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~~Strategic~~ Tactical Response: Art in An Age of Terror

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Kathleen MacQueen

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Abstract of the Dissertation

~~Strategic~~ Tactical Response: Art in An Age of Terror

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This dissertation takes as its point of departure the crisis of perception that photojournalism cannot adequately take into account the problems of representing atrocity without repeating the violence and considers the position of art in expressing the ineffable. I present the work of three artists – Hans Haacke, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Alfredo Jaar – each of whom has struggled for decades to resolve the issues of confrontation and presentation, offering a vantage point from which viewers can critically address the causes, consequences, and representation of suffering. What purpose does the aesthetic serve in rendering atrocity visible? Can we visualize suffering without perpetuating abuse? What are the ethics behind the icons? Within the context of the art historical tradition of representing tragedy and the persistent vernacular obsession with visualizing abuse, this dissertation considers Haacke's, Wodiczko's, and Jaar's counter-strategies to the practice of witnessing trauma by confronting the ethics of witness and by creating an aesthetics of response.

For Kayla

who understood from the beginning that
one can write and speak *out of* difficulty

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"It is difficult" (to borrow one of Alfredo Jaar's titles, a phrase from William Carlos Williams) to write of artists about whom any number of profound essays have been written. The artists themselves discuss both passionately and eloquently the issues they confront with their work and many of these discussions have been published. While avoiding repetition of what has been so thoroughly discussed, I also seek to earn a position within a conversation that has been ensuing for decades and strive both in my research and my interpretation to warrant the time many individuals have devoted to this project.

"It is difficult" to express my gratitude to the individuals directly and indirectly involved. First and foremost, I thank my committee members for their insight and patience through a long process. I thank my family for their support, sacrifice, and stability. I thank my unofficial readers for their tireless efforts and relentless moral support, particularly: C. Jill O'Bryan, Allison Thompson, and Pennee Bender, who tirelessly advised throughout the entire project. Their editing skills and active dialogue helped me craft the arguments that fill these pages. Their friendship gave me courage when the struggle was toughest. I would also like to acknowledge Daphne Brooks and Abigail Solomon-Godeau as long-standing mentors and Madelyn Miller whose keen awareness of the complexity of trauma has provided a secure base of support.

"It is difficult" to construct a document worthy of the impact these artists' works have had on my awareness. Some individuals are compelled to embody a concept before it becomes completely real to them; I seem to be one of these. Rather than analyze the works of these three artists in a detached, supposedly objective framework, I took them on experientially. My dissertation, therefore, became not just a goal-oriented process but also one in which I was personally implicated. I believe the lack of detachment is balanced by the commitment I extend to my readers. My analysis was a process in learning, what John Rajchman expresses as the eros of philosophy; I am indebted to Rajchman's work on Lacan and Foucault in guiding my own position vis-à-vis my subjects and for the idea that one can write and speak *out of* difficulty. From Hans Haacke, I learned that meaning is produced through the interconnected dynamics of all spheres of life. Alfredo Jaar taught me what it means to "to let go" and to allow structure and content glide into meaning of its own accord. Krzysztof Wodiczko encouraged me to project myself into the world through my own creativity as a means to stand beside the individuals and the issues I find so compelling. To each of them, I say "thank you" hoping through my intervention to offer a valuable gift in return.

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Introduction / *Art in an Age of Terror*

> The Hour of the Wolf is the time between night and dawn. It is the hour when most people die, when sleep is deepest, when nightmares are most palpable. It is the hour when the sleepless are pursued by their sharpest anxieties, when ghosts and demons hold sway. The Hour of the Wolf is also the hour when most children are born.
> Ingmar Bergman, *Hour of the Wolf*

Why begin here? 'Framing' the artwork

This project takes as its point of departure the claim that serious photojournalism has failed to adequately take into account the problems of representing atrocity without exacerbating the violence. More importantly it also considers the position of art in expressing the ineffable: can that which defies comprehension, which can only be visually represented at great cost to subject, maker, and viewer, perhaps be better addressed through the vocabulary of art? By selecting three artists – Hans Haacke, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Alfredo Jaar – who have struggled for decades to resolve the disparity between documentation and the production of aesthetic meaning, I propose to offer a vantage point from which we as viewers can critically address the representation of suffering and the ethics of bearing witness.

Traditionally, photography plays between two worlds – aesthetic and informational, iconic and vernacular, art historical and cultural – rendering any aesthetic debate problematic. What makes a mechanically reproducible photographic image artistically significant in view of the dismissal of aesthetic aura in such theories of reproduction as that of Walter Benjamin?[1] What purpose does the aesthetic serve in rendering atrocity visible? Can we visualize suffering without perpetuating abuse? What are the ethics behind the icons? Between the frames of an art historical tradition of representing tragedy and the persistent vernacular obsession with visualizing abuse, this dissertation considers Haacke's, Wodiczko's, and Jaar's counter-strategies to the photojournalistic practice of witnessing trauma by confronting an ethics of looking and creating an aesthetics of response.

Delving into any dissertation topic represents for the scholar a leap of faith into her own ability to see the job through, into the substantive value of a topic to sustain prolonged interest, and into a belief in its relevancy to an academic or perhaps, eventually, a broader audience. Add to those already enormous pitfalls a topic that addresses subject matter or ideas that most of us prefer to sidestep and you have the formula for a dissertation fraught with obstacles and delays. Indeed I reached a point in

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[1] I am thinking here particularly of his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." See his third version, Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" in *Selected Writings, volume 4, 1938-1940,* ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (London, UK and Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 251-283.

this research where the topic not only resisted being trimmed down to size, it also grew one-directionally into a morass of melancholic obsessions. I risked becoming psychologically submerged by trauma – my own deeply hidden psychological trauma and a broader social trauma of witness. The more I felt obliged to look, the harder it was for me to see.

My initial investigation was the relationship between beauty and the representation of atrocity. While I originally intended to consider documentary trends from post-World War II photography through the end of the century, I was personally and critically aware of a post-September 11th onslaught of acts of atrocity and the constant barrage of on-line streaming of violence and trauma represented both in images and in text. As I had responded to my own first-hand, up-front witness of the collapsing towers on September 11th, I ceased being able to see in spite of my willingness to look. My will to witness was not so much reluctant as disabled since I could neither absorb nor analyze the violence intimated by vernacular images.[2] The questions I wished to ask had become assault weapons against my psychic wellbeing. Rather than fight my own resistance, I began to question whether that resistance did not have its own validity. Could I not renegotiate my topic and remain committed to a simultaneous aesthetic and political dialogue on the representation of trauma? Rather than focus on representation that had failed to engage my response, why not consider alternative solutions to the chronicling of atrocity. What had I been able to see in the last months that meant something to me personally and to my investigation of the trauma of witness?

Three works forged strong mental and emotional pictures in my consciousness, three works, among the many I had seen in Chelsea galleries throughout the 2005-2006 season. They were poetic and tactical responses to the simultaneous necessity of witness and the refusal to sustain the violence through the repetition of representation. I had been familiar with the work of these artists since the mid-1980s when I was transitioning from my own career as documentary photographer and filmmaker to one as poet and scholar. Hans Haacke, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Alfredo Jaar are politically active artists who have had to grapple with the difficulties of bearing witness to atrocity, chronicling a narrative within an artistic vocabulary, and responding to both positive and negative reactions to their positions as artists and activists. Each one has a different methodology and makes a different statement in regards to the relation of violence to what we see, what we know, and how we act. Each one admits, however, that there is a difference between sight and perception, between perpetuating trauma and bearing witness.

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[2] By vernacular images I mean mass media imagery (images disseminated through newspapers, magazines, television, the Internet and even in advertising since some companies such as Benetton use explicit imagery as part of their campaigns. Images of executions in particular caused a lingering wave of nausea followed by weeks of nightmares.

The relationship of aesthetics to the function of art, the debate between universality and historical specificity, photography's relation to the real, the impact of the distribution and reception of images, ethical issues in representing someone other than oneself, and the impact of trauma and aggressivity on subject and methodology are critical to understanding the approach that Hans Haacke, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Alfredo Jaar take in their own projects. These artists are deeply aware of the heated discourse that shapes the reception and the subject of art since the culture wars of the late 1980s and the early 1990s. They are intellectual artists who read profusely, research their work thoroughly, and teach as well as produce art. While their practice underscores a willingness to take risks, they have done so highly informed of the complex theoretical discourse on the production and reception of art and its relation to vernacular media. Here is a brief introduction to the three works that are the subject of this dissertation.

Hans Haacke's *State of the Union*

(Paula Cooper Gallery, November 5 – December 23, 2005)

A head and shoulders style portrait reveals nothing of the identity of the sitter. S/he is wearing a red/orange colored t-shirt and is hooded; the hood itself appears to have been created from the star field of the American flag; the background hovers gloomily, pressing on the crest-fallen shoulders and chest of the figure; it is dark, of indeterminate color. The figure sits passively, unidentifiable.

I was making the rounds of Chelsea in the fall of 2005 with my teenage son (I suspect it was Election Day as the public school system had the day off). The Paula Cooper Gallery had just opened their first Hans Haacke show, his first solo exhibition in New York City in eleven years. We had made our way through the off-the-television-screen re-photograph of G.W. Bush's State of the Union address, the monumental blue and white field of stars that hung, as critic Jan Avgikos pointed out, as mournfully as a Piétà,[3] the kicked-in storage locker, the broken desk, the spilled pennies, and the overflowing news-feed that by this point of the exhibition had already become a river of information too deep to wade through. That is where I had stopped, shocked to be reading a bit of archival data that had recently been declassified concerning the connection of members of Bush's current administration to the Iran/Contra scandal of the mid-1980s.[4] I reflected that this piece of news would probably not make it to the pages of any major dailies, and it was just as likely to be lost to my memory recall as easily as it slipped into the coiling miasma of endless information. Here was the state of our union:

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[3] Jan Avgikos, "Reviews: Hans Haacke," *Artforum* (February 2006): 208.

[4] This could be John Negroponte, National Intelligence Director; Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense; and Charles E. Allen, chief intelligence officer in the Department of Homeland Security. None of them had been convicted of involvement in the scandal but were all high-ranking Reagan administration officials.

intricately connected to a historical past obfuscated by an overwhelming mass of partial, hidden, and forgotten details.

Haacke commented in 1981, "the art world, naturally, is not the only world there is."[5] He was speaking about the relationship between the work of art isolated in its exhibition space and the world at large from whence it derives its content and to which it then responds. He continued, "It is difficult if not impossible to trace cause and effect in this dialectical relationship. Interaction and interdependence rather occur in the subtle shaping of the ideological climate, which is an aggregate of many and conflicting influences." Considering the content and the reception of his gallery installation, *State of the Union,* this statement is just as pertinent in 2005 as it was in 1981. While Haacke's target in *State of the Union* appears obvious, the debate itself is more nuanced. For example, several critics referred to the symbolism of a divided nation much as newscasters spoke of red states and blue states on the night of the 2004 presidential elections; and while the flag field of the exhibition's signature piece, *State of the Union* (2005), was torn neatly in half, the condition represented by other works in the show such as the broken desk, the kicked-in locker and the torn flag in *Ripped* (2004) suggest that their condition is one of degradation and deliberate dismantling more than division.

Haacke has always been aware of the importance of context to a work of art. I will discuss this at greater length in Chapter One. In this particular case, the exhibition does not critique its location as much as its circumstance of timing: subsequent to George W. Bush's re-election for a second term. *State of the Union* is confrontationally political but in a space that is not typically a political sphere. Isn't this perhaps the point? Terrorists chose the site of the World Trade Towers for both its symbolic and economic value. Haacke makes the case that the administration of G.W. Bush (and by implication the voting public that placed him in office) empties the symbols of democracy by deteriorating the very conditions of democracy. Where else but in a supposedly politically neutral zone of artistic exhibition are we to recognize the fallacy of remaining anonymous and without agency like the hooded figure?

Neutrality in the field of vision is impossible as Kaja Silverman emphasizes in *The Threshold of the Visible World*.[6] Our anxieties and our desires influence our looking, which mediates our response to the images that permeate our surroundings. Even more acutely, the structures created by both visual and verbal language, mediate our position in the world, a position easily ruptured in the relationship between language

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[5] Hans Haacke, from an unlabeled photocopy in the Artists Files, Museum of Modern Art Library Queens, 1981.

[6] Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996.

and pain, consistent with the creative theories of Elaine Scarry.[7] Although one might hesitate to create an intersection between the detached conceptual realism of Haacke and a psychoanalytic approach, by correlating Haacke's political symbols to psychic symbols we can begin to understand both the complexity of meaning in symbolic visualization in general and the impact of Haacke's visual language in particular. Through an analysis of Benjamin's "aura" and Brecht's "alienation",[8] we might begin to piece together the connection of Haacke's universal and historically specific symbols to symbol systems of the psyche and the cultural imaginary.

Krzysztof Wodiczko's *If you see something…*

(Galerie Lelong, September 10 – October 22, 2005)

"…[Y]ou are part of the problem, or you are part of the solution. Especially when silence is prefigured as a certain sort of phrase, already in dispute, configured within an asymmetrical power-relation," writes artist and theorist Thomas Zummer in an essay entitled "The Casting of Shadows: 10 abstract questions, and more notes for brutal times."[9] Krzysztof Wodiczko understands well the imbalance of power relations and their significance to silence and speech. It is a theme that has occupied his work from the early vehicles and communication devices through the long series of public projections. In 2005, Wodiczko composed a large indoor projection for a space typical for contemporary artists but atypical for him: the relatively private space of a commercial gallery.

The piece lacks nothing of Wodiczko's polemics: in this case, his willingness to pit the state (represented by the ubiquitous post-9/11 slogans found throughout New York City's mass transit system – "If you see something, say something" – that prey on and multiply our fear of the stranger and the unknown) against the voices of its citizenry, both licit and illicit (i.e., illegal immigrants). This piece is both quietly beautiful and emotionally profound. By playing realism against abstraction, plenitude against minimalism, Wodiczko embedded his political quandary deep within the aesthetic framework of an installation that reveals its content slowly. For the viewer willing to take the approximately forty minutes necessary to parse out the conversation floating behind windowpanes and (in a tone not much more than a whisper) saturating the typically silent air of the gallery, were the painful refrains of individuals whose lives had been

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[7] I work principally with Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.)

[8] For Benjamin's concept of aura I refer again to his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (see footnote 1) and for Brecht's alienation effect I will cite Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic,* trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957/64).

[9] Thomas Zummer, "The Casting of Shadows," 2003, Nettime mailing list archives, Alan Sondheim posting, Tuesday, 29 April 2003, http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0304/msg00119.html.

forever marred by neighbors betraying neighbors. More than politics, we are given lives: the accounts of strangers overheard on city streets; accounts that undermine the accountability of a government that fails to disclose its intentions and actions in regards to civil rights.

Far from *agitprop* and without being theatrical, Wodiczko has accomplished the best that European radical theatre of the 1960s and 1970s had to offer. By means of understatement, we, as viewers, hear the consequences of a systemic policy of hatred and fear, wherein a national policy morphs from victim to perpetrator and we, as agents, must question our own involvement. Through a sophisticated, cinematic strategy involving displacement and suture, Wodiczko creates an opportunity for the audience to recognize (but not appropriate) someone else's vulnerable circumstances. I, for one, became painfully aware of the thumping of my own heartbeat in my throat; it was a transformative experience. *If you see something* has the sincere conviction that the agony of others cannot be simulated for enjoyment but must be actualized to reconfigure the pain into anger and subsequently into action.

We are pained by Wodiczko's work but we are also *painfully* aware that we, as viewers, are displaced from suffering. As Saidiya Hartman emphasizes in her *Scenes of Subjection*, an author has no choice but to repeat the violence by chronicling it and the reader or viewer can only be a spectator (and therefore complicit) in that suffering.[10] Wodiczko, however, shifts the emphasis from viewer reception to participant realization. In Chapter Two, I will ask what role does the cultural project play in the lives, not of the viewer, but of the subject/participant? Agency, according to Judith Butler, can be transferred from the powerful to the powerless when the voice remembers and we no longer see "the other" but endeavor to embrace the shadow.[11] In rendering visible the relative positions in regards to suffering, Wodiczko moves the participant towards a place of agency and the viewer to a place of failure. *If you see something* is not about clarity but about our very inability to see.

Alfredo Jaar's *Muxima*

(Galerie Lelong, January 3 – March 18, 2006)

Taking time is essential to observing Wodiczko's *"If you see something…"* Noting time is critical to absorbing Alfredo Jaar's *Muxima* (2005). Jaar relegated six years of his life to *The Rwanda Project* (1994-2000). As much as the American press refused to acknowledge the atrocities being committed in Rwanda, Jaar, through his project chronicling the world's neglect, endeavored to give respectful attention where the

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[10] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[11] I work primarily with two texts by Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York and London: Verso, 2004) and *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

general public had uncomfortably or obliviously looked aside. Through a series of tactical procedures he reduced the weight given the spectacle of suffering and through visual text emphasized the world of suffering that lies beyond the sign. While this project could be viewed as the quintessential statement on regarding the suffering of others,[12] in Chapter Three I show how *Muxima* builds on Jaar's insights from *The Rwanda Project* and confronts the issues of chronicling suffering on a new level. He has chosen to be accountable for that which demands witness – there is no such thing as a neutral observer – but each individual's account is predicated on relations before, during, and after the telling. Judith Butler contends in *Giving an account of oneself* that identity is linked to accountability but that the only way we can live ethically is to recognize the account of others: their own story rather than the history assigned to them.[13] Jaar does this in Rwanda and later in Angola.

Spending time in Rwanda and a total of six years contemplating and elucidating the horrors of genocide, must take an enormous toll on an individual. *Muxima* seemed to me – while sitting in the darkened gallery, viewing and listening to this 36-minute eulogy – an ode to melancholy but also to love and abandon. Neither a documentary nor a narrative film, it is a highly sensitive piece. Jaar creates visual poetry by being receptive to rhythmic sound; he selects recordings by seven different artists of a favorite piece of Angolan music to give temporal dimension to his images. While *The Rwanda Project* was visually bereft of images as a response to the abusive nature of their display, *Muxima* returns to a reliance on images as a means to assuage the soul – not ours the viewing public's, but Jaar the filmmaker's, and, in its own collective way, Angola the country's – a soul damaged by prolonged sorrow and intense scrutiny of human suffering and human cruelty. I see this as neither "hopeful" nor "weak" as some critics noted.[14] *Muxima* is as sentimental as a love song, as elegiac as a sermon, as gentle as a caress, and as damning as any indictment in a public forum. It is a gift of love that accounts for the substance of its subject.

Interestingly, all three artists excel in producing work for public forums and in 2005 and 2006, chose instead to present work in private galleries to convey significant ideas on the impact of global economics and political power struggles on civil and human rights. Although these works are rooted in a commitment to social justice, their expression is, in all cases, a highly crafted and artistically mature aesthetic achievement. Whether a dramatic appropriation of public visual symbols, an interior projection, or a

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[12] This is a nod to Susan Sontag whose writings hover around this project as both inspiration and nemesis.

[13] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* 2005.

[14] See for example Ben Genocchio, "Political Art: Futile, Maybe, but Still a Noble Pursuit" *The New York Times,* November 4, 2007; and Emily Hall, "Alfredo Jaar, Galerie Lelong" *Artforum* (May 2006): 291.

series of visual cantos, these works reveal a commitment to the role of art in challenging a public out of lethargy, confusion, or shame to consider significant relationships between our role as lovers of beauty and citizens accountable for the leaders we choose. The three artists – born in Germany, Poland, and Chile – recognize their positions as participatory and ethical political subjects indistinguishable from their roles as artists.

Can there be another beginning or are we left with the same questions? While accepting that it is not possible to merely regard the suffering of others, Haacke, Wodiczko, and Jaar show us that it is possible to address the suffering of others in ways that may be public, private, visual, auditory, creative, political, and humane. They may also be redemptive. By describing three works produced in a post-September 11th climate of fear, by speaking directly to the artists, and finally by framing the works and the conversations in a reflection inspired by psychoanalytical, performative, and philosophical theory, I continue the debate on representation, explore the artists' tactics, and consider if we have remained with the same questions or, if perhaps, we are moving to a new place with pathways opened rather than closed, towards an ethics of seeing or, to use Peter Weiss's term, an *aesthetics of resistance.*[15]

The hour of the wolf – I too am sensitive to the time between night and dawn, when the pre-dawn is bathed in colorless grey; and yet, this dissertation would not exist without the fear embedded in that hour. It is when my restless anxiety surfaces, when my psychic fears give notice to my conscious fears, when confusion becomes clarity, when the diverse threads of my intellectual and emotional investigation suddenly weave into a form, when the leopard within identifies its prey, when if presented with a precipice I would trust myself to leap successfully across. Fear is supplanted by somnambulist tenacity; I write allowing the thought to take me rather than directing my thought and through that release I discover something different from the previous day's truths.

The work of these three artists triggered in me a restless anxiety that prompted my investigations. Throughout I have struggled to learn from the work rather than impose ideas upon it. With this project, I have undertaken a journey I little expected in which rigor and discipline was accompanied by a corresponding surge of passion and renewed belief that art, though produced with great doubt and skepticism, can change lives.

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[15] Alfredo Jaar borrowed this term from the playwright, novelist, and filmmaker Peter Weiss's title of his novel published in three-volumes in 1975, 1978, and 1981 and used it for the book version of his Gramsci trilogy, "Alla ricerca di Gramsci/Searching for Gramsci" (2007). See Alfredo Jaar, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (Como, Italy: ACTAR, 2005).

I foresee that man will resign himself each day to new abominations, that soon only soldiers and bandits will be left. To them I offer this advice: *Whosoever would undertake some atrocious enterprise should act as if it were already accomplished, should impose upon himself a future as irrevocable as the past.*
Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths"

A troubled legacy: photography's truths and lies

In this introduction, I present a brief perspective on the photojournalistic practice of representing war, atrocity, and horror. A parallel look at the debates that such representation has generated, both critical and artistic, weaves through this genealogy. Then in chapters one, two, and three, I present the work created by Hans Haacke, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Alfredo Jaar in 2005 in response to the consequences of global capitalism and the war on terror. This is done primarily through conversations with the artists themselves, which are framed on either side, first by a description of the work and then by an analysis of the tactical solutions they employ in order to witness without reproducing or exploiting the pain. I have shaped this format as a means to first prioritize primary sources of the work and producers over the secondary sources of historical and theoretical contextualization. Finally, in the conclusion, I consider the relative value of artistic practice in providing an ethical means of bearing witness to atrocity as well as drawing our attention to the conditions of accountability.[16] I use myself as primary, secondary, and tertiary witness in order to elucidate the impact of participation. Can art command attention at precisely the moment we might be inclined to turn away? This dissertation proceeds from the sincere belief that, yes, it can.

I began my career in the late 1970s as a concerned documentary photographer and filmmaker interested in political, feminist, and environmental issues. As a photojournalist I found the messages I intended to communicate were continually undercut by the media forces that control the publication and dissemination of images. My frustrations led to a redirection of my efforts artistically, both visually and poetically. That artistic production in turn became stifled by a theoretical debate led by scholars and artists who critiqued image production and its aesthetic and socio-political role.[17] Now,

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[16] Jonathan Kear, elucidating the terminology of *witness,* states: "Here we might make a simple distinction between two kinds of witnessing: *to witness,* in the sense of being present at an event and *to bear witness,* to provide an account of that event." See Jonathan Kear, "A Game That Must Be Lost: Chris Marker Replays Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour"* in Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, eds. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 134.

[17] Douglas Crimp, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Rosalind Krauss, and Sally Stein have been referred to as Marxist, materialist, or contextualist scholars because of their understanding of Marx's *modes of production* (the materialist or use basis rather than the aesthetic basis of photography) and their emphasis on the context surrounding the production of a photograph rather than isolating the meaning of an image to the visual

years later, I return to these questions of representation that I failed to consider previously in sufficient depth. My scholarship is motivated by the recent evolution of the representation of trauma, the debates it has sparked, and by contemporary strategies of response and resistance.

What is the first photographic image of atrocity? Does it matter? Before photography, and also used to disseminate information, was the graphic print. We attribute to Francesco Goya not only bridging the gap between traditional and modern print making but also chronicling the horrors of his time with a sensibility that was passionate, angry, and accusatory. We are convinced by his vision, trusting in his accuracy, although Robert Hughes attests that Goya was more than likely chronicling from hearsay rather than eyewitness, especially in his accounts of the abuses of the Inquisition. He wasn't there as witness, since the Spanish Inquisition lost most of its force and abandoned its torture techniques by Goya's time. The horrors of war were more immediate to Goya's experience – the French occupation of Spain occurred during his seventh decade but, again, he likely was not a first-hand witness. Goya's *Yo lo vi,* (I saw it), was according to Hughes, "a kind of illusion in the service of truth: the illusion of being there when dreadful things happen."[18]

Susan Sontag considers Goya's *Desastres* "a synthesis" of events. Goya claims that *things like this happened*; this is to be differentiated from photography's claim that *this actually happened*.[19] Why did he make them? It is a fair question because they were not printed for either widespread distribution or even sale during his lifetime.[20] Who did Goya intend as his audience? Were they a journalistic record or a historical one for the archives? For Hughes, Goya's "*Desastres* created a form of their own: that of vivid, camera-can't-lie pictorial journalism long before the invention of the camera, of art devoted to reportage, claiming its power as propaganda from its immediacy as an act of witnessing."[21] Perhaps Goya was well aware that few would ever *see* this work while the atrocities were happening, that he could do nothing to stop them. Could Goya have

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within the image itself. See, for example, Andy Grunberg, "What Kind of Art is It? Connoisseurs Versus Contextualists" in *Crisis of the Real* (New York: Aperture, 1999). I am not suggesting that I reject their thinking, only that I took it so literally that I became creatively stymied. Artists whose critical photographic work crossed both fields of theory and practice include Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula.

[18] Robert Hughes, *Goya* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 272-3.

[19] See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 47.

[20] Hughes, *Goya,* 273.

[21] Ibid., 272.

also realized that counting on an audience is not a prerequisite to bearing witness, that there exists an imperative to speak even when no one will listen?

The artist Käthe Kollwitz devoted a lifetime of artistic sensibilities to the production of images that speak of abuse, famine, injustice, and the intimate experience of loss produced by war. She, like Goya, is a chronicler whom we trust to express our deepest anxieties and fears. Today, Antonio Frasconi carves into woodcuts the horrors of torture, kidnapping, and killing that occurred in Latin America throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. His bent and tangled figures are painful reminders that the experience of atrocity is contemporary to our time and consciousness. Luis Camnitzer also 'writes' the horrors of torture and disappearance in Latin America in his *Uruguayan Torture Series* (1983), elliptically emphasizing the tactics of abusers in their use of familiar, everyday objects and language, grotesquely eliding the distinction between erotics and pain, language and torture, image and familiarity. John Baldessari allows for contiguity where most of us would call for distinction in his *Goya Series* (1997), suggesting that the degree of separation between acknowledgement and consent is minimal. Daniel Heyman's *Amman Series* (2006) displays a frantic effort to chronicle testimony from released Abu Ghraib detainees that few will ever hear. Recently on exhibition in the New York Public Library, no reviewer made mention of this ghastly but powerful series. Although many might side-step the content, few contest the motives or the ethics of image-makers such as Goya, Kollwitz, or Frasconi – even if many believe there is no chronicler of atrocity to compare with Goya. They have interpreted pain for us and we may shed tears of recognition but do we feel responsibility for the sins committed? It is more likely we see them as belonging to a society we do not accept and to which we lay no claim. At no time do we question the veracity of their claims.

The photographic image appears to reach a different moral chord than that of prints. Perhaps this is due to the means of distribution, for although we may see either in museums or books, we attribute to the photograph of atrocity or disaster the power to upset us over our morning coffee as we confront the daily headlines. In Michael Haneke's *Three Paths to the Lake*, a 1976 film based on the 1972 story by Ingeborg Bachmann, Trotta, Elizabeth's lover, argues with her about the presumption of images of trauma upsetting the breakfast of a reader who has sufficient intelligence to imagine the scenes already intimated by the news copy.[22] Perhaps Bachman's text inspired Susan Sontag in writing her series of essays eventually published in 1977 as *On Photography.*[23] She too wondered if our bourgeois sensibility is upset by the assault or if

[22] The film script follows Bachmann's text closely (Elizabeth is the main character). See Ingeborg Bachmann, *Three Paths to the Lake* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1989), 140-141.

[23] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1973, 1974, 1977). A letter in the Susan Sontag Archives (UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections) from Ingeborg Bachman's lover, the writer Max Fritsch, to Susan Sontag after the death

our intelligence is insulted by the onslaught of pedantic demagoguery. Do we prefer not to know or do we already know more than the images reveal?

In truth, the photographic image owes much historically, stylistically, and in subject matter to graphic prints. Illustrated newspapers did not hesitate to bring graphic detail to their audience prior to the technical capabilities of the halftone that made possible the printing of photographs on the front page after 1888. On June 18, 1864, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* put illustrations (derived from photographs) of eight emaciated prisoners of war on their front page generating a controversy that did not contest their veracity or their graphic assault on sensibility but instead questioned what they could tell the reader about whom was to blame. According to historian Mary Warner Marien, the letters from the readers did not dwell on the horrific nature of the images but questioned the information the images were able to provide.[24] Philip Gourevitch reveals how in the mid-1990s, as a journalist covering the conflicts in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzogovina, he was shown the same photographs from both sides of the conflict supposedly documenting atrocities committed by the other.[25] The image as document can lie, strictly speaking, while the image as testimony reveals certain kinds of truths.

Arturo Pérez-Reverte, through his character of a pay-for-hire sword Captain Alatriste (a character of a similar mystique to that of the contemporary war photographer) claims that "an honorable man can choose the way and the place he dies, but no one can choose the things he remembers."[26] Our individual pasts haunt us as does some notion of a collective past: the Holocaust, revolution, slavery, dictatorial terror – long oppressive historical periods in which our peoples have either been victims, perpetrators, resistance fighters, or passive collaborators. No one is immune from the impact of these memories even if we are barely conscious of their consequences; they

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of Bachman refers to Sontag's interest in Bachman's work. Nonetheless there are many examples of references to the daily news and morning coffee, dating from the 1860s with Charles Baudelaire and *The New York Times* to the 1980s with Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories*.

[24] In other words, the issue was whether the Confederate Army was culpable for gross violations of human rights or the Union forces caused the deprivation of their own soldiers by cutting off the supply lines that starved the South. See Mary Warner Marien, *Photography, A Cultural History* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd. and New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002), 96-97.

[25] Philip Gourevitch, "Photography in Crisis? Some Finer Distinctions," the 2nd keynote address for "Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis," The Graduate Center, City University of New York, December 9, 2005. I attended the conference but the proceedings are available on line at http://www.photographyandatrocity.leeds.ac.uk/pa_07/pa_07.htm.

[26] Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *Purity of Blood,* trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (1997) (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2006), 17.

result in prejudice, racism, discrimination, and ensuing issues of low self-esteem, reduced resources, and fewer opportunities.

Images haunt us as well, although the degree to which an individual is susceptible to such afterlife varies enormously. I am capable of generating nightmares for weeks based on cheap television enactments of beheadings or other brutality. My husband, while listening to an NPR report on Saddam Hussein's gassing of the Kurds, suddenly let slip a platter of Sunday brunch that crashed to the floor. Having been educated in Germany in the 1970s when the approach to studying history was to accept responsibility for the Holocaust, he had images to attach to that story deeply engraved on his psyche. He is also a video editor specializing in news documentaries; he has images to attach to quite a number of horrors. They are not easy to live with yet not every one becomes anesthetized as Susan Sontag suggested in *On Photography.*[27]

Marvin Heiferman and Carol Kismaric produced an exhibition in 1994 of images that were life-changing to specific individuals.[28] They asked largely well-known people from a wide range of political and social backgrounds, what single image had significant impact on their world view. It is remarkable that contrary to the notion that we are so inundated by visual culture that all images acquire the same currency, those quoted in their book were deeply affected by very specific images much in the same way that they might be to an important book they have read or to a mentor who has guided them.

Images (whether from visual culture or from direct experience) do get under our skin and they remain there; they form the habit of gritting our teeth at night, they cause us to become intensely political, they indulge the self-mortification of our bodies, they make us heroes or cowards. Some live in extreme denial of history and its images; others manage a milder form of sublimation – a selective editing in order to get on with life. In making those edits, we try to distinguish between truth and lies. But what do we mean by truth and lies? By truth are we expressing a philosophical position or a juridical one with legal perimeters? Speaking philosophically we can refer to conceptual orders or existential ones. Since there is no legal code governing image production aside from anti-pornography, libel, and property laws, we might assume that by truth we are suggesting an ethical dilemma.

The claim for photography's exactitude has evolved into a belief in its accuracy. These are not exactly the same thing: the former implying precise replication of detail, the latter suggesting the possibility of relaying truth-value. Henry Fox Talbot claimed

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[27] Susan Sontag, *On Photography*. Sontag states, "The vast photographic catalog of misery and injustice throughout the world has given everyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem more ordinary – making it appear familiar, remote ('it's only a photograph'), inevitable" (21). This is a recurrent theme throughout the book; for example, again in chapter two she states, "…a pseudo-familiarity with the horrible reinforces alienation, making one less able to react in real life" (41).

[28] Marvin Heiferman and Carole Kismaric, *Talking pictures: people speak about the photographs that speak to them* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994).

that photographs provided evidence of material existence – in other words it was a good medium for creating inventories since it made a visual record of material objects (as opposed to a descriptive record of material objects).[29] Presumably the reduction in size, shape, and form – three-dimensions to two – was insignificant compared to the alternative translation from object to word. Oliver Wendell Holmes sardonically suggested in 1859 that once image records were made the originals could be thrown away, for the public was perfectly happy with representations rather than the real thing.[30] Jacob Riis claimed that his images of the conditions in New York City slums in the latter half of the nineteenth century supported the descriptions and statements he made in his text. He was right in a way because they are both a highly inadequate means of description based on his particular religious moral bias that saw the subjects as indigent and incapable of social uplift without the example and charity of his middle class audience. Riis's images were truthful to the context of his point of view but not to the social position of his subject.

Errol Morris has recently shared a lengthy, three-part essay on his *New York Times* blog that takes up once again the question of whether Roger Fenton was telling the truth or manipulating the scene before his camera when he took two different photographs of the same spot on the afternoon of April 23, 1855 in the Crimea.[31] Morris invited reader response to help solve what he saw as a mystery whose conclusion had been too easily reached by previous scholarship. His motivation was two sentences and a credit in Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* in which she maligned the photographer for moving cannonballs onto the road where there had previously been none, thereby manipulating the emotions of the viewer to greater effect.[32] Morris set out to establish which image came first (the photograph with the cannonballs on the road or the one with the cannonballs in the gutter of the road) presuming that by knowing without a doubt which came first, we could establish the reliability of Fenton to tell the truth or to yarn a good story to either his benefit or that of the crown depending on the direction of

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[29] Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), Part One, Plate III, Articles of China.

[30] Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *The Atlantic Monthly* (1859) reprinted in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays in Photography* (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 80.

[31] Errol Morris, "Which Came First?" *The New York Times,* Part I (September 25, 2007), Part II (October 4, 2007), Part III (October 23, 2007), http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com/ (accessed October 25, 2007).

[32] Errol Morris, "Which Came First?" Part I, Morris refers to Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* 53-54.

the critique. For Morris the process of deciphering is more important than the result,[33] however his investigation convincingly showed the cannonballs were off the road in the first image and on the road in the second. But while he tried to prove Susan Sontag was wrong and failed, he refused to give in to her assessment of motive. That evidence, he claims, is just not materially available.[34]

Critics have for decades made repeated efforts to shake down our icons and debunk their makers, thereby revealing believers to be fools.[35] Favorite targets include:

Roger Fenton's *The Valley of the Shadow of Death,* 1855

Alexander Gardner's *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg,* 1863

Robert Capa's *Death of a Loyalist Soldier,* 1936

Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California,* 1936

Arthur Rothstein's *Steer Skull, Badlands, SD,* 1936; *Fleeing a Dust Storm,* 1936.

Alfred Eisenstadt's *V.J. Day,* 1945

Joe Rosenthal's *Marines Raising the American Flag on Iwo Jima*, 1945.

W. Eugene Smith's, *Nurse Midwife,* 1951; *Tomoko in her bath, Minamata,* 1972.

The critics are partially correct – all these images have in some way been manipulated. Should we therefore discredit and discard them? What do we expect from these images? They became iconic for a reason and (although that reason may be far from my own ideological leanings) I warrant that the ability to speak to a shared belief system is one of the reasons these images took such a strong hold in society. Images elicit multiple readings and produce multiple meanings but in the case of iconographic images those meanings are consistent enough to speak evocatively to a large public over a

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[33] A comment by Slavoj Zizek in an analogy between television detective and analyst as the Lacanian *subject supposed to know* triggered this reflection. See Slavoj Zizek, *How to Read Lacan* (1996) (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), 27.

[34] Errol Morris, "Which Came First?" Part III. It is perhaps worth making available Errol Morris's assessment of the conclusion: "How to proceed? Dennis has solved the problem. There is no way – at least as far as I can see – to wiggle out of his argument. And so, it turns out that Keller, Haworth-Booth and Sontag are right. It is OFF before ON. I tried hard to prove that Keller and Sontag were wrong – to prove that ON came before OFF. I failed. I can't deny it. But I did prove that they were right for the wrong reasons. It is not their assessment of Fenton's character or lack of character that establishes the order of the pictures. Nor is it sun-angle and shadow. Rather it is the motion of ancillary rocks – rocks that had been kicked, nudged, displaced between the taking of one picture and the other. Rocks that no one cared about. "Those little guys that got kicked aside." Their displacement was recorded on those wet collodion plates not because someone wanted to record it. It happened inadvertently. Ancillary rocks, ancillary evidence – essential information."

[35] See for example a recent dispute over Robert Capa's *Death of a Loyalist Soldier* (a.k.a. "Falling Soldier") presented by the Spanish researcher, Manuel Susperregui, described in Larry Rohter, "New Doubts Raised Over Famous War Photograph," *The New York Times,* August 18, 2009, C1, New York edition.

lengthy period of time. Additionally, over time, the images lose the power of their original context and become clichés. I do not think any of this is the fault of the photographer and his or her trustworthiness; it is instead the product of our social needs. The photographers make the images; we make these images representative of our feelings and beliefs, thereby turning them into icons. We see them as truthful because they are mirrors to an already existing worldview. Do images shape our worldview while at the same time being shaped by it? Absolutely. Do they function alone? Absolutely not. There is a broader context to examine into which any image fits or runs afoul of the record.

