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I WANT TO GO TO THE FUTURE PLEASE: Jenny Holzer and the End of a Century

Abstract

The task of this dissertation is to assess the historical conditions that permitted Jenny Holzer to formulate a practice premised on language and conceptions of public space to break from historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde practices. My aim is to demonstrate the recourses sought by Holzer—through language, collaboration, and form—to reveal the operations of repression at work in the public spaces of place and language in particular moments of crises at the end of a—and at the ruined start of a new—century: the economic collapse of the late 1970s, the AIDs crisis, and the wars on terror following the events of September 11, 2001.

The exemplary projects that I study in this dissertation—from her *Truisms* posters in downtown Manhattan in the late 1970s, to her collaborative work with *The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince, and Winters*, to her work with electronic signs and stone sarcophagi to address the AIDS crisis at its most dire period in 1987-89, to her light projections whose moving impermanence reflect on the continuity of mourning as an activity—each demonstrate the impossibility of neutrality. Concentrating on works conceptualized for and realized (for the most part) in New York City over the course of a quarter century, my study uses the seeming consistency of geography, or at least the fixity of a longitudinal and latitudinal intersection, to indicate the seismic changes inflicted on the city and its residents by economic, legal, political, and violent actions—and, in the case of the AIDS crisis, criminal inaction. My dissertation argues that Holzer's

unflagging demonstration of threatened subjectivity is the necessary form of protest to an ever-more bureaucratized world.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	Vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Recombinant Aesthetics: Jenny Holzer's Truisms	14
Chapter 2. No Man's Land: Jenny Holzer in the City and the Limit of the Dérive	52
Chapter 3. "A Desire for What Works": The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters	89
Chapter 4. "I Want to Go to the Future Please": Jenny Holzer's <i>Laments</i> and the Politics of Temporality	126
Chapter 5. The Art of Losing: Jenny Holzer's Light Projections and the Right to Write	168
Images	211

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I read acknowledgements with the same mix of care and curiosity as I do obituaries, or as I listen to wedding vows, eulogies, or apologies. It is a form, like those others, that is wholly incommensurate to what is—or should be—expected. Words always fail. The enormity of sentiment necessarily slips nuance. But here I am writing my own and, as some genre of luck would have it, penning those acknowledgements for the support I received on a project largely about the inadequate necessity of language. I wish, in a way a child would, that I could place the machine I write on to my chest and have it register the enormity of my gratitude. But it gives me great joy to know the impossibility of this, to know that the labor of figuring out the relationship between emotion, setting, and sentiment and forming it into language is another way of sorting through a world that always is mediated. My incommensurate language of gratitude here, I hope, is only the beginning of an elaboration of thanks that will take various forms. I foresee much of this elaboration featuring alcohol.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my dog, Francis Bacon Blanchard Breslin, only because this just got way too serious. Bacon, you have little knowledge, and that also can go a long way.

Introduction

I Want to Go to the Future Please: Jenny Holzer and the End of a Century

While a collapse of our privileged economy is hardly desirable, it seems a prospect to be faced, and one "logical" outcome is likely to be that much of the manipulated market demand for modern art may simply evaporate... At the same time one can't help but express a masochistic curiosity about much art will continue to be made if there's literally no market demand for it... Presumably, in a world economy no longer wholly determined by the West, there are many prospects for a major economic shift in art... but, for an art whose principle dynamic is the "stability" of the present economy, and a community of artists who all have some sort of an investment in that "stability," the effects may be (and I again masochistically hope) truly amazing. Whatever we are able to accomplish now, my point is that transforming our reality is no longer a question of just making more art, it's a matter of realizing the *enormous social vectoring* of the problem, and opportunistically taking advantage of what social tools we have. One thing I'm certain, that anything we might call radical theory in the arts will have to be socially constructed in all its social dimensions. But even then it may not be a question of how much we might accomplish, since it might take something as catastrophic as a collapse in the economic structure of this society to have any substantial effect on the careening superstructure of modern American art.

Ian Burn, "Art Market: Affluence and Degradation"1

Add another collapse to the heap of the twentieth century. In the April 1975 issue of Artforum, Ian Burn offers an accurate (if not perversely gleeful or even masochistically titillated) prediction of the economic seizure that would afflict the global economy for the next decade. But it is the very possibility of this collapse that offers Burn some succor. Economic catastrophe, he believes, affords the possibility for aesthetic practices to disengage from forms of production solely constructed for consumption and recuperation into a flush, full throttle market economy.

Breakdown is conceived as a re-ordering phenomenon, a force that would, however temporarily, convulse art's relationship to its means of production and reception. In this study of Jenny Holzer's practice from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, evidence of the recalibration that Burn desires abounds. In an interview from 1992, Michael Auping asked Holzer, "... at what point did art really begin to take hold in such a way that it was meaty enough for you call it a career? Or was that ever an issue?" Holzer responded: "Career wasn't really the issue. The decision to do art was almost an

¹ Ian Burn, "The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation," Artforum (April, 1975): 37.

anticareer move. At the time I entered the art world, careers for young artists weren't a reality." By making a statement that demonstrates that something else motivated art making rather than the perceived security—financial and/or social—that a career certainly signifies, Holzer speaks to a period when the market for the untried had vanished. It is exactly this period when Holzer—and a number of her peers—both begin to experiment with forms of artistic address that were cheap and infinitely reproducible and to try on models of collectivity that render nothing physical. That is, they embraced strategies that removed the market as a criterion for assessing the functionality of the artwork. To insist on causality would be foolish though. As we know all too well, scores of the tortured were still toiling away with brush in hand during that downturn as if they could figure themselves back to another time and an economic boom (ironically, they could and did exactly that). So perhaps it's better to say that Holzer et al. worked rigorously and conscientiously within the historical, social, and cultural confines of their present in a way that explored how use might be the value more operative for an art that politicizes the aesthetic.

By invoking Walter Benjamin's famous dialectical inversion of Fascism's "aestheticization of politics," I want to suggest that Holzer's artwork also reorients how art directly relates to the politics of the period. But I also, and more blatantly, evoke Benjamin's enmeshing of aesthetics and politics here to push against Burn's almost fetishistic pleasure in collapse. I raise it now if only as a reminder that another economic collapse in this ravaged century—that of Weimar—laid the ground for a social and cultural history we only can look back to in horror. If the economic collapse of the late 1970s freed art of the market, let us remember that the same collapse participated in shackling art—not to mention the citizenry of nations—to the coercive, conservative politics of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in England. That is, if art could supposedly find itself unencumbered from the demands of exchange value, art's possible use value was extremely

² Michael Auping, *Jenny Holzer* (New York: Universe, 1992), 70.

diminished given a repressive climate that used a desperate fiscal situation as both an excuse and a ruse to introduce policies that only served the interests of those already in normative positions of class, identity, gender, and sexuality. The task of this dissertation is not only to assess the historical conditions that permitted a break from historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde practices. But it's the project's responsibility to demonstrate the recourses sought by Holzer—through language, collaboration, and form—to reveal the operations of repression at work in the public spaces of place and language. Her practice demonstrates the very impossibility of facile liberation—as if some will to collapse is all it would take to begin anew. In our current historical moment when regimes are falling with almost unparalleled frequency, it is the tenuousness and the precariousness of rebuilding that needs attention. We are too familiar with repressive returns packaged as the new.

With the exception of David Joselit's thoughtful 1998 survey text, "Voices, Bodies and Spaces: The Art of Jenny Holzer," the most cogent accounts of Jenny Holzer's practice were included in seminal essays that shaped in formative moves the reception of the most radical practices in the early 1980s. Dan Graham's "Signs" (1981), Hal Foster's "Subversive Signs" (1982), and Benjamin Buchloh's "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art" (1982) each isolate Holzer's text-based work (at this point, using media such as posters, painted signs, and plaques in public spaces) as a significant example of a site-specific practice that used language and resisted representation to critique the ideologies of everyday life. A critical practice deeply indebted to the linguistic legacy of Conceptual Art, Holzer's version of institutional critique continued to isolate ideology as it functioned through the power of institutional apparatuses. But it did so while querying how ideology and its apparatuses formed and inflected the individual and subject positions.

As Holzer's early texts famously eschewed any specific authorial voice and instead presented contradictions and plurality in the guise of competing *Truisms* (1977-79) or constructed manifestos in

her *Inflammatory Essays* (1979-82), the object of art was dematerialized as its author/creator disappeared. This refusal to subjugate (in accordance with Roland Barthes's famous statement: "To utter a discourse is not, as is too often repeated, to communicate; it is to subjugate"³) and this opening into a flat and undifferentiated field of voices and subject positions was heralded as axiomatic of the "postmodern," the anti-aesthetic, the world of total sign value. Along with the work of artists such as Louise Lawler, Cindy Sherman, and Allan McCollum, Holzer used (and was seen as using) a theoretical model of working through subject positions and using everyday modes of address "that provided concepts and invented procedures that dealt with reality." That is, Holzer's practice gained such critical attention and helped generate such formative critical responses because she exposed in physical form the pervasive and salient ambience of power outside of, and in addition to, its institutional forms. That this was achieved through language, as material interventions in public space, avowed that there is "literally not a single form of knowledge or linguistic articulation that could claim to be exempt from its participation in ideological interests."

To historicize the practice of a living artist has its dangers and its pitfalls. The most damaging would be to construct premature ends. But there is also the risk inherent to ignoring a practice of such conceptual and historical heft as Holzer's when the practitioner can help clarify positions and histories. I believe it is possible to resolve these paired dangers and explain why, over and above any subjective analyses of the "value" or import of the work, the timing is right for the project. Besides exhibition reviews and requisite catalogue essays that generally have assumed the function of a survey, the critical literature on Holzer is woefully thin—particularly surprising given her continued visibility in major international exhibitions and the historical pedigree as the first

³ Lecture in inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, to which Barthes was elected. The lecture was delivered on January 7, 1977, and published as *Leçon* (Paris: Editions du Seuil) in 1978. Translated by Richard Howard

⁴ Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1990), 240.

⁵ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "An Interview with Jenny Holzer," in *Jenny Holzer* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 119.

female recipient of the Venice Biennale's Leone d'Oro in 1990. There is sufficient room to maneuver through and around the important starts of Graham, Foster, and Buchloh. Their investigations took place some quarter century ago—at the beginning of Holzer's career, even before she began working with the electronic signs (LEDs) for which she's probably best known.

But in addition to this clear opening in the critical writing, there are two historical factors particular to the work—an ending and a return—that make the subject (or subjects) delimited and thus historically approachable. The first is Holzer's decision to abandon writing in 2001. Having produced thirteen text series from 1977-2001, her sudden cessation marked a distinct departure and end. The second historical factor is her return to the medium of painting in 2006—which she originally gave up in the late 1970s—in the wake of the latest wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the issues of detainee abuse and possible human rights violations that ensued. The end of writing and this return to painting, while not tied by any causal relationship, provide in their temporal proximity a way to work through the implications of Holzer's work. This is especially true as the beginning of her "mature" practice, the practice championed by Graham et al, began as a debate, as it was with Conceptual Art, with that ur-medium: painting. I won't address the newest paintings—works that use declassified government documents as both image and content—directly in this study; they function as a border for me. The time between the refusal and the recuperation of the medium is where my study is sited.

In interviews, in varying degrees of frankness, Holzer traces her engagement with language and public spaces. In 1993, she was asked by the Süddeutsche Zeitung's Christian Kämmerling, "One is tempted to immediately ask about the message in your work—the content is so explicit that the form doesn't seem worth talking about. Exactly how far would you go in calling yourself an artist?" She goes on to reply: "... I admired abstract painting when I was young. I wanted to be someone like Mark Rothko but couldn't. Somehow I wrecked because I had the strong need to deal

with real world questions. So, I started writing. That led me to put real texts on my abstract pictures. That made my paintings all the worse." The follow-up was: "You wanted to paint abstractly and at the same time formulate real issues...." Holzer's response: "They don't exclude each other. Gerhard Richter can do it but I couldn't. There was no way I was going to convert my themes into pictures... like social realism—factory workers on strike or something like that, Stalinist paintings. My dilemma was that I preferred to paint abstractly and I still wanted to bring my subjects to the public. The question was just... how?" I present this long exchange because it encapsulates several key misperceptions that my project is devoted to redressing, implied questions that need to be unpacked, and genealogies that require mapping. A discussion of this question posed to Holzer will help establish my general line of questioning for my project; picking at the answer will allow me to get more particular.

In addition to its tired insistence that she justify or define the designation of artist, the initial question by Kämmerling privileges content—the text—over forms that don't "seem worth talking about." This critical position—not a rare one in the literature—could be theoretically tenable: 1.) if the public sphere were not Holzer's main site for the distribution of her artwork thus necessitating formal means that would permit content and provide the contextual locus that would allow the artwork's discursive, institutional, aesthetic, and economic status and locations; 2.) if she did not engage with and invent new devices to distribute her textual production (stickers, posters, pamphlets, books, painted signs, plaques, benches, electronic signs, light projections, etc.) that examined capital's erasure of public space while collapsing the public language of advertising (her use of posters, electronic signs, and light projections) with government sponsored memorial culture (her use of plaques and stoneworks) as two sides of the same anomic coin; 3.) if Holzer's writing project had been (previously or ever) submitted to a thorough analysis that might have attempted to

⁶ Jenny Holzer, *Lustmord* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 1996), 121.

articulate how the writing actually functions in each series—the language and linguistic practices at work, the linguistic spaces the series occupy, the differentiation from traditional conventions of language production, the art historical antecedents at work that might help situate the practice. This thoroughgoing analysis of the writing has never taken place.

In short, what Kämmerling's question occludes are some of the very questions and issues my project must address: what is Holzer's writing in its various addresses (especially those written after the early texts analyzed in the early eighties); what are the forms; what theory of public space and the public sphere does the work produce; how does advertising's privatization of public space produce the same foreclosure of memory as, perversely, governmental memorial culture. The end of Holzer's writing allows the historian to treat it as a completed project.

Holzer's writing—at times declarative and frank, at other moments emotional and oblique, still at others descriptive and unnerving—initiated a way to read that was dependent on going between and behind the lines—a death of the author that produced meaning only through the activation of the reader/viewer. Since her texts can't be situated within conventional models of language production (prose, poetry, journalism, essay, etc.), the reader/viewer doesn't have recourse to patterns and expectations inculcated by definition, genre rules, or familiarity; and her treatment of universal subjects (death, war, abuse, family, conventions, love, disease) permits equal footing to those who approach. But, crucially, the reason why Holzer outflanks "the erasure of memory from the semantic axis of language" is because her conception of language has a third axis in addition to the semantic and lexical: a public axis that has much to do with the spoken word (Holzer: "These people who get up on a soap box on a street corner and make mighty pronouncements about God

⁷ Benjamin Buchloh, "Open Letters, Industrial Forms," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 72.

and the world—they were just as much my model as any kind of conceptual art''s) and the place and time in which it comes to be.

The exemplary projects that I study in this dissertation—from her Truisms posters in downtown Manhattan in the late 1970s, to her collaborative work with *The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince, and Winters*, to her work with electronic signs and stone sarcophagi to address the AIDS crisis at its most dire period in 1987-89, to her light projections whose moving impermanence reflect on the continuity of mourning as an activity—each demonstrate the impossibility of neutrality. Concentrating on works conceptualized for and realized (for the most part) in New York City over the course of a quarter century, my study uses the seeming consistency of geography, or at least the fixity of a longitudinal and latitudinal intersection, to indicate the seismic changes inflicted on the city and its residents by economic, legal, political, and violent actions—and, in the case of the AIDS crisis, criminal inaction.

With her *Truisms*, one-liners constructed to resemble clichés or common "wisdom" and assembled in typeset alphabetical lists on posters, Holzer performed a linguistic operation where the assuredness of "truths" is seen to be manufactured. By placing these posters in sites in Manhattan already affected by and in the process of gentrification, the project revealed that language, place, and identity are all sites of malleable formation pushed and pulled into certain shapes by power's dictates and responses to them. By discussing the work in the context of antecedent projects and practices like those of Yvonne Rainer and Guy Debord, I make the case that Holzer is working against the validity of chance as an aesthetic operation equally valid and accessible to all. I propose, following Rainer's critique of John Cage and Holzer's laborious construction of faulty "truths," that chance operations cannot outflank the operations of power and control that the denial of rational processes presumes. The issue is not to cede authorship and control to the vagaries of what or whomever

⁸ Holzer, Lustmord, 121.

might fill that vacuum but to conscientiously work through how authorship and meaning production can take place without restaging or implementing new forms of control or violence. Emptiness, like a meaning or power vacuum, becomes just another guise for ideology to assume. While the first chapter particularly explores the writing, the second more incisively assesses the particular gendering of space at the center of Holzer's act of postering. As opposed to most assessments that focus on the posters as objects originally not rooted to particular sites, I detail both the politics of place in Manhattan in the late 1970s as I give body to the politics of Holzer as a young woman articulating the coded space of the city.

The project consistently explores what historical models and methods were available to artists of Holzer's generation, which were abandoned, how some were recuperated, which ones were reconfigured and adapted to meet the political, social, and artistic needs of the time, and which models needed to be invented. At the same time as she was formulating the early texts such as the Truisms, Holzer was engaged with groups such as Collaborative Projects (known as Collab) and The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters who were exploring alternative means of producing and presenting art. After the first two chapters that discuss the linguistic and contextual situatedness of the Truisms, I move to an analysis of The Offices project and examine both the historical legacy of use value at work and the contemporaneous distrust of experts following a decade of war in Vietnam and the recent economic collapse. In the tradition of the Russian avantgarde, working collaboratively evinces an impulse or inclination to work anonymously (or at least in a mode that subsumes individual identity) as it presumes that the work will serve a range of public, utilitarian functions. Instead of doing the foolhardy and counterproductive and isolating Holzer's individual role within collaborative practices, I look at *The Offices* as an almost utopian attempt to revalidate use value and agency as operative terms in artistic production as I see them as flailing and almost hyperbolic enactments of the very impossibility of those same categories in artist production

of that period. Exploring that tension—while revisiting the economic and political intricacies of the period—is the work of this chapter.

While the first three chapters of this study analyze these issues from, respectively, textual and contextual vantage points, I move a decade and inside of institutional confines in the third chapter where I look at Holzer's Laments realized at the Dia Art Foundation in 1989-90. In this project, Holzer used two seemingly incommensurable physical forms—stone sarcophagi and electronic signs—to display texts that take on the themes of unnecessary death, violence, and disease from thirteen different subject positions. As in the *Truisms*, fixity of voice or subject position is replaced by permutations of difference. My desire to contextualize and differentiate the types of art production made in response to the AIDS crisis is an attempt to redress an anomie that Helen Molesworth, among other curators and critics, sees as endemic when dealing with the period. I pay attention not only to the operations and working methods of Gran Fury—ACT UP's visual and propaganda arm—and their resistance to art institutions, but to the particular confluence of historical, political, and social factors that made working at Dia (which was new to Chelsea) a specifically calibrated address to a gay audience where death and mourning could be validated with a confiscated power. Relying on the arguments that Judith Butler makes in her Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (2004), I suggest that Holzer affirms the very humanness of those living with AIDS (in addition to those dying and already dead) by creating a scenario where mourning is sanctioned and validated. By looking at Holzer's project in particular, I wanted to critically examine her use of forms that recall art historical models—in particular, Minimalism—and technological regimes of information management. Both morphological references raise pressing questions about how time, in addition to place, is politicized and how systems of rationality are instantiated. During a period when so much effort was expended to secure life-extending drugs now, to stop AIDS now, to fight against evictions now, I see Holzer working with physical forms that function dialectically to evince the false neutrality of time and the politics at work in any moment.

The last chapter details the work of mourning I see operating in Holzer's light projections. During projections, a powerful projector passes light over a scrolling film. When it's dark enough to be legible, one sees text ambling up the façade of a building. The language is restless; never standing still, it slides out of sight and into the night sky when it crawls past the building that lent it form. The fugitive and fleeting text seems to meet its antithesis in the stone and mortar of the iconic buildings that serve as screens. Yet, as was made abhorrently true with the events of September 11, 2001, we know not to trust in solidity. Vulnerability and the possibility of loss—if not loss already realized become the common denominator that the projections reveal. While I discuss in some specificity Holzer's first projections in 1996 in Florence and the text, Arno, written specifically for that occasion that deals with the loss of someone after a brutal love, the chapter broadly examines Holzer's later writing (that is, those written from 1992 until she stopped in 2001) as a synthesis of personal issues and global conflicts. My argument, one informed by the Foucauldian notion of the "indecency of speaking for others" and Rainer's embrace of indirect autobiography in films like *Journeys from Berlin* / 1971 (1980), is that world calamities are made approachable and can be mourned only when they're actively internalized. This empathetic activity doesn't presume equivalence but works to approach another's horror in the terms and through the experiences she knows. I see this lesson as applicable to the proposal for a World Trade Center memorial Holzer made that was published in the July 15, 2002, New Yorker along with eight others at Calvin Tomkins's invitation. Leaving the site a wound and projecting poems by the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska and the America poet James Schuyler into the empty pit and standing, flanking buildings, Holzer suggests that surviving is a matter of ever mourning and practicing new and other languages of loss. To pretend that things

can ever be the same, as melancholically suggested by the towers of light that are seen at each anniversary of the day, is to close oneself from the future.

In 2004, nearly a decade after she began using the form, Holzer realized projections in New York City for the first time. This series of projections, coordinated with the public art organization Creative Time, was specifically scheduled for the week prior to that year's United States presidential election. With the country involved in two disastrous wars that were increasingly viewed as groundless if not illegal, many hoped that (and worked for) the administration of George W. Bush to lose. A week prior to Holzer's projections, a now famous article on the Bush presidency by Ron Suskind was published in the New York Times Sunday Magazine (October 17, 2004). In that article, Suskind recounts a 2002 meeting with a senior aide to the President. The aide's comment, which substantiated for some the fear of unchecked presidential power grabbed in the post-9/11 chaos, merely made anecdotal what Louis Althusser formulated about the salient work of ideology more than three decades before. Suskind relayed:

The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will— we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'9

One of the poems Holzer projected onto the Hotel Pennsylvania, across Seventh Avenue from Penn Station and Madison Square Garden, was "Children of Our Age" by Szymborska. It includes the stanza that not only summarizes the principle that motivates Holzer's artistic project but reveals why she wouldn't be shocked by the aide's claim and pessimistic opportunism: "Whatever you say reverberates, / whatever you don't say speaks for itself. / So either way you're talking politics."

⁹ Ron Suskind, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush," *The New York Times Magazine* (November 17, 2004).

Silence, in other words, motivates reality as forcefully as a gun or a vote. When Holzer talks politics, she's talking back to the presumptions that often leave the rest of us inured to what is and, to speak for myself, mostly tongue-tied.

I Want to Go to the Future Please is not only the title of this project but a fervent desire to live in a country where the precariousness of life is acknowledged, where a future isn't presumed to be a matter of course, where we never cheer for collapse, economic or otherwise, especially when the consequences are never apparent. Holzer's work resists the unsaid as the continuity of power that always seems to be; as such, it joins the work of others—among them Althusser, Rainer, Lawrence Weiner, Louise Lawler, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Butler, and Robert Barry who bind this project together—who remind us that we are all actors in the important work that still needs to be done.

Chapter 1

Recombinant Aesthetics: Jenny Holzer's Truisms

"You will ask, resistance to what?" Yvonne Rainer

Black and white photographs are all that remain of Jenny Holzer's poster

installations from the late 1970s. But that isn't to say that they don't have a material afterlife.

Her archives contain some layouts of the *Truisms* posters that she prepared for the printers, ¹

marked up in her hand to clarify margins and spacing. Her studio also has a supply of them

that she provides, as always unsigned and at cost, to institutions presenting exhibitions that

request those works for inclusion. There is no limit to the edition. When more are needed,

they simply are printed. But regarding the installations themselves, the furtive placements

done by cover of night, there was no effort made to preserve the actual pieces of paper

wheatpasted to Manhattan building walls beginning in 1978. Mildewed and ripped white

posters with texts in black Futura font—with the additions of handwritten comments that

passersby would scrawl on them (Figure 1.1)—don't reside in perpetuity between sheets of

acid-free paper in a climate-controlled room. Their limited lives, susceptible to weather

damage, defacement, and disappearance, were part of the logic of an artwork that depended

as much on the time and place of reading as it did the language displayed, the design and

material chosen, and a form of installation that married misdemeanor criminality and

anonymous performance.

¹ Holzer printed her posters at Milner Brothers in Manhattan neighborhood SoHo.

14

But is it appropriate to write of this practice as past, as if the work was circumscribed like a one-time action that, if it were to be performed again, would always be some version of a re-performance? This issue is a particularly vexed one because of how seemingly timeless, or out of time, the content of the *Truisms* writing is. In her manufacture of oneliners that frequently resembled clichés and mirrored a spectrum of moral and political thinking, Holzer specifically chose to work within a genre whose distillation and compression of thought gave it an aura of inevitability—even a sense that the truisms had always existed. An encounter with one of these posters, maybe seen while scanning a familiar wall littered with the usual, generic advertisements and announcements, would be jarring because it presents itself, fundamentally, as a contradiction—a throwaway object carrying, like a repository, an inheritance of thought seemingly sculpted through history like a glacier articulating a coast line. Holzer has often cited the profusion of punk and no wave band posters announcing shows in downtown Manhattan venues for her choice of this particular form of address. The cheap and disposable format of the offset printed poster (the least expensive method at a time prior to the Xerox machine's ubiquity) was ideal for uses with an expiration date, where the design participated in, but was ancillary to, the main objective of distributing logistical information to get people to a specific space at a particular time for a stated reason. It isn't incidental that contemporaneous punk rock concert announcements, like those for bands like the Ramones or Suicide at the venue CBGB, would always include the month, day, and time of the show but rarely the year. The presumption was that the poster would be consumed in proximity to the show and then fall out of use. Legacy and historical documentation, if it was thought of at all, consisted of the recordings or photographs or fallout from the performance announced but didn't pertain to the announcement itself.

Following traditional forms of marketing and advertising, the relatively inexpensive poster also afforded bands the opportunity to make, distribute, and post fresh graphics to attend each event as a demonstration of novelty and an evocation of desire through the new. Today's information, when all is sung and done, becomes tomorrow's trash. In pairing clichés sublimated so thoroughly that they masquerade as truths with a distribution form valued specifically for use premised on immediacy and obsolescence, Holzer elegantly dismantles any claims (be they ideological or physical) that posture as timeless or inevitable. She materially enacts how moral or ideological concepts, like the poster paper itself, are susceptible to the vagaries of context, be that of a political climate, economic situation, or city wall. In addition to countering how information is naturalized in a manner consistent with Gramsci's model of cultural hegemony where ruling class ideas—over time and by force—are perceived as universal, Holzer's presentation also models a form of antagonistic and unruly democratic practice that is antithetical to hegemonic tendencies in some variants of democracy itself.

While these are the issues to which this essay will return and circle around, it's necessary to close in on that question introduced earlier: that is, how do we best qualify and address the *Truisms* posters? The received wisdom (from critics such as Hal Foster among others) is that the primary contribution of the *Truisms* is in how the writing reveals language's relationship to ideology and subject formation. Manipulating language to demonstrate its subjugating force through its roster of inconsistent and sparring ideological pronouncements, Holzer, according to these critics, indicates that it is "Only through contradiction can one construct a self that is not entirely subjected." In assessments such as these, even though the subject presumably has a body that moves it around, the stress

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² Hal Foster, "Subversive Signs" in Recodings (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 109.

primarily falls on the operations performed by language rather than the specific historical and contextual parameters where the linguistic performance meets the blood, bone, and skin of lived experience. In a departure from this important, but limited, analysis, it seems equally crucial to address what it meant for a 28 year-old woman to walk in the dark in New York City in 1978, carrying a bucket of paste and illegally postering, when one was twice as likely to be murdered or raped than in 2009.³ That is, my argument—in addition to parsing the function of the writing and its art historical antecedents—will plumb why a, self-described, 'hippie' American female artist (who was 18 years old in 1968) fixed on anonymity and public display as the condition and arena for her aesthetic production in the late 1970s. Is it crucial to see this—by turns ambivalent and antagonistic—post-Vietnam War, post-Watergate performance by an artist who came of age and into maturity during that cataclysmic era as a reflection on a democracy in crisis? If so, can we assess the contradictions Holzer exposes (or just poses) in her pairing of a litany of oppositional and antithetical textual pronouncements with a poster format that historically has been embraced by issue-motivated propagandists and protesters (in addition to propagandist advertisers)? And if my regard primarily falls on an individual artist, working in Manhattan just months after the departure of the international fleet of tall ships that had entered New York Harbor to celebrate the nation's bicentennial in 1976, it isn't to herald and newly affirm the autonomous artistic act in a period when the critical and commercial rise of Neoexpressionist painting saw the rabid reclamation of ideas of genius and authority. Rather, at an anniversary moment when a celebration of democracy's history also entailed a reflection on its current and future status, appraising the work of an artist who demonstrated the

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³ According to the New York Law Enforcement Agency Uniform Crime Reports, there were reports of 58,484 aggravated assaults, 1,820 murders, and 5,168 forcible rapes in 1979. This compares to 43,676 reports of aggravated assault, 778 murders, and 2,586 forcible rapes in 2009.

instability and unreliability of any stand-alone ideological pronouncement becomes a way (built into Holzer's practice) to assess presumptions about—and blind spots within—democracy itself.

If democracy, as writers and philosophers like Jacques Rancière, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe have theorized, often is latently exclusionary, occluding access to the antagonistic and contradictory voices whose very subversions prevent society from closing, it is crucial to see Holzer's act as representative of an array of individual transgressions that define, test, and question the limits of democracy. In this vein of thinking, we are missing the radical aspect of inclusion at the core of Holzer's *Truisms* if we don't see it as a specifically gendered act—as one that implicitly carries within it the figure of one historically excluded and silenced. No simple kumbaya appeal to equivalence, the *Truisms* are premised on rupture, on the figure in the dark posting—Luther-like—disturbances. Even though the intent of this essay is to demonstrate how the project is specifically located in its present and our past, in New York City in 1977-9, and, more largely, to speak to the violence implicit to the ideological manufacturing of timelessness, the natural, and consensus, the implication of the Truisms is nevertheless applicable to a time when we've lived through the United States Supreme Court's disavowal of votes and voices in 2000 and the opprobrium towards (and possible legal action against) WikiLeaks, an organization whose posting of government documents proposes greater transparency in operations done secretly but in democracy's name.

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It seems crucial that Holzer's embrace of language was inaugurated, in part, by a form of silencing. As is widely known and is now nearly canonical, the *Truisms* began when Holzer participated in the Whitney Independent Study Program in 1976-77. But, unlike the majority of her colleagues at the ISP who either entered after undergraduate work or with an MFA completed, she still was enrolled and ostensibly finishing her graduate degree in painting at the Rhode Island School of Design while participating in the Whitney Program. As early as 1986, in an interview with Bruce Ferguson included in the catalogue for her first touring exhibition, Holzer hinted that something was rotten in Providence. She said, "I had an unstated agreement with the school that if I left they would still let me graduate, as long as I stayed away." In this conversation, Holzer doesn't exactly qualify why this unusual agreement had been made except to suggest that her work was out of step, if not favor, with the department: "The environment in the painting department at the Rhode Island School of Design was very conservative. It was just apple and orange and nude painting." Her projects at the time inhabited something like a halfway house between mid-century abstract painting and a conceptual practice that was tentatively feeling out contextual and public specificity and the use of language as a communicative and visual material. The works ranged from an entire room first painted white and then stained with a thalo blue acrylic wash creating a spatially interrupted environment (Figure 1.2), leaving breadcrumbs out in geometric and abstract patterns so that birds would eat in a performative and predetermined order (Figure 1.3), leaving long scroll-like paintings on the beach so that passersby might walk or happen upon them (Figure 1.4), and redrawing diagrams found in psychology, religion, and astrophysics book to replicate shorthand and succinct knowledge encapsulations formatted primarily for visual consumption (Figure 1.5). It wasn't until her 2001 interview with Joan

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⁴ Joan Simon (ed.), Jenny Holzer: Signs (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 1986), 75

⁵ Ibid

Simon that Holzer gave a more specific accounting for her departure to Manhattan. When asked how she got from RISD to New York, Holzer replied, "I wanted to go to New York City to be an artist. I was in trouble with the RISD painting faculty. One of my videos was about alcoholism, which was in my family, and in the faculty. Someone asked me, You would expose your alcoholic aunt?', and a painting professor said, 'You would do anything. That is what is wrong with the twentieth century'. I considered suicide." While this testimony could be written off as an incidental anecdote or a personally painful biographical bridge between Holzer's student work at RISD and the mature practice that would develop during and after her ISP year, it reveals the RISD faculty's paired resistance to heterogeneous and non-conventional media and real life, everyday cataclysms as valid subject matter. As such, it serves as a blatant contradistinction to the theory-inflected practices Holzer would encounter at the ISP where she would work directly with artists such as Dan Graham, Vito Acconci, and Yvonne Rainer, among others. A crucial component of ISP pedagogy was the vast list of theoretical texts that Ron Clark, the director of the program, provided and from which he taught his reading seminar. By the late 1970s, Clark has said, "semiotics and poststructuralism as they are informed by feminism and Marxism had become the intellectual content of the program."8 Holzer claims this list as formative to her practice at large and specifically important in the writing of the *Truisms*. Holzer, in her words, "rewrote" as a way to contend with the list's "information."

⁶ David Joselit, ed., Jenny Holzer (London: Phaidon, 1998), 21.

⁷ Clark's list wasn't a "theory for artists" seminar (the ISP has both art practice and art history components to train, respectfully, artists and historians/curators), but rather a reading program in theory that mostly the artist participants in the ISP took advantage of. Dana Friis-Hansen, a member of the Art History and Museum Studies class of 1981 and now executive director of the Austin Museum of Art, recalls that "the art-history people were not very involved in the serious reading program that Ron had. It was available, but most of us had jobs ... so our time was tight.... I think I was there for a few [seminars]."

⁸ Howard Singerman, "A History of the Whitney Independent Study Program—In Theory and Practice," *Artforum* (November 2004).

While the import of Ron Clark's list on Holzer's post-painting practice is inestimable, and the subjects the texts offered provided models to dialectically engage what seemed like an impasse between formal and reality structures at RISD, she also consistently points to Yvonne Rainer—another ISP faculty member—as a profound influence. When asked if there were other artists at this early juncture of her practice that were important to her, Holzer responded, "Yvonne Rainer fascinated me. I thought about the things she had done with the body and with words. They scared me to death but I wanted to find a way to her subjects. I couldn't see how. The way became clearer, and it had to do with language."9 Though Rainer was a crucial participant in the theorization and enunciation of Minimalism in the mid 1960s through a formulation of dance that revealed the body "in its unadorned, physical facticity" consistent with object-based work, such as that by Richard Serra, that used material form to bring "physical awareness to space, place, time, movement," she had been working since the early 1970s exclusively with film to pressure on issues—such as narrativity, gender formation, and intersubjectivity within spectatorship—seemingly antithetical to those minimal roots. As a pivotal figure whose own sixties work helped to shape the horizon where one could witness the absent accounting of sexual, subject, and ideological differentiation and formation, Rainer provided—as a live body and mind in the seminar room in the seventies—an example of theoretical work elaborated in practice influencing the theorization and production of new practices. In his important essay, "The Crux of Minimalism," Hal Foster points to the theoretical openings that minimalism initiated, such as the critiques of the spaces of art, exhibition conventions, and the commodity status of art, in its foregrounding of the analysis of perception. Foster's point is

⁹ David Joselit, ed., Jenny Holzer, 21.

¹⁰ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 5.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

that minimalism "prepared a further analysis of the *conditions* of perception" ultimately seen manifested in the critique of the institution of art. But he is quick to point out the blind spot in considering this history only as a genealogical mapping of the legacies of Duchampian readymade presentational strategies:

... this narrative leaves out a crucial concern: the sexual-linguistic constitution of the subject. For the most part this concern is left out of the art as well, for, again, even as minimalism turned from the objective orientation of formalism to the subjective orientation of phenomenology, it tended to position artist and viewer alike not only as historically innocent but as sexually indifferent, and the same holds for much conceptual and institution-critical work that followed minimalism.¹²

While Foster sees this shortfall redressed by contemporaries of Holzer's such as Mary Kelly, Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, and Martha Rosler, among others, in their turning to "images and discourse adjacent to the art world, especially to representations of women in mass culture and to constructions of femininity in psychoanalytic theory," he leaves out Rainer—a key figure in Minimalism's theoretically crucial objectifying of the body who was also one of the first to address how this needed to be analytically addressed to resist the very objectification of the subject. Alainer's work is perhaps most crucial as a feminist act—and this may contribute not only to Foster's oversight but her very importance to Holzer in addition to the belated art historical reception of her work—when it operates negatively or specifically against a modernist tenet, even when it appears to have nothing to do with the representation of women or the construction of femininity. One primary example of this is

¹² Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism" in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 59.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Minimalism was much, and wrongly, maligned in the later 1970s and early 1980s—that is, when Holzer's work was first shown—by artists and critics championing a Neo Expressionist style of painting that attempted to revalidate the centrality of the author/maker as the guarantor of originality, imagination, freedom, etc. Minimalism—whose logic was more consistent with a celebration of the author's death and birth of the reader/viewer—was positioned as the foil and inaccurately skewered for being cold, bureaucratic, authoritative, etc. Historians and critics, such as Foster, have pointed to the conservative political agenda at work in criticism that celebrates the rehashed and retrograde (painting, expressionism) as a mode of 'return to order' over the experimental and avant-garde. Holzer has consistently maintained her indebtedness to Minimalist artists, particularly Sol Lewitt. For further reading on the maligning of Minimalism in the 1980s, see Foster's "The Crux of Minimalism" and Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan's "The Fine Art of Gentrification."

her critique of John Cage and, to a greater extent, chance operations in general as a primary mode of artistic production in the twentieth century. To this point she's written:

We can't have it both ways: no desire and no God. To have no desire—for 'no improvements on creation'—is necessarily coequal to having no quarrel with—Godgiven—manifestations of reality. Any such dispassionate stance in turn obviates the necessity of 're-telling' the way things have been given. 15

This eschewal of chance or improvisation (then somewhat synonymous with the Judson Memorial Church 'school' of dance in which she participated in the 1960s) in her choreography is not the same as a rabid reliance on script and traditional pose or position. Instead, Rainer would—almost paradoxically—represent an improvisational look by integrating everyday action and movements (walking, running, jumping, bending) into works solely authored by her.

An example of this is her famous *Trio A* from 1965 that was first presented as part of the 1966 performance at the Judson Memorial Church, *The Mind is a Muscle, Part 1. Trio A* is an approximately five-minute sequence of movement that maintains an unmodulated (and rather uncomplicated) continuity where the performer is directed to always avert her or his eyes from the audience—an appeal to break the network of seduction that disingenuously binds the viewer to the performer. Prepared so that it could be performed by dancers and non-dancers alike, by women or by men, the choreography builds on seemingly perfunctory gestures like foot taps, headshakes, somersaults, and flowing balances to create a work that resists totality or a totalizing image. A circuit of transitions, *Trio A*'s individual movements create a set framework—never *exactly* repeatable but importantly delimited—where the durational aspect of change and flux is made emphatic by the overall appearance of contingency. Noting the constructed façade present in the work, she detailed, "(my work) had a kind of provisional *look* to it, as though it doesn't *have* to be this way, it might be

¹⁵ Quoted in Catherine Wood, Yvonne Rainer: The Mind is a Muscle (London: Afterall, 2007), 19.

another way."¹⁶ Of course, when Rainer worked on the piece alone for six months in 1965, certain gestures and movements, and their relationships to other gestures and movements, were improvised. But the inscription of that improvisation or that modeling of chance into a schema—through her desire to 're-tell' it in a particular way—reveals an operation that resists passive acceptance to chance's whatever-may-come. The tension implicit to Rainer's model comes from a desire to point to the possibility of "another way" and yet maintain control of the framework of movements and the signifying scheme so that the other way another perceives or imagines cannot necessarily be ascribed to her σ r to chance.

In her systematic account of *The Mind is a Muscle*, Catherine Wood distinguishes how the constraints built into Rainer's performances are a means of distinguishing it from the excess of volition associated with a modernist painterly practice such as Abstract Expressionism. She writes:

These dances *represented* an idea of spontaneity in the form of improvisation within a rule-bound structure, so as to make transparent the decision-making agency and the 'actual weight' of real bodies, as well as the 'real time' it takes these bodies to go through their 'prescribed motions.' At one level, then, the romantic, patriarchal ideal of the lone creator in the studio that underwrites the notion of male genius embodied in the myth of Pollock seems to be rewritten in Rainer's work as a pragmatic, materialist authenticity of the body in a matter-of-fact literalness.¹⁷

Wood carefully distinguishes what could be seen as an alternate—though commiserate—claim for authenticity by insisting on the *performativity* of Rainer's practice in terms that point to the instability of identity itself. That is, she sees Rainer's performance work as consistent with Judith Butler's writing on gender as performance—where gender norms and notions of authenticity are able to be dismantled through a "subversive repetition" only because gender itself is constructed not ineffably but through a "stylized repetition of acts." This connection is important because it bridges the Minimalist preoccupation with perception as a time-based

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¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷ Ibid., 56-7.

act of contingency with a feminist claim that a woman is not always one but *becomes* through cultural and institutional indoctrination. Wood sees the enduring significance of Rainer's work, in a performance such as Trio A, in its proposition that being in the world needn't follow normative patterns but can break from them precisely by repeating them in arrangements that disfigure notions of order, propriety, and relation.

While agreeing with the assessment that "Rainer's aesthetic form resisted adherence to any pre-existing, normative ideology, 'democratic' or otherwise," I would emphasize that she specifically did this by first resisting the slipstream of chance. If chance is a way to shortcircuit volition and evade the trap of mastery in a work such as Cage's 4'33" where the activity of not playing the piano incorporated ambient and environmental sound as equally valid to the performed, its embrace—even celebration—of dispassion was nevertheless a default to what is given and inherited—not the Pollockian recourse to the untrammeled self and the unconscious but the surrender to anything outside of the self. By this logic, the privileging of the self can be sidestepped by deferring to, say, the sound of a car engine or a clock ticking. The contradiction is that even if the notion of the self is held in abeyance, the deferral to the car or the clock is nevertheless an affiliation with objects that signify reason, progress, and rationality. That these cultural affiliations have been naturalized doesn't dismiss their complicity with those very same orders of power and patriarchy that endow the self with such significance. Rainer's discovery is that chance is not an escape but the dispassionate deferral to what already is or has been. Julia Kristeva, in a 1974 interview with Tel quel that parallels Rainer's rejection of "God-given... manifestations of reality," situates feminist practice as a refusal to submit, to actively resist submission through performances of negation. She said that, "... a woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even

¹⁸ Ibid., 75.

belong in the order of *being*. It follows that feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it." ¹⁹ By working against chance, Rainer isn't attempting to outflank or oppose the contingency and indecipherability of everyday life. Rather, maintaining an element of control—that still *represents* the possibility of difference—functions as a defense against chance used as an alibi for all kinds of bad behavior and undesirable outcomes. To live is obviously to experience accidents; to live as a woman is, in more cases than not, to clean them up—the unwanted pregnancy, the wrong war. Rainer's resistance to chance is an opening to see scripts for living that haven't yet been written; it's a refusal to knowingly abandon oneself to a dead end.

In correspondence with Sid Sachs, she anticipates how one might react to her insistence on resistance. She wrote: "You will ask, resistance to what? It almost doesn't matter. Resistance to previously imposed canons of taste, to imperialism, to patriarchy, to social inequity, to war, to Abstract Expressionism, you name it. However wrongheaded, misguided, naïve, ineffectual, enraged, sublimated—a thread is there:"

In Rainer's practice, we see bodies in space performing movements that both are learned in a particular sequence for the execution of the work yet are already known as they're drawn from a vernacular of everyday gestures. The organization and arrangement of the known into previously unknown (thought certainly not unimaginable) configurations suggest a revolution based on the dismantling and reconstruction of daily life as preferable to the fascist and nihilist impulse purely to destroy—an impulse always with the pretense to start anew. This ambition to reorganize—and distinctly not to manipulate or void—everyday life intimates that any lasting

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¹⁹ An interview with Julia Kristeva by *psychoanalysis and politics*, originally published in *Tel quel* (Autumn, 1974), republished in Elaine Marks (ed.), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 137.

²⁰ Sid Sachs, Yvonne Rainer: Radical Juxtapositions 1961-2002 (Philadephia: University of the Arts, 2003), 12.

change is fundamentally premised on realigning perception so it resists knee-jerk retreats to privileged regimes of order and rationality that underwrite patriarchy as logical or natural. By pressuring on perception as another manifestation of an ideology that masks and excludes (difference, the other, etc.), Rainer is also able to equate it with chance's fundamental condition of acquiescence. Her appeal is not just to attempt resistance whenever possible, but only to succumb when there are no other options. Passivity, by those who are not forced to be passive, is a luxury and choice—not a condition of radicality through chance. It also holds true that the radical projects of desubjectification operative in Cage's aleatory practice and the Fluxus act of isolating daily events as perceptual readymades through scores—work Rainer knew from the Bay Area choreographer, and her teacher, Anna Halprin as well as through participation in Fluxus events at Yoko Ono's loft—only were liberatory if yours was seen as an embodied or possessed subjectivity that could be relinquished. What about those shut out of the institutions that endow subjectivity? What about those for whom everyday life was a prison? How does Holzer manifest resistance in her work? How does she "'re-tell' the ways things have been given" in her Truisms?

In an interview from the early 1990s, Holzer explains her turn from painting and towards language at the Whitney, a move, as already noted that she described "as a way to (Rainer's) subjects": "I wanted to write so that I could be very direct. I could say exactly what I wanted on any subject, and I could address specific topics. This is impossible to do with abstract painting. That's how I came to use language. I had the desire to be explicit and I felt the need to study dearly held beliefs." Direct. Exactly. Specific. Explicit. In this brief quotation, the profusion of adjectives, verbs, and adverbs emphasizing specificity and clarity betrays a desire for control that she seemingly sees as intrinsically antithetical to the

²¹ Michael Auping, Jenny Holzer (New York: Universe Publishing, 1992), 73.

possibilities afforded by abstract painting. But is it the nebulousness of abstract painting itself, its tenuous materialism, its tacit arrangement with the metaphysical, that Holzer turns against almost in distrust?²² Or does she resort to language and, specifically, non-literary, colloquial forms of writing to avoid the pratfalls not only of Minimalism's undercomplicated phenomenology but "the myopic definitions of the pictorial in the Modernist framework and of the linguistic in Conceptual art"? 23 Is it her attempt to outflank perceptual regimes associated with the Freudian unconscious by specifically working in modes that reference the propagandistic functions of advertising and agitprop—that is, anything but painting? And does she work against the Lacanian linguistic order—where the subject is inserted in the symbolic order only "in terms of a structural submission to law, to authority"24— through a controlled, rule-bound language performance where her creation of a series of texts simulating found or known clichés subverts the "law" through manipulation rather than submission? That is, is Holzer's Rainer lesson that a specific and controlled reorganization of colloquial materials (in this case, posters and specific types of generic language instead of bodies and gestures) a way of reconfiguring daily life and resisting slippage into habitual modes of reception and perception that attend the perpetuity of the given? If so, Rainer's model points to the subtle and latent conservatism both in collage aesthetics that depend on an anarchic frisson elicited by runaway signification with no grip on the everyday and a readymade aesthetic that promises greater awareness of the structuring confines of the institutional frame but with no suggestion of a way out.

