



# WHAT WE MADE

Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation

**TOM FINKELPEARL**

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This book is dedicated to my most inspiring teachers:

Jeff Weiss, *middle school science*

Nancy Sizer, *high school composition*

Richard Rorty, *undergraduate philosophy*

James Rubin, *undergraduate art history*

Alice Aycock, *graduate school sculpture*

They were often way off the (narrowly imagined) subject, so each one taught me far more than the curriculum might have predicted.



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## PREFACE

IN THE FALL OF 1984, Group Material arrived at P.S.1, where I was working to install “Artists Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America.” Building the show was an interactive process; in the gallery the collective (which then comprised Tim Rollins, Julie Ault, and Doug Ashford) worked with a couple of dozen other artists both physically and intellectually to interweave art and political commentary into a forceful and depressing timeline. During this process I asked Tim Rollins if he had a piece in the show. He pointed out some painted bricks and said that he had helped create them in collaboration with several young men and women who were also in the galleries working on the installation. He identified his collaborators as the “Kids of Survival” and told me that they had recently been working together on a number of projects in the Bronx. I admired the bricks, but I asked him if, aside from the collaboration, he had any time to do his own work. Rollins told me his work was a contribution to their collective work. I found the idea energizing, and twenty-seven years later I still do. In 1987, along with Glenn Weiss, I organized a show at P.S.1 called “Out of the Community, Art with Community.” That project introduced me to Bolek Greczynski and his work at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center, Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s work with the New York City Sanitation Department, and the ongoing debates surrounding cooperative art that I have found fruitful and confusing ever since.

In 2003, as we were preparing for her exhibition at the Queens Museum of Art, Wendy Ewald was telling me about her collaborative photography and its reception. She said that after more than three decades of work, she still sensed a profound misunderstanding of what she and her peers were up to. Even after considerable critical writing on artistic cooperation, exchange, and artistic participation, people still ask her if the collaborations are all she does, or if she has time for her own work. I cringed, remembering my own question to Tim Rollins. We agreed that a book specifically on socially cooperative art might be helpful.

With Sondra Farganis we gathered a group of colleagues for a one-day symposium at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School for Social Research. The discussion circled around a series of the most important issues, in particular the ethics and aesthetics of collaboration.

After the conference Brett Cook, Wendy Ewald, and I continued our discussions regarding a possible publication and developed the format of this book: an introductory text setting a framework for cooperative practice inside and outside artistic traditions, followed by a series of conversations between artists and an array of thinkers from social history, aesthetics, political science, urban planning, education, and other fields. Since the conceptual, intellectual, social, and physical sites of these projects are so complex, it is helpful to look outside of the discourse of art criticism for new perspectives. And why not use conversation as a structure of a book on interactive, conversational, dialogue-driven art? Nine years later the project is complete. So first, thanks to Wendy and Brett for those generative early conversations and for the ongoing discussions that have followed.

I would like to thank Ken Wissoker and Jade Brooks at Duke University Press. Ken has been intelligent, patient, good humored, and encouraging while guiding me through the publication process. Jade was responsive and enthusiastic in every query and request. For Duke, Judith Hoover was a superb copyeditor with amazing attention to detail. The anonymous readers to whom Duke sent the manuscript were immensely helpful in this project. The review process can be a bit humbling, but it is what makes university press books consistently worth reading. The designer, Jennifer Hill, did a wonderful job making it all look great.

Prior to final submission of the manuscript I worked with Nell McLister, who is a truly excellent editor, and her invisible hand is on every page. Ricardo Cortes was a promising research assistant before his own book hit the bestseller list, but Adrienne Koteen stepped in and did a stellar job in his place. It really helped that Adrienne is so deeply steeped in the subject matter. Writing a book, even one filled with conversations, is essentially a solitary pursuit. I spent many long days at the computer overlooking the beach in Rockaway, Queens, breaking only for a Greek salad at the Last Stop Diner. The staff there was encouraging, and that mattered.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Eugenie Tsai, for her cheerful support when I was off at the beach writing or editing and when I was running ideas by her over almost a decade. That might have been a bit tiresome, but she never let on. Her intelligent and honest insights were always on the mark.

### The Art of Social Cooperation

#### An American Framework

##### Definition of Terms

Consider two art projects.

November 1986. At dusk on a fall evening, you are approaching a tan brick building on the grounds of Creedmoor Psychiatric Hospital at the far end of Queens. In this season, at this time of night, the hospital's campus looks very much like the state mental institution it is. But Building 75 has been renamed the Living Museum with a brightly colored sign. It is home to the *Battlefields Project*, a series of art installations that a group of patients has been working on for several years with the Polish-born actor and conceptual artist Bolek Greczynski, who is by this time fully ensconced as Creedmoor's artist-in-residence. You walk into the building, through a lush garden of natural and artificial plants, through the workroom where refreshments are being served, and into the "museum" proper.

The four corner rooms of the ten-thousand-square-foot space are devoted to installations that address the subjects of hospital, church, workplace, and home, four battlefields in the lives of the participants in this venture. The hallways and antechambers between these rooms are filled with art that ranges from haunting images one might expect from the mentally ill, to hard-edge minimalist painting on the floors and walls, to art that is competent in a rather commercial-realist style. There is a chess table dedicated to Marcel Duchamp, an overflowing bin of memos from Creedmoor's health care bureaucracy, and a book in which every line has been carefully crossed out.

At first you feel the need to determine the mental health status of each person you encounter. A woman clad in skin-tight leather and spike heels introduces herself improbably as Greczynski's dentist (this fact is later confirmed). You meet a young man from the lockdown unit attired in a



A short poem spray-painted on two sheets of plywood in a corner of the Living Museum at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center, 1986. Photographs of the project generally do not include the participants because psychiatric patients are not considered competent to agree to photograph releases. Photograph by Tom Finkelpearl.

three-piece suit. Another guy who looks like a doctor could just as easily be a patient. The crowd assembled for the occasion includes an assortment of Greczynski's eccentric, theatrical, art world, club world, outsider, and insider friends mixed with doctors, patients, and their families—so the distinctions are challengingly ambiguous at first but become less urgent as the evening progresses. The museum has been created in a complex series of interactions between Greczynski and a changing group of patients (hundreds have participated). But Greczynski will not call them patients. In the Living Museum they are artists. He does not see their work as symptomatic of their mental illness, he explains, but as a testament to their “strength and vulnerability.” He sees their sensitivity, which may have forced them into this institutional setting, as an asset for an artist. The doctors tell you that for these patients, having the opportunity to assume the identity of an artist has therapeutic value, but Greczynski is suspicious of this approach, siding with the patient against the controlling institutions of therapy and the interpretation of art as a symptom—even as a symptom of healthy progress. After several hours you drive off, acutely aware that there are those who are left behind.



Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City speaking at a press conference in Times Square launching Paul Ramirez Jonas's *Key to the City*, 2010. The project was presented by Creative Time in cooperation with the City of New York. Photograph by Meghan McLinnis. Courtesy of Creative Time.