Thumbing through any history of photography text, you will find few images that have not been manipulated. Such documents are not reality; they are an interpretation of reality: a declaration of truth rather than truth itself. Imagine Fenton making his reconnaissance on April 5th as described by Morris: he walks through the Valley of the Shadow of Death (evocatively named by the soldiers themselves); there are so many cannonballs he can't take a step without stubbing his toe. He cannot return until April 23rd however with his darkroom wagon and camera. The scene is disappointing on that day from a visual point of view but the cannonballs have not ceased their volley over the hill. Does he take an image of a sparse distribution because that is what he found that day and create an image that gives no indication of the continuous artillery barrage? Or does he try to recreate the feel of what he previously saw?[36] A writer can simply choose to describe the earlier experience but a photographer faces an ethical dilemma – which representation is more truthful: the one that tells a story or the one that is visually accurate but less expressive?

Historically, documentary photography presents a troubled legacy. In textbooks it is often categorized separately as socially concerned photography and photojournalism in distinct categories, necessary perhaps for dividing a course into precise lectures but disadvantageous for discerning the purpose and impact of the photographers, their work, and the restrictions imposed by the various means to disseminate it. If we only study the images themselves we get an entirely different impression than that provided by studying the printed or exhibition context in which those images originally appeared to the public. The distinctions made by textbooks also imply a pure and an impure practice, one done for altruistic purposes, the other for capitalist gains. No practice is quite so cut-and-dry, but is instead full of overlapping motivations, compromises, and functions.

On the surface, filmmaker Errol Morris is presumably suggesting that if you just know the facts – if you're accurate enough to cull the specific details (this suggests the work of a traditional art historian, keeping the analysis strictly within the frame, and also that of an investigative journalist, decoding the evidence) – then you can arrive at a

[36] While I may speculate, I am not presuming Fenton's psychological state or motive rather I am imagining the action from the experience of working as a photojournalist.

truthful answer. This approach will give you a realistic ethics of looking based on knowledge intrinsic to the evidence.[37] What popular theorist Susan Sontag suggests is that you can deduce your knowledge from a broader understanding of social trends (working like a contextualist scholar) basing your answer on how images are used more than on how they are produced. This interpretation evolves from the premise that social patterns establish the normative response and an ethics of looking needs to be based on its dialectical opposite to encourage change.

The three artists whose work I consider in this dissertation ask us to question the make-up of our shared belief systems that render some images as icons while disregarding some subjects as inadequate or unnecessary. They ask us to question our expectation for truth and the social cost paid by those who speak it. I take their example and suggest that it is neither in the specificity nor the generality that one needs to look in order to understand the ethical implications of how we create our worldview, but in the exception. Since there is no readily apparent solution to the problem of veracity, we need to create one through a performative engagement with the act of looking based on enlarging our consciousness rather than on a self-conscious assessment. While this may sound like a 1960s form of activism, I like to think of it as an evolutionary glitch – a mutation of values that could prove advantageous – considering the exception over the rule, shaping a future that is no longer irrevocably tied to the past.

> To seek reality is both to set out to explore the injury inflected by it – to turn back on, and to try to penetrate, the state of being *stricken, wounded* by reality – and to attempt, at the same time, to reemerge from the paralysis of this state, to engage reality as an advent, a movement, and as a vital, critical necessity of *moving on*.
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> Shoshana Felman with Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*

The battleground of representation

"No other art or science is subjected to this last degree of scorn, to the supposition that we are masters of it without ado," Pierre Bordieu equates Hegel's assessment of the study of philosophy with the practice of photography in his 1965

[37] Quite possibly, Morris is "scrutinizing the documentary subject" much as he does in his films. According to Orgeron and Orgeron, "Morris's films suggest (and even embrace) the degree to which memory has been shaped by mediated and often fictionalised images, as well as the degree to which the documentarian is responsible for this transformation." See Devin Orgeron and Marsha Orgeron, "Megatronic Memories: Errol Morris and the Politics of Witnessing" in Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, eds., *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 239.

publication, *Photography, A Middle-brow Art.*[38] Not only is the practice of photography considered automatic and therefore scorned as child's play but it has also been subject to criticism that makes it the scapegoat for, as well as the perpetrator of, man's inhumanity to man. On December 9, 2005, the City University of New York Graduate Center sponsored a one-day symposium entitled: "Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis."[39] Panelists confronted such topics as the formation of icons of suffering, the connection between images and information, responsible use of images, photographs as markers for memory, and the connection between images and text in the chronicling of atrocity. The panels featured speakers from a broad spectrum of professional affiliations ranging from publishing, journalism, activism, academia, and art. Discussions were deep, complex, and challenging. Audience response and questions tended to be confrontational. Photojournalism as a profession was left at the end of the day on the shakiest grounds, having been condemned as manipulative, morally irresponsible, and guilty of perpetuating the worst stereotypes of victimization.[40] It was also upheld by many as the means to arrest attention when text alone failed to generate concern, debate, or action.[41]

Since public revelation in a CBS *Sixty Minutes* broadcast on April 29, 2004 with *Washington Post* and *New Yorker* reports days later[42] and the subsequent widespread

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[38] G.W.F. Hegel, *Principles of the Philosophy of Right,* trans T.M. Knox (Oxford 1942), Preface, quoted in Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography, A Middle-brow Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965/90), 5.

[39] The symposium was co-sponsored by the Humanities Research Institute, University of Leeds, UK; The Center for the Humanities, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York; The British Academy; and Amnesty International, USA. The day's proceedings are now available online at http://www.photographyandatrocity.leeds.ac.uk/pa_00/pa_00.htm (accessed last on 10/29/07).

[40] The condemnation, some of it deserved and some of it due to an oversimplification of the issues on the part of some members of the audience, was not universal but was significantly and vehemently voiced to cause me to consider the animosity towards a profession whose practitioners included individuals motivated largely by social and political activism. Although I had already submitted my dissertation proposal, I attribute the evolution of my dissertation towards its present form to this conference.

[41] A reporter, questioned after the revelation of the existence of images demonstrating abuse in the Abu Ghraib prison, admitted that he had previously been informed of abuse by Iraqis but "hadn't believed them" (A National Public Radio report during the week of May 10, 2004). Susan Sontag also mentions textual evidence in her essay "Regarding the Torture of Others," *The New York Times Magazine,* May 23, 2004.

[42] Seymour M. Hirsh, "Annals of National Security, Torture at Abu Ghraib" *The New Yorker* (May 10, 2004) 42-47 and Hirsh, "Annals of National Security, The Gray Zone" *The New Yorker* (May 24, 2004) 38-44. It was, according to an anonymous media

internet dissemination of the Abu Ghraib images of torture, many academic panels, symposiums, and colloquiums have been organized to confront the moral issues involved not only in torture itself but also in the visual perpetuation of abuse, typically through but not exclusive to the photographic media.[43] Donald Rumsfeld of the Bush administration blamed the photographs themselves rather than the acts they portrayed for undermining national security.[44] Members of the audience attending the "Atrocity" symposium blamed photographs and photojournalists for perpetuating atrocity by affording it visual authority.[45] One participant challenged the artist Alfredo Jaar for daring to earn a living off others' misfortune.[46]

Concurrent with the preparations for the City University of New York "Picturing Atrocity" symposium, professors Mark Reinhardt, Holly Edwards and Erina Duganne

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analyst, after the *New Yorker* disclosed it would print the images coming out of Abu Ghraib that CBS decided to air its story on *Sixty Minutes*, April 29, 2004.

[43] I'm thinking here of the scandal that erupted, spread internationally and subsequently became violent surrounding the publication of a series of cartoons in a Danish publication that were perceived as denigrating to the Islamic faith. Other symposium are too numerous to name but include: "Telling Suffering: Pain, Trouble, Trauma, and Their Stories" sponsored by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, The Center on Religion and Democracy, University of Virginia, Spring 2006; "Traumatic Effects: History," a Humanities Council Workshop panel by Research in Trauma & Violence of New York University, April 28, 2006, and "Trauma Culture: Viewing Images of Catastrophe" sponsored by the Humanities Institute of Stony Brook University, April 18, 2006.

[44] "If these [additional photographs and videos] are released to the public, obviously, it's going to make matters worse," Secretary Rumsfeld said in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee. See Sontag, May 23, 2004.

[45] By this I mean the idea that sometimes acts of atrocity are committed in order to gain media attention.

[46] The implication was that Jaar, in producing work on the Rwandan genocide, enhanced his career as an artist and therefore profited from the suffering of others. This particular complaint against *bearing witness* perhaps has its origins in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughter House Five* (1969); as a survivor of the bombing of Dresden, Vonnegut eventually wrote this novel that made him famous. Vonnegut himself confessed the awkward relationship that his success posed to him as a survivor, *Morning Edition* interview, September 10, 2003. Jean Baudrillard in a January 1993 article in *Liberation* criticized intellectuals and artists, singling out Susan Sontag, who went to Sarajevo in an effort to make a difference: "Everywhere misfortune, misery and suffering have become a raw material and an original scene…" Curator Zdenka Badovinac from the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, Slovenia, present in Sarajevo during the conflict, counters that the people of Sarajevo craved intellectual exchange as much as material goods and an end to the conflict. Baudrillard quoted in Zdenka Badovinac, "Living with Genocide" in Karen Henry and Karen Love. *War zones* (Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 2000), 15-16.

were planning an exhibition for the Williams College Museum of Art that opened early in 2006 entitled *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain.* They were working from a premise: photographs of human suffering proliferate in our society today. They then asked their viewers "to contemplate how images of suffering are made, how they should be made, how they circulate, the effects they have, and the dilemmas they pose for thoughtful producers and spectators."[47] The exhibition's title *Beautiful Suffering* alludes to a tendency in both the media and the visual arts to use aesthetics to create a seductive veneer over images of horror. Its subtitle, *Photography and the Traffic in Pain,* refers to the quantity of images representing the impact of atrocity, genocide, war, starvation, violence, disease, and abuse on the individual human being, while paying homage to two critical essays fundamental to the ethical debate on the representation of trauma and its relation to a political economy of human relations: Allan Sekula's "The Traffic in Photographs" and Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex" both from 1975.[48] Any current treatment of the topic also owes a great deal to Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) quoted frequently in the text and Theodore Adorno's philosophical essays on the dialectic between culture and barbarism, particularly "Commitment" (1962) with its well-known reference to art after Auschwitz.[49]

The essays in the exhibition publication give both a historical perspective to the production of images featuring human suffering as a primary, discursive subject and

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[47] A book publication later reproduced the exhibition as faithfully as the alternate format allowed; this was accompanied by five critical essays, which effectively broadened their audience. See Mark Reinhardt, Holly Edwards and Erina Duganne, eds., *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 12. There are, of course, precedents to both the "Picturing Atrocity" conference and the "Beautiful Suffering" exhibition. For example a millennium exhibition in Vancouver, Canada curated by Karen Henry and Karen Love titled War Zones, considered that "war in global contemporary culture is inseparable from the image." Henry and Love, *War Zones* (Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 2000), 7. They had been inspired by the exhibitions: *A Different War* curated by Lucy Lippard and *Warworks: Women, Photography and the Iconography of War* curated by Val Williams. All three were in response to a broader dissatisfaction with the minimal response by the international art community to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s. See Zdenka Badovinac, "Living with Genocide" in *War Zones,* 13-19. I am dealing with the more recent consideration of the relationship of the image to atrocity in a post-9/11 political, social, and economic environment.

[48] Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs" in *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 15-25 and Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex in *Toward an Anthropology of Women,* ed. by Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210.

[49] Theodor, Adorno, "Commitment" in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* edited by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982 (1978) and 2000).

cogently elucidate a critique that has an enormous impact on our position as spectators and potential activists responding to pain. While Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* offers an overview of public response to suffering, the authors of *Beautiful Suffering* concentrate on the relation of the image to the conditions of suffering itself. The workings of aesthetics, narrative documentation, voyeurism, exploitation, sentimentality, and ideological framing show that our relationship to images is not one of concerned empathy but a complex interweaving of economic, political, and sociological forces.

Images and the producers of images are under attack. The polemics are often simplified to the point of ridiculousness[50] but the history and the complexity of the debate on the ethics of representation runs deep. Photography, due to its indexical relationship to reality, has often superseded the print media, painting, or sculpture in drawing criticism for its attention to trauma. Thus, the history of the debate is likely as old as the medium itself but most often follows from Walter Benjamin's 1934 address questioning photography's efficacy as a purveyor of information.[51] With the second phase of rapid growth in the mass print media industry (the first phase having been with the rise of the penny press in the mid-nineteenth century) and the attraction of the new film industry came the development of modern public culture. From the beginning, critics questioned whether the proliferation of images was exciting and beneficial or whether it somehow depleted our understanding of the world through a superficial attraction to spectacle. What exactly is the battleground of representation? What are the issues and critiques? What has sparked the various debates? What are the arguments? Who has taken which side? What impact has this had on image proliferation or condemnation?

While these questions suggest the possibility for a separate, lengthy study on the genealogy of criticism, I would instead like to underline the issues that have so definitively rocked the foundations of documentary photography and concerned photojournalism and created a need to develop other means of confronting difficult subject matter visually. These include compassion fatigue (the impression there are too many problems in the world to effectively confront), dangerous pity (the opposite of the above, when uninformed help hurts), the universalization of the victim (through sentimental humanism denying a historical context), the economy of display (by proliferating stereotypes and perpetuating imbalances), the infantilization of the subject

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[50] I'm thinking principally here of the tendency to displace responsibility onto the image, blaming the photograph or photographer for creating or perpetuating pain rather than recognizing the systemic causes of genocide, torture, famine, etc.

[51] Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," given as an address at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris on April 27, 1934. First published as "Der Autor als Produzent" in *Versuche über Brecht* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), then translated by Anna Bostock as *Understanding Brecht* (New Left Books, 1973) and later appearing as an essay in Part 3 of *Reflections* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1978), 220-238.

(by naturalizing weakness), the exploitation of the victim (including both the "poster-child" syndrome and profiteering from others' suffering), the anesthetization of sensibility (through aesthetics) or psychic numbing (through overwhelming inundation), the repetition of trauma (through the act of representation and the manipulation of content).[52] Each of these issues is a dissertation topic in itself.[53] I weave them throughout the text, *Art in an Age of Terror*, for I have chosen not to defend the practice of photojournalism against attack but instead to use case studies to show when the visual image can be a powerful medium within the broader context of trauma, its political origins, and the development of an ethical subject. The challenge is to succumb neither to the tendency to *mirror* your viewer's sensibility eliciting the response "I know how it feels" nor to voyeuristically *open a window* on the world of *disadvantaged others.* Photography becomes a viable medium not when it locks an event in an irrevocable past but chronicles the act of witness as making a difference, as I hope the examples in the dissertation make clear.

> To be human seems to mean being in a predicament that one cannot solve.
> Judith Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself*

Are we bearing witness or perpetuating trauma?

Can we consider the guilt we feel at observing pictures of atrocity as affective but disconnected empathy? I have described myself when most vulnerable as a lost child crying for forgiveness but blindly disconnected from the offence. Another way to think about this traumatic dilemma is to consider what exactly creates the distance between event and responsibility. Is our physical distance (from an event of atrocity) equal to our economic distance (as privileged citizens of western nations) mirrored by our psychological distance (from any culpability)? Can a politically disengaged audience connect its fate with the fate of others and come to recognize some means of influence? Are images more successful in creating a sense of helplessness or can they generate the kind of response that precipitates action and influences both sets of seemingly fixed

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[52] While the White House found the existence of the Abu Ghraib images "regrettable" and promptly banned the use of personal cameras within military prisons and the neo-conservative Rush Limbaugh claimed they were *much ado about nothing,* the revelation of the Abu Ghraib images affected the general public's conscience differently than other images of atrocity. While we are generally outraged, the issue of manipulation does not malign the veracity – the posing in these instances is the evidence.

[53] Significant writing on these topics include Dr. Paul Slovic on psychic numbing and compassion fatigue, David Reiff on dangerous pity, Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag on sentimental humanism, Fritz Fanon, Edward Said, and Roland Barthes on the economy of display, and Saidiya Hartman on the infantilization of the subject. As a starting point, I would refer the reader to David Levi Strauss, *Between the Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics* (New York: Aperture, 2003); Reinhardt, et al, *Beautiful Suffering*; and the introduction to Guerin and Hallas, eds., *The Image and the Witness*.

destinies – that of the viewers and the subjects? It is ultimately this sense of fixed destiny that a photographer locks in time – a sense that nothing can be done to unmake the image before us, that what we see is past.

How effective, therefore, have images been in drawing our attention to the conflicts produced by global capitalism? What consequences have images had? Has any artistic production managed to offer alternative perspectives to the massive saturation of media imagery? In answering such questions, the dissertation examines the intersections between images that straddle the boundaries of aesthetic imagery and social activism. It reflects on the strategies of representation that connect us to the offence without reproducing an endless stream of violence. The artists considered simultaneously confront and deny photographic strategies to disconnect the image from any notion of a fixed position in the real and suggest instead a tenuous *what might be*.[54]

Important to this work is a grounded awareness of context – global context – what creates suffering and what is particular to the kind of suffering that has occurred generally since 1989 and the shift from Cold War global politics to the globalization of economics. This includes specifically the post-September 11, 2001 era with the intrusion of foreign terrorism (as opposed to domestic terrorism) on the territory of the United States and the resulting proliferation of attack-counter-attack of violence worldwide. While it is not the subject of my dissertation, I would like to address geography as a determining factor to "an age of terror." Naomi Klein's research frames my perspective on the relationship between the economy and violence. Neil Smith and Arjun Appadurai's work on globalization and the geography of fear, respectively, frame my viewpoint on nationalism, liberalism, and globalism (as the contemporary equivalent of imperialism) and the role these ideologies play in extending the reach and display of terror globally against the local circumstances of peoples worldwide.[55]

Perhaps the current disposition to rail against photography as evidenced by such symposiums as "Picturing Atrocity" is due to the medium's implicit indignity of flattening human form, of rendering it beyond the limits of touch and smell, and of creating an image of the body that we can scrutinize in time and detail as we would never dare face

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[54] I use the expression "the real" connoting the material conditions of life; see a lengthier Lacanian explanation in Chapter One, pages 100-101.

[55] See Neil Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2005) and Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Numbers* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006). I first read Neil Smith's *The Endgame* and subsequently found his work as urban geographer to be influenced by each of the artists in this volume. See in particular a reference by Bruce Robbins in *Veiled Histories: The Body, Place, and Public Art."* Edited by Anna Novakov. San Francisco and New York: San Francisco Art Institute and Critical Press, 1997, 142. Bruce Robbins interviewing Krzysztof Wodiczko says, "I hope you know that you've been very important to theorists of space, people like Rosalyn Deutsche and Neil Smith, and they find that your work helps them think about space."

to face with the physical equivalent, excepting our infants and our lovers… perhaps. For this very reason, I choose to study the use of photography influenced by a feminist theorization of the body that has moved towards an ethical consideration of what it means to be human and to act in a way that is contiguous to humanity. While trauma theory has emphasized the strength of verbal testimony to effectively mourn and memorialize those lost to atrocity, it has denigrated photographic images as having a negative impact on viewers.[56] In such iconoclastic critiques, the author's response often stands synedochically for all viewers. A handful of artists as secondary witnesses are paraded as examples, effectively occluding not only other interpreters of the past but also the past itself since methods of bearing witness gain precedence over the subject of witness.[57] I seek to re-introduce the subject of trauma to an understanding of the physicality of the image (in so far as it can make us cognizant of both the body's vulnerability and its agency).

Judith Butler's recent writings on ethics have influenced my dissertation research since the beginning and Simon Critchley's work near the end with others such as Jacques Rancière and Jean-Luc Nancy in between. They have all shaped the tenor of my argument. While Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* addresses issues of narrative and testimony that concern me and *Precarious Life* speaks directly to current circumstances of genocide and our responsibility facing acts of atrocity, Critchley's *Infinitely Demanding* asks a similar question to one I posed early in my research: how does one solve the motivational deficit that we face when confronted with political circumstances beyond our grasp?[58] If photographic representation overwhelms our personal sense of both affective and effective response, what then shapes an active rather than a passive reader? Butler and Critchley apply philosophical tradition to the problems facing the political subject today. I apply artistic practice. Why? While I

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[56] See Guerin and Hallas, eds., *The Image and the Witness* (2007). See particularly their introduction, 1-20.

[57] Doris Salcedo has been written about so frequently that just as her works are metonymic stand-ins for events that cannot be visualized so too has the artist become a stand-in for the affective articulation of trauma in Latin America at the expense of a long list of other significant artists. For discussions of Doris Salcedo's work see Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: affect, trauma, ad contemporary art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Edlie L. Wong, "Haunting Absences: Witnessing Loss in Doris Salcedo's *Atrabilarios* and Beyond" in Guerin and Hallas, eds., *The Image and the Witness;* and Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: images of recollection and remembrance* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007). For an example of the many artists dealing with trauma in Latin America see the exhibition catalog *Los Desaparecidos/The Disappeared* (Milan: Charta, 2006).

[58] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) and *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004/2006). Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London and New York: Verso, 2007).

refrain from narrowing the interpretative potential of these three artists by labeling them as political artists, they themselves confirm their interest in the political subject as a primary concern of their work. Butler and Critchley approach the question: "How does one become an ethical and political subject?" through philosophical investigation following on the example of Michel Foucault, while Hans Haacke, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Alfredo Jaar do the same through aesthetic praxis. In turn, I use a collaborative engagement with both the art and the artist as a means to look closely at the process of making meaning through art. Images do not always give us an object of sight alone but can also stimulate other senses and sensibilities as well. When used thoughtfully, they can remind us of our relation to a subject and events, that far too often we are willing to disown. I therefore hedge the question, "Are images ethical?" and ask instead, "In what ways can images prompt us towards ethical engagement?"

To that end, I have adopted a methodology that struggles to remain direct, honest, and actively engaged with the art and the artists who I see as secondary witnesses (chroniclers of events). While I seek, as tertiary witness, to place their work in the context of a discussion of the representation of atrocity, I wish to avoid subsuming the work to any particular theoretical or art historical agenda. I restrict my use of formal methods that look at what is contained within the art object itself – medium, composition, style, treatment, etc. I minimize any trajectory of motivation by comparing a work to previous works by the artist. I suspend comparison of the artist's work to his contemporaries. Finally, I use theory as a means to ask questions rather than increase complexity.

For I think we are at a critical juncture in the interpretation of art. As critics, we too often leave out not only the art and the artist but also the experience created by the art in our analysis. As Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz expressed centuries ago: *Tengo en los ojos los dedos, y lo que miro tiento.*[59] So rather than assume the position of art historian or art critic or art theorist, I assume the position of viewer. And, yes, I do something more than that because why should I destroy so many trees and fill so many pages (reams and reams discarded) if I am indeed like any "you" or "me"? We spend so much time looking at art but do we really see? I present to the reader the position of *what it means not to see* and the consequences that bears not just on the individual but on society as well. This phrase has significance within trauma theory in distinguishing between latent and manifest experience.[60] It relies on the notion that discovery is often

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[59] *A Sor Juana Anthology,* trans. by Alan S. Trueblood (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). Roughly translated: I hold my fingers in my eyes, what I see, I feel. I have carried this quotation with me in the pocket of a binder for several decades, its original source unknown.

[60] See for example, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Caruth states, "The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in

elliptical because fundamental to human cognition is the impossibility of knowing the initial combination of overwhelming stimuli in our infancy that set the course for determining our response to the world and any subsequent trauma. Who we are and how we respond is predicated on something we will never know. This does not mean, however, that we are without obligation. *Seeing* is not a confirmation of self but an imperative to awaken to another.

We have failed in our engagement with art and perhaps more critically with any consequent engagement with the world. For understanding is a complex business. One must be both active and passive: willing to argue and accepting of pauses in the conversation. One must be patient and wait, for demanding of art that it be thus and so is like asking the child, caught in a tantrum, to behave. Too often, in speaking for art, the critic has thrown out the subject with the proverbial bath water, relegating the visual to the service of the text. Art is an experiential catalyst, not an intellectual gambit. Contemporary art demands a different consideration than what is necessary for the art historical object. While an artist is alive and working, we need to consider his or her position and, when we have access to audience response, we need to wonder why. As Hans Haacke said:

> Artists, no matter whether they and their admirers and detractors are aware of it, respond to the constraints and events of the world at large in and through their work. In turn, what artists produce, contributes, even though only in a minor fashion, to the way people view their environment and how they will act.[61]

There are difficulties in writing about the work of living artists and eliciting their comments and support in the process. Two recent issues of *Art Journal* (Fall 2005 and Winter 2008) have devoted a series of articles about the artist interview and the relationships between writers and artists and by extension to the writing process itself. This triangulation is subject to the expectations and conflicts of interpersonal relationships, both casual and intensely profound. There are tensions produced by adoration, over-preparedness, under-preparedness, a desire “to please”, hostility, generosity, idealization, even desire. Writers of vast experience admit to being thrown off-guard when preconceived expectations do not match the dynamics of the moment. In short, deeply personal responses to new acquaintances can destabilize the critical detachment considered so important to the analysis of works of art.[62]

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the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself” (17). Thus trauma has several layers of unknowing: the death inherent within the trauma itself, the inability to comprehend the trauma as it happens, and the “mute repetition of suffering” that is the language of trauma (9).

[61] Hans Haacke, from an unlabeled photocopy in the Artists Files, Museum of Modern Art Library Queens, 1981.

[62] I am indebted to these two series of essays for helping me to reflect on my own process of engagement in the context of the artist as primary source material. See

Questions arise as to whether the artist has unduly influenced the critical understanding of his or her work and whether the interview has produced any valuable new insights or simply reworked already known interpretations. How capable has the writer been in leading the artist to new considerations? Has the one-to-one dialogue rewarded the reader with a single point of view insight or multiple considerations? What role does the artist play in interpreting his or her own work of art? Can a conversation, which cannot help but be both considered (ideas about which both participants have given a great deal of previous thought) and spontaneous (articulation that can lack precision but suggest new insight), increase critical inquiry? How much do we value flexibility, uncertainty, and argument over opinion, interpretation, and analysis?

I have chosen to embrace a role of chronicler over historian, lending credence to the value of integrating the artist into the process of articulating the work. In these three cases, the artists themselves challenged not my experience of their work but my interpretation of that experience. They provided a look into the work's development that I could only know by virtue of our conversations. As such I began to see all phases of my investigation as a process of inquiry: my research to glean as much background information as possible as a means of connecting the work I was considering into a broader context, my conversations with the artists to destabilize the impressions and conclusions I had begun to form such that I questioned my relation to the work as much as theirs, and my analysis which in the end was determined more by what I could not know than what I thought I knew.

Uncertainty is a criterion for academic weakness; within philosophical discussion, however, it is considered a strength. Both Emmanuel Levinas and Michel Foucault value the place of unknowing in knowing because it connotes not an arrival but a pursuit. The passion of philosophy is to ask questions of others. As chronicler, I allow this passion to enter into my practice and in this way open up my methodology to the instability of unexpected discourse: the artist interview. Contemporary artist Walid Raad understands that all the expert economists, sociologists, and war strategists cannot give a faithful representation of war because they fail to admit to the degree that incomprehensibility is a necessary component of the overall picture. In the text panel of his work "Oh, God, He Said Talking to a Tree" (2006/08) he quotes the artist Jalil Toufic who says:

> One of the main troubles with this world is that unlike art and literature, [expert opinion] allows only for the gross alternative: understanding / incomprehension. Contrariwise, art and literature do not provide us with the illusion of comprehending, or grasping, but allow us to keenly not understand, intimating to us that the alternative is not between comprehension and incomprehension, but

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"Thematic Investigation," ed. Johanna Burton and Lisa Pasquariello, *Art Journal* 64:3 (Fall 2005): 46-83 and "Forum: I'll Be Your Mirror, or Why and How Do We Work on Living Artists," ed. Suzanne Hudson and Anne Byrd, *Art Journal* 67:4 (Winter 2008): 8-61.

between incomprehension in a gross manner while expecting comprehension; and incomprehension in an intelligent and subtle manner.[63]

My conversations with the artists have led me to appreciate *incomprehension in an intelligent and subtle manner*. This is Judith Butler's *human predicament* prompting the fundamental investigation that I will make: to what constraints and events of the world at large is the artist responding and in return what difference can we hope their project or our response will make? How is art an act of bearing witness? What strength can we gain from the instability of incomprehension? Can aesthetics play a role in the formulation of an ethical subject? If this dissertation fails to fulfill the prerequisite rigor and the expectations of format, style, and research, it might instead create the possibility of moving from a fixed place to an open space of critical inquiry and as such has achieved its own set of expectations. This concentrated inquiry is something other than an academic document and that something else is significant. While intellectual rigor is important, it often distances us from seeing. I first and foremost accept *what it means not to see.* Next I allow that in order to see we must not only use our minds but also our experience. As Sor Juana suggested so many centuries ago, we must thrust our fingers into our eyes and feel!

[63] Also in Walid Raad, "'Oh God,' he said, talking to a tree: a fresh-off-the-boat, throat-cleaning preamble about the recent events in Lebanon. And a question to Walid Sadek," *Artforum International* 45, no. 2 (October 2006): 242-244.

Hans Haacke, *State of the Union,* Paula Cooper Gallery, November 5 – December 23, 2005.
Fig. 1-1: Installation view including in the foreground: *Life Goes On* (2005); in the mid-ground: *State of the Union* (2005); and in the background to the right: *Untitled #1* (2005).

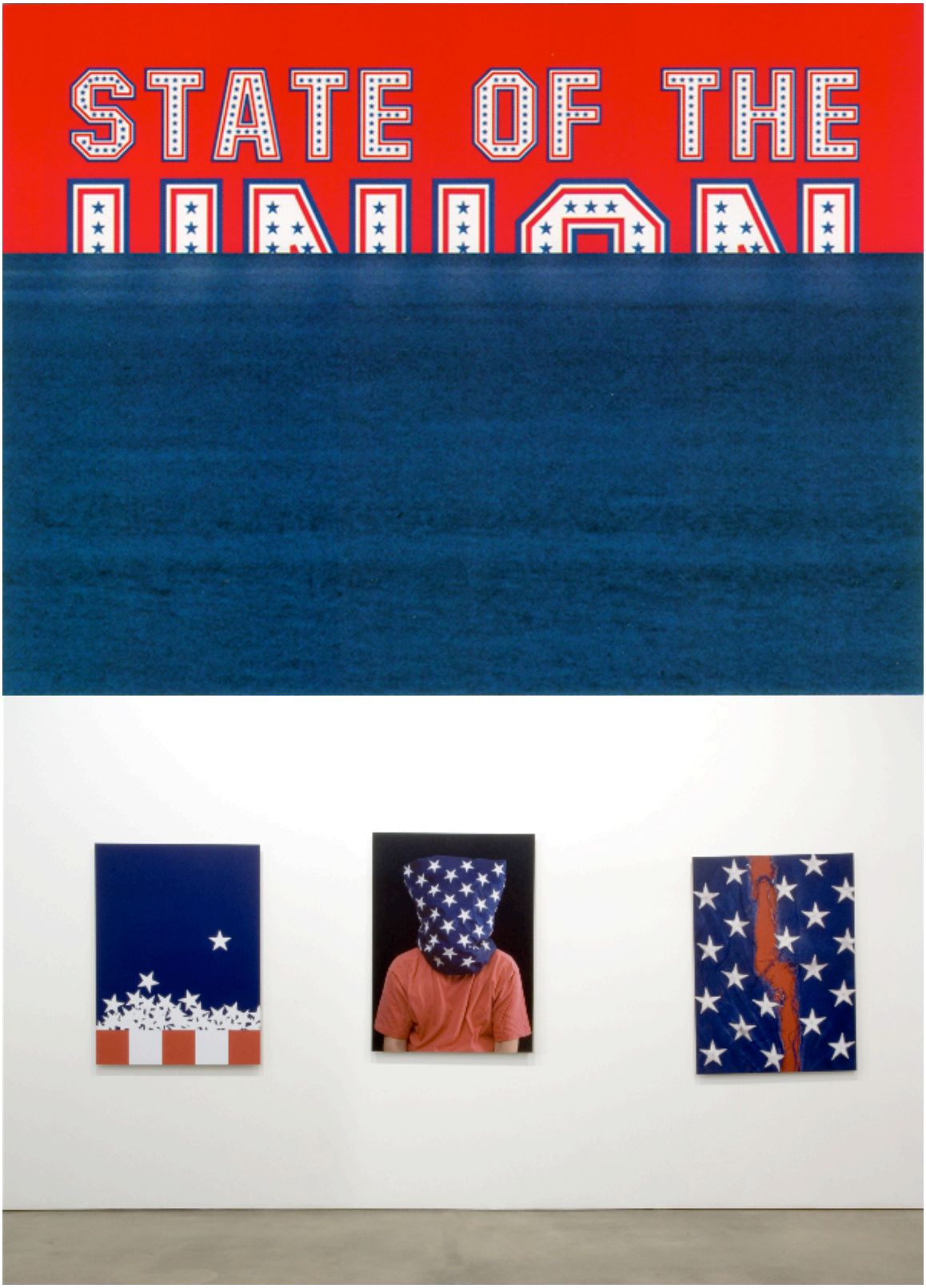
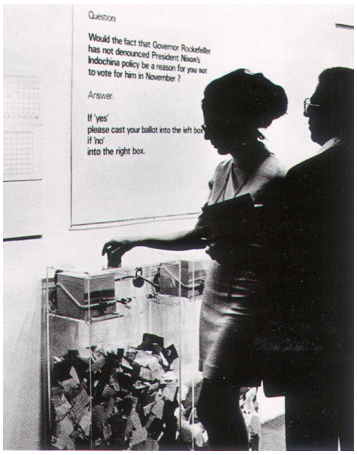


Fig. 1-2, above: Hans Haacke, *State of the Union,* 2005, exhibition announcement.
Fig. 1-3, below: Hans Haacke, *State of the Union,* 2005, installation view,
(L-R): *Stuff Happens* (2003), *Star Gazing* (2004), and *Ripped* (2004).

Fig. 1-4, above: Hans Haacke, *News* (1969), installation view, Paula Cooper Gallery, 2005.
Fig. 1-5, below: Hans Haacke, *Wide White Flow* (1967), installation view, Paula Cooper Gallery, January 11 – February 16, 2008.

Fig. 1-6, Hans Haacke, *Der Bevölkerung* (To the population), 2000, Reichstag building, Berlin (with inset of exterior inscription).



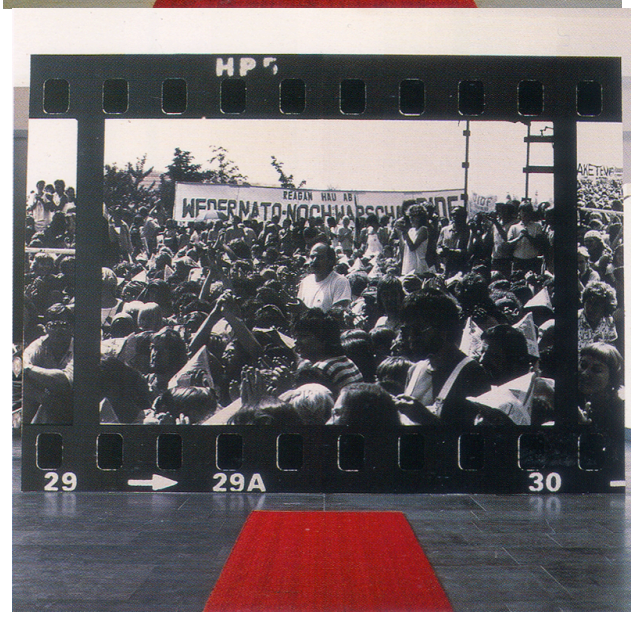


Fig. 1-7, (L), Hans Haacke, MOMA Poll, Museum of Modern Art, 1970
Fig. 1-8, (R), Hans Haacke, *Oil Painting: Homage to Marcel Broodthaers,* 1982.

Chapter One / *Face to Face:* Hans Haacke's *State of the Union*

Who is the slayer? Who the victim? Speak!
Sophocles, the Chorus of Theban elders in *Antigone*

Preamble:[1] of patriots and citizens

On entering the Paula Cooper Gallery in Chelsea in the fall of 2005, the viewer confronts first an image hastily shot and casually pasted askew wrapped across the corner of an entry wall – a re-photograph off the television screen of George Walker Bush delivering his 2004 State of the Union address to the American people. His eyes are closed, his expression vacant. We are presented not with the President propped up by the trappings of Congress, ovations, and the American flag, but with a president who so often seems but an error in transmission, inadequately aware of the ramifications his actions (and his rhetoric) cause.

This insignificant presentation (small print, wheat-pasted onto the wall in a hasty gesture as if it were a bit of guerrilla art on the scene) suggests the status of a carnival barker or a confidence man selling tonic to a duped crowd. I pass by quickly with a disgusted shiver (I may well be that particular brand of audience referred to in the art world aphorism – *preaching to the converted*). Entering to the left into the main gallery space (a large white box except for the impressive ceiling), I see suspended an enormous drapery consisting only of the star field of the American flag, the fifty sewn panels of fabric and the fifty stars have been torn in half, down to the lower fifth of the panel (fig. 1-1).[2] Half the flag is suspended from the girders of the hornbeam ceiling; half the flag (as well as the rope that hoisted it) lies flaccid on the ground – wilted, collapsed, stricken, wounded, inert, lifeless like so many soldiers sacrificed in the *war on terror,* expressionless like the Katrina victims dumbstruck in disbelief as their country abandoned them. Half the flag is held aloft in spite of the gravitational pull of the cascading stars.

The American flag became a ubiquitous sight after September 11th mounted on everything from sides of buildings to bridges to Major League Baseball uniforms, it was

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[1] The internal chapter structure of "Preamble," "Conversation," and "Reflection" was established before I *discovered* the word *Préambule* within Haacke's 1989 piece *Décor.* Historically it is used as introduction to the French document, *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen,* from 1789 and to the US Constitution adopted in 1787. I accept graciously the synchronistic overlap.

