissonance that points to the centrality of a form of smuggled performance to Norman’s work. Martens, discussing *Episode III* stated in 2009 that:


35 Tamm, “Pronkssõduri Koopia Äraviimine Saab Samuti Kunstiteoseks”. 


Within this performance there are two Renzo Martens' in the film: First there is Renzo Martens the artist and second Renzo Martens the consumer. The two Renzos interact with each other to produce the duplicity communicated by the film: I am both the observer and the perpetrator of the African's exploitation.36

A comparable fragmentation of self can be observed in Norman’s own performance, the artist regularly switching between roles and behaviours. This is most explicit firstly in the false naivety Norman adopts throughout the performance – particularly evident upon the arrival of the police – and secondly in her manipulation of her dual Russian-Estonian heritage. She is able to seem Russian to the gathered crowd, and then to seem Estonian to the police. At the most basic level she achieves this by switching between Russian and Estonian languages, although her conduct adapts significantly as well. One could argue that there are two Kristina Norman’s in the work. In fact, it could be more accurate to suggest that there are a myriad of Kristina Norman’s present, the artist flitting between positions when it is expedient to do so. Accordingly, the gathered members of ‘the Russian community’ are never in a position to firmly pin down Norman. At a number of points in the documentation one overhears bystanders speculating as to who the artist is, some attempting to persuade others that she is in fact Estonian, their inference being that she is not to be trusted.

**Disturbing Indifference**

As Badiou and Rancière have noted, the primacy of ethics in contemporary society has served to close down the opportunity for ‘free thought’, precluding criticality in favour of an indifferent and unquestioning consensus. Performance, when smuggled out of its conventions and frames, offers a particularly potent means of disturbing this consensus. Accordingly it may, to quote Žmijewski, ‘show that which is hidden’ or consciously obscured by this consensus. 37 Regardless of the ethical implications of Norman’s performance, it is to these ends that her work is oriented. One review of Kristina Norman’s Venice Biennale exhibition makes this clear:

> Whatever [Norman’s] intentions, it may just be the spark needed to blow up the peace of everyday life […] There is a man here phoning somebody to

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36 Martens comments on the existence of a similar dichotomy in his own work. ‘Within this performance there are two Renzo Martens’ in the film: First there is Renzo Martens the artist and second Renzo Martens the consumer. The two Renzos interact with each other to produce the duplicity communicated by the film: I am both the observer and the perpetrator of the African’s exploitation.’ Guerin, “Interview with Renzo Martens”.

say, excitedly: ‘Come here, quickly, the soldier is back!’ This is where, hearing the sincerity of his voice, I am shaken: what if the artist ends up disturbing, not the peace, but indifference? The indifference that makes sure that uncomfortable feelings, identities and memories stay buried.\(^\text{38}\)

In order to highlight precisely how this disturbing of indifference takes place in Norman’s work, a comparison with another field into which performance has been strategically smuggled in recent years is expedient; namely activism. One of the most prominent forms of activism over the past two decades has been tactical media. New media theorist Rita Raley sees this as a form of performance. She says that ‘to conceive of tactical media in terms of performance is to point to a fluidity of its actants, to emphasize its ephemerality, and to shift the weight of emphasis slightly to the audience, which does not simply complete the signifying field of the work but records a memory of the performance.’\(^\text{39}\) Among the most celebrated exponents of this activist strategy are The Yes Men, a duo comprising Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, who practices displays a number of similarities with those of Norman.

The Yes Men commonly adopt false identities, usually mimicking spokespersons for multinational corporations, as a means of disrupting the political sphere. In 2004, Andy Bichlbaum, one of The Yes Men, appeared on BBC World News under the guise of an invented executive of Dow Chemical Company, Jude Finisterra. His appearance coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, a gas leak caused by the negligence of Union Carbide India Limited, a chemical company taken over by Dow in 2001, who were responsible for a pesticide plant in Bhopal, India. Tens of thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands more injured. In his appearance on BBC News, Bichlbaum announced that Dow were to inject $12 billion into the regeneration of Bhopal, accepting full responsibility for the disaster. Instantly, Dow shares dropped in value by $2 billion as tricked investors sought to extricate themselves from this loss-making remuneration.\(^\text{40}\)

It is the performance elements of The Yes Men’s work – the playing of characters, the false narratives perpetuated, all conceits which are eventually uncovered for the untruths they really are – which allows their work to operate on such an ephemeral plane. This ephemerality does not negatively impact on tactical media’s political agency; conversely it is


\(^{39}\) Rita Raley, Tactical Media (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2009), 12.

\(^{40}\) This is documented in the film “The Yes Men Fix The World” (2009), directed by Andy Bichlbaum, Mike Bonanno, and Kurt Engfehr.
central to the agency of such work. Tactical media thrives on the immediacy and momentary nature of contemporary media, exemplified by twenty-four hour rolling news and instantaneous online coverage. The Bhopal hoax required only 23 minutes to wipe out a substantial portion of Dow’s monetary worth. As is the case in Norman’s practice, The Yes Men’s work seeks ‘to provoke and to reveal, to defamiliarize and to critique.’\textsuperscript{41} The purpose of The Yes Men’s action was not to prompt the remuneration of Bhopal, rather to provide a jolt out of indifference creating a situation in which ‘signs, messages, and narratives are set into play and critical thinking becomes possible.’\textsuperscript{42} The parallels between this and Badiou’s discussion of ethics and free thought are telling.

