In this text I intend to discuss the term generosity, principally in relation to four of my projects, which characterize my overall work and also seem suitable in this context. I would like to start by saying that I find the concept of “generosity” problematic in that it assumes a hierarchical structure between a giver and a recipient. I think there are very few artists interested in such a structure, especially if they are working in a social context. In my opinion, the title of the symposium out of which this book grew, “Generosity Projects,” aims at generally defining a phenomenon noticeable in contemporary art practice in the past ten to twelve years, namely, art projects that in a variety of ways contain an actual offer. To avoid potential misconception of this title, I have chosen to use quotation marks for the word “generosity.”

I am, of course, discussing the material from a Scandinavian perspective. I am pointing this out since “Generosity Projects” might be said to embody a phenomenon of an international character, which does not fully take into account national and local differences. What I mean is that this type of art (social sculpture) is formed by a social context in a higher degree than most other art expressions and that the social context, in its turn, is the result of politics, economy, history, and so forth, factors creating great differences internationally, nationally, and locally. Most of my projects would probably have been impossible to carry out in the United States, as well as in several other countries.

In 1989 I graduated from the Valand Art Academy, which is part of the University of Gothenburg and one of five fine arts schools at university level in Sweden. During my five years there, I worked mainly with painting, and I considered myself a painter. By the time of my graduation exhibition, however, I had also started working with photography. I perceived my education at the Art Academy as very isolated. There were artists discussing art, art critics discussing art, art historians discussing art, and art scholars discussing art. The isolation of this education became even more evident when I graduated and entered a society where I needed both to work and to make a living as an artist. Through friends in other professions I became acquainted with other areas of society. In this context, I would like to point out that I completed a degree in sociology before entering art school. Thus, I already had a profound interest in society. Another very impor-
tant aspect was the fact I had a very hard time identifying myself with the more traditional artist's role. I found myself wanting a social context for my work. I realized that in order to work as an artist, I would have to create a role that would also fulfill other important needs in my life.

The economic situation was another factor that influenced my direction. I graduated just before the recession of the early nineties hit, totally changing the flourishing economy that had characterized the art scene since the early eighties. By the time I was ready to exhibit my work, there were hardly any galleries left. They had disappeared due to the economic downturn. The surviving galleries concentrated on exhibiting established and traditional painters. Hence, very few galleries were interested in a recent graduate working with other expressions than pure painting. Public museums and art galleries seemed to operate in a similar fashion and were equally uninterested. Even their interest in art, considered narrow and unapproachable, decreased significantly with the budget cuts. A group of young artists realized that in order to work as artists and have their work be part of public discussions, they would need to find their own solutions and create new arenas for their art. Their thinking coincided with my own ideas, which I had started to formulate for completely other reasons.

Many critics and art historians, in their analysis of the art that can be placed within the frame of social sculptures, have seen this art more as a revolt against and a discontentment with institutional art. This analysis may be right for certain artists but not for all and absolutely not for me. I never looked upon it that way. I consider the gallery space to be a fantastic opportunity. To be able to enter a room for art directly off the street is truly a phenomenon, which is also true for all the beautiful spaces for art in museums and galleries. The change that took place was the realization that art could be so much more than it had been to date. Art can work in many contexts, and different artistic concepts require different spaces. I am also convinced that art created outside traditional institutions can influence them in a positive way. In many respects these institutions have also constituted an important counterpart to art created outside their framework.

The fact that I am lucky enough to live and work in a country that has a liberal policy towards financing the arts and culture has been another important factor in my development as an artist. The following is a good example of the cultural policy of that time. During the recession in the early nineties, the prime minister of our country declared that in difficult economic times it is more important than ever to support culture and the arts. Due to the fact that a number of commercial galleries disappeared and artists began to focus on project work, some state art funds reevaluated how their assets were spent, and more money was allotted to project-based art initiatives. In response, the government allotted more money to these funds. As a result of these initiatives, an increasing number of artists were able to realize their projects. At around the same time, the government created yet another fund to finance several large art projects, managed by artists working...
outside the confines of traditional institutions during the past few years. From an international perspective, the economic circumstances for Swedish artists have, without a doubt, been exceptional, favorably influencing both the number of projects and their content.

While describing the factors that have shaped the direction of my work, I would like to mention another that is as important when we discuss projects based around the concept of generosity. I firmly believe that what took place in the eighties and the discussion created by postmodernism are of major importance. The word *generosity* is rich in meanings that interest me, such as indulgence, forgiveness, tolerance—all concepts (with the exception of charity) that I connected with the situation and discussion that postmodernism created. This discussion had also bad effects, as, for instance, an absurd theoretical bias.