[2] A more complete selection of images from the artist's *State of the Union* exhibition can be found in the catalog published on the occasion of the exhibition *Hans Haacke, for real: Works 1959-2006,* Deichtorhallen Hamburg, November 17, 2006-February 4, 2007, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, November 18, 2006-January 14, 2007 (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2006), 232-238, 242-245.

made into Christmas lights and bumper stickers, you could get them as small as the lapel pin tucked into the open drawer of another piece in the exhibition, *Untitled #1* (2005) or as large as a football stadium. Hans Haacke (b. 1936, Cologne, Germany) has chosen to use only the stars throughout this exhibition, traditionally representative of the fifty states of the union. The stripes representing the original thirteen colonies that became the first states are not needed here. The flag as presented by Haacke is technically the Union Jack or jack of the United States, a naval flag.[3] There is a United States Flag Code that designates no flag should be allowed to touch the ground but enforcement of this code comes into conflict with the First Amendment of the US Constitution, clearly a point of reference for an artist who has often battled to protect First Amendment rights: ever since the well-known cancellation of his 1971 solo exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum the artist has highlighted the effects of patronage on the content of museum exhibitions and struggled to defend an artist's responsibility as free agent uninfluenced by commercial or political constraint.[4] A Flag Desecration Amendment has gone before Congress six times in the last ten years and was passed by the House of Representatives of the 109th Congress by a vote of 286 to 130 on June 22, 2005 – the year of Haacke's exhibition – but failed to pass the Senate by one vote the following June. Thus, in visible protest to that resolution, not yet decided at the time of the exhibition, Haacke's flag hangs suspended and collapsed like the south tower, which had temporarily left its twin holding the visual frame of the skyline for a short half hour longer on that boldly sunny, fateful day of September 11, 2001.

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[3] "Union Jack" is also the common name for the national flag of Great Britain, generally referred to as the British Union Jack. The canton with stars from the United States national ensign was the design of the Navy's jack, modified for the number of stars, from 1777 until September 11, 2002 when in deference to the war on terror the Navy adopted the supposed "First Navy Jack" with the slogan: *Don't Tread on Me*.

[4] Hans Haacke, *Werkmonographie,* with an essay by Edward F. Fry (Munich: Verlag M. Dumont Schauberg, 1972) contains the catalog material from the canceled exhibition as well as documentation of the cancelation including correspondence from Thomas M. Messer the director of the Guggenheim. For a brief summary of the cancellation of Haacke's 1971 Guggenheim retrospective, see Walter Grasskamp, "Real Time: The Work of Hans Haacke" in *Hans Haacke* (New York: Phaidon, 2004), 47-51. For a lengthier analysis see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason," *Art in America* 76, no. 2 (February 1988): 98 and footnote 6. For a discussion contemporary to the event, see Jack Burnham's "Hans Haacke's Cancelled Show at the Guggenheim" *Artforum* 9, no. 10 (June 1971): 67-71. And for a discussion of the art world rift created as artists boycotted the Guggenheim, see Grasskamp, "Real Time," footnote 5. See also Stefan Germer, "Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys," *October* 45 (Summer 1988): 63-75. For the artist's own statements on first amendment rights see Hans Haacke with Pierre Bourdieu, *Free Exchange* (Stanford: Standford University Press, 1995), 1-14.

This eponymous flag installation is nearly as monumental as Haacke's *Wide White Flow* (1967/2006) (fig. 1-5), the primary focal point of the artist's 2008 solo exhibition at the same gallery, where over 1200 square feet of white silk fabric activated by electric fans, rippled in waves across the floor of the gallery in variable rhythms depending on the number of individuals in the gallery at any one time.[5] However, while *Wide White Flow* is one of Haacke's natural systems developed early in his career, *State of the Union* works in relation to symbolic systems and thus depends to a greater degree on static visual appeal. Even though Haacke's works can be seen (although they rarely are) on purely formal terms, aesthetics become the nature rather than the intent of his large-scale installations. My view of the extreme visual strength of his Union Jack is skewed by other works within the main gallery space. These other pieces are literally dwarfed by the flag but in turn their needling presence draws attention away from this metaphorical deposition.[6] *Untitled #1* (2005) (fig. 1-1) – an overturned desk with the flag lapel pin and a broken light bulb in the spilled and upturned drawer seem to reference the jagged infrastructure of the towers, visible once the lingering dust and smoke cloud lifted from ground zero. The fact that the desk rests on a crushed steel beam into which is welded "FIRST NAME LAST NAME" – a feature of Haacke's *World Trade Center Memorial Proposal* – intimates a connection with both the macro-horror of the symbolic site and the micro-horror of individual lives lost or up-turned. A potted miniature mock-orange plant suggests as its title states: *Life goes on* (2005) (fig. 1-1), even in small and seemingly inconsequential ways. It "mocks" our resolve while affirming our resiliency.

I am pulled from my reveries by my thirteen year old who beckons me to the smaller side gallery to the right of the entrance and directly behind the large, primary installation space, where three images of a vertical rectangular format are mounted off kilter (one a little high, the other a little low, the third without regard to parallel or level proportions)(fig. 1-3). Neither as a triptych nor an installation, they are nonetheless visually and thematically linked: *Stuff Happens* (2003), *Star Gazing* (2004), and *Ripped* (2004). The centrally positioned image – *Star Gazing* – had puzzled him. "Mom, what does this image mean?" "Well, what do you see in it?" "There's a hooded figure." "Which implies what?" "Prisoners in Iraq." "Yes, prisoners in Iraq; maybe kidnapped journalists, and others." (The red of the shirt was of such a hue it plaintively recalled the orange haz-mat suit of the videotaped Daniel Pearl.) "What does a hood do?" "It makes you blind." "You also lose your identity; we don't know who this person is, do we?" "OK,

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[5] *Wide White Flow* was first exhibited in 1967 at the Hayden Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA. It was exhibited again at the Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, for the artist's two venue German retrospective in 2006 and at the Paula Cooper Gallery in 2008. For an illustration of the first installation see *Hans Haacke, for real,* 92.

[6] I use "deposition" in the sense the art critic Jan Avgikos likened the visual impact to a Pietà (see Introduction, footnote 3) and also in the sense of a witness's testimony.

if the hood are the stars, then the shirt must be the red stripes, that leaves the background to represent the white stripes, only they've gone black. I think the artist wants to say that America should be ashamed." While the remark reveals a certain youthful, reductive logic, the act of reading the image both literally and metaphorically is significant. The artist later in 2007 explains this bi-lateral approach in his work, something he had taken years to accept as legitimate.[7]

The central image – *Star Gazing* (2004) – is narrowly framed, the foreground tightly defined by the torso of a figure. The figure, presumably male and youthful (absence of distinct breasts, presence of adequate shoulders), but not necessarily so, is clothed in a red, short-sleeved t-shirt, his identity masked by a hood made from the star field of the American flag, the stars cascading diagonally down and across the facial zone. This is a photograph of a model posed in a studio. The depth of field dramatically compacted, the ground pressing upon the figure, in turn pressing upon the eyes of the viewer who stands face to face in confrontation with it. The figure in the image is larger than life but only narrowly so, enough to emphasize the absence of any equivalence between the one who sits masked and the viewer capable of looking. The former may loom larger but the latter exercises control, an inversion typical of Haacke; but in spite of the tight framing of the torso, the black ground looms heavily as a tactile-less void, sucking the figure back as much as the figure's own tactility thrusts it forward towards our own viewing plane. Tension and counter-tension are the formal strategies that imbue this extremely direct and reductive image with its impact and meaning. As an image, it is every bit as constructed as its neighbors while its texture and physicality evokes material and sensory conditions.

In the image to the left – *Stuff Happens* (2003) – the bottom sixth of the composition is comprised of small, alternating red and white squares (3 red, 2 white) and the top five-sixths is a field of blue, speckled with – as if falling down to the red and white squares below – a trove of white stars, randomly spaced but pulled as if by gravity to the lower third of the field. The print's colors are flat, primary, and in stark contrast with one another. Pure geometry and pure symbol with no sense of realism as if we were looking at an illustration for chaos theory, in which the error is defined as "the difference between the time evolution of the 'test' state [star] and the time evolution of the nearby state [star]. A deterministic system will have an error that either remains small (stable, regular solution) or increases exponentially with time (chaos). A stochastic system will have a randomly distributed error."[8] The discovery of this analogy is itself not altogether

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[7] Hans Haacke had two speaking engagements at the 95th College Art Association Conference, New York, City, February 16, 2007: first a presentation during the Radical Art Caucus panel and then an interview with artist, friend, and colleague Dennis Adams.

[8] Casdagli, Martin. "Chaos and Deterministic *versus* Stochastic Non-linear Modeling", in: *Journal Royal Statistics Society,* Series B, 54, no. 2 (1991): 303-328.

random since a fundamental understanding of chaotic dynamics involves concepts from information theory, a field developed within the context of practical communication and systems theory.[9] Hans Haacke has been interested in systems theory since 1962 when he and the artist, writer, and curator Jack Burnham began discussing 'systems aesthetics' based on the theory proposed by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy. His *General System Theory* would later be published in 1968 but was introduced to Burnham earlier by his publisher.[10] In 1969, Burnham published his *Beyond Modern Sculpture,* which contrasted sculpture as object to sculpture as system and a year later he included Haacke's *News* (1969) in his "Software" show at the Jewish Museum,[11] which the artist includes in an updated version in his 2005 "State of the Union" exhibition (fig. 1-4).

Are the stars then randomly scattered in a pattern whose probability can be deduced or is their pattern the chaotic determination of contingent events? The title of the artwork refers to a comment made by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in response to a reporter's question during a press conference regarding the extensive looting of public buildings when troops occupied Baghdad in April 2003.[12] Chaos determined by the error of *the difference between the time evolution of the Iraqi "test" state and the time evolution of the US military state,* perhaps.

The right composition – *Ripped* (2004) – whose foreground is a star field of the American flag, ripped down the center bisecting the image, frayed threads hanging loosely or nominally holding a residual connection between the right and left halves, reveals through the slash a red ground that appears as a gaping wound or scar. Like the hood in the image to its left, the stars slide on the diagonal, their top point leaning right or left or pointing down depending on how one "reads" the orientation, which can

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[9] "Communicating with Chaos," *Theoretical Interests,* Research, University of Maryland Chaos Groups*,* < http://www.chaos.umd.edu/research.html#communication> (accessed 7 July 2008).

[10] Bertalanffy's theories date to the 1930s and 1940s and were known in the postwar period through published essays and conference presentations. Luke Skrebowski clarifies that while Haacke credits Burnham with introducing him to systems analysis, Burnham's thinking on the subject gained cohesion through his observation of Haacke's work. See Luke Skrebowski, "All Systems Go: Recovering Hans Haacke's Systems Art" *Grey Room* 30 (Winter 2008): 60.

[11] See Grasskamp, "Real Time," 42.

[12] In response to the question: "Given how predictable the lack of law and order was, was there part of General Franks' plan to deal with it?" Rumsfeld said: "…Think what's happened in our cities when we've had riots and problems and looting. Stuff happens! But in terms of what's going on in that country, it is a fundamental misunderstanding to see those images over and over and over again of some boy walking out with a vase and say, ''Oh, my goodness, you didn't have a plan.'" See "A Nation at War; Rumsfeld's Words on Iraq: 'There Is Untidiness." April 12, 2003.

also be seen as the standard staggered presentation of the jack's horizontal rows. The work is constructed as a collage painting: the ground painted red on board, covered with the remnant fabric of a damaged flag. Again, textures are prominent: while the stars rest on a symbolic plane, the fabric's tactility escapes the surface of the image. The connection between symbolic dynamics and material reality is the circumstance of failure, literally evoking Lacan's "cut in the real" – the introduction of language in a psychic realm that resists representation. This is trauma.

In the 2005 exhibition, all three works are displayed side-by-side in close proximity – neither emphasizing nor denying the possibility of forming a triptych, their relationships by chance as much as by design. They are all digital C-prints occluding in some way the differences established in the process of their making: print, photograph, and mixed media collage. They are all the same format (vertical), size (57x36 inches) and color range of red, white, and blue (with the exception of black in the central image). They are not, however, all equal and their differences add to the complexity of their meaning both within the context of the "State of the Union" exhibition and also as stand-alone statements.[13] The images are not framed as traditional art would be but are mounted invisibly on aluminum and mounted at a slight distance from the wall, haphazardly ajar as if hung sloppily without the use of a leveling tool. This curious digression from standard display suggests that they are not being presented as objects, although they could be sold to collectors, marketed by the gallery system within which they operate. Haacke has long been known to display work both in and outside the gallery system, eschewing and critiquing the economic support of patronage and collecting. Although he has admitted to compromise, its evidence in his career is scant.

The functional strength of these images is not as objects then but as interpellation, a kind of "Hey, you! Over there! Come and stand face-to-face." They draw us to them, we then stand as if facing an opponent whose position is not reflective or mimetic but a challenge. When I saw them in the fall of 2005 on election day, I remember wishing I had come across them as wheat-paste art plastered across construction site panels as the artist had done with his *Poster project commemorating 9/11* (2001-2002). In that instance, white paper dye-cut to represent the parallel shapes of the twin towers was pasted over 110 different posters whose rental limit had expired in locations throughout Manhattan. The stark white of Haacke's poster contrasted with the visual density of the advertisement beneath it. Haacke's poster, pasted on top, became the ground of the advertisement, lying underneath, showing us once again his uncanny use of inversion: his poster blanks out the sky, the advertisement fills in the towers. The two take on new content based on the palimpsest of their union, the advertisement now limited to a silhouette of the twin towers sells nothing, the white

[13] A fourth image in the loosely formed series, "Mission Accomplished," a torn print of white stars in a blue field, was exhibited in a later exhibition at the Paula Cooper Gallery, January 11 – February 16, 2008.

ground defining the silhouette suggests the afterimage of physical form, now absence in our mind's eye. This reversal of foreground to background not only highlighted the chance occurrence of the content that would make up the image of the towers, it also broadened the spectrum of connections between the iconic image of the towers and the economic fabric of the cultural urban environment. The tower silhouettes shaped loss – economic, cultural, social, and human.

The documentation of Haacke's poster project is wheat-pasted, once again in a slapdash manner contradicting traditional linear formality, on the back (or exit) wall of the gallery's main installation space where I return to take in once again the various elements of the artist's composite arrangement. The artist acknowledges differences among his various audiences but also the importance of time and place to the meaning of the work, saying to the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in 1995, "The context in which the public encounters my works also plays an important role."[14] His work changes from its first incarnation to its documentation and then to any subsequent displays. When first performed his commemoration project began to hint at the underlying ramifications caused by the towers' subtraction from the urban environment and the national consciousness. The project was local and yet the physical state of the towers-as-structure is mirrored by the psychological state of the towers-as-symbol within our national collective conscious. "State of the Union" as an exhibition, would pick up three years after the commemoration project, using the documentation as a reminder of the political aftermath of our national response to the event of September 11, 2001. Along with other works in the exhibition it would also highlight the significance symbols hold as markers of values, even when gone awry.

There, unnoticed in my first tour of the space, slightly to the left of the pendant flag, a battered locker kicked to the ground spills out pennies, nickels, and dimes – *small change*. A simple wooden staff (a broom stick) holds the gilded eagle that typically tops the kind of flags one sees in the corner of a public school classroom, town hall, or courthouse, the nation's symbols revealed here, and throughout the exhibition, in debased condition. By using the locker and the eagle, Haacke harkens back to his installation, *Eagle and Prey,* part of an exhibition at the John Weber Gallery entitled "The Vision Thing" (1992), in which two rows of lockers previously used by workers of the then bankrupt Pan American Airways draw the viewer towards a gilt frame, flanked by lights and topped by the American eagle, bearing a photographic portrait of a laughing George Herbert Bush whose administration displaced fiscal and moral responsibility for

[14] Haacke, *Free Exchange*, 90. The notion of public versus private context of a work of art has been considered in his conversation with Molly Nesbit, and in an essay by Walter Grasskamp to note but two examples. See "Molly Nesbit in conversation with Hans Haacke" and Grasskamp "Real Time" both in *Hans Haacke* (2004), 6-81.

social misery to the care and attention of charity organizations in his 'thousand points of light' speech.[15] According to chaos research:

> …the recent realization [that] chaos can be controlled with *small* perturbations can be utilized to cause the symbolic dynamics of a chaotic system to track a prescribed symbol sequence thus allowing the encoding of any desired message in the signal from a chaotic oscillator.[16]

These are indeed *small perturbations* with major consequences and Haacke discretely suggests the "why and wherefore" of the problem by recreating *News* (1969).[17] News feeds from various agencies spews continuously out of one teletype machine over-flowing onto the floor with folds upon folds of information from which (if we were adequately attentive) we could ourselves make the connections between the past and the present sufficiently to know where all the actions of the Bush administration could lead us in the future. Here Haacke's challenge to the viewer to take up the sheets and read serves as his most ambiguous connector to the themes of democracy and national symbols in this composite arrangement of works since the degree of relevancy depends on the particular set of news you draw from an ever-growing wave of information.

This overwhelming accumulation of data complements the abundant repetition of stars until the visual continuity ultimately becomes self-consuming, difference being subsumed within the symbolic structure of unity. In "State of the Union" sameness becomes the root of division. Writing on the impact of the First Gulf War of 1991 (George Herbert Bush's war), Umberto Eco fashions two images:

> Old-fashioned wars were like a game of chess in which each player could try to take as many of his opponent's pieces as possible, but the ultimate goal was checkmate. Instead, contemporary warfare is like a chess game in which both players (working on the same network) move and take pieces of the same color. Modern warfare is therefore an autophagous game.[18]

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[15] See illustration and caption, "Eagle and Prey" in *Hans Haacke* (2004), 117. The eagle is for Haacke also a reference to the artist Marcel Broodthaers, particularly his installation *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (1968), which used methods of display to undermine the notion of neutrality of aesthetic objects within an institutional space, a significant influence on Haacke's own 'institutional critique.'

[16] "Communicating with Chaos," Chaos@UMD, undated, http://www-chaos.umd.edu/research.html. This is a paraphrase of the abstract from "Information Transmission Using Chaos" by Scott Hayes, Army Research Laboratory, Celso Grebogi and Edward Ott, University of Maryland (Febuary 1993). See also Edward Ott, *Chaos in Dynamical Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[17] An illustration of the first exhibition of *News* is found in *Hans Haacke, for real,* 112.

[18] Umberto Eco, "Reflections on War" in *Five Moral Pieces* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1997), 13. Yoko Ono had created her first version of an all white chessboard containing all white pieces in 1966; she entitled her piece "Play It By Trust." In the mid-1980s she sent chess pieces from one variant to both US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet

Two sides of the same color; two sides rent in coming to terms with loss; two sides bereft of effective action; two sides in self-consuming pain.

September 11, 2001: any of us who witnessed the collapse of the towers first-hand knew instantly in the convulsions of our cries, the blood draining from our faces, the weakness in our knees, the glut in our throats that the loss was incomprehensible. Instantly, the international community was apprised of the widespread and cataclysmic nature of losses in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia but it took months to bury the dead – those bodies which could be recovered – and even to reach a final count of 2,798[19] people murdered at the World Trade Center site, 224 victims of Flight 93 in Pennsylvania and the Pentagon in Virginia, 343 firefighters and paramedics, 23 officers of the New York City Police Department and 37 Port Authority Police officers. Already by October 2001, Creative Time, a New York City based not-for-profit organization that promotes the exhibition of art in public spaces, invited submissions for posters commemorating the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center. Hans Haacke submitted his plan of the white dye-cut silhouettes of the towers and Creative Time accepted his proposal. There were of course the spontaneous memorials, documented frequently in the news media, particularly those of Washington Square and Union Square Parks, the two closest public spaces open to general traffic shortly after 9/11. In the early fall of 2001, *Here Is New York,* a collection of amateur and professional photographs taken on September 11th was exhibited in a SoHo storefront and quickly became one of the most widely viewed collections of unedited (and, in that sense, democratic) responses to the event.

Throughout the autumn, national concern for New York City and international support of the nation had perhaps never been higher (at least since the end of World War II – May 8th 1945 – in Europe). Criticism was rare and largely rebuffed or disregarded.[20] But by October 7th, the US along with Canada and Great Britain had already invaded Afghanistan, creating a rift between those who emphasized an aggressive defense and those who favored international consensus and diplomacy to reach Osama bin Laden and his network of terrorists. Already the flag-wavers sided with

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Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev. See David Sheff, *all we are saying* (New York: Playboy, 1981 and St. Martin's Press, 2000), vii. While Ono saw the possibility of peace through the blanched stalemate, Eco envisioned an endless bellicose engagement.

[19] In fact this number, taken from Hans Haacke's *Proposal: Competition for World Trade Center Memorial* (2003) seems to constantly change. On the seventh anniversary, 9/11/08, National Public Radio gave the count as 2751.

[20] Judith Butler, for example, discusses the limits set on discourse in the public sphere post-9/11 in her essay "The Charge of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and the Risks of Public Critique," in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 101-127.

the barely disguised revenge-seekers paraded by the news media to justify the government's precipitous war policies being outlined by Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld. The international consensus of sympathy for the United States completely eroded with the invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, the subsequent looting and chaos after the US military entry into Baghdad in April, and the inability of Paul Bremer's transition team (the Coalition Provisional Authority) to implement a viable reconstruction plan – one that worked for the Iraqi people and promoted unity over division.

By the presidential campaign in the fall of 2004, it was clear that we were a nation divided and while half the population felt we were once again cheated out of a fair election, the other half blithely voted George Walker Bush into a second term (a vote many would come to regret having made).[21] On February 2, 2005, President Bush delivered his fifth State of the Union address claiming, "…with a healthy, growing economy, with more Americans going back to work, with our nation an active force for good in the world -- the state of our union is confident and strong."[22] There is, however, another important marker suggested by Haacke's exhibition and that is Hurricane Katrina, its devastation of New Orleans, in particular, and regions of the Gulf Coast, in general, the Administration's and Homeland Security's bungled response, and the painful evidence of disparity between the services provided to the rich and the poor of our nation. While the eponymous centerpiece of "State of the Union," the monumental pendant star-field split in half, refers to the division within the nation, the exhibition announcement refers to strategies of rescue that divided the population of the gulf coast during and after Katrina, two-thirds of the poster awash in blue, the word "Union" spelled out in stars, half-submerged, metaphorically drowning (fig. 1-2).

The ever-present optimistic spin of the White House versus factual reality, filtered through the sieve of the news media, provides the context of Hans Haacke's *State of the Union* exhibition, held one year after the 2004 election and nine months subsequent to the President's 2005 State of the Union address. While the artist includes documentation of his poster project for public space, *Commemorating 9/11* (2001-2002), as well as his *Proposal: Competition for World Trade Center Memorial* (2003) – a remarkable combination of polished black granite, patina grey Belgian blocks, and verdant green un-manicured growth, suggesting simultaneously the deep void of loss and the reflection of continuity provided by communal space – the exhibition as a whole is a composite arrangement of works within a private gallery context. Haacke's

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[21] While the administration claimed a mandate of the people – 'political capital' – in fact, Mr. Bush had one of the most narrow election leads in US history (3 percentage points). See Sam Tanenhaus, "States of Play: The News From Alaska: Another Example of the G.O.P. Split, Week in Review, The New York Times, July 5, 2009.

[22] For full text see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050202-11.html> (access July 29, 2008).

crossover positioning of public and private spheres hints at the connections between our national mandate to spread democracy throughout the world and the severe global consequences of rising nationalistic movements both at home and abroad.[23]

On September 11th our nation quaked in chaos. By the time of the State of the Union address in February 2005, we had effectively transferred chaos to Afghanistan and Iraq and had sufficiently ignored peace negotiations in the Middle East to witness an upsurge in destabilizing violence there. Haacke's exhibition manipulates the supposed "untouchable" symbols of patriotism to underscore the more significant undermining of principles those symbols represent by the Bush administration: free speech, civil liberties, human rights, justice, and true democratic representation. At the same time, the artist has also chosen to work metaphorically rather than factographically, avoiding the meticulous delineation of data that has become 'signature' of his major contributions.[24] While significant in their informational detail, the fathomless sheets of news feeds are also like so many pools of tears, a tragic reminder that there are grave conditions to attend without any clear indication of the means to do so.

To understand the artist's approach to this particular front of the war on terror,[25] I requested to meet with him to discuss his process, his commitment to provocation, his tactical mixing of the symbolic with the real, and the *experience* versus the *reading* of

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[23] I am suggesting a broader context to Haacke's *State of the Union,* one supported by theories of globalization delineated in recent publications. Neil Smith, himself influenced by the artist's bold disclosure of the intricate connections between the closed system of economic exchange and the open system of capitalism's impact on society (confirmed in a conversation with the author, March 11, 2009, CUNY Graduate Center) writes on the impact of US globalism both historically and post-9/11 in *The Endgame of Globalization* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005). For the connections between our national mandate to spread democracy throughout the world and the severe global consequences of rising nationalistic movements in Latin America, Africa, and the territories of the former Soviet Union see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

[24] The term derives from Russian Constructivism and seems to have been used first in the journal LEF. There are two publications that discuss the importance of this concept to the avant-garde. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October* 30 (Fall 1984): 82-119, and *October* 118 (Fall 2006), *Soviet Factography, A Special Issue,* ed. Devin Fore. "In brief, 'factography' can be defined as an art practice in which the facticity of given social, political and economical circumstances was seen as complex and important enough to merit artistic representation…," writes Buchloh in footnote 13 of his essay, "Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason." While Haacke was not familiar with this movement within the Soviet avant-garde, his adherence to complexity achieves a similar methodological focus on facts in many of his works.

[25] We can interpret both Iraq and the aftermath of Katrina as focal points of the war on terror, the former as a stated security threat and the latter managed by the systems of security designed and implemented by the Bush administration.

art. I found the artist extremely kind and unassuming; he was also nimble as a fox: when I steered the conversation in one direction, he took it another; if I tried to pin him down, he gently undermined my question. There was nothing malicious or deceptive about his intentions: clearly, he understood the value of upsetting expectations. I realized that I was there to learn and his anecdotal response to my questions made the experience not only profitable but also enjoyable. The following is an edited transcript of that conversation.

Conversation: the symbolic and the real

KM: I'd like to begin our conversation with a quote from Yasmin Sooka, now head of South Africa's Foundation for Human Rights, formerly a juror on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

> I would do it completely differently. I would look at the systems of apartheid – I would look at the question of land, I would certainly look at the role of multinationals, I would look at the role of the mining industry very, very closely because I think that's the real sickness of South Africa… I would look at the systematic effects of the policies of apartheid, and I would devote only *one* hearing to torture because I think when you focus on torture and you don't look at what it was serving, that's when you start to do a revision of the real history.

This was the connection you were making in *A Breed Apart* (1978) and in *MetroMobiltan* (1985) and in a great deal of your work throughout the 1980s. Does it hurt that it takes so long before a broader consciousness catches up? And have we even begun to contend with the systemic connections between terror and economics?

HH: I am glad to be – for a change – on the winning side. The points made in the quote are absolutely pertinent. When we talk about Abu Ghraib, for instance, we can talk about "bad apples" ad infinitum. But what led to the insanity of the invasion of Iraq with its horrific consequences is in danger of being forgotten. When trying to explain how art works – together with millions of other things – can contribute to gradual shifts in the public consensus, I often resort to the image of a mosaic: the more stones of a particular color are added the more its overall color changes.

KM: And the clarity of that picture…

HH: The visual arts are part of the mosaic. Just like what we read in the newspapers, what we see on the tube, and what we hear in church – the visual arts play a role in shaping our view of the world and thus can affect how we act.

KM: Yasmin Sooka is quoted in Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine,* which connects economic globalization to the reshaping of democracy as a capitalist project rather than a self-governing project and as a brutal terrorizing project as well. This information has been out there a long time – you have found it – but it took work to piece it together and then, of course, there is such an active project to discredit anyone who might frame democracy in a more strategic rather than an essentialist light.

Could you discuss your efforts to highlight the connections between democracy, democratic symbols, and terror in your installation: "State of the Union"*?*

HH: That's a big question. Let me try.

The title *State of the Union* is, of course, derived from the State of the Union address traditionally delivered by the President to Congress in January of each year. At the beginning of Bush's second term, this exhibition was my own assessment of the State of the Union. I used two different images: one for the announcement of the show and its title and the other for a work in the show.

Most immediately*,* the image on the announcement was my response to how the Bush administration reacted to hurricane Katrina. Beyond that it served as a metaphor for the general state of affairs. In the American colors, red white and blue, you see a huge expanse of blue water, a red sky above, and in the typeface used by fraternities, sports clubs and the military, in white was spelled out the title ("State of the Union") with stars in the letters. The words were sinking into the blue sea, the Union was drowning.

For the work in the exhibition, I used the star field of the American flag; not because I was afraid I would get into trouble over a presumed violation of the sanctity of the American flag, but because the star field is full of meanings. Of course, in the flag the stars represent the 50 states of the union. But all over the world stars have many other meanings as well, including political and religious connotations. A single star is often associated with the star of Bethlehem, the arrival of Christ, and salvation.

We have all looked up at the starry sky and been mesmerized. It's a great experience. For all these and many other reasons there are many songs, in which stars are referred to, among them the well-known children's song: *Twinkle, twinkle little star*. Stars have positive and happy connotations.

The star field of the flag could therefore also be a metaphor for the sky. When something happens to this happy sky, it could be understood as a sign that something is wrong. My sense at the time was (and perhaps we are getting out of it as we speak)[26] that this country, thanks to the policies of the Bush administration, was split in half. I did not identify what one and the other half represent. I merely showed a torn sky. We now have to deal with the shreds.

KM: You have touched on my next question: You consistently make use of the Union Jack as opposed to the full American flag in "State of the Union." Was that an aesthetic or a political decision? As you describe it, the decision seems to be quite strongly on the level of metaphorical content.

HH: I don't like the term *aesthetic*, it lacks…

KM: Substance.

[26] My conversation with Hans Haacke took place just prior to the Democratic National Convention in Denver, 2008.

HH: Yes, and *political* is too direct and limiting. It does not allow for the play of metaphors and allusions. But, of course, they all have political implications. They invite the viewers to get engaged and draw their own conclusions.
KM: And we were right in the middle of a congressional debate on whether to amend the constitution to prevent the desecration of the flag. When you had your exhibition the House had already voted but the Senate would not vote until the following year.
HH: Remember the 60s and early 70s, the time of the Vietnam War, when the American flag was "desecrated" to make a political statement, and the hysteric reaction of those who claimed to protect the honor of the flag, while, in fact, they were the ones who dishonored the flag in Vietnam. By now, the image of the American flag has been used for lingerie, Wall Street, and selling just about everything you can imagine.
KM: Yes, as long as it's a consumer product, it's o.k. If we see then "State of the Union" as presenting your critical interference with the symbolic language of democracy, this in turns suggests a more severe interference on the part of the Bush administration with democracy itself. Co-optation of the symbols works two ways in "State of the Union." Has the flag become just another corporate logo and the government a PR firm?
HH: I was born in a country that, still today, is a bit shy to wave the flag. The first time Germans dared doing so was during the world soccer championship. But in the US, flag waving is a sign of patriotism. And so, the use of the flag for political or corporate speech is accepted and remains potent. Would the same be true for the Italian flag, the Belgium, or the Dutch flag? Has anyone in France attacked the tricolor?
KM: The currency is different…
HH: Yes, it has an emotional resonance for a great number of Americans.
KM: So you use the symbol to its best avail?
HH: I hope I do.
KM: Metaphor is functioning within the space of the photographic images as well, specifically *Stuff Happens, Star Gazing,* and *Ripped*. You used to avoid that attribution of metaphor to your work, preferring to keep it on the solid ground of information and concrete fact. Is metaphor a tool for you in producing the work or for your audience in interpreting your work?
HH: I have used photos in many different ways. For example, with the works on New York real estate, I used photography as a means of documentation, whereas in *Star Gazing* it serves metaphoric speech while referring to something factual. Everybody who saw the images coming out of Abu Ghraib understands that my arranged photograph alludes to those "facts on the ground."
KM: And yet there is something substantial about it: the strong texture, the torso so prominently projected forward: it is almost as if we are standing face-to-face before an individual even though we cannot see that individual. Does physicality influence our interpretation? How much did you want to instill a sense of concrete presence to the image?

HH: Let me answer by telling you an anecdote. A person at *The New Yorker* was interested in this image for the cover of the magazine. I was asked if I would be willing to turn it into a painting or a drawing or allow someone else to do that for me. I said, "No, that changes it radically." And so, the idea of using it for the cover was abandoned.[27] *The New Yorker* has a strict rule never to use a photograph on its cover.

KM: Yes, I agree, your image would not be the same as a drawing. *Star Gazing,* like *US Isolation Box, Grenada 1983* (1984) and *A Breed Apart* (1978), directly addresses torture. You are willing to address the brutalization of the human body and the dehumanization of the human spirit, yet you make ethical choices when it comes to using photographic images within your works. You critically frame, for example, the work of Benetton and their leading photographer Oliviero Toscani for their role in a grotesque virtual abuse of human bodies. I'm referring specifically to *Dyeing for Benetton* (1994).

You have worked differently throughout your career in your use of the photographic image; how has this process evolved? What context do you create to protect both the image and the subject?

HH: I'm not aware of an evolution in how I use photography. If a documentary image would be the most powerful I take that approach. If, on the other hand, a different tack would be better, I wouldn't hesitate choosing that – including painting an image in oil. I don't have an ideological allegiance to any medium. What I reproach Oliviero Toscani for is that he exploits human suffering to peddle consumer goods.

KM: So in your sense of it, it is not the image itself but how it is used that makes the difference – what ends it is being used for?

HH: Yes. The goal matters – and how it is pursued.

KM: When you use a documentary image, you are very consciously framing that image in a larger context. Is that a means of protecting the content of that image? For example in *Oil Painting, Homage to Marcel Broodthaers* (1982) (fig. 1-8) there is a stark juxtaposition of images of two different mediums face-to-face at opposing ends of the room.

HH: It was important for me to emphasize that the image of the protest was employing contemporary means of visual communication such as photography versus a nineteenth-century-style of official portraiture in oil. I wanted to position Reagan in the past and with an authoritarian mien. I should add some background information on Documenta in 1982, for which I produced this confrontation. Rudi Fuchs, the commissioner of Documenta 7 had said that one of his goals was the reevaluation and promotion of painting; he, and in particular his collaborator, Johannes Gachnang, were pushing Neo-Expressionist painting of the early 1980s. That was another subtext to my

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[27] *Star Gazing* was, however, reproduced in the November 1, 2004 issue of *The New Yorker* on page 14 as a ¾ page illustration for the Arts listings, "Galleries-Chelsea," with the caption: '*Star Gazing' by Hans Haacke, in 'Election,' at American Fine Arts.*

choice of painting as a medium. The emphasis on photography – a reference to Walter Benjamin – was underlined by my providing portions of the preceding and of the following image on the filmstrip, including its sprockets. The means of the production of this particular image, so to speak, were exhibited together with the image.

KM: So we're never far away from thinking about the production of the image?

HH: Yes.

KM: Going back to the idea of fact and specificity, you recreated *News* for your 2005 show. This was originally presented in Düsseldorf in 1969 and at the Jewish Museum in 1970. We can think of news feed as *factographic* information – data that is concrete rather than empathic, requiring action rather than passive absorption – but we can also understand news language as coded in stereotype, jargon, and sound bites.

The coils on the floor, as they accumulate, begin to resemble a Möbius strip or a snake elliptically swallowing its own tail. How did you intend the news feed to work with or against the pervasive symbols of democracy in the exhibition?

HH: Let me relate the early history of this work. It was first done in Düsseldorf for "Prospect 69", an international selection of art works of the present, and a month or two later, at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York in a solo exhibition, and then in 1970 in the "Software" exhibit at the Jewish Museum. What concerned me at the time and what is still important for me today is that people coming into a gallery, a museum, or another art exhibition venue, are reminded that these art spaces are not a world separate from the rest of the world. The world of art is not a world apart. "Worldly" news enters the "sanctuary" and connects it to the world "outside."

KM: At the exhibition, I picked up a piece of information that connected members of the current Bush administration to the former Reagan administration and the Iran/Contra scandal, giving the present moment a temporal association overlapping with the past.

HH: There was an evolution in how I dealt with the accumulation of the printouts. Both in Düsseldorf and at the Howard Wise Gallery, at the end of the day, I collected what had been spewed out. I rolled it up and encased it in a clear plastic urn with a date on it. At the "Software" show, however, I became worried that such an entombment could turn the printouts into precious objects. And so I let the paper accumulate without interruption, day after day. After the show, as was also done at Paula Cooper Gallery, the "fall-out" was gathered and thrown away. You mention a Möbius strip. I did not think of shapes. This was a random accumulation, a rather shapeless mound of paper and old news.

KM: Yes, this is the state of the union – so embroiled in a massive amount of information that it becomes fathomless and impossible to negotiate. To pull out the particulars to help us to make the necessary connections is a Sisyphean task.

HH: New information constantly overlays the old and influences how we understand what we heard and read the previous day.

KM: We spoke earlier about Bourdieu's *habitus* and Walter Grasskamp's writing of the discrepancy between "everyday habitude" and the "formal rigor of art." During my visit to

Documenta XII, I noticed an overwhelmingly large portion of the viewing public carrying the heavy catalog. Looking across the spaces, I noticed more noses down in books than eyes looking up at the art.

Have we become so afraid to look that we need to first be instructed how to see? What are the conditions that block experience and awareness? Has nothing changed since 1959 when your images of Documenta II also showed viewers reading their pamphlets?

HH: Many big exhibitions, of which Documenta is one, attract an amazingly large public. The number of people going to Documenta has increased enormously to some 750,000 by now. The overwhelming majority of them have little training in looking at art works. Art is not their daily diet, they are puzzled and insecure; and they may be afraid of missing something. When they are offered guidance, they eagerly accept. That's probably a normal reaction; I wouldn't hold it against them. In fact, it may even be a sign of genuine curiosity and of their taking seriously what they are exposed to.

We would like the public to learn how to see, to decipher, to understand images that speak not only literally but also metaphorically and learn about their historical background. Catalogue texts can be helpful, *if they are done well.* Good texts could introduce visitors to ways of seeing, thinking and a language with which to articulate what they see and to share that with others. Unfortunately, most are not. The most recent Documenta catalogue, in fact, was a cruel joke.