‘Rituals of Intensification’

Returning to the stated objectives of \textit{After-War}, as related by Norman herself, the primary target of this disturbing of indifference in Norman’s work is the figure of the monument and ‘that the community needs such instruments in order to practise their communal and national identity rituals of intensification.’\textsuperscript{43} As Benedict Anderson has commented of such war memorials and national monuments, they are ‘saturated with ghostly national imaginings.’\textsuperscript{44} Norman, through the momentary disruption of her performance in the first instance, and then through the representation of this performance within exhibition formats in the second instance, reveals the fundamental absurdity of such material embodiments of a community. Particularly telling was the installation of the work at the Kunstihoone gallery in Tallinn in early 2010. The room adjacent to \textit{After-War} housed the screening of a short film entitled \textit{We are not Alone in the Universe} (2008, fig. 12). Shot by the artist and her film crew, the work details the unveiling of a small monument in the middle of farmland in rural Estonia on the site of an apparent UFO sighting. The monument itself is a small rock with the letters ‘UFO’ etched into it. The unveiling was a small affair, attended by the owner of the farmland, a couple of local residents, Norman and her film crew, another local news team, and a supposed ‘UFO expert’. The monument is initially hidden underneath a dishcloth, the removal of which is heralded by the lighting of a single firework. Following this, the owner of the farmland, who also instigated the installation of this monument in honour of his

\textsuperscript{41} Raley, \textit{Tactical Media}, 7.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 6.

\textsuperscript{43} Norman, "Poetic Investigations," 27.

\textsuperscript{44} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism}, 9.
The juxtaposition of this piece alongside After-War, with its vast, recumbent and suspended soldier, painted in a garish, egregious gold, invites comparison. The soldier becomes a kitsch icon, the physical lightness – as demonstrated by its placement hovering a couple of feet off the ground – and luminosity contrast wildly with the weathered weightiness of the original Bronze Soldier. In the video documenting the gold soldier’s installation in Tõnismägi a policeman inspecting the object knocks on it, producing a hollow, insubstantial sound. It is later blown over by the wind. These circumstantial, small details gain added significance in the contexts of the installation’s exhibition at Kunstihoone.

Her aim, however, is not simply to ridicule, but to point towards the more sinister nature of such ‘instruments’. The opening sequence of Monolith is an animation depicting the Bronze Soldier flying across the border between Russia and Estonia, before explosively landing in the heart of Tallinn. The artist here makes clear that she does not see this monument, the ‘communal and national identity rituals of intensification’, and, by extension, the ‘community’ that gathers around it, in a romanticised, bottom-up light. Rather, she emphasises the political instrumentalisation of this monument as a means of control and manipulation of a populace. While the rituals of ‘the Russian community’ shown in the documentation of her performance in 2009 seem disordered, self-organised, even impromptu, another video shown in the installation discredits this. Found footage of the Bronze Soldier’s inauguration and early ‘Victory Day’ gatherings around the monument during the Soviet era show that these rituals were official and prescribed by the Soviet officers regimenting these celebrations. Norman’s work then cannot be seen as an affirmation of the ‘really existing communities’ that she implicates, rather it highlights the cynical appropriation of community by figures of power, akin to the Nazi use of Volksgemeinschaft against which Bataille railed.

Eastern Surf, Quartermile Render Ghosts, 2012

While the ‘really existing communities’ implicated in Norman’s practice are long-established, Eastern Surf’s Quartermile Render Ghosts (2012) traces the very first stages of the attempted construction of a new ‘community’. It centres around Quartermile, a 20-acre, mixed-use redevelopment project comprising upmarket apartments, offices, retail spaces, restaurants and a gym on the southern edge of Edinburgh’s city centre. Masterplanned by Foster+Partners, it is typical of an aesthetically globalised form of modern urban development pioneered by Norman Foster among others that, as anthropologist Angela
McLanahan has argued, would look ‘as at home in Copenhagen or London as in Dubai.’ It occupies the site, and many of the buildings, of the former Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, sandwiched between the Meadows – a park which marks the southern periphery of Edinburgh’s city centre – and various University and Art College buildings. When Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond officially opened the site in 2007, he announced that ‘this is not just a collection of impressive buildings, but a new quarter of Edinburgh that could emerge as a diverse, vibrant and thriving community.’ His language echoes the tone of much of the literature that has surrounded Quartermile over the 13 years that has passed since the site was sold by Lothian Health Trust to a consortium of investors including Bank of Scotland for £30 million in 2001. Publicity materials for residential property in Quartermile proudly offer the prospective occupant a place ‘in the midst of a thriving community,’ while the project’s extensive office space marketing campaign simply inserts the word ‘business’ into proceedings. Before discussing Eastern Surf’s practice directly, I would like first, by way of contrast, to examine the representation of this ‘community’ in the form of architectural renderings by the developers and architects responsible for the project.