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²² "In the beginning I was an abstract painter because I guess I was still going for the ethereal thing, and I liked Rothko and some of the early color field painters like Morris Louis. I thought, 'Oh, that's pretty.' I started with sublime stuff, and then I guess I thought I wasn't getting it or I was getting second-hand sublime. I could do a pretty good third-generation stripe painting, but so what? So I thought, if I'm not getting sublime, maybe I should turn my gaze someplace else (Simon, *Jenny Holzer: Signs*, 74)."

²³ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Spero's Other Traditions" in Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955-1975 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 438.

²⁴ Kathryn Chiong, "Sympathy for Lawrence Weiner: One Plus One" in Ann Goldstein, ed., *Lawrence Weiner:* AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 336.

In her essay on event scores and Fluxus practice primarily centered around the work of George Brecht, Liz Kotz suggests:

In the historical recovery of Duchampian legacies in the late 1950s... the readymade provided a model to move from the aesthetics of dispersion and chance juxtaposition of Brecht's earlier scores toward a simple linguistic structure focusing attention on existing things. Brecht's transfer of this strategy from the manufactured object to the temporal perception occurs... via Cage....²⁵

The example that she uses is Brecht's 1961 word piece that simply includes the text "Exit." The isolation of a single phenomenon, through language, makes the commonplace activity not something necessary to perform but a circumstance—since it is actualized everyday anyway—that can be separated from all other perceptual matter. While Brecht's readymade elaboration crucially unweaves the fabric of everyday activity into its constituent threads, Rainer's performances importantly reconstitute the isolated into recombinant arrangements. Like recombinant DNA where an artificial configuration is engineered and introduced into an existing scenario to alter malignant traits, Rainer's work not only disrupts the framework but reorganizes its very functionality by modifying what is given into contingent arrangements that bespeak the possibility of change. This particular take on the readymade, especially as it pertains to Holzer's writing, is crucial when again considering its legacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the wake of appropriation, the so-called "Pictures" school, and that one-man affirmation institution, Jeff Koons.

Though it was (and frequently still is) assumed that Holzer compiled and recontextualized a set of found clichés—a practice that would then be structurally consistent with Sherrie Levine's contemporaneous re-photographing and re-presentation of Walker Evans's famous WPA photographs—each of the *Truisms* is a first-time pronouncement. This isn't to claim that the individual texts are "original" as in the supposed innovations of

²⁵ Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," October 95 (Spring, 2001): 85.

narrative plot, composition, metaphor, facture, simile, or slogan. Rather, the text is a manipulation of a particular concept that has cultural purchase but has never been articulated in precisely the same way. Consider one of the most canonical *Truisms*: "money creates taste." And then compare it to unauthored statements that deal with the same or similar concepts that are stock conversational devices such as: "money can't buy taste"; or "there's no disputing taste." Each shares the stripped down declarative style of the self-evidently true, but none is unassailable as fact. It is the dogmatic posturing as a postulate. If there are a profusion of divergent, oppositional, or just competing axioms about a particular subject, what does that say about the self-evidence of any belief or truth? Even though Holzer's is a novel addition to a line of declarative platitudes on taste, hers doesn't announce itself as a creative act. Simple symbols of authorship that also declare ownership of the creation, such as a signature or copyright sign, were never included in the dissemination of the *Truisms*. It purposefully traffics in the familiar and anonymously poses as something that seems already known or even said not to propose additional or alternative truths—per the model of great aphorists like Franklin, Rousseau, and Nietzsche—but to dilute the privilege accorded to inherited wisdom. By altering familiar scripts in barely recognizable ways and circulating them to be consumed, used, and repeated—the truism, axiom, maxim, or aphorism predominantly distributed by adoption and repetition—Holzer could be seen as working within modes of counterfeit or disinformation. That is, her distribution of the *Truisms*, specifically unmarked as her creation, knowingly inserts something of false symbolic value like altered or manufactured money or information—into an arena where it would be used as if it were legitimate. An argument such as this presumes that Holzer's intervention introduces—if not sheer falsity—a level of epistemological murkiness unbefitting a circuitry of communication and knowledge dependent on historicity as truth and transparency (and

vice versa, truth and transparency as a historical inheritance). But her intervention, especially taking in consideration that the *Truisms* were never shown singly but serially, as a list on a poster, where a host of subjects was addressed, suggests that the alteration of received thought and its circulation aren't pessimistic or nihilistic enactments of the impossibility of truth but acts of productive confusion that forces an examination of "dearly held beliefs" as manufactured, historical forms. Her labor is to stress the very conceit of information or truth as an unmarked entity devoid of historical and ideological machinations.

To belabor the list as a construction, Holzer systematized the arrangement of the texts by alphabetizing their order of appearance. While the list itself is generally recognized as a purely instrumental form in its non-hierarchical and non-contingent accumulation of words, phrases, or sentences, alphabetizing the sequence belies the neutrality of a system that appears to function absent of choice, desire, chance, or reason—that is, it reveals the scaffolding covering neutrality's façade. The organizational matrix of the alphabetized list also functions as an embodiment of deferral, a demonstration of control relinquished to a pre-established order. Instead of manifesting indifference (in the Cagean sense) through, for example, the supposed self-negating submission to chance and aleatory procedures, Holzer's Rainerean act reveals submission itself as an—however unwitting—adoption of the signifying effects of the realized object or act. In so doing, Holzer proffers the impossibility of outflanking volition, suggesting that fundamental to the embrace of any model, even chance, is choice. A critique of indifference—of indifference as a legible and transparent mode of working—is implicit to Holzer's posters in their suggestion that ceding choice also implies a politics. The implication is that true indifference is only logically sustainable if pure inactivity attends it. Otherwise, enacted indifference inhabits a position and existence that functions in a permanent state of default—which is susceptible to ideological motivation and projection. This is not to suggest that Holzer's work compels action but rather that her practice heightens awareness of the latent, naturalized, and illegible forms—such as language—through which power functions. The implication is that a mode of indifference risks replicating the operation of naturalization in its confusion of chance with ideological and contextual neutrality. Similar to shooting first and asking questions later, a position predicated on indifference and chance threatens to forfeit the responsibility that comes with any action.

The *Truisms* makes a clean divide between forms of language that have functional value—emblematized by Wittgenstein's concept of the language game and his famous example of the builders who use set terms in reference to particular objects to facilitate the activity of construction—and shorthand, stock phrases that seem to function as conversational building blocks while occluding their ideological function. Instead of affirming Roland Barthes's claim in *Writing Degree Zero* that "every man is a prisoner of his language," Holzer questions the porosity of the prison and looks for loopholes in the existing law that may offer a way out. The adjustment of the common and everyday expression, like Rainer's recombinant choreography, suggests that new meaning—and the possibility for change—resides in the recalibration of the found as something both marked and malleable but never transparent. Duchamp's readymade proffered, according to Douglas Crimp:

... that the artist invents nothing, that he or she only uses, manipulates, reformulates, repositions what history has provided. This is not to divest the artist of the power to intervene in, to alter or expand, discourse, only to dispense with the fiction that that power arises from an autonomous self existing outside history and ideology. The readymades propose that the artist cannot *make*, but only *take* what is already there.²⁷

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²⁶ Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 81.

²⁷ Douglas Crimp, On the Museum's Ruins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 71.

Crimp's mostly apt formulation neglects the rupture that Rainer initiates, and that Holzer's work embodies, where taking is also premised on differentially repeating as a form of remaking. In a practice like Levine's where the direct taking of another's work rejects authorship as "a refusal of the role of creator as 'father' of his work, of the paternal rights assigned to the author by law,"28 the implicit danger is that the signification of the found image—for instance the iconic 1936 Evans photograph of Allie Mae Burroughs, the "Alabama Tenant Farmer Wife," she of the clear glare and flat line lips—resists re-routing. In the noble attempt to redirect attention to the act of framing or the subject pictured and away from the "father" of the work, the risk attends of either perpetuating a most dogged law or nullifying and refuting the photograph—subject and all—in a throwing the baby away with the bathwater scenario. But it is in the work of Cindy Sherman where we see a practice similar to Holzer's differential repeating as a means of destabilizing concepts of identity and logic. In Sherman's project, exactly contemporaneous with Holzer's *Truisms*, she would dress to resemble late '50s and early '60s B-Hollywood actresses and photograph herself in stills for different film scenarios. With each photograph, she replicated a familiar type without the exact repetition of the iconic or historical. Critics such as Craig Owens have seen in Sherman's work an outflanking of the masculine desire to pin down female identity as fixed by never appearing to be the "same" in any of these performed self-portraits. He writes, "... while we can presume to recognize the same person, we are forced at the same time to recognize a trembling around the edges of that identity."²⁹ This quality of vexed recognition or misrecognition, like the seeming familiarity of one of Holzer's statements, is predicated on being near enough to the object of reference that its artifice is suspected but not

²⁸ Criag Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 84.

²⁹ Ibid., 86.

definitive. This insecurity elicited on the part of the viewer suggests that the "trembling" around identity is both applicable to the subject pictured and he who looks. But if this can be seen as a facet of play-acting or masquerade in the work of Sherman where male desire is represented to reveal desire itself as a—and in—formation, Holzer's "nearness" to the known, presumed, or historical acts as a kind of shadow that follows the ideological as found to reveal it as an object predicated on context and therefore changing shape—always on the move. Just as differential calculus is concerned with the study of the rates at which quantities change, the differential practices of Holzer and Sherman approach their subjects in proximity to avow the possibility of change and provide a frame of reference where difference is explored in degrees made manifest through iterability—that is, through subversive performances that enact the instability of signification and ideology.

If this sounds familiar, it's because Catherine Wood, in her study on Rainer that I've discussed here, found recourse in Judith Butler's theoretical model of performativity to suggest how the normative—such as fixed conceptions of gender—can be subverted through the repetition and reorganization of the same cultural acts that constitute an illusion of identity. Butler's work on performance functions as a corrective of—or a differentiation from—models of (mostly French) feminist thinking on gender, identity, and female representation by writers and theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva that were first being translated and introduced to American audiences in the mid-late 1970s—that is, when Holzer and Sherman were both formulating their practices and when they were initially received. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler's hallmark 1990 text, she pointedly refutes many of the most foundational and pervasive tenets of, what at the time were, the most advanced feminist positions. While de Beauvoir claims men

³⁰ In email correspondence with the author, Holzer recalls reading Kristeva and Cixous as part of Ron Clark's Whitney reading list.

establish their identity against women by constituting them as lack and Irigaray posits that women are foreclosed from representation because of their exclusion from a signifying economy based on phallocentric language, Butler notes that their commonality is their insistence on a female "self-identical being" as something in need of, and capable of, representation. Despite their incisive thinking on exclusion and its mechanics, de Beauvoir and Irigaray tacitly maintain that the female gender exists but only is structurally occluded—whereas Butler insists that forms of identity and gender are constructed out of those very modes of occlusion that become signifying practices that stand-in for what we generally call "woman" or "man."

Butler proceeds to address Julia Kristeva's response to Jacques Lacan's theorization that the "feminine" was repressed as a necessary condition for the establishment of language and culture formulated by a patriarchal symbolic order. Kristeva sees semiotic language—which she sees as poetic language—as the presentation of the maternal body in writing. By making poetic writing and maternity coextensive, her attempt is to isolate cultural fields where women return to sources that are seemingly outside of patriarchal order—the poetic and semiotic as outside of the paternal logos; the maternal body as solely the domain of the female. Again, Butler disclaims a model that supposes the fixity of gender by, this time, suggesting that the very idea of the maternal is a slide back into essentialism that doesn't pressure on maternity itself as a social construction. She writes, "Kristeva conceptualizes this maternal instinct as having an ontological status prior to the paternal law, but she fails to consider the way in which that very law might well be the cause of the very desire it is said to repress." By attempting to unhinge gender as an ontologically stable category, Butler seeks to destabilize and transform a political order premised on static, established roles.

³¹ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 2006), 90.

The performative, iterative practice that Butler calls for—that works to undo these roles and show them to be rehearsed, even scripted—is an elaboration on the concepts of citation and repetition that Jacques Derrida proposed in "Signature Event Context." In that text, Derrida writes, "Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written... can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engender new contexts to infinity, in an absolutely illimitable (non saturable) way."32 While Butler's work also proposes and initiates new contexts and new meanings through citation, displacement, and repetition, her departure from the Derridean model is in her call not just to "cite" but specifically "trouble" signs in ways that elicit a productive confusion. By offering the practice of drag as an example of how supposedly stable categories of gender can be made to tremble, Butler's layering of signs modifies Derrida's formulation of a chainlike arrangement where the citation can be reinscribed or cited to break the existing formation. Layering known signs into unfamiliar arrangements—like the recombinant operation that permits the formulation of a statement like Holzer's "money creates taste" out of a series of known expressions—indicates that signification is an ongoing practice of modification and elaboration rather than simply an entity able to be reconstituted simply to be shattered or broken. This implicit and partial resistance to the model of citation (without recombinant alteration) suggests that the activity is still a function of whom is doing the citing and what he chooses to recuperate—which maintains an affiliation with a traditional model of authorship and its relationship to patriarchy and power. By emphasizing the practice, or performance, of signification, Butler rejects gender to protect those so frequently excluded even in the most affirmative embraces of its name.

While her method of rejecting these feminist mothers who attempted to reclaim or

³² Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" in *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 12.

reinscribe categories of the feminine, female, and woman is exemplary, it isn't novel. As early as 1977, a French collective consisting of Simone de Beauvoir and others published an editorial in *Questions féministes* entitled "Variations sur des thèmes communs" where the refutation of feminine identity even entailed refuting some of their own previous work. The text, without explicitly naming names, takes shots at Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous, and others, including past works of de Beauvoir herself, in an effort to emphasize that debates over what constitutes feminine identity distract from the more important refutation of, and active contestation against, masculine ideology—with masculine here being an unnecessary and redundant modifier as ideology isn't ever oriented *otherwise*. While this text wouldn't be translated into English until 1980 (and not known by Holzer until later)⁵³, it's important to suggest that Holzer's seemingly genderless, anonymous project can be aligned with a particular strain of contemporaneous feminism that pointedly resisted the dominant feminist positions of the period. It suggests a practice that anticipates Butler's work in *Gender Trouble*, as it evinces that Rainer's non-essentialist, layered, recombinant practice was the model that was critical in formulating Holzer's own. In the editorial, the collective writes:

Today there is a trend that through the concept of 'women's words' focuses on a search for feminine identity. To repeat 'we are this and we are that, and above all not like you' would be a way to tell men: shit on you! All right. But does such a discourse express a true refusal, a true contesting of masculine ideology and of the system that produces it?... To advocate a 'woman's language' and a means of expression that would be specifically feminine seems to us equally illusory... it is at times said that woman's language is closer to the body... which means that the body could express itself directly without social mediation and that, moreover, this closeness to the body and to nature would be subversive. In our opinion, there is no such thing as a direct relation to the body. To advocate a direct relation to the body is therefore not subversive because it is equivalent to denying the reality and the strength of social mediations, the very same ones that oppress us in our bodies... There is no essence. There is no woman, no femininity, no eternal feminine. There is a social group burdened with lowly tasks, despised because it must do these tasks, and so little 'specialized' that the language which refers to us and give us a form simultaneously describes us as the sex,

³³ In correspondence, Holzer knew the quotation from the editorial—"There is no such thing as a direct relation to the body"—though ascribed it directly to de Beauvoir.

but also as the sex which has no sex, as the Mother-Goddess and the whore, as the muse and the bluestocking. We know that 'women' illustrate a power relation implying a double work load, professional unfitness, the lowest possible salary, the exclusive social responsibility for the care of the elderly, handicapped, and children.³⁴

I'm belaboring this, and have quoted at length from the editorial, to suggest that Holzer's own feminism similarly was more a function of ideology, power, and role dilution and restructuring than female identity construction. In an early interview, Holzer said, "I have made much of my work sex blind and anonymous so that it wouldn't be dismissed as the work of a woman or the work of an individual. Also my interests aren't only what are traditionally known as 'women's issues'." Holzer's avant-la-lettre enactment in the Truisms of Butler's call to remove the gendered pronoun and refute it as a sustainable category presumes that issues—such as rape, the right to abortion, childcare, sustainable working conditions, equal pay, and other issues traditionally categorized (so as to be dismissed) as "women's issues"—are structured by relations of power and extend beyond the delimited and limiting category of identity. The issue becomes not how to define or locate "woman" but how to accomplish and valorize the work traditionally relegated to "women" by destabilizing the very validity of categories and hierarchies themselves. When I asked Holzer about her familiarity with feminist theory before or at the time of the *Truisms*, she responded that she had read—at least parts—of Cixous, Kristeva, and de Beauvoir. But Holzer indicated that she, "... apparently was possessed by other stuff, already certain that women were fucked, busy hoping I didn't really exist, thinking that if I unfortunately did exist that unisex language and subjects were mine." By working with an array of disembodied voices and 'unisex' language, Holzer's concern is primarily with representation as a matter of

³⁴ Editorial Collective of *Questions féministes*, "Variations sur des thèmes communs," *Questions féministes* 1 (November 1977), reprinted in Elaine Marks (ed.), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 218-219; 230.

³⁵ Auping, Jenny Holzer, 79.

³⁶ Email correspondence with the author on January 8, 2011.

democracy—one that enfolds issues of identity without being locked in by them and an issue that was particularly fraught at that historical moment.

When discussing the tone or ideological leaning of the *Truisms*, Holzer strenuously makes the case that her ambition wasn't neutrality or to establish the equivalence (or irrelevance) of difference. Rather, she suggests, as in the two passages from interviews I include below, that the presentation of difference in a non-hierarchal format is an appeal for tolerance within a frame that keeps present the polarities, contrasts, and antagonisms that are inextricable from democracy. Holzer is quoted as saying:

I used the same tone all the way through. Like using the same typeface, it kept them all equally important. And each one occupied a line of its own. My thinking was that who could be a fairly accurate portrait of the way things are in the world because all these conflicting opinions exist simultaneously. The *Truisms* contain all points of view—not literally all—but they seem to, with no value judgment except what the viewer or reader brings to them. It was necessary that the form be non-judgmental in order to encourage the viewer to sort through the texts and maybe become tolerant, realizing that all these opinions are equally true for their original speakers.³⁷

They represent a spectrum from salt-of-the-earth, common-sense statements to ones that are on the fringes, either politically or psychologically. I think they are a representative sampling of opinion. I didn't want to make a didactic or dogmatic piece. That was one of the reasons for writing contrasting *Truisms*. I wanted to highlight those thoughts and topics that polarize people, but not choose sides. I was trying to represent a fairly accurate survey and not have it break down into left, right, center, or religious versus anarchist, or what have you.³⁸

By not "choosing sides," Holzer simultaneously abdicates authorial authority as she practices in her work a model of democracy that privileges not only difference but discursive disturbances. By doing so, Holzer anticipates a formulation of democracy that would be theorized later. In her trenchant analysis of what it means for a space to be "public," Rosalyn Deutsche in "Agoraphobia" relies upon the theory of antagonism in democracy as articulated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a*

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³⁷ Simon, Jenny Holzer: Signs, 76.

³⁸ Auping, Jenny Holzer, 85-7.

Radical Democratic Politics (1985). Instead of positing that a model of democracy that is seamless and without conflict is healthy, Laclau and Mouffe insist that antagonism creates the scenarios in democratic societies that permit the shifting and adjustment of thought that stymies political reification (into, for example, fascist or totalitarian forms) and refuses the stability of identity. Deutsche finds this critical analysis useful in her advancement of spaces and 'public' artworks that aren't legible or fundamentally consistent with prevailing commercial, political, or popular models. Spaces or artworks/projects that differently tremble shared space help to articulate society as a study in tectonics as opposed to surface.

Deutsche writes:

Laclau and Mouffe use the term *antagonism* to designate the relationship between a social identity and a 'constitutive outside' that blocks its completion. Antagonism affirms and simultaneously prevents the closure of society, revealing the partiality and precariousness—the contingency—of every totality. Antagonism is "the 'experience' of the limit of the social." The impossibility of society is not an invitation to political despair but the starting point—or "groundless 'ground"—of a properly democratic politics. ³⁹

Holzer, who marched in anti-Vietnam demonstrations in Washington while in college and lived through the Watergate affair, can be seen as a witness to a democracy in a state of crisis. While the *Truisms* propose a ruptured, effusive, and antagonistic democracy that counters a crisis of too little democracy, a contemporaneous argument being made by a number of influential Americans—including those in President Jimmy Carter's administration⁴⁰—was that the crisis was rather an *excess* of democracy. The Trilateral Commission, a global planning initiative founded by David Rockefeller in 1973 and with membership including important American, Western European, and Japanese heads of

³⁹ Rosalyn Deutsche, "Agoraphobia," in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 274.
⁴⁰ Noam Chomsky, in an essay entitled "The Carter Administration: Myth and Reality" published in is 1981 *Radical Priorities*, notes that, "All of the top positions in the government—the office of President, Vice-President, Secretary of State, Defense and Treasury—are held by members of the Trilateral Commission, and the National Security Advisor was its director. Many lesser officials also came from this group. It is rare for such an easily identified private group to play such a prominent role in an American Administration."

financial service and corporate law firms, politicians, and international affairs experts interested in the propagation of capitalist democracy, published a lengthy study in 1975 entitled, somewhat ironically for its contents, "The Crisis of Democracy." The report argues that industrial democracies need "a greater degree of moderation in democracy" to overcomes the past decade's "excess of democracy." Their claim is that, "The effective operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups" and that this efficacy was being challenged in detrimental ways. It suggests that the new power of the media and minority groups ("previously passive or unorganized groups... blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students and women—all of whom became organized and mobilized in new ways to achieve what they considered to be their appropriate share of the action and of the rewards...") threaten how democracy can be governed, and they castigate "value-oriented intellectuals" (as opposed to the "technocratic and policy-oriented intellectuals") for their questioning and challenging of systems of authority. The aim, as elaborated in the report, was to restore the authority and prestige of government institutions so as not to distract from the common good threatened by pesky individuals. Holzer's project represents the presence of those individuals, outside of power, barred from voice and representation.

Jacques Rancière, who references the 1975 report in his *Hatred of Democracy* (2005) where he impugns the neoconservative claim of being able to export democracy by force—specifically in the context of Iraq—and suggests "democracy" as used by those in power is the unsubtle ruse for property protection, neatly and sarcastically summarizes the Commission's findings: "A good democratic government is one capable of controlling the evil quite simply called democratic life."⁴¹ But Rancière's take is actually a defense of

⁴¹ Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verson, 2006), 7.

democracy when it is an *action*, a series of "singular and precarious acts," that wrests control away from the power of wealth and its exercise by the few. He writes, "It is not based on any nature of things nor guaranteed by any institutional form. It is not borne along by any historical necessity and does not bear any. It is only entrusted to the constancy of its specific acts. This can provoke fear, and so hatred, among those who are used to exercising the magisterium of thought." In addition to the model of resistance through performance that Yvonne Rainer initiated, it is the work of Lawrence Weiner that provides the "groundless ground" for Holzer's excessive work of antagonistic democracy that anticipates not only Laclau and Mouffe but Rancière. While the use of language is the shared morphological trait, the lesson imparted is less a linguistic one than a procedural one intimating how relationships—"the constancy of specific acts"— between subjects can be structured.

As Rainer worked against a generalized and non-specific phenomenology through the interruption of movements presumptuously considered an unsutured flow, Weiner performs research with everyday materials that leads him to linguistic interventions that only can be made specific by a viewer-reader's participation. His eschewal of material forms associated with traditional sculptural modes, including those industrial materials of minimal and post-minimal practices, rejected the idea that there were pure spaces and matter that might allow for a common perceptual experience. The turn to language, as Benjamin Buchloh notes in an interview with Weiner in 1998, avows that its universal common availability makes it "the truly contemporary medium of simultaneous collective reception." By not creating a thing to be approached but a proposition to be accessed, Weiner doesn't emphasize or celebrate the machismo of making or some reverence for the sublime experience. Rather he

⁴² Ibid., 96

⁴³ Benjamin Buchloh, "Interview with Lawrence Weiner," in Alexander Alberro (ed.), *Lawrence Weiner* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 19.

accentuates that experience can only *happen* (let alone have meaning, significance, or specificity) in the incremental, individual, and non-repeatable gesture when one mass effects another. But the gesture itself, for Weiner, is not the work but an illustration of it. The sculptural work, with language as material, remains the "objective" proposition that remains unfettered of the moral or historical connotations it might assume if its enactment seems to take on some metaphorical baggage.

For instance, Weiner, as he does for all of his artworks, experimented with objects in order to constitute the 1996 work as linguistic statement: THINGS PUSHED DOWN TO THE BOTTOM AND BROUGHT UP AGAIN. If I were to enact the piece, I could watch (or 'imagine'—Weiner refusing to insist on the primacy of materialization) my kitchen sink fill with water after turning the faucet on. I would push the faucet lever down so it doesn't overflow. I only let the two sponges go and rise to the surface after they've touched the bottom. As I enact, or illustrate, the work just three days after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami in Japan, any association with drowned bodies or disaster is my own act of transferring a meaning onto the objects that were just in my hands. This is not to downplay or invalidate an individual response formulated in reaction to the use of the artwork at a historical moment when its elements might seem allusive (or can be motivated allusively or allegorically); rather, Weiner's clarification of what is his art and what is an illustration of it is an attempt to differentiate direct experience from a rhetorical and imaginative act of mediation that risks equating likeness with equivalence. While his use of pared down language that unambiguously states material relationships permits equal access to any viewer-reader, my use of the artwork—the feel of the coarse sponge in the lukewarm water of a sink that smells like bleach—grounds me in the specificity of the time and place of this activity. The experience is non-transferable, but the artwork proposes the validity of

each interpretation of it and a non-hierarchical assessment not only of the materials used but of each subject who animates the materials. While each experience is different, the right to it is not circumscribed. The implication is that Weiner's denial of the universality of phenomenological space accentuates the specificity of each material encounter while simultaneously denying the superiority of any experience over another. For example, my empathetic response to those who have been afflicted by disaster in Japan is a response not to sponges that buoy as they rise to the surface after they've been pushed down. My empathy results from an awareness and appreciation that those who suffer are identical to me. They, too, are sensate subjects capable of replicable actions that illicit a specific, though passing, sensation of what it means to be in this world. Weiner has specifically addressed the issue of use in a 1989 interview with Dieter Schwarz: "When society uses it, it uses it in terms of a metaphor. But it only works as art if it is not metaphorical, because then each society can take its own needs and there is no imposition and it also passes through the time lag—as culture changes, as values change."

Some critics have challenged whether certain manifestations of Weiner's work is really as devoid of metaphor as he insists. For example, Buchloh asked Weiner about his 1991 work SMASHED TO PIECES (IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT) and the specific historical conditions it assumed or referenced when installed in Vienna (to be particular, on the Flakturm, a World War II anti-aircraft defense tower) the same year as its creation. Clearly alluding to the history of the Holocaust in Vienna and the 1938 Kristallnacht (literally 'crystal night' or 'night of broken glass' after the smashed shop windows) Nazi pogrom against Jews where 95 synagogues in that city alone were destroyed, Buchloh was seeking to establish if, among other competing readings of the purposefully indirect text, Weiner was

⁴⁴ Dieter Schwarz, Lawrence Weiner: Book, 1968-1989 (Cologne: König, 1989), 180.

using the mnemonic capacities of language to evoke the particularities of the site. Weiner responded, "It found an immediate metaphor when it was placed within that structure. If they have been objectified culturally, then historical references are usable as materials, because that is an objectified cultural entity the same as time and sound and remembrance." After Buchloh continued pushing on how uncalculated the move was, Weiner said, seemingly exasperated as he'd just described his contemporaneous projects regarding sound:

I am interested in the difference in sounds between night and day. They offered me this Flakturm... I knew damn well it had a metaphor. It was the work that was coming out at the time, maybe at that moment I was thinking about those things. Art is fabulous because it starts off as one thing and becomes something else for somebody. That is its whole function. In fact this is not the metaphor of this particular work. If I put it in another context, which I often do as you know, it has a totally different metaphor. You put that piece in the South Pacific and all night you will hear coconuts falling, all day you hear coconuts falling.⁴⁶

As Weiner describes it here, the work functions like perceptual brakes or a stop sign, where some object (like coconuts) or something objectified (like the history of Kristallnacht) can be accessed and apprehended—as metaphor—because the apparatus of perception has been directed towards it through language that never assigns a definitive reading. But what are we to make of the parenthetical "in the still of the night"? Is this just an amorphous description of a period of time that you or I would have to experience and deem as 'the still,' as if this description could be as definite as the article that precedes it? Or, perhaps, it's an unintentional citation of the Cole Porter song written in 1937 for the film *Rosalie*? Or is it an accidental reference to the 1956 popular song of the same name by the American doo-wop group 'The Five Satins? It seems to be an odd opening in Weiner's work to clichéd thought and language or an already organized cultural formation. But there are other appearances of

⁴⁵ Alberro, ed., Lawrence Weiner, 26.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 28.

this type, such as the 1970 work SOMETHING OLD SOMETHING NEW SOMETHING BORROWED SOMETHING BLUE, a piece which replicates a traditional wedding phrase (some attribute it to the Victorian England period) that indicates qualities of objects to be worn or carried for good luck. Or there is the 1990 artwork, GONE WITH THE WIND, which shares its name with the 1936 Margaret Mitchell novel and the 1939 film starring Clark Gable. While one could see Weiner possibly succumbing (purposefully or not) to the ubiquity of popular culture and the culture industry, it is also possible—and more in keeping with Weiner's work—to see these works as attempts to reclaim the materiality implied by the texts through an invitation for each of us to literarily objectify what the linguistic proposal suggests. Could this be seen as a way to bring the language back to meaning as sensibility and physicality through a hermetic act, a meaning occluded by the naming and communicative form of the song title and popular phrase which transforms the acts or objects into signs as solid as steel? If I pick up a maple leaf and leave it on the sidewalk on a blustery day to blow until it's out of my sight, do I recuperate that activity and language from its almost monopoly connotation of Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler? Dieter Schwarz has pointed to the hermetic capacity of Weiner's work, a quality in keeping with the objection to metaphor in his practice. He writes:

... the radical negation of any poetic dimension of the linguistic works, that is, any dimension that points beyond the occasion, stems from the determination not to create any suggestive linguistic form that transcends the syntactic order and that could be regarded as the representation of a predetermined order or of an authority responsible for objects and language.⁴⁷

If we're to regard Weiner's work as a break from predetermined order or authority, it follows that the fungibility of the linguistic form—universally accessible but not prescriptive—is a

⁴⁷ Dieter Schwarz, "The Metaphor Problem, Again and Again: Books and Other Things by Lawrence Weiner," in Ann Goldstein, ed., *Lawrence Weiner: AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 181.

means to reinscribe the activities and objects of daily life with individual and specific clarity. If I'm tempted by hyperbole and want to claim Weiner's work as flirting with a reenchantment of the world (or the local) through materiality, it's because the project seems so indebted to and in dialogue with the notion of *disenchantment* that Max Weber famously described as the 'fate of our times' in his 1918 lecture "Science as a Vocation."

In a world absent of a godhead but where its substitute was being dangerously sought across disciplines, Weber located the scientific disciplines as the arenas where a fate also characterized by "rationalization and intellectualization" could be met with action and analysis. 48 In this lecture to graduate students in the sciences at the University of Munich that was as much a practical assessment of career prospects as it was a stern warning against the irrational, the charismatic, the leader, and any presumption of the self-evident, he advocated that science's contributions were tripartite: "the technology of controlling life by calculating external objects as well as man's activities"; "methods of thinking, the tools and the training for thought"; and "clarity." For Weber, the third element was the most consequential. He said, "... if we are competent in our pursuit (which must be presupposed here) we can force the individual, or at least we can help him, to give himself an account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct. This appears to me as not so trifling a thing, even for one's own personal life."50 For Weber, one confronts "the disenchantment of the world" not by reinvesting it with old concepts or even older gods but through verifiable work that can account for the make up of the world as well as one's actions within it. Weiner, working against the mythic and heroic horizon of Abstract Expressionism, the industrial sublime of Minimalism, and a postwar

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 299.

⁴⁸ The full quote reads: 'The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world."

⁴⁹ Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," reprinted in Wolf Heydebrand (ed.), *Max Weber: Sociological Writings* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 298.

landscape ravaged—in part—by actions permitted through too little accounting for individual conduct, found recourse in propositional work that left meaning in one's own hands. If the world isn't reenchanted (which would suppose a slide back to myth and the irrational that is anathema to Weiner and Weber), the ambition in Weiner's work is that the objects in it help each subject in the ongoing work of constituting her place in the world and her relationship to others. To this end, Kathryn Chiong has written about Weiner's practice:

... the work creates a kind of voyage-in-place through the distance it carves between ourselves and our intended objects, through a linguistic intervention that suggests that we do not understand what an object is, what it does, or what it looks like other than in singular moments of tenuous connection, in flashes of an almost encounter that remain different each time. And if Weiner's "relational aesthetics" engage us in a constant reconfiguration of our relationship to objects, then by necessity they provoke a different understanding of our being with one another, as the voiceover in Godard's 2 ou 3 choses explains, "What is an object? Perhaps it is a link enabling us... to pass from one subject to another, therefore to live together."

Weiner proffers a practice where a constellation of linked, precarious acts might suggest a form of democracy premised in difference. But it is a practice indebted to physical reality and a form of linguistic intervention that operates by transparency, legibility, and accessibility.

While Holzer's work with language similarly would reject types, genres, or conventions of language production (such as journalism or poetry) in order to disturb the perceptual reflex that jerks in the direction of the known, and though her production also rejected both a didactic impulse and claims to universality, her practice doesn't take language at its word. In 1993, Weiner himself spoke to this distinction:

Holzer and Kruger are completely different in what they are trying to do with the use of language. They're trying to use language as a means of communication of a stance. It's nothing to do with sculpture. I'm trying to use language as a means of presenting a mise-en-scene, a physical reality.⁵²

For Holzer, while the language itself may not deal directly with sculpture, her location of it

⁵¹ Chiong in Goldstein, ed., Lawrence Weiner: AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE, 341-42.

⁵² Alberro, ed., Lawrence Weiner, 121.

as a *site* where ideology is reproduced in the subject cannot help but have ramifications in physical reality (not the least of which is the actions of the subjects who participate within it). Though Weiner's linguistic propositions reject rigid adherence to materials, they are still wed to the notion of objects structuring human relations. Holzer's move isn't a rejection of the physical world or Weiner's suppositions, but rather an opening to include how the specter of ideology shapes the primary material of everyday life (language) in almost imperceptible ways—ways that produce, but also in turn reproduce, the institutions that Louis Althusser details in his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Language, as a form that inculcates ideology specifically because of its ability to be simultaneously and collectively received, then disturbs the possibility of any unmediated interaction. As Holzer demonstrated in the *Truisms* through subversive performances of language types, the subject as an amalgamation of desires, preferences, and judgments is itself shaped through cultural and economic practices that carve a body into social presence. Her actions aren't premised on individual agency and unmotivated action but rather through a constellation of institutions and roles that position her in society. Althusser writes:

Ideas have disappeared as such (insofar as they are endowed with an ideal or spiritual existence), to the precise extent that it has emerged that their existence is inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals defined in the last instance by an ideological apparatus. It therefore appears that the subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system (set out in the order of its real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, describing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief.⁵³

Language acts, in this system, as the grease that keeps these material practices from grinding to a halt. While Weiner would ascribe any reading of his GONE WITH THE WIND—permanently installed in English and German on a building located on Berlin's

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⁵³ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in Ben Brewster (trans), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 169-70.

Venloerstrasse—as metaphorical, the opening it leaves to misguided readings that might attempt to equate the Antebellum (just post-Civil War) American South in the novel that bears the same name with Berlin or Germany just after the fall of Communism in the East (just post-Wall) reveals a blind spot in the practice. The freedom given to associate takes as given that the imperative to act is in the hands of the individual. Even though he admonishes that, "... you just have to be careful as an artist not to make work that will allow itself to have a metaphor made of it against what you believe in, against your own morality," Weiner still bases his project on individual (each viewer-reader's) control and responsibility. Holzer's project, specifically because she doesn't present a physical reality but represents how ideology wends its way through language and into life, doesn't chance being hijacked into rituals that recuperate any acts and affirm, wittingly or not, the current shape of the world or irresponsible readings of it. She exposes the manufacture of those rituals so language can be seen as an accomplice to the material practices that bend consciousness.

When I've used the traditional language of sculpture in the above (by using verbs such as shape and carve and bend), it isn't to make some facile equation or bad pun on how the altering of masses is the conceptual link between Weiner's sculptural practice and social existence inextricable from ideology that Holzer examines. I've incorporated that active, involved, and material language to insist that physical reality is the domain of both artists. As Weiner formulated a practice through language that insisted on the specificity of object action and experience as the means "to rethink our position in *this* world," Holzer used language to rupture the conception that this world is a monolithic form and dilute its seeming stability. Holzer's *Truisms* propose the precarious and single activities of giving voice that structure democratic sociability. In order to make these voices present, it was necessary

⁵⁴ Alberro, ed., *Lawrence* Weiner, 121.

⁵⁵ Chiong in Goldstein, ed., Lawrence Weiner: AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE, 342.

to intercede in spaces where those normally silenced could see the representation of enunciated opposition. By taking her work to the street, Holzer's activity of posting insists on her own right to presence and representation—her own right to disturb—even if it is only in that space traditionally left to those "previously passive or unorganized groups." In the next chapter, we take to the streets and the particular contextual conditions that give specific weight to her textual production.

Chapter 2

No Man's Land: Jenny Holzer in the City and the Limit of the Dérive

After dark it's a relief to see a girl walking toward or behind you. Then you're much less likely to be assaulted.

Jenny Holzer, from the *Living* series (1980-82)

Private property created crime. Jenny Holzer, from the *Truisms* series (1977-79)

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There is no physical document that catches Jenny Holzer in the act. There are no photographs or Super 8 film footage of her lugging a bucket of wheat paste and a stack of Truisms posters, trudging around downtown Manhattan in the late 1970s. Besides her professions of responsibility and the photographic relics that we have of posters molting from the sides of buildings like old skin, there is no evidence of her walking alone in the dark of night—ducking police, property owners, and those who might want to hurt a young woman walking—covertly placing her unsigned and anonymous work. Though it's common practice to discuss Holzer's adoption of the poster as a form of vernacular public address that facilitates collective reception, there is a rupturing silence surrounding the physical activity of postering itself. There is a tendency to forget that a body on the street was a precondition for the placement of the work. There is an attendant tendency to neglect the specific material, economic, social, and historical conditions of New York City in 1978 that contextualized how the posters were initially seen and received. The result is an appraisal that ignores the implications of a woman articulating the space of the city by walking a place vastly different from the one we now know. The omission of this analysis prematurely forecloses readings of Holzer's Truisms that specifically take into account how this somatic activity shares a conceptual horizon with her linguistic production. The ambition of this chapter is to redress this gap in scholarship, giving body and context back to a project too

frequently passed on as a disembodied voice. By discussing the economic and social conditions of New York in the late 1970s, Holzer's collaborative work in inclusive projects that eschewed real estate as another manifestation of power, and her act of postering that suggests the specificity of a body on the move through a specifically bounded social and historical space, I'll locate a very different form of the dérive operative in Holzer's work. While her drifting also implied a resistance to instrumentalized reason and commodified (and clichéd) thought that is consistent with the psychogeographical concept articulated by Guy Debord in 1955, her gendered act doesn't maintain the same faith in chance and the chance encounter as a means out of—what Debord saw—as the rote experiences circumscribed by the advanced capitalist city. Her dérives, walks fraught with opportunity as well as risk, suggest the city as a social sphere open to new inscriptions as well as the site of multivalent forms of power (for example, property and sexual violence) that constrict use and close off opportunity—and perhaps life. By heightening one's awareness of this dialectic, Holzer's project reflects on the city as an ongoing site of ideological construction that can't be left to luck.

At the end of the 1970s, New York was still suffering from its near bankruptcy in 1975 (the famous Daily News front page headline from October 30, 1975, read "Ford to New York: Drop Dead" in reference to his refusal to "bail out" the city) that was barely averted through federal loans and debt restructuring. The city suffered from an unemployment rate that was precipitously high and left others underemployed. Basic civil services, such as garbage removal, were limited; and the severe poverty contributed not only to a spike in the crime rate but pervasive homelessness that was not met with federal, state, or city assistance. In her short story, "New York City in 1979," the experimental writer Kathy Acker—who happened to live downstairs from Holzer on Eldridge Street in the

Lower East Side in the early 1980s—bluntly described the state of a city she witnessed as dangerous and abandoned:

New York City is a pit-hole: Since the United States government, having decided that New York City is no longer part of the United States of America, is dumping all the laws the rich people want such as anti-rent-control laws and all the people they don't want (artists, poor minorities, and the media in general) on the city and refusing the city Federal funds; the American bourgeoisie has left. Only the poor: artists, Puerto Ricans who can't afford to move... and rich Europeans who fleeing the terrorists don't give a shit about New York... inhabit this city.¹

Though Acker's assessment seems perilous, it pales when compared to contemporaneous pop culture depictions of the city. In the futuristic film Escape from New York that was written in the mid-1970s, set in 1997, and released in 1981, the United States has witnessed a 400% increase in crime and the island of Manhattan has been cut off from the continental U.S. and left to function as a readymade prison. There are no guards or cells within the city itself. The grid of the streets and the existing architecture are unaltered and only populated by 'prisoners'—as if the logic of Manhattan as abandoned to societal refuse and as prison was always operative in the function and public conception of the city. Both examples share a conception of New York transformed into a non-place, a site where presence is less a matter of choice than economic or criminal predicament. Acker's more accurate or realistic portrayal of city and federal politics and their ramifications on populations isn't the nadir of this transitional period in New York history—a history of industrial and working class decline following World War II, when production requiring skilled labor was largely exported and the domestic United States economy was dominated by managerial and service industries. Rather, the low point in New York for the poor—as meticulously traced in Rosalyn Deutsche's Evictions—would be that partially manufactured intersection where relaxed zoning and real estate regulation met a new financial services / managerial class eager

¹ Kathy Acker, "New York City in 1979" in Essential Acker (New York: Grove Press, 2002), 134-35.

to buy pieces of Manhattan. The once abandoned city was then reclaimed at the expense of those who, first forgotten, were now gentrification's evicted. If the poor weren't now homeless, the other displacement was a move (or series of moves) to another borough or another town, resolutely *away* from wherever the new center happened to be bought.

As Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan point out in their damning assessment of the early 1980s art world's abetting of conservative political policies, particularly through procuring real estate in historically poor or lower class neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side, the 215,000 jobs being added to New York City's economy when it began to crawl out (between 1977 and 1984) were largely in the financial industries and business service sector. During the same period, 100,000 blue-collar jobs were lost in the city. Such 'incompatibility between the work force and the economy' was pronounced in New York City but not specific to it as various accounts of the postindustrial have established. But the *severity* of the incompatibility was specific to New York both because of the extreme and concentrated wealth of those participating in the financial service industries in contrast to those working in more traditional industries and the dearth of affordable real estate given the very geographical shape of the city and the high demand for *any* real estate. The disparity in incomes and spatial constraints lead to the displacement of peoples and an almost inexorable slide into the city as a gentrification machine. Deutsche and Ryan write:

Gentrification is an important aspect of this strategy of impoverishment. By creating neighborhoods and housing that only the white-collar labor force can afford, the cities are systematically destroying the material conditions for the survival of millions of people... The process of gentrification in New York City takes various forms. On the Lower East Side these have included abandoned buildings, harassing and evicting tenants, and rapidly turning over neighborhood property in order to escalate real-estate values... As one agent of these economic forces, the city—which owns sixty percent of the neighborhood's property through tax defaults and abandonment of buildings by landlords—employs well-tested tactics to facilitate the transformation of the Lower

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² Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification" in Annette Michelson, ed., October: The First Decade, 1976-1986 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 154.

East Side. The first of these is to do nothing at all, to allow the neighborhood to deteriorate on its own accord."

Deutsche and Ryan take the bold stand (and, as they quote from contemporaneous celebratory reviews of the "East Village scene," an often unobserved and mostly unpopular one) that galleries and artists who moved into these economically depressed neighborhoods assisted their destruction, sped up the displacement of working class and impoverished families in a regressive slope that leads to homelessness, and accelerated the rate of gentrification by serving as an exploratory front guard for moneyed 'maybe' residents who prefer for others to clear the space for a more comfortable encampment. Noting that the galleries they lambasted, such as Fun Gallery and Civilian Warfare, celebrated and propagated a type of expressionist painting (both in the mode of graffiti and Neo Expressionist work) that extols a romantic and mythic (and violently conservative) conception of individual liberation, Deutsche and Ryan equate the confusion of personal freedom associated with 'bohemia' and a model of 'transgression' (that is, in fact, easily recuperated) with a dominant political ideology that uses individual freedom as a straw man

³ Ibid., 156-57.

⁴ While the film itself has its share of romantic posturing of the aloof and feckless 'hip' artist, *New York Beat* or *Downtown 81* (starring Jean-Michel Basquiat and written by Glenn O'Brien and shot December 1980-January 1981) also contains a great deal of documentary footage of Basquiat walking through a blighted Lower East Side with vacant lots filled with rubble and debris, boarded buildings, and empty streets—along with stereotypes of drug dealers, junkies, prostitutes, rough types, and graffiti writers. Basquiat's character introduces the context with a voice-over: "The Lower East Side. Looked like a war zone. Like we dropped a bomb on ourselves." The Lower East Side wasn't the only neighborhood that looked bombed out. In the South Bronx during the late 1970s, made infamous by Howard Cosell's comment 'the Bronx is burning' during a Yankees World Series game in 1977 when a helicopter camera shot caught a fire in proximity to the ballpark, owners as well as residents were literally burning real estate down. Postwar urban white flight, the opening of the Cross Bronx Expressway in 1972 which sequestered the South Bronx (particularly the neighborhood of Tremont) and drastically reduced real estate values contributed, and the general economic climate contributed to an extremely poor and criminally active environment where recuperating any money from properties or escape into better subsidized housing came only with limited insurance claims and destruction. By the early 1980s, nearly 40% of the neighborhood had been burned to the ground.

⁵ As a devastating debunking of the claim that East Village art was a transgressive performance of individuality, Deutsche and Ryan flatly state, "This program of individual, as opposed to social or political liberation is so unthreatening to the status quo that Fun Gallery does fifty percent of its selling to art consultants." They later quote Bill Stelling, a founder of Fun Gallery, "Art consultants obviously like the art that is less controversial. This is why this kind of art works in corporate headquarters.... It's not something that would offend someone in the Moral Majority (167-68)."

argument to hide the deep structure economic forces that constitute the social. To gentrify, it can be implied, is to colonize. And, for the vanguard of gentrification addressed, the fundamental mistake is seeing oneself as outside of—or even resistant to—the colony you aided in establishing.⁶ But is it possible to work outside of a culture that absorbs as it displaces?