One may criticize a lot of what took place during the time, but for me personally, as a young artist educated in the modern tradition, it was immensely liberating to feel that everything was possible and allowed. I didn’t have to be in opposition to anything, nor did I have to be angry. This feeling of openness was in itself generosity on a large scale. In this I found possibilities for a different artistic role, one with room for increased participation and one that would make me feel less of an outsider. I recommend that you keep this description of the political and economic climate in Sweden and the factors that influenced my direction as an artist in mind, as I move on to describe four of my projects.

_Bus 993_

In September 1993, a couple of artists living and working in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, initiated an art project called *The Rules of the Game*. The number of invited artists equaled the number of balls in a billiard game. Every artist was asked to choose a number, which corresponded to one on the billiard balls. The balls were broken on a billiard table. After the break, the balls were placed on a city map of Stockholm. The position of the balls on the map determined the location where each artist would create his or her project. Thus the most important parameter for this project—the place—was determined by chance.

My billiard ball stopped next to a busy avenue in the city center. On this location were a couple of bus stops for local busses. There was also a statue of a famous Swedish poet who came from the same province as I do. The location also had another connection to my life and myself. I live and work in Gothenburg, which is a city on the Swedish west coast. The largest newspaper in the city is the *Gothenburg Post*, which happened to have its Stockholm office right where my billiard ball had stopped.

These three components—the bus stops, the statue, and the newspaper office—made me think about a journey, my own geographical journey. I had once
left the same province as the poet. He moved to Stockholm, I moved to Gothenburg, which was also represented at this location in Stockholm where we now had all united.

Quite a few factors influenced the design of my project. One of the most important concerned the intention of *The Rules of the Game*, namely to comment on the big city. An effective way to comment on something would be to place it in relation to its opposite, I thought. Pondering this and a few other ideas eventually led me to the conclusion that I wanted to create my own bus line between my allotted location in Stockholm and a small community nearby. The little paper-mill community of Skoghall, which happens to be the place where I was born and raised, came to represent that small community.

It was my intention to offer people the opportunity to travel to Stockholm, especially those people who, for whatever reason, had hardly ever traveled to or visited Stockholm previously. During the project, a total of approximately four hundred people traveled on the bus, which was called “993” and was completely free of charge. Travelers from Skoghall had a six-hour stay in Stockholm, to be spent any way they liked. Travelers from Stockholm, on the other hand, got a week’s stay in Skoghall, since the bus only shuttled back and forth once a week.

In order to publicize the bus line, I placed ads in the local papers. I had scheduled office hours between eight and ten every morning so that people could call and book a seat. But in order to avoid giving away all the seats to the more proactive prospective travelers, I contacted the unions at the paper mill and asked them to inquire whether any of their unemployed or disabled workers would like to travel to Stockholm. The ministers in a small community also usually have a good knowledge of parishioners in need, and of those who might benefit from getting away from the everyday grind. Hence, I asked the ministers to help, and after a few days they produced a list of people who were interested. With such methods, a diverse crowd of people came together and traveled once a week, over a five-week period, between Skoghall and Stockholm. There were variations both in age and in social status. And they sat together on the bus for nearly eight hours.

Since this was the first project of its kind in Sweden, discussions naturally arose about whether this project could be considered art or not. However, for me as an artist it was a milestone. I had never before, in any of the exhibitions I had participated in at the expense of so many people in the family. We tried to have the best for all, but eventually they moved on an almost daily basis. The family was the community without their parent.

The time of the buses remains one of my memories, the buses numbered 993. It’s early morning when the bus drivers are lining both sides of the street and the air is probably due to them, and they remained the same for many years. In the morning when the bus drivers are lining both sides of the street and the air is probably due to them, and they remained the same for many years.
moved to Gothenburg where we now had
one of the most interesting ways to comment
on the relations and the small city where I was
to offer people the
opportunity to visit the
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people traveled called “993” and were
Travelers from various places in Stockholm, to
asked. Travelers from...
In 1994 a Swedish curator collaborated with a restaurateur in Stockholm on a project called F.ART (well aware of the English connotation of the word). It took the form of inviting one artist, one evening a week, to the restaurant and asking them to intervene. One artist made changes to the menu, another to the interior, a third staged a performance. At the time that I was asked to participate, Sweden had recently held elections and a new government had been formed. Technically, the formation of a government is called a “government installation” in Sweden. As most people are aware, there is also the concept of installation art. I told the curator that I intended to make a government installation. Subsequently, I was busy lobbying and convincing the prime minister and his cabinet to participate. After a couple of weeks, we were informed that there was a possibility the prime minister and some of the other ministers would participate. They even let us know what date and evening would work for them. We adjusted our schedule to theirs and arranged a government installation at the restaurant. Two days prior to the event, security police went through the whole building in which the restaurant was located. They even rented an apartment across the street, where they could observe who entered the restaurant. There were two plainclothes bodyguards in the restaurant. The tables were not reserved; anyone could come to the restaurant and have dinner with the government. The dinner was even subsidized. A three-course dinner, including coffee and brandy, was offered at the equivalent price of four dollars. According to my arrangement, one minister was placed at each table.