Rendering Community

precedents ranging from British philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s late-eighteenth century designs for the panopticon – and indeed Foucault’s retrieval of panopticism in Discipline and Punish – to the Haussmanisation of Paris in the 1850s and 60s, have demonstrated that architecture has long been a primary means of exerting control and regulating behaviour. Grand-scale urban developments such as Quartermile are simply a recent manifestation of this. Crucially, this controlling function of architecture is fundamentally teleological, in that a particular end or goal – for instance, the normalisation, preclusion or encouragement of certain types of behaviour or activity – predetermines the form of the architecture. This is perhaps most apparent in the form of the architectural renderings, the purpose of which, as was noted in a recent New York Times article, ‘is not to predict the future […] but to control

47 The phrase ‘in the midst of a thriving community’ was used in advertising brochures for property in Quartermile. ‘A thriving business community’ is used as the headline for Quartermile’s office space website: http://www.qmile.com/office-property-edinburgh-quartermile/who-s-here
Their teleological operation is twofold. Firstly, they designate and represent an end point to the architectural process, prior to the outset of construction, a telos towards which this process is oriented. Secondly, and more significantly, they are intended to act as self-fulfilling prophesies of sorts, helping to ensure a usage of the space concordant with the architect’s initial desires. In imaging the future procedure of a space, potential users of this space are informed as to how they should act. Furthermore, their sunlit abstractions of reality are consciously seductive, encouraging these potential users that they not only should act just so, but that they want to.

Formally, the renderings for Quartermile (fig. 13) are fairly conventional, showing spotless, sunlit buildings and (supposedly) public spaces populated by an array of summer-attired figures cycling, shopping, striding purposefully to work with briefcase in hand, pushing prams or simply relaxing in the sun. Two circumstantial factors make them worthy of closer attention however. Firstly, given the extended period of construction and the site’s centrality and visibility in Edinburgh, architectural renderings have taken on an exaggerated public function in this instance. Between 2001 and 2007 the entire site was encased in a tall, blue perimeter fence adorned with an array of renderings, stock images and slogans, selling the passing public visions of the ‘thriving community’ to come. Since the opening of the first completed sections in 2007, this blue fence has contracted to encompass the as-yet incomplete portions of the development. Nonetheless, throughout the entire thirteen years and counting of this process, this fence and its representations of Quartermile have been the predominant means through which the site has been encountered by the public. Even now, a great many more people pass by this fencing than enter into the complex itself.

Secondly, in the case of the fencing, as well as in other media, architectural renderings have been accompanied by a concerted linguistic implication of community, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Online, on billboards, in brochures and in the news, digital visualisations of Quartermile, throughout its construction, have been paired with invocations of a ‘vibrant’ or ‘thriving community’. When viewed in this context, the renderings take on an evidential quality, guarantors of the community that will one day inhabit the site. It is also worthy of note, particularly in light of architecture’s teleological function, that many of the claims made for community are made in the present tense. The claim that ‘here residents enjoy life in the midst of a thriving community’ was made prior to the completion of the site.

Accordingly, the prospective or speculative nature of the call for community is underplayed, supplanted by the positioning of community as a constant or an inevitable telos towards which the construction process will invariably move.

Of course, such claims for community must not be taken at face value. As has been mentioned in chapter 2, it is, according to Bauman, one of the tendencies of modern capitalism to ‘attempt to resuscitate or create ab nihilo a “community feeling.”’ Such attempts, as architect Austin Williams has argued, display a ‘casual disregard for the very thing that makes [community] special: communality - a voluntary association of interested parties.’ They pursue all the supposed benefits of community while simultaneously and impatiently circumventing the time-consuming process of ethical crystallisation essential to the constitution of the community in the first place. This was perhaps most apparent, and exaggerated, in the form of model villages, such as Bournville, through which industrialists endeavoured to harness the cohesive powers of community to their own industrial and productive ends. Contemporary urban developments such as Quartermile are the logical descendants of these model villages. Often funded by the finance sector - Quartermile was part funded by the Bank of Scotland - they attempt to impose an ethics upon residents conducive to the production of capital in a post-industrial economy, that is, to the benefit of their financiers. And, as was the case with model villages, they speak in the rhetoric of community, proclaiming themselves volubly as such. Model villages were consciously sold according the image of a rural idyll, the form of pre-capitalist community that this image connoted offsetting the industrialisation around which these settlements were clustered. Developments such as Quartermile implicate community to similar ends, albeit updated according to the financialised form of capitalist production that they attend to.