Beginning in 1978, Holzer canvassed the Lower East Side, SoHo, and parts of TriBeCa and blanketed them with her *Truisms* posters (Figure 2.1). To work outside of traditional domains of exhibition was a reality when the art "world" itself was smaller and when a non-painterly practice such as Holzer's was outside of market taste. It also constituted a political choice to identify with those outside of power. Holzer's concurrent engagement with Collaborative Projects (Colab)—the artists' group in New York best known for its *The Times Square Show* of 1980, which was held at an abandoned massage parlor and was deemed by *The Village Voice* to be "the first radical art show of the 1980s"—suggests the primacy in her practice of working in forms and spaces that called attention to the specificity of site and worked against displacing the local population. Organized in 1977 and incorporated as a not-for-profit in 1978 which allowed it to apply for funding from agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts, Colab worked under the premise that a democratic mode of exhibiting meant thematic shows with open calls that eschewed a

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⁶ In his 1961 comments in preparation for his project *The Store*, which art historian Julia Robinson has described as both a site for performing ongoing making and a 'triage site' for the disaster of advertising where he could 'pathologize the commodity,' Claes Oldenburg already established the elasticity of the dominant culture to absorb both critique and transgression: "The bourgeois scheme is that they wish to be disturbed from time to time, they like that, but then they envelop you, and that little bit is over, and they are ready for the next. There even exists with the b. values a code of possibilities for disturbance, certain 'crimes' which it requires some courage to do but which will eventually be rewarded with the b. scheme. B values are human weakness, a civilization built on human weakness, non-resistance. They are disgusting. There are many difficult things to do within the b. values, but I would like to find some way to take a totally outside position. Bohemia is bourgeois. The beat is bourgeois—their values are pure sentimentality—the country, the good heart, the fallen man, the honest man, the gold-hearted whore etc. They would never think f.ex. of making the city a value of good." Claes Oldenburg, *Store Days* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), 8.

managerial class of arts administrators who absorbed funds that could be going directly to artists and who frequently mimicked tactics—like the solo show—consistent with the operations of commercial galleries. Foregoing a 'home' space that might limit the range of themes addressed, impede financial flexibility, and unwittingly serve as a gentrification agent, Colab housed installations in rented, borrowed, or empty sites that were either available or conducive/contextually resonant with the theme addressed. One famous example of the use of a squatted space—and one that directly demonstrated Colab's political position—was the 1979-80 (New Year's Eve until a few days after the New Year) Real Estate Show held in response to rampant real estate speculation and forced evictions of longtime Lower East Side residents. Colab members broke into an abandoned building on Delancey Street and installed works that addressed the themes of real estate and private property. The exhibition was quickly shut down by city authorities but not before garnering both local and international political interest—the city eventually conceded and offered a building to Colab that later became ABC No Rio; Joseph Beuys, during the time of his 1980 Guggenheim exhibition, came down to express his 'solidarity' with the young artists.

Disregarding the cool and measured placement of works favored by museums and galleries, Colab exhibitions often took the shape of a salon-style, overstuffed and engorged, hang that accommodated as many artists (and non-artists) as possible. Robin Winters, a member, succinctly explained the origins and intentions of the group:

Colab started in reaction to or in relation to P.S. 1, Creative Time, The Kitchen, and Artists Space... My basic thrust and opinion, which I still believe, is that real estate and administration take too much money away from artists. Colab, as a group of 50 indigent maverick artists, supplied more money and more direct show space to more artists, with less funding, no real estate, and no real administrative costs... The question is, how do you coalesce and get monies funneling directly to artists? Colab started with these issues and was formed in order to try to get a piece of the pie.⁷

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⁷ David Little, "Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back: Collectivity and New York Alternative Spaces," *Art Journal* 66, no. 1 (Spring, 2007): 63.

Holzer's major contribution to Colab was the 1979 "Manifesto Show" she organized with Colen Fitzgibbon.8 With an open call and unjuried exhibition at 5 Bleecker Street (a storefront where Fitzgibbon also lived), "Manifesto Show" accommodated 150 artists (Figure 2.2). Holzer said of this exhibition: "Colen and I made an administrative structure that was useful to other people—the artists and the audience. Everybody made their own manifestos about what they thought should happen in the world." The claim to have "made an administrative structure that was useful" (italics are mine) indicates an attempt to fashion a new model—as opposed to adopting a given one—that emphasizes access to space and the presentation of a plurality of voices (as opposed to the pastiche presentation of an amalgamation of styles then synonymous with German Neo Expressionism and its American equivalent). Providing an inclusive forum given the limited exhibition space afforded to artists (specifically those working with forms not embraced by the market or with political subject matter) was central to the mission of another critically important artist group of this period, Group Material. This shared conceptual horizon suggests artistic practices conceived as pragmatic and political responses to considerations of space and its associations to power.

In a September 1981 open letter, "Caution! Alternative Space!," distributed to the audience at the UPTOWN/DOWNTOWN exhibition at City Gallery in October of that year, Group Material discussed the origins of the project, its ambitions ("to develop an independent group that could organize, exhibit and promote an art of innovative form and social change"), and the change in its orientation after beginning in 1980. Discussing the abandonment of a storefront gallery space they rented and organized on East 13th Street for

⁸ During this period, Coleen Fitzgibbon identified her work as being made by "Colen Fitzgibbon" so that the gender of the producer wasn't immediately apparent.

⁹ Joan Simon (ed.), Jenny Holzer: Signs (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 1986), 69.

over a year, they introduced their flyer with the optimistic (as well as romantic and outmoded) reasoning for renting space: "This was our dream—to find a place that we could rent, control and operate in any manner we saw fit. This pressing desire for a room of our own was strategic on both the political and psychological fronts. We knew that in order for our project to be taken seriously by a large public, we had to resemble a 'real' gallery. Without these four walls of justification, our work would probably not be considered as art." With its "room of our own" allusion to Virginia Woolf (and her extended essay from 1929, A Room of One's Own), Group Material establishes that they originally sought a space in order to assert their equality, their parity with other holders of place and power—that is, holders of real estate. Though this neutered equality forsakes difference in favor of total opposition to the dominant paradigm, it suggests how power breeds by enticing us to emulate it. While Woolf clearly opposed in her essay the mechanisms of patriarchy and the opportunities it only presented to men, she wanted access to the walls that instantiated those very mechanisms. In moving beyond that important but first order logic, Group Material's letter maps the road beyond property. It progresses by acknowledging that their anti-model (which they accidentally emulated in form) was the alternative space, that the attempt was to engage with the community and provide access to exhibition space, and that maintenance of real estate encumbered the fulfillment of their mission. I will quote a large portion of the flyer because its content and tone is in keeping with Colab's working logic as well as Holzer's heightened sensitivity around and ambivalence towards the exhibition apparatus and its framing mechanisms:

We hated the association with 'alternative spaces' because it was clear to us that most prominent alterative spaces are, in appearance, policy and social function, the children of the dominant commercial galleries in New York. To distinguish ourselves and to raise art exhibition as a political issue, we refused to show artists as singular entities. Instead, we organized artists, non-artists, a very broad range of people, to exhibit around a special social issue... Everything had to change. The mistake was obvious.

Just like the alternative spaces we had set out to criticize, here we are sitting on 13th St., waiting for everyone to rush down and see our shows instead of taking the initiative ourselves of mobilizing into more public areas. We had to cease being a space and become a working group again... GROUP MATERIAL WANTS TO OCCUPY THAT MOST VITAL OF ALTERNATIVE SPACES—THE WALL-LESS EXPANSE THAT BARS ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK FROM THE CRUCIAL SOCIAL CONCERNS OF THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS." The flyer/letter signaled Group Material's turn to a new practice "based around distribution and employing public spaces... planning projects for city squares, newspapers, and mass transit...."

For Colab, Group Material, and Holzer (in her individual postering practice), to reject the trappings of an official space was to assume a "homeless" practice where the position of outsider rejected ownership and power as it demonstrated an allegiance with those without a voice and forced from homes. One extension of this logic, which Holzer would explore, would be to take to the street.

Holzer's criteria for where she would place the posters couldn't be more straightforward or more opposed to the normative destination concept: "I put them up wherever posters normally go, where I hoped people would notice them; a very simple aesthetic—you put them where you think people would read them." The aim wasn't to create some kind of auratic place or "site within a site" where the city would be revealed as some impossible and ridiculous source of mystery or fount of possibility just waiting to be redemptively discovered. Unlike the early 1970s work of Charles Simonds, for example, who populated ruined, maligned, or abandoned Lower East Side sites (such as a crack in the façade of a burned out building or a pile of rubble) with miniature architecture models of dwellings and settlements for "an imaginary group of little people," Holzer avoided serendipitous modes of urban art placement that tacitly implied that the city somehow could

Use Manhattan: Photography and Related Practices, 1970s to the Present (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 248.

¹⁰ Julie Ault, ed., Show & Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material (New York: Four Corners Books, 2010), 57.

¹¹ Rex Reason, "Democratism, or I Went to See *Chelsea Girls* and Ended Up Thinking about Jenny Holzer (1982)" reprinted in Thomas Lawson, ed., *REAL LIFE Magazine* (New York: Primary Information, 2006), 127. ¹² Lytle Shaw, "The Powers of Removal: Interventions in the Name of the City," in Lynne Cooke, ed., *Mixed*

be reenchanted or redeemed by random individual acts (of making and looking) that ignored the very structural inadequacies that lead to decline. It's conceivable to see Simonds's work as participating in some latter day engagement with the Surrealist occupation with the outmoded. If we see his interventions as disruptions in the present order of things that permit a working through of a past that led to this public calamity, one certainly can analyze the work as critiquing an economic order that permits blight as it psychically imbues these models with a utopian vision of future use and purpose (albeit imaginary and fantastical). Implicit to the project then is a process of abandonment following construction that depends on a viewer haphazardly discovering what Simonds leaves in a fashion analogous to the Surrealist dérive. In that mode of walking without purpose or specific desire—that usually involved a shopping component—finding the marvelous was frequently a matter of discovering outmoded objects—usually at the liminal space of the flea market—that disturbed the neat symmetry of contemporary notions of use, function, and purpose. In Hal Foster's estimation, this recuperation of objects situated outside of the rapacious churn of capital aims "not to romanticize this old economic mode so much as it is to spark a connection between psychic and historical dimensions via a social object—a connection, however private, that might be both critical and curative in the present." But what happened when one made a discovery, however private, of a work by Simonds? Regardless of the point of your walk—to commute, because you had no cab fare, because no cabs rolled through the neighborhood, to see this *thing* people chattered about—there is the threat that the walk, even retrospectively, is converted into a pilgrimage. The ruin of a destroyed neighborhood is reimagined not as a calamity and public disaster with economic and real life causes and consequences but the setting that permitted (in fact, was necessary for) this

¹³ Hal Foster, Compulsive Beauty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 161.

microcosm of wonder. The danger of walking alone is no longer remembered as a risk but a fortuitous sliver of privacy. The walk, in effect, is stolen from time—or, perhaps more egregiously, the object-centeredness of this variant of the dérive translates time into the extraneous filler between "a connection... in the present." I'm using the term "filler" not only for its association with objects and things added as padding or supplementary material to add bulk and quantity to a more precious commodity, but for its linguistic function as a sound or word emitted or spoken by a conversation participant to indicate that she or he has paused but has not finished speaking. Examples of "filler" in speech include: uh, er, um, like, y'know, actually, literally, basically, etc. This stopgap activity privileges the "writing" and "speaking" of those authors and subjects in customary positions of power who articulate it through physical forms (the artwork, the architecture) that constellate the city into a series of landmarks. What one gets to is privileged over the means through which one attempts to arrive. As I'll argue in the remainder of this chapter, Holzer's move was to suggest that the idea of a city is predicated on continuous, unscripted use instead of the programmatic prescription of the architectural grid or the organized matrix of stops on a train or subway line. What transpires between and among subjects, partially structured by the opportunities and impediments of the physical environment, becomes the criteria for evaluating how the city functions and who it is primarily structured to serve. The posters—and the array of voices presented on them—insist on the vagaries of urban life and the ongoing acts that resist the homogenization that is the frequent partner of gentrification.

When we see the handful of archival photographs of Holzer's posters weathered and rotting from building walls, one could be forgiven for seeing them as endpoints or destinations, something arrived upon and, if one wanted to see a particular one again, somehow linked to a site one would have to return to. But the photographs don't—and

can't—reveal the extent of Holzer's nocturnal work or the number of posters that covered these neighborhoods like a rash. It's impossible for them to picture how Holzer's movement in space, and between sites where a poster would reside, proffers another model of writing the city. How does her walking in the city presume to be a form of writing? And how do the texts of the *Truisms* themselves relate to a walking practice that casts a city as a text incessantly being written? While these issues will be articulated here, it is also necessary to suggest that the city isn't a blank page or a snow-covered field, without either footprints or horizon, where each mark articulates some version of volition, choice, and expression. Spatially delimited and defined by architecture, infrastructure, and property laws, which permit and forbid access (DO NOT ENTER signs, for example, being one public expression of the salient law), the city is both physically and semantically coded as a form largely programmed for particular and predominant uses. But this view of the city as a space that is physically and legally constraining isn't a complete accounting. It neither takes into consideration how individual activity can disturb systems that control and order, nor does it elaborate on how social use and/or abuse of space and sites are as physically determining as a brick wall that restricts movement. It's critical to describe how inhabiting the city and animating it through individual and contrarian use permits us to read power more clearly by seeing how one can operate against it. But it's also necessary to describe the *limitations* of use—for example, equating the inability to pass or trespass with (both latent and blatant) censorship. This makes clear that the regulatory crucible of the city is frequently invisible due to how pervasive the means of control are. While a fence or façade is an obvious impediment, the threat of physical danger or bodily harm is frequently unseen. According to the New York Law Enforcement Agency Uniform Crime Reports, there were reports of 58,484 aggravated assaults, 1,820 murders, and 5,168 forcible rapes in 1979—the year after

Holzer began postering. This compares to 43,676 reports of aggravated assault, 778 murders, and 2,586 forcible rapes in 2009. One writes the city with her steps. But if she fears her own erasure in a dangerous city, a limited presence leaves little said. If present in the text of the *Truisms* is the very possibility of *voices*, a litany of competing and antagonist claims to "truth" that posit the individual as contradictory and internally opposed as it proffers a model of democracy premised on difference and against consolidated power (as analyzed in detail in the previous chapter), Holzer's boots on the ground give body and heft to subject positions usually shuttered behind hegemonic and monolithic readings of the city. But how does walking manifest itself as an act of inscribing and demarcating?

In his "Walking in the City," Michel de Certeau wrote against the possibility of knowing or conceiving of a city purely through visual recourse. Linking modern, planned urban systems with panoptical regimes of control, de Certeau establishes that a perspectival and totalizing view of the city (as he describes in his famous observation of looking from what was the 110th floor of the World Trade Center) calcifies it into something administered, suppressed, and homogenized. This view denies the individual and plural practices of the city for a regulatory schema that establishes, defines, and, ultimately, limits possible activity. de Certeau's method was to approach the urban as a "text" that is only written through the local acts of locomotion, motion that functions as locution. The practitioners of these acts of locomotion cum locution are walkers, those who "make use of spaces that cannot be seen." He writes: "The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other." It's evident

¹⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

¹⁵ Ibid.

even in this short quotation and my brief discussion that de Certeau's model is antithetical to a touristic mode of urban exploration and explanation through landmarks. In this same vein, he dismisses surveys of routes—those accountings of paths most taken—as obfuscating the activity of passing and moving. He suggests how impossible it is to reconcile a temporal act with a linear mark on a map that postures as fixed even though direction (which way did he go!) isn't decipherable. This latent denial of practice rejects those singular acts that constitute how spaces are used and joined together that escape systems of control and surveillance. It rejects the constant and incremental series of alterations—via experiences—that shape the city in favor of fixed moments and places of being that presume established forms of action. de Certeau claims walking as writing, and more specifically a speech act, primarily because it manipulates and modulates an established system (topography as language; language as topography) to create both new possibilities as well as ambiguities within orders that seemed fixed. Just as Holzer treated the cliché and aphorism as the site of recombinant reform to disturb ideology's impervious façade, de Certeau conceives of walking as the mode that invents ways of being through alterations of the known. He writes:

The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be; it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors). Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other's blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler, carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice. These diverse aspects provide the basis of a rhetoric. They can even be said to define it.¹⁶

While de Certeau cogently offers the walk as liberating possibility, his introduction of the figure of the peddler helps to isolate a significant blind spot in his own theoretical ramble.

The only interdiction to walking—as a form of spatial organization—that he indicates is the

¹⁶ Ibid., 101.

physical impediment of the wall. The only prohibition that de Certeau recognizes is the selfimposed ("... he forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory"¹⁷). That is, his theory of walking supposes that the walker/actor/writer largely operates by his own volition. His freedom to select how he actualizes the city is predominately unencumbered. And while the activities of other walkers help to constitute "the long poem of walking," de Certeau's account fails to consider how proximity isn't merely a physical determinant that alters movement but that it also can be a manifestation of economic and social orders that predicate whether presence itself is safe, desirable, or an option of last resort. The figure of the peddler can offer the object that disturbs the mundane and the usual, but his very presence makes obvious and tangible that one frequently takes to the streets in service to masters other than one's self. To peddle on public streets frequently indicates that the person has nowhere else to go in the attempt to make a living, a position that has little to do with choice and intimates relations based less on possibility than desperation or just plain necessity. de Certeau neglects that desperation and necessity can make some walkers the targets of threats and harm that simultaneously function as acts of censorship and erasure. In addition, if the peddler is a symbol of one who can't afford to work or to live within the city where he hawks his goods, he stands for a figure historically banished from city centers through aggressive acts of governmentsanctioned gentrification as described earlier in this chapter. The particular historical intersection of Holzer's work in downtown New York, particularly the Lower East Side, was a transitional one where danger and gentrification were both present—where acting as a walker-writer was a risk; but it was a political activity to suggest the legions of those silenced and evicted.

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¹⁷ Ibid., 98.

It's ironic then that a common reading of the *Truisms* posters is that they assume "an image of authority." Michael Auping, a curator and writer as sensitive to Holzer's practice as any, commented to her in an interview from the early 1990s how struck he was, before it was common knowledge that the work was hers, by the presumption in the art world that the *Truisms* were the work of a man. In addition to negatively attributing this to living in "a chauvinistic society" that assumes "anything interesting is done by a man," he accounts for it by pointing out that the work has formal components, especially the choice of type and font, that lend it the look of authority. Holzer, indirectly disagreeing, points out that she specifically chose a voice that was anonymous, or at least attempted to be sex blind, because she didn't want the work immediately dismissed because it was done by a woman. She tacitly implies sexism in pointing out why the text could have been ignored, but Holzer doesn't concede that the voice is male, merely anonymous. Auping's response, which follows, is pertinent in its well-intended, if not confused and perhaps misplaced, presumption that women would want to claim authority as it historically has been configured:

... In a male-dominated society you associate the voice of authority with a male voice, and since you appropriate the voice of authority through your image, I think that people immediately assume you are male. In a sense, you are hijacking that voice and making it yours, not just for yourself but for other women. I think that is one of a number of reasons that women are particularly taken by your work.¹⁸

This reading of Holzer's work prioritizes the text (over the other instrument of transmission, the medium of the poster and the walking presence in the city) and regards language as a transparent and communicative system that can be "appropriated" or spoken by anybody and still retain its meaning—a meaning reducible, in this equation, to traditional male authority. Auping's claim, then, assumes that authority is something that Holzer (and, more largely, women) want to acquire rather than a tenet of power they'd rather disclaim, disown, and dismantle. The "hijacking" of voice that Auping describes presumes that the artwork

¹⁸ Michael Auping, Jenny Holzer (New York: Universe, 1992), 79.

adopts a form of language akin to passing, to model how authority can be taken by posing as one with access to the master or dominant strategy to take it for herself. Though Holzer does construct a series of texts that mimic the assured clarity of ideological pronouncements, she seems to do so almost as farce or exaggeration, to stress the very narrow confines of acceptability where certain norms of speech endow subjectivity.

To this point, Judith Butler has written how:

... a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate for subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not. To move outside the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability in one's speech is to consummate one's status as a subject of speech.¹⁹

The point of Butler's claim is that subjectivity isn't a given status but one conferred by and formed in power's regulatory crucible. The example she uses to work through this line of thought is the status of gay men and women in the United States military when disclosure of one's homosexuality would precipitate dismissal from the armed services—the so-called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law. She proposes that various forms of explicit and implicit censorship are at work in a society and are geared towards affirming certain views of legitimacy, consensus, and autonomy. In this argument, censorship isn't, as it's usually configured, only a denial of liberties, but the means through which power (the state) silently delimits who has the right to speech and, subsequently, can be considered a citizen. Indeed, in most instances, the operations of power that delimit this status aren't readily perceptible. Butler describes power's "illegibility" as a matter of its sheer pervasiveness—conferring upon it a state of inevitability and normativity that contributes to its near invulnerability. But Butler's analysis also acknowledges that speech exists outside of power's confines, just as persons surely do—she calls this impossible speech, and it follows that this form of speech

¹⁹ Judith Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (London: Routledge, 1997), 133.

escapes another alternative to acceptable speech, the domain of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," silence. She writes, "'Impossible speech' would be precisely the ramblings of the asocial, the rantings of the 'psychotic' that the rules that govern the domain of speakability produce, and by which they are continually haunted." Holzer's choice of language, the list of seemingly clichéd ideas and opinions, would imply the seemingly endless array of subject positions usually obscured from visibility and denied voice—the silenced that are presumed to exist but are invisible between the sentences and phrases, outside of the city centers as well, that are given and give legibility.

It's significant that Holzer's choice of the poster form was influenced by some unknown person's posted ranting in and around Times Square in New York City. 21 While this antecedent suggests that Holzer saw "impossible" speech as one model for countering hegemonic truth claims, it also demonstrates that her choice of site and distribution device corresponded to someone who had no other place to speak, in a place of last resort. The form of the poster represented and animated the *space* of the foreclosed and oppressed while the texts themselves—the truisms—presented antagonistic voices that modeled democracy as contingent on radical difference. In an interview, Holzer has spoken about the beginnings of the *Truisms* posters: "At that time, I got the idea partly from someone—I assume it was a man—who went around plastering Times Square with posters that warned other men to stay away from the area, warning them that they would get leprosy and tuberculosis if they crossed this imaginary circle that he'd supposedly put around it. I was amazed at how the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ As is well known, Times Square during this period was notorious for its association with the gamut of sex trade operations (pornographic book stores, prostitution, hustling, peep shows, strip clubs, etc.) and other illicit industries such as drugs. Due to the businesses, legal and illegal, that called Time Square home, actual residences were cheap and, like the Lower East Side where Holzer lived at the time, artists resided alongside lifelong tenants and poor immigrants.

word 'leprosy' on a poster could stop you short, and at how effective these posters were (."²² By replicating the form but not the mode of address, Holzer was able to place presentation and expectation in productive tension. Presenting neither a raving mad nor commercial voice—the expected and dialectical mode of public address in the capitalist world—Holzer is able to insure the representation of the oppressed while premising her project on the nature of democracy within and against capital.²³ The series of writing that would follow the Truisms was her Inflammatory Essays (1979-82), a series of 100-word declarative, sometimes fierce, and often aggressive texts on posters that used the history and form of the manifesto as their points of departure (Figure 2.3). While this form of writing lived up to its name and was frequently hot in tone, similar to the leprosy crier in his chiding of someone or some group into an action or against others, the *Truisms* were cool and factual. If Holzer's writing would later move to performances of modes of "impossible" speech—assuming the voices of would-be revolutionaries, mystics, and all-purpose ranters—and also private, even incidental speech in series like Living or Survival where the offhand tone and content seemed more viable for daily living than a dictum or pronouncement, beginning with all-toopossible-and-obvious speech exacerbates the "impossible" place in which they're posted and how untenable actually being in the city could be.

But the gendering of place (or conceiving of how place is gendered) contributes to considerations of the tenability of the city and how each subject makes use of it. One doesn't

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²² Bruce Ferguson, "Wordsmith: An Interview with Jenny Holzer," in Joan Simon, ed., *Jenny Holzer: Signs* (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 1986), 75.

²³ The man hanging the threat of disease on the city walls, creating 'this imaginary circle,' tacitly associates the specter of illness not only with an impugned moral infirmity but with the paucity of economic health. The tacit and the unsaid function here within an ideological register that presumes that a universal abhorrence towards disease (regardless of its socio-economic causes or maintenance) would also object to poverty, the poor, and non-traditional sexuality and lifestyles. Though posturing as a warning, a textual address, these posters perform an operation alongside of the linguistic that reveals the hidden power of language to mobilize ideology while keeping its presumptions interred (maintaining consistency over contemplation of "the anarchic growth and total arbitrariness of decay"). The posters as physical objects that populate the city's walls spatially inscribe ('the imaginary circle') a particular locality, place, and population—in this setting, as diseased or harboring disease.

write neutered nor does she walk in a neutral setting. And while Holzer's linguistic production presents gender as a formation and activity, this doesn't prevent women—as individuals traditionally outside of power—from being abused. While Holzer's act of walking or being in the city doesn't have to be feminine or of the female, the threat of rape and/or bodily harm is specifically heightened because someone else identifies her and preys on a condition of the other being "not man." In 1980, as part of her Living series that appeared on the very public formats of bronze plaques and hand painted signs, Holzer wrote: AFTER DARK IT IS A RELIEF TO SEE A GIRL WALKING TOWARD YOU OR BEHIND YOU. THEN YOU ARE MUCH LESS LIKELY TO BE ASSAULTED (Figure 2.4). While Holzer's 'YOU' could seem gender neutral, her use of this shifter pronoun in the context of the chance of assault at night being reduced by the presence of a 'GIRL' implies that the pronoun refers to another woman. Protection isn't necessarily implied; one implication is that a would-be attacker now has more options, decreasing 'your' chance of being assaulted. As power limits (or censors) what can be said, its reflections in daily life also limit where one can go. Theoretical readings that equate writing with motion or walking, such as Michel de Certeau's, are fundamentally premised on notions of meaning shifting as individual actors drift and reconfigure orders. But they give little weight to how a gendered actor might be limited in her drift. One reading—both compelling in content and telling in its oversight by Roland Barthes insists that writing needs to stay limber and (using a metaphor of physicality) continuously shift ground to resist cooption by power. But his introduction of the figure of the prostitute shows what type of agent-less body unfortunately is presumed when a woman is placed in space. Though a walker, she waits at the intersection. Her life is written by someone else stumbling upon her. He writes:

A writer—by which I mean not the possessor of a function or the servant of an art, but the subject of a praxis—must have the persistence of a watcher who stands at

the crossroads of all other discourses, in a position that is *trivial* in relation to purity of doctrine (trivialis is the etymological attribute of the prostitute who waits at the intersection of three roads). To persist means, in short, to maintain, over and against everything, the force of drift and of expectation. And it is precisely because it persists that writing is led to shift ground. For power seizes upon the pleasure of writing as it seizes upon all pleasure, to manipulate it and to make of it a product that is gregarious, nonperverse, in the same way that it seizes upon the genetic product of love's pleasure, to turn it into soldiers and fighters to its own advantage. To shift ground, then, can mean: to go where you are not expected, or, more radically, to abjure what you have written (but not necessarily what you have thought), when gregarious power uses and subjugates it.²⁴

If Holzer's writing enacts an incessant shift of semantic terrain as a form of resistance to power as detailed in the first chapter, her walking and postering embody a similar protest against place subjugated through the invisible forces of ideology. By making voices present in places that are mostly silent (or just pulverized into white noise by advertising and the din of power), Holzer forces a consideration of those who are occluded, figures who aren't usually granted presence. By doing so, one is forced to consider the specificity of she who walks and how the agency of the walker/writer is curtailed. Instead of the walker as a general category, we're forced to contend with a portion of the population to whom abjuring is a luxury that presumes that she even has a claim or a choice. What then is the historical place of the female walker?

Any numbers of writers and theorists have written of the impossibility of the female flâneur as a historical category. The most concise explanation offered, in a mode coextensive with the historically grounded thesis of Linda Nochlin's groundbreaking essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," is that cultural mores and the function of traditional institutions (from churches, to schools, to the police) largely forbade the inclusion and participation of women in public affairs and spaces—particularly if she were alone. But there is a specter who is the exception, a wanderer marked by her difference. The solitary and

²⁴ Roland Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, January 7, 1977," trans. Richard Howard, *October* 8 (Spring, 1979): 9.

shadowy female figure that is the corollary to that ur-modernist figure, the flâneur who shrugs off bourgeois occupations and preoccupies himself specifically with the useless, with not producing as defined by capitalist pursuits, is the prostitute—she who is inscribed with the name that follows her action, *street walker*. While these two types are the ciphers and emblems of a Baudelairean modernity where subjectivity and subject position were primarily determined by one's relationship to capitalism, the prostitute's lone wanderings *were* productive in the sense of earning money for a sexual service and, unfortunately though frequently, *re*productive. The prostitute's wanderings, then, aren't those of one who easily could choose otherwise, whose rejection of the economic structuring of life by alienated forms of labor was from the vantage point of one who could return or could afford not to. Rather, hers was a historically circumscribed injunction to walk motivated, in part, by a (certainly, masculine) society where the image of capital was replicated in everything—in bodies as well as in desire.

In his famous essay on Manet's Paris, "Olympia's Choice," T.J. Clark glosses the problem and category of the prostitute:

Prostitution is a sensitive subject for bourgeois society because sexuality and money are mixed up in it. There are obstacles in the way of representing either, and when the two intersect there is an uneasy feeling that something in the nature of capitalism is at stake, or at least not properly hidden... It is specifically a matter of bodies turning into what they are usually not, in this case money... The prostitute is a category: one that authority tries to keep in being on the edge of social space, as a kind of barrier against nature—against the body's constant threat to reappear in civilized society and assert its claims. Balzac put the matter succinctly... when he had a character say to one of his heroines, 'You are, in the files of the police, a number, apart from all social beings.'25

One telling connection that Clark brings to bear on his analysis of prostitution and its particular relationship to capitalism fixes explicitly on the concept of movement. In a

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²⁵ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 102-3.

discussion that triangulates Haussmann's redesign of Paris to facilitate and frustrate certain forms of circulation, the movement of capital's invisible hand, and a prostitute who was no longer registered with the government and therefore less subject to monitoring and stasis, he positions the prostitute in a liminal physical and conceptual space—as the dispossessed and the discarded, forced into mobility. She is of a society, and yet, simultaneously, exists as the logical categorical outcome of a society predicated on the production of goods. When the role of the flâneur has been rehabilitated and adopted at various junctures in the twentieth century, it largely has been assumed in a guise redolent with the relatively empowered position of the male subject choosing to exclude himself from reigning political and economic mechanics. I'll argue that Holzer (and, more largely, female artists and artists of color) would work in public, on the city street, moving through its spaces, specifically as a way to foreground her own historical positions—aligned with the prostitute—as the traditional disjecta of a society that uses and trashes them. After I've finished, I hope it won't seem coincidental that the most celebrated recourse to the flâneur trope reveals a modernist coin whose flâneur head had a prostitute tail.

In the late 1950s, the Situationist International's articulation of the notion of dérive was meant to encourage a practice of being in the city that shirked the prescripted and the functional. Guy Debord wrote in 1956:

In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there... From the dérive point of view cities have a psychological relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.²⁶

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²⁶ Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," in Simon Ford (ed.), *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog, 2005), 34-5.

Two years later, in 1958, the dérive was modified to describe a "mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiences." While this practice obviously is historically indebted to the Surrealists and their meandering search for the marvelous in the unexpected and circumstantial encounter, the dérive was less concerned with the transformation into marvel as it was in stripping away the dissembling façade of regiment and purpose imbedded in the city that blocked the revolutionary topoi of pleasure and play that possibly would allow for a new material understanding of place. My use of language that suggests activity, to strip, is as misleading in its attribution of purpose and intention to the act of dérive—where the casual and chance dethroned the causal—as it is a deliberate reference to the sexual—even masculinist, and perhaps masculinist as synonymous to colonialist—underpinnings of the project. This stress is to fundamentally distinguish it from the ambitions of Holzer's work and to posit how chance would be differently appreciated after Rainer's feminist work.

Both Tom McDonough and Libero Andreotti note that Debord offered the *Carte du pays de Tendre*, an imaginary representation of the Land of Love devised as an aristocratic pastime by the seventeenth-century noblewoman Madeleine de Scudéry, as one source of the dérive. Like *The Naked City*, one of Debord's psychogeographies or cartographic representations of a dérive, it also charted a "passional terrain"—the erotic theme, Andreotti relays, suggested also by its strange resemblance to the female reproductive organs. It has also been suggested that another possible model was Jens August Schade's erotic novel, *Des êtres se recontrent et une douce musique s'élève dans leurs coeurs*, first published in 1947 that traced the

²⁷ Guy Debord, "Definitions," reprinted in Libero Andreotti, ed., *Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 1996), 69.

roaming of a libertine, traipsing in and out of love, without any real aim. 28 If pleasure motivates the dérive, and if it is pleasure that also links sexuality and the dérive, it could be viable to read each associated by their similar refusal of the productivist imperatives of bourgeois society. But this argument is only tenable for a male (and sexist) subject—he, for instance, who hasn't traditionally assumed the labor of childrearing that is the other side of sexuality's pleasure. The specter of the naked city, or the city imagined as reproductive, alone suggests its equivalence to the passive sexual plaything, the gendered body present to be acted upon. If the prostitute as a model of modernity is figured in the dérive, she's one other encounter in the flâneur's chain of inconsequences. In a similar manner, it's significant that in Debord's first written elaboration of a dérive that appeared in Les Lèvres Nues, the writing primarily consists of descriptions of the people they met—Algerians, West Indians, Jews—as he and his companions bar hopped around Paris. To specifically call attention to the immigrants and exiles whose identity (or identification) as other in France is partially premised by their move there, Debord's touring suggests a pleasure that necessitates belonging, to be able to point to other historical wanderers he blows past, to a disturbance that never goes beyond play. His mention of his passing acquaintance of persons from backgrounds long associated with France's mutually related colonial and commercial aims leaves them, like the prostitute, as one more discarded incident from the fringe that, by Debord's deed of walking and then writing, could be useful—if just for a moment. The dérive's blind spot is its uncritical regard to the relationship between movement and agency, between circulation and the forms of authority it assumes.

I belabor this account of the dérive because the questions of authority, the presumption of place and belonging, and the refutation of chance and the unmarked subject

²⁸ Libero Andreotti, "Architecture and Play," in Tom McDonough, ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 222.

are all central to Holzer's Truisms project. Like Rainer's methodical rejection of Cage that I explored in the first chapter, Holzer's deliberate activity of being in the city opposes chance as another form of privilege as practiced by Debord. But this centrality isn't limited to her choice of language that rehearses power's crystalline rendering of opinions into truths; it is fundamental to her decision to expose these calculated constructions on the street—as a form of everyday practice and as an activity of walking (and postering) that itself functions as a speech act. To avow that one's place of belonging is—or that one's work belongs to—the street is not so much an affirmation of place as it is the evidence of an absence of options. The street literally stands as the outside to power and the institutions that shape—through law, education, religion, language, etc.—its appearance and passage into a seemingly involuntary condition. Though outside of power, the street certainly isn't immune to its imperceptible spread. It isn't a reprieve from a programmatic life structured by economic and political orders; the street isn't the open domain or shared commons where some imaginary public can communicate without hierarchies and with clarity. Rather, and this is particularly evident in a city like New York in the 1970s and 1980s that witnessed a dramatic increase in crime, its homeless population, and unemployment outside of services industries such as finance, the street becomes the site for those with nowhere else to go, the ejected, the silenced.

The public *sphere* frequently has been described as a democratic arena premised on inclusiveness and transparent, universal principles. This definition of the public sphere that sees the well-being of a democratic society as indivisible from an accessible and open communicative environment is the problematic one formulated by Juergen Habermas. Resistance to this model—operative in Holzer's work—has specifically focused on two perceived blind spots: inattention to the "historically specific institutions that structure the

possibilities for communicative access"²⁹ and imprecise attention to "the embodied, situational and dialogical elements of everyday human-life"³⁰ that structure the possibility of discourse or even the possibility of having a voice at all. Graffiti, for example, acts as a physical eruption and semiotic interruption in illicit spaces as a protest of the "historically specific institutions" that have disavowed the specificity and particularity of "everyday human-life," but its practice nevertheless maintains the very Habermasian ideal that discourse and representation can affect public opinion and lead to political action. It maintains the hope (or illusion) that the voice will be heard. Critics of Habermas who point to the exclusions that his model presume (notably women, racial minorities, and the economically marginalized without access to the bourgeois institutions who would demonstrate that few concerns are common and avow the heterogeneous over the universal) note that the discursive public sphere he posits masks the hegemony and ideology that props up universality—this is one reason Holzer always proffers a panoply of, frequently contradictory, voices. But his critics nevertheless work from his model to address post-bourgeois models of the public sphere.

The political philosopher, Nancy Fraser, offers her formulation of the public sphere as a layered strata of discourses that runs alongside the predominant one and its ideology. She argues that repressed groups form "subaltern counterpublics" that are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." Counterpublics provide ideological reprieves that enable withdrawal, regrouping, and association which can ultimately permit agitational incursions into the dominant public

²⁹ Nick Crossley, ed., After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 159.

³⁰ Ibid., 30

³¹ Nancy Fraser, Rethinking the Public Sphere (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1991), 67.

sphere. But how do counterpublics in the public *sphere* announce themselves in public *space*? Isn't this the question that Holzer specifically seeks out to address, through posters premised on polyphonic address? The descriptive terminology I've used and quoted in this paragraph doesn't immediately help in rousing an answer: 'counter' and 'oppositional' and 'agitational' suggest a mode of operating against the public sphere in a manner somewhere between the critical element of negation and the militant aspect of combat; but descriptions such as 'alongside' and 'parallel' position the terms of this engagement as a specifically spatial one, and inclusive at that, operational *within* public space. It is important to note that Fraser never suggests a counterpublic sphere to supersede the public sphere—this would predict the failure of counterpublics disturbing and rerouting the functionality of the historical and hegemonic public sphere. But the rerouting of the public sphere, then, takes place on two levels as the mixed verbiage I describe signals: in the form of discourse that is oppositional in its maintenance of specificity, difference, and particularity³²; in the use of space and media to position and habituate this oppositional discourse as contiguous to the existing and lived landscape. Holzer's presentation of counterpublic discourse through or alongside the signifying systems of the dominant ideology isn't to maintain that those very systems and public spaces are transparent or generally accessible. It is to insist that discourse structures those public spaces and forms, making their meanings mutable and imagining new uses for the monolith (or even its disappearance).

³² This notion is structurally analogous to one that David Wojnarowicz suggested: "To make the private into something public is an action that has terrific repercussions in the pre-invented world. The government has the job of maintaining the day-to-day illusion of the ONE TRIBE NATION. Each public disclosure of private reality becomes something of a magnet that can attract others with a similar frame of reference that each public disclosure of a fragment of private reality serves as a dismantling tool against the illusion of ONE TRIBE NATION; it lifts the curtains for a brief peek and reveals the possible existence of literally millions of tribes; the term GENERAL PUBLIC disintegrates." From Brian Wallis, ed., *Art Matters* (New York: NYU Press, 1999).

To imagine Holzer on the street isn't to romanticize this gesture as a method of discovery (as in Debord's walks) or as a mode of direct political protest (like the posters produced by Atelier Populaire in Paris in 1968³³). The very ambiguity of the posters and the anonymity of their address produce an uneasiness that primarily elicits questions of belonging—and what it means to belong. My argument has insisted that the form and language of address affirm the right to presence of the traditionally oppressed through an aesthetic project premised on recombinant reorganization and disturbance. The particular social, economic, and political factors then operative in Manhattan (specifically, prior to its dramatic gentrification beginning in the late 1980s and continuing to this day) made intervening in public space not a utopian project but a series of catalytic events that could disrupt the sanctioned order and reveal the "counterpublics" there. The possibility for disruption could only happen because the city itself already bore so many material markers of being disturbed: a preponderance of litter, the visible homeless population, abandoned buildings, empty streets, barely concealed illicit industries (prostitution and narcotics), etc. That these material markers were not yet relegated to the periphery of the city or banished to the boroughs meant that the smooth continuity and functionality of the spectacle was in a precarious and dubious position, witnessed by a mixed population of users of that shared space. One could see the cracks in the surface. If she got too close, she could feel them. Holzer's canny and strategic move was to explore these cracks through a physical form that disturbed one's

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³³ The following is a statement from the Atelier Populaire regarding their production: "The posters produced by Atelier Populaire are weapons in the service of the struggle and are an inseparable part of it. Their rightful place is in the centers of conflict, that is to say, in the streets and on the walls of the factories. To use them for decorative purposes, to display them in bourgeois places of culture or to consider them as objects of aesthetic interest is to impair both their function and their effect. This is why the Atelier Populaire has always refused to put them on sale. Even to keep them as historical evidence of a certain stage in the struggle is a betrayal, for the struggle itself is of such primary importance that the position of an 'outside' observer is a fiction which inevitably plays into the hands of the ruling class. That is why these works should not be taken as the final outcome of an experience, but as an inducement for finding, through contact with the masses, new levels of action, both on the cultural and the political plane."

sense of who had the right and authority to speak in and through public space. In so doing, they also confound the usual relationship between figure and ground in public space that takes the latter as fixed (the street, the architecture) and the former (the passerby, the resident) as transitory. Instead, doubt is thrown on any sense of inherent belonging when ideology is revealed as inherently *groundless* and not the brick and mortar that silently instantiate authority.

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At the same time Holzer was anonymously postering throughout Manhattan, she also participated in three window installations at significant 'alternative' art spaces in New York City: at Franklin Furnace in 1978 and Printed Matter and Fashion Moda in 1979 (Figures 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7). In each case, Holzer occluded visual access into the very "space" that hosted the display by placing various sized *Truisms* posters *inside* of the windows oriented so that one could only read them from *outside*. While bringing the posters within the fold of institutions could be viewed as retrograde in its fixing of these polymorphously functioning objects as art, it can also be maintained that it demonstrates an ambivalent, even antagonistic, position where dependence on the institution for literal support is, at the same time, met with a literal turning of the back to the usually privileged place to show. I will suggest that this antagonistic position is both an elaboration of a newly received model of institutional critique elaborated in practice (in the mode of Daniel Buren and Michael Asher) as it is a specific response to the fraught economic and political conditions of New York City in the late 1970s, particularly the role the arts/artists played in the debate over gentrification. By placing the *Truisms* posters in the windows, Holzer makes these storefront sites resemble spaces under construction or unoccupied, in each case signifying that ongoing work is being done inside or that the empty space sits unrented or abandoned—what both manifest is

space not as neutral or transparent but laden with the restrictions, connotations, and realities of private property.

The Truisms were often mistaken for a compendium of appropriated phrases instead of fabrications—with readers/viewers frequently marking, checking off, or striking through some texts as a means to signify agreement or opposition—suggesting that the validity of the list as a whole was considered nowhere near as dubious as some of the individual claims to be found within it. That even Holzer's fabrication could be accepted as fact suggests language's commodious accommodations as a sanitized and sanitizing home that denies the labor of its own making. To belabor the list as a construction, Holzer systematized the arrangement of the texts by alphabetizing their order of appearance. While the list itself is generally recognized as a purely instrumental form in its non-hierarchical and noncontingent accumulation of words, phrases, or sentences, alphabetizing the sequence belies the neutrality of a system that appears to function absent of choice, desire, chance, or reason—that is, it reveals the scaffolding covering neutrality's façade. For a 1979 installation at the South Bronx alternative art space Fashion Moda, Holzer placed two large posters in the street level windows nearly occluding visibility inside. Responding to a neighborhood with a large Hispanic population, Holzer installed, side-by-side, the same list of Truisms in Spanish and English. With the Spanish poster installed to the left of the English one, Holzer recognizes the privileging mode of reading from left to right shared by the Spanish and English alphabets and grammars and places the unofficial, but predominant, language of the neighborhood in the position of authority. But the different translation of each truism wouldn't be found in the same side-by-side symmetry as the posters themselves. Since the labor of translation obviously alters, among other factors, spelling and word order, and because Holzer maintained a system of alphabetized arrangement consistent with each

translation without any master order, lists that were seen as nominally the *same* show themselves to be fundamentally different, contingent upon external ordering systems that are historically inscribed and manifested contextually. The neutrality of order or sequence, of alphabetization or the direction of translation or the privileging of one language over another, is revealed as a symbolic politics that has material consequences in the lives of those who inhabit particular spaces and places.

If the alphabetized system of ordering makes legible that the list's framework and its contents are both precarious formal conceits, the actual layout of the text further emphasizes that what one sees is a set of decisions and synthetic guises. There is an extreme dissonance between the list's appearance of monolithic assurance and stability produced by the uniformity of font and identical flush left alignment and the sparring ideological and thematic content of the list's individual components. The poster's black text on white ground assumes a color scheme mute to emotional or expressive signification. The uniformity of font and alignment suggests consistency and equivalence, which Holzer strategically presents as a proposition that queries the relationship between familiarity and conformity. How does one reconcile the translation of often conflicting and oppositional truth claims into a serial visual presentation predicated on even-handedness and neutrality? Holzer worked as a typesetter when she first moved to New York for both small alternative presses as well as commercial entities such as The Direct Marketing News. Any typesetting involves choice—for example, use of a particular font, its size, and combination with other fonts depends, for example, on the history of that font, design intent or purpose, and the context in which one is using it. One could then understand a visual presentation of neutrality as an objective achieved through an elaboration of decision-making and formal processes. That is, one could understand the appearance of neutrality as a purely a product.

This vexed relationship with space and real estate, evinced in the practices and statements of Holzer, Colab, and Group Material, is a further elaboration and reflection on the "situational aesthetics" of Michael Asher. Works such as his 1972 Galleria Toselli, Milan where the gallery's walls were sandblasted to reveal coarse surfaces and rough textures antithetical to the supposed flat neutrality of the white cube expose the 'empty' space as fecund with presumptions about the material constitution of impartiality and disinterestedness. Reversing the mystical and mythifying implications of projects such as Yves Klein's 1958 installation *Le vide* where the framing device of the empty gallery was somehow endowed with the legitimizing auratic power of the artist himself, Asher's stripped scenario reveals that the identities of art, artworks, and even the artists themselves are socially produced through material containers that bear traces of contingency. Asher's demonstration reveals that the gallery is never empty but aura always already is. When Holzer takes to windows, she both puts her work and the space in which it's positioned on display while pushing attention to one's position physically standing on the street, in the city, as a participant in urban life—not just a member of an art 'world' or audience, but a member of a New York City citizenry. At the same historical moment that Holzer was literally turning Asher's model inside out, ³⁴ Louise Lawler's contribution to the exhibition ------, Louise Lawler, Adrian Piper and Cindy Sherman Have Agreed to Participate in an Exhibition Organized by Janelle Reiring at Artists Space, September 23 through October 28, 1978 extended the installation into the street. Hanging a borrowed 1883 painting of a racehorse by H. Stulman from the

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³⁴ It should be noted that Asher, at this exact time, was also turning his investigation to the institutional façade. His 1979 project for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, consisted of removing concrete panels from the entrance façade of the museum and installing them inside. It would be a mistake to describe the site where the elements were removed as blank or empty—one now could see the constitutive framework that usually, and invisibly, supports the institution's public face. When the artwork entered the collection of the MCA, it was contingent upon the piece lasting only as long as the building—a clarification and definition of the piece being inseparable from the building that both permits the artwork and provides the material and logic for its existence. With the MCA's move in 1996 away from the Ontario Street location, the artwork itself no longer existed.