KM: There's the double necessity of allowing oneself the fresh perception of a child while responding as an intelligent adult.

HH: I don't know how to solve this dilemma. Let me add, I have had the experience that a good number of art critics and art historians, whose business it is to decipher images, often focus only on journalistic aspects of the works but miss references and signifying formal aspects when they write about my stuff.

KM: Your work and your writings hold an unwavering conviction for their role as critical intervention. Although I consciously avoid the term *political art*, is it possible to pose a thread from Géricault to Manet to Haacke? While your work defies either the sentimental or the romantic – there is no heroic artist, no mystery, no personal expression or evidence of "hand", no signature, no empathic engagement – can you deny a connection to the political fervor of the Romantics and Realists, those intent on breaking the canon, the control of state patronage, and re-scandalizing the scandal?

HH: Of course, I am aware of these artists and see myself in that tradition. But I don't like being pigeonholed as a "political artist." Aside from the reductive nature of the label, it falsely suggests that the work of other artists has no political dimension. Most people think they know what is "political" art. In fact, they have a very simplistic understanding. After all, there is no similarity between the work of Tatlin and Heartfield, or Picasso and El Lissitsky, to name just a few. The political references in the paintings of Manet and Courbet are often overlooked. Both were eminently political-minded artists. They infused many of their paintings with overt political messages.

As an aside, I have been making a lot of photographs of nature. I had a show two or three months ago in Germany of 228 photographs that I had taken of the plants that had grown around *DER BEVÖLKERUNG* at the Reichstag in Berlin – close-ups of the flora, but also of snails and spiders. I used one of the images for the announcement – the photo of the only flower I found in bloom in April: a little blue flower. The "Blue Flower" plays a central role in German Romantic literature. I used it ironically but also because I liked the image of this little flower. Maybe it comes as a surprise: I like beautiful things and, deep down, I may be a Romantic.

KM: I get a sense from you that I should be wary of taking a broad notion and making it too narrow but I should be equally cautious of taking a narrow idea and expanding it out. "Don't box things in." You'd like me to avoid creating limitations; that whenever there is a small note, make it resound.

HH: I don't like one-liners.

KM: No *sound bites* then! What would you like me to consider in thinking about "State of the Union"?

HH: As with all other things: look at the individual works, the whole, and the historical context. In this sense, I could call it a "composed" show. It was designed in relation to a given space and how one thing "rubs" against another.

Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard, Marcel Broodthaers (1969)[28]

Reflection: chaos and the divisive nature of pain

That magmatic entity known today as 'folks'

So what exactly is the "rub" of Hans Haacke's installation and where do we find it?[29] His remarks during our conversation were at times puzzling. They seemed to open trap doors rather than land me on my feet running. I had a feeling that even in the space of a studio interview that Hans Haacke was up to something. I also had the distinct impression that I would not find my ground during this process but that Haacke had

[28] Translation: A throw of the dice will never eliminate chance. I attribute the quotation to Marcel Broodthaers whose book of that title was actually a visualization of the poem of the same title by Stephane Mallarmé. Marcel Broodthaers, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard* (Antwerp and Cologne, 1969, quarto, 58p). See Ann Rorimer, "The Exhibition at the MTL Gallery in Brussels, March 13-April 10, 1970," *October* 42 (Fall 1987): 101-125. See also Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* (September, 1982): unpaginated.

[29] History's most famous "rub" is in Shakespeare's Hamlet "To be or not to be" soliloquy (Act Three, Scene One) "…To die, to sleep; / To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there is the rub; / For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause…"

offered me instead a handful of stars. All right then, let us begin with stars, mosaics, and a roll of the dice.

In a paragraph of just under 100 words, I have used a half a dozen or so colloquial expressions. In 1995 Umberto Eco gave a talk to representatives of both the Italian government and press entitled "On the Press." In it he discusses how the Italian press had abandoned their cryptic language of the sixties and seventies, in which they spoke in code to politicians, over the heads of everyday readers, within the columns of their journals: a kind of intra-political speech rather than clear and open discourse. These so-called "parallel convergences" referred both to a political process of the rapprochement of incompatible units and also to an indirect means of address .[30] By the mid-90s, Eco was accusing the press of speaking in aphorisms and clichés in order to appeal to "that magmatic entity known today as 'folks.'"[31] Both speech practices – elitist and colloquial – undermine the possibility of an inter-political dialogue or practice of open speech between government and constituencies: a dialogue that instead of running parallel, crosses and overlaps in points of exchange.

American television and radio media (both news and talk shows), more than ten years later, refer with abandon to American citizens as "folks". To me, "folks" has always had a condescending tonality, connected to clichés such as "salt of the earth" or "down home" – removed from the centers of judgment, economics, education, and power. It is a term that Hans Haacke approaches critically. Eco published his essay in a compilation entitled, *Five Moral Pieces*, a title I cannot avoid associating with Bertolt Brecht's 1935 essay entitled, "Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties," a major influence on Haacke and subsequently on both Krzysztof Wodiczko and Alfredo Jaar.[32] In order to combat lies and ignorance one must, according to Brecht, overcome five difficulties: "He must have

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[30]"Parallel convergences" is a difficult term to define as it has both general and historically specific meanings. In the case of Italian politics it represented the efforts of the Christian Democrats to remain in power through coalitions with the Social Democrat, Socialist, and Communist parties. The strategy of "parallel convergences," also known as "the historic compromise" ended with the kidnapping and death of the Christian Democratic leader, Aldo Moro, by the Red Brigades in 1978. Generally speaking, the term refers to non-converging dialectics. The US Congress has also been accused of speaking in code when specific issues cannot be broached due to legality or security as in the recent nomination hearings for Judge Sonia Sotomayor's Supreme Court nomination. See David Novak of the Washington Post with Steve Inskeep on *Morning Edition,* National Public Radio, July 15, 2009.

[31] Umberto Eco, "On the Press" in *Five Moral Pieces* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2002), 36.

[32] Other arguable associations are Jacque Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation,* trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) or, perhaps most linguistically equivalent, Bob Rafelson's 1970 film, *Five Easy Pieces.*

the *courage* to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; the *keenness* to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; the *skill* to manipulate it as a weapon; the *judgement* to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the *cunning* to spread the truth among such persons."[33]

In describing his work, *Der Bevölkerung,* proposed in 1999 and inaugurated in 2000, Haacke distinguishes between the inscription on the façade of the Reichstag building in Berlin, *DEM DEUTSCHEN VOLKE (T0 THE PEOPLE)* with his own inscription grounded on the floor of an open-air interior courtyard, visible to the public from the roof, *DER BEVOLKERUNG (TO THE POPULATION)*(fig. 1-6). Here again Haacke uses inversion: in lieu of the people dwarfed by the building looking up to the inscription, the people are elevated looking down to the foundation, the metaphorical positions reflecting strength rather than baseness. Brecht had written in 1935: "In these times, the one who says *Bevölkerung* (population) instead of *Volk* (folk or people)… already does not support many lies."[34] He was referring to the dangerous tendency to categorize people, including sameness (ethnicity, values) and excluding difference (ethnicities, education, class). Eco's "magmatic entity" and Brecht's "population" allude to the indissoluble grains of difference rather than the blended mix of assimilation or the singularity of ethnic purity. The politician's "indirect address" alludes to the exclusivity of language as jargon.

Eco considers the media as a fourth estate, a critical examiner of the other three (traditionally speaking: royalty, clergy, and commoners – also divided into bourgeoisie and peasants). Haacke's "direct address" is his effort to instill a level of truth seeking to the material practice of art. In his own assessment, Haacke has said that we should not leave politics to the politicians.[35] This suggests the need for a critical practice to deal with issues effecting humanity. For Haacke, the press is needed for tactical complicity but he does not see journalists as absolute free agents. Journalists face difficulties in

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[33] Bertolt Brecht, "Appendix A: Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties" (1934/35) in *Galileo* (New York: Grove Press, 1991); extracts in *Hans Haacke* (New York: Phaidon, 2004), 94-96, emphasis in the extracts. Also available in its entirety online, <http://ricardo.ecn.wfu.edu/~cottrell/ope/archive/0903/att-0196/fiveDifficulties_brecht.pdf> or <http://grace.evergreen.edu/%7Earunc/texts/theater/brecht/fiveDifficulties.pdf >.

[34] Bertolt Brecht quoted in Hans Haacke, "Thoughts about the Project, 1999-2000" in *Hans Haacke* (2004), 141.

[35] "Experience tells us that one should never leave politics to the politicians. Aside from the trouble this can get us into, such abdication would also be in conflict with generally held notions of democracy. But it would also be dangerous for art. Shutting out the social world would reduce it to a self-consuming 'art for art's sake." Hans Haacke is quoted in the press release for *State of the Union,* Paula Cooper Gallery, November 5-December 23, 2005.

writing the truth.[36] It is therefore up to artists both to maintain their status as free agents and also to engage in a practice of social and institutional critique, highlighting complicity when "agency is not free."

Rosalyn Deutsche argues that democracy is a theoretical principle underlying all of Haacke's oeuvre and that direct address was his "maneuver in a campaign to form his audience into a public."[37] She explains that while *Gallery Goers' Birthplace and Residence Profile* was Haacke's first work to take the social world as its object of study, the polls implemented a new tactic in the form of Haacke's art – that of direct address – in which the imperative "indicate" suggests the second-person pronoun "you."[38] Haacke asked the viewer in *Gallery Goers' Profile* to indicate on a map his/her birthplace with a red pin and his/her place of residence with a blue pin. Subsequently, Haacke would use both the imperative and the interrogative form of address. The questionnaire for the planned *Guggenheim Poll* (1970), for example, was a single sheet of paper whose twenty questions were to be answered by checking the appropriate yes/no response. In *MOMA Poll* (1970), in *Visitors' Profile, Documenta 5* (1972), and in *John Weber Gallery Visitors' Profile I and II* (1972 and 1973), Haacke implemented as Deutsche suggests "the apparatus – ballots, ballot boxes, keypunch cards, questionnaires – of some of the core institutions of representative democracy – voting, demographic studies, opinion surveys – to foster the growth of direct democracy."[39] By acknowledging his viewers' presence, by asking them questions, by giving them the right of response, Haacke creates through the polls not only the material conditions of social relations necessary for a democracy but he also makes us aware of the tenuous nature of those conditions.

In his proposed questionnaire for the Jewish Museum 1970 "Software" exhibition, for example, Haacke asks: "In your opinion is the moral fabric of this country strengthened or weakened by the U.S. involvement in Indochina?" and "Is the use of the American flag for the expression of political beliefs, e.g., on hardhats and in dissident art

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[36] This is clearly in evidence in spring 2009 as investigative reporting is no longer supported by the majority of media outlets.

[37] Rosalyn Deutsche, "The Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much" in *Hans Haacke, for real,* 69.

[38] Deutsche, "The Art of Not Being Governed," 64. *Gallery Goers' Birthplace and Residence Profile* (Part I) took place in 1969 at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York City. Luke Skrebenski argues that Haacke's *Recording of Climate in Art Exhibition* (1970) where the artist displays a thermograph, barograph, and hydrograph used to monitor climate conditions in a museum setting, is also a social world study since it highlights the relationship between art and regulative functions safeguarding the material and financial value of museum displays. See Luke Skrebowski, "All Systems Go," 67.

[39] Deutsche, "The Art of Not Being Governed," 66. All these art works are adequately illustrated in this volume.

exhibitions, a legitimate exercise of free speech?"[40] (One notes how closely those questions correspond to the circumstances of the "State of the Union" exhibition by replacing Iraq for Indochina.) Speech is the ideological basis of a democracy but it is not always its functional foundation, for speech can be denied to large portions of the population. We can also cease to exercise our right of free speech giving over that expression to national icons as Haacke alludes in *State of the Union*.

In *Five Moral Pieces,* Umberto Eco reflects on contemporary ethical issues, contemplating war, moral belief, the press, fascism, and intolerance as significant weak points in our society. In his essay on war, Eco refers to conflict as a *game of weights.* I followed many empty leads trying to discover the origin and/or meaning of this reference, just the sort of obtuse indicator Haacke pours into his own works. Is this literally a game or is Eco referring to the concept of balance in game theory?[41] In French and Italian, weight and power are often amalgamated suggesting a distribution of power, judgment, or aptitude.[42] There is also the connotation of *value* or that to which we give *weight,* or a sense of standards as in *weights and measures,* and again the *weight* of concern. In Eco's concerns, I recognize the weight I feel in confronting the exchange of information, consideration and categorization of peoples, aggression, political malfeasance, and our ethical positions in regards to both personal and collective responsibility. This list also summarizes the issues inherent to Haacke's *oeuvre* in general and "State of the Union" in particular.

Because of the right of free speech and because of Haacke's activism, I was confused that an artist known for bold confrontations with authority had created no public component to "State of the Union." Neither had he involved his public actively by using either the imperative or the interrogative address. Interestingly, Haacke did not choose to return to these early tactics used in exhibitions from 1969-1973 but continued with the practice of assemblage that he had developed for such interventions as "Viewing Matters" for the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in 1996 and "Mixed Messages" for the Serpentine Gallery with object selected from the Victoria and Albert in 2001. While these museum interventions rely on incongruities to jar our perception (much like the artist Alfredo Jaar would do in his film *Muxima* as we will see in Chapter Three), "State of the Union" uses assemblage primarily to accumulate meaning through repetition and emphasis.

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[40] Hans Haacke quoted in Deutsche, "The Art of Not Being Governed," 64.

[41] Dr. Michael A. Riccioli states in an email message to the author, September 10, 2008, that the game of weights "certainly is a hangman game but without the hanged person, thus a guessing game of letters and words based on odds and probability.

[42] Thanks to Caroline Bem and Katie Mace for clarifying the nuance in use and translation of this term.

So let us address Haacke's friction – the tension among and between accumulated works – in this exhibition. On the one hand, the installation reveals a remarkable visual unity with the repetitive use of stars. It also has a thematic unity referred to by its title: "State of the Union." On the other hand, there is an almost awkward display of chance in its composite nature. The constellation he constructs is uncharted, incomplete, and ruptured. It is painful. Let us consider this a metaphor rather than a cliché. We will add to it the metaphor of mosaics he spoke of in our conversation, Broodthaer's roll of the dice in the epigraph, and Eco's game of weights because it is in the play of standards offset by chance that we are likely to find a clue to Haacke's means (if not endgame) of representation.

'Seeing stars' – terror, torture, and the nation-state

In conversation, Hans Haacke suggested that the division he saw as a wound in 2005 was healing through the candidacy of Barack Obama. As I review this chapter in May 2009, just over 100 days into the Obama presidency, the divisions created by the actions of the Bush administration are regaining the spotlights of blogs and the headlines of print and television media. At the time of the 2005 State of the Union address, one of the principal conflicts in public opinion was the degree to which accepted ethical standards of conduct could be adjusted in the name of national security. Three months into a new presidency, the conflict rides on the threat that full policy disclosure poses to national security. Then and now, torture is the subject of the debate. Haacke's exhibition as a whole speaks of democracy, division, and the nature of symbolic language, while its details expose just what has undermined the integrity of our democratic institutions – infringement on civil rights including free speech, *habeus corpus,* transparency, and willingness to uphold international codes of ethics in regards to torture. *Star Gazing* literalizes the metaphor "seeing stars" (often invoked in the inadequate description of pain): Haacke's mesmerizing "starry sky" – a figure blinded by a hood of stars – winces under threat of torture. As the artist suggests, "Everybody who saw the images coming out of Abu Ghraib understands that my arranged photograph alludes to those 'facts on the ground.'"[43]

In discussing torture in her book *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry details the relationship between pain and language, particularly in the signification of the tools and emblems of torture but also in the relationship between pain and interrogation. Pain is used to control the language of the victim thereby gaining agency over that individual's extension into the world (his ability to create a relationship to and within the external world). Torture therefore, according to Scarry, deconstructs an individual's worldview by destroying the building blocks of sentience (vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste) symbolically shredding what is civilized through the localized example of a body, or set

[43] The Abu Ghraib torture images were disclosed on CBS's *Sixty Minutes,* April 29, 2004. See Introduction, footnote 42.

of specific bodies. Torture always displaces the responsibility onto the victim, not only destroying the physical body (individual) but also the social body (worldview) and the juridical body (legitimacy). Scarry explains this relationship between the physical and the verbal:

> Torture consists of a primary physical act, the infliction of pain, and a primary verbal act, the interrogation… The connection between the physical act and the verbal act, between body and voice, is often misstated or misunderstood. Although the information sought in an interrogation is almost never credited with being a *just* motive for torture, it is repeatedly credited with being the motive for torture.[44]

The Bush administration failed to understand history: they credited national security as a just motive for information and information as a just motive for torture. They paraded information – known in the field as "intelligence" – but they sought legitimization.[45] Haacke identifies trauma as both the cause and the condition of the division within our nation-state: we have a flag that has wrapped itself around the notion of torture, hiding its effect and masking its intent. For the intelligence gained from torture is a negative sentience – a display of authority and power – an actuality of little worth, which hides its true ideological purpose of breaking the resolve of the opponent and substantiating the legitimacy of power's rationale. So Haacke presents us with division – two sides bearing the same standard, two sides in which opposition resembles its foe. All this in the context of an endless stream of information – its own form of intelligence – the infiltration into the aesthetic space of the gallery of alternative information networks of news and ideas. *News* (1969/2005) (fig. 1-4) is representative of Haacke's defiance of the spaces of exhibition as enclaves with boundaries, forging instead a connection between the outside world and the inner sanctum of art spaces.

Haacke began this exploration of context in 1959 as a student guard at Documenta 2 in Kassel, Germany. As Walter Grasskamp relates, by taking black and

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[44] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 28.

[45] Recent news goes further by suggesting a link between the frequent use of torture and the need to establish a legitimate justification for the invasion of Iraq. See, for example, Jonathan S. Landay, "Report: Abusive tactics used to seek Iraq-al Qaida link" in *McClatchy Newspapers,* Tuesday, April 21, 2009, http://www.mcclatchydc.com/staff/jonathan_landay/story/66622.html. See also Brian Knowlton, "Report Gives New Detail on Approval of Brutal Techniques" in *The New York Times,* April 21, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/22/us/politics/22report.html. See also Joshua M. Marshall, "Bubbling" and "Neocons Gone Wild" in the *TPM Blog,* May 14, 2009, http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/week_2009_05_10.php?ref=fpblg. See also Frank Rich, "Obama Can't Turn the Page on Bush" in *The New York Times,* May 16, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/opinion/17rich-5.html?emc=eta1 (all accessed May 18, 2009).

white photographs of the galleries and its visitors, Haacke "was observing for the first time the enormous effort required to isolate a work of art from the everyday world and shift it into the context of an art exhibition from which it draws much of its aura. The anti-art strategies of Marcel Duchamp or Walter Benjamin's theses on the aura of a work of art were still unknown to Haacke."[46] By 1961, Grasskamp continues, "the overlapping of perception and the context of viewing now became the subject of Haacke's work."[47] Haacke became aware that the work of art was not only impinged upon by the viewer, but also by the space and context of the exhibition itself. He put this to practice first with natural systems but then expanded his exploration to include social systems.

Since the Renaissance, the advent of oil paint and canvas released the painting from the wall while a renewed interest in Classical sculpture freed the figure from its architectural base; rather than a piece of a larger whole, the art object became more akin to a reliquary whose significance was autonomous and whose display was flexible. For Walter Benjamin, the mobility of art and its reproducibility abolished the aura of distinction that was manifested through its particular religious or secular space and purpose. For Benjamin, meaning in a work of art became expansive but also diluted through accessibility, mutated through multiple contexts and altered through the loss of aura, its own originary moment. But Haacke noticed that art's purveyors as well as its public had translated galleries and museums into their own form of sacred space, cut off from the outside environment. This psychic transformation could only happen through extreme denial of the connections inherent to the production, display, and reception of art. As part of a larger spectrum of postwar European art, Haacke began to explore the dissolution of art as object and its reintegration into the broader processes of life. Jack Burnham championed these new explorations that developed first in Europe in the postwar period, particularly among artists of the New Tendency movement, stating that: "Beyond this lay a slowly growing awareness that art was not bound by frame or pedestal, but, in terms of its effective control of surrounding space, enjoyed considerable power to expand into its immediate environment."[48]

In 2008, Hans Haacke displayed in the Paula Cooper Gallery a recreation of his 1967 piece, *Wide White Flow* (recreated in 2006 for Haacke's two-part retrospective in Germany and installed in the Diechtorhallen, Hamburg): over 1200 square feet of silk floated as a sea of white rippling just inches off the floor, its waves held aloft and in motion, counteracting gravity's forces by air currents produced with a row of fans at the

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[46] Grasskamp, "Real Time: The Work of Hans Haacke," 30.

[47] Ibid., 30-31. He also notes that this is "…[y]ears before the artist and critic Brian O'Doherty brought this subject to a head with his pioneering analysis of the 'white cube' in 1976…"

[48] Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The effects of science and technology on the sculpture of this century* (New York: George Braziller, c.1969), 238.

far end of the gallery space (fig. 1-5).[49] Only marginal space was available to the viewing public who were compelled to hug the walls while the art flowed through the space, a neat reversal of typical object/viewer relations. Viewers today bring an entirely different sensibility to the piece than the viewers of forty years ago: the overstated quantity (an entire room full) of understated material (electric fans, fabric) rendered a sensually replete but sparsely determined aesthetic experience. Forty years previously, except in the most narrow of avant-garde art circles, fabric itself, let alone the more abstract notion of wind and gravity, was not an accepted medium for art.[50] In addition, the work could only exist in time and motion giving it more in common with film than with sculpture. *Wide White Flow* was redefining the contours of art in space and as medium.

For Haacke, however, medium itself was not the message: instead the counter-forces of gravity and wind flow suggesting time and movement, influenced by the quantity of people in the room impeding and ricocheting the current of air, became the stimulus to consider wider speculation about the interaction of natural forces in everyday life and their relation to our individual aesthetic sensibilities. Few critics have ever noted what Burnham, as an interpreter of the artist's work, perceived from the outset: Hans Haacke is a sensualist![51] This does not make him a formalist; importantly, Haacke's sensuality is neither of form nor of content, but of the relations between visible and invisible forces, between structures and ideas, between the familiar and the strange. Even then, I believe Haacke had the metaphoric sensibility that he reveals today in his interview. After all, what is the first lesson of any young art student studying in the academy? Fabric precedes the figure in a steep hierarchical curve of drawing expertise. Can *Wide White Flow* be seen also as a satirical comment on the laying aside of craft in

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[49] See *Hans Haacke, for real* for a view of its first installation at the Hayden Gallery, MIT, Cambridge, MA in 1967, 92.

[50] As a friend of Jack Burnham, Haacke may have heard the story of A.W. Rimington's June 6, 1895 light concert on a color organ using "fourteen arc lamps project[ing] a series of juxtaposed colors on an undulating curtain of white silk." See Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture,* 1969, 286. Haacke left the element of light ancillary to the movement of the fabric, leaving out color altogether, and he moved his fabric from a more denotative vertical position to a greater connotative horizontal position. Most recently, however, Haacke created a new version of this 1967 piece as *Vertical Flow* adding a projection component in his exhibition "Weather, or not" for X-Initiative, New York, November 21, 2009 – February 2010.

[51] In regards to Haacke's natural systems, Burnham writes: "It would be misleading to classify Haacke as an artist primarily devoted to applying cybernetic principles to mechanical artifacts; rather his interests are in those cyclical processes which manifest evidences of natural feedback and equilibrium. One might call this an environmental systems philosophy, one that has little to do with practical or theoretical science. Instead it reveals a keenly sensual attitude toward the most ephemeral phenomena." Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, 348.

an effort to move art away from limited bourgeois sensibility to a more technological and democratic process?[52] Even so, Burnham emphasizes that the artist refuses to see his 'natural' systems work "as images in the older sense of iconic art."[53] In a conversation between the two, Haacke explained:

> I did think of signing the rain, the ocean, fog, etc., like Duchamp signing a bottle rack or Yves Klein declaring November 27, 1960, as a world-wide 'Théâtre du Vide.' But then I hesitate and wonder if isolated presentation in one limited given area, an estrangement from the normal, is indispensable. It is a very difficult question. It finally boils down to a definition of art and I don't know what this 'Art' is.[54]

The lesson of estrangement, like that of truth, is learned from Bertolt Brecht – his *Verfremdungseffekt* – the sense that if you take something out of its normal context you are more apt to view it critically.[55] The air currents in *Wide White Flow* (1967) and *Blue Sail* (1964/1965), the water in *Condensation Cube* (1963/1965), and the frozen condensation in *Ice Stick* (1966) – all natural systems works – took their aesthetic form from natural processes thus appealing both to the mind and the senses. Haacke was also compelled to see how far he could rely on the ordinary, its emphasis on the uncanny provoking both awareness and critique. By piling debris washed up on the sands of Carboneras, Spain in a *Monument to Beach Pollution* (1970), Haacke gives an ironic nod to the banal materials subscribed to by the artists of the Arte Povera movement, fashioning both a natural system, adjoining the involuntary actions of waves and the selective action of collection, with a social system, in which accumulations

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[52] Walter Grasskamp suggests that Haacke's fascination with GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel), a group of French artists whose "analytical rationality and geometrical clarity made even the Zero Group's cool art-design seem romantic" was based on the freedom they offered from bourgeois taste and cultural expectations. See Grasskamp, "Real Time," 31-33.

[53] Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture,* 1969, 347.

[54] Jack Burnham, Interview with Hans Haacke, June 1966, *Tri-Quarterly,* Supplement 1 (Spring 1967).

[55] Leo Steinberg aptly underscores the effect of estrangement in the case of Haacke's 1984 installation of his 1983 *U.S. Isolation Box, Grenada* at the City University of New York Graduate Center (then on 43rd Street in Manhattan): "Haacke's partisan message is clear, and if he had placed it in a normal political context, such as a radical journal, it would have gone by unnoticed, like camouflage." The implication is that 'out of context' his work had even greater impact. Leo Steinberg, "Some of Hans Haacke's Works Considered as Fine Art," *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business,* ed. Brian Wallis, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986, 15. For an understanding of the *Verfremdungseffekt* or Alienation Effect see Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic,* translated by John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) particularly 121 and 140-147.

interface with habits of refuse disposal in a consumer society. At stake are both a giving up and a getting back, a sculptor's technique of addition and subtraction, a movement of tides, and a circular rather than a linear system – a metaphorical return of the repressed.

In Haacke's configuration, sentience (use of the senses) is the basis for consciousness (awareness). It is through the senses that we build our worldview, establishing our extension into the world (conscience). As *Monument to Beach Pollution* shows, Haacke was capable of critique in both content (consumer debris) and means (self-reflective rather than self-reflexive art). Early in his career, he discovered that only a critical position provides the means to knowledge and the possibility for action: to be a fully operative participant in society, it is necessary to ask questions. In 1969 when the artist produced *News,* he had joined the Art Workers' Coalition, formed in January of that year in response to a conflict between the artist Takis and the Museum of Modern Art over the use of his work in the exhibition, "The Machine at the End of the Mechanical Age," curated by Pontus Hulten. The coalition directed its activities, boycotts, and negotiations to the relations between artists and museums, galleries, and collectors, artist rights, accessibility of art to a broader public, the rights and representation of all artists in museums, and the role of art in society, including a commitment to political issues such as the War in Vietnam. In spite of only three years of existence the Art Workers' Coalition defined issues and influenced policy changes that remain significant today such as free admission to museums and contractual arrangements that safeguard the rights of the artist in use, maintenance, and resale of his or her work.[56]

It is useful to consider Haacke's visitors' poll for the Museum of Modern Art in 1970 in light of his activism. The Art Workers' Coalition strove to establish art, artists, and the cultural sphere as an operative force in society rather than as an autonomous sphere that was somehow isolated from the messy business of war, economics, and social politics. As a coalition, it encouraged debates among members and also between the various spheres of the art world, held interventionist performance protests, distributed questionnaires, and sought to influence museum policy in the display of art and the contractual arrangements with artists. They also considered art's public, questioning how broad a demographic museum admission policies encouraged, for

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[56] See Lucy Lippard, "The Art Workers' Coalition: not a history," *Studio International* 180 (November 1970), reprinted on the occasion of the exhibition *That Was Then… This is Now* at PS1/MOMA, June 22-September 22, 2008. A thorough analysis of the relationship between Haacke's activism and the development of his artistic practice is long overdue and beyond the scope of this chapter. For further reading on the context of art activism of the era see Francis Frascina, "Meyer Schapiro's Choice: My Lai, Guernica, MoMA and the Art Left, 1969-70," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30/3 (July 1995), 481-511 and 30/4 (October 1995), 705-728; Julie Ault, *Alternative Art New York: 1965-1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009.

example. The impingement of external forces on the production and consumption of art interested Haacke. While his visitor profiles dating from 1969-1973, asked multiple questions about the race, gender, age, socio-economic class, education, and professional status as well as political opinions of the participant, *MOMA Poll* (fig. 1-7) asked but one question: "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" A 'yes' ballot was deposited in the left transparent acrylic box and a 'no' ballot was deposited in the right one. Photoelectric counting devices tallied the votes in real time.[57]

The artist interrogates his public, persuading 12.4% of them to participate, but by making the results visible he curtails any apparent sociological accuracy in the findings since any participant might be influenced by the results. Data collection would, therefore be a by-product rather than a purpose of the procedure. What then is he up to? One can read this work literally as an incursion into the cultural sphere of a ballot procedure making the viewing public participants in a democratic process. The question, however, begs a more allegorical reading, and helps us to better understand the visual language of Haacke's composite installation, "State of the Union." In *MOMA Poll*, the artist is direct: he asks a question through his art in order to elicit a response from his audience. He asks his viewers to consider a position; by prompting an action, he is shaping a public. Nonetheless, he phrases his question in the negative: "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy [the absence of a position] be a reason for you not to vote for him [the absence of an action] in November?"

Haacke's question is a form of direct address because the piece requires an answer in order to become the work of art that was intended; his double negative on the other hand is indirect address speaking in code as it were to the possibility of dissent – contradicting the system, emphasizing non-action through a negative and action through a response. It is precisely calculated in relation to the Museum of Modern Art, which was founded by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller whose son Nelson Rockefeller, four-term Republican Governor of the State of New York, ceded his ten-year presidency of the museum in 1948 to his brother, David, also chairman and CEO of Chase Manhattan Bank at the time of Haacke's poll. The circuit of political, economic, and cultural conduits is as complex in this system as in Haacke's natural systems and his deceptively simple procedures allegorically mask a much deeper subversive message of political participation through dissent.

A tactical mixing of the symbolic with the real

In a reconsideration of both the chronological and conceptual divide imposed on Haacke's work by subsequent critical interpreters, primarily Benjamin Buchloh and

[57] For a description of the political and cultural context of the question as well as the results of the poll see the caption information, *MOMA Poll*, 1970, *Hans Haacke* (2004), 8-9.

Rosalyn Deutsche, Luke Skrebowski recently argues that the artist's use of systems theory is consistent to both his natural systems and his social systems work, emphasizing not only the continuity but also the overlapping of the two practices.[58] While Buchloh (definitively) and Deutsche (with greater nuance) consider a transition in Haacke's practice from a systems aesthetic in which the technological medium created the formal properties of the piece to a practice with a political intent in which the exploration of social systems becomes the content of the piece, Skrebowski insists that Haacke's interest in technology, often seen as playing itself out in first a formalist and then a critical methodology is perhaps overstated in Haacke's case, conveniently reproducing the traditional modernist binary division between "the twin poles of technophilia and technophobia, explicitly associated with utopian and dystopian social outcomes."[59]

Instead, Skrebowski asks us to consider all of Haacke's work as operating within a systems theoretical context. Systems theory evolved as an area of study on the eve of the Cold War during a series of conferences that brought together scientists in such broad ranging disciplines as biology, anthropology, mathematics, sociology, and political science.[60] It developed from a biological understanding of the interrelatedness of organisms within an ecosystem and the willingness to classify biological organisms not by appearance but instead by organizational properties, as Ludwig von Bertalanffy did in his work between the wars.[61] In the meantime, the mathematician Norbert Weiner was using organizational principles to process information in mathematical terms and to

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[58] Luke Skrebowski has emphasized in an important thesis that the natural and social systems are not mutually exclusive as Benjamin Buchloh has insisted in various essays over the years but that they are complementary investigations both chronologically and methodologically. I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Skrebowski's argument as a catalyst for my own thoughts on this topic. See Luke Skrebowski, "All Systems Go," 54-83.

[59] Ibid., 58. Andreas Huyssen points out that the aesthetization of technics dates from the end of the nineteenth century and reaches a pinnacle in the works of the Futurists and the Constructivists even while the horror of the machinery of World War I advanced a denunciation of technology in Dada and perhaps an equivalent renunciation in Surrealism. Neo-avant-garde artists who engaged with technology beginning in the 1960s often straddle an ambiguous relationship to the perceived impact of technology on society.

[60] The Macy Conferences (1946-1953) were a series of meetings of scholars from diverse disciplines held in New York and organized by Warren McCulloch for the Macy Foundation to establish the principles for a science of the human mind. Significant advancements in systems theory, cybernetics, and cognitive science were generated by these discussions.

[61] See Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968) *General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, and Application*, discussed in Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture,* 316.

develop control mechanisms so that machines could self-adapt to variable situations.[62] His publication of *Cybernetics* (1948) along with Bertalanffy's concurrent essays and subsequent volume *General Systems Theory* (1968) established the potential for a broad range of applications to science, psychology, and aesthetics. System theory's scientific principles differ essentially from classical Newtonian science in considering purpose and meaning as a guiding role of scientific inquiry.[63] In addition, the notion of cause and effect is substituted with a more complex set of variables including multiple, mutual, and recursive dynamics.[64] Henceforth, information was no longer data but a complex webbed interface connecting and influencing all aspects of our lives, which in turn responded to and shaped the organization and use of information.

Skrebowski considers *News* (1969/70) as highlighting "the value of information, the currency of the postindustrial age."[65] But while *News,* when first created, made use of current (if hardly ground-breaking) telecommunication technology,[66] when recreated it provides a dated physicality to the infinite stream of information that now circulates as part of the internet information age, an invisible technology with no physicality but with enormous consequence, reshaping industry, economies, and political revolutions.[67] Jack Burnham, who not only introduced Haacke to systems theory but also championed Haacke's early systems work, emphasized information technologies as an environment that intersects with aesthetic production rather than as a technological tool per se.[68] The systems theory that has been perceived by so many as both the content and context of Haacke's early work continued as methodological practice throughout his career rather than as a fixed structural component of his work. In a systems inquiry, one selects the

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[62] See Norbert Wiener (1948) *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine,* discussed in Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, 314-5.

[63] "The Primer Project," http://www.newciv.org/ISSS_Primer/asem04bb.html (accessed May 22, 2009).

[64] Ibid.

[65] Skrebowski, "All Systems Go," 63.

[66] Descended from the stock ticker machines of the 1870s used to transmit stock exchange trades, the teleprinter or teletype machine was adopted by the Associated Press in 1914 for its coverage of World War I as a means to receive and transmit information across a dispersed network of locations.

[67] I am referring here to the use of Twitter and other instant messaging trends that counteracted a ban on the reporting of political protests that resulted from contested elections in Iran in June 2009.

[68] Skrebowski, "All Systems Go," 64.

tools and methodology that best suits the purpose and nature of the specific situation[69] - thus Haacke's varied selection of medium, venue, and procedure according to the demands of each individual project.

The distinction between a formalist interpretation of Haacke's physical (natural) systems and the political implication of his social (designed) systems goes against Haacke's understanding of systems theory (as apparent in his work), which would create no such categories but would instead see the physical and social systems as interrelated through theory, methods, and application. In fact, Haacke in his precise application of various mediums specific to each project shows an amazing consistency throughout his oeuvre if one considers his priority of purpose over means of application, organization over elements or medium, and ethics over results. The flexibility the artist gives to formal content but the precision he exacts on methodology is not only as relevant to his social systems as it was to his physical systems but also to his assemblage interventions in the large museum installations and the smaller composite gallery exhibitions.

The composite "State of the Union" installation reveals the abstract concepts of iconic language systems, memorial, political satire, and critical inquiry through the use of the material means of detritus, the guerrilla tactics of wheat-paste artists, and the communication systems of global capitalism. The connections between formal imagery, allegorical intimation, and real world events reflect a broader philosophical basis to his work than direct political advocacy would imply. The artist goes beyond the phenomenological status of the world to the invisible and non-concrete interrelations of forces: materialistic and physical, but also relational, economic, and political. His purpose here seems to ask his viewers to consider the import not just of cause and effect but also response. He does this through the casual almost haphazard juxtaposition of incongruous objects in order to shift awareness from victimization to complicity. His approach is teleological in regards to his natural systems and etiological in regards to his social systems though Haacke, true to systems theory, goes beyond cause and effect, to the dynamics of multiple, mutual, and recursive operations.

As the artist stated in our conversation: "As with all other things: look at the individual works, the whole, and the historical context." This is consistent with the abstract concept of the relationship of parts to the whole and with the statement written by Haacke for the invitation to his 1969 exhibition at the John Wise Gallery in which he said, "The working premise is to think in terms of systems, the product of systems, the interference with and the exposure of existing systems." Nearly four decades later at the Paula Cooper Gallery, Haacke seems most interested in the act of interference (rather than of exposure), as much G.W. Bush's interference with civil liberties as with his own interference with sacrosanct symbols. Patriotic icons are the symbolic language of the state but Haacke co-opts them here to create his own symbolic language of

[69] Bánáthy, Béla H., "A Taste of Systemics," *The Primer Project* (1997).

representation.[70] Although, Haacke has used the image of the US flag in its entirety in previous works,[71] in "State of the Union" he has specifically limited his visual vocabulary to stars. This apparent limitation broadens the interpretive potential of the work, extending beyond patriotism and binary divisions to a more subtle expression of antagonism, anxiety, and desperate conditions. In Haacke's use of stars, torn to shreds and scattered eclectically throughout the gallery space, we witness a similar analogy to the incomprehensible, indescribable sphere in which pain is linguistically located. As expressed by Elaine Scarry:

> Vaguely alarming yet unreal, laden with consequence yet evaporating before the mind because not available to sensory confirmation, unseeable classes of objects such as subterranean plates, Seyfert galaxies, and the pains occurring in other people's bodies flicker before the mind, then disappear.[72]

Through the visible Haacke asks us to consider the *unseeable* – both the details lost in an overwhelming and endless succession of excess data and the negation of sentience so determinant of humanity that torture obliterates – and then he asks us to make connections. His star fields are framed equally by formal regularity and chaotic splintering, reflecting their kinship to both the regularity and chaos of systems theory. Consider again the response of the thirteen year old, New York City public middle school student on election day 2005 to the image of the figure cloaked in the star field hood: "OK, if the hood are the stars, then the shirt must be the red stripes, that leaves the background to represent the white stripes, only they've gone black. I think the artist wants to say that America should be ashamed." This student recognizes the function of symbolic language to metaphorically achieve a message that is not explicit but is implicit in the conflict between the juxtaposition of reality and abstraction. Red, white, and blue, iconically indicative of pride has been corrupted to red, white, and black, ironically suggestive of shame. Recall the artist's own words in our conversation: "…whereas in *Star Gazing* it serves metaphoric speech while referring to something factual." Haacke specifically used a photograph, not a drawing or a painting, or any other medium; this is his tactical mixing of symbolic inference with concrete actuality. Presence is imperative as an operative system in the real world.