‘In the Midst of a Thriving Community’

It is Quartermile’s claim for community that I see as being the object of Eastern Surf’s Quartermile Render Ghosts, in which members of the public and hired actors were invited to perform as supposedly archetypal residents of Quartermile (fig. 14). They entered unheralded into the completed ‘semi-public' central square and proceeded to simulate actions borrowed from renderings of the space. A man wheels his bike across a road; a woman walks past with keys in hand, preoccupied by the content of her ongoing phone conversation;

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50 Bauman, Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World, 34.

and, truly in the style of architectural renderings, several attractive and well-attired young things loiter and linger, basking in the sheer delight of this idyllic public space. The resulting documentation of the performance occupies a liminal space, between render and reality; an uncanny image of on the one hand, how the space ought to be occupied, and on the other how it never will. This disquiet is amplified in other photographs produced as part of the project, in which actors stand in front of the aspirational images of the interiors and exteriors of Quartermile that festooned the perimeter fencing (fig. 15). Often it is the merest suggestion of blue plywood in a corner of the image, as well as some judicious cropping, that reveal the presence of imposters in these images.

Despite the occasional passing of residents and customers of the various commercial outlets in the development, the performance was not once interrupted or questioned by members of the public. Compare this with the reaction to Norman’s installation of her gold soldier at Tõnismägi, which sparked a heated response from both police and public. While the performers in Eastern Surf’s work were mimicking the actions and activities of archetypal residents as seen in computer generated renders of the development, the exaggerated artificiality – or indeed, the exaggerated conformity – of their performance clearly marks it out as something unusual. Their performance was ambiguous, but by no means invisible. The performance was left, for the most part, undisturbed not because it went unnoticed, but because it was not deemed ‘dangerous’, to return to Schechner’s terminology. If, as has been established, the danger of performance derives from its disturbance of the set of norms or ethics pertinent to a particular space, then this points again to a flaw in Quartermile’s claims for community.

The relationship between community and ethics is long established and integral. ‘Really existing community’ is predominantly defined according to, and constituted by, ethics. Ferdinand Tönnies wrote in his tome of 1887, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, that:

> Anything which is in agreement with the inner character of a community relationship constitutes its law, and will be respected as the true, essential ‘will’ of all those bound together in it.

Tönnies’s characterisation of ‘law’ as pertaining to community is more readily equated with our contemporary understanding of ‘ethics’ than anything legislative. As his translator,
Jose Harris, states in his introduction to the 2001 edition of Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: ‘in Communities (Gemeinschaften) law emerged from common experience and shared work.’ It is a ‘subliminal shared morality’ as opposed to the ‘Civil Society’ or Gesellschaft permutation of law; a ‘product of juristic and administrative rationality and formal legislation.’\textsuperscript{55} Regardless of whether the community is crystallised around nationality, ethnicity, religion, locality or any of the other identifications that may give rise to a ‘really existing community’, what in actuality coheres its constituents, defines its limits and its behaviours is an ethical code, a set of norms to which the community must adhere. What is absolutely key is that this ethics is truly ‘subliminal’ and ‘shared’. It takes the form of an unspoken consensus. Bauman took up Tönnies’s discussion of community in his book Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World, describing this ethics as ‘the proper and real will of those bound together’. He adds a further important clarification regarding the role of ethics in the constitution of Gemeinschaft:

> The community-style, matter-of-factly (zuhanden, as Martin Heidegger would say) understanding does not need to be sought, let alone laboriously built or fought for: that understanding ‘is there’, ready-made and ready to use – so that we understand each other ‘without words’ and never need to ask, apprehensively, ‘what do you mean?’\textsuperscript{56}

Despite the claims for community made by Quartermile, a shared and subliminal ethics like that seen in more established ‘really existing communities’, such as those at stake in Norman’s work, does not exist, and therefore Eastern Surf’s performance has no ethical consensus to disturb. It is therefore not dangerous. As Bauman comments in typically lusty fashion:

> Once it starts to praise its unique valour, wax lyrical about its pristine beauty and stick on nearby fences wordy manifestoes calling its members to appreciate its wonders and telling all the others to admire them or shut up – one can be sure that the community is no more (or not yet, as the case may be).\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54}I follow Rancière in defining ethics as ‘the kind of thinking which establishes the identity between an environment, a way of being and a principle of action.’ Rancière, “The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics,” 2.

\textsuperscript{55}Jose Harris, “General Introduction” to Tönnies, Community and Civil Society, xix.

\textsuperscript{56}Bauman, Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World, 10.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 11-12. Agamben’s proclamation that ‘a true community can only be a community that is not presupposed’ also seems pertinent here. Giorgio Agamben, Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 47.
Eastern Surf’s performance was in fact interrupted on one occasion, by a ‘concierge’ wishing to know what was going on (or, to return to Bauman’s phrase cited earlier, ‘what do you mean?’). His concern was not founded on a concrete complaint against Eastern Surf’s actions. He made no specific protestations against them. Rather he was under the general impression that what they were doing was somehow not ‘normal’, was somehow in transgression of the ethical norms supposed to govern the space of Quartermile. These ethics, even in the eyes of the concierge, are entirely unclear and seem as arbitrary as the use of the term community in the development’s literature. They are absolutely not ‘shared’ or ‘subliminal’. This is not an ethics held in common by the residents, but rather an ethics imposed from above, and enforced by paid staff, in the hope that one day, through habit, policing and patrolling, they will be adopted by the residents. This is not an ‘essential will’ of the community but a ‘product of juristic and administrative rationality and formal legislation.’