Aqueduct Racetrack inside of the gallery space, Lawler also installed two powerful stage lights—one was directed towards the place where a viewer would stand to look at the painting, the other was aimed out of the front gallery window and illuminated the area outside. Drawing attention to what exists outside of the gallery's walls, Lawler proposes that the act of looking, even the desire to look, and certainly the possibility of access (or even wanting to gain entrance or knowing how) is a cumulative and combinatory manifestation of "what came before you and what comes after you" that is, the concatenation of political, economic, and personal factors that constitute the subject position being formed in the social that equally announces itself in the space of the street and the space of the gallery.

Lawler's contribution drains the exhibition space of any illusions that it is an area of exception (where aura and myth might breed) and grounds it in the present, in the social, in the place as both exhibition space and property.

If we see Holzer's postering as consistent with other practices (like that of Asher and Lawler) that are clearly concerned with locating and presenting the social construction of art, her collaboration with alternative spaces should not be seen as a capitulation to the mechanisms of power (even in paltry forms) that both Colab and Group Material resisted and found suspect, but a purposeful and calculated performance of how the institutional space could be used as a vehicle to address its own fraught position. To totally resist the institutional apparatus is to adopt a form of silence that concedes the primary spaces of artistic discourse and argumentation. Though Adorno was specifically speaking about the impossibility of simply denying culture as a way to outflank the barbarism he saw implicit to one with Auschwitz as its logical endgame, his castigation of silence is applicable to all moments when culture seems complicit in degrading the individual to a point where

³⁵ Ann Goldstein, "In the Company of Others," in Helen Molesworth, ed., *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures (looking back)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 137.

resistance or intervention seems impossible. He writes, "Not even silence gets us out of this circle, since in silence we simply use the state of objective truth to rationalize our subjective inability, thereby once again degrading truth into a lie." Holzer's street level address doesn't passively adopt *or* overtly embrace the institutional format. It assumes an interstitial position that presents a concept of display that reveals it fundamentally to be as much about hiding and concealing (other possibilities, other subject positions, other truths, etc.) as it is about proffering or revealing.

The antagonism witnessed in the ideological firefight among the texts on the *Truisms* poster itself is mirrored in a contentious display that avows the need for the place as it disavows a desire to strictly belong to it (or be inside of it, as if consumed and digested). While the business of gentrification and the savage economic policies that attend it aren't thematically addressed in Holzer's poster projects (both the window displays and the peripatetic/homeless posters), their internally discordant rhetorical content and their precarious placement just barely belonging to place materially demonstrate the conflict at the core of social life—the differences and fragile conceits often degraded into the lie spread by power of the autonomous, the self-evident, the natural.³⁷ What Holzer crucially shows is that

³⁶ Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1995), 367.

In her trenchant analysis of what it means for a space to be 'public,' Rosalyn Deutsche in 'Agoraphobia' relies upon the theory of antagonism in democracy as articulated by Laclau and Mouffe. Instead of positing that a model of democracy that is seamless and without conflict is healthy, Laclau and Mouffe insist that antagonism creates the scenarios in democratic societies that permit the shifting and adjustment of thought that stymies political reification (into, for example, fascist or totalitarian forms). Deutsche finds this critical analysis useful in her advancement of spaces and 'public' artworks that aren't legible or fundamentally consistent with prevailing commercial, political, or popular models. Spaces or artworks/projects that differently erupt shared space help to articulate society as a study in tectonics as opposed to surface. Deutsche writes: "Laclau and Mouffe use the term *antagonism* to designate the relationship between a social identity and a 'constitutive outside' that blocks its completion. Antagonism affirms and simultaneously prevents the closure of society, revealing the partiality and precariousness—the contingency—of every totality. Antagonism is "the 'experience' of the limit of the social." The impossibility of society is not an invitation to political despair but the starting point—or "groundless 'ground"—of a properly democratic politics. "There is politics," says Laclau, "because there is subversion and dislocation of the social." Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 274.

the ideological operations that give shape to cities and lives alike are largely hidden—the posters that block one's visual access inside, like large construction fences or scaffolding or closed office doors (not to mention the factories, formerly of New York, that were forced elsewhere), demonstrate that work is always being done even if we can't see it. The finished product is just that.

Chapter 3

"A Desire for What Works": The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters

A lot of professionals are crack pots Jenny Holzer, from the *Truisms* series (1977-79)

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In 1979, living in a city gripped by high unemployment and brutal inflation, six young artists formed the short-lived *The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters* (Figure 3.1). They had stationery; there was an office at 305 Broadway in downtown Manhattan. With an alphabetized name redolent of a law or brokerage firm, *The Offices* not only greeted the world with a titular handshake that flirted with officialdom; they also presented themselves with a business card in hand (Figure 3.2). In addition to the logistical information that relays their name and how they might be reached, *The Offices* included a brief description of their offerings on the card: "Practical esthetic services adaptable to client situation; Our consultation includes a review of your needs and suggestions for realistic action." To take up the language and guise of a white collar, service-industry consultancy during a period of economic collapse initially seems an incongruous move for artists—five of whom were still participating in and organizing exhibitions and events for the anti-institutional Collaborative Projects (discussed in Chapter 2)—who individually and collaboratively worked away from market ready modes. One participant, Robin Winters, spoke directly to this when he said: "The idea that a group of artists could get together as

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¹ The participants were: Peter Fend, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince, and Robin Winters. I'm very grateful to Coleen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, and Peter Nadin for allowing me to interview them in preparation for this chapter.

² Unless otherwise cited, the documents regarding *The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters* were found in Jenny Holzer's archive.

creative cultural workers and represent themselves as functional, was very different from what was going on for example in painting at that time, and we all had some interest in that from various directions. But this is also very much in opposition to current positions in art."³ The projects that the collective embarked upon included: consulting to 112 Greene Street, the art and performance space in SoHo, about future programming, the evolution of the space, and "re-branding" itself with the new name White Columns; hosting and facilitating a one-day information session regarding immigration issues; meeting with scientists at the California Institute of Technology to help develop "a creative media campaign for promoting a scheme for replacing fossil fuels with a marine-biological source"; meeting with the UN International Labor Organization; and developing an exhibition, "Pleasure / Function, Practical Aesthetic Services Adaptable to Client Situations, in Los Angeles hosted by David Amico and sponsored by the Foundation for Art Resources. It would be easy to assume that the project was a mere throwaway conceit particularly given the brief 1979-80 lifespan and the paucity of projects accomplished, a joke that used the conditions of an intolerable economy to sarcastically exacerbate what might be considered the financial uselessness—or plain general lack of use value—of aesthetic work. The more difficult challenge is to take The Offices seriously, or at least to consider what factors led to an objectless practice, based on collaboration, where art was perceived as a potentially practical endeavor with "realistic" applications, and where a recent history of institutional critique made emphatic that no experience is outside the conventions of language or ideological investment. The usual suspicion (or pessimism) attending talk of utility after a history of failed utopian art programs such as that of the Soviet avant-garde won't be abandoned here. But it seems crucial that *The Offices* didn't attempt to replicate models prefaced on seismic

³ Céline Condorelli, Support Structures (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), 158.

change coordinated and calibrated in alignment with political orders. Rather, the decision to seek out clients in an individually addressable format is already a deflated optimism (as in, yes, change is possible but it is incremental and limited), the realpolitik of cultural work that resists ideological posturing as it abandons the grand sweep of history. While this scalpel over chainsaw approach internalizes the defeat of those artistic movements in the service of revolution—and in this regard the disillusion is as much post-Altamont and post-Vietnam as it is post-Soviet avant-garde—it still comes as somewhat of a surprise that *The Offices* assumed the self-confident (or authoritative or authoritarian?) image and language of the law firm or corporation as a stand-in for the professional world. Only a little over a decade after 1968, why did these artists cede the ground of protest? Why inhabit the guise of the "professional" at this historical moment in the service of an artistic practice?

While I'll return to the issue of the professional, particular in reference to a crisis in confidence in the expert and expertise that was proclaimed at this historical moment, it seems crucial also to consider use value as a category very much at work in the services that *The Offices* hoped to offer. While there is something almost absurd in the heterogeneity of groups met with and the range of working methods that would be needed to handle the disparate, would-be 'client' base, there also is something profoundly intriguing in their animation of agency and problem-solving under the guise of art "to affect reality, to exist otherwise than just aesthetically, to claim a potential to recognize history." I borrow this quotation on the function of an art enmeshed with the idea of use value from the epilogue of Benjamin Buchloh's 1978 essay "Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham." As an idea also elaborated upon in his essays on Soviet Productivism (his 1984 essay "From Faktura to Factography") and Hans Haacke (including "Hans Haacke: Memory and

⁴ Benjamin Buchloh, "Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 198.

Instrumental Reason" from 1988), use value functions by embracing communicability and rejecting aesthetic experience as a passive and contemplative mode divorced from the reality of cultural histories. As such, Buchloh (and others, including Leah Dickerman and Maria Gough) point to the factographic model in the Soviet Union after the revolution (c. 1921) as a counter (or parallel) variant of modernism—premised on use value—specifically engaged in a form of art making that responded to the needs of the society and the particular social groups served by the work. The factographic model, with its embrace of the documentary capacity of photography and a form of descriptive prose writing that embraced accounting, facts, and analysis over constructed, metaphoric schemas identified with a genre like the novel, must be seen as an intentional break with pre-revolutionary cultural forms (as it was a rejection of the contemporaneous post-revolutionary retreat to the conservatism of socialist realism). Productivism took seriously the contention that the form of any individual work replicated the ideological proclivities embedded in the histories and institutions in which that form was inaugurated. Not only was form ideological in productivist accounts, as Dickerman details in her essay "The Fact and the Photograph," but it was instrumental in how subjects of a new society would be formed and transformed after a defining break in subject/object relations and the introduction of a new political order. Factography (at least at its inception, before being swallowed by the totalitarian state the Soviet Union would become) was in the service of a form of emancipatory aesthetics that would model what a new Soviet subjectivity could be as it detailed and organized the concepts and objects that would fashion the identity of the new state. Use value inhered in the act of being in service to—and being responsive to—the new order and the claims on that new citizenry.

When one sees the factographic as model being approached by an artist such as

Hans Haacke from an historical distance of some fifty years in his 1971 work *Shapolsky et al.*,

Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, one witnesses it mobilized not in the service of—or to the *use* of—a hegemonic or newly empowered order. Rather, Haacke's work—photographs of 142 'slum' buildings and the 142 corresponding data sheets and 6 charts that detail the (murky) financial underpinnings of property exchange and the preferential treatment given to those properties' owner, Shapolsky, and his shell companies—is in the service of those outside of power, banished from information, and withheld from fact. Haacke's reinvestigation of the factographic and productivist legacy affirms its counter/parallel modern function to "affect reality" and serve the needs of particular social groups.⁵ But his post-Stalin (and perhaps post or anti-national) deployment of the model sees use value readily eclipsed and absorbed by propagandistic and nationalist expediency. By using the factographic model to reveal the oppressive ways in which property continues to be owned and controlled by the very few, Haacke's work is in the service of and useful for—those who aren't considered as equal subjects by regressive political, cultural, and social formations. Though a well-known story at this point, and amply described in Julia Bryan-Wilson's 2009 Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era, it's worth repeating that the possible inclusion of Shapolsky was the main reason for the cancellation of the 1971 solo show Haacke was supposed to have at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Thomas Messer, then director of the Guggenheim, wrote Haacke that museum policies "exclude active engagement towards social and political ends"—a clear indication that Haacke was on the wrong side of the social and political. But not only was the exhibition cancelled, its curator, Edward Fry, was fired. In response to the cancellation and firing, the Art Workers Coalition (including members such as Yvonne

⁵ This is in keeping with Haacke's description of his work: "Part of my message is that art should have a use-value rather than be seen as the commodity produced by an entrepreneur." Quoted in Benjamin Buchloh, "Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason" in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 221.

Rainer and Lucy Lippard) protested within the museum and vowed not have any dealings with the museum. If it is possible to recuperate factography *after* its ignominious (but ready) capitulation to the propagandistic needs of the totalitarian state, Haacke's embrace of it suggests that any new usefulness of the model must reject any impulse to function in the service of propaganda and that it specifically must serve the interests of—and be bound to the needs of—a counter public or publics. That is, factography only can be on the side of those on the outside. Power masters factography; it renders it impotent. As I detailed in Chapter 2 of this study, the concept of the counterpublic was formulated to account for previously excluded populations (for example, the economically marginalized, racial and ethnic minorities, women and those who identify as non-male) barred from a participatory public sphere premised on equal access to communication and representation. As Nancy Fraser writes, and as I quoted earlier, counterpublics serve as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourse to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." The censoring of Haacke's Shapolsky demonstrates how threatening opposition is to the 'smooth' functionality of the bourgeois public sphere and the institutions that function in its name; yet the artwork's clarification of how property and real estate can be crucial aesthetic concerns given the institutional footprint of the "art world" served as an important model for artists working later in the decade, such as those involved in Collaborative Projects (Colab) and The Offices, attuned to the needs of communities and social groups and the spaces artworks inhabit and use.

Colab's Real Estate Show, which was briefly introduced in Chapter 2, took place at 123 Delancey Street in New York City's Lower East Side from December 31, 1979, until it was

⁶ Nancy Fraser, Rethinking the Public Sphere (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1991), 67.

closed—literally padlocked from the inside—by the Housing Preservation and Development Agency on January 2, 1980. On December 30, Colab artists entered the unused space and began clearing and cleaning it. The idea of reclaiming the property for neighborhood use was a direct response—and artworks were made and presented that responded—to massive real estate speculation in the area and known collusion between city agencies and property developers. In a manifesto-like document produced for and distributed at planning meetings for the show, the artists involved crafted a description and a legitimization for their action. A portion of that document reads, and I quote at length:

This is a short-term occupation of vacant city-managed property.

The action is extralegal -- it illuminates no legal issues, calls for no "rights." It is pre-emptive and insurrectionary.

The action is dedicated to Elizabeth Mangum, a middle-aged Black American killed by police and marshals as she resisted eviction in Flatbush last year.

The intention of this action is to show that artists are willing and able to place themselves and their work squarely in a context which shows solidarity with oppressed people, a recognition that mercantile and institutional structures oppress and distort artists' lives and works, and a recognition that artists, living and working in depressed communities, are compradors in the revaluation of property and the "whitening" of neighborhoods.

It is important to focus attention on the way artists get used as pawns by greedy white developers.

It is important for artists to express solidarity with Third World and oppressed people.

It is important to show that people are not helpless -- they can express their resentment with things-as-they-are in a way that is constructive, exemplary, and interesting.

It is important to try to bridge the gap between artists and working people by putting artwork on a boulevard level.

It is important to do something dramatic that is neither commercially oriented nor institutionally quarantined -- a groundswell of human action and participation with each other that points up currents of feeling that are neither for sale nor for morticing into the shape of an institution.

It is important to do something that people (particularly in the art community) cannot immediately identify unless they question themselves and examine their own actions for an answer.⁷

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⁷ The entire document can be found at: http://www.abcnorio.org/about/history/res_manifesto.html. Accessed last on April 6, 2012.

While the utility of the project lies in its attention to gentrification and particularly the toll it takes on local, longtime, non-artist constituents as a microcosm of the manifold abuses inflicted upon oppressed peoples, it only functions and has use value because the show was physically closed. The ideas represented or intended by the individual works or the exhibition at large were actualized by a closed door and a padlock. If one legacy of factography is an impulse away from the individual and passive aesthetic experience, Colab continues it by insisting on community-based projects that produce a participatory aesthetic where the structuring (and delimiting) of the public sphere is made evident. In this regard, the manifesto's assertion that "it is important to do something that people... cannot immediately identify..." proposes that resistance to the known is simultaneously a political and aesthetic act to resist those forms that reproduce fraudulent ideologies. Keeping in mind Robin Winters' statement about the intended functionality of *The Offices* (and, by extension, of Colab of which he was also a member) and how that "was very different from what was going on for example in painting at that time," the Real Estate Show demonstrated that a productivist, post-Haackean strain of use value could resist regressive politics as it countered the exclusivity of painting, the market, the individual, and the institution as modernity's most obvious ghosts.

During the same year, *The Offices* also engaged in a community-based artwork that stressed utility while positioning themselves alongside those outside of power. Titled "Work Towards a Methodology for Future Action," they announced their project as: "A representative from *ONE STOP IMMIGRATION CENTER, INC.* has been engaged to distribute information about the problems of immigrants in the U.S. by Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin at 8:30 p.m., 616 South Broadway, June 22." While Haacke revealed property as a system that perpetuates power and used the documentation to produce an accounting of

how those on the 'inside' usually stay there, The Offices isolated immigration issues as other forms that create the parameters for institutionalized 'belonging.' As Haacke takes property not as fact but as a system of relationships, exchanges, and information, The Offices see the 'problems of immigrants' as addressable—if not remediable—by providing access to spaces and people that can provide 'information' that can potentially demystify, for example, complicated legal hurdles to citizenship. In an e-mail to the author from March 27, 2012, Peter Nadin described the event: "There were two people from the One Stop Center at the opening. They offered advice to immigrants in a forum outside of the usual context. Plus as an immigrant myself, I was very sensitive to issues regarding what is now called 'selfdeportation.' Also, in larger context—as we are all immigrants—it seemed to be a pertinent question to all citizens." The notion of the 'pertinent' in regard to 'all citizens' that Nadin raises suggests that issues relating to, or often dismissed as concerning, the few more largely implicate the functionality of a particular society at large. While the project provides support for immigrants (or the minority of the general population and one not endowed with the privileges of citizenship), Nadin's framing of it with this language demonstrates that the use value of such work doesn't merely flow from privileged giver of information to passive recipient of it. It reveals a framework that prioritizes communicability as an aesthetic formation with potentially emancipatory results as it simultaneously points to the imbalances of power in any system (i.e. that which is to be redressed). By enabling a scenario that creates participatory modes of both perception and organization and addresses how the individual can be seen as—or made into—a subject within—or withheld from—a larger collective, the immigration project addresses that pertinent modernist dilemma of how to dialectically consider the individual and the collective always at the same time. The project also sees it as

⁸ E-mail to the author on March 27, 2012.

the responsibility of the artist to address modes of experience outside of the hegemonic, to develop skills that are not part of the traditional 'artistic' repertoire, and to provide information that addresses issues pertinent to the realities facing publics.

If the above is one set of criteria for a type of factographic inflected practice that prioritizes use value, *Rat Patrol* from 1979 sits squarely within that public-oriented, productivist legacy. When Christy Rupp wheatpasted some 4,000 posters with a life-size image of a rat throughout trash strewn downtown Manhattan streets, she dragged into presence a representation of what thrives when continued consumption meets government neglect. At a time when city services were being cut, Rupp's rats—installed in marauding bands as if the vermin were on victorious parade— can be seen as a symptom both of capitalism's unforgiving tax on the environment and a failure of the dominant public sphere to redress systemic inadequacies when the invisible hand smacks too hard. Rupp—another member of Colab and instrumental to the *Real Estate Shon*—found the image in the archives of the New York City Health Department. Her archival work, in addition to her use of a form like the poster largely unaffiliated with "high" modes of artistic address, demonstrates a repurposing of skills and materials to adequately address new concerns. As such, this salutary elaboration on Haacke's model of aesthetic functionality uses tactical measures to individually address practical problems.

But what of those artistic practices that labor in functionality but whose idea of use value doesn't cleanly register with works that traffic in the (counter) public good? I raise this issue here, at this juncture, to remind myself that even Haacke's corrective of productivist factographic practice admits to the impossibility of continuity with a hopeful past. Though it doesn't admit to the loss of the possibility of use value as such, that Haacke's work could address a seemingly infinite number of moving targets suggests that the control of both use

and value are in the tight grasp of those who only think and know of them as the constituent parts of monetization. While Colab, The Offices, and Rupp endeavor to perform vital civic and social functions and serve the (counter) public interest and create work that resists the trappings of the pure commodity, there is a scrappy exasperation to the practices. Though the impermanence of their works is theoretically consistent with a politics that avoids seats of power knowing that the seat ultimately rules the sitter, foregoing longevity necessarily assumes—and it's a conscious assumption of—a position of ongoing loss and defeat. The heroic absurdity of *The Offices*—to want to deal with labor, immigration, the energy crisis, and/or whatever situation one might throw their way—is that it admits to how much is in need of desperate fixing. They profess a desire to do what they can, though the openendedness of issues to address and the impossibility of remedying them all leave failure as a presupposition. Yet the desire to embark on such tasks—and to imagine a variant of artistic practice that resists culturally and politically affirmative forms such as contemporaneous Neo Expressionist painting —manifests a mindset in line with Camus's memorable image and plea, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." But this isn't too invalidate their labor or work; it isn't to refute the import and necessity of the category of use value within artistic production. Rather, I'm belaboring this point to make a differentiation between aesthetic practices capable of "succeeding" and those practices that function to initiate ongoing acts and new developments—which I see operative in these latter day practices described here that adhere around use value and functionality—that may affect reality. "Success" as an operable term to describe the developments of works that aim to initiate ongoing acts—of which I also would add Christopher D'Arcangelo and Peter Nadin's Ceiling Pieces from 1978 that I'll soon discuss—might be defined simply as slowing down the processes of inevitable loss and failure.

On the documentation that served both as a description of the individual project and an invitation to view the work, D'Arcangelo and Nadin also would describe what motivated their particular practice. The statement reads: "We have joined together to execute functional constructions and to alter or refurbish existing structures as a means of surviving in a capitalist economy." Each piece was a newly constructed wall or surface—a ceiling for example—that would cover the existing one. Sanded flat and painted a pristine white, the presence of this new architectural and aesthetic object might be missed by those not already intimate with the space or the project. The piece obviously insists that we disregard, ignore, or take as given the objects that provide crucial functions such as protection and cover; but each intervention also dramatically emphasizes the invisibility of the labor that produces that functionality. Unlike what is generally held for painting or sculpture, a good wall is one that leaves no trace of the worker's hand. In a conversation with the artist Ben Kinmont in 1997, Nadin spoke of this disjunction: "Now if you're applying white paint to a white ground, the question always come to you: well, what's the difference between me with the white paint applying successive layers of paint to this wall and what Ryman's doing." Invoking the figure who stripped painting down to a fundamental schema of surface, mark, and medium, Nadin's introduction of the work of Robert Ryman as a frame of reference to discuss their pieces gives their practice not only an art historical precedent but also a point of departure where function is emphasized over reduction. If the Ryman painting is one rendered into elements, D'Arcangelo and Nadin reveal how elemental labor and a transactional economy are to any production.

The document produced to describe the piece purchased—D'Arcangelo and Nadin always use this transactional term over the less financially freighted language of

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⁹ Condorelli, Support Structures, 208.

¹⁰ Ibid.

"commission"—always includes: the number of days it took to accomplish the work; the size of the area worked on both in square feet and vertical and horizontal dimensions; the person who provided the function (invariably the purchaser); the statement "design by function" indicating both that the purchaser dictated the design *and* that the wall itself dictates its own covering; the names of whomever executed the project; the materials used in the construction; the purchaser of the work; and the times and location when one could see "the product of" however many "days work" it took to accomplish the piece. For example, one piece from 1978 was described as:

Nine days work:

912 sq. ft. 38' x 24'

Function by Louise Lawler

Design by function

Execution by Peter Nadin and Christopher D'Arcangelo

Materials: Celatex, Drywall, Lath, and Nails

Purchased by Louise Lawler

The product of nine days work may be seen on January 23rd and 30th, 1978, between 3:00 and 6:00pm at 407 Greenwich St. N.Y.C., 3rd floor, front.¹¹

While the function of the wall is self-evident, the elaborate and detailed description of the labor, materials, persons, and time involved in the construction of the functional object aims to clarify the circuitry of constituents that are often occluded in the finished product. By describing the execution of such constructions and structures as "a means of surviving in a capitalist economy," the forms themselves are ancillary to the labor that permits remuneration which thereby allows survival. If the price of wage labor per hour or the cost of the total project isn't revealed in this otherwise exemplary documentation, one can assume this omission admits to a non-standardized mode of charging or giving value to the

¹¹ Ibid.

work. Just because their aim is to survive in a capitalist economy, it doesn't mean they must replicate capitalism's dictates whereby labor, time, and use are clearly translated into monetary value. But theirs isn't a standard practice. As we know from the ongoing plight of the working class—whose plight would be accentuated with the economic policies of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s—to survive through forms of manual labor such as the type performed by D'Arcangelo and Nadin would become increasingly difficult. Somehow, the importance of material labor and its laborers would be dismissed in an increasingly material world. Yet just as *The Offices* weren't going to remedy inequalities in immigration rights with their work, the utility (or the success) of such practices is that they can possibly slow down the processes through which inequalities are naturalized or seem natural. They make the processes through which we become oblivious a bit more obvious; they reveal how difficult survival is.

As I introduced in the very beginning this essay, *The Offices* not only contend with the legacy of use value as an idea inherent to artistic production, they questioned the role of the "professional" as the ultimate arbiter of judgment and success. In an attempt to address this issue and also to ground my reading directly in the period, I'll take a brief detour through the historical landmarks of the time to suggest why a period of disillusionment was met with artistic practices that attempted to reengineer the relationship between experts and concerned members of a larger "public".

In 1976, the former peanut farmer, Jimmy Carter, was elected the President of the United States. Carter inherited a country economically hobbled and shattered in morale. The 1973 oil crisis in the United States (and in much of Europe) was triggered when the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (or OAPEC) began its embargo protesting the U.S.'s continuing support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War. This abrupt stoppage in the flow of oil contributed to an economic seizing that resulted in stagflation,

the dangerous cocktail of stalled growth and high inflation that brutalizes employment, spikes interest rates, decreases manufacturing and production in general, and makes everyday life that much more costly. The country would experience a second oil crisis with exploding petroleum and gas prices in 1979 when the Iranian Revolution disrupted oil production and when Carter finally ceased importing Iranian oil as a de facto sanction imposed on the new anti-American regime. Fiscally strapped, the American public also was weathering the public embarrassment of the Watergate scandal and the resignation of the sitting President, Richard Nixon, in 1974. Demoralization regarding the country's standing was further intensified when Gerald Ford, Nixon's Vice President and successor as President, issued the former president a pardon, guaranteeing that Nixon would avoid prosecution. The crises weren't limited to economic and domestic political breakdowns. The near meltdown of the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor in Pennsylvania on March 28, 1979, revealed that failure and uncertainty also attended the country's scientific ventures. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan further intensified international divisions and a continuing Cold War where the world was parceled into pockets of ideological "ours" and "theirs". Diplomatic and ideological breakdowns also were at the center of the Iran hostage crisis from 1979-80 where supporters of the revolution invaded the American Embassy in Tehran demanding that the United States apologize for meddling in Iranian internal affairs (including the 1953 overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadeq and the Shah's CIA assisted restoration) and unfreeze Iranian monies seized during the revolution. The problems facing the country were as extensive as a menu at a Chinese restaurant, so it wasn't a surprise that many, including Carter's Vice President Walter Mondale, strenuously objected to a speech that was ultimately given on July 15, 1979, where Carter discusses the nation's general malaise instead of pinpointing *specific* issues to address. Mondale would later say that he:

... argued that there were real problems in America that were not mysterious, that were not rooted in some kind of national psychosis or breakdown, that there were real gas lines, there was real inflation, that people were worried in their real lives about keeping their jobs. We could engage the nation by addressing those problems and asking for a new level of public support... I also argued that if, having gotten elected on the grounds that we needed a government as good as the people, we now were heard to argue that we needed a people as good as the government, that we would be destroyed.¹²

Instead, Carter delivered a speech that his pollster, Patrick Caddell, advised him to give citing recent figures that showed him having a 25% approval rating and a majority of Americans thinking the country—contrary to the "logic" of progress implicit to the American Dream—would be in a worse position in 5 years.

Carter spoke of this threat to American democracy as "more serious than energy or inflation." He said that the threat was not directed to "our political and civil liberties" or "the outward strength of America." Rather, he claimed in somewhat mystic strains, "The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and the loss of a unity of purpose for our Nation." After discussing the physics of the American Dream and its Newtonian maintenance of forward motion, Carter began to tack religiously and speak of the American people losing "faith" in the government, democracy, the future, and the nation's past ambitions. He pointed to an increased preoccupation with materiality in the country, a preoccupation he sees attending a loss of meaning in lives and a lack of "confidence or purpose." In the speech, Carter points to the symptoms of this crisis:

The symptoms of this crisis of the American spirit are all around us. For the first time in the history of our country a majority of our people believe that the next 5 years will be worse than the past 5 years. Two-thirds of our people do not even vote.

^{12 &}quot;Carter's Crisis of Confidence Speech." Reproduced at:

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/carter-crisis-speech/. Last accessed on November 28, 2011.

The productivity of American workers is actually dropping, and the willingness of Americans to save for the future has fallen below that of all other people in the Western world... These changes did not happen overnight. They've come upon us gradually over the last generation, years that were filled with shocks and tragedy. We were sure that ours was a nation of the ballot, not the bullet, until the murders of John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. We were taught that our armies were always invincible and our causes were always just, only to suffer the agony of Vietnam. We respected the Presidency as a place of honor until the shock of Watergate. We remember when the phrase "sound as a dollar" was an expression of absolute dependability, until 10 years of inflation began to shrink our dollar and our savings. We believed that our Nation's resources were limitless until 1973, when we had to face a growing dependence on foreign oil. These wounds are still very deep. They have never been healed. Looking for a way out of this crisis, our people have turned to the Federal Government and found it isolated from the mainstream of our Nation's life... Often you see paralysis and stagnation and drift. You don't like it, and neither do I. What can we do?¹³

While Carter would proceed after this juncture by giving a fairly prosaic political speech, listing action items to immediately address the energy crisis, the speech is striking in this quoted passage for its brutally honest and shockingly brief summary of American failure and its clear-eyed assessment of a country at an impasse—a block that he accurately describes as more a separation between expectation and reality, a metaphorical gash, something more akin to a bodily wound. While the speech (simultaneously self-reflexive and finger-wagging) would ultimately be a political liability exactly for the reasons Mondale indicated, it continues to be a fascinating historical document because it reveals a symbol of power confessing to weakness; the speech is a rare admission by one in power of ideological fallibility, a far rarer admission than the admission to a particular or personal wrongdoing. But the speech, three years into what would turn out to be Carter's one-term presidency, endures as evidence of inefficacy. While Carter's gentle and genial leadership may be instructive to how resist the jingoist, domineering chauvinism that usually attends power, it gained few adherents because

¹³ President James Carter, "Crisis of Confidence" speech. Reproduced at: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/carter-crisis/. Last accessed on November 28, 2011.

rumination never leaked into problem solving. The leadership failed in practice, by not aligning rhetoric and theory with it.

Watching this speech over thirty years after its first transmission, I have difficulty with the moralization that seems to accompany Carter's framing of failure as having some form of nobility. It seems a not so subtle repackaging from a TV mountain the Christian Beatitude that the meek shall inherit the earth. That is, the American dream is only deferred something akin to the tale of Job where suffering ends with regained health and wealth because the protagonist remained righteous. I imagine—and it's only my imagination—that the six artists involved in *The Offices* saw the speech as a capitulation. Their individual and collaborative practices resisted mythologies (of genius, of inevitability, of the tortured artist, of the deferred reward) that prop up power and divide the drowned and saved in naturalizing terms. As I've detailed in the first two chapters, Holzer's Truisms project attempted to chip away at the seeming neutrality of institutional and ideological facades by showing the malleability of opinions often taken for axioms in the public spaces that order lives. Other projects, such as those by Coleen Fitzgibbon and Robin Winters, under the name X + Y, already were proposing that art could be used as a vehicle to analyze how services are sold, how information is relayed, and how we place value on objects and operations.

In their 1976 project "International Services," Fitzgibbon and Winters rented time on cable access television in New York to offer "art services made to offer; international services adaptable to your situation." The examples they gave range from the expected (films showings, portraits, installations) to those generally perceived as outside the purview of the culture industry (demonstrations, review of ethics, armed protection, kidnapping).

Describing their television program as "an ad you can interrupt," Fitzgibbon and Winters took phone calls when they weren't going through the litany of "services" offered or listing corporations, products, and institutions that they wanted to "stop" including Con Ed, nuclear power, "Ma Bell" (the Bell Company, now AT&T), CIA, FBI, Big Mac, and the Trilateral Commission. When one caller asks what they are doing, Fitzgibbon gives their canned line about offering art services but also reveals that they are simply advertising for jobs, that "like most people" they are looking for work and that she had lost the welfare she was living on. The conversation frequently addresses the bleak economic state of the country and city, revealing that the selling of art services is as futile—but, crucially, no more ridiculous or impractical—as selling any other non-essential (food, heat, clothing, etc.) product when discretionary spending is nearly non-existent. The failure that Carter so neatly addresses—of the economy, of the military, of government, of diplomacy—is more particularly the failure of experts, the failure of the professional classes to achieve success in the arenas in which they were trained. By offering their services as artists, in fields that have nothing to do with what may fall within the traditional parameters of "art," Fitzgibbon and Winters are both professing the desperate search for employment regardless of training while assailing the inefficacy (and inadequacy) of experts who led the nation to the respective economic and political collapses. I see *The Offices* elaborating on this critique of "the expert" but not in a parodic vein. A point of real inquiry and practice begins by asking the hypothetical question: if you, expert, have been trained in this field and yet have failed, continually and seemingly with no hope of rectification, what harm is my amateur attempt; perhaps the amateur, the artist, will accomplish the task? If The Offices assume the guise of the expert, it isn't some aspirational attempt to ascribe themselves credibility or bump

¹⁴ All quotations from "International Services" from my transcription. A DVD was kindly provided by Coleen Fitzgibbon.

themselves up some hierarchical ladder. Rather, *The Offices* give the appearance of taking *themselves* seriously, even carrying a card that means business, affirming that the illusion of expertise is frequently no more than another kind of card trick.

In the May 14, 1979, edition of *Time Magazine*, Frank Trippett published an essay with the title, "A New Distrust of the Experts." In it, Trippett attempts to reconcile Thomas Jefferson's famous axiom about the workings of democracy—"Whenever people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government"—with the fact that the increasing specialization of knowledge frequently leaves a ponderous gap between the expert and the citizen. His point isn't to express some populist, anti-elite, anti-intellectual argument where public and popular acceptance of knowledge is more crucial than the production and analytical verification of knowledge itself. Rather, he observes the debilitating effects of secrecy shrouding how knowledge is to put into use and delivered into products—he cites the belated acknowledgment of the detrimental effects of DDT, of "DES that seemed a nifty preventative of miscarriage in the 1950s..." and then "linked to cancer a generation later," that federal atomic authorities "were encouraged by President Dwight Eisenhower to confuse the public about the risks of radiation fallout during the atomic bomb tests in Nevada in the 1950s," etc. Trippett questions how to link expert and citizen together again and suggests the knowledge is often withheld from the "public" because of knowledge's relationship to power. He writes, and I'll quote extensively:

The citizenry's essential interest is not in knowledge per se but the social uses to which it is put. What is often kept from the citizen, in the form of knowledge, is social and political power. When demonstrations and controversies break out over seemingly esoteric technical questions, the underlying question, as Cornell University's Dorothy Nelkin puts it in a paper on "Science as a Source of Political Conflict," is always the same: "Who should control crucial policy choices?" Such

¹⁵ Frank Trippett, "A New Distrust of the Experts," *Time Magazine* (May 14, 1979), reproduced at: http://www.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,916784-1,00.html. Last accessed on November 28, 2011.

choices, she adds, tend to stay in the hands of those who control "the context of facts and values in which policies are shaped." On its face, the situation may help explain the mood of public disenchantment that has persisted long after the events— Viet Nam and Watergate—that were supposed to have caused it. Surely neither of those national traumas caused the drop of popular confidence in almost all key U.S. institutions that Pollster Louis Harris recently recorded. It also seems doubtful that either deprived the Administration's energy crusade of both popular support and belief. Could it be that many citizens simply feel foreclosed not only from knowledge but also from the power that knowledge would give them?... If it is reasonable for Americans to demand more candor, prudence—and humility—from the experts, it is also reasonable that the citizenry demand of itself ever greater diligence in using all available information, including journalism's increasingly technical harvest. Plainly the citizen's plight is not subject to quickie remedy. Yet any solution would have to entail a shift in the relationship between the priests of knowledge and the lay public. The expert will have to play a more conscious role as citizen, just as the ordinary American will have to become ever more a student of technical lore. The learned elite will doubtless remain indispensable. Still, the fact that they are exalted over the public should not mean that they are excused from responsibility to it—not unless the Jeffersonian notion of popular self-rule is to be lost by default.

In this estimation, knowledge itself isn't to be feared only its manipulation and how it is controlled and stockpiled like any other commodity or armament. Since it is the "expert" who maintains the tools to withhold and obfuscate, it is the category of the expert which has lost esteem when products marketed as beneficial turn out to be the things killing us. Communicating knowledge becomes the means to connecting the expert with the citizen and salvaging a democracy based—at least on the surface—on clarity and the common good. On the letterhead of *The Offices*, Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin presented a tripartite example of how knowledge withheld triggers catch up work and distrust, an example congruous with Trippett's contemporaneous take. Significantly, Holzer and Nadin level a complicated critique that chastises those that withhold knowledge while not sparing those who don't seek it and take "the path of least resistance". They write:

Bug Spray

What is a pesticide doing in the Long Island drinking water? As in many cases, the process that created this problem is invisible. Why do we always work backwards from a failure? We should start from a certainty. We know that pesticides are poison

and are unlikely to improve drinking water.

Invisible Man

It is safe to assume that someone invented the pesticide, someone sold it, and someone bought it. They were all motivated by the short term advantages the product could give. We can also assume that decisions have been made at various junctures to promote the pesticide's use. The wrong decisions were made. Now we are left to deal with the consequences of these decisions.

We Do It

We are encouraged to believe that someone is overseeing the decision making process. We are encouraged to act without questioning exactly what we are doing. For our part, we tend to choose the path of least resistance. This says something about how bad results seemingly appear from nowhere.

The text suggests that *The Offices* were intended to function as a way out of an impasse where information and knowledge are shrouded and protected. If the expert isn't going to give answers, perhaps the artist-citizen can elicit a response by probing for and asking the right questions.

If the questioning of the professional or the expert—or, perhaps better, the validation of the concerned artist-citizen—is waged by *The Offices* using borrowed language and symbolic forms from that very terrain (i.e., the business card, the consultation meeting), it demonstrates that a critique and retooling of the relationship between expert and citizen must not be pure rejection. It is a willingness to assume the role of problem-solver that is as necessary as it is distrusted, especially at a time of collapse and uncertainty. It also reveals that the contradictory, directly oppositional logic used to encounter anti-modern, barbaric impulses might not be apposite to this later historical moment when the limits of unadorned refusal are already known. That is, an aesthetic of sheer negation or a politics of pure opposition are doubted when—from the vantage point of 1979 (and even today)—the same economic and political structures that led to Vietnam and other recent disasters are still in

place after a generation of protesters and conscientious objectors. As is probably evident, using language that opposes "professional" or "expert" with "amateur" is not so distantly removed from an earlier dialogue that sought to historicize, as Benjamin Buchloh puts it, "the modernist credo of deskilling." In Buchloh's discussion of what, in other instances, has been called "the return to order," his argument seeks to establish the different ways in which artists have reacted to "the seemingly irreversible elimination of subjectivity under the conditions of advancing industrialization and democratization." He writes of an antimodern return to "an antidemocratic, if not outright aristocratic and anti-industrial aesthetic" where artists placed "renewed emphasis on artisanal skills and the virtuosity of competence to assert the disciplinary boundaries between artistic and techno-scientific forms of knowledge." ¹⁸ If one strain of modernism was directed towards exploring modes such as the readymade and the photograph (specifically the type of amateur photograph used / taken by Ed Ruscha) that would "achieve actual forms of a new egalitarian communicative culture," it was a position that was attempting to find a way out of a reactionary impasse that sought a return to "privileged knowledge" and the conservative political formations usually buttressed by that form of privilege. If the late 1970s and early 1980s saw a rabid return of and retreat to antimodern painterly strategies such as narrative, figuration, and representation in the Neo Expressionists (i.e. Julian Schnabel, Eric Fischl, etc.) as one retrograde strategy of presumptuous confidence and bravado in the face of global political and economic failure, the contemporaneous adoption of various appropriation strategies by artists demonstrated that the heroic subject was nothing but a myth conjured by commercial and political cultures drilled into consciousness by the ubiquity of advertising. Could The

¹⁶ Benjamin Buchloh, "Raymond Pettibon: Return to Disorder and Disfiguration," October 92 (Spring 2000): 38.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Offices be seen as modeling their practice on the readymade form of the corporation and a reevaluation of aesthetic skills as a countermodel to or a complication of the category of the "skilled" expert? Can the embrace of deskilling or the deskilled then be seen as analogous to their attention to Productivism's (via Haacke's) adoption of use value as a way out of modernist cul-de-sacs? If so, can we posit that just as functionality was a way for *The Offices* to reject ideologies and subjectivities passed down through regressive, inherited forms, deskilling permitted "critical analysis of the specific social, political, and ideological interests that certain forms of aesthetic knowledge have served and fulfilled"? Or perhaps we can see *The Offices* embracing a form of deskilling that doesn't solicit new answers but breaks down the paradigmatic and elicits the questions that lead to better communications between the expert and the citizen.

Richard Prince, another member of *The Offices* and the one artist in the group not also associated with Colab, was at this very moment exploring a complicated renegotiation of the strategy of deskilling where the readymade *and* the photograph were inseparable. Tearing advertising photographs from sources such as the *New York Times* and various Time-Life magazines and re-photographing them, Prince deftly undermines the supposed privileged place of artistic creation by merely making *again* what is already there as he demonstrates that our psychic desire for heroes, models (as in exemplary formations), and validated orders is a marketing tactic subsequently internalized into how we form ourselves (or, more passively, *are* formed) as subjects. His further elaboration on a form of aesthetic production active in the work of Andy Warhol from the 1960s demonstrates Prince's ready dismissal of originality as a motivating factor. His appropriation of the readymade images of a commercial culture and his use of the accessible technique of the amateur snapshot (Prince

²⁰ Buchloh, Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry, 210-211.

spoke of his nonexistent skills in 2003: "I had limited technical skills regarding the camera. Actually I had no skills. I played the camera. I used a cheap commercial lab to blow up the pictures. I made editions of two. I never went into a darkroom."²¹) suggest the eschewal of power and mastery. While a presentation of the fundamental powerlessness of the images is a necessary antidote to the very real psychic power exerted by the originals and counters the Neo Expressionist embrace of a heroic, branded self, their traffic in the same system of objects and images they mean to contradict leaves them, at best, inert and, at worst, available for recuperation and cooptation (as we've witnessed in the fairly recent market frenzy for a masterly Richard Prince). But if we see appropriation as one way out of this hollow and compensatory desire to recuperate a moment before collapse and failure, I propose that The Offices adopt the functionality and guise usually associated with the professional to deplete expertise's aura of authority and invincibility (and invisibility)—as the rephotographs dismantle the implicit intent of the originals—as it affirms the problem-solving and method based labor often employed in the most radical, advanced, and systematic of artistic practices (for instance, those of Daniel Buren or Hans Haacke). But caution should be taken, as the simple distrust of experts is a leitmotif that is ideologically promiscuous: the hippies blamed the expert technocrats, politicians, and big business for the Vietnam War; punks pinned expert media manipulators for the commercialization of music and the neutralization of subcultures; the religious right casts dispersions on expert scientists for parading as facts those hypotheses that might undermine certain spiritual convictions. The Offices resist the pessimism of plain refusal (the t-shirt ready sloganeering of "don't trust experts") by adopting a methodology of working premised on another tripartite proposal and admonition: "avoid useless work; rework anything; work for yourself." This do-it-yourself proposition is

²¹ Steve Lafreniere, "Richard Prince Talks to Steve Lafreniere," *Artforum* (March 2003). Accessed last on November 28, 2011 at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_7_41/ai_98918646/

fundamentally in keeping with the punk rock ethos of this period that saw its artistic correlative in the work of Colab who mounted frequent and on the fly exhibitions in lofts, storefronts, and squatted spaces. It is also a demonstrative rejection of Guy Debord's dictum from 1953 (he alleges)—later embodied in the popular images and language of the Paris protests of 1968—"ne travaillez jamais" ("never work") as another form of failure or a sign of too passive protestation. Foregoing the entrenched mechanism to be "discovered" and placed within a discourse, punk rock and Colab constructed situations that outflanked the normal routes of validation by actively creating their own scenarios. The tripartite methodology (or directive) was reproduced on a flier they produced announcing a 1980 exhibition in Los Angeles that coincided with a "business trip" there where they "heard inquiries from and recommended changes for the Los Angeles area" and where they:

worked with these clients: LA Public Library—working conditions; Global Marine Development, Inc—offshore structures for biomass and thermal gradient energy; Bob Zimmerman, artist-civil engineer—offshore cities; Foundation for Art Resources—relation of art support systems to collaborative ventures; I.C. Chuang, civil engineer—space-frame structures; Vic Henderson, Randy Davis, David Amico, Artists—layout of downtown LA; California Institute of the Arts—panel discussions: responsibility of artists for material conditions; Glenn Small, architect—how recent art gives definition to his work; Don Piccard, balloonist—suspended canopies; UC-Irvine—film showing better use of Irvine terrain; KPFK—public radio call-in show: specific problems, specific responses (air pollution, public-access TV, implications of media choice.

The Offices proposed "adaptable" services and "suggestions" for future action. These were not dictates from one who, by definition, should know better than another; this was a process of slowing down the compulsion to act that often leads to uninformed actions. As appropriation worked from a world readymade and encrusted with the armature of myth and power in an attempt to reveal dissembling surfaces, *The Offices* crucially began from a practice based on an iterative operation—to *rework* refutes the naïve optimism and egotism that one can remake, that one can work from scratch. Though *The Offices* function in a world where

faith in experts has been lost, they retained the importance of having the tools to shape a world whose malleability need not only form violence and strife. The idea is not to destroy the problem-solving functionality we usually expect from professionals and experts but to reimagine who might make the new solutions and to reconsider the means through which we arrive at them. The six artists assumed a name and guise that historically functioned as an imprimatur. But when that history is tarnished, the name functions like an appropriated photograph of a time, place, or product we should have known better than to just accept on someone else's word.