Patrick Li (left) and friends exchanging keys as part of *Key to the City* by Paul Ramirez Jonas (center), 2010. Photograph by Meghan McLinnis. Courtesy of Creative Time.

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Spring 2010. Having received an intriguing email blast from Creative Time, a public art organization, you arrive in Times Square to experience a project by Paul Ramirez Jonas called *Key to the City*. You know little about what to expect except that it will be based on the longtime New York tradition of the mayor awarding a symbolic key to notable visitors and public heroes. You are informed that you will need a partner for a key award ceremony, and you pair up with a young woman, Annie, who has also arrived solo. You get in line with Annie (and a couple of hundred others), and you are instructed to fill in the blanks on the first two pages of a passport-size booklet that gives a bit of background. You and Annie chat as you decide why to honor each other with a key to the city. When you have arrived at the “Commons” area created for the event, she reads out the text: “I, Annie, on this third day of June, bestow the key to the city to you, being a perfect stranger, in consideration of your spirit. Do you accept this key?” Yes, you do. “Then, by the power temporarily granted to me and this work of art, I, Annie, award you this key to the city.” She hands you the booklet and a key that is inscribed with a small drawing of hands exchanging keys. You reciprocate, reading the formal text and handing her the booklet that you have inscribed, and that is the last you see of Annie.

The project's key is the opposite of the traditional key to the city: anyone can get one, and it is not merely symbolic. Over the next couple of months the key unlocks doors, closets, gates, display cases, and so on, at

twenty-four sites indicated in the booklet. One afternoon you take the 7 train to Corona, Queens, and visit the Louis Armstrong House Museum, where the key opens the door to Armstrong's private bathroom. Then you walk over to the Tortilleria Nixtamal, where, remarkably, the key opens up the downstairs kitchen and you receive a lesson in taco making. Over twenty sweaty minutes you also learn how a tortilla kitchen in Corona operates: hot, fast, and in Spanish. As you make your way around the city, you see sites that are normally hidden and meet the New Yorkers behind the doors. The work becomes something of the talk of the town, as more than fifteen thousand people participate.

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While both art projects were participatory, there were substantial differences. Both the Living Museum and *Key to the City* fall under the rubric of what is variously dubbed participatory, interactive, collaborative, or relational art. However, in recent texts on this sort of art, critics tend to distinguish between projects that are designed by artists and projects that are created through dialogue and collaboration with participants. For example, Grant Kester, an art historian at the University of California, San Diego, differentiates between collaborative, "dialogical" works and projects based on a scripted "encounter."<sup>1</sup> Claire Bishop, an art historian at City University of New York, identifies "an authored tradition that seeks to provoke participants and a de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity."<sup>2</sup> And the critic and curator Claire Doherty describes "those practices which, though they employ a process of complicit engagement, are clearly initiated and ultimately directed by the artist . . . and those which, though still often authored by the artist or team, are collaborative—in effect 'social sculpture.'"<sup>3</sup>

As Kester points out, the categories of the scripted encounter and the de-authored, dialogical collaboration are generalizations, and perhaps it would be more useful to describe a spectrum of activity rather than draw such a clear line between practices.<sup>4</sup> On this spectrum, *Key to the City* would tend toward the scripted encounter, while the Living Museum leans toward the dialogue-based tradition of works created collectively. Greczynski created a platform for the creativity of the patients at Creedmoor, while Ramirez Jonas sent the participants on a well-planned series of encounters. *Key to the City* was clearly a work by Paul Ramirez Jonas, though the individual participants—both the key holders and those who welcomed them to each site—took an active role. You were the actor, and

there were no spectators. The text you read in Times Square was prepared by the artist. As you traversed the city to the other sites, the interactions were considerably looser, but you were still on a route between access points prepared by Ramirez Jonas. On the other hand, the Living Museum was created in a long-term interactive process that was orchestrated (rather than authored) by Greczynski. The art projects that composed the Living Museum were created by Creedmoor patients working many hours a week over many years, interspersed with an occasional painting by Greczynski. The project was made by the group—hence the title of this book, *What We Made*.

When you visited an open house at Creedmoor, you seemed somewhat peripheral to the main event, which only Greczynski and the patient-artists experienced—an event that unfolded very slowly in a decidedly closed house. You got only a glimpse; you were welcomed as a temporary guest. This split between the collective creation of the art and the viewing and experiencing public is present in a number of projects discussed in this book. Importantly, the issue of social benefit was closer to the surface in the Living Museum than in *Key to the City*. Though Greczynski resisted the therapeutic interpretation of his project, the open and relaxed atmosphere at the Living Museum gave the tangible sense of a curative space for the mentally ill. While one can easily point to political meaning in the ways Ramirez Jonas opened up the city and in the democratization of an elitist tradition, there was no sense that the project was meant to turn around the life of its participants.

Walking through Building 75 at Creedmoor, the audience—art critics, psychologists, patients—had a hard time understanding the overall environment as an aesthetic project. Two decades later *Key to the City* unfolded in an art-historical context that has come to allow for an interactive moment in public space as an artistic product worthy of analysis. But the language surrounding the practice is still up for grabs. In her article “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” published in *Artforum* in 2006, Claire Bishop notes that there is a range of names for the activist wing of the less-authored practice, including “socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art.”<sup>5</sup> For the sake of that article, she settled on the term *social collaboration*. I would agree with Bishop’s use of the word *social*. Though no word can sum up the efforts of any group of artists, the word *social*—as in social encounters across social classes—helps locate this practice in an experiential and



intellectual realm that also includes social studies, social work, and social housing.

However, I favor the term *social cooperation* over Bishop's *social collaboration*. There are three main reasons for this. First, in art criticism, *collaboration* often refers to teams such as Gilbert and George or collectives such as Group Material. It implies a shared initiation of the art, and start-to-finish coauthorship. We have no clue what Gilbert or George has independently contributed to one of their photographs, or what Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Tim Rollins, or Felix Gonzalez-Torres individually contributed to a given Group Material installation. And even if we do understand that W. S. Gilbert wrote the words and Arthur Sullivan composed the music, there is a clear acknowledgment of equal coauthorship in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. For many of the projects discussed in this book, collaboration is simply too far-reaching a claim to make; not all of the participants are equally authors of these projects, especially in the initiation and conceptualization. *Cooperation*, on the other hand, simply implies that people have worked together on a project. Even the projects on the de-authored side of the spectrum involve a self-identified artist who can claim the title of initiator or orchestrator of the cooperative venture, including the projects in which little or none of the final product is by his or her own hand. Second, calling the work *cooperative* situates the practice in the intellectual zone of human cooperation. There has been significant research in recent decades in the fields of evolutionary game theory, rational and irrational choice theory, theories of reciprocity and altruism, the new cognitive science of interconnection, and evolutionary economics. While acknowledging that human beings are territorial and aggressive animals, many in these fields are beginning to understand in what ways we are also a hypercooperative species.<sup>6</sup> Third, understanding what social cooperation means to John Dewey and other pragmatists has helped elucidate these artists' work for me, which I discuss in the conclusion. So for the sake of this book, I call the Living Museum and projects like it "socially cooperative," and works like *Key to the City* "participatory" or "relational." This is not meant to be a value judgment. There are trivial and profound projects throughout the spectrum, and both the Living Museum and *Key to the City* struck me as brilliant and provocative in their own right. Most of the projects in this book, however, lean toward the socially cooperative, works that examine or enact the social dimension of the cooperative venture, blurring issues of authorship, crossing social boundaries, and engaging participants for durations that stretch from days to months to years.