The Particular and the Universal

As was stated at the outset of this chapter, the relationship between the particular and the universal with regard to community constitutes something of a blind spot in the philosophy of postmodern community. And yet, in this chapter, two art practices have been discussed which contribute significantly to an understanding of ‘community as such’ (the universal) by virtue of their attendance to ‘this or that community’ (the particular). This methodology has a long history in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. As sociologist Saskia Sassen notes of the study of cities in her article of 2013, ‘Does the City have Speech?’:

Every city is distinct and so is each discipline that studies it. And yet, if it is to be a study of the urban, it will have to deal with these key features: incompleteness, complexity, and the possibility of making.\(^58\)

This methodology underpins the remainder of her article, in which she examines the specifics of particular examples, not as an end in and of itself, but in order to construct a more reflective and pertinent abstraction of the urban (or the ‘city as such’). Likewise it has formed the basis of many theoretical interventions into the issue of community beyond the realm of philosophy. Anderson, for instance, in *Imagined Communities*, grounds his research in the particularities of various nations and nationalisms, and yet is primarily concerned with the broader issues of nationalism and community (as such).\(^59\)

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\(^{58}\) Saskia Sassen, "Does the City Have Speech?," *Public Culture* 25, no. 2 70 (2013): 209.

\(^{59}\) Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 
It is in this sense that I see the work of practitioners such as Norman and Eastern Surf as having contributed to the negotiation of community. As I have argued, the negotiation of community must be transversal, taking place across disciplines, forms and methodologies. The philosophical interventions into postmodern community that have underpinned this thesis are essential, but in isolation they are in danger of becoming abstracted from reality; ‘ideological’ in the sense discussed in chapter 4. Art’s turn towards anthropological and sociological methods and practices has thus opened up a particularly potent role that art may play, offering a corrective to these purely theoretical negotiations. Indeed, given the necessity that anthropologists abide by ethical codes of conduct, and the persistent refusal of artists to do likewise, it may be argued that art offers even more to this negotiation than anthropology. If ‘ethical delirium’ precludes ‘free thought’, then art’s circumvention of ethics marks it as a field in which preconceived notions of community may be challenged and subverted without hindrance.
Figure 11: Still from Kristina Norman, *After-War*, 2009

*Image courtesy of the artist*

Figure 12: Still from Kristina Norman, *We are not Alone in the Universe*, 2008

*Image courtesy of the artist*
Figure 13: Foster + Partners, Architectural Render of Quartermile, 2005
Image © Foster & Partners

Figure 14: Eastern Surf, Quartermile Render Ghosts, 2012 (Detail)
Image courtesy of the artist
Figure 15: Eastern Surf, Quartermile Render Ghosts, 2012 (Detail)

Image courtesy of the artist
CONCLUSIONS: Contemporary Art after Communitarianism

This thesis has aimed to critically reassess and situate a tendency in art in the first decade of the new millennium that has otherwise been inadequately dealt with by art history. The manner in which community has been implicated by artists working during this period has required a treatment that positions it alongside philosophy (as well as, to a lesser extent, sociology), rather than as a simple illustration to a master discourse proposed by theorists. Given the consonance in concerns between the theorists of postmodern community during the 1980s and 1990s and artists attending to the question of community in the early twenty-first century, attention to the conditions that precipitated this artistic interest in issues developed in theory twenty years previously is demanded. It is for this reason that Part I of this thesis devoted such focus on the socio-political climate of the period and its relationships to the contexts that occasioned the theories of postmodern community. As has been demonstrated in chapter 2, the post-communist condition – ‘the lack of any discernable horizon’¹ – rather than receding with time in the wake of 1989, has become embedded and ingrained to a greater extent than could previously have been envisioned. Likewise, the depth and breadth of neoliberalism’s purchase over the political landscape has thrived, largely unchallenged – despite increasing pressure post-2008 – in the absence of credible alternatives. These two factors have combined to tighten the ‘unique epochal knot’ described by Roberto Esposito in 1998.²

It was these conditions that artists responded to with such urgency as the new millennium dawned. Part I also offered preliminary and more abstract thoughts as to both art’s institutional capability to advance a negotiation of community, given its compromised status in relation to neoliberalism, and its potential as a form of thinking, parallel to that provided by theory. This second factor was expanded on through the more concrete analyses of Part II. In chapter 4 practices that have rejected the supposed immanence of immediacy, presence and duration to the process of collaboration have offered an insight into the parallel immanence of these factors to community. In works by Cyprien Gaillard and Oda Projesi, collaboration acts as a form of analogue to community, and negotiation derives from their juxtaposition. Participatory art has been seen in chapter 5 to be a productive site of

¹ Sheikh, "Vectors of the Possible: Art between Spaces of Experience and Horizons of Expectation," 158.