In a question and answer session after the artist presented this work in a New York City conference in 2006, a woman asked if he had not perhaps harmed the model,

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[70] A large variety of symbolic icons are just one of many tools in the artist's visual vocabulary and they (like medium) are always specific to the work. Corporate logos for example have been used in *A Breed Apart* (1978), *MetroMobiltan* (1985), and *Helmsboro Country* (1990).

[71] Works containing the image of the US flag include *Storm* (1991), *Collateral* (1991) and *Sanitation* (2000).

[72] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 4.

in the same way captors harm their prisoners, by hooding him.[73] Haacke patiently responded that the model was his son and he didn't mind. The question appears naïve, as it is the job of actors and other aesthetic interpreters to evoke reality without recreating harmful conditions. On the other hand, the question reveals just how closely we maintain the relationship between representation and reality. For the space of a few moments, the son of the critic (author of this text) was standing face-to-face with the son (the model in the image) of the artist. This coincidence is the chance roll of the dice setting in motion the intersecting dialog that later became part of this dissertation. One child felt himself accountable through his interpretation of the other child, face-to-face, in spite of the absence of a reciprocal gaze. Metaphorically speaking, the willingness to put one's own child in this position is akin to a challenge to consider the ethical position of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. When we send our children to war, is the sacrifice we intend to exact on our foes equal to the sacrifice we are willing to make ourselves?[74] Would we substitute the victims of torture with our own flesh and blood?[75]

Even for Haacke, while a necessary distance between representation and reality is crucial to his production, representation works as a reminder of the languages we use to articulate our position in the real – it is the means that bears the weight of ethical engagement, as well as its provocation to active response. I use the term "the real" in the sense of Michel de Certeau connoting the material conditions of life predicated on its own "other" – the Real (a kind of authenticity that predates it as history) – and shaped by language.[76] In Lacan's theory of psychic structure, the triad relation between the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real determines our relation to the "facts on the ground." The world of words (the Symbolic) creates the world of things (material

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[73] Hans Haacke spoke during the Radical Art Caucus panel of the 95th College Art Association Conference, New York, City, February 16, 2007.

[74] In this discussion, I use the words 'child' and 'children' to mean offspring rather than youngsters. In terms of the face-to-face encounter, without referring specifically, I am relying on the ethical set of relations delineated by Emmanuel Levinas.

[75] This idea played out in a debate between two network news hosts when MSNBC's Keith Olbermann responded to Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity's offer to undergo waterboarding for charity. Olbermann offered to donate to the families of US troops $1000 per second that Hannity sustained the torture. See David Bauder, "Olbermann pressing on Hannity's waterboard offer," Associated Press, April 29, 2009.

[76] See in particular Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (1975) trans. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), introduction and chapter one. In the preface, de Certeau writes that the writing of history "is born of the relation that discourse keeps with the real that is forever its object" (xxvii). In the introduction he speaks of "the gap separating reality from discourse" (8-9) and in the first chapter he states, "On the one hand, the real is the result of analysis, while on the other it is its postulate" (35).

conditions but also the Imaginary) while the Real is set apart, immutable and outside language. Haacke prefers the solidity of concrete fact and the awareness of sensual perception to any adherence to abstract principles or belief systems. Still his understanding of the symbolic dynamics of language systems opens a range of interpretations that include ethics. Haacke does not represent the Other but instead creates an allegorical challenge to our accountability in relation to others. This is his response to the images that flowed over the Internet, leaking out as so much bad blood from the prison of Abu Ghraib – not a repetition of the horror but a reframing as allegory of the denial of responsibility.

Benjamin Buchloh introduced the notion of allegory in the procedures of appropriation and montage used by contemporary artists in the 1970s and early 80s. He cites George Grosz's discussion of "confiscation, superimposition and fragmentation" as allegorical methods.[77] Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman include "extended metaphor, personification, parallel meanings, and narrative" as all standard features of allegory.[78] Allegory is a visual language, historically used to create a diversion: Aesop and La Fontaine fashioned tales of anthropomorphic animals to transmit messages of a subversive political nature; George Grosz and John Heartfield used images "cut up at will," torn, and pasted "in such a way as to say in pictures, what would have been banned by the censors if we had said it in words."[79] In his short essay, "The Rhetoric of the Image," Roland Barthes makes use of an advertising image to show how a representation, although not a discrete semiological code like language, can be "read" like language. Language is a digital code; its markers have no direct relationship to what they represent: an "L" for example has no embedded reason to represent the sound it makes and its meaning is constructed because it is one in a sequence of other indicators that form the building blocks of language. An image, on the other hand, is analogue; it is a representational double to an object that exists in the real world. It is not a building block of signs in the same way a letter is but directly refers to what it represents. Images, however, just like words bear meaning and Barthes asks, "How does meaning get into an image? Where does it end? And if it ends, what is there *beyond?"*[80]

Barthes breaks the image into suggested parts: the linguistic message formed by surrounding text and the iconic message both coded (connoted) and uncoded (denoted). Since images are polysemous, having a floating chain of signifieds, they are anchored

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[77] See Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures," unpaginated.

[78] Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms* (Brooklyn: UDP, 2009), 13.

[79] George Grosz, originally quoted in Hans Richter, *Dada: Kunst und Antikunst* (Cologne: Dumont, 1963) quoted in Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures," unpaginated.

[80] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977/1986), 32.

by the linguistic message. The linguistic message guides the identification of the denoted iconic message along with the interpretation of the connoted iconic message. The text, therefore, has a repressive value in accordance to the ideology of the society to which the image is invested. The denoted image works on the principle of transparency: the relationship of the image to what it represents appears as innocent. This "natural" relation to the real renders the connoted image invisible, lying under the plane of directness. Thus between the linguistic text that directs our reading of the real and the immediacy of the denoted image, the rhetoric of implied messages occurs over, above, around and under the surface of the image. It operates marginally to the analogue nature of the image and seemingly doesn't operate at all. Haacke understands the deceptive nature of representation, whether textual or visual, and punctuates its use as sign in order to decipher and make meaning apparent. As film theorist Robert Stam states,

> In 'From Work to Text' Barthes made two distinctions. 'Work' was defined as the phenomenal surface of the object, for example the book one holds in one's hand, i.e. a completed product conveying an intended and pre-existent meaning. 'Text' was defined as a methodological field of energy, a production absorbing writer and reader together. 'We now know,' Barthes wrote, 'that the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.[81]

Allegory, as Haacke uses it conceptually, is *a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of* representations *blend and clash*. It is both pre-text (the idea) and post-text (the complicit response).[82] It is selective, recursive, and accidental. Haacke creates his installations not as 'work' *conveying an intended and pre-existent meaning* but as "text" in a *field of energy…absorbing writer and reader together.*

In this light, let us return to the notion of activism in regards to "State of the Union." *The New Yorker* magazine review described the exhibition as functioning as commentary rather than direct involvement.[83] In actuality, Haacke designed a hypothetical intervention into a social arena distinct from the gallery space, proposing a

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[81] Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977) quoted in Robert Stam, *Film Theory, An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 186.

[82] "If allegory assumes context, conceptual writing assumes all context… Thus, unlike traditional allegorical writing, conceptual writing must be capable of including unintended pre- or post-textual associations." Place and Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms,* 23.

[83] *The New Yorker* (11/28/05), 44.

public component for Times Square.[84] *Times Square Star Gazing* was intended to reproduce the image *Star Gazing* in lights on the electric signboard in New York City's Time Square. The incongruity of two strong iconic emblems – hood and flag – existing within the same frame and then placed in the context of entertainment, spectacle, and advertising creates a discordant echo that was likely to provoke an editorial response on the street, if not in the media as well and would have played to an audience distinctly different than those who frequent the Paula Cooper Gallery. Haacke is fully aware of the efficacy of such tactics. In 1995, in conversation with the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu he states:

> In the specific cases we are discussing, the problem is not only to say something, to take a position, but also to create a productive provocation. The sensitivity of the context into which one inserts something, or the manner in which one does it, can trigger a public debate. However, it does not work well if the press fails to play its role of amplifier and forum for debate. There has to be a sort of collaboration.[85]

Strategy, tactics, and logistics (war)

The title of this dissertation crosses out the word "strategic" and replaces it with the word "tactical." The subtitle uses the word "terror" but avoids the word "war." Just as Krzysztof Wodiczko (as we will see in Chapter Two) appropriates language for his title, *If you see something…,* without duplicating the original context of the phrase by leaving it incomplete, so too do I make use of language from a current political context, including the *war on terror* as well as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, without tying the meaning directly to any specific ideological position, particularly that of the US government. I use language to suggest a more complex dialectical debate that takes into consideration the nuanced relationship of strategy and tactics to war and terror. In creating a title, I create a representation, a suggestive image whose language is at once visual, factual, and symbolic. By leaving in evidence the word "strategic" slashed and replaced by "tactical," I concretely reveal my own tactical maneuver in highlighting the difference between the two connotations.

"If a war machine could be said to have a body, then tactics would represent the muscles and strategy the brain, while logistics would be the machine's digestive and

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[84] Email correspondence with the artist, Wednesday, September 24, 2008 11:22 PM. This was not an actual proposal but a hypothetical one, a visual representation of the proposal on display in his *State of the Union* exhibition.

[85] Pierre Bourdieu speaks of Haacke's 'symbolic weapons' – that art as symbolic language can work powerfully to counteract the equally symbolic speech of corporate or governmental propaganda – advertising, patriotism, or sponsorship. In their discussion they also emphasize the chain of action and response that extends the impact of any particular art piece and opens a debate across a broader spectrum of society. See Haacke, *Free Exchange,* 20-22.

circulatory systems: the procurement and supply networks that distribute resources throughout an army's body."[86] Manuel De Landa, while ascribing to war the characteristics of a complex life system, describes the hierarchy of the functions of war in terms of the traditional philosophical split between mind and body. Strategy also bears the connotation of the function of power designed by government and military leaders while tactics would be the maneuvers of men and women in the field. In this way, Michel de Certeau differentiates the bird's-eye-view flattening effect of strategic mapping and statistical configurations of institutional positions from the disruptive meandering non-patterns of individuals carrying out their daily lives.[87] The terms 'strategic' and 'tactical' are most frequently associated with war but are also used to describe the maneuvers in games, whether deterministic as in the non-cooperative game of chess or random as in the mixed strategies of digital gaming. Frequently strategy refers to the highest and tactics the lowest level of planning, suggesting a hierarchical split.

Often in casual analogy, strategy and tactics are interchangeable leading a reader to question her understanding of the significance of the term; war as terminology is rarely questioned, yet ought to be. What has now become a truism – that war is politics by other means – is really only half of a dialectical position elucidated two hundred years ago by Carl Von Clausewitz.[88] The thesis to this antithesis, as Christopher Bassford points out, is that war is nothing but a duel or a wrestling match (depending on the translation) on a larger scale.[89] The analogy of "contest" or "game" is common and this concept of 'determined sides' is picked up both by Elaine Scarry in 1985 and Umberto Eco in 1991. But while Scarry saw the *doubleness* of war's division as a pairing of opposites, symbolically portrayed in uniforms, colors, geographical divisions, and the polarity of good and evil, making war's intent "the reciprocal activity of

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[86] Manuel De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines,* quoted in Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), ix.

[87] See Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Lives,* trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984, chapter seven.

[88] The actual quotation is : "War is merely a continuation of politics with the admixture of other means." See Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), on line version <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/CIE/Chapter18.htm> (accessed 6/26/09).

[89] Ibid.

injuring for a nonreciprocal outcome,"[90] Eco recognized that modern warfare had changed significantly from past assumptions such that the division or doubleness of sides had become indistinguishable and therefore reciprocal. Scarry's game of chess or war, the goal of which was to disable the opponent through casualties, becomes Eco's contest played out on the same network whose casualties impact both sides simultaneously to the same degree. To reiterate: "Modern warfare is therefore an autophagous game,"[91] without the necessary means to out-injure the opponent and therefore to reach a conclusion.

Hans Haacke's "State of the Union" takes on the topic of division rather than war, per se, but it implies the context of the war on terror and its resulting change in infrastructure that lent so much ineptitude to the Katrina disaster: Homeland Security. It also implies the notion of contest as revealed in his font choice for the exhibition announcement (fig. 1-2), a font used by fraternities, sports teams, and the military on their logos and emblems, which promote morale and team spirit, so necessary for the successful outcome of a contest. But a nation divided is a nation at war with itself, even if that struggle is in the rhetorical realm of debate (or lack thereof). So Haacke turns the "us" and "them" binary division presented after September 11, 2001 by the Bush administration ("you are either with us or you are a terrorist") into an inversion by showing that the division in the post-9/11 world order is not between the US and the external world but within the nation-state itself, and therefore, in many ways, a division of sameness. Both sides bear the same colors; both sides use the same symbolic language, and both sides risk the possibility that the division (in spite of Haacke's own optimism) could persist endlessly.[92] Again, Eco:

> There would be a final moment if war were still, as Clausewitz would have it, the continuation of policy by other means… But in our century it is the politics of the postwar period that will always be the continuation (by any means) of the premises established by war. No matter how the war goes, by causing a general redistribution of weights that cannot correspond fully with the will of the contending parties, it will drag on in the form of a dramatic political, economic,

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[90] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 1985, 116.

[91] Umberto Eco, "Reflections on War" (1991) in *Five Moral Pieces,* 13.

[92] "Overall, the poll portrays a nation torn by conflicting impulses and confusion." While Haacke visualizes "a nation torn" in 2004/2005 and I refer to the division that erupted over the release of the so-called "torture memos" in April 2009, the US suffers a persistent rift endlessly bouncing from issue to issue whether race, health care or the economy as political pundits and talk show hosts find greater political efficacy in division than in finding common ground. The quotation comes from an analysis of a New York Times/CBS poll on health care reform. See Adam Nagourney and Megan Thee-Brenan, "New Poll Finds Growing Unease on Health Plan," *The New York Times,* July 30, 2009.

> and psychological instability for decades to come, something that can lead only to a politics 'waged' as if it were warfare.[93]

Eco wrote his essay in response to the First Gulf War but how prescient his remarks are to the endless morass that constitutes the current Gulf War, the War in Iraq, and now forseeably the War in Afghanistan as well. In this light, the game of weights indicates the distribution of advantages so akin to the dynamic processes of game theory that comprehends both chaotic and deterministic conditions of balance or to quote Donald Rumsfeld: "Stuff happens." A contest of two ideologies morphs into a division that is both the product of and the production of chaos.

Game theory is an outgrowth of information and communication theory and, although applied to such diverse venues as entertainment and administrative organization, is a product of the war industry. Haacke was already cognizant by the mid-1970s how technology could just as easily destroy populations in Vietnam as suggest the model for communications in a democracy. His adherence to systems theory changed from a positivistic attitude of interrelations between physical and social forces to a critical skepticism of the complexity of competing and interacting forces. In fact Clausewitz's synthesis of his thesis (war is a brute contest) and his antithesis (war is rational policy) makes a triangle out of the binary: war is "a dynamic, inherently unstable interaction of the forces of violent emotion, chance, and rational calculation"[94] – in other words: symbolic dynamics. This opens the discussion to a more complex notion of interconnectedness and competition between spheres. War, too, is a system but one prone to irrationality, repetition, and unspeakable pain.

Real time influence

Hans Haacke did not need to throw out systems aesthetics in favor of politics simply because systems theory had a positivist root that he could no longer adhere to in all good conscience in light of war technology. Systems theory as a methodological practice opens a broader philosophical understanding of complexity. Haacke uses the medium of painting if it is pertinent to the context of the exhibition (Oil Painting: Homage to Marcel Broodthaers, 1982) (fig. 1-8), juxtaposes photojournalism with corporate logos if that is relevant (*MetroMobiltan,* 1985), inserts popular advertising in order to draw out the relations to commerce (*Der Pralinenmeister*, 1981), and appropriates the icons of patriotism when they most effectively speak of or to the constituents he wishes to address (*State of the Union,* 2005). So, too, he uses systems theory as a medium, a tool, a means, or a methodology shifting it from its base in positivist science to a more pragmatic function of language and representation. Consider the parts and the whole: communication, interaction, and links between them are allegorically inverted,

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[93] Eco, "Reflections on War," 14.

[94] Bassford, *Clausewitz in English.*

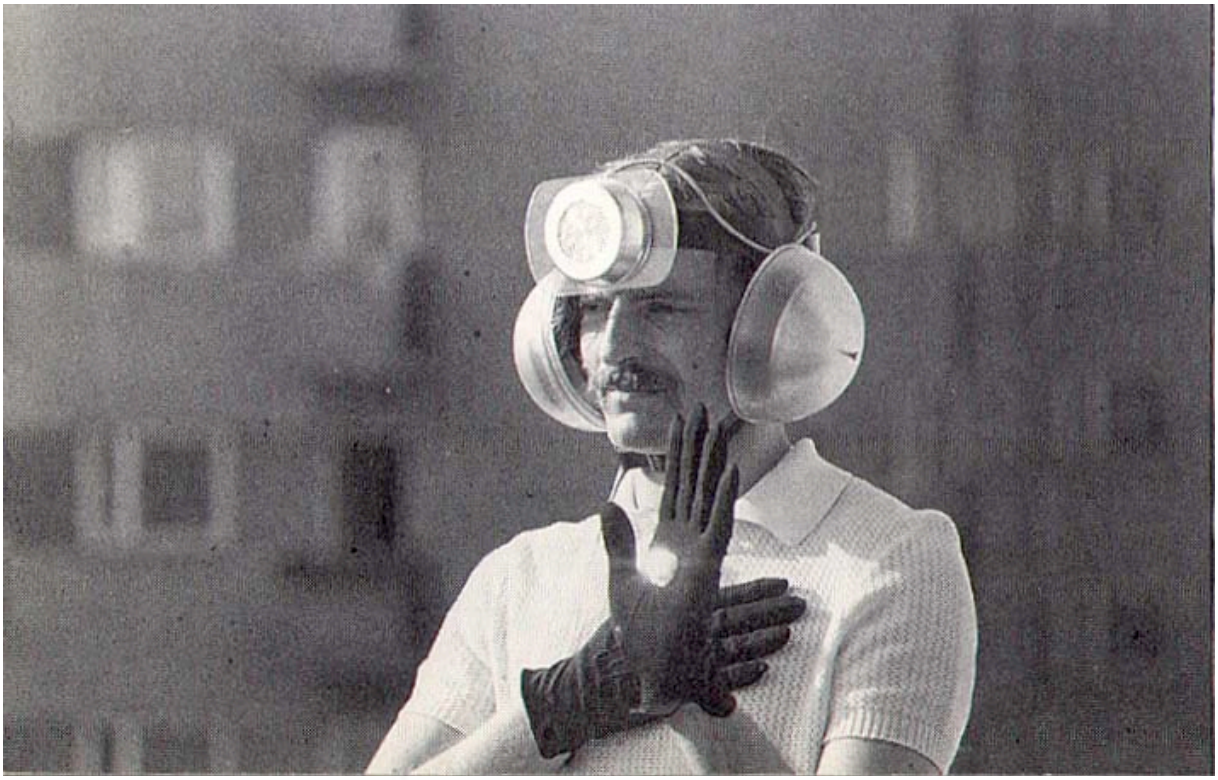
appropriated, and collaged as *multiple, mutual, and recursive dynamics* – symbolic dynamics with a very firm reference to the real.

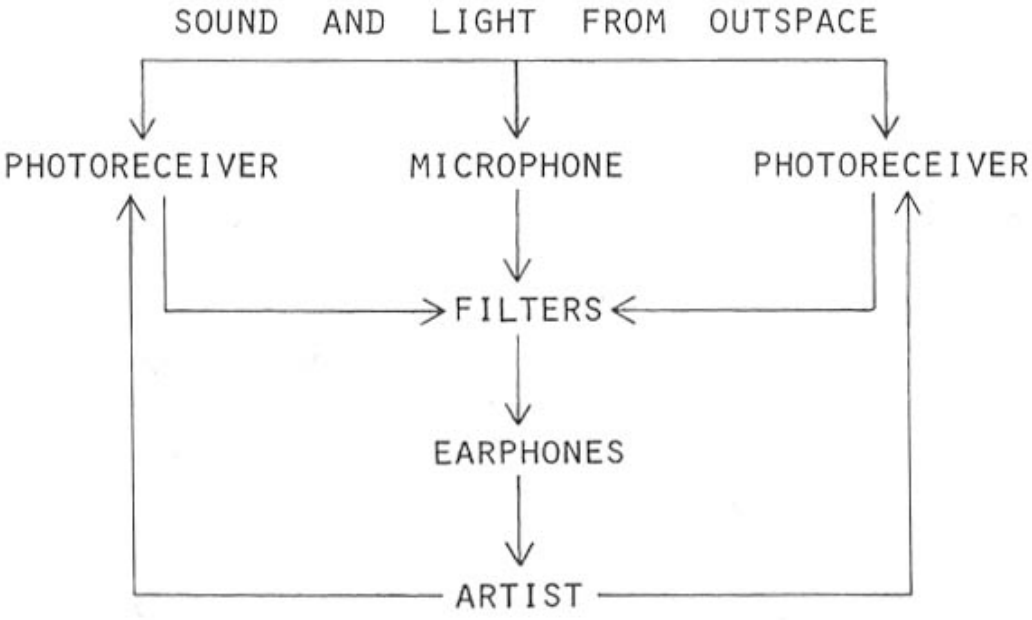
In "State of the Union" Haacke creates a composite of elements that "rub" against one another. Photographic representation is one of his mosaic pieces: one medium among many as well as part of a larger discourse with social, political, and metaphorical connotations. The means becomes relevant in terms of its use. For Haacke, there is nothing inherently truthful about photography but it can be made use of in order to speak the truth. If courage, keenness, skill, judgment, and cunning are necessary in writing the truth, Hans Haacke has exposed an additional requirement, something he bears as a kind of sixth sense: skepticism. This compels him to ask questions, of himself and of his viewers, whether art world cognoscenti or the chance encounter of a teenager with a flag in a white box gallery.

David Leege and Kenneth Wald in discussing the meaning of cultural symbols suggest, "The most powerful symbols are found not in complicated theories of taxation and economic growth or in efficient structures for health care delivery or in strategies for fighting terrorists or winning a war. They are found in pictures and in sounds that tap into primary group experiences of things that promote pride or satisfaction or tap into reservoirs of fear or revulsion."[95] Hans Haacke, through uncanny juxtapositions interrupts the unquestioned mark cultural symbols hold on our political consciousness. In using direct address (imperative and interrogative) to his constituency and indirect address (art historical jargon) to map the full complexity of the discussion, he urges a rapprochement of parallel convergences, communication that may never intersect but must always remain open and active. As we will see in the next chapter, Krzysztof Wodiczko inverts pictures and sounds as a means to recognize another kind of collective experience triggered by reservoirs of fear in our post-9/11 democracy.

[95] David C. Leege and Kenneth D. Wald. "Meaning, Cultural Symbols, and Campaign Strategies," in *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior*, edited by Neuman, W. Russell, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 296.

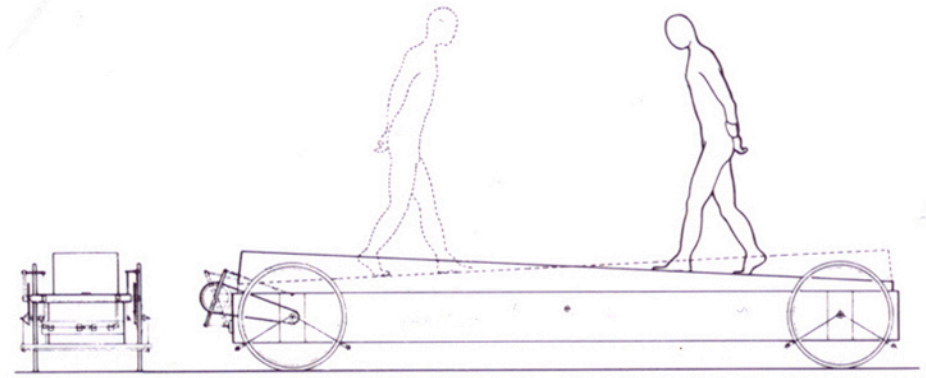
Krzysztof Wodiczko, *If You See Something...*, Galerie Lelong, New York, September 10-October 22, 2005.
Fig. 2-1, Installation view; high-resolution video projectors, 4 computers,
5-channel sound installation; each projection: 13'4" x 48" (416 x 122 cm).
Fig. 2-2, Composite view of 4 projections.

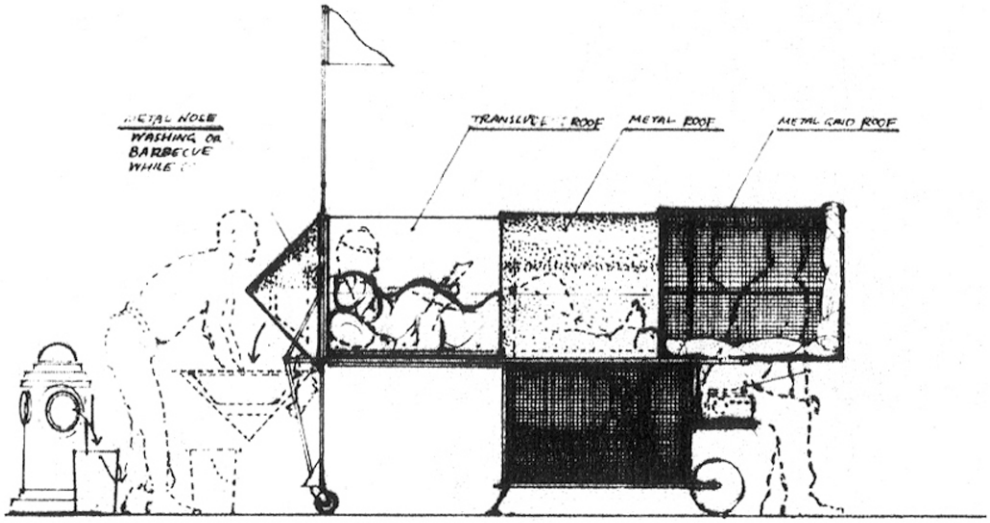




Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Personal Instrument*

Fig. 2-3, Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Personal Instrument*, Warsaw, 1969.
Fig. 2-4, Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Personal Instrument*, diagram, 1969.





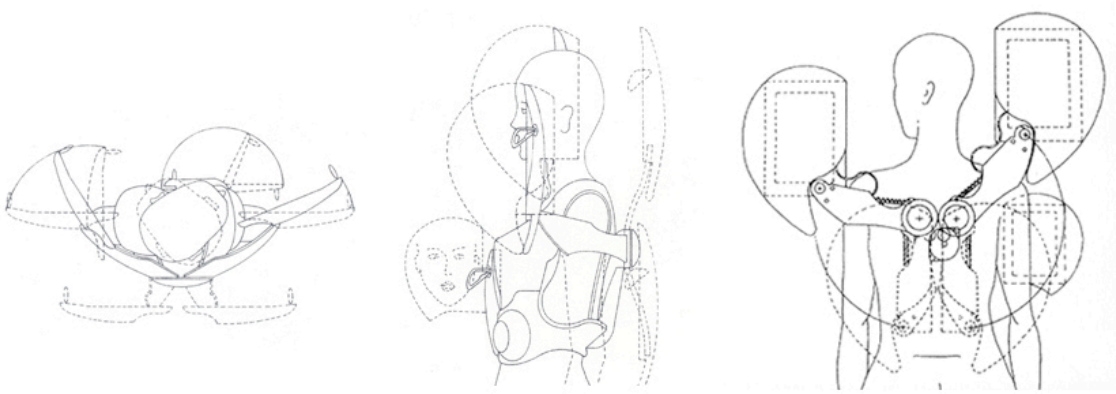
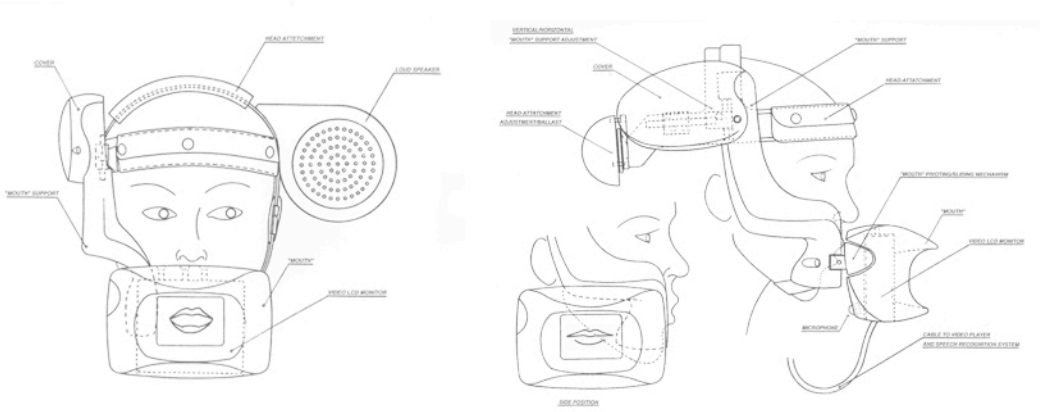


Fig. 2-5, Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Vehicle,* 1971-73, drawing of uni-directional vehicle.
Fig. 2-6, Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Homeless Vehicle*, 1988-1989, drawing of aluminum and mixed media vehicle.
Fig. 2-7, Krzysztof Wodiczko, *AEgis: Equipment for a City of Strangers*, 1999-2000, drawing.



Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Porte-Parole,*1993 (Variants, 1995-1997, designed with Joshua Smith)
Fig. 2-8, Above: Helsinki, 1993
Fig. 2-9, Below: Variant 2, 1997

Fig. 2-10, Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Border Projection* (part two), Centro Cultural Tijuana, 1988.
Fig. 2-11, Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Projection,* Campo Santa Maria in Formosa, Venice, 1986.
Organized by the Canadian Pavilion, *XLII Biennale di Venezia.*

Chapter Two / *Casting Shadows:* Krzysztof Wodiczko's *If you see something…*

> Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies… Limit of the diaphane in. Why in? Diaphane, adiaphane. If you can put your five fingers through it, it is a gate, if not a door. Shut your eyes and see.
> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1961)

Preamble: first person / *flâneur*

In the fall of 2005, the large inner space of a New York City Chelsea district gallery is darkened; the tall floor-to-ceiling windows that face the street have been repeated in the interior so that when I enter, I also have the impression of being about to leave, drawn to the exterior light that filters through these frosted panels but fails to fill the gallery space. Figures, silhouetted behind the haze, move in and out of the window frame giving me the impression of watching workers taking a cigarette break outside. Instead I am viewing Krzysztof Wodiczko's interior, high definition, life-size projection: *If you see something…* (2005) (fig. 2-1).

The sidewalk cigarette break is a common sight in New York City since Mayor Bloomberg passed stringent no-smoking laws; it is as ubiquitous as the slogan peppered for the last few years throughout the transit system: "If you see something, say something." Now an occupant of the interior, I begin to overhear the exterior conversations that penetrate the glass boundary. Just as when moving through the city, now in the gallery I pick up little snippets of conversation here and there and, when overhearing something of interest, make an effort to identify its source and its subject. The conversations are as mobile as the figures on the other side of the windowpanes so I lean against a pillar to stabilize myself and focus on the dialogue and gestures of those individuals who remain just out of reach but not out of earshot beyond the veil of glass. I wish I smoked (or could smoke) so that I might blend into the scene – my voyeurism incidental (a result of vicarious vernacular sound) rather than purposeful (listening in).

The conversations are anxious, human dramas – conflicts produced when an individual finds him- or herself at odds with the system whether political, social, or economic. Two women speak of a marriage that is ending; a man confesses of his inability to care for his aging mother; two other men share the problems their children are having in the playground. Seemingly mundane, the edge in their voices belies the nature of the snatches of conversation I have just described. A sense of urgency holds me voyeuristically, a solitary observer who listens. In a conversation in Punjabi, English words slip through: "deportation," "nine eleven," "Muslim" and slowly the weight of the anxiety clarifies the visual haze that renders the identities of the speakers anonymous. The woman's marriage is collapsing because her Middle Eastern husband cannot take

the racial isolation that has suddenly become the norm at his workplace; he is returning home to an environment in which she, as a Western woman, feels uncomfortable. The son has not been able to care for his aging mother because he has been wrongfully held in detention for several years and is now in deportation hearings. Children in the playground have shunned their Arab playmates. A man cries because he is under investigation for sending money to Pakistan and hasn't been able to feed his family since his accounts were frozen.

These conversations flow through the space of the gallery the same way that ambient sound filters into a building's foyer from the sidewalk – sounds of cars driving by, sirens blocking out speech, high-heels clicking on the sidewalk, conversation fragments. There is in actuality no physical presence in Galerie Lelong in the fall of 2005; the remarkable nature of the installation is that the artist recreates an event in thin air. What the viewer witnesses is a high definition video projection with audio turning the gallery from a space of display to a space of interaction. The viewer drifts in, unexpectedly playing a part by responding to conditions that give every appearance of being real: the frosted-paned windows projected onto the gallery walls, behind which passersby linger in conversation on the sidewalk outside but through which their conversations drift, audibly but overlapping, such that one must carefully isolate sound in order to detect the conversations. People are visible through the windows but only as diaphanous forms because the image of frosted glass mutes definition, softly silhouetting faces into anonymity (fig. 2-2).

If you see something… divides interior and exterior space as well as listeners from speakers. I am the one intended by the system to say something. I am the one who might possibly call the authorities based on a conversation overheard while taking a cigarette break at work. I might also be the one who recognizes the fragile circumstances of these people who are, because of a turn of events, suddenly highlighted for all to notice. I am the one unexpectedly lurking in the shadows, actively listening, as if someone's life depends upon it. Their voices are private, my accountability is made part of the public system but circumstances also reverse these positions. I am isolated, overhearing conversations, alone among strangers, anywhere.

> I am not at all the sort of person who attracts attention, I am an anonymous presence against an even more anonymous background. If you, reader, couldn't help picking me out among the people getting off the train and continued following me in my to-and-fro-ing between bar and telephone, this is simply because I am called "I" and this is the only thing you know about me, …for the moment my external behavior is that of a traveler who has missed a connection, a situation that is part of everyone's experience.[1]

[1] Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* (New York: Harcourt, Inc. 1981), 14-15. The particular experience I describe in the gallery is a solitary one but the installation accommodates crowds or individuals equally well, giving the impression of a transitional space whose population is variable across time.

In his post-structuralist novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler,* Italo Calvino alludes to the anonymity of the *flâneur*, Charles Baudelaire's nineteenth-century creative rendering of the modern urban dweller who is externally present in a ubiquitous environment, an anonymous individual in a generic urban landscape. The work of Krzysztof Wodiczko (b. 1943, Warsaw, Poland) is particularly reliant on notions of the flâneur as well as concepts of wandering through nomadic existence and temporary community engagement. The lone flâneur, a modernist fetishization of the individual, is seemingly antithetical to outright interaction with an environment or intervention within a community, a postmodernist guerrilla-style confrontation. Wodiczko's work, however, is precisely designed to confront paradigms with contradictions. His interest in the avant-garde, public spaces, mobile designs and communities, as well as his interrogative address of memory is particularly apt for a discussion of public systems and private voices. At the same time, he pits the physical presence of the body against the ephemeral transmission of sound and projection, asking us to consider, within the vocabulary of visual art, what has the potential to leave a mark and who is complicit in the trace?

Is the flâneur an observer? Perhaps she can be a participant? The modernist figure takes in the world through receptive sight but the postmodernist figure "projects" vision outward as a site of spectacle. These contrary natures are united in the gestures of Wodiczko, whether as physical, utilitarian objects, or as ephemeral projections, complicating the position called "I" in a shifting imbalance between author, subject, and spectator. It is in the narrative use of "the first-person pronoun that the inherent doubleness of subjectivity, the simultaneity of the speaking subject and the object of speech, is closest to the surface of language," suggests film critic John Dorst.[2] Wodiczko's characters are the speaking subjects but also the object of what Judith Butler terms the *speech act*,[3] "If you see something, say something!" The viewer, aware

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[2] John Dorst, "Which came first, the chicken device or the textual egg? Documentary Film and the Limits of the Hybrid Metaphor," *Journal of American Folklore* 112, no. 445 (Summer 1999): 279; quoted in Devin Orgeron and Marsha Orgeron, "Megatronic Memories: Errol Morris and the Politics of Memory," in *The Image and the Witness: trauma, memory and visual culture*, ed. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 241.

[3] See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), and *Precarious Life* (2007). The speech act is a concept in linguistics and the philosophy of language that relates speech to action; the term originates with C.S. Peirce. See Jarrett Brock, "An Introduction to Peirce's Theory of Speech Acts" in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 17 (1981): 319-26. It is most notably discussed by John Searle, *Speech Acts* (published posthumously 1969) and John Langshaw Austin who used the term "performative utterance, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Foucault preferred the phrase "speech activity" in Michel Foucault, "The Meaning and of the Word" in *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001).

of her participation as witness/spy, is also a subject – the "I" of the stage – complicit in the description of the represented identities of the speaking subjects.