## An American Framework

While this book focuses on an American perspective, I try not to define too narrowly what it means to be an American artist. A number of the interviewees were born abroad but live in the United States now, including Pedro Lasch, Tania Bruguera, Lee Mingwei, Teddy Cruz, and Ernesto Pujol. Evan Roth was brought up here but lives in France. In fact at this point in the country's history, it would be inaccurate to represent cooperative art practice in America without a considerable representation of immigrant artists. But first let us take a couple of steps back and consider a framework for the development of this practice here in the United States.

### Historical Context: Social Movements in the 1960s

These practices, of course, have a history. In my conversations with progressive activists and artists, one after another they mention that they participated in, based their techniques on, or drew inspiration from the spirit of the 1960s, particularly the civil rights movement, the counterculture, and feminism. Some of the social relations and democratic institutions created in those movements during that period were mirrors of the socially cooperative art that was simultaneously emerging. In the 1960s there were competing models of negotiation and conflict within progressive political movements. In his essay "The Phantom Community," published in 1979, the Princeton sociologist Paul Starr distinguishes between two broad categories of counterinstitutions that developed during that period:

An exemplary institution, such as a utopian community or consumers' cooperative, seeks, as the term suggests, to exemplify in its own structure and conduct an alternative set of ideals. . . . Compared with established institutions, it may attempt to be more democratic in its decision-making, or less rigid and specialized in its division of labor, or more egalitarian in its distribution of rewards. . . . In contrast, an adversarial institution, such as a political party, a union, or a reform group, is primarily concerned with altering the social order. Oriented toward conflict, it may not exhibit in its own organization all the values that its supporters hope eventually to realize.<sup>7</sup>

In Starr's dichotomy, cooperative action is associated with the egalitarian and democratic *exemplary* institutions, while conflict is associated with the *adversarial* groups. But the dialectic is not rigid, and Starr points out that some of the most famous adversarial groups in the 1960s also

sought to be exemplary. He cites, for example, conflict-friendly community organizing within the civil rights movement, as well as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which was adversarial in many of its tactics but engaged in “extremes of participatory democracy” in an attempt to exemplify the changes that it was fighting for in society.<sup>8</sup> It is the practices of exemplary groups like these that resemble most closely the practices of socially cooperative artists.

### Civil Rights and Community Organizing

A number of the artists in this book cite the civil rights movement as an inspiration, including Wendy Ewald, who was stirred by the black power movement in Detroit as a kid; Brett Cook, who cites civil rights ideology; and Rick Lowe, who participated in African American activism in Houston.<sup>9</sup> But in the 1960s the civil rights movement was divided between the rhetoric of collective action most eloquently presented by Martin Luther King Jr. and a more radical politics of confrontation espoused by leaders like Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X. Cook refers in his interview (chapter 10) to King’s principle of a “network of mutuality,” a term he often used, including in his final Sunday sermon on March 31, 1968, five days before he was assassinated: “Through our scientific and technological genius we have made of this world a neighborhood, and yet we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood. . . . We must all learn to live together as brothers. Or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”<sup>10</sup> King’s goal is not only economic justice but interpersonal interconnection, a model of anti-individualist mutuality. Steeped in Gandhian nonviolence and a Christian ethic of brotherhood, King sees this mutuality as both desirable and inevitable. We are not only seeking interconnection, we are “caught” in this “inescapable network.” But by the mid-1960s alternative voices were emerging. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was morphing into an increasingly radical counterinstitution. It had hailed the power of “redemptive community” in its Statement of Purpose in 1960 and had recruited countless northerners to engage in cooperative organizing in the South in the early 1960s.<sup>11</sup> But an SNCC memo from 1964 shows a growing frustration with the personal, self-actualizing impulse of some who were joining the civil rights fight. Lamenting their “bourgeois sentimentality,” the memo notes, “Some of the good brothers and sisters think our business is the spreading of ‘the redemptive warmth of personal confrontation,’ ‘emotional enrich-



The civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965. Photograph by Peter Pettus. Courtesy of Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

ment,’ ‘compassionate and sympathetic personal relationships,’ and other varieties of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation derived from the vocabulary of group therapy and progressive liberal witch doctors.”<sup>12</sup> Here the philosophy of cooperation is described as unsuited to the urgent work of resisting oppressive racism. This critique of cooperative action as accommodation and compromised liberalism is still leveled at socially cooperative projects, be they political or artistic.

But as Paul Starr points out, exemplary institutions were not limited to redemptive warmth and sympathetic relationships with those outside the group. Saul Alinsky, whose ideas took shape in the civil rights struggle, came to epitomize American community organizing. A hero of the non-communist Left, Alinsky was a pragmatist interested in what works for poor communities. In his book *Reveille for Radicals*, published in 1946, he outlines his strategies, which address many of the issues that cooperative art confronts. For Alinsky, the community organizer is a facilitator of social interplay out of which emerges the “people’s program.” His ideal organizer has faith in the ability and intelligence of the people to imagine a solution to their own problems. He wrote, “*After all, the real democratic program is a democratically minded people—a healthy, active, participating, interested, self-confident people who, through their participation and*



Saul Alinsky addressing a crowd before a meeting in Flemington, New Jersey, 1967. He was working with the coalition FIGHT (Freedom, Integration, God, Honor, Today) as part of an effort to promote racially diverse hiring practices at Kodak Corporation, whose shareholders meeting was taking place in Flemington at the time. Photograph courtesy of AP Photo.

interest, become informed, educated, and above all develop faith in themselves, their fellow men, and the future.”<sup>13</sup> Alinsky does not deny the community organizer’s pivotal role, especially at the initial stages of mobilization, but he insists that the action must come from the people themselves. After an additional twenty-five years of experience, Alinsky wrote *Rules for Radicals* (1971), in which the ethic of mutual growth is clear: “An effective organizational experience is as much an educational process for the organizer as it is for the people with whom he is working. . . . We learn, when we respect the dignity of the people, that they cannot be denied the elementary right to participate fully in the solutions to their own problems. Self-respect arises only out of people who play an active role in solving their own crises and who are not helpless, passive, puppet-like recipients of private or public service.”<sup>14</sup>

For Alinsky, the process of addressing the problem collectively is a major part of the organizing initiative. But he was far from an advocate of “redemptive warmth” or “emotional enrichment” for its own sake. He states quite clearly that “a People’s Organization is a conflict group,” and his strategy revolves around identifying issues, provoking conflict, and finding

winnable battles — seeking what he calls the “displacement and disorganization of the status quo.”<sup>15</sup> Through tangible and specific local victories, he hoped that the communities could rebalance power. It was *within* the organization, through the local identification of social complaints, through the activation of the community members, through collective, cooperative action that Alinsky helped facilitate what Starr would call exemplary institutions that also seek actively to change the social order. Community organization, undertaken on a massive scale by SNCC and articulated by Alinsky, became a staple of social movements throughout the country. Throughout this book you will hear about community participation, active contribution, and learning while teaching, all crucial ingredients of community organizing and urban planning in the 1960s.