Before digging too deeply into the conditions and concepts of work and labor involved in The Offices, it seems important to gain some understanding, best in the words of those who participated, of the project's aims. In a 2008 interview with David Joselit and Rachel Harrison, Peter Fend begins his discussion of his later practice with a segue into *The* Offices. He says, and I'll quote at length:

In 1979, Jenny Holzer conceived a sort of spin-off called *The Offices*. This was in line with her fantasy of being a lawyer, and also of communicating with and providing services to normal people, not art people. She and I had both wanted to be, or been pushed to be, lawyers. So we thought, 'Why can't we be art lawyers?' That is to say, have clients, have a firm, have credentials, and work in a real-world mode. So Jenny, for example, initiated our going to the UN. These were people in policy-making positions, we thought, who knew little or nothing about art but could gain the benefit of artists' ideas. She thought we could begin with the International Labor Organization. She wanted to spread the idea, a theme we worked with, of Pleasure / Function,' that the choice of work should align also with what gives pleasure. We had a meeting in an ILO office near the UN Building; I don't think anything concrete came of it. But I liked the idea of dealing with such people. Medical doctors, for example, don't just do business with collectors of medical artifacts. They do business with normal people needing expert help. So, we could do projects having to do with clients' needs. This included starting White Columns, which was previously called 112 Greene Street. We came in, as a consulting group, and renamed it White Columns.²²

Fend's comments point to the ongoing negotiation within artistic practice about how to reconcile art practice with traditional forms of labor and the labor movement. But as

²² David Joselit and Rachel Harrison, "A Conversation with Peter Fend," October 125 (Summer 2008): 118.

opposed to the artists associated with the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s or those who participated in the Art Workers' Coalition that was formed in 1969, The Offices didn't emulate blue-collar labor groups that might suggest a class identification that would be misplaced or presumptuous. Modeling their practice after a consulting or a law firm demonstrates an acknowledgment that their class and educational backgrounds (all had, at least, college or university degrees) made it impossible for them to suggest solidarity with "labor" by adopting the guise of a fellow traveler. Instead, assuming the administrative, white-collar model professes that solidarity is based on political commitment to the issue at hand rather than personal or emotional allegiance. Nevertheless, it's striking that one of the first attempted projects was with the International Labor Organization given that, in the words of Julia Bryan-Wilson in her writing on the AWC and the politics of 1969, "the yoking of art to labor was especially charged given the changing status of workers within the thinking of the U.S. New Left, which distinguished itself from earlier leftist organizing in part by reorienting energy away from union labor activism." Bryan-Wilson continues, "Rather than believing that only blue-collar workers were the potential agents of revolution, New Leftists began to champion 'intellectual laborers' such as students and artists." But it isn't pure nostalgia for another period of labor rights and identification for which Holzer and The Offices are pining by associating themselves with the ILO. During a time known for the economic transition to postindustrialism where service-oriented work and the management of information supplanted industrial production and manufacturing, The Offices preface being embedded in the contemporary knowledge and information economy through their "immaterial labor" as their desire to work with the ILO demonstrated a profound sensitivity to the lives of workers impacted by the violence of a new economic order that

²³ Julia Bryan Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 4.

tramples upon those who no longer fit. This imagined suturing of economic orders—the bridging of the postindustrial with the industrial instead of a theory of one order eclipsing another—suggested by *The Office's* desire to work with the ILO reveals that they didn't necessarily buy into the New Left's rhetoric that a radicalized intelligentsia would replace the working class as the catalysts of political change. In a capitalist economy, change comes at another's expense and people are displaced with the old economies that are no longer. A model of collaboration through consultation avoids possibly demonizing or making invisible or erroneously (and egregiously) "speaking on behalf of" a class of people who are most susceptible to political neutralization and economic blight when jobs are lost and voices are silenced. It becomes a process of working together, of communicating between groups with separate expertise. Even if this project never led to anything "concrete," a program of seeking client-collaborators that straddle historical and economic periodizations suggests work done in the service of subjects often lost behind corporate or political edifices (and sweeping historical narratives). But what exactly is the work that *The Offices* aim to do? How do "esthetic services" and "consultation" aim to rework an impaired world at a crossroads?

In a manifesto-like text entitled "Here to There" and dated December 1, 1979, Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin establish what could be conceived of as the guiding logic and the mission statement of *The Offices*. They wrote:

The present system deadens our sensibilities and threatens our well-being. Society must be reworked so it is more responsive to our needs. It is not adequate to expose social ills or to deal with problems symbolically or metaphorically. It is realistic to act directly to propose and implement an improved order. It is time to clarify rather than confuse. The basis for effective action is acknowledging there is no neutral stance; it is important to understand the implications of what we do on a daily basis before undertaking larger revisions. Then it is reasonable to assume the power and responsibility to attempt a more pleasurable, more functional system. Pleasure and function are not mutually exclusive; both are required for a non-coercive, supportive society. A desire for what works is a legitimate point of departure. Procedure should not rely on ideology, activity should not illustrate it. Every problematic situation is unique; inherent in our response should be an appropriate course of action.

Constructing a practical methodology is an appropriate course of action. We advocate integrating esthetics with practice to supply points of reference that will, by force, better our position.

If one facet of the postindustrial economy was the increased reliance on information management and dispersal as an engine of growth, we see Holzer and Nadin functioning within this order yet advocating a position where gained knowledge is only valuable if it helps put into practice what will "better our position." This insistence on action and direct advocacy is what differentiates the ambitions of *The Offices* from Hans Haacke's important and prefiguring practice where research proved (rather than Holzer and Nadin's "acknowledging") that "there is no neutral stance" and yet did so frequently at a journalistic or scientific remove. In a project such as his 1974 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees, Haacke investigated what ties connected corporations and those responsible for guiding the museum's mission. As expected but only revealed because of Haacke's research, a number of trustees had dubious business interests, including ties to the Kennecott Copper Company which "had played a central role in the brutal overthrow of democratically elected Chilean president Salvador Allende in 1973."24 While we can imply through a work such as Haacke's that the museum isn't the bastion of neutrality and ideological purity it is romanticized to be, the mechanism that might compel change or action isn't implicit to the work. The Offices, in a fit of measured optimism, make action explicit to their work and insist that critique (the exposing of "social ills") is a necessary first step but inadequate for preparing a "course." The desire to move beyond the institution of art recognized, in a manner consistent with Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, that those who wage and control power have a vested interest in permitting, confining, and naturalizing some critique by permitting it to such an extent that the viewer / citizen is contented with this

²⁴ Ibid., 208.

sanctioned protest. That is, if institutions such as the art museum contribute in shaping the parameters of citizenship, they can also serve as the decompartmentalized arenas where displeasure and critique are welcomed to gather specifically so they don't spill into other pools of economic and political life. Julia Bryan-Wilson smartly connects Haacke's description of his work as a "double agent"—working within the institution to show its very fallibility and ideological construction—with Herbert Marcuse's validation of Rudi Daschle's notion of the subversive potential of "the long march through institutions... working against the established institutions while working in them... by 'doing the job,' learning... and at the same time preserving one's consciousness in working with others." The Offices continue upon this march but take Dutschke and, by extension, Marcuse at their word when they insist on the plurality of institutions, an extension and departure from Haacke's decidedly focused examination on art institutions and their complicit relationship to power. The list of "clients" they met with in Los Angeles—from public libraries to individual entrepreneurs to universities and media organizations—demonstrate both the determination to exceed the perceived insularity of art institutions and the desire to investigate if some common ground might exist between and among fields usually regimented and separated into islands of expertise. Holzer and Nadin, in another text from this period entitled "House & Office," use the metaphor of the wall to describe the ideological barriers that form locked-in and patrolled enclaves of knowledge. The insinuation is that strict disciplinarity doesn't aid—as they called for in "Here to There"—in forming the specific methodologies that will contend with the "unique" and "problematic situations." Their concept of a "system" insists on a theory of integration ("integrating esthetics with practice," for example) to address problems—no matter how unique—that are always in relation to other problems. In that case,

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²⁵ Ibid., 181-2.

the specificity of methodology doesn't depend on the *delimitation* of knowledge and disciplines (and, by extension, enforced borders of places and bodies) but on the opening of structures to reveal the strangling ties—a first step at working to undo them. The text reads:

The walls inside our modern house or office were built by someone for someone to keep someone out. The walls provide only the illusion of security. Is it appropriate to expect isolation and safety when the structure actually is thin and fragile? Should we build stronger barriers or should we acknowledge and react to the real properties of the structure (that it divides for its own perpetuation and well-being without protecting us)? By staying within our designated spaces we cooperate with the effort to part us. Separation maintains this system of suspicion and threat. We must realize we are vulnerable. We must eliminate the dangers posed by the existing structure.

Reading this text at a time when Republican candidates for the United States presidency are outdoing one another in their proposals for grander, larger, taller, thicker, and more electrified fences to separate the border shared with Mexico, we witness another instance where a complicated debate over race, economics, and the very function of the nation-state (and each issue's relationship to the others) is whittled down to a simplistic brawl over a wall. The admonition to realize and accept vulnerability rejects xenophobic and other fear-based accounts where the Other is responsible for any and all harm and that resistance is the only form of protection. Rather, praxis based on vulnerability insists that availing one's self to the Other is the only method that reveals the structural impediments instantiated to safeguard the current order of things. Eroding disciplinarity functions analogously to this opening to the Other by its assertion that strict separation subtends the illusion of knowledge production as it props up the guise of protection.

But the porosity of disciplines advocated by *The Offices* doesn't mean advancing their total collapse or eroding the potency of specialization. Unlike the melding of art, sciences, and politics proposed for the "Free International University" by Joseph Beuys—who was an active presence in the New York art world in 1979 given his retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum that very year—the collaboration implicit to *The Offices*'s model

resisted the formation of another, competing monolith where differences were subsumed under the pompous model of the gesamtkunstwerk or the corporate model of total dedifferentiation where control is exerted by neutralizing any individual's claim to competence. The humility of the model proffered by *The Offices* presumes that each discipline inflects the other when placed in relation to it—that is, the model insists that there are no hierarchies as it crucially maintains a politics of difference. The nimbleness of this interdisciplinary approach—where integration retains the validity and value of the individual collaborator in keeping with their desire for "a non-coercive, supportive society"—doesn't endeavor to consolidate or assume power, even if under a new name or different form. It sidesteps the reflex to claim power—or avoids power's recuperative attempts to claim success—by only dealing in specific interventions where "every problematic situation is unique." As a collaborative body itself, The Offices internally functioned as a system that resisted the compulsion to advance a singular vision that frequently borders on the mythic and the totalizing. In the same document that discusses the Los Angeles trip and client meetings, The Offices specifically address their composition and working method: "As individuals, we encompass diverse political and esthetic viewpoints. As a consulting firm, we collaborate to effect workable improvements." The emphasis on diversity within the organization is a way of publicly attesting to the power (or perhaps more fittingly, the efficacy) of heterogeneity and internal inconsistency. It is a way of submitting that the politics or ideologies of any individual is tempered, balanced, or contested by others before being ratified as a consensus approach; or it is a matter of making evident and obvious that any recommendation in the advancement of "workable improvements" is shot through with a multitude of voices with varied origins that yields no final pronouncement. It is too little remarked that Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of "polyphony"—or the co-presence of voices and

subject positions in a text that never reconcile into a domineering or controlling vision—in the works of Dostoevsky came at a historical moment when Stalin was consolidating power and remaking the guise of the state as indistinguishable from the visage of the ruler. It is this same violent consolidation that led to Bakhtin's banishment and, ultimately, the delayed reception of his pioneering work in literary analysis and linguistics. If we see Bakhtin's analysis as an astute reading of works fashioned to posit truth as a formation and subject positions as shifting as well as a contemporaneous critique of a political order that had abandoned the revolutionary possibilities of communitarian action for the myth of the individual leader, I would suggest that the polyphonic "diversity" of The Offices was a Bakhtinian attempt to address problems in non-totalizing forms. The rejection of mastery also was a refusal to be—or more precisely, the fervent wish not to be—mastered. Just as we witness the teetering instability of truth in the manifold articulations of Holzer's Truisms, The Offices compel the citizen / collaborator who seeks its services to undo presumptions as they reconstruct the models that will establish a "more functional system." This is a form of reworked specialization, a renegotiation of disciplinarity, that takes collaboration seriously. If the "specular surrogates for identity" nullify debate and critique into a flat sea of equivalence, maintaining the possibility of desire and a better position submits that subjects (in relation, in dialogue, at work) still have a viable place in a roiling public life.

As discussed earlier, small narratives, radical reappraisals, and limited, realistic ambitions are frequently crushed in the retrograde rush to compensate for decline with conservative comforts. Finding heroes making paintings tempered the vertigo of those who could no longer feel the ground and wanted to. But heroic painting was only one specialized manifestation of a regressive cultural kick. Heroes, as a category, were desired across the historical and political landscape. The election of the movie star, Ronald Reagan, in 1980

made this psychic kick a potent reality. Aspirational in its prophetic gesturing toward the grand, Reagan's 1981 inauguration speech downplayed the types of incremental and functional improvements that a group like *The Offices* aspired to enact. The speech surrendered the often anonymous and collaborative work of improvement to heroes and dreams. Reagan said:

It is time for us to realize that we're too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams. We're not, as some would have us believe, doomed to an inevitable decline. I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. I do believe in a fate that will fall on us if we do nothing. So, with all the creative energy at our command, let us begin an era of national renewal. Let us renew our determination, our courage, and our strength. And let us renew our faith and our hope. We have every right to dream heroic dreams. Those who say that we're in a time when there are no heroes, they just don't know where to look.²⁶

The Offices was decidedly a project that rejected the very category of the hero, a rejection very much out of step with its—and to a large extent, our current Reagan-obsessed—time. To this day, many of its past members, including Holzer, choose to emphasize what they see as its failure. Holzer, in an unadorned attempt to dissuade me from writing about the project, said: "There's very little to know about *The Offices*." Peter Fend, in correspondence with Coleen Fitzgibbon, bluntly stated that *The Offices* "did not work" and "the experience was noteworthy but was also unsuccessful... It did not even get off the ground." Perhaps this fixation on its perceived failure—instead of the promise it offers as a model for inter and cross disciplinary collaboration—is symptomatic of the pervasive narrative of success that only values results. Within that logic, the branding of "White Columns" certainly isn't a career-maker. Perhaps it comes from the disappointed vantage of those who sought a way for art practice other than the gallery-museum nexus only to be crushed by an art world that,

²⁶ President Ronald Reagan, Inauguration Speech. Reproduced at: http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres61.html. Last accessed on November 28, 2011.

²⁷ Email to the author on November 7, 2011.

²⁸ Email to Coleen Fitzgibbon from Peter Fend on February 5, 2011.

in Peter Fend's words, "turned sharply to the right in 1980."²⁹ Or perhaps it is because, with historical hindsight, one can witness the voracious and insatiable capacity the corporate world has for devouring counter-models and turning them into the engines that raise new markets out of stillborn economies. For example, every corporation worth its publicity and marketing outlay touts the diversity of its employee pool not only for its productive jockeying of ideas and solutions but to suggest being representative of the global marketplace. Or perhaps it is because the management-consulting model they chose to emulate—even with considerable adjustments, particularly in terms of the clients sought—has become synonymous with a culture whose rigid realignments benefit the corporate state and shareholder bottom line as they force workers and the middle class into even more tenuous states of existence.

But from the vantage point of my writing in New York in November of 2011, more than two months into the Occupy Wall Street protests in Zuccotti Park, more than a year after the landmark *Citizens United* case that afforded corporations many of the rights of individuals, at another time when anger and distrust toward the experts that coordinated this economic and political mess continues to mount, *The Offices* offer a model that is an alternative to (though largely in sympathy with) a culture of protest that frequently lacks political practicality and the tools to channel righteous anger towards systematic and structural change. Going beyond the first order refusal of the dominant order, *The Offices* offered services that sought to reevaluate whether corporate means of valuation and success were the only means to adjudicate whether progress had been made. The gritty individual addressing of the unique "problematic situation" deflates the romance of protest that often has its own en bloc ideology. Resisting this generalizing (and, alas, corporatizing) impulse,

²⁹ Ibid.

The Offices refused to illustrate or rely on ideology and saw legitimacy, to again quote "Here to There," in each "point of departure." For the same organization to advocate personal pleasure and the acceptance of bodily vulnerability as means to begin countering the "existing structure" and "current system" is to see a direct correlation between the maintenance of radical subjectivity and the end of business as usual. In his 1972

Counterrevolution and Revolt, Herbert Marcuse called for an art that held in tension "a dialectical unity between what is and what can (and ought to) be." In Holzer and Nadin's "Here to There," the services of The Offices are humbly offered as a way to get beyond the present through uses whose values are still to be determined.

³⁰ Herbert Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 93.

Chapter 4

I Want to Go to the Future Please: Jenny Holzer's Laments and the Politics of Temporality

I love Matisse's *Dance*, but it seems now that the really important subjects to go after are the things that could kill everybody. And these things tend to be extremely negative. It's possibly more acute in New York because every aspect of life here is an emergency.

Jenny Holzer, 1986

The ceremony was short and simple and tense. The rectangular coffin was built in unpainted plywood by Peter Ballantine who also built most of Judd's plywood sculptures.

Rudi Fuchs, on Donald Judd's 1994 funeral

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At some point in the editorial process for an essay I was commissioned to write on Jenny Holzer's light projections, I received a draft with the artist's comments. I don't think it was meant for my eyes, but the editor felt I needed to see one pithy command in particular—and without his mediation—to determine where and how to go from there.

After a brief discussion of the electronic signs, stone sarcophagi, and texts that constituted Holzer's *Laments* series and its installation at the Dia Art Foundation in 1989, I made a parenthetical aside that Holzer was never diagnosed with AIDS, the prominent and ostensible subject of the work. Her admonition couldn't be clearer or more direct in its red text: don't go there. Though time has buffeted the blow of what I now clearly recognize as a deserved reproach, I was initially at a loss for why I'd been upbraided without even a grunt of elaboration. Isn't it part of my function as a historian to untangle and specify the constituent factors that wittingly or not contribute to the artwork's reception? If so, isn't serostatus as valid a frame to question and explore identity and identity's problematic role in artistic formation as gender, race, and sexuality are? Or was my transgression presuming a status I only assumed because I've never been disabused of that notion and have known her

¹ An expanded and re-worked version of this commissioned essay is the fifth chapter of this study.

as seemingly healthy? Or could it be construed that my attempt to "out" a status I assumed was negative an outrageous affront to solidarity—specifically with people with AIDS (PWAs)—premised not on diagnosis but total and undifferentiated equality? These—and others—were the questions and thoughts I attempted to flesh out as motivating Holzer's terse injunction.

But none, after much consideration, was apposite. For that particular essay, I dealt with the problem by ignoring it or, spinning the valence positively in my favor, tabling it for later. I simply removed the aside. But the question still kicked around, and I'm introducing this essay on the *Laments* with this anecdote because where I failed—and what elicited Holzer's comment—hinged on my anemic historical imagination and mistaken prioritization of the present. My problem was a historical and methodological one that I hope to redress. When Holzer first showed what would later be named *Laments* at Documenta 8 in June of 1987 (Figure 4.1), ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was barely two months old and Zidovudine (AZT) had only been approved for marketing by the FDA in late March of that same year. Though officially reported cases of AIDS in the United States had reached 32,000, the epidemic and crisis were still nascent. Given the prolong incubation period of the virus, testing wasn't immediately conclusive. One lived between and witnessed horrid and incommensurate temporal poles—the finality of the deaths of those around you, the prolonged, inexorable, yet hasty acts of dying, the determinate periods between tests or dosages, the elasticity of dread, the immediacy of results.

For me to assess and simply ascribe diagnosis in the past tense was to ignore the terror of living in the presence of a new disease—one that Holzer feared she may have carried—in the city it most ravaged. My declarative aside presumed something known, overwriting and dismissing the particularity of a historical, cultural, and social context

conspicuously burdened by the unknown. Writing from a current historical moment when the virus is manageable (if not yet curable) and new prophylactic drug therapies are being introduced, I neglected the very real state of emergency one lived in when the virus was ignored by political figures—President Reagan's infamous six-year-long failure to make a statement about AIDS—when the first rudimentary drug cocktails largely were financially out of reach especially given insurer's denial of coverage to PWAs, and when there was no positive prognosis if one tested positive.

When discussing her 2009 exhibition "ACT UP New York: Activism, Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987-1993" at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, Helen Molesworth succinctly pointed to the crack I tripped over. "It is so disturbing," she said, "that there seems to be this real sense of cultural amnesia around this pivotal time." While Molesworth's important exhibition was a crucial—though startlingly belated and nearly singular—attempt to resuscitate the precariousness of cultural and political acts at a time when there was nothing hyperbolic about claiming that SILENCE = DEATH, its sole focus was on the educative and agitprop materials that were the primary modes of address used by groups affiliated with ACT UP such as Gran Fury. While descriptions and analyses of some of these graphics will figure into this account, my particular examination of Holzer's project is an attempt to articulate a type of practice that doesn't cleanly square with the two dominant types of work produced during the AIDS crisis—the propagandistic work included in Molesworth's exhibition made in the service of advocating direct action and a form of elegiac or memorializing art that frequently used photography in a misdirected attempt to exacerbate and universalize the "human condition" of those who suffered.

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² "ACT UP Encore," *The Harvard Gazette*, 15 October 2009, available at http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/10/act-up-encore/

Work by artists such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres and David Wojnarowicz also fall between my too simplistic categories of production because they avoid the polarities of embracing either a propagandistic or a mnemonic function. But Holzer's project crucially signals towards each extreme—the breathless electronic signs used in the *Laments* and employed in her practice since 1982 spew language in a mode that carries the media and market imprimatur of information as purely instrumental and end-oriented (Figure 4.2); the stone sarcophagi intimate a heroic dead that won't be lost to the vagaries of time and a succession of myopic presents (Figure 4.3). By dialectically approaching what were generally seen as irreconcilable visual approaches to the crisis, Holzer wasn't purely advocating a non-aesthetic emphatically focused on contemporaneous militancy or an over-aestheticized treatment that frequently rendered the subject as victim and abandoned him to apolitical timelessness. Her hybridized approach kept the very issue of temporality—foregrounding time itself as a political and bureaucratic material—front and center by locating the criticality of keeping a memorial, even elegiac, function present alongside advocacy work made for the living in the aim of securing them a future.

Perhaps perversely, it's possible to attribute the amnesia that Molesworth suggests surrounds this period to the very success of ACT UP and Gran Fury. Though ACT UP vehemently insisted as early as 1988, in the wake of the life-saving introduction of protease inhibitors such as AZT, that 'THE AIDS CRISIS IS NOT OVER,' members such as Larry Kramer and Jim Eigo in their contributions to the ACT UP Oral History Project³ claim that

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³ According to its own mission statement, "The ACT UP Oral History Project is a collection of interviews with surviving members of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York. The project is coordinated by Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman, with camera work by James Wentzy (in New York) and (on the West Coast) S. Leo Chiang and Tracy Wares. The purpose of this project is to present comprehensive, complex, human, collective, and individual pictures of the people who have made up ACT UP/New York. These men and women of all races and classes have transformed entrenched cultural ideas about homosexuality, sexuality, illness, health care, civil rights, art, media, and the rights of patients. They have achieved concrete changes in medical and scientific research, insurance, law, health care delivery, graphic design, and introduced new and

their greatest success as an organization was their direct action work to force the FDA and pharmaceutical companies to release those virus managing drugs—the result of extensive labor, lobbying, and protesting of the near ubiquity of government inaction from 1982 and the first rumors of a 'gay cancer.' The fact that the ravages of the virus were significantly slowed in the United States gave the illusion that the virus was a period problem; and the polar visual means largely used to address the period either achieved their instrumental ends and were no longer of use or specifically commemorated a death but—perhaps unintentionally—transformed a life into a relic. Neither was capable of—nor was the graphic work of ACT UP / Gran Fury designed to be—an ongoing embodiment of the radical epistemological breakdowns that attended an unprecedented epidemiological collapse and quandary.

The ambition of this essay is to register how Holzer's work keeps alive the very debates about memory, information, advocacy, sexuality, and power that animated political life around AIDS in the late 1980s but also how those same debates questioned the role artistic production could play, if any, in cultural transformation. Writing about this period, particularly Holzer's project, is also a means to counter my own presumptuous sense of security in the present. Her direct lament to me—don't go there—only now seems related to ACT UP's insistence on the perpetuity of crisis. With new social emergencies erupting daily, it's an inexcusable luxury to proffer diagnosis without contributing in one's own way to myriad forms of treatment and analysis. While the AIDS crisis demonstrated this in extremis, vulnerability—to oppressive and obfuscating political orders, to ignorance, to disease—isn't a period concern. Working against historical amnesia, this essay suggests that the AIDS crisis

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effective methods for political organizing. These interviews reveal what has motivated them to action and how they have organized complex endeavors. We hope that this information will de-mystify the process of making social change, remind us that change can be made, and help us understand how to do it."

is with us whenever we're attuned to the protean and seemingly immune myths of inevitability and timelessness that continue to suffocate American political life and social imaginary.

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When you entered the *Laments* installation at the Dia Art Foundation in Chelsea in 1989 (Figure 4.4), you could walk into the dark. There was the possibility that the thirteen vertical electronic signs—each streaming a different text of varied length—affixed to the building's columns would have run their course of language and light. They would be waiting mutely to begin again in unison until, one-by-one, the solitary drops into darkness would begin once more. In this momentary vacuum, there would be some fumbling for bearing and place. Shoulders of strangers might errantly touch in that sticky duration of not being able to see. Visibility gradually would return in a burst of ascending text. In a narrow gallery parallel to the electronic room was a succession of thirteen sarcophagi (Figure 4.5), each with a different text that corresponded to the single LED sign with the same text in the adjoining space. The engraved writing, broken into lines consisting of a few words and centered, filled

⁴ The texts of the Laments series is reproduced here, with each separate text within the series separated by a forward slash: THE NEW DISEASE CAME. I LEARN THAT TIME DOES NOT HEAL. EVERYTHING GETS WORSE WITH DAYS. I HAVE SPOTS LIKE A DOG. I COUGH AND CANNOT TURN MY HEAD. I CONSIDER SLEEPING WITH PEOPLE I DO NOT LIKE. I NEED TO LIE BACK TO FRONT WITH SOMEONE WHO ADORES ME. I WILL THINK MORE BEFORE I CANNOT. I LOVE MY MIND WHEN IT IS FUCKING THE CRACKS OF EVENTS. I WANT TO TELL YOU WHAT I KNOW IN CASE IT IS OF USE. I WANT TO GO TO THE FUTURE PLEASE. / IF THE PROCESS STARTS I WILL KILL THIS BABY A GOOD WAY. SHE CAN LIE ON MY FAMILIAR BELLY. OUR BACKS WILL BE IN LINE AND THEN INDISTINGUISHABLE. I WILL TAKE HER DOWN BEFORE SHE FEELS THE FEAR THAT IS CAUSE AND RESULT. / WITH ONLY MY MIND TO PROTECT ME I GO INTO DAYS. WHAT I FEAR IS IN A BOX WITH FUR TO MUFFLE IT. EVERY DAY I DO NOTHING BECAUSE I AM SCARED BLANK AND LAZY, BUT THEN THE MEN COME. I PUT MY MOUTH ON THEM. I SPIT AND WRITE WITH THE WET. THE WET SAYS WHAT MUST STOP AND WHAT SHALL BEGIN. I SPIT BECAUSE THE DEATH SMELL IS TOO CLOSE TO ME. THE STINK MAKES WORDS TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT WHO KILLS AND WHO IS THE VICTIM. DEATH IS THE MODERN ISSUE. / NO RECORD OF JOY CAN BE LIKE THE JUICE THAT JUMPS THROUGH YOUR SKULL WHEN YOU ARE PERFECT IN SEX. YOU POSITION YOUR SPINE UNTIL IT WAVES. YOUR HANDS RUN TO SPOTS THAT FEEL DIFFERENT. BREATHING TELLS THE PERSON WHAT TO DO. YOU TRY TO STOP BECAUSE THAT IS THE FUN. THEN YOU SQUEEZE AND BECOME UNCONSCIOUS NEAR WHOMEVER

the expanse of the sarcophagi's top surface and assumed a roughly anthropomorphic shape. The sarcophagi were arranged from smallest to largest. The first was scaled to a child's body; the last would fit a full-grown adult.

While the use of electronics was de rigueur for Holzer in 1989 having turned to the devices after her use of the Spectacolor signboard in Times Square in 1982 (Figure 4.6),

WHICH IS THE DANGEROUS THING IN THE WORLD. AT THE END YOU DO NOT WANT. YOU CARRY THIS SENSATION TO THE CRUEL PLACES YOU GO. / THERE IS NO ONE'S SKIN UNDER MY FINGERNAILS. THERE IS NO ONE TO WATCH MY HAIR GROW. NO ONE LOOKS AT ME WHEN I WALK. PEOPLE WANT ME TO PAY MONEY FOR EACH THING I GET. I HAVE EVERY KIND OF THOUGHT AND THAT IS NO EMBARRASSMENT. I LOOK AT MYSELF WHEN I BATHE. WHAT I GIVE TO ALL THE PEOPLE WHO DO NOT WANT TO LIVE WITH ME IS ARITHMETIC. I COUNT INFANTS AND PREDICT THEIR DAYS. I SUBTRACT PEOPLE KILLED FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER. I GUESS THE NEW REASONS AND PROJECT THEIR EFFICACY. I DECORATE MY NUMBERS AND CIRCULATE THEM. / I HAVE A HOT HOLE THAT WAS PUT IN ME. I CAN LIVE WITH IT. PEOPLE MADE IT AND USE IT TO GET TO ME. I CAN HURT IT TOO BUT USUALLY I PUT MY THINKING THERE FOR EXCITEMENT. WHEN MY MIND IS RIGHT I CAN SAY WHAT NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR. I BRAG ABOUT MY INDIFFERENCE, BUT THE LAST KIND PART OF ME RAVES BECAUSE I WILL NOT BE THE ONLY DEAD ONE. I KEEP THE HOLE OPEN. / THE KNIFE CUT RUNS AS LONG AS IT WANTS. IT IS THROUGH MY STOMACH. I KEEP LOOKING AT IT. I HAVE MORE COLORS THAN I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT. THE HOLE IS LARGE ENOUGH FOR MY HEAD. THE HOLE WAS BIG ENOUGH FOR THEIR HANDS TO MOVE FREELY. THEY PUT THEIR FINGERS IN BECAUSE THEY SHOULD NOT AND BECAUSE THEY DO NOT GET THE CHANCE EVERY DAY. / I WAS SICK FROM ACTING NORMAL. I WATCHED REPLAYS OF THE WAR. WHEN NOTHING HAPPENED I CLOSED A ZONE WHERE I EXERT CONTROL. I FORMED A GOVERNMENT THAT IS AS WELCOME AS SEX. I AM GOOD TO PEOPLE UNTIL THEY DO SOMETHING STUPID. I STOP THE HABITUAL MISTAKES THAT MAKE FATE. I GIVE PEOPLE TIME SO THEY FEEL THEIR LIVES MOVING OVER THEIR SKINS. I WANT A LARGER ARENA. I TEASE WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF MY ABSENCE. / I WANT TO LIVE IN A SILVER WRAPPER. I WILL SEE WHOOPING ROCKS FLY. I WILL ICE ON MY BLACK SIDE AND STEAM ON THE OTHER WHEN I FLOAT BY SUNS. I WANT TO LICK FOOD FROM THE CEILING. I AM AFRAID TO STAY ON THE EARTH. FATHER HAS CARRIED ME THIS FAR ONLY TO HAVE ME BURN AT THE EDGE OF SPACE. FACTS STAY IN YOUR MIND UNTIL THEY RUIN IT. THE TRUTH IS PEOPLE ARE PUSHED AROUND BY TWO MEN WHO MOVE ALL THE BODIES ON EARTH INTO PATTERNS THAT PLEASE THEM. THE PATTERNS SPELL OH NO NO NO BUT IT DOES NO GOOD TO WRITE SYMBOLS. YOU HAVE TO DO THE RIGHT ACTS WITH YOUR BODY. I SEE SPACE AND IT LOOKS LIKE NOTHING AND I WANT IT AROUND ME. / DEATH CAME AND HE LOOKED LIKE A RAT WITH CLAWS. I MADE HIM GO INTO THE WALL. I KEEP HIM THERE WITH THE PRESSURE OF MY MIND. I HEAR HIM SCRATCHING AND CLIMBING. MY THOUGHTS FLY TO THE WALL TO SEAL THE CRACKS AND ADD PLASTER LAYERS FOR STRENGTH. I KEEP MY BRAIN ON SO I DO NOT FALL INTO NOTHING IF HIS CLAWS HURT ME. I DO NOT WANT TO LEAVE MY HOUSE AND THE PEOPLE I LIKE. I DO NOT WANT TO STOP KNOWING ALL MY FACTS. I DO NOT WANT MY BODY TO TURN INTO SOMETHING ELSE. WHEN A RAT MAKES YOU UNCONSCIOUS YOU GO ON A CONVEYOR BELT AND ARE DUMPED FROM THE END. YOU DROP IN SPACE AND NEVER HIT BOTTOM EVEN THOUGH YOU NEED TO AS TIME PASSES. / I CAN MAKE WOMEN'S BREASTS WEEP. I DREAM WORDS. MY IDEAS COME FROM MY SKIN. I WAKE IN TERROR FROM WHAT IS IN ME BEFORE EXPERIENCE. I CONJURE WHAT HAS NEVER BEEN TO DAZZLE MYSELF. I DO NOT WANT TO BE LEFT TO BE EATEN. I MOVE IN AN ENVELOPE OF ALL SMELLS. I HOOT WHEN MY BRAIN FILLS.

adopting stone was a new departure.⁵ She first incorporated the material into her practice in 1986, particularly in bench form for her *Under a Rock* series (Figure 4.7), in direct response to the persistent Cold War fear of nuclear eradication—particularly heightened given the 1986 Chernobyl disaster—and the horrific novelty of living alongside what was then described as an epidemic or, with more sinister religious and judgmental valences, a plague. She commented on this by saying: "Going to stone instead of paper or electronics was a result of thinking, 'Well, if everyone dies, this writing will stay on the rock.'" In addition to her apocalyptic motivations, she found that the memorial uses and connotations associated with a holocaust-surviving form permitted reflection on the boundaries of what made some lives—and not others—worthy of official commemoration. That the landscape is littered with the equivalent of state-sanctioned mourning totems to state-sanctioned violence (also known as monuments) makes her embrace of a memorial vocabulary at a time of mass death and government inattention especially evocative. While a thorough examination and historical contextualization of Holzer's chosen forms (both physical and linguistic) will be necessary to situate their use in this guise, it's critical to initially address the

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⁵ The Spectacolor sign (and LED signs more generally) is structurally consistent with the billboard, but it functions under the hybridized logic of the newspaper and television in its combination of content and advertising. The LED technology was introduced as a practical application in 1962 to be used as an indicator lamp in many devices. While LED technology has uses today that range from architectural lighting and automotive lighting, it is primarily used for signage. In 1982, Holzer was invited by New York's Public Art Fund to populate the massive electronic Spectacolor LED sign directly in Times Square as part of the their "Messages to the Public" series that began that same year (and lasted until 1990). The Public Art Fund, a nonprofit arts group based in Manhattan whose mission is to deliver art to publics in public space in New York City, began the work in Times Square when the artist, Jane Dickson, proposed its use. Dickson, a member of Collaborative Projects (or Colab) along with Holzer and who was instrumental to the "Times Square Show" of 1980 where a storefront was rented for a sprawling group show, already had been designing computer animation for the electronic billboard at One Time Square for its intended use—advertising and news transmissions. The idea was for the artist "statements" to be presented before, after, and in-between the normally scheduled programming. Holzer's project entailed displaying a selection of her Truisms there such as: ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE; MONEY CREATES TASTE; FATHERS OFTEN USE TOO MUCH FORCE; TORTURE IS BARBARIC; EXPIRING FOR LOVE IS BEAUTIFUL BUT STUPID.

⁶ Michael Auping, Jenny Holzer (New York: Universe Publishing, 1992), 90.

contemporaneous debate that raged at this time regarding the efficacy and use of art and art institutions to address AIDS and the AIDS crisis at all.

While the efficacy debate is a thoroughly entrenched leitmotif of modernist art production from Surrealism to Dada to Situationism, its reoccurrence permits reflection on the particular historical coordinates that motivate a return. The very site of Holzer's installation, the Dia Art Foundation, was especially engaged at this moment in examining the politics and possibilities of exhibition making in light of their opening a new center in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. While Chelsea had become the nucleus of gay life in New York by the late 1980s, the neighborhood was on the periphery of the art world until Dia's move there. Dia was established in 1974 by Heiner Friedrich and Philippa de Menil to support the types of projects—such as long-term, site-specific installations—that generally couldn't be (or just plain weren't) supported by normal collecting institutions. For this reason, the foundation's real estate ambitions were in keeping with the activity of passage implied by the translation of its name from Greek—"through." The peripatetic institution had no real 'home' but bought or rented spaces that were conducive to the realization of a particular project by one of a core group of—mostly minimal and post-minimal—artists whose work the foundation also collected. For example, in addition to maintaining projects like the Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton, New York, and others, Dia sponsored and continues to maintain two large works in New York—The New York Earth Room and The Broken Kilometer—by Walter De Maria in separate spaces in SoHo that were commissioned in the late 1970s. Though Dia has long been associated with artists who came to critical prominence in the 1960s and 70s such as Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Fred Sandback, the opening of the Chelsea space allowed a continuation of their mission but with a renewed concentration on supporting work made in the present. Though the first installations in

1987 came from the collection, the press release from that same year announcing the preliminary programming of the West 22nd space articulates their recommitment to commissioning new works:

In keeping with the well established goals of Dia, programming for the 548 West 22nd Street project will in the future center on specifically commissioned work from single artists or collaborative teams of artists. Artists will be asked to consider the space and to work with Dia over extended periods in preparation for their projects. The intent remains to encourage new work on a scale and of a nature that might not find accommodation in other art institutions or among private collectors of art. Exhibitions will be long term, with a minimum duration of one year, to allow repeated visits and the opportunity to view the work over an extended period of time.⁷

While this statement of purpose and intent certainly relates to the foundation's mission, it also demonstrates an institution attempting to reconcile a reputation grounded in a certain history of art making—namely minimalism, post-minimalism, and land art—with the concomitant determination to reach new audiences and facilitate new production. I'm belaboring this institutional history to insist that the audience that would be drawn to Dia in the late 1980s—when Chelsea hadn't yet become an art center—would have been one generally familiar with the specificity of its approach. While artists and projects passed through, Dia itself would have been a destination for visitors. I'm laying this groundwork to establish the tactical precision of Holzer's project and its contiguity to—and attempt to bridge—community and institution.

With scheduling imminent for the new space, Dia convened a panel in June of 1987 of five arts professionals to meet and discuss what it would, and could, consist of. One participant, the artist and filmmaker (and, at that time, still instructor at the Whitney Independent Study Program) Yvonne Rainer, problematized the concept of the exhibition entirely by insisting that the institution focus as much—if not more—on the context of production as it does on objects isolated from the "social field in and from which the

⁷ Press release, "Dia Art Foundation Begins Major New Exhibitions Program," September 22, 1987, available at http://www.diacenter.org/press_releases/main/101

objects... derive their meaning."8 Under Rainer's advisement, Dia invited Group Material and Martha Rosler to produce projects that ultimately assumed a 'town meeting' format and addressed, respectively, the conditions under which democracy is enacted and issues regarding housing, urban planning, and homelessness. Instead of using the new venue in Chelsea, Group Material and Rosler were asked to situate their projects at the spaces Dia then maintained in SoHo at 77 Wooster Street for installations and at 155 Mercer Street for "open, public discussions." At this time, SoHo was the center of the New York art world and offered, in the words of Dia's director, "ready accessibility to the audience actively participating in this critical process as well as to the general public." But being kept out of Chelsea—in Rosler's words "Dia wanted to keep us both (me and GM) away from their fancy new space, and their mailing list" -- suggests that the institution didn't necessarily want too much attention placed on their choices of real estate and means of expansion. It could be extrapolated that the context of production that Rainer wanted to foreground was acceptable to Dia if the institution itself wasn't seen as a bad producer (or colonizer or gentrifier). While Chelsea has, at this writing, eclipsed SoHo as the geographical locus of the international contemporary art market, it was then a neighborhood—where there weren't warehouses and garages—that was ethnically diverse with a high concentration of gay and lesbian residents. The gay population moved northward from the old enclave of the West Village partially because of increased gentrification and skyrocketing real estate prices there and also to provide some geographical distance—as a substitute for desired but impossible psychological escape—from one of the epicenters of the AIDS crisis. At a moment when reckoning with the crisis and its impact entailed fighting for affordable housing and against

⁸ Brian Wallis, ed., Democracy: A Project by Group Material (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), xviii.

⁹ Ibid., xiii.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Email to the author, 10/31/2011. An email to Gary Garrels, then curator at Dia, was not responded to.

the evictions of residents unable to earn an income due to illness as well as pushing for the release of medicines and access to healthcare, the compounded issues of gentrification and real estate—as well as the particular rights of a citizen in a supposedly democratic society were crucial and timely cultural issues. By offering their programs in SoHo, Group Material and Rosler were addressing a readymade audience in a neighborhood already well in the process of evacuating any vestiges of economic and racial diversity and mixed-use function. That is, the gentrification that began in the late 1960s there was already ostensibly complete by 1987. By being refused access to the new "fancy space," Rosler and Group Material also were refused the opportunity to assess within the site itself what these vanguard real estate activities in Chelsea would mean for the neighborhood, its diversity, and the lives of those who called it home. Significantly, Rosler in her SoHo installation "posted a printout of Dia's real estate holdings on the wall during the final part of the exhibition, which was called 'City: Visions and Revisions. They (Dia) were not happy and made a special plea not to include it in the publication." Sometimes it's as damning (and nearly dialectical) to show the emperor's ample closet as it is to show him bare. By choosing to present programming in the form of multi-authored and collectively assembled exhibitions and pairing them with participatory formats including lectures, round tables, and other educative modes that were both consensus building and myth busting, both Group Material and Rosler affirmed the place of social engaged practices and those cultural institutions that supported their presentation as legitimate and even politically efficacious. But by not taking part in Dia's real estate expedition, they intimated that no amount of cultural work—even in the service of political aims—was worth the disruption of neighborhood and economic life that may adversely affect even a single life.

12 Ibid.

137

While Dia and the artists with whom it collaborated were attempting to negotiate the fragile relationship between art and cultural production and their direct and salient ramifications on social and political life, Gran Fury was issuing the blatant declaration that "WITH 42,000 DEAD ART IS NOT ENOUGH" (Figure 4.8). That text, with the added admonition "TAKE COLLECTIVE DIRECT ACTION TO END THE AIDS CRISIS," was published on one side of a December 1988-January 1989 calendar for The Kitchen, a non-profit art space in New York that primarily sponsors literary, new media, and performance practices. Those on The Kitchen's mailing list would have opened the monthly listing of events to find this Gran Fury poster as one side. On the other side, in addition to details about upcoming programming and placed between a listing of the institution's staff, board, and volunteers, the collective included a black and white photograph of AIDS activist demonstrators battling with the police (Figure 4.9). The image formally resembled the type of documentary and archival material that would have been familiar to those who followed performance practice, specifically those who would be on The Kitchen's mailing list. While the text certainly was meant to serve as a provocation to an audience disproportionately affected by the epidemic to goad them into doing more, the photograph could be seen as playing a more provocative role regarding the role art could play in addressing the crisis.

Though Gran Fury notoriously plundered and appropriated art historical references and forms—and I'll return to this specifically in regard to their 1986-87 presentation, *Let the Record Show*, in the window of The New Museum of Contemporary Art—their typical mode was to liberally borrow from artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer whose work specifically addressed the machinations of a mediated, media saturated world. Gran Fury's utilitarian embrace of efficient and already formulated types of address allowed them to effectively reached audiences and disrupt the blank ubiquity of most advertising. But what

was the role of this seemingly ambiguous photograph that sat in the layout without attribution or explanation—save for the fact that the calendar was "signed" as a Gran Fury authored piece? Sitting just above a list of scheduled performance events, the photograph could be mistaken as documentation or illustration of a past event or a press packet type image announcing what lies ahead. A familiarity with the documentary afterlife of performance practices—that they *live* through the photograph and the archive—might have sensitized someone on the The Kitchen's mailing list to Gran Fury's photographic provocation that lives were being fought for on the streets, outside of performance. The power of using a documentary style image frequently seen in the context of performance is the subtle critique it levels against the calendar's main audience. The black and white image conjures the missed iconic event passed down through these static remnants. The implication is that the dull monochrome and fetishized past satiates a passive audience even though history is being made in chromatic excess, and outside of art confines, in the present of New York City.

The provocation that attends the image—and resonates with the ART IS NOT ENOUGH text—is that an audience that yearns for historical participation in addition to historical and aesthetic contemplation will see the inclusiveness of the photograph as an invitation to act up alongside those pictured. But the possibility of generating this response is only conceivable because of the semantic slippage caused by the aesthetic similarity between demonstration and performance documentation. This is a slippage that distinguishes between political and artistic work but sees the importance of working in a panoply of modes to address and compel as many people as possible to act. Within Gran Fury, the astringency of the ART IS NOT ENOUGH claim was met with considerable debate. In a 1990 interview with David Deitcher, members of the collective voiced opinions that ranged

from the danger of polarizing artmaking and activism to affirming the propriety of the statement due to the general lack of response from the very figures in the art world—namely leaders of museums and galleries, as well as trustees and collectors—that wield political control through influence and wealth.

Tom Kalin raised concern about dictating that one form of artmaking—"terse, direct and didactic"—serve as the only one to address the crisis. And yet a repeated claim was a list of other responses that were not enough: "... art is not enough; fundraising is not enough; memorials are not enough... quilts are not enough." Though Richard Elovich considered the statement to be too open-ended and thus necessarily just grist for a regressive "art" argument (these were Elovich's own quotations, implying the argument's very limitations and lack of impact on more pressing health and human rights issues), part of the necessity of addressing the problem at all was the problematic nature of the artwork coming out of the period that wasn't didactic and that didn't address educative and public health issues that advocated, for example, safe sex and using clean needles. Michael Nesline suggests this when he very directly states: "I think there is an art argument to be made. I'm not so naïve about the art world as to perceive it as one monolithic thing, but there is a major part of the art world which takes in the latest issue and chews it up as fodder. I don't think that the AIDS crisis should be allowed to be exploited in that way by artists. And if we serve as a goad to prevent that from happening, then that's all for the best to me."