² Esposito, Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community, 1.
experimentation into social structures and dynamics, offering material interventions into community that echo – whether deliberately or otherwise – theoretical engagements with the concept. The practices of Artur Żmijewski and Tania Bruguera are exemplary in this respect. Chapter 6 focussed on practitioners, including Kristina Norman and Eastern Surf, utilising public performance strategies to puncture the ethics that surround ‘this or that community’ in order to divine more clearly what ‘community as such’ might entail.

These modes of negotiation outlined in Part II are by no means exhaustive. Indeed, the art practices discussed in chapter 1 offer further models of how art may operate as negotiative of community, from Dean Kenning’s quasi-theoretical discussions of being-in-common, to Goldin+Senneby’s speculative incursions into the relations between capital and community. What emerges is thus a formally diverse grouping that is nonetheless tightly bound by a shared intention to position community as the object of art’s productive capacities, as a variable to be challenged, contested and rethought.

From Communitarianism to Postmodern Community

In order to extrapolate further significances from these practices, and the tendency they together form, it is constructive to dwell here on their precise art-historical situation. The manner in which community is implicated in these practices marks a profound shift from its dominant implication in the history of art during the twentieth century. As Kate Crehan has related in her book of 2011 *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective*, community arts emerged during the 1960s as a means of deploying the skills and aptitudes of art towards material and quantifiable social amelioration. More specifically, it was intended as a means of ‘enjoining artists and local people within their various communities to use appropriate art forms as a means of communication and expression.’ This tendency continued, and grew particularly during the 1980s. Artists working in the UK in this period such as Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn are particularly notable. Crucially, Crehan notes, the communities at stake were almost invariably ‘impoverished’ or ‘deprived’, adhering to the dangerous equation of community with subalternity that has dogged the anthropological use of the term in recent years.

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid; Delanty, *Community*, xi.
During the 1990s this lineage, which had for so long existed beyond institutional boundaries, gained significant acceptance within the ‘mainstream’ of the art world. It converged with a lineage in feminist art history, most visibly in the form of the institutional proliferation and influence of what Suzanne Lacy termed ‘new genre public art’, a reconsideration of public art that demanded the use of ‘traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues relevant to their lives.’ Lacy’s comrade in various feminist art programmes and projects during the 1970s, Arlene Raven, characterised this strand of art as ‘that which attempts to draw together a community and to participate with its audience in the definition and expression of the whole physical and social body in both its unity and diversity.’ Here, the faith in the transformative and activist power of community and community-building that came to characterise much of the socially engaged practices of the 1990s is clear. It is this faith that aligns such practices with communitarian philosophy and politics. Miwon Kwon indeed later directly described the work championed by Raven as ‘activist and communitarian in spirit.’ Communitarianism, despite having been in the lexicon since the nineteenth century, gained particular ground during the 1980s and 1990s (concurrently, although in vastly different disciplinary, political and geographical environs, to theories of postmodern community, it should be noted). Reacting against liberalism’s conviction that ‘what people consider right or wrong, their values, should strictly be a matter for each individual to determine,’ communitarianism proposed that ‘we require shared (“social”) formulations of the good.’ Accordingly, communitarianism was grounded upon a faith in communities, and in the ‘community of communities’ – society – as being the essential core units of politics. To borrow the title of a section of an essay by Phillip Selznick outlining the comparisons between communitarianism and religious belief, central to this philosophy is ‘affirming the principle of community’.

Esposito noted that communitarianism, and a communitarian understanding of community rooted in pre-capitalist forms such as Gemeinschaft, predominated during the 1990s, and continued to do so at the point of his writing in 1998. He also saw this model of community

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7 Raven, "Word of Honor," 162.

8 Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 105.


as a misrepresentation and a ‘negation’ of what ‘community as such’ – or ‘\textit{communitas}’ in his vocabulary – encapsulated.

Yesterday as well as today (indeed more so today than yesterday), community appears to be marked, indeed saturated with communitarianism, patriotism, and local and factional interest that with regard to \textit{communitas} constitute not only something different but the clearest kind of negation.\footnote{Esposito, \textit{Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community}, 16.}

This is an opinion shared by many of the theorists of postmodern community cited in this thesis, most notably Zygmunt Bauman.\footnote{Bauman, \textit{Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World}, 4.} Nonetheless, Esposito concedes that communitarianism and postmodern community both derived from the same socio-political contexts: ‘It is this society of individuals, who were already a destructive force for the organic ancient community, that now generates new communitarian forms.’\footnote{Esposito, \textit{Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community}, 136.} Accordingly, communitarianism and postmodern community must be viewed as vastly different responses to a shared circumstance, one privileging ‘this or that community’, the other seeking to interrogate ‘community as such’ as a means of rethinking the term from the ground up, and imbuing it with renewed political and critical purchase.