In 1969 Sherry Arnstein, an advisor to the federal government’s Department of Housing and Urban Development, wrote an influential essay, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” in which she argues that participation in decision making is a cornerstone of a democratic society and that poor communities have traditionally been denied power over the use of federal funds in the United States. She lays out a hierarchy of forms of “citizen participation,” starting at the bottom with the least desirable approach and ascending to the most desirable at the top:

8. Citizen Control
7. Delegated Power
6. Partnership
5. Placation
4. Consultation
3. Informing
2. Therapy
1. Manipulation

Arnstein calls manipulation “the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by powerholders.” Therapy occurs when the powerful try to “cure” the apparent pathologies of the powerless—for example, teaching the impoverished how to control their kids. Informing citizens about plans for their community with a “one-way flow of information” fails to tap into local knowledge. Consultation is a step closer to drawing on community knowledge, but “offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account.” Placation allows a token amount of community input into the project design. Partnership invites citizens into the decision-making process. When an urban renewal program gives

majority say in a project to the local community, it has delegated power. Finally, when power and funds go directly to a “neighborhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds,” citizen control has been achieved.<sup>16</sup> Arnstein takes pains to point out that the ladder is a simplification, but the article was widely read, and its ideology of participation clearly echoes Alinsky’s. It is easy to see how this taxonomy might apply to projects in this book. For example, Harrell Fletcher’s film (chapter 6) might be considered a partnership with the gas station owner Jay Dykeman, while Rick Lowe’s *Project Row Houses* (chapter 5) could be an example of citizen control.

Arnstein’s ladder is useful shorthand for a model of cooperative participation in the late 1960s: the less top-down the better. Critics might shudder at the application of this sort of chart to the evaluation of art; it is easy to imagine an art project that reaches the highest level of participation but remains simplistic aesthetically. The mere presence of deeply engaged community participation in an art project is not the final word on its merit, even if it is a great sign for community organizing. But the negative values on Arnstein’s list tend to echo what critics decry in some community art projects: manipulation, decoration, tokenism, and therapy. In any case the civil rights movement and community organizing of the 1960s offer models of participatory action that still resonate in present-day community organizing, urban planning, and art — not to mention social justice movements worldwide.

### The Movement and Participatory Democracy

The counterculture of the 1960s also created a range of important exemplary anti-institutions formulated on a model of participatory democracy. “The movement” was a catchall phrase for the activities of the counterculture, from antiwar protests to sexual liberation and alternative living arrangements. Many of the most important activists in the movement cut their teeth organizing in the South for SNCC, and the tactics and rhetoric of participatory liberation ripple through their actions and texts.

Students for a Democratic Society started primarily as a civil rights organization but increasingly focused on the antiwar movement as the decade progressed. One of its founding documents was the Port Huron Statement, drafted mostly by Tom Hayden in 1962. The document is a far-reaching indictment of the status quo in America, with discussions of foreign policy, workplace discrimination, industrialization, and other topics.

Of particular interest here, though, is the statement's position on participatory action:

In a participatory democracy, the political life would be based in several root principles:

- that decision-making of basic social consequence be carried on by public groupings;
- that politics be seen positively, as the art of collectively creating an acceptable pattern of social relations;
- that politics has the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community, thus being a necessary, though not sufficient, means of finding meaning in personal life.<sup>17</sup>

Like Alinsky, Hayden et al. are arguing that only through social and political participation can democracy and justice be achieved, and that participation is both a means and an end, that “the political order should serve to clarify problems in a way instrumental to their solution.” The Port Huron Statement argues that the isolation of contemporary American social life can be overcome and community can be created when private problems “from bad recreation facilities to personal alienation” are “formulated as general issues.”<sup>18</sup> It is a matter not simply of experts understanding and solving the problems of the world, but of citizens themselves actively working in “public groupings” to address society’s problems and make decisions.

SDS sought to bring these ideals into reality through its own democratic structure, through community organizing (much of it in the North, though little was successful) and mass participation in the peace movement. Hayden states that the heritage for participatory democracy was transmitted to SDS through John Dewey, who was a leader of the League for Industrial Democracy (the original name of the organization that would become SDS). He cites Dewey’s notion that democracy is not only a governmental form but also a mode of living and communicated experience.<sup>19</sup> I return to Dewey in the conclusion.

In his essay on the history of communes, Timothy Miller, a religion professor at the University of Kansas, states that while communal living has existed in many periods in American history, in the mid-1960s “communitarian idealism erupted in what was to be by far its largest manifestation ever.”<sup>20</sup> In their book on communes, co-ops, and collectives, the historian John Case and the Tufts University sociologist Rosemary Tay-



lor argue that communes were emblematic of a difference between the American Left in the 1930s and the New Left of the 1960s. Unlike their predecessors, the New Leftists sought to practice a politics of everyday life. Hence the problems inherent in work and family life “could not be solved by individuals acting alone; they were, as the New Leftists saw it, the common costs of life in capitalist America, and they therefore called for collective action. One fundamental concern of the movement, then, was to find new ways of living and working.”<sup>21</sup> One of the most famous communal groups was the Diggers in San Francisco, and participatory art was at the center of their endeavor. Born out of the highly politicized San Francisco Mime Group, the Diggers were primarily interested in living freely as a group, creating live anarchic street experiences, and de-commodifying the alternative lifestyles of Haight-Ashbury, following the maxims “Do your thing” and “Create the condition you describe.”<sup>22</sup> It is impossible to draw a line between their art and their life, though their Intersection Game, which casually snarled traffic, tended toward participatory theater, while their Free Food initiative leaned toward community support.

The Diggers’ influence was felt strongly in New York, where Abbie Hoffman, Anita Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Nancy Kurshan, and Paul Krassner founded the Youth International Party, known as the Yippies. Kurshan, Abbie Hoffman, and Rubin had been important members of SDS and were schooled initially through the organizing efforts of SNCC in the early 1960s. According to Michael William Doyle, a historian at Ball State University, the Yippies began as the New York Diggers but soon found their own vision. While the Diggers were interested in live participatory action, the Yippies were intent on disrupting public discourse with their provocative street actions, and they developed a complex form of guerrilla political theater.<sup>23</sup> Famously, at the New York Stock Exchange in 1967, fifteen free spirits organized by Abbie Hoffman tossed hundreds of one-dollar bills from the gallery above the stock exchange, creating several minutes of mayhem as the stockbrokers scrambled to pick up the cash from the floor. It was a well-publicized and embarrassing moment for the center of American commerce.