If you see something… suggests the possibility that the tree falling in the forest does not exist since no one has heard it. The silhouettes, which appear as shadow figures standing just on the other side of frosted panes of glass, are realistic projections on the wall of individuals, filmed and recorded, their conversations emitted through small, unnoticeable speakers hugging the pillars of the gallery space. These are people who if it were not for the 'war on terror' would go unacknowledged. Their material existence as players in a grander scheme are as questionable as Estragon and Vladimir in Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" who exist because the audience determines that they exist, just as Godot exists for Gogo and Didi because they wait for him.[4] Just as I wait, extending my visit to the gallery (usually one of a few minutes) to a long delay of listening.

Estragon: Well, shall we go?
Vladimir: Yes, let's go.
They do not move.

Curtain[5]

In my introduction, I compare Wodiczko's piece to avant-garde European theatre. First there is the influence of Bertolt Brecht on his work, both the *Verfremdungseffekt*[6] and the awareness of divisions between characters, actors, and spectators that fosters a critical spectatorship but, for Wodiczko, also opens an opportunity to envision a variant democracy.[7] Next there is something in his connection to the ordinary person, in his emphasis on the banal, in his sparse tactics, and in his willing political engagement that connect him to avant-garde performance developing in postwar Europe along with the movement of radical politics – an arena of activist interventions – that came to a head in the public demonstrations and riots of 1968. Krzysztof Wodiczko came of age in this era of political discontent when protest slogans declared: "No right to speak without

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[4] Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" was first produced in 1953 in Paris as "En attendant Godot" and in Berlin a few weeks later as "Warten auf Godot" with the English-language premiere in London 1955. Gogo and Didi are nicknames within the play itself for Estragon and Vladimir.

[5] Close of Act One and Act Two in Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 36, 61.

[6] Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* or alienation effect, operates when the mechanism of the production is emphasized to reduce empathy and heighten reflection. See *Brecht on Theatre, the development of an aesthetic,* trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 94-96.

[7] See Krzysztof Wodiczko, "An Interview by Jean-Christophe Royoux" in *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 178.

interrogation!"[8] At that time, performative action was part of dissident life and for Wodiczko a radical response to a repressive regime.

In Poland in 1968, artists could not produce art with obvious political content but if they produced art with apparently no content at all the state had no argument on which to deny its presentation.[9] Wodiczko began to produce vehicles that moved through civic space – streets, parks, and walkways – that functioned flawlessly but ineffectively, moving only in one direction (fig. 2-5). It was in this futility that Wodiczko's vehicles functioned not as objects but as actions, suggesting metaphorically the automaton-like function of the Polish citizen by operating with the same inflexibility. In this way Wodiczko succeeded in producing work that slid by the restrictions of the state but subverted in turn that system by highlighting limitation as a function.

He also recognized the blindness by which avant-garde artists fell in line with the state systems. For the sake of survival, artists had their day jobs and created art in the safety of their studios at night and on the weekends. Many working artists accepted each work practice as effectively isolated from the other, while a few realized that the aesthetic work legitimized a system sufficiently secure to allow avant-garde art to exist relatively unchecked. Wodiczko chose to demonstrate the uncomfortable legitimacy each afforded the other. During one of our conversations, the artist demonstrated, in mime, *The Personal Instrument* from 1969 (fig. 2-3). A microphone, worn on the forehead, retrieved sound, photoreceivers in gloves isolated and filtered the sound through the movement of the hand, which was then perceived discriminately by the artist, perceptually confined by the sound-proof headphones (fig. 2-4).[10] Since public speech was denied, Wodiczko highlighted the selective listening skills that were vital (under authoritarian restrictions) to a Polish citizen's survival. By taking his work into state-controlled public spaces, Wodiczko, in the same gesture of resistance as

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[8] The artist Mary Kelly recalls this slogan in a conversation with Sasha Archibald in *At the Mercy of Others: The Politics of Care,* ed. Sarah Lookofsky, Sasha Archibald, Elena Sorokina, and Cira Pascual Marquina (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2005), 25.

[9] For an analysis of the artist's early work in Poland, see both Peter Boswell, "Krzyzstof Wodiczko: Art and the Public Domain" and Andrzej Turowski, "Wodiczko and Poland in the 1970s," *Public Address: Krzyzstof Wodiczko* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1992), 9-12 and 26-35.

[10] Krzysztof Wodiczko collaborated with Jozef Patkowski and Experimental Studio in Warsaw from 1967 to 1976 generating sound electronic interface for musicians. His acute sensitivity to sound may also be an influence from his father, Bohdan Wodiczko (1911-1985), who conducted the National Philharmonic in Warsaw, the Reykjavik Philharmonic, and the Warsaw Opera among others. Wodiczko, after receiving his M.F.A. in industrial design in 1968, was employed for two years by UNITRA to design popular electronic products.

protesters, registered dissent of a system that fostered only one-directional critical thinking – listening over speech.

It was this double-sided interpretation (how a work operates in the world but also how it refers to the conditions of its making) that Wodiczko would come to share with Hans Haacke. Haacke working from an anti-art Duchampian strategy of context and Wodiczko developing a post-Constructivist campaign of social intervention[11] had each complicated the interpretation of a work of art to include the tension between what the art presumably shows in isolation (considering the physical boundaries of the work) and what it reveals in context (in relation to both the physical and conceptual time and space of its installation). As seen in the previous chapter, Haacke's works from the 1960s and 1970s investigating the impact of the physical properties of wind, water, and ice as well as his informational systems of the 1970s owed their aesthetics to the consequences of ephemeral processes (what wind does to a piece of fabric, how ice alters its form as it melts, how endless rolls of unwinding paper take up physical space). They also owed their multiple layers of meaning to pre-existing systems whether physical and environmental, or social and political. As Hans Haacke states:

> A "sculpture" that physically reacts to its environment is no longer to be regarded as an object. The range of outside factors affecting it, as well as its own radius of action, reaches beyond the space it materially occupies. It thus merges with the environment in a relationship that is better understood as a "system" of interdependent processes. These processes evolve without the viewer's empathy. *He becomes a witness.* A system is not imagined; it is real.[12]

While Haacke was exploring systems of physical and informational exchange, Wodiczko was contemplating ideological impediments to systems of exchange.

> It was difficult [in Poland] to find an artistic voice, which could interrogate ethical and political voicelessness… One was forced to listen directly but not speak directly. This sparked the formation of a peculiar culture of indirect listening, sharing it through veiled speech… I presented a person who made an art work out of the art of listening, switching on one part of a frequency and switching off another, reinterpreting what was happening without speaking.[13]

It is with this notion of selective listening, veiled speech, and witness that we must confront the players in his mise-en-scène *If you see something…* for, if we are sensitive

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[11] In an interview with the editors and writers of *October*, Wodiczko refers to his early "de-constructivist" technical "inventions." He also discussed the significance of the avant-garde to the development of his theories. See Wodiczko, "A Conversation with *October" Critical Vehicles,* 151-6.

[12] Hans Haacke, New York, 1967, quoted in *Hans Haacke* (New York: Phaidon, 2004), 90. Emphasis added.

[13] "Interview with Wodiczko" in *Beyond Ethics and Aesthetics,* Gevers and van Heeswijk, eds. (Amsterdam: Sun, 1997), 450-52. Reprinted in Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles,* 102-3.

enough, we will realize that it is really they who are interrogating us. By choosing to listen to these private conversations, we assume an uncomfortable position. Self-consciously, we become complicit in an act of voyeurism and thus subject to the question: what are we doing there? Pedestrian spying, easily dismissed on New York's busy streets, becomes a question of ethical accountability in Wodiczko's installation. Who has the right to speak? Who to listen?

Wodiczko not only represented metaphorically the voiceless individual; he also emphasized through his vehicles and his instruments what a citizen could and could not do in real time and real space, demonstrating his work in the public square. During the early stages of the culturally and politically relaxed leadership of Edward Gierek (1970-80), Wodiczko could expand his place in the public sphere abroad, exhibiting work in France, Germany, the United States, and Canada. With the aggressive crackdown following worker strikes in 1976, however, greater privileges relied on greater compliance to the system and Wodiczko made the difficult decision in 1977 to remain in Canada rather than return to Poland, exchanging his position of cultural traveler to one of political exile.[14] Interestingly, his concern for speech rights and for the relationship of the individual to the state did not lose relevancy within the social and cultural systems of western democracies.

> After years of being far from a native cultural life, the life dissolved in cigarette smoke and coffee-table debates, now far from the avant-garde like style (of a Baudelairean state-socialist *flâneur*), here one again finds oneself resubmerged (to one's immigrant dismay) into a quite familiar "artistic" atmosphere and "cultural climate."[15]

The concept of the flâneur, evoked by Wodiczko in a 1983 essay, dates to Charles Baudelaire's 1863 composition, "The Painter of Modern Life," a supposed tribute to the illustrator, Constantin Guys, who produced sketches for the *Illustrated London News* on fashion, war in the Crimea, and general everyday subjects.[16] The portrait essay, however, is Charles Baudelaire's means to "sketch" out his own theories on the representation of modernity; in it he creates a counter-culture alternative to the dandy who represented for French society the detached boredom of the intellectual esthete

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[14] Wodiczko's exile followed a critical year in Polish insurrection that eventually led to the Solidarity Movement. In 1976 there was a nationwide series of worker strikes, followed by demonstrations, lootings, and subsequent arrests of strikers, militants and intellectuals who supported the workers. See Keith John Lepak, *Prelude to Solidarity: Poland and the Politics of the Gierek Regime* (Columbia University Press, 1988). His decision was complicated by both political and personal factors. See Wodiczko, "A Conversation with *October" Critical Vehicles,* 159-160.

[15] Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles,* 33.

[16] Charles Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" in *Curiosités esthétiques,* with an introduction by Jean Adhémar (Paris: Éditions de L'Oeil, 1956), 399-446.

who held himself above the riffraff of mundane, bourgeois existence (particularly that of the capitalist). More relevant to modernity, the flâneur becomes for Baudelaire an engaged everyman and a passive no man, distinct from the crowd but at home in the fray of everyday life.

For Baudelaire the purpose of the poet and the artist are identical: to capture the immediacy of the real through spirit and imagination, shaping the representation of a rapidly changing world. Tradition held no quarter in Baudelaire's estimation; it stifled a direct engagement with the present. Baudelaire's essay marked the turning point away from a focus on the modern world as defined by the Renaissance and its engagement with antiquity to the world of modernity in the era of high capitalism.[17] *Modern*, *modernity*, and *representation* would never be quite the same again. The more the industrial economy became reliant on precision, regulations, and hard work, the more culture was defined as provisory and contingent, the product of an idle mind and freely ambulatory individual.[18] Such an individual with a heightened sense of his immediate surroundings strikes Wodiczko as sufficiently detached to be critical, sufficiently marginal to avoid automatic assumptions and procedures, and sufficiently alienated to have cause for action against social systems that promote alienation. For Wodiczko, the nineteenth-century flâneur becomes the twentieth-century refugee – the economic and political exile no longer inhabiting his place of origin, nor embraced by her homeland-by-default. The emphasis is on political rather than cultural alienation and survival over detached observation.

Wodiczko continued his vehicles in Canada to reflect on "the bureaucratization of culture" that the Canada Council represented.[19] These vehicles (Vehicle-Café, Vehicle Platform, Vehicle-Podium, for example, from 1977-79) continued their unidirectional capability. They soon took a very different form and preoccupation in the United States, however, where alienation was as significant for the homeless as it was for the stateless. There his vehicles became the mouthpiece of a neglected community and a visible protest against the political and economic systems that exclude certain communities from social advantages. Within the context of Reagan era economics, urban

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[17] The expression comes from Walter Benjamin's proposed title for his writings on Baudelaire: *Charles Baudelaire: a lyric poet in the era of high capitalism*, a version of which was published with translation by Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973). They are available as essays in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 1913-1926 and 4, 1938-1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996 and 2003).

[18] "Provisory and contingent" come from Baudelaire but the relationship of work to idleness is expressed by Benjamin in his essay on Baudelaire. See "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, 4: 30-31.

[19] Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles,* 78.

gentrification, and social profiling of the urban poor, Wodiczko changed his vehicles from contradicting state systems to creating systematic interventions highlighting non-existent programs.[20] In short, they became useful.

The *Homeless Vehicle* (1988-89) (fig 2-6) is perhaps Krzysztof Wodiczko's most contentious and least understood project, one which would benefit from the perspective of temporal distance but which serves the purpose of this dissertation in terms of the development of the artist's process in working in collaboration with social communities.[21] In *Homeless Vehicle* we see a fusion of creative versatility and social practice to redirect attention from the work of art as dissent to the work of art as social action: in this case, the discussions and design collaboration with members of the homeless community to develop both a physical object and a conceptual design that would make their participation in the urban economy visible and self-directed.[22] Although functional units or machines, Wodiczko's vehicles mean nothing without the collective process developed to achieve them. In a 1992 interview the artist explained how the design of vehicles for collecting and recycling bottles and cans "perverts an existing situation by rendering it somehow legitimate, but without legitimating the crisis of homelessness."[23] He added that the 'operators' of the vehicles could suddenly take themselves seriously:

> You see this in certain gestures, certain ways of behaving, speaking, dialoguing, of building up stories, narratives: the homeless become actors, orators, workers, all things which they usually are not. The idea is to let them speak and tell their own stories, to let them be legitimate actors on the urban stage.[24]

The performative process of the *Homeless Vehicle Project*, so often considered only through the symbolic form of the vehicle itself, will become the primary trajectory of the

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[20] For a lengthy discussion of the complex connections between economics, realty, public spaces and stratified communities see Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996/98) and Alex Vitale, *City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2008). See also Neil Smith, "Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale," *Social Text* 33 (1992): 54-81.

[21] The artist's project became emblematic of a larger debate of the relation of art to social context particularly in regards to voice (who speaks) and whether art serves as a catalyst or a solution.

[22] The artist worked with David Lurie and others creating makeshift homes in and around Tompkins Square Park. See Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Homeless Vehicle Project.*. (Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto Shoin, 1991) and *Krzysztof Wodiczko: New York City Tableau, Tomkins Square, The Homeless Vehicle Project* (New York: Exit Art, 1989).

[23] Wodiczko, "An Interview by Jean-Christophe Royoux," *Critical Vehicles,* 177.

[24] Ibid.

Instruments and eventually part of the artist's projections as well. Through the vehicles, Wodiczko addresses the "communicative economy of persons who themselves are the major critical vehicles of the present: the alienated inhabitants of our cities, and in particular contemporary urban nomads, immigrants."[25]

While the communities "homeless" and "immigrant" do not necessarily overlap, the economic stresses are more closely related than one might imagine. Rosalyn Deutsche, for example, argues strongly that homelessness is less likely to be caused by personal liability as it is by economic factors determining employment ratios, cost of living, education, and dramatic restructuring of neighborhoods.[26] As mentioned in the introduction, the context of globalization is significant to the preoccupations and concerns Wodiczko brings to his projects: what the artist refers to as *capitalisme sauvage*.[27] Global economics has had a major social impact on both a micro and a macro level and whether one considers the internal urban migrants or the external global refugees, economics have influenced the wars, upheavals, and crises that have put populations on the move. Urban geographer Neil Smith points out the globalization of production is intricately connected to the "astonishing levels of global migration since the 1960s…"[28]

The impact of globalization on the position of the individual to society is the context of Wodiczko's work, broadly speaking. The combination of functional design with conceptual intent might describe the tools of his aesthetic vocabulary. However in dealing with his subject, Wodiczko works not as an author but as a facilitator enabling unsanctioned speech, making visible an undercurrent in society – the homeless, the illegal alien, the disenfranchised. In developing his projects of cultural communication, Wodiczko often works with activist groups to make connections with marginal communities. His projects are of three distinct types: the vehicles: starting with his unidirectional one in Poland in 1971, including *The Homeless Vehicle* of 1988-89, and most recently *Veteran Vehicle* of 2008; the instruments: the initial experiment of *Personal Instrument* of 1969 revisited in the 1990s with *Alien Staff, Mouthpiece, Aegis* (2000) (fig. 2-7), and *Dis-Armor* (1999-present), and finally his projections both interior

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[25] Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles,* xvi.

[26] See Deutsche, *Evictions*.

[27] Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, xv. He is referring to what is known in English as *extreme capitalism*, widely known through the policies of the Thatcher government in Great Britain (1979-90), it was an economics based on supply and demand with no legislated restrictions or interventions. The anti-regulation economics of President Ronald Reagan (1981-89) were closely allied to those of the Thatcher government as both were reactions against Keynesian economics owing much to Milton Friedman's free market economics.

[28] Neil Smith, *The Endgame of Civilization* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 140.

and exterior for which he is best known, produced first with slides throughout the 1980s and later with video beginning in Krakow in 1996. Wodiczko's preoccupation with the *politis* – citizenry – carries through all his work whether vehicles, instruments, or projections. His *politis,* however, are not the legitimate franchised citizens discussed by Michel Foucault in *Fearless Speech* (2001) but politically and culturally alienated peoples. Their participation precipitates the development of both a narrative and visual language that makes *If you see something…* significant not only for subject and process but for its formal qualities as well.

During the 1980s, Wodiczko had begun work that investigated the relationship of the physical body to the architectural body within the social terrain taking the form of projections on public monuments and symbolically significant buildings, of which the artist would create more than eighty in public spaces in Europe, the Middle East, Australia, and the Americas. The widespread venues of the projections reflect the shift since the 1980s from cultural production within artistic capitals such as Paris, Berlin, or New York to an increasingly decentralized artistic practice of a global network of biennials, art fairs, and media coverage of cultural events, but Wodiczko was not conveniently hitching a ride on a wave of cultural opportunism. In each of his projections he developed his commentary on the intersection between local and global culture, economics, and politics. The projections are well-documented and frequently noted for drawing attention to the advantages of an interventionist, "transitory" public art as opposed to traditional permanent fixtures, which become locked into an historical position they cannot always sustain over time.[29] By staging brief projections onto architectural facades for a few hours (and occasionally a series of nights), Wodiczko could be topical rather than universal or historical. The process leading up to those relatively short venues, however, could take months and sometimes more than a year. It is this process of production that develops meaning not necessarily for how the work is received but for its significance as ethical practice, shifting debate from the efficacy of medium to the usefulness of methodology, though in ways different from Hans Haacke.

In these projections, the artist alternates between symbolic, iconic, and indexical images – the principal relations an image can have to its subject, according to the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce – that is, predicated on a cultural reference, a physical resemblance, or a physical relation respectively.[30] In many instances they

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[29] See for example Ewa Lajer-Burchardt, "Understanding Wodiczko" in Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Counter-Monuments: Krzysztof Wodiczko's Public Projections* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1987), unpaginated; Douglas Crimp, Rosalyn Deutsche, and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "A Conversation with Krzysztof Wodiczko" in *October* 38 (Winter 1986): 23-51; and *Public Address.*

[30] Charles Sanders Peirce formulates what would become a key feature of semiotics as early as the 1860s. See *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce,* ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). See also *The Essential Peirce, Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 1 (1867-1893)*, ed.

scramble all relations: the hand, an index of the body – someone's body – is also an iconic representation of communication that might symbolically represent an open or closed ideological position. While Wodiczko's visual repertoire for his projections includes chains, missiles, tanks, coins, cameras, boots, swastikas, guns, candles, food baskets, corporate logos, ears, and eyes, it is the hands that gesture the most enduring suggestions of manipulation, abuse, appropriation, and concern (fig. 2-10). His use of imagery is denotational in its precise selection yet at the same time connotational suggesting uncomfortable layers of visual messages that upset how we read and interpret visual culture. The reductive, visual signs monumentally-sized to fit the facades on which they are projected, are not meant to read simply as logos for a political agenda, instead they suggest a contradiction in order to disrupt the kind of assumptions that beset the casual passerby.

Following Walter Benjamin, Wodiczko holds a certain distrust in continuity – that things simply "go on" – and entertains a break in the status quo or, according to him, the psycho-social structure of the city.[31] Too much is automatic and easily accepted, too much is inherited from the past, and too much guides us unmistakably to a predictable future. Wodiczko suggests that the official city is a city of victors over vanquished, successfully erasing catastrophe and wound.[32] In such a scenario, disruption, difference, and dissent are minimized, if not erased. Public spaces are crowned by public monuments that reify great men and splendid achievements. Wodiczko believes that when the public views its city's monuments with sidelong glances out of the corners of its eyes, it accepts the monuments as natural and uncoded. By intercepting vision with projections, he replaces an unconsidered reception with a critical one. This is a lesson learned from Brecht and we will find Alfredo Jaar proceeds from a similar preoccupation in the disruption of expectation.

Pre-emptive engagement is a tactical maneuver that becomes even more pronounced in the otherwise discrete and personal Instruments developed throughout the 1990s with the Interrogative Design Group Wodiczko heads at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Initially based on the iconic staff of the wandering prophet, the *Alien Staff* (1992 and its variant, 1992/93) was designed to mediate conversation between aliens (the juridical term designating all immigrants whether of legal or illegal status) and the franchised population of an urban environment. The staff not only presented an object of curiosity to passersby, causing them to interrupt their pace long

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Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992).

[31] Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles,* 4.

[32] Ibid. Wodiczko is working from Stéphane Mosès' interpretation of Walter Benjamin's theological-political model of history. See Mosès, "The Theological-Political Model of History in Walter Benjamin" in *History and Memory* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1989).

enough to ask questions, it also became a repository of narrative recording and objects both sacred or necessary (e.g., green cards) to the lives of the immigrants. The double presence of the immigrant both carrying the staff and within the staff as document and as voice evokes for Wodiczko the distinction between "'media' and 'life' [and] invites a new perception of a stranger as 'imagined' (a character on the screen) or as 'experienced' (an actor offstage, a real-life person)."[33] Wodiczko developed new equipment in 1993 that focused even more directly on democratic speech rights for the performative stranger. *Mouthpiece* (*Porte-parole*) (fig. 2-8, fig. 2-9) extended the immigrant's narrative to a collective experience thereby pulling her out of isolation and creating a kind of protective zone around the principle of disclosure. The video technology, to be worn over the mouth, suggests a gag while at the same time creates a point of curiosity and thereby a point of entry: appearance gives way to experience. According to documentation, between 1993 and 1997 thirteen culturally displaced persons used variants of the *Mouthpiece* in Paris, Malmö, Helsinki, Warsaw, Amsterdam, Trélazé, and Angers.[34] The flâneur collides with the crowd – the work of art in an age of multiplicity.

While the works I have briefly outlined indicate fundamental preoccupations of the artist that play out in the production of *If you see something…* , I might just as well have chosen to discuss various influential texts or films: *The Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929)*, City Lights* (Charlie Chaplin, 1931)*, Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959)*,* or *Bread and Chocolate* (Franco Brusati, 1974) for example. I do not wish to imply that there is a logical thread of development; artists seek out new ideas, form different tactics, and are buffeted by varying experiences that tend to prevent a predictable delineation or progression as they work. Indeed in any career as full as that represented by this artist whose projects have become too numerous to track, I would be remiss to imply that the few examples I have selected are representative of his entire *oeuvre.* I have selected them, therefore, as indicators of a way of working that destabilizes existing expectations, emphasizes contradictions, and melds a fine-tuned aesthetic practice with social discourse.

Wodiczko's work, past and present, proceeds from an ethical imperative: art must be angry and it must produce results – not big ones but small, rippling waves that spread out across the surface and reverberate deep within our systems of engagement. First, the work must ask questions. Second, it must respond to "the process of survival, resistance, and the healing of social, psychological, and physical wounds."[35] Third, it must sustain an ongoing level of critical alertness in order to formulate an everyday

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[33] Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles,* 104.

[34] Ibid., 121.

[35] Ibid., 16.

practice of social and political resolve rather than create an occasional glitch in the fabric of society. While emphasizing change, he avoids a utopian vision towards a better tomorrow, always vulnerable to translation into simplistic formulae of the oppressor and the oppressed.[36] Wodiczko's writings over the last four decades reveal an impassioned practice that incorporates research, dialogue, and concern for the fate of humanity. While emanating from distinct methodological differences, all three artists – Haacke, Wodiczko, and Jaar – share this fastidious research and emphatic humanitarian concern. Distinct from the others, however, Wodiczko's process eschews reason and resolution in favor of pushing beyond his control. It bolsters the ordinary manifestation of basic survival even while it seeks the extraordinary rearrangement of social and political strata. Most of all it encourages art practitioners (all individuals for that matter) to "work *in* the world rather than 'about' or 'upon' it."[37]

Coinciding with ethics are politics. Wodiczko believes in keeping democracy active by introducing disorder – "a kind of ethical turbulence"[38] – so that the interference will produce an effort and a consciousness that democracy must always exist as a state of becoming. For Wodiczko, urban planning, real estate development, and public memorials privilege some citizens' rights over others and naturalize poverty as a result of indigence rather than economic and political pressure.[39] As such, his public projections serve as counter-monuments in the full sense of the term: against tradition, against permanency, and stacked against the political framework of passively accepted ideological positions.[40] They are protest actions asking us to consider the possibility of re-engendering "Prague Spring" and the Parisian "May 1968" as well as the catalytic uprisings in Warsaw in January of that same year, when workers and students affixed

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[36] Lisa Saltzman claims a utopian vision for Krzysztof Wodiczko basing her conclusion on the activist position he takes towards the communities with whom he works. See Saltzman, "When Memory Speaks" in *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 29-45. The artist contrasts utopia as an abstract goal and utopia as a belief system, distinguishing frequently between a commitment to social justice and idealism. See particularly *Critical Vehicles*, 178. He also made this clear in two conversations with the author, New York City, March 6, and December 5, 2008.

[37] Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, 17. This statement is similar to the Christian admonition to be in the world, not of the world (John 2:15-17; Philippians 2:12-18 and Matthew 5:13) but in this case has likely evolved from Walter Benjamin's theological-political model of history. See Mosès, "The Theological-Political Model of History."

[38] Ibid., xiii.

[39] Ibid., xiii. See also Rosalyn Deutsche, "Krzysztof Wodiczko's Homeless Projection and the Site of 'Urban Revitalization'" in *October* 38 (Fall 1986), 63-99.

[40] For a full discussion of his projections see Wodiczko, *Public Address.*

themselves bodily to state monuments demanding a different focus on the political process.[41]

I spoke with the artist on several occasions throughout 2008 about the installation, *If you see something…,* and about his process as an artist. He is an intensely concentrated individual – physically compact, intellectually profound, and emotionally layered by his decision to bear witness to trauma. His commitment to his project is proven by four decades of continuous production and, in spite of a busy schedule, I found him extremely generous with his time and highly emphatic that misconceptions about his work be corrected. What follows is an edited compilation of our conversations divided into theoretical topics pertinent to his installation: *spatial division, fear and the inability to see, process and the inner public,* and *open speech.* If these words serve some purpose in setting the record straight, they do more to initiate further investigations, for Krzysztof Wodiczko is himself a catalyst for engagement while his work is constantly in the process of being written.

Conversation: second person / *migrant*

Spatial divisions

KM: Can we talk about your 2005 installation, *If you see something…*?

KW: Let me explain how I see this work now. First of all, the interior of the gallery is an important element because galleries usually have no windows so viewers expect a work of art to be a sort of window: the image of an inner or an outer world or somewhere in between the inside and the outside (but not very consciously so).

The gallery in the context of Homeland Security, which is in fact the "Ministry of Interior" as it is called in many countries, shows a kind of Orwellian connotation. For Orwell, if you remember, the "Ministry of Love" has no windows. We could ask: What is this ministry policy doing to our psychological interior? So it's clear that once you are inside the gallery it becomes a metaphor for your own isolation from what is happening outside the gallery. What is the relation between those who don't know what takes place in the outside – you and me, most of us – and those who know – these others – the ones who are in prison, detained and deported, or their families who are left out and fearful, and those activists who tried to help them?

KM: How did you reach those individuals?

KW: There were 15 various organizations: without them I would not know what is happening and, without their support I would not be able to work with those survivors. That wall needs to be broken. You have to pierce some holes between the interior of ignorance (ours) and the world of unspeakable, unbelievable experience (theirs). This wall is built by the Ministry of Interior – what we hear and what we don't hear – which is their systematic policy to create separation.

[41] In January 2008, Krzysztof Wodiczko created a projection for the poet Adam Mickiewicz's monument in Warsaw, commemorating the uprisings of 1968.

Even the Patriot Act, as such, was unknown by those who voted for it because it was offered so quickly and no one would vote against something called the “Patriot” Act even if they failed to read it. This is the reality of our ignorance, fear, and resentment to even learn and the counter-reality of those who are affected.

KM: And so, you created windows?

KW: Saying this, it became clear to me that it was not sufficient to break the wall and show what is on the other side but that the impossibility of seeing what’s on the other side should also be represented. Therefore the foggy image – no matter how much we want to know and how much those people are trying to tell us– there will still be a fog. That is why those milky windows became useful equipment.

That became an obvious decision for me to project one of those windows, filmed from the inside and multiplied in the gallery, as if it was some kind of pavilion from which you could see what would be happening on the other side as if it were the real thing – actual people talking about actual problems with each other unaware that we are watching them. Voices heard partially, muffled, bodies seen but not recognized. For various reasons it was the right opportunity: this window and the technology of high definition projection creates a very strong illusion of a real presence.

When we filmed, people were emotionally in the midst of something that was happening to them. We reconstructed and created various scenes and dialogues of stories but some happened in real time as well. For example, at one point when we were filming, a lawyer took a phone call communicating with another lawyer about a mass deportation. There was someone praying, there was a dog, there was a Polish window-cleaning crew: it is something they do, they clean most Chelsea gallery windows everyday but I asked them to do it again for the film. You clean the window to bring more light but you still cannot clear the milky surface. Cleaning is the job of immigrants: they take the maintenance jobs, often illegally, and often in spite of having advanced technical or academic degrees.

KM: So how do you move from the day-to-day to the space of exhibition?

KW: I am describing the reasons – aesthetic, political, ethical – for this method of projection. I usually project on outside surfaces on symbolic structures. The difference from projecting on the outside and inside is fundamentally different: an interior projection is our projection of our interior to the outside world. It engages the gallery as a symbolically charged space that is too often taken for granted as a space for the display of pictures or objects but it can be a vehicle for serious work. I was quite happy that I managed to engage this.

KM: The interior space gave the impression that you had gone underground – politically underground – that the public arena had been symbolically shut down…

KW: Yes, the Ministry of the Interior disposed people to move the political process indoors but of course they started wire-tapping. It is Homeland Security’s doing that we are forced to our interiors but at the same time we are subjected to surveillance in those interiors. The opening of the show purposefully coincided with the anniversary of the

bombing; it was a kind of memorial project but a memorial to whom? In this case, it was to the survivors or victims of the fallout in response to the bombing.

Fear and the inability to see

KM: You are interrogating the conditions of terror…

KW: Yes, the issue of terror because the title of your work is *Art in an Age of Terror…* In Slavic languages, terror is reserved to external actions that are threatening you and directed at you; the internal state is one of horror. Speaking in English, even if no one is terrorizing you – but only if something horrifies you – you can feel terror. The confusion of the use of the word terror is that you don't know whether you are talking about your subjective relation to it – horrifying feelings of being terrorized – or the actual terrorist acts against you.

This is skillfully played by politicians. "The war on terror" is the war both on terrorism and on terror: that is on our subjective fears, feelings, imaginations and perceptions of being terrorized. It's a kind of psychological project mixed with a foreign war project. Feelings, imaginations, and perceptions can be manufactured, including "terror." First of all the US "war on terror" exaggerates fear so you may be willing to take actions to decrease your sense of insecurity – staging war on the outside and the inside – according to the wishes of the Ministry of the Interior. This "staging" is not the topic of my work but it is the context.

KM: Your representations become more real to us than the actual people would be to the Bush administration.

KW: Is this about our fear or that of the people on the other side? Where is this terror? Whose terror is it? The image of terrorists is being distorted… some other work should be done on this because they are being treated as non-human. What is real here is also the reality of the fog between us and them and their emotional charge as they try to convey their situation of being terrorized. There are so many "terrors" here and this gives a sense of complexity to the situation.

[Our conversation is interrupted by a call the artist is expecting. We resume the discussion later.]

KM: I'd like to put this interior work in perspective with your exterior projections. When did you move from the slide projections to the video projections?

KW: 1996, Krakow.[42] It was waiting to happen. I was working on *Porte-parole* in France[43] and so I was already working in a narrative mode creating conditions for people

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[42] For a full transcript and documentation of the project see *KW: projekcje publiczne, public projections 1996-2004*. With contributions by Anna Smolak, Malgorzata Gadomska, Dariusz Dolinski, et al. Krakow: The Bunker Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery, 2005, 8-19.

[43] The instrument, *Porte-parole* (Mouthpiece) was first made in 1993 with variants made and used from 1995-1997.

to open up and articulate unwelcome, unspeakable, and overwhelming things in public. I was asked by filmmaker Andrzej Wajda to do a projection for an urban festival he curated. We chose to work in the center of Krakow, projecting onto the Central Market's City Hall Tower, the area where everyone meets, at the main point on the cognitive map of the city. The Central Market is the largest public space in Europe, with a tradition of public gatherings, whether cultural, religious, or political events, since the 13th century.

The occasion of the festival asked for something special to happen and these powerful "BARCO" type video projectors were there for projecting Wajda's films in the outdoors. It was the first time this kind of equipment was available in Poland and I had access to them. Eventually we formed a familiar type of crew that I need for those projects but it expanded and I became a kind of filmmaker. I was surprised how easy it was for me to combine the projection work with the work of a film crew, a sound system crew, an editing crew, and a team of social workers from the Women's Center.

"Let not only the tower speak."[44]

Poland, and perhaps Krakow in particular, was a very tough place for women at that time; there had been a change of regime and many social projects shifted from government to other agencies, including Catholic organizations who in the name of 'family values' often sent those women back to their homes for further abuse… children as well. The main Polish Catholic paper, Tygodnik Powszechny, attacked the projection. Most media, though, was very open. I learned a lot from that project. It was a major leap.

KM: Was that the first testimonial projection?

KW: Yes, I resorted to my previous experience in terms of projection but this was the first time I used video with a powerful sound system. An additional crew was required. The projection crew reached 25-30 people, definitely. The crew was the first public to witness the project but they became increasingly negative; the more they heard the testimony, the more they were against it. "The situation is not so simple," they would say, "The projection is not telling the full truth."

KM: Or was it a truth they were not able to hear?

KW: The crew considered this as not the full truth but it is also clear that they were feeling uneasy with what was being said. It was very familiar to their personal experience, such as alcoholism mixed with domestic violence ("too close to home" as we say in English). Some of the perpetrators of violence spoken of in the testimonials were respected intellectuals. The mixture of success and unpleasant truths was uncomfortable. One person who was speaking through the tower was a psychotherapist herself and even she was victimized, held as a prisoner by her husband (an intellectual who had previously been imprisoned for his political ideas).

[44] After the projection the Women's Center created a poster with this slogan to mobilize new members.

There were many other stories of torture and of people addicted to drugs… At one point, I thought the project would collapse because of the negative and fearful response of the crew, the project's *inner public* as I call it… See, this is what I was talking about: such a large crew with tentacles with the rest of the city, strong connections because they were members of a prestigious and popular city art center. They were starting to talk about this at night when lots of people heard and there was feedback during the day.

The projection was falling apart. One of the final tests was taking place as usual; we finished the test late at night taking advantage of a special agreement with the city. It was a completely empty, huge plaza – a Gothic/ Renaissance plaza – and we heard some noise but it was hard to tell where it was coming from. Finally we focused on the source: there were two teenage girls sitting there in the plaza clapping. We were busy putting back cables and equipment, packing up seemingly without paying attention – it's an enormous amount of work to execute these projections – but the next morning when I came back to the studio, the crew was smiling.

KM: Yes, of course, they were unwilling to accept the truth!

KW: I don't know what happened but it was a different world after that. Those two girls, without knowing it, saved the project. Now what kind of public is that? How do you call it? They were public witnesses…

KM: They were corroborating witnesses.

KW: Perhaps without them and the effect they had on the crew I would not have succeeded. They were a living proof of the potentially positive reception of the project.

KM: Do you think it has to do with the intimacy that was made so large and so public that made people uncomfortable?

KW: Yes, especially in Krakow, a city of hundreds of monasteries and churches and hidden dark stories behind a veil of domestic privacy. It's a beautiful place – the "pearl of Europe" according to guidebooks – with awful housing projects and a huge industrial Stalinist district next to a gigantic steel mill, the Nowa Huta. There's the other Krakow that is not seen in that official pearl-of-Europe Krakow: the hypocrisy of "Victorian" bourgeois secrecies, the power of the clergy, and a post-Stalinist past.

The projection was taken seriously by national media as well as outsiders, students in summer programs and tourists, for example. We distributed translations in English. The issue became recognized as a public problem, but not only in Krakow.

KM: Did you have the same response with *If you see something...*? Has that issue become more public?

KW: There was a review in *The New York Times* by art critic Roberta Smith, her article brought in a large audience in the last week of the show; it was very crowded. Maybe it was the only show that touched on September 11th at the beginning of the Chelsea season when you have 200 openings. It was very public by the timing of it. People, whether they liked it or not, saw it and it became a meeting place, a connecting place for various organizations, activists, and their clients.

Process and the inner public[45]

KM: What is more important to you: the process of the work or the impact it has?

KW: The impact of the process. The people with whom I work, who become co-artists of this project: their lives are a key issue. We were speaking of the project from the perspective of "us" – the viewing public. What if we talk about the project from the point of view of those who bring their life to it?

My emphasis is on the position of the project in the lives of those who are potential and actual co-artists. It is important how they can make sense of this project and make use of it for their own lives and the lives of others: to create conditions under which those people will open up, articulate their traumatic memories with an emotional charge and do so with full consciousness that they are animating some public space. Also, to take advantage of that environment with its prestige and accessibility to others with the attention the media will pay. My purpose is to give them full understanding of the vehicle they use in order to become agents who seek social change and to feel that they can help others who are in similar situations.

They help themselves by getting involved in a cultural project. They are now reconnecting with society from which they've been isolated by the circumstances created in large part by the Ministry of the Interior. They break that wall to some degree and show also that it is impossible for us to really identify with their situation or establish a bridge of empathy. No, it is the impossibility of real understanding of their situation that is being projected.

This is extremely important. The real people, the actors, were there at the opening and they met each other and could establish links through this project. The art world is a vehicle through which you can legitimize the importance of a problem. Every step helps – those working in film, journalists, theorists, activists are all missing the boat – these individuals want a certain understanding of the complexity of the problem but also of the need to unveil/to transmit what is being hidden.