Six months later, I opened up his home to a man who wanted to move an "outsider position" such as "social sculpture" or "art that integrates outside at the same
After each course, they would have to change tables, in order to avoid the same minister talking to the same people all evening.

Of course, the media showed huge interest in the event. However, I refused all inquiries from journalists and tried to keep the event a secret as long as possible. There were several reasons for this strategy. At that phase in my career, I was not quite sure how the media really worked, and with all the interest in the government dinner, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to handle the situation. It was important to me that the event would not turn into a stunt. I also wanted it to be possible for "ordinary people" to come to the restaurant. Their chances would definitely decrease if the event received too much media attention.

The discussion that followed Government Dinner was mostly about how I managed to get the government to participate in this art project. People seemed more interested in celebrity issues than in asking interesting questions about the relationship between artists and politicians, or what the dinner meant from an artistic perspective. This really surprised me, since it seemed that there was, after all, a very marked boundary between politicians and artists. They inhabited two separate worlds that, according to many, should not mix if art was to avoid being tainted and losing its value.

Later, when I worked as an advisor for the Swedish Minister for Culture, an assignment I also turned into an art project, I experienced these opinions even stronger. At the time, I thought, as I still do today, that such a view of the arts is completely outdated. I was surprised how strongly the romantic ideal about artists was still held in Sweden. Many held the view that an artist should not get involved with or be too close to the establishment or circles of power, but should instead stay out on the fringes of society. They meant that the risk of being "corrupted" was too big. It is this view of art that I mean is outdated. The risk of being corrupted is present in all contexts/situations, and it's therefore up to every individual artist to be aware of what situations/relations/contexts can influence his or her artisanship. In relation to the discussion of the extended concept of art, the "outsider position" is impossible, and not least when it comes to expressions of art such as "social sculpture" or art where the artist is an instigator in relation to the art that integrates into the environment. It's impossible to participate and stand outside at the same time.

Four Lectures

Six months later, I was asked to participate in another project. A curator had opened up his home, where he lived with his wife and three children, to artists who wanted to mount an exhibition or devise a project. The experiences of Government Dinner and the subsequent discussions around celebrity issues, together with the fact that I still had not completed my work with the politicians, made me come up with a proposal for a project I called Four Lectures.
I sent out a simple mailing, informing people that there would be four lectures held in the apartment, one every Saturday. In the mailing, one could, among other things, read the following:

Saturday, February 18, 2pm
DAMIEN HIRST
Art process / Life process

Saturday, February 25, 2pm
CINDY SHERMAN
What's the meaning of results?

Saturday, March 4, 2pm
BILL WOODROW
Awareness of the expression in the material

Saturday, March 11, 2pm
MIKE KELLY
Art, art, art, bloody art

The content of the mailed piece was deliberately vaguely formulated. It was nowhere stated that the artists mentioned would actually attend. Hence, one had no idea if these artists would give a lecture, or if the lectures would be about them. The outcome, however, was that many people thought that Mike Kelly, Cindy Sherman, and the others would come to the little apartment in Gothenburg. If I was able to get the Swedish government to come to a restaurant and participate in an art project, people were convinced that I would be able to arrange for Cindy, Mike, and the other artists to come to Gothenburg. Hence, an earlier event had created so much confidence in me that even my fellow artist friends thought it was for real. I was at the time also working as an advisor to the Swedish Minister for Culture (a dinner invitation can lead to a lot!), which of course strengthened the trust in my being able to attract such artists. For example, it was thought I had received generous funding from the Ministry of Culture for this purpose.

The rumor of Cindy's, Bill's, Damien's, and Mike's eminent arrival in Gothenburg spread quickly. Journalists called, curators called, everyone wanted to meet the artists and interview them. I went underground and was unavailable. In my stead, the curator who owned the apartment took care of all external contacts. People were desperate to have an opportunity to meet the international art celebrities. At this point, I will not tell you the whole story about the project. I have only chosen the first two lectures, which concerned Damien Hirst and Cindy Sherman.