Though Nesline doesn't specifically address the artists or projects he finds problematic, Kalin does shortly afterwards, and they're specifically the same ones—or types of photographic projects by Nicholas Nixon and Rosalind Solomon—that Douglas Crimp

14 Ibid., 208.

¹³ David Deitcher, "Gran Fury" in Russell Ferguson, ed., *Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 204-5.

rigorously critiques in his 1988 paper "Portraits of People with AIDS." Crimp, an ACT UP member, art historian, cultural theorist, and author of the important 1990 study AIDS Demo Graphics that examined the history of ACT UP's protests, vigils, acts of civil disobedience, and attendant visual materials including those by Gran Fury and its members, constructs an essay that analyzes both the media's response to "putting a face" to AIDS as a "bureaucratic abstraction" and the portrait photography that became the way art institutions dealt with representing the crisis. He begins his essay by describing Nicholas Nixon's 1988 "Pictures of People" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art where some of those people were living with AIDS. Nixon's photographs of PWAs frequently are made in serial form where the individual sitter is represented over a period of time. The critic for the New York Times wrote at the time that "the result is overwhelming, since one sees not only the wasting away of the flesh (in photographs, emaciation has become emblematic of AIDS) but also the gradual dimming of the subjects' ability to compose themselves for the camera." While the contemporaneous reviews of the photographs almost universally praised them for their "unsentimental, honest, and committed portrayal of the effects of this devastating illness," 16 Crimp's damning assessment is that the images merely recapitulate the overdetermined stereotype of the enfeebled "victim" succumbing to a natural and inevitable death. ¹⁷ He quotes extensively from the account William Olander, the New Museum curator who invited Gran Fury to exhibit there in 1987 and who died of AIDS in 1989, gave of his experience

¹⁵ Andy Grundberg, "Nicholas Nixon Seeks a Path to the Heart," New York Times, September 11, 1988, H37.

¹⁶ Douglas Crimp, "Portraits of People with AIDS" in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 84.

¹⁷ Members of ACT UP boycotted the MoMA show for this very reason. Crimp describes the protest: "Sitting on a bench in a gallery where the photographs of PWAs were hung, a young lesbian held a snapshot of a smiling middle-aged man. It bore the caption, "This is a picture of my father taken when he'd been living with AIDS for three years.' Another woman held a photograph of PWA Coalition cofounder David Summers, shown speaking into a bank of microphones. Its caption read, 'My friend David Summers living with AIDS." The ACT UP members also passed out fliers that castigated those who would depict PWAS as people "to be pitied or feared, as people alone and lonely." Their desire was to counter this misconception and show PWAS as "vibrant, loving, sexy, beautiful, acting up and fighting back."

viewing Rosalind Solomon's "Portraits in the Time of AIDS" at the Grey Art Gallery because it neatly summarizes the problematic nature of these images that vanquish the sitter's privacy as they transform an individual into a depoliticized and ahistorical representation of disease:

The majority of the sitters are shown alone; many are in the hospital; or at home, sick, in bed. Over 90% are men. Some are photographed with their parents, or at least their mothers. Only four are shown with male lovers or friends. For the photographer, "The thing that became very compelling was knowing the people—knowing them as individuals...." For the viewer, however, there is little to know other than their illness. The majority of the sitters are clearly ravaged by the disease. (No fewer than half of those portrayed bear the most visible signs of AIDS—the skin lesions associated with Kaposi's sarcoma.) Not one is shown in a work environment; only a fraction are depicted outside. None of the sitters is identified. They have no identities other than as victims of AIDS.¹⁸

The claim that "art is not enough" becomes not only a provocation to do more direct political action work regarding safe sex, housing, and health care issues but a direct protest against art itself—and its institutions—if it was only going to be used to propagate ineffectual and ponderous, if not outright dangerous, caricatures of the passivity of viewers, subjects, and cultural production. Gran Fury's 1987-88 installation at the New Museum, "Let the Record Show," demonstrates and enacts their ambivalence towards art and art institutions. Mark Simpson, a member of Gran Fury and ACT UP, claims, "One of the reasons we accepted the New Museum project was because it made a window on Broadway available and we wanted that opportunity to reach everyone who walked by; not just people who go to the galleries. Since then we've considered doing projects in galleries, and we probably will, because of the potential that they offer to reach people." Simpson's comment suggests that the primary reason for accepting the offer was the real estate at their disposal. The storefront window offered access to passers-by who may or may not be actively conscious of—or even care about—the ideological power wielded by the museum as

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¹⁸ Crimp, Melancholia and Moralism, 93.

¹⁹ Ferguson, ed., *Discourses*, 209.

a supposed store of sanctioned knowledge—not just some other shop of commercially available stuff.

The museum and its space was used, in one sense, not as an active and embodied culturally specific material that could be détourned—in the very basic Situationist sense of replicating the structural attributes of a material, genre, or form only to evacuate its connotative associations by substituting radical or disruptive content—but merely as rent-free property. But the installation itself acknowledged the efficacy of the museum as an engine that could facilitate discourse or question basic beliefs on how power legitimates and produces information.

The focal point of the window display was a neon version of the SILENCE =

DEATH emblem. A predecessor to Gran Fury's propagandistic work, the Silence = Death

Project combined the eponymous text with the pink triangle that had been used by the Nazis

to mark gay men in concentration camps. Originally at their own expense, the six gay men

who called themselves the Silence = Death project printed the emblem on posters and

plastered them throughout Manhattan in 1986 in a manner analogous to print advertising as

well as Jenny Holzer's own postering work. The appropriation of the pink triangle

announced the history of violence directed towards gay men, the repression of those

histories, and the concerted effort needed to counter repression as permission for de facto

sanctioned violence. The obvious implication was that government inaction to the AIDS

crisis was no less egregious—and as deadly—as Nazi extermination practices. Incorporating

this other collaborative group's emblem into their display, Gran Fury simultaneously refused

the stultifying master modernist narratives implied by singular authorship—consistent with

Group Material and Rosler's Dia installations—as it embraced the propagandist's basic,

utilitarian drive to implement what is effective.

To exacerbate the contiguity of violent histories and suggest that the future will validate their accusations, Gran Fury included a blown-up photomontage mural from the Nuremberg Trials. In the words of Crimp, "Let the Record show indicted a number of individuals for their persecutory, violent, homophobic statements about AIDS—statements cast in concrete for the installation—and, in the case of then president Ronald Reagan, for his six-year-long failure to make any statement at all about the nation's number-one health emergency." Also included in the installation was an electronic (light emitting diode) sign that displayed a ten-minute loop of text that detailed the lack of response by the government to the crisis. Crimp suggests that:

If an art world audience might have detected the working methods of such artists as Hans Haacke and Jenny Holzer in ACT UP's installation, so much the better to get them to pay attention to it. And after taking in its messages, who would have worried that the work might be too aesthetically derivative, not original enough? The aesthetic values of the traditional art world are of little consequence to AIDS activists.²¹

From the perspective of political exigency, it's hard to disagree with Crimp's "whatever works" approach and description of cultural appropriation. But to place Haacke and Holzer under the umbrella of the "traditional art world" inaccurately situates their frequently antiaesthetic and decidedly tactical approaches as it downplays the complex historical and theoretical underpinnings of types of work that make them politically apposite to—not just visually useful for—ACT UP's larger project.

For example, the Haackean use of the Nuremberg image makes the argument that documentary photography can only be properly approached when its context is blatant and evident and the position of the image's author (or user) is clearly articulated.²² This is less a

²⁰ Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, AIDS DEMOGRAPHICS (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 15.

²¹ Ibid.

²² The most famous example of Hans Haacke's use of photography is his *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real-Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971). In this work, which incidentally led to the cancellation of a planned solo exhibition at the Guggenheim, Haacke paired seemingly innocuous photographs of New York tenement buildings with descriptions of those buildings' ownership and financials and charts that

specific argument about photography—though the concept of documentary objectivity has been rigorously challenged by, among others, Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler as early as the mid-1970s—than a visual argument regarding the veiled politics and ideologies that permit a subjected people to be spoken for as well as silenced. By using the electronic sign that was synonymous at this time with Holzer's work, Gran Fury advanced a theoretical argument latent in her work that information reflexively, if not challenged or queried, becomes a product of the technology that prepares it for consumption. Technology, in an argument that I'll substantiate later and that comes out of Herbert Marcuse's essay "Some Implications of Modern Technology," is not a neutral phenomenon but the ongoing process whereby the concept of the individual and individual rationality succumbs to systematic standardization that befits the maintenance and functionality of the hegemonic order. Perhaps contrary to Gran Fury's intention, their adoption of the electronic sign less effectively functioned as a mode to transmit information about AIDS than it emblematized that AIDS—the failure to adequately address it by those in power, the insistence by activists that a response befit the crisis, the sharing of news about treatments that weren't universally available and advising about prevention techniques—fundamentally concerned the politics of information management. Since the primary—and historical—function of the electronic sign was to transmit news in the form of headlines, stock quotes, and advertising, the information quotient was negligible compared to its capacity to simplify complex arguments into consumable statements that were frequently in the service of the financial and ideological ends of the advertisers or owners of the sign.

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detailed the complicated changing of hands of those properties. While Benjamin Buchloh sees the piece rearticulating how the sculptural experience was transformed from three-dimensional object to photographic presentation, the work also blatantly suggests that there is no such thing as a blank façade—there is a story and a spatial history behind every representation.

ACT UP's resentment towards—and intellectual argument with—the mass media's treatment of the crisis was its positioning of PWAs as "marginal" figures within American society—gay men, drug users, and minorities—and therefore their implicit denigration of the emergency situation. The crisis and virus were frequently sensationalized—the specter of the person infected and still promiscuous—instead of culturally and scientifically positioned. The sensational becomes a form of conceptual simplification and distraction that mimics the journalistic function to provide information regarding neglected political matters but—in bad faith and in the service of entertainment—fails to provide useful content. While the content that Gran Fury provided in their electronic sign was useful, the fact that it mimicked the abbreviated address usually found there and didn't stray from the untrustworthy "facticity" of the media format, inadvertently revealed that the mirror-side of the consumable is the disposable. The power of technology—particularly in the service of information management—isn't its obvious affirmation of the hegemonic. Its true power is the capacity to subsume the margin completely so there isn't any visible or represented form of an alternative. The illusion of equality makes an emergency crisis seem ridiculous—the sublime shock of a natural "irrational" catastrophe is permissible but the admission of systemic and endemic malfeasance directed towards an ailing minority would suggest that power functions by violent, intentional exclusion or negation. This would reveal the artificiality of power as a construction and not a natural right.

The problem that Group Material, Martha Rosler, and Gran Fury each variously addresses is how to challenge the apparatuses of a presumptuous power without surrendering the capacity to shape discourse—the very domain of power—or replicating it. In the same interview with Gran Fury that I've quoted extensively from already, Donald Moffett explains their initial disregard of the apparatuses associated with art institutions. He

said: "I think we used to thumb our noses a bit at the power and the performance of that complete art system, with its journals and magazines, but that power is real."²³ In response to Deitcher's follow-up question where he asked about the kind of power, Moffett replies, "The power of distributing the word, of telling people what some people are doing. The press has been crucial to us in a lot of ways, whether or not we want to acknowledge that, or respond to it, or just say it's okay."²⁴ Moffett's ambivalence towards the media and its relationship to Gran Fury is a manifestation of the thorny theoretical problem raised when the marginal is "given" the opportunity to speak from power's usual post.

I'll argue in the remainder of this essay that Holzer's Laments addresses this theoretical impasse by treating the institution and readymade forms recombinantly. A continuation and expansion of the argument I pursued in the first chapter where I analyzed Holzer's early textual productions as subtle alterations of known forms—such as the proverb and the manifesto—that destabilize the authoritative position of the traditional, this theoretical assessment and language that references biochemical processes takes on a completely different—and perhaps problematic—valence when used to address cultural production made in the context of a deadly virus. While David Joselit theorized a viral aesthetic in his writing on Nam June Paik in Feedback and Gregg Bordowitz more recently has analyzed the structure of the virus in reference to General Idea's 1987-94 Imagevirus and the collective's polymorphous repurposing of Robert Indiana's famous LOVE graphic, my discussion will not focus on how the insidious logic of the virus is replicated. My position is that the power implicit to an apparatus cannot be transferred as if it were an infection,

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²³ Ferguson, ed., *Discourses*, 206.

²⁴ Ibid., 207.

passed on by mere embodiment.²⁵ A notion of the recombinant examines power as—and understands it to be—a system of established forms whose elements need to be reconstituted in order for the address to be altered and yet remain effectual. In Holzer's case, genre-less language embedded in specific readymade objects freighted with historical connotations transforms the very functionality of each. While it's no coup d'état, the body is at least given an opportunity to speak. But to whom—to what individual bodies, to what idea of the body politic—is Holzer speaking with her *Laments* and, in particular, how is this evidenced by her choice to present the installation within the context of an art institution? And how does the concept of a recombinant aesthetic help us to situate how the address is performed?

As I explored in the first two chapters of this study, Holzer began her career working outside of the normal confines of the art apparatus partially out of a desire and political inclination to reach audiences not traditionally addressed by practitioners and proponents of high culture. Does moving *inside* concede then that the ambition of the earlier work—its truly utopian dimension—to participate as an agent in demystifying the forces and institutions that structure everyday life was somehow naïve? Or does it reveal an evolving concept—nascent in the particularity of the place of address in the postering work—of the specificity of cultural practice given the fatuous conceit of "the public"? Does the move

²⁵ Bordowitz writes about the viral as a concept and aesthetic formulated by William Burroughs to escape from hegemonic orders. He writes: "The virus is perceived as an ideal form, like a pure idea. A oneness infinitely repeatable as both one and many-all-the-same... For Burroughs, the virus was a soft machine: it survived by parasitic attachment to organic matter, transforming living tissue into inert material... Both capitalism and communism seemed to require the suppression of the homosexual, and queer Burroughs attempted to break free of all kinds of conformity. He attacked both corporate capitalism and state-sponsored communism by unleashing the infectious potential of homosexual desire." Gregg Bordowitz, *General Idea: Imagevirus* (London: Afterall, 2010), 12-13. While the concept has agency as a way to counter the unchecked spread of unregulated power, a model of negation bound so closely to the death drive only produces and replicates a breakdown of sense, reason, and rationality. This is important and clarifying work, but it fails to offer counter-models for (perhaps too optimistic or utopian) approaches to how everyday life and its forms can be reoriented—and *lived* with. My concept of the recombinant is indebted to the viral aesthetic but suggests that change can be activated in the reorganization—and not just replication and diffusion—of the known.

inside—not a permanent, but a provisional one—demonstrate a type of elastic, tactical approach to art making that realizes the impossibility of reaching "collective consciousness" and sees the alternative as addressing the particular shards of an always already shattered public? To work at Dia was to direct her production specifically towards two distinct audiences whose populations overlapped significantly—gay men and those men and women who made up the professional visual art community. As mentioned earlier, Chelsea had become the epicenter of gay life in New York by the early 1980s. By the time Dia moved to its location on West 22nd Street in 1987, organizations addressing the AIDS crisis—obviously in addition to businesses already there such as bars, restaurants, and book stores owned by and geared towards gay men—already had made the neighborhood home. Gay Men's Health Crisis, an organization founded in January of 1982 to share information and raise money to research what the Centers for Disease Control had then just declared an epidemic, had their offices just four blocks from Dia on 254 West 18th Street. Though located in the West Village, the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, where the majority of the ACT UP organizational meetings were held, was less than ten blocks away on 13th Street after the group purchased the former Food and Maritimes Trades High School in 1983.

The content of *Laments*—the mourning, militancy, and melancholy of living in a time scarred by the AIDS crisis—would have intersected with the everyday life and politics of the population of gay men who were Dia's immediate community and neighbors. At the same time, Holzer's choice to embed this content in forms like the L.E.D. sign and stone sarcophagi redolent with minimalist morphological associations would both address and interrupt the historical lineage and narrative of Dia itself and the movement most associated with it. Holzer's *Laments* unsubtly rebukes both modernist and minimalism art presumptions, particularly in regard to the politics of presence or the present. Michael Fried's infamous

argument that the minimal object creates an environmental mise-en-scene where the encounter becomes one with theatrical attributes is provocatively—and politically—actualized in Holzer's installation. Unlike objects of modernist art such as the early paintings of Frank Stella that the critic argued were fully and instantaneously accessible, Fried argues, the minimal object was a durational one. For him, according to Robert Storr, "the true modernist work of art was self-contained, immutable, indifferent to its surroundings, and as such always already 'present.'" Fried's description helped later critics, such as Hal Foster and Anna Chave, assert that the open-ended phenomenology seemingly inaugurated by the work really assumed a default to the experience of a white, male viewer. These assessments assert that minimalism, like the modernist work Fried tried desperately to differentiate it from, eradicates sexual, class, and racial difference in its presumption of spaces and experiences unfettered from the political.

Felix Gonzelez-Torres specifically leveraged the structure and surface appearance of minimal works in pieces such as his floor grids constituted of candy pieces and cube-like stacks of give-away posters that recall works by Carl Andre and Donald Judd. Recognizing the accuracy of Fried's assessment of minimalism's almost prop-like motivation of space into a scenario in which one could act and interact with others, Gonzalez-Torres—at the same historical moment that Holzer did—saw that he could enrich and reveal the non-neutrality of the space by using content that signified political concerns or made room for the presence of gay subjects. For example, two sets of poster sculptures were printed in 1989, each with an individual text: "Memorial Day Weekend" and "Veteran's Day Sale." Seemingly anodyne word choices, they simultaneously refer to the domestication and commercialization of ritualized and historic moments—as well as persons—cut off from context. Produced in the

²⁶ Robert Storr, "When You See This Remember Me," in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, ed., Julie Ault (New York: SteidlDangin, 2006), 21.

context of the AIDS crisis, the works also address the current lives lost or severely altered by government (in)action and the already present reflex to shop the memory away. His works could critique the usual occlusion of non-normative persons and indicate the ideological structuring of space while at the same time leveraging the participatory theatricality of minimalism through his recombinant forms. The boundaries of inclusiveness are questioned but still traversed for new ends where purity becomes as fatuous a concept as immutability. While the critiques of minimalism usually press on Fried's discussion of (and omissions regarding) the phenomenology of space, they neglect that phenomenology also pertains to the experience of time and, specifically, how one locates one's body in time as well as space.

In the works of Holzer and Gonzalez-Torres that reference minimalism but also the AIDS crisis, the politics of time becomes the pertinent issue by questioning the ideological constitution of *both* duration and presence. While the candy sculptures are returned to their "ideal weight" eventually after pieces are licitly taken, this oscillation isn't only a physical morphing where the size of the work diminishes then returns and where the individual piece is licked and sucked into incorporation. While the physical displacement radically challenges definitions of sculpture dependent on concepts of wholeness and structural integrity, the tangible displacement of time and the permanent displacement of death pervade the work as a matter of historical orientation. The immediacy of taking and eating signals a complicated reflection on how to be present (in pleasure, desire, pain, or just in the mundane) when others no longer, and you soon may not, endure. The mourning ritual that Holzer evokes through the use of the sarcophogi makes an awareness of death—and the politics of loss—the very condition for experiencing the present. Duration, a minimalist quality that Fried rightly ascribed to it, is the haughty presumption of survival—that one will be on the winning side of wealth, of politics, of health, and that your time won't be cut short. But

presence, that modernist trope, proposes a completeness and total lack of contingency that banishes—or just prefers to keep hidden—the machinations of ideologies that shape outcomes. The use of minimalist forms by Holzer and Gonzalez-Torres rupture the neutrality of temporal orders and recast time as a material influenced by presumption and prejudice: delays in drug approvals, rushed housing evictions, precipitous declines in T-cell counts, dosages taken at exact times for maximum effectiveness, long-term drug trials, waiting for the next election, only being able to visit a partner during 'official' visiting hours because you're not legally family, waiting for a diagnosis, waiting to die. These projects demonstrate that bodies are moved and touched by decisions, directions, and inactions that cut time into just another administrated order.

Before further addressing the theoretical claims and problems addressed by Holzer's morphological referencing, it's important to suggest that this work of citation wasn't a simple case of art historical name-dropping or a type of hall of mirrors theoretical insularity. Using these formal references and crisis content was analogous to specifically delimiting the scope of the address and claiming an awareness of audience as one does when using direct address in speech. Confining—or directing—the address wasn't a pessimist's retreat to an indoctrinated audience. Rather, it was a formal acknowledgment that any concept of universal and equal access ignores the internalization of cultural (or institutional) prohibitions, mores, and expectations that systematically bar and delimit in acts similar to unwitting self-censorship or inherited ideological parroting. These issues are particularly pertinent to Holzer's practice when the use of a technological form, such as the electronic sign, often saliently carried with it a naive optimism or illusion that access to mediums of authority is the same as access to authority itself or equivalent to somehow liberating repressed voices. For example, one of the basic failures of immediately crediting social media

technologies such as Facebook and Twitter for the apparent success of the 2011 Arab Spring is that it equates a homogenized protest of the existing power with the nuanced and systematic actions (let alone the very diversity of peoples in a variety of places laying claim to authority) that will ultimately govern and wield a new power. While the technology creates a scenario where the individual can expound, it has no agency in redressing the economic or cultural infrastructure that might translate information or opinion to systemic change. It neglects that corporations such as Facebook and Twitter have a vested interest in new ("emerging") markets (and the good PR that comes with good will) and that their borderless social dabbling and dilettante politicking gains profit and users of a capitalist citizenry who live as dual citizens enmeshed in the teetering national model. Finally, and most crucially, such technologically optimistic claims fail to register how the protester or individual is formed as a subject specifically through these new modes of authority (that simply masquerade as counter models). If one comes to speech and considers it a right only because he or she has been spoken to, doesn't this establish one's position as always subordinated? Doesn't the individual claim to power that the new tech-optimists see embedded in the form just become another myth of a mythologizing, salient, and pacifying power? This is the issue that Benjamin Buchloh addresses when discussing an early project of Holzer's.

While commending the young artist for tackling issues of "audience address and audience specificity," Buchloh ultimately critiqued her 1984 project *Sign on a Truck* for propagating the idea that permitting and allowing representation was coextensive with an analysis and debunking of the ideological structures that underlie representation itself. *Sign on a Truck* was a project that Holzer organized for presentation just prior to the 1984 United States presidential election. Making use of a thirty-foot tall Mitsubishi sign that Holzer rented at considerable cost with funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and

New York City's Public Projects in the Arts, the project took place at two locations in Manhattan and featured thirty videos by artists and authors, interviews conducted in the street where passersby were asked about their political concerns and opinions, and open microphone sessions where only audience participation created the image seen and the representation of a political reality expressed by the interlocutor (Figure 4.10).²⁷ Buchloh's assessment of the project ultimately hinged on what he claimed was its perpetuation of the myth of the "collective mind as being innately democratic" that only needs access to direct self-expression to realize its political ends. He faulted the project, in other words, for not foregrounding its own construction and structural limitations:

Without an artificial construction that accompanies the spontaneous representation of the collective consciousness, we shall be confronted simply with the voices of the ideological state apparatuses as they have been internalized, the synthesis of prejudice and propaganda, of aggressive ignorance and repression, of cowardice and opportunism that determine the mind of the so-called public (especially the white middle-class public, as Holzer's tapes showed abundantly). The artificial construction—Brecht's idea of the caption—is crucial to make the distortion of collective thought evident both to those who are constituted by it and to those who contemplate its representation on Holzer's video screen in the *Sign on a Truck* so that they may recognize and understand their own conditions: that the systematic depoliticization of the individual, the constant deprivation of information and of education tools, cannot be compensated for by the enforcement of consumption.²⁸

The art institution itself functions for Holzer like the artificial construction, or Brechtian caption, that specifies, and therefore limits, interpretative possibilities. This act of specification (or delimitation where organization and neighborhood alike are anchored with associations) also reduces the constituents—or members of that impossible collective—who see themselves or their world view replicated in that interpretative framework cum mirror. Though there may be a decline in something brute and statistical like sheer numbers of

²⁷ Artists/activists who participated in the event included Ida Applebroog, Jonathon Borofsky, Vito Acconci, Susan Silas, Madre, Leon Golub, Dan Hurley, Jeff Turtletaub, Mike Smith, Jolie Stahl, Claes Oldenburg, Keith Haring, Ben Chase, Jenny Holzer, Coosje van Bruggen, Randy Twaddle, Mark Stahl, Barbara Kruger, Mike Glier, Kim Jones, Justen Ladda, Shelly Silver, Kim Higgins, Maartje Higgins, Jacquie Leader, Patricia Blair, Craig Stockwell, Knight Landesman, Charles Guarino, John Fekner, Double Trouble, and Richard Admiral.
²⁸ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "From Gadget Video to Agit Video: Some Notes on Four Recent Video Works," Art Journal (fall 1985): 224.

possible viewers reached, the direct address and blatancy of Holzer's choice of connotative devices, namely the sarcophagi and L.E.D. signs, form an audience who choose to participate and who, largely, know the stakes of what they're participating in. Volitional reciprocity, the act of meeting Holzer's direct address by participation and not blind consumption, is the antithesis of Louis Althusser's famous example of hailing—of an individual *indirectly* addressed by a police officer—that he uses to describe the internalization of the workings of the ideological state apparatuses at the level of what passes for instinct. One could easily write this argument off by equating it with problematic concepts of volitional participation such as the fleeting act of voting or even the 'turnstile' argument that affiliation can be determined by what one chooses to spend her money on. That is, one shouldn't mistake ciphers of presence for an act of participation. But Holzer averts this possible blind spot by configuring an installation where the types of objects and forms used cannot be dissociated from specific rituals of living a life in public in late 20th century New York—the ritual of mourning; the ritual of being assaulted by, submitting to, and partially being constituted through mass address. This can't be mistaken for neutered picture gazing.

Unlike *Sign on a Truck*, one cannot confuse the *Laments* installation with a form—like the journalistic one that the 1984 project too closely replicates—that hides how its structural composition relates to its analysis of representation as something constructed and mediated. While the sarcophagus was morphologically consistent with an object like a Donald Judd box—an object that could serve as a conceptual synecdoche for Dia's historical and theoretical origins and a body of work that Holzer knew intimately from passing 101 Spring Street, Judd's home and studio where like works were displayed, for years—and therefore could complicate the relationship between institutional history and present social reality,

there was nothing ambiguous or allusive about it. Holzer's act was to convert one portion of the gallery into a site of official commemoration.

Designed as a funeral receptacle that was meant to stay above ground, the sarcophagus was an ancient form that kept the dead present through structures that would be part of the lived landscape. The presence of death—and not just of the dying—was a particularly fraught issue at a time when many young men with AIDS left New York City to die. Often unable to afford proper health treatment or pay rent, and despite the heroic work of care giving services, it wasn't uncommon for someone to return to hometowns or families who had shunned them not so long ago. While many died, the funeral was not part of the ritual of memorializing and mourning. Besides the fact that many left New York, Karen Finley discusses other reasons for the dearth of funerals:

Because of homophobia and ignorance, many victims of the disease did not even receive proper funerals. Undertakers were afraid to handle the bodies, families were ashamed of the cause of death. There was no service, no wake, and the deceased person's friends had no way to express their grief. In response to this, the memorial service became commonplace. Friends and loved ones would come together to remember the deceased with speeches, slides, and so on. There were so many deaths that one service seemed to blend into the next. In my community there was the feeling of a constant funeral—a constant grieving.²⁹

By creating a funereal setting, Holzer is able to address how, even in death, some categories of people outside the bounds of normativity or on the wrong side of power aren't privileged with representation. As I will explore in greater detail in the next chapter when I look at Holzer's light projections and their relationship to mourning, the politics of representation and the resistance against admitting certain existences has received new critical attention due to the recent U.S. led wars in the Middle East and the continuing Israel-Palestine conflict where civilian deaths are barely registered. Judith Butler has written probingly in *Precarious Life* about what constitutes a grievable life and, more specifically, how the very category of

²⁹ Karen Finley, A Different Kind of Intimacy: The Collected Writings of Karen Finley (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990), 114.

"the human" is constituted through rituals of sanctioned mourning where the mourned and the mourner are admitted into representation. A primary example that Butler uses is the question of whom is granted an obituary in the supposedly politically neutral press. She relays the story of a Palestinian citizen of the United States who submitted obituaries for two Palestinian families killed by Israeli troops to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She writes: "

... the obituaries could not be accepted without proof of death. The staff of the *Chronicle* said that statements 'in memoriam' could, however, be accepted, so the obituaries were rewritten and resubmitted in the form of memorials. These memorials were then rejected, with the explanation that the newspaper did not want to offend anyone.³⁰

When these deaths aren't breached into official channels of communication that both validate the life lived and contextualize the event of death, they recede invisibly behind the various institutional facades of power.

Another example that illustrates this almost as farce—if it weren't so deadly serious—is the news that comes as I write this that the Israeli interior ministry has authorized construction of the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem directly over the site of a 12th-century Muslim cemetery. An Israeli Supreme Court ruling in 2008, after Palestinians originally challenged the proposed site, sided with the government of Israel and ordered graves to be excavated and removed to the periphery of where the museum would stand. Rashid Khalidi, a Palestinian-American activist, has spoken about the construction and points out the malicious irony at play: "... we remain firmly opposed to any building in the oldest Islamic cemetery in Jerusalem, as should any persons of good conscience and moral integrity... It is nauseating, and especially hypocritical, that this

 $^{^{\}rm 30}$ Judith Butler, Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (London: Verso, 2006), 35.

desecration is carried out in the name of 'tolerance' and 'human dignity."³¹ While the Interior Ministry justifies the project as presenting "architecture that is modest and thoughtful, and that contributes to the creation of a public space that is fitting for the area on a local and urban level," it ignores that the displacement of graves is also a de facto (and more than symbolic) attempt to invalidate any Palestinian claims to Jerusalem. To have a place of mourning is also a testament to a position of belonging. Butler suggests this when she writes about the relationship between acceptable grief and the public sphere:

... it seem important to consider that the prohibition on certain forms of public grieving itself constitutes the public sphere on the basis of such a prohibition. The public will be created on the condition that certain images do not appear in the media, certain names of the dead are not utterable, certain losses are not avowed as losses, and violence is derealized and diffused.³²

By effacing the representation of Palestinian faces, graves, and names, the aim is to invalidate and even to erase the politics they would stand for. Butler draws a continuum between these acts of omission as acts of dehumanization and the violence of another proximate historical silencing—"how few deaths from AIDS were publicly grievable losses."³³

Holzer's decision to err on the side of the archaic and the ceremonial rather than the colloquial (for example, the use of a modern coffin) was an attempt to dignify these deaths as *historical* tragedies—to be kept present, above ground, and in sight—as well as to affirm the validity and value of each life. But the setting also conjures a site sanctioned for *official* mourning. Unlike the rented bar or the commandeered office or restaurant generally used for the memorial service, the gallery was reconfigured to mimic the architectural and physical embodiments of an "ideological state apparatus" such as the church or government mausoleum. This accentuation of the *official* also relates to the issue of participation raised

³¹ "Irony Be Damned, Israel Will Build Its Museum of Tolerance Atop a Muslim Graveyard," artinfo.com, July 14, 2011, available at http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/38107/irony-be-damned-israel-will-build-its-museum-of-tolerance-atop-a-muslim-graveyard/. Accessed July 14, 2011.

³² Butler, *Precarious Life*, 38-39.

³³ Ibid., 35.

earlier. Holzer isn't merely displaying objects that represent mourning; she provides the rare setting customarily associated with scenes or acts of "acceptable" grief. The implication is that grief itself isn't necessarily a private matter but a function of public *display* among a community of others. If, as Butler claimed, a public sphere can be constituted negatively through the omission of representation that comes from prohibiting certain forms of grief, permitting grief allows the participatory creation of a public—specifically a public of those usually rendered *other*—through these mourning acts.

The conceptual confusion that Holzer introduces by turning part of the art institution into a crypt is reminiscent of Theodor Adorno's famous description of the museum in "Valéry Proust Museum." In that essay, he writes:

The German word, "museal" (museum-like), has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. They testify to the neutralization of culture.³⁴

Adorno's assessment is in keeping with the reasoning many members of ACT UP and Gran Fury, as I've traced earlier, gave for exiting art spaces and embracing guerrilla and propagandistic techniques. That is, what good is an institution of death in a fight for life? But can't the argument be made that the present needs of any minority group maligned "now" are inextricable from the endowment of historicity itself and historical respect? Isn't the assertion and maintenance of difference *within* equality a way of complicating and adding to historical memory without resorting to an anarchist's violent default to an impossible new origin? In keeping with Butler's claim that the commonality of individual, bodily vulnerability is the transom where a conception of the "I" crosses over to the possibility of thinking as "we," doesn't the right to a dignified death that the installation embodies suture even the

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³⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 181.

most politically and ideologically disparate peoples? Isn't the museum a cultural organ of unbelievable efficacy if the objects in the process of dying that it houses serve as a reminder of the temporal specificity of she or he who interacts with them? If the process of dying is the mutual coefficient shared by object and viewer alike, perhaps the institution serves as a political agent specifically by denying the validity of transhistorical thinking and accentuating the import of present action to avoid, for example, the unnecessary deaths and pain that too often accompany reactionary political orders. But is it impossible, like outflanking death, to avoid the neutralization of culture?

In his analysis of Hans Haacke's *GERMANIA*, the artist's 1993 German Pavilion installation at the Venice Biennale where he pulverized the original Nazi-era travertine floor, placed a cheap and enlarged reproduction of a deutsche mark where the swastika used to stand on the facade, and included a photomontage at the entrance of Hitler visiting the same space in 1934, Benjamin Buchloh discusses the role of metaphor and its relationship to cultural practice in what he calls Haacke's spectacle set. Buchloh describes how visitors immediately latched onto the installation's "intrinsic reference" to the 1823/24 Caspar David Friedrich painting "Das Eismeer" ("The Arctic Sea"). The painting, with the alternate title "The Wreck of the Hope," depicts shattered ice flows ensnarling the detritus of what used to be, but which is now unrecognizable as, *Hope*. He writes:

Though not integral to the reading of GERMANIA (and possibly not even intended by Haacke himself), the frequency and enthusiasm with which almost every reviewer established this reference points to the conditions of sudden relief that the yielding to metaphoricity provides to its audience. This audience wants to be newly conventionalized within the very places and positions that had instantiated traditional modes of audience behavior: passivity, admiration, awe, entertainment, and most importantly, disciplinary separation... The return to metaphoricity signals an acceptance of the spheres of culture as passive and merely consumable, severed from the definition of culture as political practice and agent of transformation.³⁵

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³⁵ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Hans Haacke: From Factographic Sculpture to Counter-Monument" in *Hans Haacke: For Real* (Düsseldorf: Richter, 2006), 56.

The prohibition against metaphor stemmed from its association with "a formative moment of privileged experience that would predate and supersede the hic et hunc of the (nonmetaphoric) condition of pure process, pure indexicality, pure self-explanatory presence."

Laments similarly suffers from a partial relapse into the comfort of metaphor with the morphological nod to minimalism in its very church, Dia. And yet unlike falling off the wagon and into Friedrich and the historical ditch of German Romanticism, Holzer's tumble into metaphor mixes, confuses, and reorients the relationship between a cultural precedent and a cultural act-the ritual of mourning. That is, the experience melds what is usually a bifurcated metaphoric reflex to either a privileged (past) experience or a contemporary social practice. Not only is the visitor forced to reckon with the political and cultural contexts for these untimely deaths and the conditions of contemporary mourning acts and the spaces allotted to—or denied—them, she newly questions what those old minimal forms might have had to do with—or what they took for granted about—the body, bodily process, and perception as specific, lived experience in the first place. This recombinant conceptual layering not only queries the legacies of a formative cultural precedent, it pressures on presumptions about the seeming neutrality (or the impossible idea of "pure") of a social practice like mourning, or even burial, that can still be denied certain persons. Holzer's productive meshing of precedent and practice specifically embraces the multivalence of metaphorical associations—the Judd box, the tomb, minimalism, mourning—as a strategy of defamiliarization. Reflex is contradicted; metaphorical recourse isn't to the known, passive, and neutralized but to a destabilized present where memory can be witnessed as faultily

³⁶ Ibid., 55.

161

constructed and ideologically perpetuated. Holzer's recombinant use of metaphor is in the service of present needs; history is reconstructed in the service of the present emergency.

Unlike the stationary solidity of the texts engraved on the sarcophagi, the insistent movement of the *Laments* language on the electronic signs eats attention. While language is additive in its stone incarnation and recedes into the surface and connotative layers of the form, the content constitutes the very functionality of the L.E.D. sign. Light and language scrambling up the sign is like the breath on a mirror of a man feared dead. But this aggressive material demonstration of presence always careens forward. It addresses a future that is mere afterthought. There is no structuring or consideration of what that future might be, only the animalistic clawing to reach past imminent demise and into the preordained. While Holzer's language counters this drive to imminence as I'll shortly describe, her choice of formal mode of address purposefully adopts the pomposity of expectation that is simultaneously the mark of conformity and power.

In a 1986 interview in *Art in America*, Holzer suggested her reason for embracing the electronic sign in her practice: "High technologies do seem to be the mediums of authority, especially in the 80s. If you're considered radical, you're either shot or ignored, so I think I can be trickier and possibly more effective if the message seems to come from on high, rather than from beneath." Holzer's quote suggests a vision of technology as a system of control and a form of manipulation. By rejecting fantasies of technology as a liberatory form, and as I briefly introduced earlier, she follows a theoretical line of thought most clearly articulated by Herbert Marcuse and Lewis Mumford in the first half of the twentieth century. While frequently discounted as phobic accounts of modernization, their respective writings on technology more specifically warn against succumbing to a system of efficient production

³⁷ Bruce Ferguson, "Wordsmith: An interview with Jenny Holzer," first published in Joan Simon, ed., *Jenny Holzer: Signs* (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 1986), 83.

that inculcates this same rationality into all forms of social and political behavior. The aspiration is that technological progress might free the subject from the brutal labor of producing necessities and permit her the time to grow and produce differently (though this utopian ambition is sketched only lightly); the logical fear, and the heart of Marcuse's argument in particular, is that the mechanization of production also produces a systematized rationality that no individual will be able to outflank or escape once she has internalized its method. Marcuse writes:

... the force which transforms human performance into a series of dependable reactions is an external force: the machine process imposes upon men the patterns of mechanical behavior, and the standards of competitive efficiency are the more enforced from outside the less independent the individual competitor becomes. But man does not experience this loss of his freedom as the work of some hostile and foreign force; he relinquishes his liberty to the dictum of reason itself. The point is that today the apparatus to which the individual is to adjust and adapt himself is so rational that individual protest and liberation appear not only as hopeless but as utterly irrational.... rational behavior becomes identical with a matter-of-factness which teaches reasonable submissiveness and thus guarantees getting along in the prevailing order.³⁸ Holzer takes this argument to its logical end by assuming information and language to be the

ultimate sites where the prevailing order is represented, produced, and replicated. A future predicated on conformity is one that also confuses the constant motion of a technology like the electronic sign—that usually displays advertising, stock quotes, and news briefings—with anomie's inertia and the internalization of power's dictates.

But Holzer's insertion of her own texts doesn't naively assume to interrupt this logic; her disruption points to this violent structuring of time and the rampant disregard it pays to—and flagrant disavowal of—lives that don't fit into this schema of uninterrupted flow and continuity. Particularly in her *Laments* writings where violence, disease, and unnecessary death are variously addressed, Holzer insinuates subjects and themes, such as the AIDS virus, that rupture the supposed rationality of an impermeable technocratic order. The thirteen *Laments* texts aren't ascribed to any particular figure or gendered entity; the rootless

³⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *Technology, War, and Fascism*, ed., Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 1998), 48.

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pronouns 'I', 'ME', 'YOU', 'YOUR', and 'THEY' are used uniformly to create an embodied world where the particular gender, race, or sexual identity of speaker/subject is rudderless and can be directed towards the identification the reader wants to assign. Instead of a lack of specificity denying empathetic access, this open-ended structure specifically engages the reader to witness the uniformity of violence and death while asserting the particularity with which it is experienced and lived. This form of rudderless identification does the double work of imagining gender and sexuality as performative and not assigned categories as it acts as a prophylaxis against those who would want to deny the work's validity based on particular prejudice. Holzer's differently directed political project is one that resists representation not because it can't do legitimate work but because its provocations can easily be reversed. The variability of address isn't ambivalence in Holzer's work but a refusal to settle for any one-dimensional rendering that might account for how a subject is formed or pictured. One witnesses this across the thirteen texts where no united image is produced but rather a complicated and varied emotional mindscape.

While some particularly point to scenes of emotional reckoning and actual violence—the contemplation of aborting a child "if the process starts"; the experience of being cut open for a reason not given save "they do not get the chance every day"—others extol the frenzied pleasure of physicality and thought—"no record of joy can be like the juice that jumps though your skull when you are perfect in sex"; "I dream words. My ideas come from my skin... I hoot when my brain fills." Only one text ambiguously alludes to AIDS, and it does so in a framework that points to time structuring how one lives with the disease: "The new disease came. I learn that time does not heal. Everything gets worse with days." The disease is not named save for a reference to its vintage. This operation of not naming unfixes the disease from a historical rhetoric surrounding AIDS that connected it

unambiguously with gay men and leaves "new" as less a temporal designation than an empty space holder for the ever-mounting heap of generalized disasters. In this ambiguity, Holzer's concept of the "new disease" aligns with Adorno's description of Samuel Beckett's Endgame, the postwar play that addresses living through a persistent, post-apocalyptic void, when he writes: "...The name of the disaster can only be spoken silently. Only in the terror of recent events is the terror of the whole ignited, but only there, not gazing upon 'origins." Holzer, who was reading Beckett when conceiving of the Laments, similarly doesn't name or specifically historicize the disaster she describes. Analogously, her refusal of a genre type to align her text denies association with forms locked into shackled meaning. In structuring an event without reference, Holzer doesn't deny history but forces the reader to partake in the historical circumstances of her own lived present. The refusal to gaze upon origins is to deny the possibility that a fixed site and time can be located where something like blame or causality resides. It isn't that one forgets the past but that she works in the present to fight its regressive inertia. Holzer ends her text that begins with "the disease came" with the seemingly simple desire that couldn't be any more impossible: "I want to go to the future please." Taking the future not as fact but desire, this simple line denies time's passage as matter-of-fact; it denies the frictionless slide of language up the electronic sign as the only order. This confounding of the sign's temporal logic transforms it—in a recombinant fashion as I have suggested elsewhere—and casts doubt on its immediate legibility and transparency. The contingency of being—how much it is out of one's hands—is rendered heartbreaking with the obsequious 'please' that ends the text and hopes against finality.

In a 1989 interview with Sylvère Lotringer given shortly after his diagnosis with AIDS, David Wojnarowicz contrasts the durational qualities of his artistic work with that of

³⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Samuel Beckett* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), 58.

the historical and theoretical practice of Lotringer: "Your movement in time is such a luxury for me. The way your projects extend, going through years and years of development, is provocative." Wojnarowicz's comment isn't a critique of Lotringer's work or an attempt to define, differentiate, and validate his form of practice against another's. Rather, the idea of luxury exacerbates that all issues of time and survival concern what is afforded and withheld from one. Time's not only money; it's ideology.

But what is Holzer's lament? She intriguingly titles the project after—though doesn't model in practice—a form known from Greek drama where the oppressed classes (women, foreigners, and the enslaved) were given voice to mourn those who have, and what has, passed. In her study *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy*, Casey Dué argues that tragedians like Euripides used the form to create an empathetic link between the conquering Greeks and the vanquished. But more recent accounts of lamenting deny this possibility. Shortly after the Adorno passage on Beckett that I quote above, he continues: "As in utopia, the last days pass judgment on the species. But this lamentation—within mind itself—must reflect that lamenting has become impossible. No amount of weeping melts the armor; only that face remains on which the tears have dried up." Resisting this dead pessimism, Holzer's plea, I believe, is simple: keep mourning; it's the only thing that joins us all, we the vanquished.

⁴⁰ Giancarlo Ambrosino, ed., *David Wojnarowicz: A Definitive History of Five or Six Years on the Lower East Side* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 184.

⁴¹ Adorno in Bloom, ed., Samuel Beckett, 58.

Chapter 5

The Art of Losing: Jenny Holzer's Light Projections and the Right to Write

Anxious and undecided about how to write about Jenny Holzer's light projections, I distracted myself by looking at the photographs saved to my computer's desktop. They're the typical amateur fare, consisting mainly of friends and family. On the screen, the images replace each other like study cards for an imaginary class alternatively titled "The History of Denial" or "Pleasure Has No Archeology: A Case Study." There are too many smiles here. People are pulsating, in a still picture, with health. If joy is dampened at all, blame it on nostalgia's spit—a view from a beloved apartment that's home no more, or the broad smile of a brother's former girlfriend. I tell myself not to cry over spilled milk when my lip is still wet with white. At least I tasted it. But the picture I didn't know what do with, and what brought me back to Jenny Holzer with the doubled force of the uncanny and unconscious, was one I took of my father in Florence. In this photograph, he's standing just steps from a place I know best from other pictures there of Holzer's first light projection some fourteen years earlier. For the Biennale di Firenze in 1996, she positioned a projector on the north side of the Arno River. When it was sufficiently dark, the projector cast a crawl of lightformed text onto the water, the river wall, and the Palazzo Bargagli that sits just above (Figure 5.1). The porous and insistent light first pushed past large-format film scrolling inside the machine, then through a lens that magnifies the projected content, and finally onto surfaces whose mass and opacity reflected light back as language and legibility. Arno, the text Holzer first wrote for the AIDS fund-raiser "Red Hot and Dance" 1992 and rewrote for Florence where it was titled, slid up contours assuming the shape of whatever it passed, being pulled away from place even as it endowed visibility on spaces usually lost to the night. Was it just the coincidence of Florence that, while wandering around for a place to start

writing on the projections, led me to the photograph of my father? When I've been present at the projections (in New York, Washington, Providence, Miami, San Diego, Chicago, Basel, and Zurich), I'm usually looking at them while talking or reading aloud—with a brother, girlfriend, stranger, friend, colleague, or, once in California, with my father. The private act of reading is transformed into a bounded period of time when a public place is transformed into an excuse to leave homes or hotel rooms and gather. But what one does in the presence of the creeping light is a private concern—there is no forced sociability; no pretense, as in the poem by Wallace Stevens, that "[w]e make a dwelling in the evening air, / In which being there together is enough"; no miraculous righting of old inequalities. The politics that the projections intimate are subtle, but they're evident in the logic of the light passing out of presence. When it slips from the tentative hold of a landmark, a dune, the foam of a breaking wave, there's no recovery. The measured pace of the projections is inexorable in this slow accumulation of loss. We gather to practice losing together. But what are the specific politics of this practice? I'll return to this question later. Yet I wonder if thinking of loss as something one can practice, or considering Holzer's projections as a metaphor for losing and an act of mourning, actually made me look for that photo of my father and the private disaster I rehearse.

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It's winter, and he's dressed warmly in all black standing on the south bank of the Arno. The Ponte Vecchio, as in many a respectable amateur Florentine shot, sits in the background longing for perspective. With one hand in his coat pocket and the other at his side, he smiles slackly but enough that his face, loose with age, still locks into a much

younger man's dimples. It is February in the picture, just some nine months ago. I spoke to him just the other day. He told me of a good doctor's report and busy weekend plans. Though my father is very much still here as I write this, the photograph terrorizes me. I could not deny that I live as his possible survivor (that is, if I live). Roland Barthes, when writing about the activity of looking at photographs of his mother as a young woman after her death, famously detailed the incidental visual pricks that conspired to make the loss into an open wound. The difference is I'm looking towards loss. I'm not yet wounded by this one. The photograph of my father animated the child's fear, no less real for being older and almost involuntary, not that I would lose but that I live not knowing when loss might come. Everyone dies. Yes, everyone does. The question isn't how to reconcile oneself to death. The question, one that Holzer also asks, is how to live without fear warping whatever the future might bring.