Hoffman claims in retrospect that a source for his actions was Antonin Artaud’s book *The Theatre and Its Double* (1958), in which Artaud calls for a new “poetry of festivals and crowds, with people pouring into the streets.” Hoffman describes the planning process as relatively anarchic: the Yippies would just divide up into groups and work on various proposed actions. In some cases the results were well-planned tactical media events,



Yippies visit the New York Stock Exchange. Abbie Hoffman (smiling, right) and Jerry Rubin (right with mustache) hold up a burning five-dollar bill. The crowd applauds the parting gesture outside the Stock Exchange on August 24, 1967. Photograph by Jack Smith/*New York Daily News* via Getty Images.

while others were free-form “be-ins.” Many of these collectively imagined actions allowed onlookers to become involved. “If observers of the drama are allowed to interpret the act,” writes Hoffman, “they will become participants themselves. . . . The concept of mass spectacle, everyday language, and easily recognized symbols was important to get public involvement.” Some of the actions had a handful of participants, as at the Stock Exchange, while others had thousands or even tens of thousands, such as an alternative Easter action in Central Park.<sup>24</sup> The Yippies, joined by other activists and agitators, gained international recognition for their disruption of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. The whole world was indeed watching as they exposed the brutal side of the Chicago police.

Hoffman correctly observed that the art world was not particularly interested in his theater. Like the other groups that he saw as his brethren (e.g., Bread and Puppet Theater, who were also regulars at the mass demonstrations), Hoffman was more concerned with public communication than art magazine press. He argues that the Museum of Modern Art’s interest in Allan Kaprow’s happenings and Pop art “while ignoring our brand of political theater just proves the connection between suc-

cessful artists and the rich.”<sup>25</sup> But just as the Diggers created a communitarian utopia that has echoes in today’s micro-utopias, the Yippies created a precedent for interventionist artists like the Yes Men, who would follow a couple of decades later.

Starr concludes that on an organizational level, “the counter-institutions unquestionably failed.”<sup>26</sup> One commune after another closed its doors; SDS, always plagued by a lack of structure, collapsed amid rancorous dispute in 1969. The intermingling of personal life, political action, and idealistic group orientation comes up over and over in accounts of the 1960s, but perhaps most importantly (and successfully) in feminism. While the living experiments of the communes seem to have risen and fallen in cycles in American history, the feminist movement has been more or less relentless in the past century. The progressive ideologies and practices of the 1960s were well suited to energize a new wave of feminist thought and action that still reverberates in American culture.

#### Feminism and Political Performance

After the Second World War many middle-class Americans sought refuge from what they perceived to be cramped and crowded cities. In the most advanced car culture on the planet, it was less imperative to live close to the center, as the husband could commute to his job while the wife organized the home and raised the kids. Suburbanization was in full swing for the white middle class. There were contemporary critiques, including *The Split Level Trap* (1960), an analysis of the psychosocial environment of the suburbs, and Lewis Mumford’s book *The City in History*, written a year later, which lamented the social conformity of the suburbs and the housewife’s alienation from the social relations of the city within a monotonous, uniform, television-dominated existence.<sup>27</sup> But the role of women in this world was blasted open with the publication in 1963 of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. At once a well-published author and a suburban housewife, Friedan was reacting against what she saw as the rigid and constricting life that confined women to the home without outlets to develop an individual identity. She wrote, “The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the 20th century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone.”<sup>28</sup> Only by naming the problem and shedding the oppressive gender role assigned to her, only by finding herself through creative work of her own, Friedan argued, could the new woman become confident, self-

aware, and capable of self-fulfillment. *The Feminine Mystique* became a bestseller, catapulting Friedan to public prominence and jump-starting Second Wave feminism.

*The Feminine Mystique* struck a chord of discontent, poking a hole in the prevailing image of the woman. But it was not an overall critique of the social trends in America, and it implicitly centered on women like Friedan herself: middle-class white suburbanites. Gerda Lerner (later to become an eminent historian at the University of Wisconsin) wrote to Friedan upon the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, hailing the book but also arguing that the problems that individual women face cannot be solved “on the basis of the individual family.” Lerner argued that solutions need to be framed in terms of the larger community and require “a system of social reforms [including] day care centers, maternity benefits, communized household services,” and so on.<sup>29</sup> In fairness, as the Cerritos College historian Susan Oliver points out, much of this agenda was embraced by Friedan when she became president of the National Organization of Women.<sup>30</sup> In *Redesigning the American Dream* (1984), the Yale architecture professor Dolores Hayden argues that the “haven” created for women in the postwar period, the architecture and community planning of suburbanization, was a gendered sociopolitical and environmental nightmare. While Friedan saw the main oppressor of women as “chains in her own mind and spirit,” others saw more systematic oppression, especially for women outside the comfort zone of the suburbs.

But as the 1960s progressed there emerged a group of women with the tools to take the critique further, with the birth of the women’s liberation movement. In her book *Personal Politics* (1979), Sara Evans, a historian at the University of Minnesota, argues that the roots of the women’s movement were in the civil rights movement and the New Left. Using copious examples, Evans argues that women learned firsthand about gender inequality by working in male-dominated groups like SNCC and SDS. Of particular importance in these organizations were new models of egalitarianism, including “the anti-leadership bias and the emphasis on internal process,” “the theory of radicalization through discussions,” and “the belief in participatory democracy,” but many women steeped in liberation ideology and Second Wave feminist self-confidence recoiled at the movement’s consistent blindness to or acceptance of sex discrimination.<sup>31</sup> (Accounts of the woman’s role in the Diggers commune are no better.)<sup>32</sup> “What was required to produce a movement,” says Evans, “was only for women to apply the new ideas directly to their own situation, to make the connections be-

tween 'the people' whom they sought to aid and themselves as women."<sup>33</sup> This connection was made, and a new liberation movement emerged.