We were joining each other, even if our objectives were slightly different, we had a larger objective that we shared. And that was very nice.

KM: How do you see your socio-aesthetic project as different from other cultural producers?

KW: In order to establish contact with potential co-artists, animators of the interior, you need to go through various organizations that first protect them from an artist like myself. It's a danger; it's a risk. They resent or even fear the artists who sensationalize, who

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[45] The term *inner public* is specific to Krzysztof Wodiczko. He uses it to differentiate the unrecognized participants in a project from the viewing public, which has been the center of much theoretical debate on spectatorship prompted by semiotic studies since the 1970s. For a concise but comprehensive outline of reception theory see Marco de Marinis, "The Spectator's Task" in *The Semiotics of Performance,* trans. by Aine O'Healy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 159-188.

romanticize, who make a career out of the misery of others, who can make trouble by compromising the work of some of those activists if they are exposed.

It is a complicated process. I met with potential participants who then convinced their support organizations to take part in the project because they started to trust my intentions and see their own benefits. This took six or seven months to go through this process: to be rejected, to be mistrusted, to be put into tests… but, without the help of a few who decided to trust me among these very important intermediary parties, without organizers and activists who work for the victims and their families, mostly the Pakistani organizations, without their trust – there would be no project. So they know each other and had to communicate with each other that it is worth getting involved in this project. This took time. Once the project was initially destroyed (psychologically and politically) and the project survived the destruction, then the project proved to be strong enough to be used by those who had attempted to destroy it in the first place…

KM: What do you mean by "destroyed"?

KW: What they say: "Get out, we don't have time, etc…" At first there is understandable suspicion, psychologically speaking there is the destruction of the project; the project has to survive and be reconstructed as something useful.

We were making various tests to see what would happen with the milky glass. It was installed here in this space. They see on video what is seen on the other side of the glass and recognize what gestures will make an impact and how much of their own face they do or don't want recognized. They also had to realize how much of the real stories they would bring to the situation, gradually scripting their own narrative; so a lot of work was done right here where we are sitting.[46]

Step by step, the stories that we were recording and re-recording, gained more emotional components. Bringing back traumatic memories is very difficult. At first their testimonies take the form of listing only the dry facts of the experience without any ability to express emotional impact and feelings, at best a kind of judicial or report language from speaking with police or lawyers. They have yet to change to another language and retrieve emotional details that are repressed. It takes time. It is partially psychological work but it is also cultural work, communication work, and artistic work because they become storytellers and, scriptwriters, and actors of their own life.

After we went through training here in the studio we moved to the sidewalk for two days of filming on location. We had a film, sound, and lighting crew – a professional, 20-person crew involved in the process.

KM: The conversations seem spontaneous.

KW: Many of those scenes that they reenacted could have been (or they actually were) taking place on the street. Many important conversations do take place in public

[46] The space is at most 80 square feet, filled with the overflow of too many projects and not enough time, leaving only as much space as could accommodate a small table and chairs.

spaces because it is less likely that someone will record or wiretap it. Casual meetings and talking about experience often happen outside especially now because those at work have to go out to smoke; so those scenes are quite natural.

KM: Yes, the sidewalk cigarette break is as ubiquitous as the subway slogans…

KW: In this moment I want to return to the topic of the "public" and "audience" and say something that may be the most important from my end about this subject. In the context of my external projections, I'm being asked: "What is the reaction of the public?" Why don't we ask instead: "What was the position of this project in the lives of those who animated the interiors and exteriors of my projections?" Isn't it that they are the public themselves? And who are those people who are not visible but who are another public in those projects?

They are the families, the lawyers, the social workers, and perhaps many of those who could not do it – colleagues – but who are around all the time. They provide a special zone, a protective zone, during the projections and during the time of production. They may be ready later another time to join another cultural project. You should add the film crew, the coordinators, the post-production crew, the gallery staff, and curators who support a project.

It has never been discussed by any critics that there is such a thing as an inner production-related public sphere of a project that could become, say, 250 people, if we consider numbers as important. Their impact, their position in the city, and the way the project might help them is then creating another public…

KM: …and another project.

KW: Yes, this is how the public is being produced by this work and how this becomes a public art project because it is not only their art project but potentially their life project as well. This inner public sphere is the way the group uses the project as a transitional object. They are developing their capacity to communicate, to express, to transmit, to talk to each other, to convey something to others; so they infuse this project with their inner world and at the same time they accept the project as part of an outside world. D. W. Winnicott explains his theory of "transitional object" in his last work, *Playing and Reality*.

KM: Winnicott is no longer widely read; perhaps we have forgotten his tools.

KW: He talks about the potential zone, the third zone of experience. It's an issue to what degree this is a transitional object for that inner public and also for the so-called viewing audience, the outside public. It is the way they start recognizing both the inner and outside world. But the outer public has a quick experience and the inner public has a longer experience, which gains integrity and conviction and has the potential to be an agency for change.

KM: Should we distinguish between *inner public* and *inner public sphere*?

KW: Yes! It is clear to me that there is an *inner public,* which becomes a small-scale public sphere because there is indeed some kind of discourse taking place that gives feedback to the actual projection. This helps the transmission be more articulate,

critical, and effective in calling authorities into accountability. This *inner pubic sphere* has a developmental quality so it may also be called a *developmental public sphere* in terms of its role in providing for protective conditions that secure the survivor's abilities to express and transmit their experience and their oppositional voice. Yes, this Habermas or Kluge and Negt would like in regards to what they call *proletarian public sphere*.

Perhaps it could also be called *socio-aesthetic public sphere*, developing through this particular projection because of those who are connected to the participants who give their life and voice to the project. I have not organized this in my head yet as a theory; I just watch and notice that something else is being created that stays longer than the project itself. In the process of working on those projects – including discussions in bars before and afterwards –there is a build-up of a certain kind of consciousness needed to take action. These co-artists make use of the kind of set-up I propose: their supporters – case workers, psychotherapists and activists whom they trust, also their lovers, their friends, researchers, and media people who are connected to the various groups, and the technical crew who is often committed to the project – all these people reinforce their political links and collective identity.

KM: So the *inner public* is not a closed system?

KW: Intellectuals and others – everyone is there, as Brecht would like – it's a complicated process but there are times when those two, the spectators and the inner public, intersect. Art critics, filmmakers, and others connect through openings, closings, and parties as I described.

Open speech

KM: One could think of the *inner public sphere* as a process of transmission. Is this where the importance of testimony comes in?

KW: Here *Fearless Speech* is coming, to which we referred earlier. Without this inner public sphere as a psycho-cultural project operating as a *transitional object* there is no possibility of transmission of what translators of Foucault call "fearless speech." Strictly speaking *parrhesia* does not mean fearless speech but open speech or free speech. Free speech for people who are traumatized, who are isolated, forced to be on the other side of that wall, is extremely difficult. Foucault could say whatever he liked about antiquity and the democratic process reserved only for the *politis*, the privileged people of rights, the members of the *polis,* but how about those masses of marginalized citizens and residents of our cities today who, unlike in ancient Athens now have rights but only on paper, not in reality: how are they able to become *parrhesiatic* speakers?

They need cultural projects; they need transitional objects; they need to be an integral part of the process of making the cultural project – often first critically "destroying" it and than rebuilding it – in order to convey something with the help of the project as a democratic artifice. Something may seem very simple to us but for them the act of speech, as an emotionally charged act of public truth telling is as enormously difficult as it is crucial for their survival and contribution to positive change. One of those who was speaking from behind the foggy glass window in the show – whose business

was destroyed, who was shown on the front page of the Boston newspaper, who was presented in the media as a traitor working in a terrorist lab – was in actuality working with people with AIDS. He said he had two things to keep him going – God and the American Constitution – he was showing the copy of the constitution he keeps everyday in his pocket.

He's a perfect *parrhesiatic* speaker: he's talking about democracy from his stomach, from his heart, speaking from the wounds of his experience about democracy! He's telling the truth and reprimanding the world and testifying through courts about being a victim of and a witness to injustice. At the same time he is testifying in the name of democracy in hopes that this will change the world for the better. This is the definition of a *parrhesiatic* speaker: someone who risks his own reputation, wellbeing, and even his life for pro/testing what is wrong as a contribution toward the better. It is his *pro,* on the basis of *testis*, his witness. But Foucault didn't, he could not talk about those people, he was talking about the *politis*. Without psychological and aesthetic cultural projects, there is no possibility to learn from Foucault about present day democracy, open by law to all… in other words, what he didn't say: that Athenian *parrhesiatic* project has to be turned today into technological, psychological, cultural, and artistic work.

KM: Where Foucault leaves off, Judith Butler brings to the present with her theory that subjectivity can't be focused on the "I" – it has to be focused on the "You".

KW: That's Levinas; that's from our side of the wall, yes… This Other – the other side of this foggy window – that we could not recognize, with whom we could not and should not identify, empathize, or frame, is, as Levinas would put it, the face of the Other as naked evidence of a person's existence. At the same time we must protect this Other from our appropriation through empathy. So the use of the frosted, foggy, semi-transparent windows may be the Judaistic aspect of this project, perhaps.

KM: Memory is thought of as something past but your project gives a strong impression of the present.

KW: Memory is according to some psychotherapists an action of telling a story.[47]

KM: Which is an action of the present.

KW: A story, a history, a memory is rooted in the present time. Benjamin would say it is a vision: a hope lived by the mode of the present. It is the present time that is being refused as unacceptable in the name of this present's unjust and catastrophic past; meaning I re-member, re-call something that has happened in the past that has a destructive impact on my time now and that should never happen again in the future. The future should be liberated from the danger of repetition from the thing that has happened in the past and that is still happening – a fearless warning. Memory has something to do with the word memento – a warning – "I warn you, beware, be mindful,

[47] This statement refers principally to Pierre Janet, *Psychological Healing,* [1919] vol. 1, trans. E. Paul and C. Paul (New York: MacMillan, 1925), 661-63, quoted in Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992/97), 37.

and be reminded." It is an urgent call to disrupt the repetition of a catastrophe and injustice in the future.

KM: What is the balance for you between this socio-political-cultural project and your commitment to visual art? You are a visual artist, after all; you are creating a piece of visual engagement.

KW: That part of the work that is seen by the art world – only a small part I might add – should never the less be as thick as possible. There need to be many layers so that what is not seen directly through the work still gives a sense of the entire social process. I'm talking about the life engagement of people that should be leaking through the specially created tiny cracks in the work, and in this way be transmitted "between the lines." It's not that different from what other artists historically have tried to do – perhaps a similar methodology to Gericault's *The Raft of the Medusa* – to re-scandalize the scandal with the help and involvement of actual survivors of the horrifying catastrophes; just as Manet's *Execution of Maximillian* or Hans Haacke's projects have done – there are in principle strong similarities.

The métier, the craft, the aesthetic work is extremely important; otherwise, you might get the concept but it would not become your full emotional experience. People who have less experience in creating artifice, illusion, or evocative installations could actually trivialize the social project. It happens often. Less experienced artists jump quickly to socio-aesthetic work and it becomes a more social than aesthetic experience. Now of course we are also dealing with a very refined audience; lots of people who go to the gallery have seen many other media shows. I was pleased to get the report from the gallery staff that a prominent curator came to the show and immediately left complaining: "Someone is washing the gallery windows! When will the show open?"

KM: Because they couldn't see it.

KW: They couldn't see it was art. Artists have always been tricksters, historically; there's nothing new about that.

KM: You took an about-face; you went full-thrust into illusionism. That has not been popular. It is always: make the fact that it is a representation obvious; show up the perils of representation. You said, O.K., we've had enough of that; this is going to be full semblance of reality and let's see what happens in that circumstance.

KW: Fine. I agree and disagree. One has to see both sides of that window. It's like Manet's *Bar at the Folies Bergères* – he's focusing on the presentation but there is also a person there – what we see and what we can't see. The realism is something I don't want to lose.

KM: And that realism is perhaps the connection between the aesthetic and the social aspects of the project.

KW: The project was proactive, both clinically and critically. Clinically not only in a diagnostic way as Gilles Deleuze would like (merely detecting and naming the social and singular ills) but also in an interventional, prognostic, and transformative way (healing the ills, interrupting their continuity, and proposing preventive means against the

sickness to come). The participants used the project, whether consciously or not, to heal both themselves and society at large, to have a different channel that's not judicial. It's therapy: the project became a *transitional phenomenon* for them – they learn to accept through the project both an outside and an inner world they don't fully control but may learn how to control to some degree – so it is in this transitional way you can feel they are using the project to gain access to the circulation of power. These people don't have a philosophical situation from which to speak; truth is in the process of trying to figure out what it is you are saying; you have to develop; this is how and why you work toward recovery from trauma.

Winnicott has a brilliant expression to describe an important aspect of the traumatic condition – the "freezing of the failure situation." The primary witnesses or survivors have to go through a developmental or re-developmental process to "unfreeze" and to regain their confidence in safety and effectiveness of their pro-active work.

KM: What are the dangers in working with trauma as your subject?

KW: Yes, if I use the word "trauma" I'm in trouble here. I am not a clinician. This is strictly speaking not a health-based project: healing in a medical sense. It is a cultural health project about narrative, proactive therapy, and para-theatrical art of public testimony. It is an interventional socio-esthetic act. If I say it is cross-cultural communication work then it's also fine. It is difficult for traditional psychoanalysts to accept public space as a clinical environment, which I think is a major mistake. My experience and my intuition as a public artist who works with people tell me otherwise.

Previously, I have spoken about designing a bandage to heal the wound even if the wound should not exist; but that is not enough, the bandage could also be such that it will be able to speak and remember and articulate and transmit conditions under which the wound happened. Interrogative Design[48] responds as such as a bandage to the needs that should not exist in hope that articulating them and providing emergency help and spreading consciousness of those conditions will lead to their obsolescence – this is its utopia – one I must have in order to move in the direction of that horizon, even if I never reach it. Otherwise, I would be going backward. Without utopia, you move backward: it doesn't mean you will reach that ideal situation but in this way you at least transform the situation. I think that is an achievement. That is all I can do. I wish I could do more.

[48] Krzysztof Wodiczko is head of the Interrogative Design Group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Their goal "is to combine art and technology into design while infusing it with emerging cultural issues that play critical roles in our society yet are give the least design attention." See http://interrogative.mit.edu/about/ (accessed 11/22/09).

Levinas speaks of the subjectivity of the subject. If one wishes to use this word – why? but why not? – one ought perhaps to speak of a subjectivity without a subject: the wounded space, the hurt of the dying, the already dead body which no one could ever own, or ever say of it, *I, my body.*
Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*

Reflection: first person plural / the *inner public*

Something else is being created that stays longer than the project itself

Implicit in the haze that hinders the glare and impinges a mirrored reflection, that softens the hard edge of a framed division and prevents direct contact with the projection, is a wound. If you fail to recognize it in the body language then you shall certainly hear it in the cadence of the voices. The wound as an act of incision, a cut, a disruption – Derrida's *trace,* Barthes' *punctum* or Lacan's *cut in the real* – also, the originary trauma of the subject or the violence of interpretation. Cultural production is an active process, aggressive and demanding, but the controlled management of conflict can at times relieve the escalation of tensions that often leads to traumatic events.[49] To (ad)dress the wound can initiate healing; but in the case of trauma, that wound is often invisible, buried in the deepest recesses of the psychic fabric – hidden and seemingly forgotten but ultimately manifested in alternate behaviors and visions. We will therefore begin with the invisibility of the site of the wound. We will begin with Krzysztof Wodiczko's *inner public*.

Throughout his career as an artist, Krzysztof Wodiczko has been a cultural facilitator as much as a cultural producer. With his vehicles, instruments, and projections, he has sought both to highlight the conditions that inhibit speech and to create alternate conditions to facilitate speech. In response to Michel Foucault regarding *parrhesia*, the practice of open speech in a democracy, Wodiczko points out that technically parrhesia belongs to the *politis*, the privileged participants of a democracy. How does one hear those who are denied democratic presence, those who by their very movement find themselves *in-between*? In-between countries, in-between legitimacy, in-between jurisdictions. In our conversation, Wodiczko asked: "What was the position of this project in the lives of those who animated the interiors and exteriors of my projections? Isn't it that they are the public themselves? … This inner public sphere is the way the group uses the project as a transitional object."[50]

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[49] This comment reflects my understanding from conversations I had with the artist in relation to his teaching practice and his work with survivors of trauma. The notion of agonism is developed in the artist's recent publication *City of Refuge,* in which he credits Chantal Mouffe, "Democracy, Power and the Political" and "For an Agonistic Model of Democracy," in *The Democratic Paradox* (London and New York: Verso, 2000). See Krzysztof Wodiczko, "A Memorial for September 11," in *City of Refuge: A 9/11 Memorial,* ed. Mark Jarzombek and Mechtild Widrich (London: black dog publishing, 2009), 12-49.
[50] From this point forward, all quotations from the artist, unless otherwise noted, refer to the conversation transcribed within the chapter itself.

He refers to D. W. Winnicott's term "transitional object" as a process of development, of healing, and of taking control of one's own life. Wodiczko was willing to relinquish control of his project to his subject group: immigrants whose lives were traumatized by the fall-out of fear generated after September 11th. He worked with fifteen different human rights and social organizations to reach the participants. The entire project took over two years. Wodiczko describes his initially tentative position in relation to these organizations: "It is a complicated process. I met with potential participants who then convinced their support organizations to take part in the project because they started to trust my intentions and see their own benefits. This took six or seven months to go through this process: to be rejected, to be mistrusted, to be put into tests… At first there is understandable suspicion, psychologically speaking there is the destruction of the project; the project has to survive and be reconstructed as something useful." In this way they became co-artists, actors (active) in their own lives, reconstructing traumatic memories as therapy, as cultural work, and as artistic work. This *inner public* used the project as a means to reintegrate intimately personal and politically public worlds far removed from the exigencies of the art market.

The *inner public sphere* is, for Wodiczko, a kind of meeting place – the operations of the project and the reverberations that emanate beyond the project. As the artist explains: "I have not organized this in my head yet as a theory; I just watch and notice that something else is being created that stays longer than the project itself." He also explains that this *inner public sphere* is not a closed system, that "art critics, filmmakers, and others connect" depending on their level of commitment and engagement. Yet the permeability of the social system must remain a critical question and so Wodiczko creates a kind of double effect: a division between *those who know* and *those who don't*.

By denying full visual access to the participating public, Wodiczko emphasizes the strained conditions that democracy has accepted in proposing a distinction between citizens with rights and citizens without them: the economic migrant and political exile in-between the *here* of temporary status and the *there* of untold horrors. Instead of empathizing with individuals whose physical, social, and political experience we cannot possibly know, the viewing public faces its own accountability for the conditions endured by others. In this way, Wodiczko radically shifts focus away from the viewer's empathic experience to that of the *inner public*, whose own act of bearing witness constitutes for the migratory individual not only open speech but also activism. We, the viewing audience, are left in the broad open space of the gallery, a cultural space and a market place – Benjamin's arcade – they, the *inner public,* are on the other side of a divide, an uncertain space – the city street. They are, as Judith Butler describes them, "a

population…cast out of the polis and into bare life, conceived as an unprotected exposure to state violence."[51]

In his four-channel video projection installation, *If you see something… ,* the audience witnesses passersby engaged in conversation on the sidewalk, presumably during cigarette breaks at work or meeting at a prescribed location before heading off together. The viewer is also a passerby whose act of witness is problematized by a visual haze (the frosted glass panels) that both determines the overall aesthetic of the work and establishes a protective barrier between participant and witness. This lack of clarity suggests a weakness in the epistemological conditions of witness: what can we know, what are the conditions of knowledge, and whose knowledge is recognized? Michel de Certeau uses the analogy of the passerby in his essay "Walking in the City."

> The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below," below the thresholds at which visibility begins. The walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner,* whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it.[52]

This plebian heroism is not a subject for the documentarian's literal transcription (as in social documentary photography for example criticized so rigorously by Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, and others in the early 1980s[53]) so much as it is for the poet's analogies or the novelist's first person narration shifting to the third. The roaming flâneur of Wodiczko's earlier work (evocative of his own position as a traveler, analyzing like Alexis de Tocqueville the inequities of social systems) reaches a point of *restless* stasis in *If you see something...* (reflective of the tension of surveillance and the ambiguous ethical position of the gaze).

The viewer needs to wander the gallery seeking out the dialogue but then fix herself in place to fully grasp the content. The shadow people shift restlessly behind the glass while talking but remain in place, their figures subtly moving out of view only as the dialogue fades but slipping back into view so long as the viewer waits – for another cycle – a movement that retreats, recedes, and then re-emerges as if it can exist only within the frame of the window. This stasis highlights the relation of the individual to

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[51] Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation State? Language, Politics, and Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 37; Butler refers to Giorgio Agamben, *Homer Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[52] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall (London, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

[53] For example, Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography) in *3 Works* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981) and Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" in *Thinking Photography,* ed. Victor Burgin (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1982), 84-109.

circumstances beyond one's control. The vulnerability that is so much a part of these relations emanates from the notion that "attachment is crucial to survival."[54]

Judith Butler sees Benjamin's *trace* (the mark left behind) as one of psychic vulnerability consequent of the attachment of "I" to "You". In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Butler determines that any narrative account is partial, incomplete, and inadequate as a subjective description because much of who we are is determined by what we cannot possibly know.[55] At stake is address: to whom are we speaking and what have they asked of us? Our ego develops before language; therefore primary relations in our infancy are accountable for much of our subjectivity. Our response to the world is due less to an anxiety of lack, she discovers, as to a plethora of overwhelming stimulation and messages. The trauma of this first address is critical to understanding how we respond to hurt, injury, and subsequent trauma. We are as human beings inseparable from our social relations. More significant than social norms is the interaction between "I" and "You." Our determinacy by the address of the other is inexorably linked to our obligation to them.[56] As viewers we begin to mirror the beings beyond the glass: locked into the space, walking away only to be drawn back, a kind of Freudian *fort/da*. The game of peek-a-boo, "gone away/come back again," or "here and there" that is necessary for the child's assuagement of separation anxiety is for de Certeau a reflection of both spatial and linguistic relations:

> In the framework of enunciation, the walker constitutes, in relation to his position, both a near and a far, a *here* and a *there.* To the fact that the adverbs *here* and *there* are the indicators of the locutionary seat in verbal communication – a coincidence that reinforces the parallelism between linguistic and pedestrian enunciation- we must add that this location (*here* – *there*) (necessarily implied by walking and indicative of a present appropriation of space by an 'I') also has the function of introducing another in relation to this "I" and of thus establishing a conjunctive and disjunctive articulation of places.[57]

In much the same spatial experience, here – there, I become obligated to the fate of Wodiczko's strangers in *If you see something…* , if only by recognizing my distinction from them: I am *here,* they are *there.*

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[54] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 45.

[55] This concept is also established by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[56] Butler is working primarily with the existential phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas. See in particular *Otherwise than being, or, Beyond essence,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

[57] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 99.

We are all under surveillance

The participants of Wodiczko's mise-en-scène are restricted to the space of the window frame where, we as viewers direct our gaze. Ours is a voyeuristic gaze, at one and the same time privileged and uncomfortable. We are made to feel almost guilty for over-hearing these intimate revelations.[58] In such an experience the wide expanse of the gallery space begins to feel restrictive, collapsing into the illusion of time and space that the windows represent, like the proscenium arch of a stage: "believed to be 'real' in itself, a 'reality' that existed in a parallel formation to physical reality."[59] Both viewers and actor/participants are caught in the present tense their storytelling creates. This is the sense of immediacy prompted by surveillance, characterized by theatre historian, Elizabeth Barry as "the predicament of being seen…and the guilty apprehension that we feel…that someone is watching our every movement, and judging us."[60]

Benjamin writes, "The arcades are something between a street and an *intérieur*."[61] Wodiczko establishes the large volume of time and space presented by the gallery as a place in-between, a viewing space. I enter a space that is distinct, isolated, and enclosed. There are windows so it is seemingly open to the exterior but once I have entered the darkened space I am no longer cognizant of doors. As I tune into the conversations that drift quietly through the space, there is no exit. I am dwarfed by the enormous volume, caught in the net of time with a *guilty apprehension that someone is watching* [my] *every movement*, listening to my every word. I also guiltily recognize that *someone* is myself. I watch and listen – the divisions of witness/spectator/spy uncomfortably elided. I am participating in a moment that belongs entirely to itself, cut off from the world, yet at the same time excruciatingly relevant to the world.

We are all under surveillance in this space – myself and the passersby – these immigrants are framed by the windows becoming *tableaux vivants*: part image, part spectacle. Since the Renaissance, the work of art has been thought to be a window on reality. Here Wodiczko, ignoring both the modernist and postmodernist trends to break

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[58] Thanks to C. Jill O'Bryan for sharing her own viewing impressions.

[59] I am playing with the theatrical concepts introduced by Michael Kobialka in "Spatial Representation: Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Found Reality" in *Theatre Journal* 44, no. 3 (October 1992), 329. Kobialka discusses *the experience of representation* as establishing a sense of immediacy.

[60] The relationship of confinement to surveillance is a theme that Dr. Elizabeth Barry discussed in a lecture on the playwright Samuel Beckett, "Beckett in Berlin" 16 March 2007, <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/people/academic/barrydrliz/berlinlecture> (accessed January 17, 2008).

[61] Benjamin, *Selected Writings,* 4:19.

with illusionism, conflates window and art, both literally sharing the same frame.[62] But is this truly illusionism as I suggested in my conversation with the artist? Illusionism in its Renaissance definition requires its receding perspectival space, which is nonexistent in *If you see something…* Instead there is a reliance on realism *as if* the actor/participants are there behind frosted glass windows and *as if* the windows themselves (actually a projected image) serve as an alienating barrier that causes us to become aware of our own position in the space and critical of the artificial divide. It is the 'making strange' of the experience through the normal, everyday incongruities such as the window washer and the dog pissing that adheres to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* – the recognition that while in a gallery viewing art we seemingly are viewing normal, everyday occurrences upsets our expectations causing us to question rather than accept as natural the experience the installation provokes.

Yet it is not the window barrier that separates these two publics but our own inability to know their experience, an experience that we might expect to discern just as we "read" a visual document. The desaturated colors of the figures viewed through frosted glass suggest a reading in black and white. The gray tones once a code for "serious" (as opposed to commercial) photography – both fine-art and social-documentary images – have, since the advent of digital photography and the publication of color images in newspapers, become coded as "historical."[63] This would precipitate a reading of document, memory, or memorial, suggested by the image as *memento mori*. I resist, however, an interpretation restricted to the past tense or to death for while these figures represent individuals whose lives are precarious, they are also very much alive. As Jan Avgikos points out: Wodiczko "eulogizes the living."[64] And as the artist said in conversation, "Memory has something to do with the word memento – a warning – 'I

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[62] The modernist break with illusionism emphasized the flatness rather than the suggested depth of the picture plane and traded a fixed-point perspective for views from multiple positions. The postmodernist break with illusionism emphasized the image as a constructed sign rather than a naturally occurring view.

[63] I am not aware of any published confirmation of these ideas but the difference in generational "readings" of black and white images was explicit during class discussions in my "Critical History of Photography" course. Of course, Larry Burrows began his color coverage of the Vietnam War for *Life* magazine in 1962, noted by Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others,* 37. However, by the late 1970s, *Life* still considered it too shocking to document the first open heart surgery in color and used black and white. A year or so later they considered their public sufficiently acclimated and assigned photographer Enrico Ferorelli to shoot the surgery in color.

[64] Jan Avgikos, "Krzysztof Wodiczko, Galerie Lelong," *Artforum* (December 2005), 278.

warn you, beware, be mindful, and be reminded.' It is an urgent call to disrupt the repetition of a catastrophe and injustice in the future."[65]

The semi-opaque glass protecting the anonymity of the speakers is also suggestive of the shadow world to which our surveillance has relegated them. They speak in closed intimacy, the window denying any threshold that might be crossed yet they almost gesture to us, recognizing our presence, perhaps even *warning* us. As one individual pulls out a document to show a colleague, by positioning it on the glass to show the verso, we see the recto disclosing for just seconds the possibility of some revelatory piece of information. And just as hands played such an important role in Wodiczko's public projections, here too, in private they almost plead for a connection that might release them from the torment of the space into which they have been locked. Just as we are privy to their conversations, they too seem cognizant of our role in this game of cat and mouse.

The policy of observation, surveillance, and capture is part of the system of national and colonial expansion that marks the economics of modern migration. It is also the game of the modernist flâneur introduced by Charles Baudelaire and discussed by Walter Benjamin who sets the flâneur as writer in the panoramic space of the marketplace.[66] The panorama – like the arcade and flâneur a nineteenth-century innovation – is a place of entertainment and spectacle. The modernist flâneur interpreted by many in the twentieth century as indicative of a non-conformist creative spirit, an individual set apart from the crowd, alienated by society but as such sufficiently detached to be a more accurate cultural chronicler (Dziga Vertov, Robert Frank, or Jack Kerouac, for example) becomes in the twenty-first century a more dubious individual of questionable intent as public space is redefined by the conceptual perimeters of terror.

This fascination with surveillance by the government, now ramped up for the twenty-first century as a multimedia dragnet with billboards, a revamped website, email alerts and television partners,[67] had previously been acted out in Fox Television Network's long-running program America's Most Wanted, which netted 2,500 calls a

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[65] This is closer to the interpretation of the use of the phrase by Tertullian, *Apologeticus* (197 CE), chapter 33. Tertullian's text is, in itself, akin to *parrhesia* – "that the truth, being forbidden to defend itself publicly, may reach the ears of the rulers by the hidden path of letters."

[66] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:18.

[67] "10 Is The Loneliest Number," On the Media, National Public Radio, January 25, 2008, Bob Garfield interviews John Miller of the FBI, http://www.onthemedia.org/transcripts/2008/01/25/04 (listened to on the date, transcript accessed January 30, 2008).

week from 8 to 12 million viewers.[68] Thus it is not only the Foreign Intelligence Security Act of 1978 (FISA) and its amendment the USA Patriot Act of 2001 that has widened the government's surveillance potential[69] but each and every citizen who is authorized to determine perpetrator from onlooker:[70] "If you see something, say something!" Or from Benjamin's perspective from 1938: "In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in the position of having to play detective. Flânerie gives the individual the best prospects of doing so."[71]

The beginning of another kind of account

The question arises: when is the act of observation *surveillance* and when is it *witness*? Wodiczko's interior projections of 2005 deal with the contentious choices a citizen is asked to make. Tactically, he sets the stage for a profound, philosophical struggle: what is the relation between reality, recognition, and interpretation? Who wields the power of representation? How are they ethically positioned? Judith Butler recognizes the discrepancy in representation as a discrepancy in voice: "The ability to narrate ourselves not from the first person alone, but from, say, the position of the third, or to receive an account delivered in the second, can actually work to expand our understanding of the forms that global power has taken…"[72]

After September 11th the use of the first person narrative changed dramatically and complicated (if not irrevocably changed forever) the notion of the "I" (as set forth by Italo Calvino's subject narrator or by Baudelaire's flâneur and Wodiczko's wanderer) and its contiguous neighbor "You" through the question of accountability. Butler responded to what she saw as a tightening of post-9/11 discourse; in speaking of the conditions (rather than the causes) of terrorism, she claims:

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[68] Terence Smith, "Arresting TV, a News Hour with Jim Lehrer Transcript, November 26, 1999, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/july-dec99/amw_11-26.html (accessed January 30, 2008).

[69] The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act was revised and accepted by both the House and the Senate just prior to its expiration date and signed into law by President Bush on July 10, 2008.

[70] Operation TIPS (Terrorism Information and Prevention System) was designed by the Bush Administration in 2002 to allow service workers to report on 'suspicious' activities in homes or hotel rooms; the program came under fierce opposition in the press, among civil rights organizations, and in congress; it was canceled by the Homeland Security Act of November 2002. See in particular Nancy Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002).

[71] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:21.

[72] Butler, *Precarious Life,* 8-9.

> …we have to understand not only how it is experienced by those who understand themselves as its victims, but how it enters into their own formation as acting and deliberating subjects.
>
> This is the beginning of another kind of account.[73]

The narrator "I" needs to cede to the subject "You" in order to understand the relation of one to another because the first person narration, as explained in *Giving an Account of Oneself,* is by function incomplete. Only can "You" complete the "I" – not in the sense of mirroring the "I" as in theories of subjectivity beginning with Heidegger and working through feminist theories of the gaze and postcolonial discourse of the Other – but in the sense of a dialectical debate in which positions of power are inscribed. This is Levinas' "face-to-face" encounter with the Other who cannot be reduced to sameness because of a simultaneous recognition of proximity and distance (here – there).[74] In connecting her philosophical theories to her political goals, Butler argues:

> Our collective responsibility not merely as a nation, but as part of an international community based on a commitment to equality and nonviolent cooperation, requires that we ask how these conditions came about, and endeavor to re-create social and political conditions on more sustaining grounds. This means, in part, *hearing beyond what we are able to hear*.[75]

"I imagine crowds of strangers presenting themselves in such unsolicited disclosures as they make their way through the city," wrote Wodiczko in 1998 about his piece *Aegis: Equipment for a City of Strangers* (fig. 2-7). *Aegis* shares an affinity with Benjamin's description of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus:*

> His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past… But a storm is blowing… This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.[76]

In *Aegis* the eyes and mouth are wide open, the wings are spread but progress is a storm and thus veiled. By 2005 the veiled link that Wodiczko establishes between his viewer and his projections is significant in comprehending the relation between seeing and saying. "If you see something, say something!" shifts to "If you see something, …listen!"

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[73] Butler*, Precarious Life,* 11.

[74] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo,* trans. R.A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985).

[75] Butler, *Precarious Life,* 17-18. Emphasis added.

[76] Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings,* 4: 392.

Wodiczko's public projections suggest that the official city is a city of victors over vanquished whose monuments maintain a notion of progress linked to a legacy of destruction.[77]

> The history of a nation or city, like every synchronic narrative, collaborates with the history of catastrophe by celebrating the lineage of 'our' progressive and victorious traditions. To avoid future catastrophes, daily disclosures of the often-hidden destructiveness of the present must be linked to critical recollections of past disasters.[78]

Naomi Klein also specifies "catastrophe" as both an historical justification and a political means for progress. In her recent publication *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), she shows how the political disciples of Milton Friedman's economic theories have exploited disasters to push through controversial legislative change (accompanied by repressive measures) with minimal hindrance or debate. Michel de Certeau wrote, too, of the relation between catastrophe and political ideology:

> The ministers of knowledge have always assumed that the whole universe was threatened by the very changes that affected their ideologies and their positions… When they transform their bewilderment into 'catastrophes,' when they seek to enclose the people in the 'panic' of their discourses, are they once more necessarily right?[79]

His 1984 essay from which I have been quoting, begins on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center and looks down to the patterns of the streets below before descending to his imaginative promenade. That he framed his comparison between footsteps and speech acts in the shadow of the twin towers is uncanny; that his "preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation"[80] lies under the surveillance of the *ministers of knowledge* seems only fitting. De Certeau's "pedestrian rhetoric… composed with the world's debris"[81] will historically transform into desperate sprints through a cloud of dust and rubble. The subsequent rhetoric is literally choked. Butler explains the absence of debate operating in the belligerent response to the attacks of September 11th as the binarism of "us" and "them" – "the invidious distinction between civilization (our own) and barbarism (now coded as 'Islam' itself)."[82]

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[77] Benjamin referenced in Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, 4.

[78] Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, 4.

[79] Certeau, *Everyday Life,* 95-6.

[80] Ibid*.,* 98.

[81] Ibid., 107. Note the similarity in language to Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* as De Certeau speaks of 'catastrophes' and 'debris.' See Benjamin quotation on previous page.

[82] Butler, *Precarious Life,* 2.

When Wodiczko frames his inner public within the boundaries of windows, is the shift from exterior to interior space creating a divide or a pass through? Much of our interpretation depends on whether we see his figures as real people or as silhouetted shadows and his frosted panes as windows or as a veil, membrane, or transparency. We have developed a connection to Baudelaire's flâneur in understanding Wodiczko's work: the lone individual isolated from the crowd and the politically, economically, and culturally exiled figure disregarded by but operating in the public sphere of everyday life. The flâneur is characterized by restlessness directed towards a keen observation of the spectacle of the marketplace. Benjamin understands that Baudelaire "never finds expression through a direct presentation of its inhabitants… *For the flâneur, there is a veil over this picture*. This veil is formed by the masses; it billows 'in the twisted folds of the old metropolises.'"[83]

How do we define *the public* and what kind of divisions are we inclined to accept? Rather than a binary stance, Wodiczko suggests a point of view from which the spectator can no longer take a solid position for granted. He also interjects the position of the third public, the inner public who perform not only a protective zone for open speech but also present an ethical position of legitimizing cross-cultural speech.

Lisa Saltzman in her discussion of the artist's 1998 public projection, *Bunker Hill Monument,* refers to the medium of projection as "a light source that transformed the image as index into the image as illusion, photograph into phantom. For even as that projected image maintained its properties of likeness, it was also, always, a mere semblance."[84] The life-size figuration the artist adopts in his interior projections, however, suggests a stronger enunciation in relation to twentieth-century theory of representation – a move away from image as sign to image as performance. His point of contention is not with our faith in the existence of the individuals portrayed but in our faith in the venue of the gallery to sustain the kind of meaning they provoke. Projection, however, is not limited to the medium itself but pertains also to the principle of viewing. Video / *videre /* "to see" – the emphasis given by Saltzman – suggests a closeness to documentation rather than to recognition, a more significant attribute to bearing witness in Wodiczko's assessment. There is more at stake in the concept of projection than the chronicle of an event. Projection also has to do with the perception of being.

Think of the floor-to-ceiling window for the moment as threshold – the viewer can cross to the position of the speakers only by imaginatively projecting her image to their side. Thus she metaphorically becomes the same immaterial projection as the "actors" on the set. Both positions, however, whether that of binary opposition or identification through resemblance, rely on the identical social practice of interpellation and our

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[83] Baudelaire, *Oeuvres,* vol. 1, 102: "Les Petites Vieilles" quoted in Benjamin, *Selected Writings,* 4:34.

[84] Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter,* 27.

cinematic viewing practice of suture.[85] In so doing, we project ourselves unconsciously onto the principle characters in a film and identify with their point of view. This is a form of appropriation.