The Damien Hirst lecture was the first event and, of course, expectations were enormous. The line outside the apartment was long. I arrived fifteen minutes late. Later I was told that my course was going on without me. I realized the situation only when I arrived at the apartment. I was greeted by a packed room of attentive students. I had written, was a situation resembling a exercise in love, half a cup of coffee, and I went.
utes late. Later I was told that people in line had thought I might have been late due to traffic on the way back from the airport where I had, of course, been picking up Damien Hirst. I walked by the line that stretched all the way from the courtyard, up the stairwell, and into the apartment on the third floor. It was totally quiet. No one said a word. When I arrived in the apartment, I told the assembled that Damien Hirst had sent me a fax that morning excusing himself from coming to Gothenburg, due to personal reasons, but also, that he had faxed the script he had intended to read, asking me to read in his stead. The script, which I had written, was a text starting out with art theory but slowly going on to something resembling a cake recipe. Measure a cup of understanding, three tablespoons of love, half a cup of understanding, and so on. It then turned into a real cake recipe and I went into the kitchen and baked the cake. Oddly enough, people stayed in the apartment. Either they were in shock or possibly unable to act out of pure disappointment. I set a table with a tablecloth on which Damien Hirst's name had been embroidered and we shared the cake. It all ended in a very good discussion. We discussed the art scene, our views on artists as megastars, on a level with rock stars, but also our ability to handle disappointment. Some people were very upset; a few teachers and students from the Department of Art Theory at the University of Gothenburg felt especially cheated. Anyway, I had designed this Hirst lecture wholly with the help of the Bible. Everyone is waiting for the mighty god, who does not come, but sends his messenger instead. A lot of people are not pleased by this message. There was also strong biblical symbolism in the tablecloth/shroud and the shared cake/bread.

The following Saturday was not as crowded, for obvious reasons, but attendance was still unexpectedly high. I am told that people were under the impression that the lectures might have been planned on a Russian roulette principle, with one lecture being the real thing. No one wanted to miss it. Many who attended out of pure curiosity were interested to see how I would solve the assignment this time.

The following happened: I had already installed a speakerphone in the apartment. Right before the lecture, when everyone was gathered in the apartment, I called to say that I was at the airport waiting for Cindy Sherman, but she was not on the flight. I also mentioned that I just passed the café and had happened to see someone who looked like Cindy. This person was in fact the minister for culture (who does actually look a little like Cindy). I asked her if she would consider being Cindy's stand-in and she said "yes." So there we were in a room at the airport, planning to have a phone conference with those gathered in the apartment.

Most of this was true. I was in fact sitting in a room with the minister for culture, but far from the airport, in a totally different part of Sweden. When people in the apartment realized they had been given an opportunity to speak freely to the minister for culture, a discussion started and continued for almost two hours. Many topics were covered: the relationship between art and politics, politicians' incompetence when it comes to art issues, the economic situation of artists, and
FOUR PROJECTS

In the summer of 2003, I worked with three other artists on a project in New York. The name of the project was "Four Lectures". The four artists were Alfredo J. Cárdenas, David Hammons, Cao, originally from China, and myself. The project was a collaboration of artists from different backgrounds, and it was a unique opportunity to work with international spaces and a book of the project was published.

The project was divided into four parts, each part focusing on a different aspect of the city. The first part was a performance in a church, the second part was a lecture in a museum, the third part was a workshop in a school, and the fourth part was a installation in a park. Each part was designed to interact with the community and to create a dialogue between the artists and the audience.

I think everyone enjoyed the event. It was a great opportunity to connect with the community and to share our ideas and experiences. The project was a success and it was a great learning experience for all of us.

Jörgen Bengtsson
Four Lectures (Damien Hurst) 1995
so on. I think everyone in the apartment realized that in being offered direct contact with the country's minister for culture, they were participating in a unique event.