Holzer speaks of the projections as a return, of sorts, to optimism—an almost miraculous statement for someone who frequently invokes a version of the following: "When I do not exert some effort to be cheerful, I watch for the death of everything." The period preceding Holzer's first projections at the Biennale di Firenze was marked by the death of her mother in 1993 and work on her *Lustmord* series, writings she began as a response to the violence committed against women in the Bosnian War but which ultimately concern the atrocities against women everywhere, every day. Not only was Holzer grieving for her personal loss; her writing work left her mired in tragedy, cruelty, and violence. She credits her turn to the projections for giving her the latitude to think about the future. Is

¹ Jenny Holzer, "Book Report, A Response to Artist's Choice, 1997" in *Jenny Holzer*, eds. David Joselit, Joan Simon, and Renata Salecl (London: Phaidon, 1998), 111.

² Holzer and Helmut Lang, the designer who now practices as an artist, were paired by the writer and editor Ingrid Sischy to work together in Florence. In addition to developing an exhibition, Holzer and Lang collaborated on a fragrance which she has described as evocative of "the smell of the morning after a

there anything in the work that hints to how that future might come? Before delving into the projections proper, it's necessary to take an extended detour through Holzer's writing and its various permutations to suggest the correlation between forms of textual address and forms of distribution.

Having already used forms such as posters, plaques, painted signs, electronic LED signs, and stone benches as the supports for her textual production, the move to projections initially can be seen as a similar appropriation and redeployment of familiar objects with known connotations to upend expectations. But to study the particular topics Holzer addresses in the early-to-mid 1990s, just prior to her first projections, is to witness a modulation and shift in theme that seems particularly germane when it's contemporary to the embrace of a new presentational device. In the past, she has attributed outsourcing fabrication of art objects to her distrust of the hand. She writes, "I wonder to myself about the origins of power and its abuse. In Crowds and Power Canetti locates it in the hand and its sharpened fingers. Some irrational extension of this thinking has me make artwork I don't touch." But the projections signal a much more radical move to working with the least tangible of forms, with material impossible to hold. What, if anything, compels the total banishment of touch at a time when the content of her writing specifically addresses the apperception of distant disasters? With her series War (1992) and Lustmord (1993-95), Holzer approached specific, topical subject matter outside of her immediate or purely imaginative purview. In War (1992), the motivating historical incident is the Gulf War; in Lustmord (1993-95), it is the war in the former Yugoslavia. While Holzer takes these violent international

passionate but difficult night." The working relationship became a friendship. Holzer cites it as immeasurably important to her and formative in her thinking about optimism and survival. ³ Joselit, ed., Jenny Holzer, 111.

incidents as starting points for more textured and ambiguous (and, at times, personal) writings on accountability, death, memory, power, and trauma, to name a few thematic footholds, using particular but second-hand events as a starting point is a departure from her other writings where tragedy and violence is ambient and everywhere and its threat made to feel immediate. The projections demonstrate how the incommensurable can be tentatively approached without a touch that often confuses compassion with claim.

Holzer frequently uses some combination of her own texts and often borrows the writings of others such as the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska for projections. Contextualizing only two of her series (from 1977-1996, she wrote eleven) alongside the concurrent turn to projections isn't an attempt to show causality or overly determine some affiliation between content and form; rather, this more precise regard aligns a new type of address with a new mode of addressing to question what concerns, if any, make them historically apposite and related. In an earlier series like *Laments* (1989), where the underlying issue is living with, or living with the threat of, or dying from AIDS, the illness couldn't be a stranger to any resident of New York City, like Holzer was, who saw its ravages up close. The threat, particularly when the cause of transmission was still unknown or when a diagnosis was outstanding, was real; and its consequences were emotionally and viscerally tangible in sick men and women, protests, hospitals, newspaper and magazine articles, television reports, and funerals. Holzer's 1989 exhibition at the Dia Art Foundation buried the Laments texts on the surfaces of marble sarcophagi and pulsed them through electronic signs. The presentation made the language not only sensate but the historical moment and tragedy it addressed in linguistic adjacency immediately sensible—if not ever comprehendible. The immediacy of the threat, the presence of mourning, and the ongoing activity of raising awareness were made tactile, literally, by objects with heft and weight—things that could be

touched, whose "real world" functions made their meaning indivisible from the lived, physical landscape. Using familiar materials and legible forms, Holzer suggests that her themes also are ones at hand and within reach.

But with *War* and *Lustmord*, the fact of distance requires a strenuous examination of how the near impossibility of broaching another's war, another's death, another's rape, and another's exile might be done by balancing estrangement with commensurability. The ambition is to provide the intellectual and aesthetic framework where faraway death and tragedy often mediated into pure visual, statistical, and emotional abstractions can be individually apprehended without surrendering to presumptuous universality or equivalence. The formal and ethical problems far surpass the danger of serving as an ideological patron as Walter Benjamin famously warns of in his 1934 essay "The Author as Producer." The danger goes beyond replicating entrenched culture and power by perpetuating "technique" even if the "tendency" is correct—the real risk is eclipsing the singularity of individual and historically circumscribed tragedy in an act of misplaced solidarity and luxurious empathizing. But isn't the greater peril abandoning solidarity and empathy completely?

The central question that needs to be posed concerns how Holzer's writing functions and, more particularly, how the different forms, written and deployed in different historical moments, signal a move from historical reflection and analysis to more ambiguous integration of autobiography and world event that reaches an apogee in the light projections and the *Arno* text. In earlier works, such as the *Truisms* (1977-79) and *Inflammatory Essays* (1979-82), she took on types of writing, the aphorism and the impassioned essay, that have a certain pedigree and lineage. She cites the writings of, among others, Chairman Mao, Rosa Luxemberg, and Emma Goldman—and anonymous posted rants in Times Square—as formative to her own crafting of essays that present an array of fervent avowals of causes

and ideological positions. Holzer came to the truism or aphorism while participating in the Whitney Independent Study Program in 1976-77. Fed a steady diet of theoretical texts (mostly semiotics and poststructuralism as they were shaped by feminism and Marxism), she decided to process these complicated writings into digestible assertions that pose as directives or facts. Without any direct attribution that would make it possible to go back to the source, the Holzer truism stands alone, an empty but insistent and persistent cipher of argument, reason, and debate. This stand-alone, readymade quality of the truism or aphorism—that it seems like it has always been—partially is attributable to the genre's use by a pantheon of famous thinkers—including Pascal, Emerson, Wilde, Blake, Twain, and Einstein, to name a few. The usual association of aphorism with celebrated or famous thinker not only unfixes the bauble of thought from historical time and context into fame's nebulous sphere of the always, it presupposes that these gems are endowed with genius or, more pointedly, a genius's supposedly unassailable thought. The famed aphorist and his aphorism become synonymous or, as Derrida has written, "The absolute aphorism: a proper name." Holzer disturbs a logic which equates thinker with thought (or thinker with a particular brand of thought) by penning a menu of frequently contradictory 'truisms' where it becomes impossible to identify the proper name of Holzer with any one strain of values, mores, or beliefs. Since Holzer would never sign the posters she arranged with an alphabetized list of truisms and posted throughout downtown Manhattan anonymously, those who saw and read could conceive of it as a compendium of stolen and unattributed quotes. One could still imagine the possibility of a proper name, which would ground thought to an anchor of cache, behind each text—a projection of and desire for an order where singularity holds and we keep on quoting heroes. This questioning and critique of the proper name—particularly the implication that the proper name was always male and

signified claims to truth if not genius—could be found in other projects of this period, notably from artists such as Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine.

In a 1972 piece and reworked in 1981, Louise Lawler "squeals, squawks, chirps, twitters, croaks, squeaks, and occasionally warbles the names—primarily the surnames—of twenty-eight contemporary male artists, from Vito Acconci to Lawrence Weiner." In an interview in 2000 with Douglas Crimp, Lawler provided the foundational story for what became known as *Birdcalls*:

In the early 1970s, my friend Martha Kite and I were helping some artists on one of the Hudson River pier projects. The women involved were doing tons of work, but the work being shown was only by male artists. Walking home at night in New York, one way to feel safe is to pretend you're crazy or at least be really loud. Martha and I called ourselves the 'due chanteusies,' and we'd sing off-key and make other noises. Willoughby Sharp was the impresario of the project, so we'd make a 'Willoughby Willoughby' sound, trying to sound like birds. This developed into a series of bird calls based on artists' names.⁵

Lawler's simultaneously humorous and antagonist project responds, as Rosalyn Deutsche has noted, both to "physical attack in the streets of the city and discrimination in the alternative art world." By using the names of critically (and in some cases, commercially) validated male minimalist, postminimalist, conceptual, and pop artists as a type of parodic, incantatory weapon, Lawler demonstrates that the engrained patriarchal order returns, like so much that has been repressed, as a repetition whose altered inflection pierces the primacy of the original. With a warble, the proper name's meaning and signification varies and fluctuates, like the voice that regularly shifts pitch and frequency even as the sound remains continuous.

⁴ Rosalyn Deutsche, "Louise Lawler's Rude Museum," in Helen Molesworth, ed., *Twice Titled and Other Pictures (looking back)* (Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2006), 130.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 130-31.

⁷ Her 1981 addition of neoexpressionist painters Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Anselm Kiefer, and Julian Schnabel to the list demonstrated that the 'birdcall' was always a roll call, with the elasticity of any list to add new models to a successful product line. Neoexpressionism, a type of male-dominated painting

The 1981 exhibition of Sherrie Levine's *After Walker Evans* series—where she rephotographed and presented the signature Depression-era Farm Security Administration (F.S.A.) photographs of the 1930s in a seemingly unaltered state—interrupts, as Douglas Crimp writes, "the discourse of mastery through the refusal to reinvent an image." But her denial of invention (or denial "to reinvent") isn't just a refusal to make or create (artwork, meaning, etc.) as some indictment of the fecundity of originality usually associated with masculine myths from Prometheus to Picasso to Pollack. The act of re-presentation reorients the reading of the photograph away from the authorial act—the genius of Evans, the story of Evans—of framing the shot and endowing what it encloses with import, meaning, and value. Levine's act directs a viewer's regard to the subjects locked within those frames—it is those subjects who begin to matter. Is it consequential that some of the first photographs that Levine chose to reproduce were by (by then) praised and famous men of the weak and powerless?

Craig Owens speaks to this in his essay "The Discourse of Others":

When Sherrie Levine appropriates—literally takes—Walker Evans's photographs of the rural poor or, perhaps more pertinently, Edward Weston's photographs of his son Neil posed as a classical Greek torso, is she simply dramatizing diminished possibilities for creativity in an image-saturated culture, as is often repeated? Or is her refusal of authorship not in fact a refusal of the role of creator as 'father' of his work, of the paternal rights assigned to the author by law? (This reading of Levine's strategies is supported by the fact that the images she appropriates are invariably images of the Other: women, nature, children, the poor, the insane....) Levine's disrespect for paternal authority suggests that her activity is less one of appropriation—a laying hold and grasping—and more one of expropriation: she expropriates the appropriators.⁹

But what about those Others, the unnamed, those subjects of the photographs that Owens insightfully locates but never really investigates? The emphasis in the above stresses the

trend that many regarded as a return to aestheticism, was then modish and featured predominately in commercial spaces and international contemporary art exhibitions such as Documenta 7.

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⁸ Douglas Crimp, On the Museum's Ruins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 6.

⁹ Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 83-4.

operation of Levine's refusal to author but the analysis still fixates on renunciation as a productive activity—with authoring and *not* authoring just different sides of the same coin. There *are* other solutions to the problem of authorship—one being the "I prefer not to" of Melville's Bartleby where refusal is met with inactivity and the objection to produce equates to a conscientious rejection to participate in labor marked by unknown effects (i.e. violence). But Levine does produce and, specifically with the Evans photographs, she reproduces the genre of "victim" photography that Owens addresses earlier in his discussion of Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-75). In its repetition and reproduction of these photographs of the unnamed other, does Levine's work risk further victimizing the subjects? Or does her repetition purposefully frustrate our immediate and axiomatic reading of these photographs as "Evans's" specifically so we can witness the levels of violence inflicted on the *subjects* pictured?

Conscious of the violence implicit to this form of documentary photography where subjects merely represent types, Rosler purposefully substitutes or avoids hackneyed photographs of inebriated men (so called "Bowery bums") and instead presents deskilled photos of Bowery stoops and storefronts and constructs black type on white typewritten cards with alternative terms for drunkenness such as "plastered" and "rosined." By depopulating the images of characters, Rosler shows the Bowery literally as the street that bears that name rather than a man adjectivally ascribed that term in opprobrium. By populating a white field with black words that relate to intoxication, she shows verbs and adverbs that describe actions and behavior but do not pejoratively identify a person—as in calling someone "a bum." At issue in Rosler's work, and what Owens underemphasizes in Levine's *After Walker Evans* series, is the function of "victim" photography and how this representational mode functions. Owens efficiently traces what is at stake:

Despite his or her benevolence in representing those who have been denied access to the means of representation, the photographer inevitably functions as an agent of the system of power that silenced these people in the first place. Thus, they are twice victimized: first by society, and then by the photographer who presumes the right to speak on their behalf. In fact, in such photography it is the photographer rather than the 'subject' who poses—as the subject's consciousness, indeed, as conscience itself."

Rosler's recourse to the unskilled, amateur photograph and her belabored enumeration of words that connote drunkenness are structurally analogous to Levine's act of rephotographing. While both artists walk away from signature styles and traditional techniques, they also choose forms that insist on and allow for repetition, accretion, and multiplicity to avoid the signifying shackles of the proper name and that allow the subject to stand, if not speak, on his or her own behalf. They don't presume to speak for the subject but show how the subject is typically *spoken for*.

In Difference and Repetition, Gilles Deleuze elaborates how repetition is a potentially liberatory model in its ability to "rescue the small difference between levels of repetition." In our standardized and administrated lives, continuity becomes the fixture of days. But repetition's addition of the same doesn't produce the redundant—the doubling produces the specter of alterity, a parallel or divergent life, or a mirror image that confuses the habitually reproduced with an illusion or mystification. Repetition reveals these barely hairline fractures in a stereotyped life. It reveals the sliver of difference that separates the imposition of the absolute from the possibility of subjective action. In After Walker Evans, Levine recedes not just as the author of these images but as the endower of subjectivity. While the subjects in the photographs still can't speak, at least they're no longer subsumed under another's name and the meaning it colonizes.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

Along with her contemporaries Lawler and Levine, Holzer's early investigations of genre and the proper name transported into the cultural sphere the Althusserian lesson that our roles as subjects are formed (imposed) by and acquired within a field of established social practices. Inheritors of an art world and gender assignation (Lawler's roll call insinuates the masculine privilege of that world while voiced as a bird, slang for girl or woman), recipients of art and American histories (Levine's regurgitation of those histories emblematizes returning that repression without a receipt to indicate a history not bought into), and recyclers of intellectual, political, and social thought as so much cultural detritus (Holzer's reformulation of once inventive thinking suggests how branding violently assimilates, burns through, and simulates novelty like any consumer product), these artists touch the edges of ideologies' mirrors to indicate the spaces within which identities are formed and intimate a delicate desire for a place outside. They reveal the various forms through which the subject is annihilated. While Holzer's early genre bending made materially manifest how the individual is indentured to ideology, her later writings would confuse, even break from, those confines completely as a way to not only show but speak to repression. Later series, such as the texts Lustmord (1993-95) and Arno (1996), muddle memoir, diaristic aside, reportage, and observational language befitting a naturalistic novel. The rejection of genre adherence and the proper name sidesteps any facile claims to legitimacy or automatic critical frameworks—by writing outside of or between forms, Holzer assures that her thematic content doesn't fit comfortably within apparatuses (critical, administrative, etc.) that deplete claims of subjectivity and flatten them into marketable literary products. The act of writing *outside* of given forms is both a means of seeking a way out of (or better, through) historical impasses as it is a way to demonstrate one's own history within History through a right to write.

Roland Barthes considers the idea of writing as the way out or though when considering Proust. He writes:

Proust is seeking a form which will accommodate suffering (he has just experienced it in an absolute form through his mother's death) and transcend it; now, 'intelligence' (a Proustian word) is a power which traumatizes or desiccates affect; Novalis called poetry 'that which heals the wounds of intellect'... We do not know by what determination Proust emerged from this hesitation, and why he flung himself so deeply into his *Search*...; but we do know the form he chose: it is the very form of his *Search*...: novel? Essay? Neither one, or both at once: what I should call *a third form*.¹¹

While Barthes's 'third form' is nebulous and impossible as a practical model to adopt, it does signal towards a combinatory type of writing—indivisible in its parts—which pairs affect with intellect as a way to 'transcend' emotional and historical impasse. That Barthes locates Proust's search for new form as a way to accommodate and transcend suffering caused by a mother's death is historically significant—Barthes wrote his essay while mourning the loss of his own mother, a loss he attempted to transcribe within a mourning diary he kept but also vivified through 'intellectual' work such as the essay on Proust where suffering was analyzed as an object capable of endowing with form. This is an impulse shared by Holzer and one also motivated by a mother's loss—a loss that also signals a formal break from the earlier writing and the texts, such as *Lustmord*, that follow. The right to write, emphatically seized by writing *outside*, is not a given. To write at all, as Hélène Cixous discusses in "Coming to Writing," is an activity conspired against if the would-be writer, like Cixous and Holzer, isn't coded properly: "Everything in me joined forces to forbid me to write: History, my story, my origin, my sex. Everything that constituted my social and cultural self." Though born from death, she posits that writing acts to fend it off, to resist consolation and resignation. Cixous

¹¹ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 279-80

¹² Hélène Cixous, "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays, trans. Sarah Cornell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 12.

positions writing as the device that is able to leave a trace, contract with time, and make one's self noticed. While Barthes, via Proust, indicates the possibility of writing functioning as a formal passage by entwining affect and intellect, Cixous makes a space for the conspired-against writer (the Other) within the rotary of suffering, remembrance, and endurance. With these differently exemplary models, Holzer confronts writing not as elaboration, explanation, argument or insertion of a new voice into an old debate. Rather, the act becomes an incision into an historical schema, now animated by the death of her mother, where recourse to forms between genres permits the genres themselves to act as recombinant. It also, as I submitted earlier, forced Holzer to examine her personal history alongside the larger political and historical stage. This did not mean discarding the analytical rigor demonstrated in the forms she adopted with the Truisms and Inflammatory Essays when attempting to apportion the personal and reconcile its place in the schema. Rather, the somewhat startling move—the insertion and distribution of the autobiographical—suggests a practice manifesting the consequence of an early theoretical gambit that critiqued representation as it revealed how ideology was embodied. Positioning oneself beside and within the critique insists that one can only speak (or attempt to speak) for herself.

When valorizing Michel Foucault's practice in conversation with him, Deleuze inadvertently speaks to the type of critique also practiced later by Holzer, Lawler, and Levine and the consequences that I'm locating in Holzer's autobiographically inflected work of the 1990s. In a 1972 interview between the two, he said:

There is no denying that our social system is totally without tolerance; this accounts for its extreme fragility in all its aspects and also its need for a global form of repression. In my opinion, you were the first—in your books and in the practical sphere—to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others. We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the

consequences of this 'theoretical' conversion—to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf.¹³

What Deleuze claims as a theoretical fact is the threshold (what Deleuze elsewhere called a wall) where theory and critique is relayed into a practice that moves behind the important, but limited, moratorium on representation. The 'indignity of speaking for others' is not only a condemnation of misplaced or mistaken identification (the posing as conscience that Owens writes of) but an attempt to valorize those forms of practice that connect speech and individual experience as a way to see how power is perceived by the subject and how power might be addressed by the affected individual. When Holzer integrates thoughts of her mother and her 1993 death in Lustmord, the inclusion is not only her own manifestation of loss alongside of those Bosnians we don't hear or read who mourn the passing of a loved one. The death also conjures her own rape and attack by the man who also may have sexually assaulted her mother. 14 The loss drags into the present—a present populated with the horribly 'normal' daily violence against women in addition to the audacious and calculated use of rape as a weapon of the then-ongoing war in the former Yugoslavia—the violence perpetrated upon her that can be written alongside the violence inflicted upon others. By speaking for herself, and writing into presence an act, like her gender, traditionally relegated to silence, Holzer approaches historical violence and tragedy as the accumulation of individual ravages made permissible by cross-culturally (somewhat tacitly) sanctioned violence, sexism, and consumption—she reveals violence as a continuum that stretches from

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¹³ Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power," in Donald Bouchard, ed., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 209.

¹⁴ In a section entitled "Book Report: A Response to Artist's Choice," published in David Joselit, ed., *Jenny Holzer* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 111, Holzer wrote: "My mother, Virginia Holzer, died in 1993. Though about her appeared in *Lustmord*, but I could not describe the size and import of her death. De Beauvoir explained a mother's dying to herself, to me and to any reader (my note: in *A Very Easy Death*). My mother's death was especially difficult because she may have suffered sexual assault of which she did not speak. I was attacked by the man who may have harmed her. When De Beauvoir places her mother's mouth on her own I am overcome."

the personal to the political and back again. Her ability to make the far away and seemingly abstract into something proximate is also a result of her eschewal of genre.

Informed but not defined by types such as fiction, memoir, reportage, and poetry, Holzer's writing avoids the slippery logics of both representation and documentation. In working between and outside genre, the writing is structurally resistant to speaking for—the reader/viewer becomes conscious of being spoken to in the effort of deciphering what the writing is. The reader/viewer is solicited to participate in the meaning of the text at the same time as he or she is never given access to the potentially prurient titillation of what would have been made manifest in representation. In this activity, the reader stands empowered and yet rendered powerless—an accurate reflection, if ever there was, of the condition of watching a disaster within an equivocating democracy; in this case, an American one that tarried to substantively involve itself until the war's fourth year when claims of genocide were already three years old.

But Holzer's embrace of the ambiguous 'third form' isn't just a distant invocation of Barthes and Proust. Another practitioner, one closer to home and who was also her former teacher, would have provided a model where autobiography and the political could productively inhabit the same space or adjacent spaces. Yvonne Rainer, who led seminars at the Whitney Independent Study Program when Holzer studied there in 1976-77, moved from working in choreography and dance into film in 1972 particularly because of a desire to more explicitly explore, as B. Ruby Rich writes, "the power politics of interpersonal relations, male-female dichotomies, the ambiguity of power, and, in terms of media, a critique of dominant modes of production and representation." Rainer's film *Journeys from Berlin | 1971* (1979-80) continues her filmic analysis of how the personal can be plumbed

¹⁵ Yvonne Rainer, The Films of Yvonne Rainer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 3.

alongside power politics, and yet the specificity of its references (to nineteenth century Russian female anarchists and nihilists, political repression in post-war Germany, the activities of the German domestic political/terrorist group R.A.F., and the Baader-Meinhof affair—with particular attention to the female reporter turned militant, Ulrike Meinhof—where members of the R.A.F died under suspicious circumstances) marks the historically demarcated subject as an entity revised and constructed by the particularities of a present capable of reanimating the past.

The parts of the film that don't delve into then-present day German politics or some analysis of where different models of revolution and resistance diverge revolve around a psychoanalytic session where the camera-facing analysand faces a rotating triumvirate of analysts. The patient's equally probing and meandering soliloquy—where the intangible frisson of potential discovery escapes the inevitable plodding and usual pleasure of narrative—suggests ways she has battled to overcome a sense of powerlessness. It is when she stops believing in that powerlessness as definite that she can begin addressing her suicide attempt. While the viewer isn't given any clues that the analysand/patient partially stands-in for Rainer or parts of her biography, the second half of the two-part title of the film indicates the year Rainer attempted to kill herself—a suicide attempt she has attributed elsewhere to a complicated love affair. The network that links Rainer, the patient, Meinhof, and historical female figures quoted throughout the film such as Emma Goldman, Angelica Balabanoff, and Vera Figner is one that links the commonality of their oppression (the violence imposed upon them) as primarily something sexually conditioned and not equally translatable to "the oppression of men at the hands of the state." In separating and specifying the type of oppression, Rainer attempts to analyze power and its formulation

through an incisive act of differentiation where power's usual mode of diffusiveness is seen as rendered and distilled.

Since she speaks as one of Deleuze's "directly concerned" alongside other historical examples of frustrated empowerment and actualized oppression, she is able to "confiscate, at least temporarily, the power to speak" which is the "first step in the reversal of power and the initiation of new struggles against existing forms of power." Rainer specifically refers to the relationship between the personal, the political, and power when she writes:

The personal and the political are not synonymous. They overlap and intertwine. And one must struggle constantly to assess one's power, or lack of it, in every sphere of one's life. This is all very general. Approaching from a somewhat different angle: I find it necessary to question the relationship of my personal frustrations to my social criticism. When am I justified in explaining the former in terms of the latter? Social criticism may not be disqualified by personal interest, but then neither do social formations always account for my private frustrations.¹⁷

Rainer's continuous questioning of the relationship, in her own life, between the private and the social and the personal and the political is an attempt to locate those points of intersection where power can be partially uncloaked. The continuum of oppression that Holzer establishes in her writing, as Rainer does in her film, trades equivalence for the analogous—an act of refusal to master another's discourse as it shows solidarity with other mastered peoples looking for their own ways out.

In her essay "Trip to Hanoi" written in 1968 after her return from a nearly month-long stay in North Vietnam, Susan Sontag relates her initial difficulty reconciling the Vietnam she constructed—from a distance—as an ideological commitment and the Vietnam she experienced. The difference isn't so much the obvious divide between the intellectually imagined and the physically real, but a matter of reorienting the reasons why and to whom her unflagging committed is directed when she experiences it as a Vietnamese and

¹⁶ Bouchard, ed., Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, 214.

¹⁷ Rainer, The Films of Yvonne Rainer, 22-23.

international incident and tragedy and not solely as an American crime. She cites Godard as helpful in formulating this realization. She writes:

In his brilliant episode in the film *Far from Vietnam*, Godard reflects (as we hear his voice, we see him sitting behind an idle movie camera) that it would be good if we each made a Vietnam inside ourselves, especially if we cannot actually go there (Godard had wanted to shoot his episode in North Vietnam, but was denied a visa). Godard's point—a variant on Che's maxim that, in order to crack the American hegemony, revolutionaries have the duty to create 'two, three, many Vietnams'—had seemed to me exactly right.¹⁸

Though Sontag was able to put perception and experience in tandem through her Hanoi trip, her introduction of Godard's commentary suggests a minimal moral and political threshold for those who cannot directly participate—actively internalizing the war, in effect opening another front, resists the passive consumption of war when it—really beginning with Vietnam—was packaged as a television *event* and news *story*. For Holzer, opening up this war 'inside ourselves' became even more imperative as war's relation to everyday life increasingly became out of reach and out of hand.

As Jean Baudrillard in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1991) and other writers have pointed out, the 1990-91 violence in Kuwait and Iraq was relegated to a new degree of immaterial virtuality when it was formulated and portrayed as a technological endeavor (green hued night vision attacks on CNN, 'smart' bombing, etc.) rather than a blood and guts reality. Far from denying the actuality of the Gulf War, Baudrillard's point was that its translation to something almost purely mediated by technology made death nearly invisible and war, therefore, that much more palatable to the consumers of its images. War's presentation becomes a wager's strategic tool—to keep it going is a public relations feat precluding the sight of damage and atrocity in detail.

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¹⁸ Susan Sontag, "Trip to Hanoi" (1968) in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 211.

Holzer's project in *War* and continuing with *Lustmord* (a work that specifically takes on the systematic targeting of Bosnian women for rape and murder by ethnic Serbs during the war in the former Yugoslavia) was not to enter into a losing image battle to counter overload whitewash with brutality. It wasn't to assault with information—anyone could compare the published fact of approximately 35,000 Iraqi war dead to the 300 dead Americans in the Gulf War and see a statistical gulf that didn't even consider the displaced, the orphaned, and the starving. Rather, the ambition—following Godard and Sontag—was to create a purely linguistic world, with pronouns replacing subjects and fictive, horrific situations in the place of specifically known events, where the real wasn't so much eclipsed as made uniquely, abysmally inhabitable in the act of an individual's viewing or reading. This use of language avers, in a manner analogous to Primo Levi's demonstration in *Survival at Auschwitz* (1958), that while the act of witnessing another's suffering is impossible to mimetically capture and express, the act of approaching and enunciating suffering itself becomes an ethical imperative—giving language to suffering properly memorializes its victims by keeping it and them *present*.

In War, the verbs are all active and culpability is lost in a miasma of ongoing, continuous violence (Figure 5.2): 'I stab the boy. I cut holes to drain him;' 'The ocean washes the dead. They are face up face down in foam. Bodies roll from swells to open in the marsh.' Lustmord, which is written from the perspectives of victim, perpetrator, and observer, similarly takes the form

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¹⁹ In her 1993 essay, "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo," Susan Sontag discusses the experience of staging a production of Samuel Beckett's famous play in a city besieged and consistently shelled. She writes: "No longer can a writer consider that the imperative task is to bring the news to the outside world. The news is out. Many excellent foreign journalists... have been reporting the lies and the slaughter since the beginning of the siege, while the decision of the western European powers and the United States not to intervene remains firm, thereby giving the victory to Serb fascism. I was not under the illusion that going to Sarajevo to direct a play would make me useful in the way I could be if I were a doctor or a water systems engineer. It would be a small contribution." Susan Sontag, Where the Stress Falls (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 299-300. Her point is to not downplay the importance of good and necessary reporting. Rather, Sontag writes about the possibility—through the staging of the play—of inserting some normality to a ravaged city. But writing about the experience is a way to disturb a reader's (like this one's) fortunate normalcy.

of present tense, unadorned declarative sentences that trade the specificity of context for the factuality of one size fits all horror (Figure 5.3): 'My breasts are so swollen that I bite them; I bite her closed again; I walk outside to the path and see the plants, each handled by her, unmarked by her dying.' In both cases, the attempt is to entwine what otherwise is received through television and news as mediated with daily terrors of act and memory that could be at-hand—a presence that seeks to strangle any indifference to the distant.

Providing language to scenarios frequently relegated to statistics, reportage, and violent imagery often presented more pornographically than empathically, Holzer reorients one way in which power is usually exercised. Judith Butler has written that:

... the conditions of intelligibility (for utterances) are themselves formulated in and by power, and this normative exercise of power is rarely acknowledged as an operation at all... This means that a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate for subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not. To move outside the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability is to consummate one's status as a subject of speech.²⁰

The coextensive presentation of victim, perpetrator, and observer in *Lustmord*, for example, isn't some suggestion that war blindly dehumanizes and makes equals out of any of those ravaged by it, regardless of role. Rather, Holzer's endowment of a victim's subjecthood through language reconstitutes the victim's right to be—a right that a perpetrator denies not only through violent acts but by power's very denial of speech to those it pushes outside of political spaces and representation. That the perpetrator would speak is certain, an obvious correlative to the dictum that the victors write history—it's also an explanation why the Serbs, presuming their power wouldn't be challenged, would operate camps and commit atrocities almost openly. Placing language in the mouth of the vanquished, directly alongside the perpetrator, is to aspire to a model of history that attributes imbalances of power as

²⁰ Judith Butler, Excitable Speech (New York: Routledge, 1997), 133-134.

much to unequal access to speech as material might—one that Walter Benjamin wanted to scratch and claw back into time and place. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," he writes:

In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.²¹

In Holzer's work, the divide between death and life, extinction and survival, the disaster abroad and the one at home, is as thin as a knife's edge and as tenuous as the shaking hand that holds it. Without a word, you're dead.

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The text Holzer wrote for Florence—her first text to be presented by light projection—bleeds an account of losing someone to AIDS with the more general treatment of loss after a great and terrible love. *Armo* consists of an accumulation of short phrases in which most, like the beginning three (I WALK IN / I SEE YOU / I WATCH YOU), posit an actor, an action, and either a place or object or person acted upon. The unadorned activity doesn't betray a narrative or lose itself in description. The phrases stay at the level of one taking possession of what he or she does or claims. It remains tightly focused in the realm where one has power, not where he or she is immobile or paralyzed by powerlessness. The exceptions are accusations or confessions such as YOU ARE THE ONE WHO DID THIS TO ME; NO ONE TOLD ME; or MY MOTHER KNOWS. Regardless, the unadorned simplicity of each phrase (and both types of phrases) betrays the complex psychological work that comes when language is divested of those structures that might

²¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940) in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255.

possibly carry the weight of melancholy and trauma—the adjectival and descriptive embellishment of rationalization and obsession, the nurtured plot of fate. The streamlined language reads like the distillation, something edited and re-written (and edited and rewritten, and on and on) of something often repeated and analyzed so that the starkness of a traumatic event can be claimed, integrated, and somehow restored into a functioning life. The sculpted phrases stand like the lean musculature of a psyche that has done mourning's heavy lifting, and yet despite their taut resilience, they remain vulnerable. It calls to mind Elizabeth Bishop's writing about the "art of losing" in "One Art," a poem written after the suicide of her partner Macedo Soares in which Bishop projects an assured self surveying just another in a constellation of losses: "keys...places...names...beloved houses...cities...rivers...continents...you." The repeated admonition (woven into the poem's villanelle form) that "the art of losing isn't hard to master" reads like an unconvincing mantra. The echo structurally, and purposefully, belies the poem's content. The reader, with each escalating example of something lost and each insistent declaration of the ease of mastering loss, becomes less convinced. This is Bishop showing the severity of her grief by refusing to even proffer the loss. The loss is not only a disaster, it's an unmitigated one. There is no movement here, no escaping the confines of something not yet even able to be acknowledged.

In *Arno*, Holzer not only keeps the tense of the writing unrelentingly present to suggest the *activity* of grieving as one productive way to beckon the future and slip trauma's noose, she marries it to a form that is all movement. When the white light of the projections moves and the lines of text continue to rise as others disappear from sight, the viewer is given an object lesson in working through loss as a way of wanting the future. It is the future as the gift of more—more time, hopefully, marked by the good. Loss, inscribed as a gift and

activity, is also fundamental to the candy pieces that Felix Gonzalez-Torres began in 1991, the year his partner, Ross Laycock, died of AIDS. When viewers encountered a work like "Untitled" (Lover Boys), they could take one of the silver cellophane-wrapped candies piled in a corner—an "ideal" weight, 355 pounds, the combined weight of Gonzalez-Torres and Laycock. The supply is endless, with the work returned to the ideal when enough are taken. Rather than implicating he who takes and tastes as responsible for the loss, Gonzalez-Torres involves the participant in the ongoing act of grieving it. Grief is built into the work as an activity—something practiced—rather than a period with a tidy beginning and end. The consumption into bodies and memory allows for the ideal—the idea and fact of the lover within the ideal—to be reconstituted and remembered, like the supply, endlessly. Though Holzer's projections do end—even if they were to go all night, daylight would devour them—their work suggests loss and grief as open-ended. This repetition and release through loss, in the work of Gonzalez-Torres and Holzer, reveals the power of mourning as a way to permit a future.

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One would likely recognize any number of the places and buildings where Holzer has realized projections. Like me, you may have a picture of yourself or someone you love on the banks of the Arno. You may have a postcard of the Louvre or the Panthéon. Or perhaps you've seen a film that uses one of the sites, like the Guggenheim Museum or Rockefeller Center or Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, as the backdrop for a scene. Many of the sites traffic in a currency of recognition, the stuff of snapshots, postcards, and stage sets—even if we've never been, we mostly know where we are in these acts of looking. What happens at these sites isn't public because the space is seemingly open and democratic. We consider these spaces "ours" because the marketing of tourism, films, institutions, and even

nations permits the possibility of literally buying into the idea (and, to a certain extent, the fantasy) of them. I look at Holzer's projections on these landmarks with such attentiveness, in a kind of shock, because it smacks my narcissism, breaks the purchased fantasy that the place (maybe where I've been once or even never) is somehow "mine." The temporary, immaterial alteration floods the place with alterity, of being otherwise than I always thought or could imagine. In this way, the projections create the condition where the idea of a public space and the public itself can be defined not by what is necessarily (and physically) there, but by what (or who) can be sensed is missing or lost. In this sense, the public isn't necessarily only an aggregate of people and places, but an incomplete formation that allows consideration on who is not allowed representation and presence—those out of step with the powers that be—and why. These absences, or a void at the center of what is generally conceived of as public, permits a reappraisal of what responsibility as a collective endeavor might be. Holzer offers, in this vacuum and void, the possibility of forming a public created out of the commonality of grief and mourning, specifically in places that open grief to visibility. Even if the losses are individual, she establishes the setting to see them, and the mourning of them, as a shared, public event. Judith Butler, especially in her essay "Violence, Mourning, Politics," has written movingly and cogently on the gulf between "grievable" and "ungrievable" losses. The examples she gives of "ungrievable" deaths, such as Palestinian families killed by Israeli soldiers and civilians in Afghanistan in the latest war there, are those shut out of a humanizing discourse because cultural and political frameworks (such as newspapers and militaries) don't attend to the lives or deaths of such people—the notion being that they were not quite living to begin with, what Butler attributes to a failure of recognition and an identification with the perpetrator of harmful policies and deadly violence by those in power. She credits this not to an explicit discourse but "in the ellipses by which

public discourse proceeds," recalling, for example, "how few deaths from AIDS were publicly grievable losses."²²

In her projections, Holzer offers a model and metaphor for mourning where losses—those lost to ellipses and silence—not only become publicly grievable but where a public itself is created by a shared capacity to mourn and, as a consequence, can think of the future premised by collective responsibility. When criticizing the rush to end grieving after September 11, such as George W. Bush's call for action less than two weeks after the attacks, Butler claims that a fear of grieving compels a rushed sequence of events, sometimes violent, that attempts to patch up power and return the world to a lost (or fantastic) order. She asks, "Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence? Is there something to be gained in the political domain by maintaining grief as part of the framework within which we think our international ties?", Earlier, I asked what the politics of a practice of losing are, of grieving together. Holzer's work demonstrates that to practice loss is to identify with suffering, with a sense of human vulnerability. Engaged in this type of mourning, a public professes not just the capacity to grieve together but, perhaps, to avow some kind of responsibility for physical lives besides one's own. In her Survival series, written between 1983–85, Holzer already advocated mourning as a means of collective action. In a text that could refer to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an association of Argentine mothers who bravely bereaved and protested together for the return of their disappeared during the 1976–83 "Dirty War," Holzer wrote: MOTHERS WITH REASONS TO SOB SHOULD DO IT IN GROUPS IN PUBLIC AND WAIT

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²² Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 35.

²³ Ibid., 30.

FOR OFFERS (Figure 5.4). With the first Florentine projection and thereafter, Holzer (by then a mother herself) joined those working for the future to come.

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In the July 15, 2002, issue of *The New Yorker*, Jenny Holzer and eight other artists presented their proposals for a memorial at the site where the World Trade Center towers once stood. In her rendering, Holzer only reveals the western edge of the mutilated periphery with no direct visual confrontation with the place, the physical ground, of the area designated as Ground Zero (Figure 5.5). The majority of the picture reveals the still-standing Battery Park City buildings on the western fringe of Lower Manhattan, a simulation of projected texts that would crawl up the buildings' facades, and a glimpse of the Hudson River and the beginning of the rest of the continental United States. Only in the bottom left portion of the picture does the viewer see the skeletal vestiges of ruin in a building that looks like the splintered edge of a broken bone broken and another building left cloven, its insides exposed. In the most basic terms, Holzer's memorial consists of projected light, a selection of texts, a surface onto which she can project those texts, and a place where the projectors can be sited. If we consider that the area she leaves largely out of the rendering is the site where the towers stood, another term that should be added to the list is absence. The power in leaving the place ravaged and untouched is not to accentuate and insist upon the traumatic void as a necessity in itself. But by leaving it empty, by allowing absence to be procreative in its construction of memories and alternative futures, this maintenance of absence allows conceptual and political building that follows Brecht's maxim: "Don't start from the good old days but the bad new ones." In Holzer's case, this start comes from the tacit suggestion that the projectors be placed in the Ground Zero site. Not that we see them. From the rendering, a viewer can see that the texts crawl out of the pit and onto the buildings. The

texts, two poems by, respectively, the American poet James Schuyler and the Polish Nobel laureate Wisława Szymborska, create a pair of images that are also speech acts. Scrolling like credits at the end of a film, the process of viewing and reading involves not only the time it takes to witness the moving language but being near enough so it can be seen. This insistence on personal and physical proximity necessitates a confrontation with a landscape violently altered. But by incorporating adjacent buildings as screens for the texts, Holzer's proposal acknowledges that loss resides next to survival and not in a vacuum. It is the balance and negotiation between the two, absence and presence, destruction and production, that serves as a model for a kind of artistic and political project that insists on an accounting of the present before ill-considered acts goad a hastily arranged future into existence.

When Holzer stopped writing her own texts in 2001, she began to seek out and incorporate the writing of others (in addition to re-presenting her own thirteen series) to serve as the textual component of projects, particularly the light projections. With the exception of her collaborations with the American poet (and her friend) Henri Cole, with whom she began working in 2003 on a series of projections of his poem "Blur" in Venice, perhaps no other discovery and borrowing has been as significant as the poetry of Szymborska. Though Holzer first suggested projecting the Polish poet's work as part of the *The New Yorker* proposal, it wasn't until late October 2004, with the country less than a year into the Iraq War, that Szymborska's poems were first seen on building facades in Manhattan.²⁴ Invited by Creative Time, an organization that commissions and presents

²⁴ Holzer decides what texts to project at a particular place on a case-by-case basis. For 2011 projections in Poznan and Krakow, Poland, Holzer chose Szymborska texts in homage to the poet's country of birth and residence. But the choice of Szymborska was partially motivated because her poems frequently, like Holzer's texts, seem unauthored. That is, they read like a compendium of general thoughts that somehow found articulation. The generality of the colloquial voice and themes addressed make poems less like the "opinions" of one person that could then easily be dismissed and more akin to general "wisdom" or ambient opinion that takes more to debunk because the ad hominen target is less clear. In both cases, Holzer and Szymborska mimic the "plain talk" of power to stealthily posit the positions of the oppressed.

public art projects mainly in New York City, Holzer realized light projections at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, The Cooper Union, Bethesda Fountain in Central Park, and (what was then) the Hotel Pennsylvania, directly across Seventh Avenue from Madison Square Garden and Penn Station. A number of poems by Szymborska, in addition to others by Cole, Yehuda Amichai, May Swenson, Elizabeth Bishop, and Dana Goodyear, made up the play list for a series that moved among perspectives on personal loss, calamity in general, and the specific catastrophe of the Bush administration's march to war.

While the writings were not Holzer's own, the method of assimilating and presenting a multitude of voices to circle the complexity of life and its character as always (and always simultaneously) personal and political has been fundamental to Holzer's work and writing since her first text, the Truisms (1977–79). In that series, Holzer manufacture of one-liners mirrored a spectrum of moral and political thinking that she then listed alphabetically and presented on the street as posters. Refusing didacticism or righteous preaching, the list doesn't presume to catalogue belief's promiscuity. Rather, it provides the conditions for seeing the vagaries of belief and allows an opening to witness and construct one's self outside of rigid categories and known roles. It also presents a model of democracy, as articulated in the first chapter of this study, that sees antagonism as a productive means of generating inclusiveness. Holzer's turn to selecting the poems of others performs a similar task of presenting emotions and situations that she makes available as a vicarious experience. But unlike the *Truisms*, which, through sheer accumulation, assail any form of thought constructed and distilled so that its logic seems natural and inevitable, Holzer's delicate sequencing of borrowed poems more specifically intimate the layering of thought and feeling in any individual where a moment of shock over a world event is followed by an unexpected

tender reprieve or combines with some ambient dread. It isn't that the selection of poems serves as some emotional or intellectual proxy for Holzer; instead, the range of voices and topics stands as one constellation that, arbitrary as the arrangement of the constituent pieces may seem, gives us some sense of where we stand. The decision to appropriate and represent poems by others—texts that traffic in a literary form embedded in particular histories and traditions—could be seen as a retrograde capitulation to models of expression and subjectivity that seem contrary to Holzer's own anti-genre writing project as traced in this chapter. But her recourse to these poems came after the events of September 11, 2001, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that ensued. It was during this same period that Holzer began a series of silkscreen paintings that used government documents regarding the lead up to the wars, internal memos and emails concerning their execution, and correspondence regarding the treatment of "enemy combatants" as the "image" on the surface of the hand painted ground. In an interview with Holzer, Benjamin Buchloh asked about this return to painting. He inquired, "Is working with painting a decision that recognizes the necessity for a more expressive, if not expressionist, form and format to articulate messages of political protest and opposition at a moment of a seemingly endless war and increasing erosion of elementary civil liberties in the United States?"²⁵ Buchloh's suggestion that painting might be a viable option at that historical moment was premised on painting—the individual act—as a sign of opposition to a Bush administration that eradicated individual rights both in the "homeland" (via the Patriot Act) and abroad (via the denial of rights afforded under the Geneva Convention to Taliban soldiers, also known as "enemy combatants"). In a desperate moment, the implication was that an individual act of opposition was a last ditch and concerted—if ineffectual—means to distance oneself from the ruling ideology when that

²⁵ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "An Interview with Jenny Holzer," in David Breslin, ed., *Jenny Holzer* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 121.

ideology was purposefully closing any windows to opposition or difference. While Holzer's use of poems in projections isn't exactly analogous, it is a similar attempt to forge a coalition of ideas and voices that suggest the network of *individuals*—often occluded and lost—opposed to monolithic force. Holzer's use of the poems isn't a validation of expression per se but a representation of the multiple ways of thinking *otherwise* even in the face of the hegemonic.

With her selection of "Could Have," the Szymborska poem she proposed using for the World Trade Center memorial, Holzer places our feet squarely in the shoes of those who survived only by luck—and not just those who were in or near the towers, but all the rest of us, too, who didn't die that day because we were elsewhere, or perhaps even because someone reading this years from now hadn't yet been born. The first stanza locates the reader, as the rest of the poem elaborates, in places where she is left unscathed by some indeterminable catastrophe, whether through incident or mere accident: "It could have happened. / It had to happen. / It happened earlier. Later. / Nearer. Farther off. / It happened, but not to you...." The indeterminate tenses and contradictory positions banish blame and all vestiges of "why" ("why did this happen," "why did I survive") from the poem's purview. We're left with the bare fact that it happened. The fact of survival isn't parsed in evaluative terms; it is not a metaphysical matter of "why me" but simply a physical matter of how. Another stanza includes: "You were in luck—there was a forest. / You were in luck—there were no trees. / You were in luck—a rake, a hook, a beam, a brake, / a jamb, a turn, a quarter inch, an instant. / You were in luck—just then a straw went floating by." The poem is a wondrous testament to all the ways survival is (unfortunately) an exception, and Holzer mobilizes it almost as a plea to resist the immediate rush to blame and act, a plea to pause before vindication, to slow down before the execution of revenge. This isn't some

way to postpone the adjudication of justice or defend the indefensible while marveling at one's own good fortune. The pause acknowledges life's precariousness. Szymborska's poem ends with bafflement over the randomness of what once might have innocently been called "good fortune": "I couldn't be more shocked or speechless. / Listen, / how your heart pounds inside me." What is left isn't reason or blame or even anger over the just-missed but a scared heart beating into the chest of the person embraced. It is this fear, the involuntary trembling of a fragile body, that Holzer suggests might slow war's drumbeat and avoid the headlong rush into other tragedies. By proposing to place the poem in a location weighted with history and fraught with trauma, Holzer doesn't assign meaning or specificity to words that Szymborska wrote in 1972—just a year after both towers were completed, when their ruin would have been hard to conceive. She lets the language rub against the site like flint on steel to see what fire burns in each reader.