Around the turn of the millennium, however, various interwoven factors combined to precipitate a widespread dissatisfaction with this form of ameliorative, communitarian, art-as-social-work practice across the most visible organs of the art world. Firstly, discontentment surfaced regarding the ease with which such practices were recuperable and subject to instrumentalisation. Commenting on the situation in the UK, Claire Bishop stated in 2006:

New Labour have for the last nine years instrumentalised art to fulfill policies of social inclusion – a cost-effective way of justifying public spending on the arts while diverting attention away from the structural causes of decreased social participation, which are political and economic (welfare, transport, education, healthcare, etc).\footnote{Roche, "Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop".}

This was closely tied to New Labour’s own adoption of a communitarian philosophy at the heart of its reworking of socialism along centrist lines.\footnote{Driver and Martell, "New Labour’s Communitarianisms."} Secondly, and related to this, came severe doubts as to art’s direct social efficacy, particularly given the oppressive conditions
described by Bishop. Indeed, Raven herself acknowledges this as early as 1995, when she wrote that ‘community itself is more often than not out of reach. How much change can art effect in the social climate of the United States in the nineties?’ Thirdly, art around the turn of millennium, or rather the institutions that act as tastemakers and barometers for the art world’s tendencies, became newly enamoured with the legacy of conceptual art. Peter Osborne proclaimed in 2013 that ‘contemporary art is post-conceptual art’, while the title of an edited volume produced by Mara Ambrožič and Angela Vettese in the same year declared that ‘Art is a Thinking Process’. Social amelioration, art-as-activism and quantifiable impact shifted from largely desirable qualities to, in many cases, vulgar aspirations for art. In his 2010 book The Nightmare of Participation, architect Markus Miessen rejected this ‘soft form of politics’, and as we have seen in chapter 2, a belief that practices oriented in these directions are either messianic, or performing a kind of social engineering on the part of the state has become more pervasive in recent years. As Bishop has noted ‘it is crucial for art practices to tread a careful line between social intervention and autonomy, since demonstrable outcomes are rapidly co-opted by the state.’

Finally, the impact of 1989 began to truly hit home. The post-communist condition was not simply a passing hangover, but a global malaise that would not be budged easily. Accordingly, faith in the impact of small remedial measures in isolated and localised communities became tenuous. In the words of sociologist John Holloway, ‘no rearrangement of the furniture does anything to halt the relentless assault of the walls.’ Instead, there was an increasing taste for a mode of practice that cared not for the furniture, but wished to think more abstractly about the walls, their make-up, and what form their assault was taking.

The initial impact of the work of Jean-Luc Nancy et al. should not be overstated. Theirs was a niche philosophical concern with little impact beyond the academy. Nonetheless, in the wake of these dissatisfactions with a communitarian art practice, their theoretical reflections

16 Raven, "Word of Honor," 162.
17 Osborne, Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art.
18 Ambrožič and Vettese, Art as a Thinking Process: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production.
19 Miessen, The Nightmare of Participation (Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality), 14.
20 Roche, "Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop".
came to be increasingly popular in the art world.\textsuperscript{23} It is telling that many of Nancy’s greatest apologists have come from an art background, and in his later years he, like Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek, has found the art world an increasingly hospitable domain. In the theories of postmodern community a scepticism towards community as the communitarians had formulated it could be found, coupled with a repudiation of the idea that the empowerment of ‘this or that community’ could be the basis for a radical political project. Postmodern community appealed to the conceptual proclivities of the post-2000 art world, offering an abstracted take on community and the problems arising from the rampant individualism promoted by neoliberalism. This is not to suggest though that the artists described in this thesis had all read Nancy and that this had been formative to their work. This is the case with the likes of Kenning, however, in the majority of instances this was simply the result of (for want of a better word) the \textit{Zeitgeist}. The tenets of postmodern community increasingly became the primary mode of engaging with the concept of community, offering a means of attending to community, without the immediate danger of recuperation or instrumentalisation.

\textbf{After the Social Turn?}

As curator Lars Bang Larsen so acerbically noted in his 2012 article ‘Turn! Turn! Turn!’\textsuperscript{24}, the tastes of the contemporary art world move quickly. ‘They talked about the Linguistic Turn for 20 years, imagine that... Today the life expectancy of a new Turn averages five to seven art rag covers.’\textsuperscript{24} According to Larsen’s criteria, the social turn is notable for its relative longevity. Nonetheless the signs are there that the social turn, comprising both its earlier communitarian form, and the later phase I have outlined in this thesis, seems to be on the wane. The 2012 edition of \textit{documenta} in Kassel, the most significant of all the taste-makers/followers on the international stage, was notable in its embrace of what has since been termed the ‘turn to the object’.\textsuperscript{25} Informed by emergent tendencies in philosophy including speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, the art world, from artist-led initiatives in South East London to the pinnacles of the biennial world, has become increasingly (or once again) enamoured with materiality, objects and ‘thing-ness’. Cultural theorist Svenja Bromberg’s 2013 essay ‘The Anti-Political Aesthetics of Objects and the


\textsuperscript{24} Lars Bang Larsen, “Turn! Turn! Turn!,” \textit{Mousse}, no. 35 (2012), http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=879.

\textsuperscript{25} Bromberg, “The Anti-Political Aesthetics of Objects and Worlds Beyond”.