A key factor of women's liberation was the group. The late 1960s saw the rise of feminist consciousness-raising through group interaction, a practice formalized by a collective called New York Radical Women (NYRW). In 1969 the feminist pioneer Carol Hanisch wrote an article, "The Personal Is Political," in the Redstockings journal *Feminist Revolution*. She was responding to critics, including mainstream political feminists and radicals like the SNCC activist quoted earlier, who ridiculed consciousness-raising as self-indulgent "mouth-to-mouth resuscitation." Hanisch made the argument that the collective act of discussing women's personal issues (e.g., "Which do/did you prefer, a girl or a boy baby, or no children and why?") was valid feminist practice that transcended self-interested therapy: "We discover in these groups that personal problems are political problems. There are not personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for collective solution."<sup>34</sup> Hanisch's article was widely reprinted and passed around in the next several years, and the notion that the personal is political is considered by many to be the "single identifying mantra" of Second Wave feminists.<sup>35</sup> As Mary Ryan, a women's studies professor at the University of California, Berkeley, has written, "The first task of feminist scholars and activists was to dredge through their personal lives and women's everyday experiences for those issues which required publicity."<sup>36</sup>

Indeed the personal issues were publicized. According to Kathie Sara-child, a member of the NYRW, it was Hanisch who prompted the group to expand their consciousness-raising into the public realm, to go beyond a service or membership organization to what she called "zap" action on the model of SNCC. The most famous action undertaken by the group was a protest at the Miss America Pageant in 1968: about a hundred women picketed the event, then threw high-heeled shoes, girdles, *Playboy* and *Good Housekeeping* magazines, and other implements of what they called "female torture" into a "freedom trashcan."<sup>37</sup> According to Hanisch, the impetus for the Miss America action came from a classic NYRW consciousness-raising session. After talking about the powerful and conflicting emotions evoked by watching the beauty pageant on television, the group decided to take action. Hanisch wrote, "From our communal thinking came the concrete plans for the action. We all agreed that our main point in the demonstration would be that all women are hurt by



An early consciousness-raising session at the Women's Center in Greenwich Village, 1970. Photograph by Bettye Lane.

beauty competition — Miss America as well as ourselves. We opposed the pageant in our own self-interest, e.g., the self-interest of all women.”<sup>38</sup> In a flyer that was handed out on the Atlantic City boardwalk the day of the Miss America action, the organizers referred to the event as “boardwalk-theater” and “guerrilla theater.”<sup>39</sup> Like the Yippies’ action at the New York Stock Exchange, the Miss America action received tremendous publicity, including front-page coverage in the print media. According to Hanisch, the protest “told the nation that a new feminist movement [was] afoot in the land.”<sup>40</sup> If the personal was political, boardwalk theater helped make it public. Though these actions did not have a huge impact in the art press, artists were simultaneously adopting, adapting, and translating this sort of collectively imagined, cooperatively created political theater in the aesthetic realm, even as the aesthetics began to blur with social action. With the well-known and broadly inclusive participatory experiments and community organizing of the civil rights movement, the counterinstitutions and street theater of the movement, and the collectivism and political theater of feminism, the table had been set for the emergence of cooperative art practices.



On the boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey, New York Radical Women dispute the image of American women being presented at the Miss America pageant nearby. The action, which was suggested at a consciousness-raising session, gained national media attention in 1969. Photograph © Jo Freeman.

### Pioneers in American Cooperative Art

Just as the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in the early 1960s was a necessary precursor to the actions of the New York Radical Women toward the end of the decade, ideas in the Fluxus network were precursors to cooperative art that unfolded later. Fluxus intended to put an end to art reflecting the artist's ego in favor of ideas that were unprotected by copyright, often consisting of directions for actions that could be undertaken by anyone, thus allowing art into the realm of the everyday for the benefit of the people. If ultimately Fluxus failed to achieve its goal of integrating art and life, it nonetheless opened the door to a range of anti-individualistic, participatory art practices and provided early intellectual inspiration.

Fluxus was an international network that included important members in Europe and Asia, but for the most part it was centered around the self-appointed chairman, George Maciunas, in New York. In 1962 Maciunas proposed that art could “arrive at a closer connection to concrete reality” and that Fluxus “anti-art forms are primarily directed against art as a profession, against the artificial separation of producer and performer,

or generator and spectator or against the separation of art and life.” Later he proclaimed that Fluxus “should tend towards collective spirit, anonymity and ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM.”<sup>41</sup> For all of Maciunas’s aspirations, however, there is no indication that Fluxus in fact broke out of the art world. A Fluxus store offering low-cost items, which was open for a year on Canal Street in New York, did not sell *a single item*.<sup>42</sup> As Joseph Beuys said, Fluxus “held a mirror up to people without indicating how to change things.”<sup>43</sup> John Hendricks, a Fluxus insider who produced a number of their events at Judson Memorial Church, was of a similar mind. Frustrated by the in-group nature of their activities, along with Jean Toche he proceeded to take a more public tack with the Guerrilla Art Action Group later in the 1960s.<sup>44</sup> But Fluxus and its intellectual and artistic community was an important early testing ground for two artists who would have enormous influence on the genesis of cooperative art: Allan Kaprow and Joseph Beuys. Kaprow was a member of the Judson Church circle and the Rutgers University Fluxus crowd and submitted work for Fluxus special editions in the early 1960s. Beuys was an early Fluxus participant, and Fluxus ideas reverberated through his work from the beginning to the end of his career. I will return to Beuys later.

While Kaprow was involved early on in Fluxus, he made his name outside the network as the father of the happening during the 1960s. In his essay “Participation Performance,” written retrospectively in 1977, Kaprow says that while there was audience participation in the happenings, the involvement was relatively inconsequential, akin to an audience member being called to the stage in a television show or a “guided tour, parade, carnival test of skill, secret society initiation,” thus remaining within the genre of the scripted participation. Kaprow emphasizes that the audience participants were well aware of the style and taste of the artists, as they were initiated into the contemporary art world, and he proposes that continuity of taste culture and community are a prerequisite for this sort of participatory art. “This may seem truistic,” Kaprow writes, “but participation presupposes shared assumptions, interests, languages, meanings, contexts, and uses. It cannot take place otherwise.”<sup>45</sup> This sort of performance was not designed to cross social boundaries.

As the decade progressed, Kaprow moved on from happenings to “life-art” and the conscious blurring of aesthetic categories. In the spirit of the concretist Fluxus artists, Kaprow began to examine the potential in declaring certain everyday activities as art, to “consider certain common transactions — shaking hands, eating, saying goodbye — as Readymades.”<sup>46</sup> As



he wrote in “The Education of the Un-Artist” (in 1969), “Random trance-like movements of shoppers in a supermarket are richer than anything done in modern dance.”<sup>47</sup> He was playing consistently on the line between life and art in the form of small-scale participatory performance. The critic Jeff Kelley observes that by the end of the 1960s “a Happening by Kaprow was no longer something you went to, but something you and a few others undertook. Performers were no longer mixed with the crowd; there was no crowd, only volunteers. Resonance tended to reside in the specific settings, communitarian experiences, and big ideas (like imitating nature, or turning work into play) that were part of the background noise of 1960s American society.”<sup>48</sup>

In 1969, the year he wrote “The Education of the Un-Artist,” Kaprow collaborated on an education art project called *Project Other Ways* with the educator Herbert Kohl, who was teaching at UC Berkeley at the time. It was an uncharacteristic endeavor for Kaprow that highlights the relationship of participatory art and progressive education, a theme that runs throughout the projects in this book (Mark Dion in chapter 2, Tania Bruguera in chapter 7, Wendy Ewald in chapter 8, Brett Cook in chapter 10). Rethinking education was a hot topic in the late 1960s, from the battles over curriculum to the social restrictions placed on college students and the local control of school boards. In 1968 Kohl published *36 Children*, which is both a chronicle of his experiences as a sixth-grade teacher in Harlem and an indictment of the educational system’s failures to meet the needs of inner-city kids.<sup>49</sup> Interest in radical pedagogy was opening the door to a flexible, interactive approach to working with students. As Kohl and Kaprow got started, there was ongoing turmoil down the street at UC Berkeley, and tear gas was in the air.