By the time the projections were realized in New York, ²⁶ it would be difficult to read "Some People," another of Szymborska's poems, on the side of the Hotel Pennsylvania and not think of the ramifications of living in or visiting a nation who was at war (Figure 5.6). But the language of the poem couldn't be more oblique or general. The first stanza reads: "Some people flee some other people. / In some country under a sun and some clouds." It isn't a matter of conjecturing *which* war Szymborska may be referencing but accepting that this is the condition of any war, even if waged under *another* sun. Some facts, the poem and Holzer's use of it imply, are alienable. While Holzer could be seen as recruiting this poem into a critique of the war in Iraq and the more amorphous "war on terror," her use of the poem more generally addresses the ramifications of war upon civilians and the daily horrors of violence rather than matters of policy or realpolitik. By placing it in a context that is not

²⁶ Though not at the World Trade Center site. A site visit was made and initial discussions were conducted, but nothing came to fruition.

immediately construed as political, Holzer is able to avoid the polarizing particularities of war and ideology and to speak more generally to the harrowing conditions of survival and states of internal and external exile that attend all wars. Szymborska's fifth stanza states these no-win conditions: "Always another wrong road ahead of them, / always another wrong bridge / across an oddly reddish river. / Around them, some gunshots, now nearer, now farther away, / above them a plane seems to circle." This wasn't the first or last time Holzer would reference the disasters of war, 27 but the significance of her use of projection is that, as it evokes the working *through* operative in mourning, its very form embodies the wandering of the exile, a state of being that has particular resonance when surveying the crises of the past century. As death is grounded in place, those who survive are often required to be on the move—exile, both forced and voluntary, becomes a condition of and for existence.

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So, life *as* exile is materially embodied in the projections, but how do we experience it? In the light projections, language takes to the building like an anxious guest, a self-conscious visitor unsure of how welcome he really is. To say that language is fundamentally homeless implies its dependence on contexts and users to construct spaces of temporary legibility where it can have a place. But contexts and those who witness those contexts endlessly change. In each projection, in dozens of cities, having taken place on every inhabited continent but one, there is a brief reprieve from homelessness—but it remains the ongoing state.²⁸ The texts migrate over the surface of the building in ceaseless escalation and

²⁷ Holzer's series *War* (1992) and *Lustmord* (1993–95) address, respectively, the Gulf War and the war in the former Yugoslavia. Her work with U.S. government documents, which began in 2004 with an exhibition at the Kunsthaus Bregenz and continues into the present, explores the modern history of the Middle East, particularly U.S. involvement, and the current wars there.

²⁸ The philosopher Thomas Keenan has written regarding the relationship between language, context, and meaning: "Austin [author of *How to Do Things with Words*], after all, is right: the circumstances do matter, almost entirely. They are not at the disposal of speakers to change at will—they let us speak, give us a place, make us subjects. But the rules, contexts, and capacities are not absolutely fixed either, and one version of the basic

disappearance, never modulating in pace and never standing still. I can remember standing on the west side of Fifth Avenue watching Holzer's 2008 projections on the Guggenheim Museum (Figure 5.7) and wanting certain lines that she chose of Szymborska's to just stop, like the simple three words with which "Some People" begins: "Some people flee...." And though that nostalgic desire to linger is frustrated by the insistent turning of the projector's scroll, what is gained is not some idea of the inexorable progression of history but the embodiment of the bitter march imposed on those who are on history's losing side. Holzer's effort is to attest to how power is survived by those in a state of weakness and impermanence. When the rootless touches the firmness of brick and mortar like a mask that only partially obscures the face, the question of *belonging* immediately becomes the concern. Holzer's pauseless projections never even hint at belonging. Though they adapt to the shape of the building and cover it, they always are moving elsewhere.

When discussing his projections of imagery on architecture and monuments, Krzysztof Wodiczko names the operation an "aesthetic counterritual." If the building literally embodies an ideological formation of mastery, Wodiczko claims, disturbing its mask is one way to crack the myth of impervious power locked in the seemingly innocent and obvious. The intervention, then, has the possibility to specifically address the historically accreted weight borne by a particular context. For example, his 1985 projection of a swastika onto the tympanum of the South Africa House in London was a direct response to the apartheid government's successful lobbying for money from the Thatcher administration. His contention is that buildings speak violently in their entitled silence. His response is to introduce, through images, the possibility of other voices living within the otherwise gated,

question of politics is this: How do they change? How are they changed?" Thomas Keenan, "Drift: Politics and the Simulation of Real Life," Grey Room 21 (Fall 2005): 99-100.

²⁹ Krzysztof Wodiczko, "Public Projection" (1983) in Critical Vehicles (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 48.

univocal community. But while the image, like the swastika, jars with its first blush incongruity with the embassy building and the London site, its static presence boldly professes that it belongs or questions, to the point of absurdity, what belonging means. It fleetingly poses as permanent and natural to antagonize the very concept of ideological privilege and fixity. If Wodiczko aims to pierce a building's ideological armor to show power stripped and vulnerable, Holzer's more prosaic effort (and this I see as immeasurably positive in its adherence to reality over symbolism) is to attest to how power is survived by those in a state of weakness and impermanence. The work doesn't heroically (or naively) attempt to counter power's mechanics; it resolutely mirrors the slippery and shadowy existence of an age described by thinkers and writers—from Hannah Arendt to Edward Said to Giorgio Agamben—defined by the refugee, the displaced person, and mass immigration.³⁰ Though Holzer's projections seem to share Wodiczko's impulse to chip away at myth whenever a hammer's at hand, their guileless march up the building's face is redolent with the exile's step-by-step logic of simply getting by in a place that isn't yours. As Holzer's use of language and the projections share precarious existences premised on temporary accommodation, they both are absolutely contrary to nationalism and its characteristics. If, as Edward Said has posited, "Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage... It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs,"³¹ then exile is a state of being characterized by drifting and discontinuity. Finding a material mode that registers the logic of exile as endless transition and translation, Holzer's

³⁰ Said writes: "Our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers—is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration. Against this large, impersonal setting, exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism." Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile" (1984) in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 174.

³¹ Ibid., 176.

projections provide the appropriately tenuous and fragile visibility evocative of those who do not or barely belong.³²

If there is model for Holzer's embrace of a practice that eschews the material constraints that repeat a nationalist logic of belonging, it can be found in the work of Robert Barry. In his *Inert Gas Series* from 1969, where specific quantities of krypton, argon, xenon, and helium were released into the atmosphere at specific times and specific locations, or in *90 mc Carrier Wave (FM)* from 1968, where sound would inaudibly and invisibly (though physically) fill a room, Barry uses materials specifically for their imperceptible characteristics to question how legible or perceptible any space is. But beyond the importance of Barry's work for its introduction of an expanded field of materiality and its nascent critique of

³² The projector as the physical carrier and object that permits the precarious display is similar in its mobility to the language presented. Usually unpacked and repacked the same day as the projection, the anonymous black case where the project resides—appropriately called a "road case"—bespeaks an existence defined by the incessant set-up and breakdown of moving. If one measure of the projections' affiliation with the exile is a life of fundamental portability, one antecedent is Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, the museum within a box that he constructed out of photographed miniaturized replications of his preferred and best-known works. But while Duchamp's project, produced during the dangerous years from 1935 to 1941, tackles the problem of bringing a version of what is already yours near, literally within hand, at a time when conflict and its intimations threatened any type of material survival, it does so within a bubble of self-preservation and containment. T. J. Demos has written about Duchamp's project:

^{...} it meditated upon the existential vulnerability of homelessness... but also offered the means to combat the fragmenting effects of exile through the reconstruction of a portable home built upon the assembly of photographic reproductions. More than simply combating the fragmenting force of dislocation, the suitcase also carefully draws on that very power in order to free itself from the institutionalization it at once internalizes and acknowledges. Creating an innovative artwork that escapes all traditional categories, it also proposes the means by which Duchamp modeled a form of subjectivity that freed itself from the strictures of an increasingly claustrophobic national identity, the evasion of which is brilliantly exemplified by Duchamp's cheese merchant slipping through the regulatory mechanism of Nazi borders.

Demos, The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 20.

Demos shrewdly associates Duchamp's use of photography with the museological impulse to preserve and decontextualize. By suggesting that the project demonstrates how the crisis of memory that exile induces is made manifest in the desire to recuperate and join together as much as possible, Demos finds Duchamp "longing for an independent existence in an era of fascist domination, growing artistic institutionalization, and exile's desperation (19)." While Demos's reading is extremely persuasive, its one blind spot is its uncritical differentiation between an escape from nationalism and an adoption of a facile cosmopolitanism that mimics the flow of capital and goods more closely than it resembles the tenuous, temporary, and often barely visible existence of homeless peoples. While it seems apposite to see Duchamp's *boûte* operating within and replicating the institutional forces of displacement that are as similar to nationalism as they are to the museological apparatus, it shouldn't be dismissed that Duchamp also models a form of cosmopolitanism that posits a citizen at home anywhere but fortunate enough to be able to influence the shape of that experience's walls. It is a form of cosmopolitanism in which nationalism's insularity, its maintenance of a division between what lies inside and outside of its borders, endures.

contextual and ideological transparency, his projects crucially are uninhibited by territory or specific cultural signifiers.³³ If the projects evince belonging, they do so in dramatic contradistinction to nationalism's avowal of culture and custom; that is, as physical properties found in nature, the fact of gas refutes the possibility of culture or custom made and posing as *natural*. And if the ideology of nationalism is partially premised on having borders one can both physically and metaphorically position oneself by, Barry usefully submits porosity as one countermodel espousing exchange and integration over an insularity that constructs categories of insider and outsider. Barry's resistance to rationalized space and its associations with systems (perspectival, social, etc.) that control and represent the world as it is or 'as it ought to be' has been ongoing in his practice. His early paintings, for example Four Squares from 1967 where small square paintings of the same color were installed on the four corners of one wall, refuse to delimit or define a single point from which one is to look or where the work must singly be in order to be apprehended. This multiplication of sites where the painting exists simultaneously opens the space to the viewer as it refuses to site the viewer in any one position that would confine her perception to a fixed point. In his refusal of boundaries and resistance to closure, Barry avoids authoring the space or suggesting the authoritarian act of dictating how the space must function.

In a rather anomalous work that gives some indication of the political and antiauthoritarian foundations of his practice, Barry presented his *Marcuse Piece* in a handful of venues in 1970-1. The works consists of a text that is applied to a gallery wall which also contains part of a quotation that ends Herbert Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation* (1969). The text of Barry's piece reads: "Some places to which we can come, and for a while, 'be free to think about what we are going to do." Marcuse's short book was simultaneously a salvo to

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³³ The tools to measure the gases or produce the carrier wave may be the product of a company and nation that bears connotation and signification, but the gases and waves in their "pure" state are base materials.

revolutionary forces, such as those in Vietnam and Cuba who took to arms as a last resort against imperialist capitalism, as it was a rumination on what a new form of socialism would look like outside of the confines of pure production and an affirmative culture that substantiates the existing "pseudo-democracy in a Free Orwellian World." I'll quote at length how Marcuse ends his book to get a better sense of the context from which Barry quotes:

And then there is an answer to the question which troubles the minds of so many men of good will: what are the people in a free society going to do? The answer which, I believe, strikes at the heart of the matter was given by a young black girl. She said: for the first time in our life, we shall be free to think about what we are going to do.³⁵

While Barry's earlier work proposed an escape from space as a marked ideological formation, the Marcuse piece—in its quoting and recontextualizing of the quote in new language that refers to space ('places') and duration ('for a while')—specifically signals the impossibility of the freedom "to think" without novel conceptions of the physical parameters where that thinking and doing will be done. His proposition of the empty gallery with the text simply imprinted on the wall functions similarly to Michael Asher's 1972 *Galleria Toselli, Milan* where the gallery's walls were sandblasted to reveal coarse surfaces and rough textures antithetical to the supposed flat neutrality of the white cube. Where Asher exposed the "empty" space as fecund with presumptions about the material constitution of impartiality and disinterestedness, Barry suggests that ideological "freedom" and new beginnings are impossible without a reorganization of the spaces and environments where life is led. Reversing the mystical and mythifying implications of projects such as Yves Klein's 1958 installation *Le vide* where the framing device of the empty gallery was somehow endowed with the legitimizing auratic power of the artist himself, both Asher's and Barry's

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 $^{^{34}}$ Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), x.

³⁵ Ibid., 91.

stripped scenarios reveal that the identities of art, artworks, spaces, and ideologies are socially produced through material containers that always bear traces of contingency and politics.

This unmoored state shared by the work of Holzer and Barry isn't some nihilistic denial of place and community but rather a reflection on conditions after historical events made the home and homeland equally implausible. In Minima Moralia, Theodor Adorno writes about the condition of exile as the impossibility of being at home, particularly after World War II:

The house is past. The bombings of European cities, as well as the labor and concentration camps, merely proceeds as executors, with what the immanent development of technology had long decided was to be the fate of houses. These are now good only to be thrown away like old food cans....The best mode of conduct, in the face of all of this, still seems an uncommitted, suspended one: to lead a private life, as far as the social order and one's own needs will tolerate nothing else, but not to attach weight to it as to something still socially substantial and individually appropriate....Today we should have to add: it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.³⁶

Exile becomes, then, a substitute (a forced one for some that Adorno believes should be adopted by all) for the same nationalist ideologies and institutions that endorse and wage war, subsequently (and perversely) destroying the very homes that symbolize nationalism itself.

In his essay, "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said has written that "the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other."³⁷ If Said's point is valid, and if Holzer's projections follow the logic of cross-cultural fungibility implicit to Conceptual art that contradicts the normal workings of the nation-state, then the projection form itself must also materially bear

³⁷ Said, Reflections on Exile and Other Essays, 176.

³⁶ Theodor Adorno, "Refuge for the homeless" in Minima Moralia (1951). Reprinted in Rolf Tiedemann, ed., Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 40-41.

the trace of nationalism. It isn't sufficient for the projection to only embody exile as a process of mobility and translation. It isn't enough to present texts that suggest meaning's homelessness, the fragile need that uncomfortably ties context and context so that each can speak through the other. But how do the projections, seemingly innocent in weightless, white light, carry the mark of nationalism—even as a remainder or ghostly trace? Seeing light as merely pure—another index of guileless nature—is to forget that the most violent nationalist ideology of the twentieth century prominently used it as symbol of might and territory.

A German postage stamp from the World War II era shows a soldier in the foreground looking through binoculars at the same angle of the elucidating spotlight just behind him. In this image, the tool that assists in waging war and defending land takes on a purely mythical and ideological function. The searchlight not only stands in for the power to reveal hidden truths but also to suggest that darkness—like any enemy, anyone outside of the boundaries of belonging—was something to be conquered and vanquished. As a military tool that also can be operative as a classicizing, aesthetic form, the searchlight became an obvious choice for National Socialism and Nazi imagery. With Albert Speer's "Cathedral of Light," the lining of the Nuremberg Fair Grounds' perimeter in 1937 with a succession of searchlights, the night rallies of the Nazis were framed within a spectacular spectral architecture that suggested a protective enclosure while implying infinite expansion from within. Light—now far from unmarked purity—becomes the xenophobic, nationalist symbol that, as it erases darkness, obliterates an enemy synonymous with exile and death.

³⁸ It's no surprise that the idea was disliked by the commander of the German Luftwaffe, Hermann Goering. His squabble wasn't aesthetically motivated. The number of searchlights represented most of Germany's strategic reserve and left the country vulnerable to a night attack. Hitler pushed the concept into reality not only because of the symbolic heft of this form concretizing the illuminating power of National Socialism but because it also functioned as disinformation: "If we use them in such large numbers for a thing like this, other countries will think we're swimming in searchlights."

Light and dark become the dialectical equivalents to Said's nationalism and exile. In Holzer's work, light is the material reminder of the unseen. Though she has projected throughout the world, the 2001 Berlin series (at sites including, among others, the Chancellery, the Berlin State Library, the Neue Nationalgalerie, the Altes Museum, and the Jewish Museum, to name a few) most explicitly and directly suggest the stakes of this ongoing project (Figure 5.8). In a city still touched by the memory of Speer's light and physical vestiges of that horrible century, her light and text on old and new buildings combine that millennial hope for a fresh start with the scarred knowledge that time doesn't heal all wounds. Realized in late January and early February, in those relatively forgotten and quiet months before 9/11 and new wars over homeland, the almost obsequious projections suggest the conditions of those stateless—from the history of the Jews to the present of Palestinians—who subsist in the shadows of all nations and who wander in cities that never will be home.

Just three weeks after the World Trade Center disaster, Calvin Tomkins reported in the October 1, 2001, *New Yorker*, that two artists (Paul Myodo and Julian LaVerdiere) and two architects (Gustavo Bonevardi and John Bennett) were working to realize an impermanent memorial. Though their initial ideas and plans were independently conceived, the team of architects and team of artists began to collaborate after they learned of the similarity of their proposals. Fashioned out of projected light, the commemoration would evoke the presence of the lost through spectral shafts that assume the basic form of the towers. They called the project, "Towers of Light." In the brief article, Bonevardi is quoted as saying, "It's not imposing anything on the city, but showing the world that New York is unbroken, and that we're here, and vibrant, and alive." The article concludes with the architects having the last words:

'It will definitely not be a tourist attraction,' Bennett said. 'By no means,' Bonevardi said. 'It'll be something you see from afar—maybe as far as a hundred miles. It could

even be done in other cities—towers of light on the Washington Mall, for example. Wouldn't that be stunning?' 'A sort of friendly apparition,' LaVerdiere said."³⁹

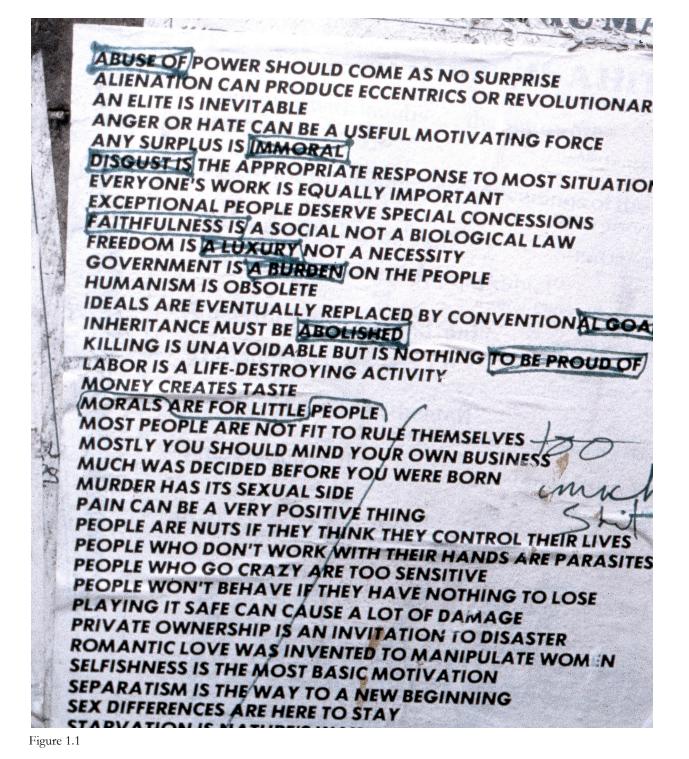
At ground level, when the project is realized as it has been for the last decade, the illusion of the light towers breaks into its constituent parts. Two grids of spotlights evoke the footprints of the buildings; the individual lights create a field of vertical lines that become a totality of two only when viewed at a remove. While mining the symbolism of loss through the material logic of light (visible but not tangible), the image of the skyline made whole through the visual recuperation of the towers defers real mourning in this melancholic manufacture. It professes loss but betrays, in a move completely at odds with Holzer's project, an inability to lose.

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Together, my father and I saw some of Holzer's projections in San Diego in January 2007. On the beach in La Jolla, behind the Museum of Contemporary Art, we watched the projections touch the Pacific (Figure 5.9). The language followed the crest of a dark wave, and the white light of the letters would sometimes be lost in the pale foam of the break. Language had met its slippery match. Meaning and sense were only as reliable as a moment of gravity and current. We watched for what we could read, but also for the incidents witnessed—birds feeding in the double curve of an O on a wave, a swell bulging the midsection of a passing word, some revelation shared in conversation—that make everything new. We stood in the cool night—I remember neither of us was dressed warmly enough; we wanted another California—and began planning another trip, somewhere, some day, soon. We imagined a future. It feels indecent to end with myself, with my own private fears about surviving him and a loss I know but can't predict. But I do so because I could

³⁹ The project first was realized on the six-month anniversary of 9/11, March 11, 2002, and continues to be instantiated yearly to commemorate the day.

(can) always run anything by him. If being raw to his loss and repeating it endlessly in advance made me that much more vulnerable to and responsible for the lives of others, he'd tell me (it's in his eyes in that photograph on the Arno) keep going.



from *Truisms* (1977–79), 1977 Offset poster 34.75 x 22.9 in. / 88.3 x 58.1 cm Installation: New York, 1977 © 1977 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY Photo: Jenny Holzer



Blue Room, 1975
Acrylic wash over latex paint
Dimensions unknown
© 1975 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

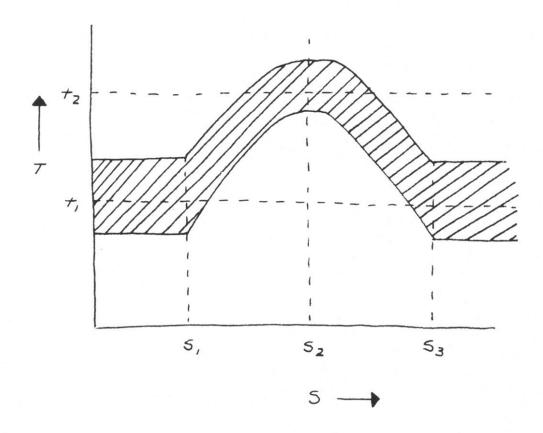


Pigeon Lines, 1975
Bread, pigeons
Installation: Providence, Rhode Island, USA
© 1975 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Figure 1.4

Beach Carpet, 1975
Acrylic on cotton
600 ft. / 182.9 m
© 1975 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Two bodies run together, fuse, and then vanish

Figure 1.5

Diagrams, 1976
Ink on paper
6 x 4.5 in. / 15.2 x 11.4 cm, each
© 1976 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

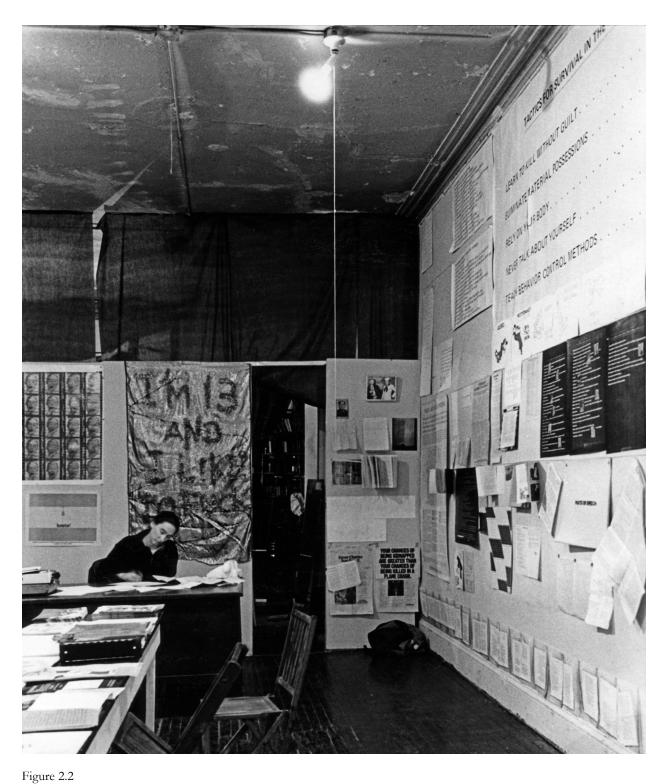


Figure 2.1

from *Truisms* (1977–79), 1977 Offset poster 24 x 18 in. / 61 x 45.7 cm Installation: New York, 1977

© 1977 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo: Jenny Holzer



Manifesto Show, with Colen Fitzgibbon and Collaborative Projects, 1979 Installation: 5 Bleecker Street, New York
© 1979 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY Courtesy: Jenny Holzer / Art Resource, NY



from Inflammatory Essays
Offset poster
17 x 17 in. / 43.2 x 43.2 cm
Installation: New York, c. 1979–82
© 1979 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

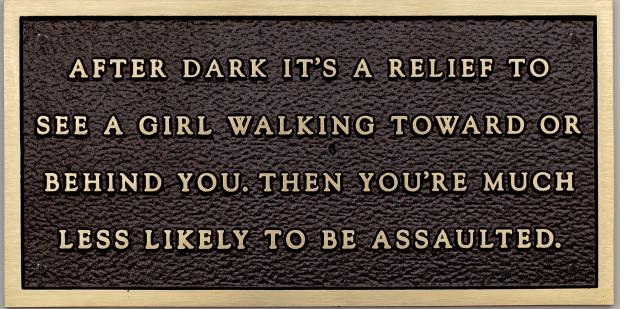


Figure 2.4

Living: After dark it's a relief to see a girl..., 1981
Cast-bronze plaque
5 x 10 in. / 12.7 x 25.4 cm
Text: Living, 1980–82
© 1981 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

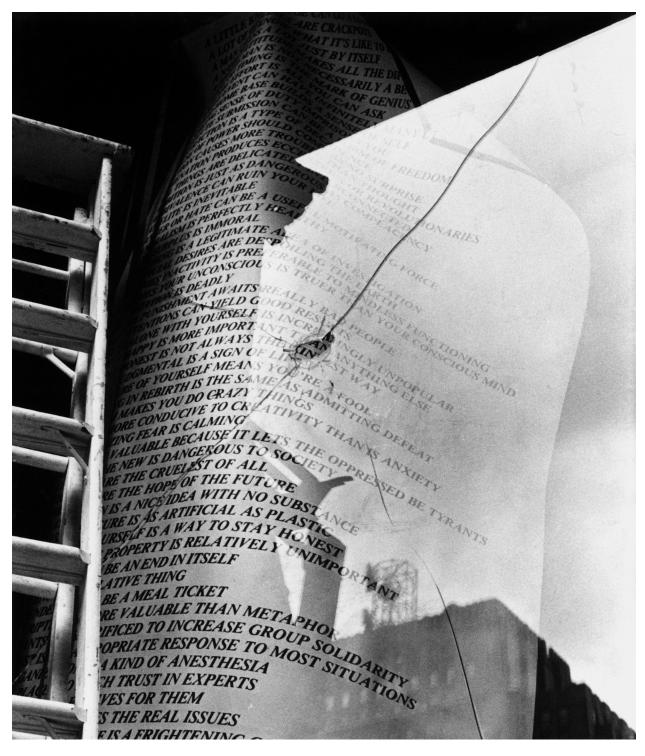


Figure 2.5

from *Truisms* (1977–79), 1978 Photostats, audio tape, posters (partially destroyed) Installation: Franklin Furnace, New York, 1978 © 1978 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY Photo: Mike Glier



Figure 2.6
from *Truisms* (1977–79), 1979
Photostats and audiotape

Installation: *Printed Matter Window*, Printed Matter, New York, 1979 © 1979 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo: Jenny Holzer

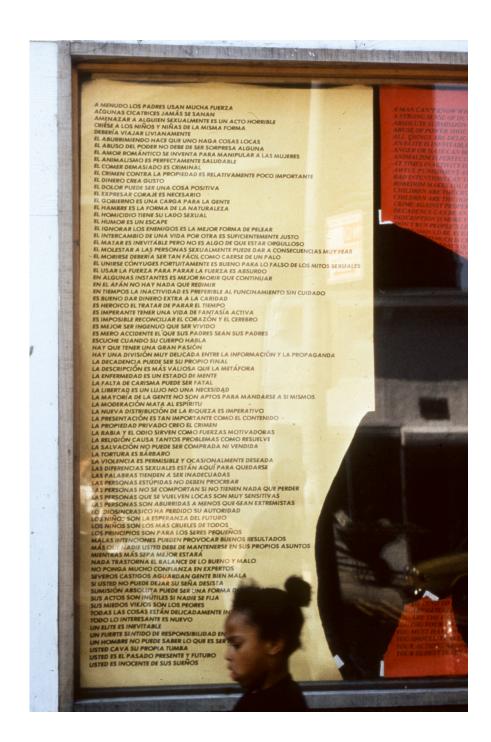


Figure 2.7

color photostats and audiotape 8' x 36"

Text: Truisms, 1977-79

Installation: Fashion Moda Window, Fashion Moda, New York, 1979 © Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

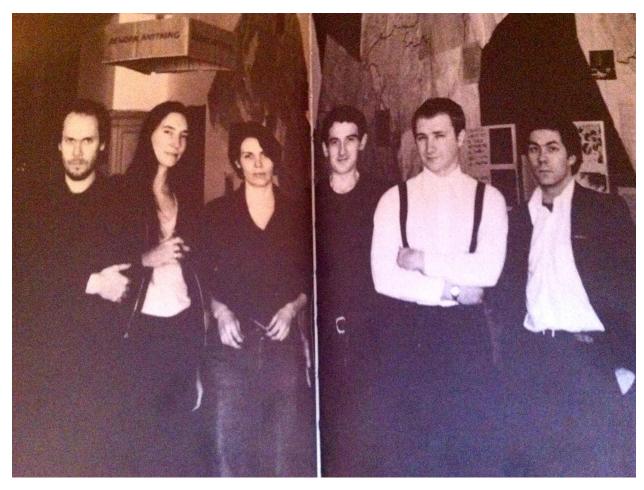


Figure 3.1

Photograph of the members of *The Offices of Fend Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters*From left to right: Richard Prince, Jenny Holzer, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Peter Fend, Peter Nadin, and Robin Winters

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Figure 3.2

Business card of The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters



Documenta 8, 1987
2 LED signs, 2 sarcophagi
Text: Laments, 1988–89
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany
© 1987 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

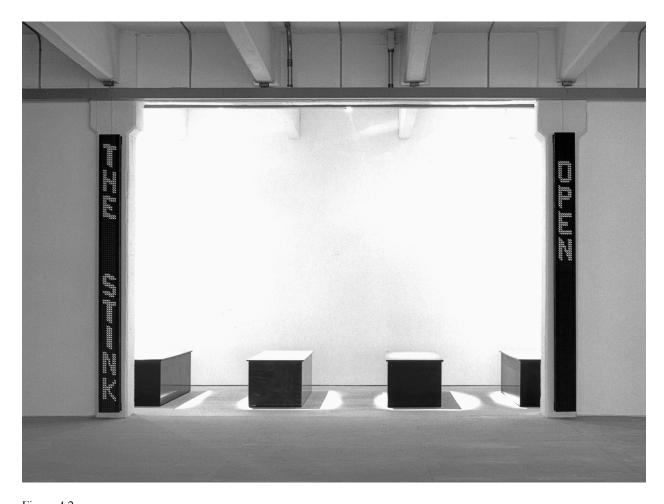


Figure 4.2

Exhibition view: *Jenny Holzer: Laments 1988–89*, Dia Art Foundation, New York, 1989

© 1989 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio

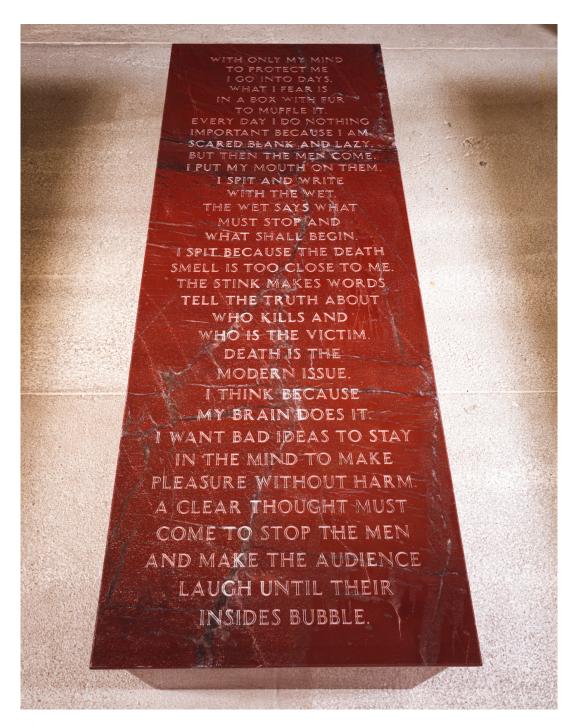


Figure 4.3

Laments: With only my mind..., 1989 Red Ankara marble sarcophagus

82 x 30 x 24.4 in. / 208.3 x 76.2 x 61.9 cm

Text: Laments, 1988-89

Installation: Jenny Holzer: Laments 1988-89, Dia Art Foundation, New York, 1989

© 1989 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Courtesy: Jenny Holzer / Art Resource, NY

Photo: Larry Lame



Figure 4.4

Exhibition view: *Jenny Holzer: Laments 1988–89*, Dia Art Foundation, New York, 1989 © 1989 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio



Exhibition view: *Jenny Holzer: Laments 1988–89*, Dia Art Foundation, New York, 1989 © 1989 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY Courtesy: Jenny Holzer / Art Resource, NY Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio

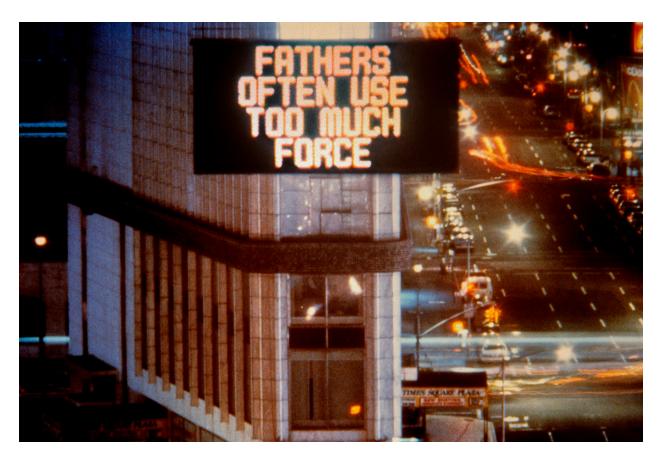


Figure 4.6

Messages to the Public
Spectacolor electronic sign
20 x 40 ft.
Text: Truisms, 1977–79
Times Square, New York
© Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

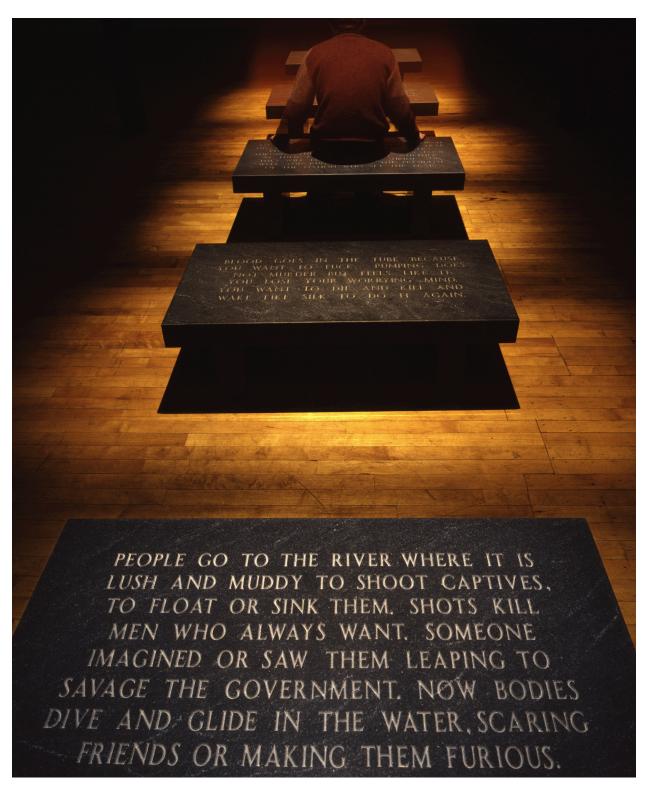


Figure 4.7
Exhibition view: *Jenny Holzer: Under a Rock*, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, 1987
© 1987 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
Courtesy: Jenny Holzer / Art Resource, NY
Photo: Michael Tropea

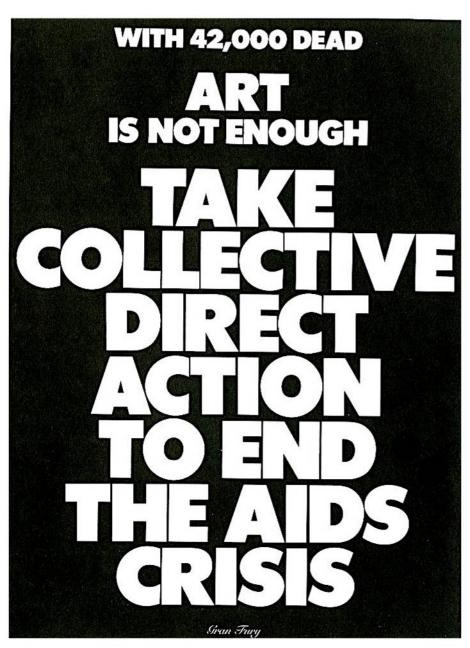


Figure 4.8

Gran Fury designed December-January 1988-89 poster/calendar of events for The Kitchen Courtesy of The Kitchen



Gran Fury designed December-January 1988-89 poster/ calendar of events for The Kitchen Courtesy of The Kitchen

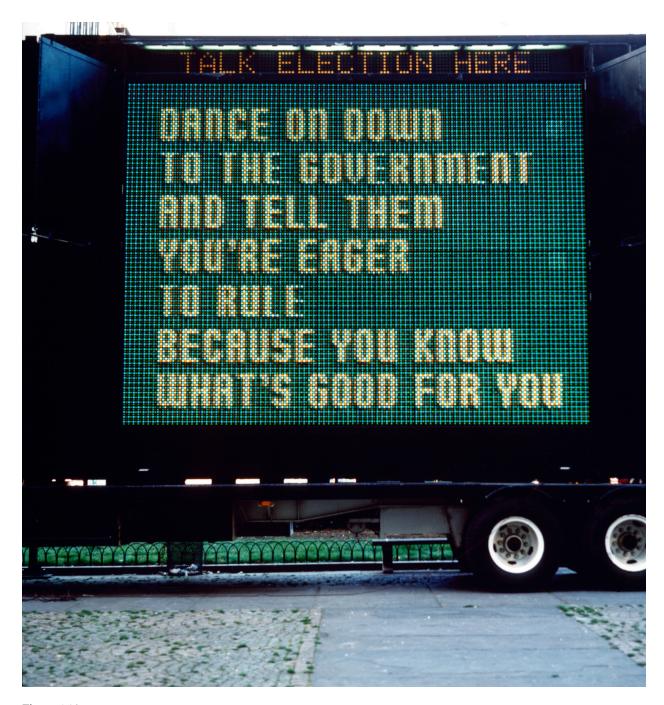


Figure 4.10

Sign on a Truck, 1984 Mobile 2000 video control system 161.5 x 216.5 in. / 410.2 x 549.9 cm, screen

Text: Survival, 1983–85

Site view: Grand Army Plaza, New York, 1984

© 1984 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo: Pelka/Noble

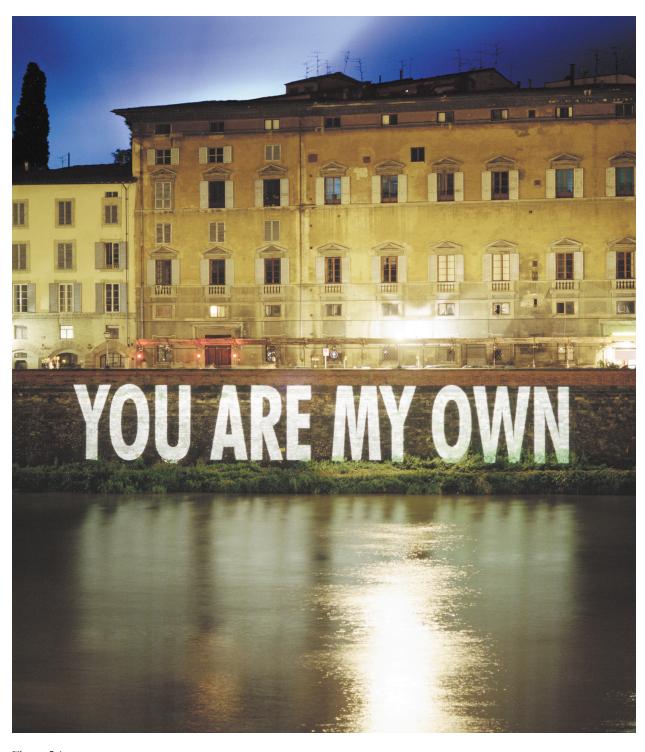


Figure 5.1

Xenon for Florence, 1996 Light projection Arno River, Palazzo Bargagli, Via de Bardi, Florence, Italy Text: Arno, 1996 © 1996 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY Photo: Attilio Maranzano



Figure 5.2

from War, 1992 LED signs

112.5 x 10 x 4.5 in. / 285.8 x 25.4 x 11.4 cm, each

Text: *War*, 1992 Kunsthalle Basel

© 1992 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Lustmord, 1993
Cibachrome print of ink on skin
13 x 20 in. / 33 x 50.8 cm
Text: Lustmord, 1993–95
© 1993 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
Photo: Alan Richardson



Figure 5.4

Survival: Mothers with reasons to sob..., 1984
Cast-aluminum plaque
6 x 10 in. / 15.2 x 25.4 cm
Text: Survival, 1983–85
© 1984 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

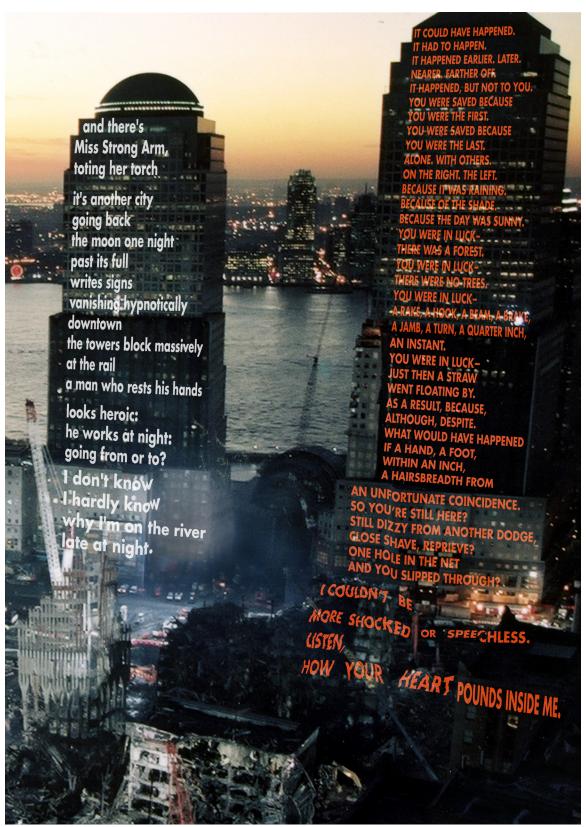


Figure 5.5
Jenny Holzer contribution to "After the Towers: Nine Artists Imagine a Memorial" Calvin Tomkins, *New Yorker*, July 15, 2002

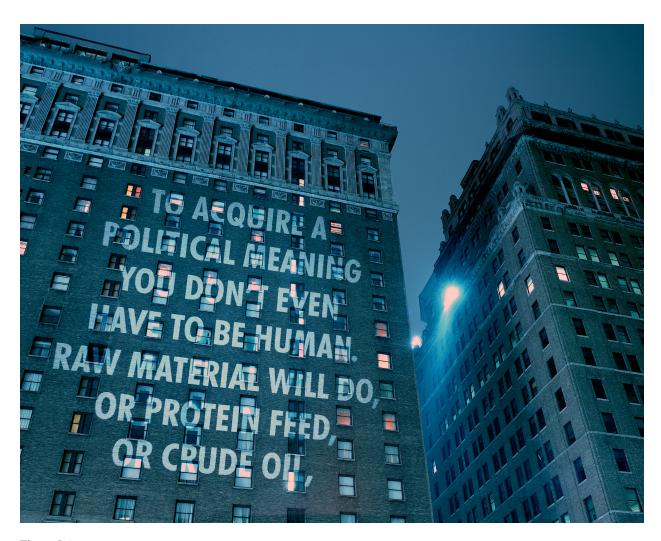


Figure 5.6

For New York City, 2004 Light projection

Hotel Pennsylvania, New York

Text: "Children of Our Age" from *View with a Grain of Sand* by Wisława Szymborska, copyright © 1993 by the author. English translation by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, copyright © 1995 by Harcourt, Inc. Used/reprinted with permission of the author.

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Photo: Attilio Maranzano



Figure 5.7

For the Guggenheim, 2008

Light projection

Text: "Some People" from *Poems New and Collected: 1957–1997* by Wisława Szymborska. English translation by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, copyright © 1998 by Harcourt, Inc. Used/reprinted with permission of the author. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

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Photo: Annie Tritt

Photo © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

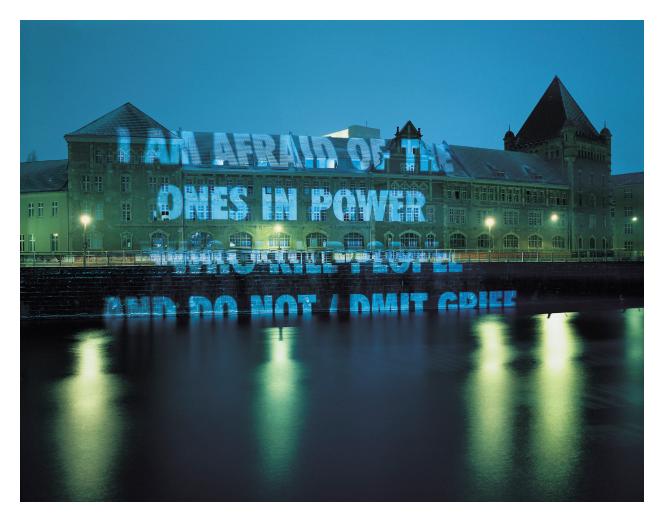


Figure 5.8

Xenon for Berlin, 2001 Light projection Museumshöfe, Berlin Text: Mother and Child, 1990

© 2001 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo: Attilio Maranzano



Figure 5.9

For San Diego, 2007 Light projection Wipeout Beach, La Jolla, California, USA

Text: "The End and the Beginning" from *View with a Grain of Sand* by Wisława Szymborska, copyright © 1993 by the author. English translation by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, copyright © 1995 by Harcourt, Inc. Used/reprinted with permission of the author.

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Photo: Philipp Scholz Rittermann