/Public Safety/Two American Policemen

In the summer of 2000 I returned to the little paper mill community of Skoghall with three other artists, each of us with a site-specific project in mind. The other artists were Alfredo Jaar from New York, Esther Shalev-Gerz from Paris, and Paco Cao, originally from Madrid, Spain, but now living and working mainly in New York. The name of the project was Public Safety and it touched upon many issues simultaneously. For a long time I had wanted to work with a whole community and Skoghall was perfect for this purpose. It had a full range of public institutions: church, police department, fire department, community hall, ball park, and so on, all located within a small radius and easy to oversee. I also had all the necessary local contacts to make this project happen. In this case, I do not want to describe the project in its entirety, but rather to focus on a few things that I find relevant in this context. I would like to mention though, that the project as a whole took three years to plan and execute. Within the framework of the project, an art conference with international speakers was arranged in Skoghall as well. A documentary was also filmed and a book documenting the event is currently being written.
For my project I brought two policemen from Phoenix to Skoghall. Neither of them had ever left the United States before, but for ten days they patrolled the town in their uniforms. Sweden is one of the most Americanized countries in Europe and American cops are well known to the Swedish people, especially from movies and from other media, but more as fictional characters than as real people. Hence, my idea of wanting to relocate these well known, clearly American symbols in the little community and making them real to the residents in their own environment. In the movies, actors play the cops. In Skoghall the real cops took the role of the actors, since they were not legally allowed to fulfill their duties as policemen in Sweden. It all turned out the way I had imagined, but worse. The American cops were looked upon as movie stars. They were asked to sign autographs and to participate in radio and television shows, and the newspapers carried long articles discussing their activities on an almost daily basis. Schools called me and asked me to bring the cops over, since they couldn’t get anything productive done: the students just talked about the American cops. What took place was both fascinating and scary.

Two other projects, created by Alfredo Jaar and Paco Cao, might illustrate the concept of generosity a little more clearly. Alfredo Jaar had a large exhibition hall, constructed of wood and paper, erected in the middle of the town square. The paper came from the local paper mill, which Skoghall is built around. The exhibition hall was open for twenty-four hours and showed a group exhibition with fifteen young Swedish artists. When the exhibition closed, the structure and its contents were set alight and burned to the ground. Alfredo wanted to offer the residents of Skoghall the experience of having a community exhibition hall. Through the gift of the exhibition hall, with all the effort it took to build, and at the same time by its destruction, he hoped to create a deeper sense of loss, so that people would realize how much they missed art and culture in their everyday lives. The discussions around Alfredo’s project very soon polarized into two sides. One group thought it was crazy to burn such wonderful wood; it could have been used for a more reasonable purpose. The other group was of the opinion that the exhibition hall should have remained there as a permanent art venue.

Paco Cao deposited his body as a work of art to a Spanish museum sometime in the mid-nineties. In order for Paco Cao to be part of the Public Safety project, the council in Skoghall had to write a letter requesting to borrow him. Paco’s idea was to be transported from Spain to Skoghall as a work of art, that is, without a passport. This entailed huge difficulties and many very funny incidents, especially with the passport authorities. When Paco Cao arrived in Skoghall, he of-
ffered the residents the opportunity to borrow him. Whoever was interested had to sign a contract, promising to keep him protected from rain and cold and also to refrain from harming him in any way. Several residents took up his invitation.

Public Safety turned out to have significant influence on the little community. After the project was finished, the public architect drafted a new plan for the community, which was totally inspired by the project. The residents also chose Alfredo’s exhibition hall to be the most beautiful building in the community and submitted it to an architectural contest. Recently the mayor of the community stepped down after twelve years in office. A journalist asked him, what he considered most important and memorable during those years. He answered, “Public Safety.”

The media have been immensely important to me. With the help of newspapers, television, and radio, I have been able to create the imaginary space I have needed to put my projects into context. I was initially very reserved, but perhaps also a little afraid of the consequences of using the media as tools in my projects. There were two reasons for this fear. On the one hand, the traditional artist’s role versus the outsider’s, on the other, the fear of losing control. Many of my projects could easily have turned into spectacular stunts. There would have been a huge risk of the projects being dismissed as stunts had I not considered the media useful tools. Since I carefully monitored the information given to the media, I controlled the interpretation of my projects. Instead of being a threat, the media became collaborators, helping with the effort to disseminate information about the projects.

In my experience, the kind of art projects that I have described here, and that could be considered “social sculptures,” are better realized outside the traditional framework of galleries and museums. When meeting with an audience that is unaware of the established codes, the more direct and intimate communication that this kind of work requires is generated.

In conclusion, I would like to add a few words concerning the “generous” aspects of this kind of project. If one looks upon it from an international point of view, the broader phenomenon is really about food, people meeting each other, and an opportunity for increased communication. These are all very basic and fundamental needs in human life. Perhaps the fact that projects like these are emerging indicates a recognition of the importance of these basic needs in our society and current time. If this is the case, these kinds of projects carry an important message by both identifying these needs and, sometimes, even fulfilling them.