In *Project Other Ways* Kaprow and Kohl launched a series of pedagogical experiments to bring art into the Berkeley Unified School District, including a cooperative project with a group of sixth graders. Kaprow and Kohl had noticed that a faction of kids from Oakland who were thought to be functionally illiterate were in fact quite interested in writing—at least writing graffiti. After an initial positive experience with the kids over an afternoon photographing what was scrawled in the local bathrooms, Kaprow said:

Kohl and I saw a germ of an idea in what had just happened. We covered the walls of our storefront offices with large sheets of brown wrapping paper, provided felt-tipped pens, paints and brushes, staplers and rubber

cement. We invited the kids back the following week and put on the table the photos they had taken. They were asked to make graffiti, using the photos and any drawings they wanted to make, like the graffiti they had seen on our tour. At first they were hesitant and giggled, but we said there were no rules and they wouldn't be punished for dirty words or drawings, or even making a mess. Soon there were photos all over the walls. Drawn and painted lines circled and stabbed them, extending genitalia and the names of locals they obviously recognized.<sup>50</sup>

In that Kohl and Kaprow were catalysts of the creativity they saw in these sixth graders, the project mirrors the work of Wendy Ewald, who started her collaborative educational practice the same year as *Project Other Ways*, and it presages the work of Tim Rollins, who would collaborate with the Kids of Survival in the Bronx more than a decade later. For these egalitarian progressives, the imbalance of the teacher-student relationship seemed like a good target, and the educational environment would prove receptive to this sort of interrogation. But from the beginning of Kohl and Kaprow's project, there was a question of political versus artistic agendas. Kohl, a prominent social activist and advocate of the open school movement, had politics in mind, while Kaprow was interested in artistic play, emphasizing the open-endedness of the process and the product. When a park that was cleaned up and reoriented through community collaboration during the project was soon vandalized, Kelley says, "Kaprow was characteristically philosophical—the parks had come from rubble and were returned to rubble."<sup>51</sup> But Kohl saw politics, not poetry.

After a year Kaprow left *Project Other Ways* to take a position at the newly founded California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), where at first he was surrounded by members of the New York scene, including Fluxus artists like Alison Knowles and Nam June Paik. So just as Diggers techniques were transplanted to the East Coast, post-Fluxus ideologies made their way across the continent to the West Coast. Kaprow's influence as a teacher (at CalArts and later at UC San Diego) was long term and profound. According to Kelley, when Kaprow got to CalArts, the same sort of social expectations that Kohl had for *Project Other Ways* were held by some of the students, particularly the feminists: "It was assumed by many activist artists that Happenings, if scaled to the ideological proportions of feminism, might change society. Students would often raise questions and issue challenges about the social efficacy and political purpose of



Audience members experience *Yard* 1967 by Allan Kaprow at the Pasadena Art Museum. Photograph © 1967 Julian Wasser for *Life* magazine. Courtesy of the Allan Kaprow Estate, Hauser & Wirth, and The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (980063).

Kaprow's art. They wanted to change the world; Kaprow wanted to play with it."<sup>52</sup> One of those students was a young artist named Suzanne Lacy, and I will return to her soon.

Back on the East Coast, artists were beginning to experiment with models that crossed the line from intragroup participation to social co-operation. A major figure was Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Though she had not read Carol Hanisch's article in *Feminist Revolution*, Ukeles says, "We all walked around in the early '70s saying that the personal is political."<sup>53</sup> Ukeles went on to translate feminist dictum into action. In the late 1960s and early 1970s she began blurring her private and public life in so-called maintenance art works. In these performances Ukeles did what she did at home—cleaning and maintaining—in public spaces and galleries, performing the scrubbing of the sidewalk or the dusting of a museum. A year after the New York Radical Women's action at the Miss America Pageant (and the same year that "The Personal Is Political" was published), Ukeles wrote and distributed the "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!":

I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also (up to now separately) I "do" Art. Now, I will simply



Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside*, 1973. Part of Maintenance Art Performance Series, 1973–74. Performance at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.

do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art. I will live in the museum as I customarily do at home with my husband and my baby, for the duration of the exhibition. (Right? or if you don't want me around at night I would come in every day) and do all these things as public Art activities: I will sweep and wax the floors, dust everything, wash the walls (i.e. "floor paintings, dust works, soap-sculpture, wall-paintings") cook, invite people to eat, make agglomerations and dispositions of all functional refuse.<sup>54</sup>

In this text Ukeles set the stage for "service art": cleaning buildings and serving food are both strategies that have been carried out by others in subsequent decades. But most important, she made public her own "women's everyday experiences."

Ukeles continued to generalize her maintenance work and eventually formed a partnership with the City of New York Department of Sanitation, where she has served as artist-in-residence since 1977. Her interweaving of the domestic acts of maintenance that are mostly carried out by women and the public acts of sanitation that are almost exclusively executed by men, and her interweaving of the art world genre of performance with the world of urban systems, constituted an unconventional leap across borders of gender and class. For Ukeles, the women's liberation ideology of the political personal formed a foundation that would later be augmented by her interest in artistic traditions of collaboration that were beginning to bubble up.<sup>55</sup> Working with the sanitation workers in New York she has built exhibitions, parades, and a ballet for garbage barges on the Hudson River. She has gone on to collaborate with service workers in Europe and Asia. Her residency in the Sanitation Department is one of the best-known and most influential American examples of socially cooperative art.

#### International Influences: Debord, Beuys, and Freire

Any discussion of collaborative art in the American framework must acknowledge important intellectual and artistic contributions from abroad. There are several writers and artists from overseas whose influence is beyond question. I am not referring to Roland Barthes and others whose proclamation of the death of the author was much discussed at the time, but the ideas of Guy Debord, Joseph Beuys, and Paulo Freire that have resonated strongly with artists and intellectuals interested in notions of cooperation, dialogue, and participation.<sup>56</sup>

The French writer and filmmaker Guy Debord and the Situationist International movement he led loom large in the field. Debord's artistic, intellectual, and political project was a fight against passivity, against a society divided between actors and spectators. His writings differentiate between the "spectacle" that is grand and impersonal (e.g., the mass media) and the "situation" that is local, personal, and interactive. He strove to loosen the grasp of the debilitating stupor of the spectacular. In his essay "Towards a Situationist International," published in 1957, Debord wrote, "The situation is . . . made to be lived by its constructors. The role of the 'public,' if not passive at least as a walk-on, must ever diminish, while the share of those who can not be called actors, but in a new meaning of the term, 'livers,' will increase."<sup>57</sup> Ten years later, in *Society of the Spectacle*, he was even clearer about his desire to activate the spectator: "The alienation of the spectator, which reinforces the contemplated objects that result from his own unconscious activity, works like this: The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires. The spectacle's estrangement from the acting subject is expressed by the fact that the individual's gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator does not feel at home anywhere because the spectacle is everywhere."<sup>58</sup>