World Beyond’ examined this shift, noting of *documenta 13* ‘the exhibition’s curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev left no doubt as to the enormous impact object-oriented ontology had had on the development of her aesthetic.’ Running concurrently with *documenta 13* and taking place less than 200 miles away was the 7th edition of the Berlin Biennale, curated by Artur Žmijewski. This orgiastic mess of sub-Žmijewski examples of what he calls ‘the applied social arts’ seems, albeit with limited room for retrospection, a hedonistic epitaph to art’s social turn.

This then seems an opportune and urgent moment to reconsider the social turn in contemporary art historically in a serious and meticulous fashion. Returning to a dissatisfaction I hold with the theorisation of the social turn mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, it would seem inadequate to be left with a purely formalist characterisation of this tendency as an interest in collaborative or participatory forms. A focus on the agenda that underpinned the resurgence of these forms of practice offers a considerably more productive window onto these practices. It is this task that I have endeavoured to undertake in this thesis, exploring the possibility of a reconsideration of the social turn in art through the lens of the concept of community, a regnant concern in much of the work that has constituted the social turn, and one through which a more coherent understanding of its development may emerge.

**Art’s Contributions to Thinking Community**

It is worth at this point restating and tackling two of the central questions arising from this thesis: what has art offered to the negotiation of community; and what precisely has it contributed to the discourses in philosophy that I have positioned as precursors to this tendency in art? Concise answers to these questions cannot be provided given the heterogeneity of ways in which community has been attended to in the practices described in this thesis. However this points to one of the sources of art’s potency as a contributor to the discourse on postmodern community, namely, the diversity of forms and strategies that are today encapsulated within the broad descriptor: ‘art’. This is the first of four answers I wish to offer to the above questions. Over the course of this thesis I have examined documentary, participatory, collaborative, installation, performance, and video practices. Each of these brings with it a different set of possibilities, limitations, and protocols to be followed or flaunted. This heterogeneity has afforded artists attending to the issue of community a wealth

26 Ibid.

27 Artur Žmijewski, "The Applied Social Arts."
of options with regard to the tactics, strategies and angles of approach that they may use. This is not to mention those practices that consciously elide the boundaries between the above categorisations: Norman’s hybrid documentary/performance work, for instance.

The hybridity that characterises many of the works examined here points to a second response. Contemporary art is defined by its lack of any external boundary. To return to the subject of chapter 2, it is granted a permitted autonomy to transgress its traditional limits and enter into fields outside its immediate and habitual domain. The activism of Bruguera’s work and the anthropological methodologies described in chapter 6 are exemplary in this respect. This opens up yet more angles of attack from which to negotiate community. What is more, while art may stray into these foreign territories, it is not bound by the strictures and regulations of the fields it encroaches into. Norman’s work does not abide by anthropological ethics, while – to give a more mundane example – Kenning need not accurately and consistently footnote the text that provides the voiceover for Metallurgy of the Subject.

This relative freedom from disciplinary parameters and constraints, particularly in the case of Kenning’s work, advances a third answer to the above questions. As has been dealt with extensively in the early chapters of this thesis, art has increasingly functioned as a mode of thinking. However, as Kenning himself has made clear, this is not a mode of thinking that treads ground already covered by philosophy, sociology or other theoretical disciplines. The form of thinking proper to art is altogether more elusive. As a quotation from Kenning cited in chapter 3 states:

    Art will only be specifically useful if it maintains its strangeness, its darkness, its ability to disturb, to tap into the unconscious; if it maintains, that is, its character of producing something we don’t recognize.28

While theories of postmodern community relied on rational thought process and clear articulation, art revels in providing obscure, tangential, liminal or ethically provocative responses to any given question. It does not attempt, except in the most didactic of cases, to close down meaning, instead opening discourses up in new and unfamiliar directions. In the face of the post-communist condition and the pervasive preclusion of the political imaginary it has occasioned, this is a valuable quality.

Finally, and as has been most clearly articulated in chapters 5 and 6, contemporary art has offered a material counterpart to the purely cerebral domain of philosophy. The work of Żmijewski, for instance, is grounded in material experimentation and play, engaging in microcosmic tests of social relations, being-together and participation that, when taken in concert with theoretical studies of these same issues, offer a more exhaustive aspect onto community than theory alone may offer. Likewise, art has been seen to materially disturb the conventions and consensuses that define the social sphere, in doing so, revealing the hidden machinations, processes and hierarchies at play. The theoretical discussions of community’s instrumentalisations by capital described in chapter 2 gain a significant degree of legitimacy and depth when placed alongside Eastern Surf’s material intervention into precisely the same issue.

Again, these four responses are far from exhaustive. It would be impossible to isolate precisely and conclusively the respects in which art has contributed to a transversal negotiation of community without closing down meaning and interpretation. As stated above, part of art’s potency in the negotiation of community has been its capacity to open up and diversify discourse, to invite responses and challenges, and to reply to questions by asking more questions. It has been the task of curators, theorists, critics and, latterly, historians to offer partial and subjective readings of the significances of contemporary art for thinking community. It is to these ends that this thesis has been produced, and it is my hope that this impulse is taken up elsewhere and in new directions.


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