Though he was active since the late 1950s, Americans often perceive Debord as a figure of the late 1960s. One year after the publication of *Society of the Spectacle* in France, he and the Situationists achieved mythic status when their ideas escaped the academy and spilled onto the streets of Paris in the events of May 1968. In the catalogue for the large-scale exhibition on the Situationists that made its way to Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art in 1990, the film theorist and avant-garde historian Peter Wollen writes that in the spring of 1968 "student groups were influenced by the SI [Situationist International], especially in Nanterre where the uprising took shape, and the Situationists themselves played an active role in the events, seeking to encourage and promote workers' councils (and a revolutionary line within them) without exercising powers of decision and execution or political control of any kind."<sup>59</sup> By this account the Situationists stayed true to their philosophy, and the workers and students were "livers," collective actors in an event that is honored in the memory of the Left across the world. In 1968 the Yippies' street theater created a memorable political spectacle in Chicago, but it is the Situationists' antispectacle

in Paris that seems to carry more weight in the imagination of American cooperative artists.

There is no clear narrative of how or when Situationist ideas came to the United States. The critic Peter Schjeldahl suggests that Gordon Matta-Clark was inspired by Debord and the Situationists when he was studying in Paris in 1968, and Matta-Clark's urban cutting has been compared with the Situationists "dérives."<sup>60</sup> There was a branch of the Situationist International in New York in the late 1960s, and Leandro Katz, an active New York Situationist, published a translated text by Debord in 1969. (*Society of the Spectacle* itself first appeared in English in 1970.) Katz told me that the artists he was close to at that time included Matta-Clark, Helio Oiticica, Suzanne Harris, Kathy Acker, Joseph Kosuth, and Charles Ludlam, so some Situationist ideas certainly made their way through the tight-knit New York art world.<sup>61</sup> And some of the interactive projects created by this cohort seem to be cooperative art. In 1971, along with Carol Goodden, Suzanne Harris, Tina Girouard, and Richard Lew, Matta-Clark opened a restaurant and meeting place called Food. According to Goodden, Matta-Clark saw Food as a sculpture. He designed everything in the space, cooked some of the food, made a film there, cut out a part of a wall (inspiring his cut sculptures), and "tried to sell the whole idea of Food to Castelli [Gallery] as an art piece."<sup>62</sup> So perhaps Matta-Clark is thought to be a translator of Situationist ideas into interactive art in New York in the early 1970s, though I have yet to see any specific documentary evidence of his connection to the group. In any case, mainstream knowledge of the Situationists came much later, with general interest in the late 1980s and especially after the exhibition in Boston in 1990. Thus at the moment when cooperative art was beginning to find greater institutional support in the 1990s, Situationist ideas were freshly circulating in the United States, especially their notion of the antispectacular "liver" and their involvement in politics on the streets of Paris.

The artist whose name came up most often in discussing influences with the participants in this book is Joseph Beuys, with his notion of "social sculpture." Beuys's post-Fluxus work was known in America from the 1960s, but it was not until the early 1970s that the art world really took notice. In fact, though Fluxus was centered in New York, it was Beuys who brought some of its important ideas back home. By the time he came to New York in 1974 for his first public lecture in the United States, he was already a huge draw, for fans and detractors alike. This was two years after he had been dismissed from his academic position in Düsseldorf for re-

fusing to impose entry requirements for his classes, and the year of his first performance in America, at the Rene Block Gallery. About seven hundred people showed up for his lecture in the New School for Social Research's auditorium, which held only 350; half the audience was stranded outside. The transcripts depict a raucous event in which the audience seemingly felt encouraged by Beuys's rhetoric of dialogue to interrupt, disagree, and generally create an unruly atmosphere that Beuys seems to have embraced. This was the first time an American audience heard his ideas first-hand, and here is how he described his mission:

I would like to declare why I feel that it's now necessary to establish a new kind of art, able to show the problems of the whole society, of every living being—and how this new discipline—which I call social sculpture—can realize the future of humankind. . . . Here my idea is to declare that art is the *only* possibility for evolution, the only possibility to change the situation in the world. But then you have to enlarge the idea of art to include the whole creativity. And if you do that, it follows logically that every living being is an artist—an artist in the sense that he can develop his own capacity.<sup>63</sup>

Beuys is talking not only about social art forms but also about an open society that acknowledges the creativity of all, or, as he had said in 1972, "A total work of art is only possible in the context of the whole society. Everyone will be a necessary co-creator of social architecture, and, so long as anyone cannot participate, the ideal of democracy has not been reached."<sup>64</sup> In this text Beuys sounds a lot like the Port Huron Statement's call for participatory democracy, but the intellectual context was different. In an essay on Beuys's influence here, the critic Kim Levin argues that Americans saw his work in our context, not his own, and that we drew faulty parallels. "In our literal climate," writes Levin, "we never suspected that he was a symbolist, an expressionist, a mystical romanticist."<sup>65</sup> What seems to have stuck in the consciousness of many artists is the inclusive notion of "social sculpture," or at least an American literalist version of it. The self-defined "social sculptor" Rick Lowe (chapter 5) often cites Beuys as a major source of inspiration, even if he is not sure that Beuys would be able to relate to *Project Row Houses*.<sup>66</sup>

In 1973 Beuys said, "Communication occurs in reciprocity: it must never be a one-way flow from the teacher to the taught. The teacher takes equally from the taught."<sup>67</sup> He was inadvertently echoing both Saul Alinsky, with his notion of the community organizer as colearner, and the in-





In the New School auditorium in New York in 1974, Joseph Beuys presented a “public dialogue” in which audience members were invited on stage to ask questions. Beuys answered and wrote notations on a blackboard. Photograph © Peggy Jarrell Kaplan. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.

fluent theorist of dialogue, the Brazilian Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in 1968. When the book came out in English in 1970, it was embraced by many progressive educators in the United States and by artists as well. Freire’s “problem-posing” pedagogy is based on dialogue in which the teacher and the student become “jointly responsible for the process in which all grow.” In the 1980s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was ubiquitous in activist artists’ studios. And while Beuys could sound like Freire, Freire could sound like Debord; in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire writes, “In cultural invasion the actors . . . superimpose themselves on the people who are assigned the role of spectators, of objects. In cultural synthesis, the actors become integrated with the people, who are co-authors of the action that both perform on the world.”<sup>68</sup> Again we see the emphasis on the oppressed subject (the student, in this case) becoming an actor and coauthor. As opposed to Beuys, there was no mistaking Freire’s politics; he had very clear leftist political goals, which he articulated as a dissenter under right-wing dictatorial rule.

Freire’s theories were quickly translated into artistic form by his compatriot Augusto Boal, who published *Theatre of the Oppressed* in 1973. Like