Notwithstanding the hypothetical connection, identification by this method has its weakness because it establishes the perception of the viewer as the significant identifying principle. We never successfully recognize the other in his or her entirety except through the site of suffering and only in relation to ourselves.[86] The obliteration of the Other through identification is a form of secondary violence that limits the effectiveness of empathy as a political position.[87] Empathy directs the gaze to the Other but it is the response and the feeling of the viewer that is registered, not the conditions of the subject. "We were speaking of the project from the perspective of 'us' – the viewing public. What if we talk about the project from the point of view of those who bring their life to it?" asked Wodiczko. These include the participants whose figures we see framed in the space of the gallery windows but also the colleagues, lawyers, and social workers, all of whom generate a kind of protective zone in their lives and throughout the duration of the project.

Wodiczko's projections are the visible framework of a concept but, ultimately, it is the working through of that concept – the process – that is most important to him. His project is akin to Winnicott's *transitional phenomena* by which the infant or the traumatized individual gains "an intermediate area of *experiencing,* to which inner reality

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[85] Interpellation is Althusser's concept of misrecognition, derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, it has to do with the tendency to accept a particular cultural identity. Althusser gives the example of "Hey, you!" hailed by the police. Many within earshot will stop and turn, assuming the projection the police makes by his suggestive but anonymous appellation. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York, London: Monthly Review Press: 1971), 127-176.

Kaja Silverman combines the ideological concept of interpellation to the psychoanalytic discussion of the Other to form her theory of suture as our willingness to displace ourselves as subjects and to connect with the camera "eye." See Kaja Silverman, "Suture" (1983) in *Narrative, Apparatus and Ideology,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[86] This position is successfully argued by Saidiya Hartman in Part One, "Formation of Terror and Enjoyment" in *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17-112.

[87] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 20. In footnote 6, Hartman refers to Gayatri Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), in which she outlines the politics of translation and the ethics and terms of one's identification with others.

and external life both contribute"[88] and which determines "the cultural life of the individual."[89] Wodiczko, like Winnicott, is "studying the substance of *illusion,*"[90] as his projects follow the same developmental sequence that Winnicott outlines: 1) the participant relates to the project as already existing in the world, 2) the participant destroys the project, 3) the project survives the destruction, and finally 4) the participant remakes the project into something useful.[91] Wodiczko describes a complicated process of skepticism, adaptation, and finally trust that takes months and the cooperation of many different communities[92] before his project could be realized: "In order to establish contact with potential co-artists, animators of the interior, you need to go through various organizations that first protect them from an artist like myself. It's a danger; it's a risk."

At stake are the lives of the participants in the project – lives traumatized by persecution. Lives set akimbo by the process of alienation that takes the situation of the immigrant who is often escaping from conditions unimaginable and frames it as a threat to that immigrant's adoptive nation: the point of origin impossible and the point of destination untenable. "My emphasis is on the position of the project in the lives of those who are potential and actual co-artists. It is important how they can make sense of this project and make use of this project for their own lives and the lives of others," says Wodiczko. These are lives that are fraught with terror, traumatized by the fall-out of the terrorist act of September 11, 2001 and the US "war on terror."

Casting shadows, forging consequences

Yet as Fred Moten debated in response to Saidiya Hartman over the representation of trauma we are left with Adorno's petition that "the abundance of

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[88] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971), 2-3.

[89] Ibid., 100.

[90] Ibid., 2-3.

[91] See a similar delineation in Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* 94.

[92] The non-profit organizations with whom the artist collaborated were listed during the exhibition at Galerie Lelong. They are also enumerated in *October* 123 (Winter 2008), 175, and include the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (Asli); the American Friends Service Committee (William Coley); the Asylum Project, Immigrant Rights Program (NYMRO); the Civil Liberties Union Boston Chapter; the Coney Island Avenue Project (Bobby Khan); the Council of Pakistan Organization (Mohammad Razvi); Desis Raising Up and Moving (DRUM); Families for Freedom (Aart Shahani and Subhash kateel), Keeping Hope Alive (Jane Mee); the National Immigration Project (Malik Ndau); Peaceful Tomorrow (Nail Ashour); Physicians for Human Rights (Barbara Ayoite); Safe Horizons, Immigration Law Project (Ellen Friedland); the Visible Collective (Naeem Mohaiemen); and the War Resisters League (Steve Theberge).

suffering tolerates no forgetting."[93] So long as atrocity is committed then we are committed to trace its violence.[94] But how to do this – to uncover violence without creating violence? Wodiczko is committed to trace its violence in the corners that are forgotten, hidden, and overlooked. The participants in *If you see something…* avoid appropriation by virtue of their presence, their voice, their gesture, and their distance (or absence of availability to the viewer). In other words, the object is not always determined by the subject's abuse; the object can resist determination.[95]

Objects *do speak,* Moten claims, and in doing so resist their place in relation to the subject. He seeks to re-animate and re-evaluate the scream of suffering through sound, tenacity, and authenticity, re-engaging language with both spirit and materiality and, in so doing, reclaim the function of resistance.[96] In psychoanalytical terms, what is audible is evocative of both the visual and the sexual; it is also transmutable, flexible, indeterminate, and improvisational. Sound, for Moten, is the origin of African American spiritual music, jazz, and hip hop; it is the root of black radical thinking. In this sense, sound as a seemingly meaningless form gives birth to meaning while its re-enforcement fosters resistance. The tonality rather than the lyricism of songs express racism and resistance.[97] In refusing to re-appropriate the sounds of violence, Moten claims we weaken our opportunities for resistance. But the sounds of violence need not be reflected through the scream alone; one cannot help but think of *Porte-parole* and its exaggerated cyber mouth (fig. 2-8, 2-9). Likewise, Wodiczko's *If you see something…*

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[93] See Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). See also footnote 56.

[94] The author cites Asha Varadharajan's theories of emancipatory critique and resistance. The goal of her project is "to shift the focus from the decentered subject to the resistant object and to disentangle the practice of epistemology from the violence of appropriation." See Varadharajan, *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak* (1995), quoted in Moten, *In the Break,* 256.

[95] Varadharajan herself refers to Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* by adding, "[Adorno] seems to offer this double opportunity. His notion of the dialectical relation…between subject and object simultaneously insists on the carapace of identity that encloses the subject and on the resistance of the object to the subject's identifications." Quoted in Moten, *In the Break,* 256.

[96] Just as Jacques Derrida refutes Ferdinand de Saussure in terms of the visual dimension of language, so Moten refutes Saussure on the physical dimension of speech through sound. See Moten, *In the Break,* 13-14.

[97] Moten, *In the Break,* 20. Hartman would herself reevaluate her position and through her own expressive anguish write the story of the beating death of a girl on a slave ship although the historical record had left but "a few lines from a musty trial transcript [as] the entire story of a girl's life." See Saidiya Hartman, *Lose your Mother, a journey along the Atlantic slave route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 138.

demands full attention and a commitment in time to catch the dialogue that whispers through the gallery space. Focusing on the gesture of the animated discussions, but tuning into the voices (so close to breaking), I slowly lock in on the substance of the ongoing debates and in doing so I move away from myself and allow the other to speak. For Butler, "[t]his decentering follows from the way in which others, from the outset, transmit certain messages to us, instilling their thoughts in our own, producing an indistinguishability between the other and myself at the heart of who I am."[98]

At stake is the observer giving herself over to "the anonymous body of the actor into my ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss."[99] It is also anguish as I recognize the violence at the root of the text. As Butler points out, "[for Levinas] it is not a question of humiliating oneself, as if suffering were in itself… a magical power of atonement."[100] For Levinas, subjectivity begins with "the most primary level we are acted upon by others in ways over which we have no say, and that this passivity, susceptibility, and condition of *being impinged upon* inaugurate who we are."[101] For Butler, the recognition of vulnerability is not a recognition of dominion, of power relations, but of ethics, of accountability taking into consideration others as well as ourselves.

In Krzyszztof Wodiczko's *If you see something…* the viewer must make a choice to participate. I must commit the time to attend to the conversations and that commitment already signifies a willingness to subordinate myself to the speech of another. I am given visual pictures – projections that are at once singular, solitary images and also dynamically shaped by gesture, fluidity, rhythm, and syncopation – but we need to determine the sound. I cannot simply pass by and hope to "get it." In this large, bounteous space exists a moment of intimacy, an unwitting sharing of confrontation. I am not here to feel shame, sorrow, or compassion; empathy has no space. I am here, whether holding back or confronting the glass through which I can see no faces, to recognize my role in shaping the fate of others and in turn to be altered, influenced, and guided by their experience.

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[98] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* 75. Butler does not discriminate between verbal and nonverbal forms of articulation as "all kinds have their necessary limits" (60) but she emphasizes, "…no one survives without being addressed; no one survives to tell his or her story without first being inaugurated into language by being called upon, offered some stories, brought into the discursive world of the story" (63).

[99] This is Roland Barthes description of the cinematic close-up. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), reprinted in *A Barthes Reader,* ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Want, 1982/1998), 413-414.

[100] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* 88.

[101] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* 90. Emphasis added.

The monument is absent, history momentarily swept aside; there is no prosthesis that can help as transitional object in processing trauma. I am presented with shadows, veiled figures whose anonymity is necessary for personal security. Presence is necessarily linked to *here* but predicated on *there* (de Certeau's *locutionary seat in verbal communication* – between one another). Even traumatic memories figure as experience contained in the present. Empathy might absorb the Other but in Wodiczko's drama the Other is a shadow figure that cannot be absorbed into ourselves. According to the artist, "[the actors] break that wall to some degree and show also that it is impossible for us to really identify with their situation or establish a bridge of empathy." Pain is neither the image nor the scream but instead the rhythm of sound reverberating through the space. It is there to be acknowledged as the degree of separation between us, created as much by reprisal as by terror, leaving the figures colorless, de-saturated in the pre-dawn light of anxiety.

Shadows behind a glass, veiled but visible, muffled but audible; figures shifting, gesturing with minimal movement. They present to one another but they box with us, shadow boxing a fighter's rhythm facing up to the opposition, preconditioning what cannot be fixed either in time, space, or politics. This is currently the social rhythm of public space – a gesticulation of the desire for exchange – a suggestion of the silencing rhythm of censure. Soon words will spill out, they will not be contained, flowing ceaselessly, one after another without pause or comma, virtually incomprehensible in their gushing profusion. The noise will augment, become painful, visibly present as vibrations on the skin. All will be scarred, burned by the words' volcanic flow. Stillness, not as silence, but as deafening blow – a new kind of trumpet.

Peter Brook entitles his 1968 thesis on theatre *The Empty Space,* opening with the now famous lines: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged." But what does it mean when the one walking across the empty space is the one watching? Does the viewer walking across or do the shadows framing the edges become the performance in Wodiczko's space? The artist aesthetically creates Foucault's dilemma of not-knowing within knowing. We cannot know but, to extrapolate Adorno's plea, we cannot afford not to know.

What is the spectator's task? The Bush administration since September 11th has offered two positions – us (US) and them (Islamic extremists) – with alternative understanding as untenable politically and socially. Butler convincingly argues how the rapid labeling of dissenting critique as unpatriotic or anti-Semitic has reduced the level of complexity in political debate over the last few years.[102] This is a specific charge to a particular situation, nonetheless we can extrapolate to other circumstances Butler's insistence that a truthful dialogue is reliant on understanding how we receive information

[102] Butler, "The Charge of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and the Risks of Public Critique," *Precarious Life,* 101-127.

– as a proscriptive or as a potential. This same understanding is essential to appreciating the role of art in tackling subjects that have gotten snagged in the limits of political and cultural debate, particularly as interpreted by popular media, whether news or entertainment.

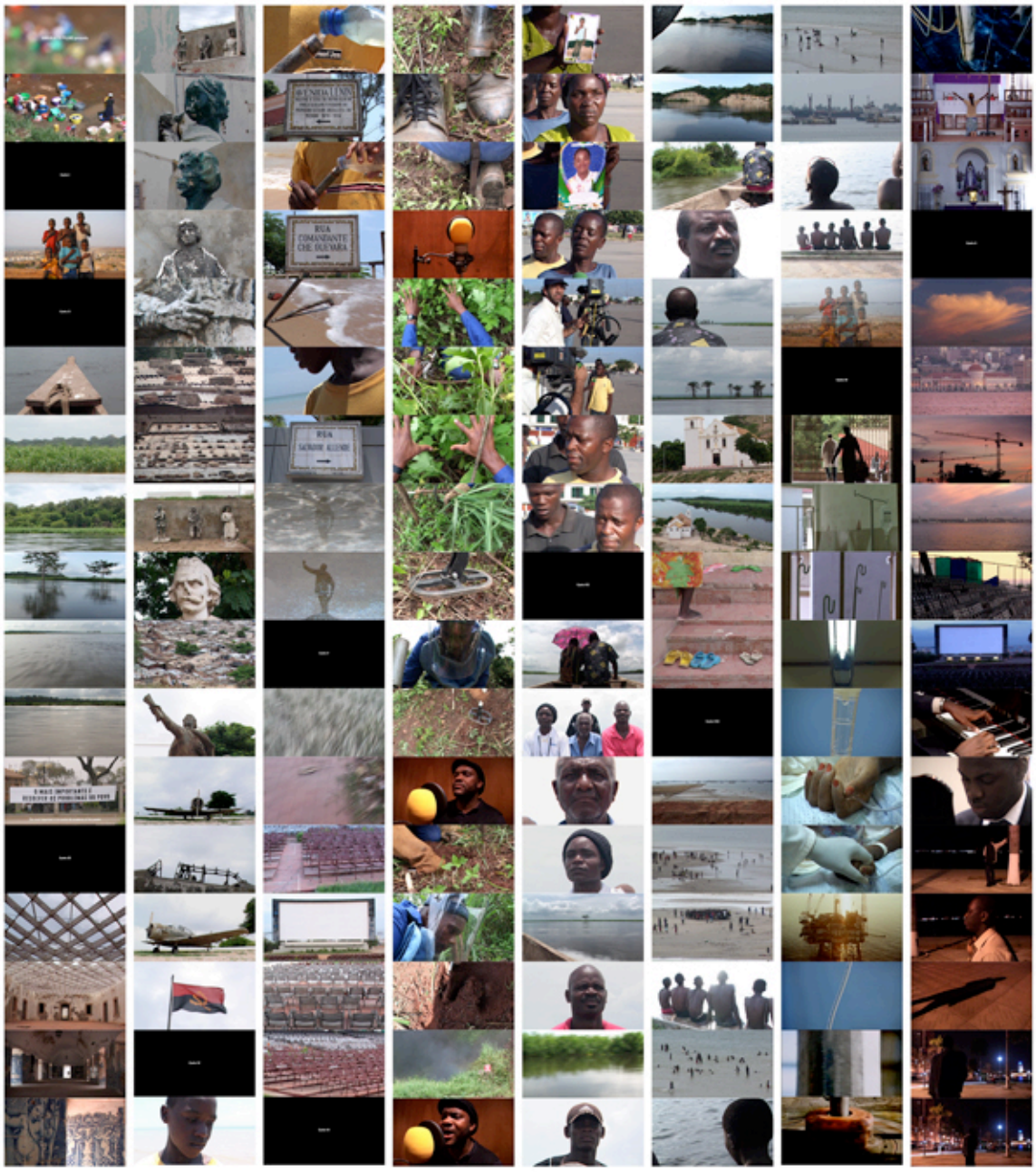
The work of art *If you see something…* suggests *the abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting*. Individuals, who as primary witnesses were traumatized by events beyond their control, brought their experiences to the surface and scripted their own text – eliminating in a sense the interpretive witness – determining how closely to approach the glass and how much to reveal – above all, speaking their own story. Fifteen non-profit organizations, individual witnesses, lawyers, social workers, translators, film crew, gallery staff, and the artist made up a temporary community. "It has never been discussed by any critics that there is such a thing as an inner production-related public sphere of a project that could become, say, 250 people, if we consider numbers as important," comments Wodiczko.

As process, the project is transitional becoming a statement about possibility, transmission, and the shaping of cultural experience. As art, the piece relies on the centrifugal pull of the Observer as "I" walk across the empty space. I do not speak. I relinquish narration. *For the moment my external behavior is that of a traveler who has missed a connection*. Those on the other side of the window continue their conversations, oblivious to my waiting until another kind of transition takes place as the pronoun "I" shifts to the pronoun "You" – *forever an anonymous presence against an even more anonymous background* – carried forward in this writing. We never come face-to-face: you have your space on one side of the glass and I on the other but just as the process of the project formed its own public, so too the performance perpetuates your thought, word, and deed. The immigration lawyer, the American Catholic whose business is shut down, the wife of the Lebanese American who has left her, the children ostracized on the playground are all carried beyond this passage in time, space, and dialogue – casting shadows, forging consequences.

Judith Butler cites a "representational challenge" in presenting the conditions of those cast outside the system. Wodiczko accepts this challenge through the contradictory position his *inner public* performs: "The speaker can speak but can the listener listen?" A story is told; this is the first step. When it is heard, the pronoun "I" cedes to the pronoun "You". As Slavoj Zizek realizes: Jacques Rancière argues that "political struggle proper is…not a rational debate between multiple interests, but, simultaneously, the struggle for one's voice to be heard and recognized as the voice of a legitimate partner."[103] Krzysztof Wodiczko by visualizing a painful division produces a double effect: on the one hand, he claims "it is the impossibility of real understanding of

[103] Slavoj Zizek describing Jacques Rancière's position against Jürgen Habermas in "Afterward by Slavoj Zizek" in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2000), trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 70.

their situation that is being projected;" on the other hand, he instigates a tessellated reaction generated by the *inner public sphere* that extends out into the city through a larger discourse shared as a means to formulate the pronoun "We" – an engaged critical dynamic in contradiction to the isolation of fear. He has not *missed the connection*: the mouth left mute marks the slash of a wound, afforded speech it trumpets a warning, but given embodiment through physical gesture, the voice gains legitimacy, becoming a full rhythmic presence breathing accountability into and for the *precarious lives* of others. *If you can put your five fingers through it, it is a gate, if not a door. If you see something…* listen! This is not a proscriptive but a potential: another kind of account.



Alfredo Jaar, *Muxima,* Galerie Lelong, New York, January 3 – March 18, 2006

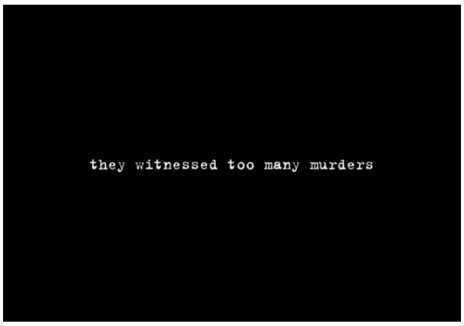
Fig. 3-1, Alfredo Jaar, *Muxima*, 2005, digital video, color, sound, 36 minutes, various stills representing each canto in order (reading from upper left, top to bottom, to lower right).

Alfredo Jaar, *Muxima*, 2005, Galerie Lelong, January 3 – March 18, 2006
[Exhibitions include: Lisbon, Geneva, Barcelona, Madrid, Rome, Kansas City, Los Angeles, and the 52nd Venice Biennale, African Pavilion]
digital video, color, sound, 36 minutes.

Fig. 3-2, Above: Canto I, 'Muxima,' six boys pose above the city of Luanda.
Fig. 3-3, Below (R): Canto V, an empty screen of an outdoor amphitheatre.
Fig. 3-4, Below (L): Canto VII, the journey to the Church of Nossa Senhora Da Muxima.

Alfredo Jaar, *Real Pictures,* 1995, linen photographic boxes with text each containing one cibachrome print, box: 2” x 11.5” x 9”, print: 8” x 10”.
Fig. 3-5, Installation view, Centre d’Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona, April 20-June 7, 1998.

Alfredo Jaar, *Lament of the Images*, 2002.
Fig. 3-6, Installation view of light wall at Documenta XI, Kassel, Germany, 2002.
Installation: 3 Plexiglas plates with inscriptions, light wall, mixed media.
Text panels: each 23 x 20 inches (58.4 x 50.8 cm).
Light wall: 6 x 12 feet (182.9 x 365.8 cm)



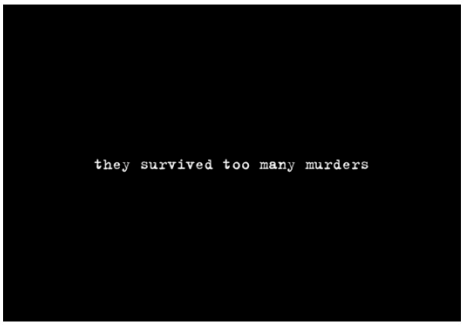


Fig. 3-7 (L), Alfredo Jaar, *Studies on Happiness*, Santiago, Chile, 1979-1981.
Fig. 3-8 (R), Alfredo Jaar, *The Sound of Silence,* 2006, projection stills.
Fig. 3-9 (Below), Alfredo Jaar, *Gold in the Morning,* 1986, installation view, Venice *Aperto*

Chapter Three / *Murmurs of the heart:* Alfredo Jaar's *Muxima*

> And I forgot the element of chance introduced by circumstances, calm or haste, sun or cold, dawn or dusk, the taste of strawberries or abandonment, the half-understood message, the front page of newspapers, the voice on the telephone, the most anodyne conversation, the most anonymous man or woman, everything that speaks, makes noise, passes by, touches us lightly, meets us head on.
> Jacques Sojcher, *La démarche poetique* (1976)

Preamble: my heart is clean

Title sequence: Silence…, darkness…, text scrolls down the screen: Rhythm in light / rhythm in color / rhythm in movement / rhythm in the bloody cracks of bare feet / rhythm on thorn nails/ yet rhythm / rhythm / Oh painful African voices![1]

Then those soft-washed colors of salt water and hazy white light of hot humid days, blurred, draw into focus with the credits (fig. 3-1). We see from overhead round, colorful pails; women are washing, bent over like Millet's gleaners, Degas' dancers, or Picasso's woman ironing but also like saplings under the strain of adverse conditions. The screen fades into and out of black for each canto title.

Artist note:[2] The title scene is an homage to Angolan mothers as Agostinho Neto does in his poem:

> My mother
> (oh black mothers whose children have departed)
> you taught me to wait and hope
> as you have done through the disastrous hours

Canto I: six boys, half are standing, half are kneeling, each with their hands on their heart (fig. 3-2). Stillness. Silence. A visual reference to the film's title: *Muxima*.

Artist note: Six children pose for the camera, smiling, and touching their hearts. Muxima means heart in Kimbundu, one of Angola's main languages.

Canto II: music begins, a full band version of *Muxima* by Os Kiezos, with a sense of urgency, the pulse of life blood beating in the veins; visually we see the bow of a boat, then a pan of the coast, the wake of the boat, again a pan – trees, grasses, cloudy skies – the music stops and the film cuts to a banner announcing: O MAIS IMPORTANTE É RESOLVER OS PROBLEMAS DO POYO (Most important is to solve the problems of

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[1] Excerpt from "Fire and Rhythm" by Agostinho Neto (1st President of Angola (1975-1979).

[2] The "artist note" is a single sheet of paper made available by the gallery for the sake of viewers who are looking for interpretive guidelines.

the poor); the suggestion of place; a journey; a thematic subtext, language as signifier indicating both context and content.

> Artist note: The start of a journey to the Church of Nossa Senhora da Muxima, located 160 km south of Luanda, Angola's capital. This church, built in the XVI century, is a simple structure located next to the Kwanza River, Africa's second longest river.

Canto III: a different version of the same song, by Ngola Ritmos, with fewer instruments and singers, this is softer, slower; we see the sky through the pattern of lattice overhead, the camera pans down to a wide view of an abandoned hall with crumbling plaster walls, partially tiled with decorative blue and white-glazed porcelain; then a series of near still-images of decayed, abandoned statues from a colonial past, a Portuguese past, bricks holding in place the tin coverings of roofs, an outstretched arm of a statue, an abandoned World War II bomber, the flag of Angola – an historical presence is established.

> Artist note: A visit to the Fortaleza, an old military casern where Portuguese colonial monuments have been abandoned. One of the many legacies of the Portuguese colonization is underdevelopment: the great majority of Angola's inhabitants live in extreme poverty in makeshift constructions on 'borrowed' land.

Canto IV: percussion, flute, and singer, Ruy Mingas; a boy's face looking down, the filling of a lead pipe with water from a plastic bottle; the water runs through the pipe to the sand, there is no functional purpose to this task except perhaps that it is soothing and passes the time. Signs declare: *Avenida Lenin, Rua Comandante Che Guevara*, and *Rua Salvador Allende* – place names signaling allegiance to both communist and socialist doctrines, language indicative of history and dreams.

> Artist note: The utopian dreams of a young nation crushed by a wave of corruption and ruthless global economic interests.

Canto V: ambient sound, running footsteps first on the grass then on the pavement; the camera moves with the steps, then stops to frame an outdoor amphitheatre with empty seats and an empty screen – the absent image – a frame within a frame, a recurring motif in the artist's work (fig. 3-3).

> Artist note: An emergency clearly exists but it remains invisible, and there are no witnesses.

Canto VI: ambient sound of birds chirping, footsteps in tall grass, twigs cracking; the camera focuses on the ground, there is no horizon line, a close-up shot of boots fills the screen, the feet walk carefully (almost gingerly), a figure crouches; cut away to a microphone – bold yellow foam ball on a stand – ambient sound disappears, music begins delicately, tentatively (the music is both diegetic and non-diegetic to the scenes depending on the edit); cut away to the underbrush, hands stretch out, spreading through the plants like fingers through hair, the careful cutting of grasses with thick gloves and machete, the delicate lifting of sticks, a surgical cutting of the underbrush; cut

to microphone, cut back to metal detector and then blue-suited, heavily masked and hooded African (a visual confirmation of the landmines he is searching); cut to a singer standing at the microphone, the microphone as large as his head; cut to gentle digging, determinedly like an archeologist; cut to distant shot of an explosion (ambient sound of explosion); cut to Beto de Almeida who begins, *a cappella*, his song "Muxima," which continues over the remaining images without ambient sound: women and men standing on line in the street, holding postcard images of children, waiting to be interviewed by a reporter and filmed by a cameraman. The scene, reminiscent of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires,[3] signifies the missing, many of them children killed by landmines, the legacy of a fourteen-year war of independence against Portugal followed by a twenty-seven-year struggle for post-colonial power:[4] subtle references to dramatic consequences of power struggles.

> Artist note: According to a recent U.N. report, there were at least 18 million active land mines scattered throughout Angola. About one of every 356 people is an amputee, the highest ratio in the world. As a result of the civil war, there is still a large number of missing people, and their relatives come every day to the Plaza da Independencia in Luanda where a television crew film their appeals and broadcast them daily on national television.

Canto VII: an orchestral version of the song by Os Kiezos; we see two men from the back, seated in the bow of a small boat, one holding a pink umbrella; the horizon line is low, touching the tip of the bow, and clouds wash across an otherwise blue sky (fig. 3-4); there follows a series of shots, near stills, group and single portraits of men – the passengers in the skiff moving swiftly across the water; the colors are of a porcelain glaze, hazed by the shiny reflection of the water and the clouds; their skin shines; they are expressionless, in a trance-like stillness from the monotonous movement of the skiff; the camera darts quickly from the boat to the shore locking on the white-faced façade of a church (the music stops); a brief overview of the church from the hill above cuts quickly to a close-up shot of sandals abandoned on the steps of the church, tiny ants crawl across the stucco, bare feet proceed up and down the stairs.

> Artist note: The journey to the Church of Nossa Senhora da Muxima continues. A popular song says: *My heart is clean, for that reason I can go to Nossa Senhora da Muxima without any fears or regrets and nothing will happen to me.* An Angolan proverb declares that *he who goes to Nossa Senhora da Muxima with an evil heart risks being drowned crossing the river to get there.*

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[3] An association formed to find the missing sons and daughters abducted during the years known as the Dirty Wars (1976-1983) in Argentina.

[4] Angola is the third most heavily mined country in the world. It is estimated that there are nearly twice as many mines as people in Angola and that 98% of its victims are civilian, often children playing in the fields. See "Landmines: The Scourge of Angola" by Ian Feinhandler and Filippo Nardin for the "*New England Town Meeting to Ban Land Mines,"* Boston, November 2, 1997, http://www.aeaf.org/papers/1997-11-ian-feinhandler.htm (accessed 4/15/08).

Canto VIII: guitarist, percussion, and chorus – bold – after several bars, a solo voice of Mario Rui Silva; we are given a distant shot of a shore-line dotted with bathers (men and boys), then six thin, strong backs, backlit in a halo of blinding white light, then a series of shots cutting back and forth between distant shots of bathers performing acrobatics on the shore and quiet, still young men sunning on a wall, while the petroleum port filled with tankers reminds us of the discontinuity between the hopeful idealism and the economic realities of both their local and global circumstances.

> Artist note: Children playing and dreaming of a better future for Angola. In the background, the only visible signs of a booming economy.

Canto IX: guitarist, Waldemar Bastos; primarily women walking but others too in an institutional foyer with gate and guard, a pink wall with a slashing white diagonal eases the incessant grid of the steel bars; a solo voice plaintively sings as close-up shots of an I.V. tube come into focus against a gray plaster wall followed by cut-aways between various close-ups of I.V. hooks, bottle, fluorescent light, and I.V. drip (I am already nauseous), a hand gloved in plastic holds another hand with painted nails that rests on a standard-issue dotted cotton fabric; we cut to a helicopter shot of an oil rig and back to the I.V. drip in the tube, then to a spinning oil drill, the I.V. drip, and water splashing around the rig; cut to a woman kneeling at a draped altar, arms raised in supplication, she remains in this position a long time seemingly talking to God or to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, slowly she brings her hands together.

> Artist note: …It is estimated that between 8 and 12 percent of the population of Angola is living with HIV-AIDS and very few resources are being dedicated to fight the disease. Petrodollars constitute 90 percent of Angola's income and 42 percent of its GDP… [I]nspite of the massive oil revenues, the Angolan government and its foreign partners have failed to distribute this newfound wealth in new AIDS programs or other…urgently needed health and social initiatives.

Canto X: pianist, Paulo de Oliveira plays passionately (on screen), image cut to a cloud at sunset – pink and white against a blue sky – reflecting color rather than holding pigment, a sea-side city at dusk, lights have just been lit, the empty amphitheatre, close-up of the pianist's hands (the music now diegetic to the film) with white cuffs, suit sleeve, and bracelet; cut to the face of the pianist as he plays; cut to the pianist – presumably – a suit jacket slung over his shoulder, arm stretched out, hand braced against a tree trunk along a promenade (music is now non-diegetic); the pianist slowly walks down the promenade, it is night, the city lights glow creating a shadow silhouette of our wanderer.

> Artist note: A pianist plays a very personal and nostalgic version of Muxima and ends his daily journey in the Avenida Marginal very late at night, dreaming of Muxima, the woman of his dreams.

Credits: all participants in the film are named, they scroll to the rhythm of Ruy Mingas' *Muxima*.

This is Alfredo Jaar's (b. 1956, Santiago, Chile) *Muxima* (2005), his visual poem to Angola, a thirty-six minute color film with sound that is to be screened in one sitting in a darkened room, viewers seated on hard benches. It is not looped, the intention being that the film follows a sequence and Jaar is willing to demand the concentration (rather than the relaxation) of his viewers or else release them from any obligation to the piece at all. I saw the film in 2006 at the Galerie Lelong and again in 2007 at Wesleyan University's Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery but it premiered in 2005 in Kansas City's Grand Arts Gallery, was screened also in Luanda, Angola and in Namibia and was included in the African Pavilion of the Venice Biennale of 2007. Reviewer Emily Hall found it weak in comparison to the politically demanding works Jaar has produced to date, particularly the various pieces of *The Rwanda Project* (1994-2000). Ben Genocchio found the film "hopeful." I find it neither. As I sat through multiple screenings in a cold, harsh environment (in the case of the Wesleyan installation), I recognized the misery of a broken heart.

Muxima is the film produced by an artist who has seen too much but cannot cease the compulsion to bear witness to the conditions born by those he loves. This artwork was produced not as a statement but as a necessity – it is the side of mourning as it begins to move beyond loss and ground itself in recognition rather than resignation. While the viewer remains stationary, the film itself fluctuates like a blade of grass between the movement of a breeze and the quiet stillness of hot sun. My mind obliges in dual agitation and meditation. Inspired by poetry, music, and narrative film, Jaar establishes rhythm as physical pulse with sensual cues (both auditory and visual) that prompt us to reflect on the missing links – the unwritten text of life experience – that completes the story suggested by the fragmented structure of the sequences. As he has always insisted, Jaar will not tell all; he will only suggest. His is the *element of chance introduced by circumstances*: the front page of newspapers or the half-understood message. It is up to me, as his viewer, to determine whether I have the will to join his act of bearing witness in order to complete the sequence through compassion, understanding, and response. This is not an easy task, for each of us has to account for our heart: guilty or clean.

Much of the movement in the film begins and ends with water: the washing of the clothes, the skiff on the river, the boy filling a pipe that spills into the sand – water coming from anywhere and going nowhere, the churning of the oil rigs, the playful acrobatics in the surf. Even the gentle, persistent drip of the I.V. tube suggests liquid as life blood and the 90% of our body that is not solid but responds to the tides and the pull of the moon – if only we were capable of observing such minutia. It is the minutia of daily life that make up the imagery in *Muxima* but it is a daily life that has its own rhythm and rhyme, close to both heaven and hell, experiences that a great deal of Jaar's potential audiences can only approximate, however much we may tune in to the lament.

There is the motion of walking as well: the heavy boots of the mine-detonator, the racing steps of a youth in the outdoor auditorium, the anonymous feet of the mendicants,

begging not to passersby but to God, the sultry paces of the pianist along the coastal promenade. While the wandering flâneur seemed to be an apt metaphor to explore the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko and the local application to a global context, the movement of footsteps plays a different role in Jaar's work as global connections bear down on the local context. Movement here is a life pulse, no different from the birth of a child, four every second, or the death of a loved one, two every second of every day.

In a way, film is a new medium for Alfredo Jaar but in another way it is not, for he studied both film and architecture as a university student in Chile. Neither is film a radically new medium for artists to explore as there has been a great deal of experimental film and video done by artists that moves beyond the few-minute loops familiar among graduate students and young artists on tight budgets. Leslie Thornton, for example, has been producing works for decades that reach feature-length but also are serial in nature and thereby extend across time (when linking the thematic content of multiple works) as well as within time (when caught up in viewing any one particular piece). The painter, Julian Schnabel, has produced four feature films since 1997 including *Basquiat* and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly.* Isaac Julien's films are shown in museum exhibitions rather than in the theatre. Recently Johan Grimonprez has created his second (near feature-length) film essay, *Double Take,* a collage of Cold War posturing, television, arms race, coffee, Hitchcock, and a quest to find the real in an overwhelming simulacra of duplication.

Neither experimental nor traditional, neither narrative nor documentary, *Muxima* evolves less as cinema than as visual poetry – inspired by the brevity of haiku but bearing the epic weight of human suffering, perseverance, and exploitation in the framework of cantos. Like the supplicant in the film itself, kneeling with raised arms at the altar of the Church of Our Lady of Muxima, Jaar has pleaded with his viewers from the beginning of his career to make some sign that they care. This is one more tactic in a nearly three-decade investigation into the efficacy of visual language to convey both information and a plea. Choosing the structural device of a *canto,* used in dividing the segments of an epic poem, he refers both to Ezra Pound (*The Cantos*) and Pablo Neruda (*Canto General*). I might add here Dante's *The Divine Comedy,* divided into one hundred cantos.[5] The etymological root of *cantos* is the Latin *cantus* meaning song, so we see that Jaar makes a complete integration of song structurally, ontologically, phenomenologically, and metaphorically.

[5] In 1999 Alfredo Jaar curated an exhibition in Sweden in which he contrasted the projections of images by twelve photojournalists: one each of their most horrific images followed by one each of their happiest images, alternating in sequence. He called the exhibition: "Inferno e Paradiso."

It is through song that we are able to realize mourning, that we negotiate our place among peers[6] and, it is through song, that Jaar retrieves for us the viability of the image. Song reclaims visibility from the blind spot of denial, on which – as Adriana Valdéz asserts – our image of the public realm is so often based.[7] Both Krzysztof Wodiczko and Alfredo Jaar recognize the transparency of certain communities to our field of vision and while Wodiczko establishes a self-conscious awareness of the act of seeing through or past someone, Jaar seeks to arrest our vision and hold it in place. *Muxima* is both simple and complex – a direct face-to-face that is also a palimpsest, interweaving elements of a cultural imagination that is African and Western, local and global, immediate and timeless. *Muxima* is, after all, created by a Chilean about an African country. It is a work of intercultural sensitivity and politics. My interest is less in Jaar's right to make such a film than in the fact that he did and, as his African participation in the African Pavilion of the 52nd Venice Biennale attests, his efforts were recognized.

My response to Alfredo Jaar's work is rooted in my experience as a filmmaker and photojournalist from 1977 to 1987. I am amazed at how clearly the artist recognized dilemmas in representation that I had to learn the hard way, experientially (fighting with editors and media sources on their selection and contextualization of my images). Yet, Jaar too admits failure (both in the following conversation and in his assessment of various works): failure to fully separate the image and the cultural process from a prescribed expectation by viewers, established by commercial media and patterns of consumption; failure to establish the image not as reality but as an indicator of reality; and failure of the image to serve its subject rather than its means of distribution. It is this struggle between the viability of visual art and the dilemma of representation that anticipates my complicity with Jaar's practice – both a critical engagement with the image and a fervent belief that there is something to be gained from the recognition of failure. Within this palimpsest of information (a certain journalistic drive) and experience (the understanding of human frailty), I found common ground in the following conversation with the artist that I have divided into four sections: *early decisions, sight and sense, movement and time,* and *anger and protest.* The artist has an exceedingly

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[6] This is the premise of Nadia Serematakis' anthropological work in Greece. See C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Devination in Inner Mani* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[7] Adriana Valdés, "Works 1980-2006: Notes for a poetics of Alfredo Jaar" in *Jaar SCL 2006* (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2006), 53. She states, "Being invisible. Being there but unseen. Being transparent, so that people look straight through you without seeing you. Being the blind spot in the other's field of vision…" See also Bruno Cuneo, "Practices of Devotion" in the same volume, 178-189. These ideas are reliant on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) and Jacques Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993).

complex and demanding practice and he travels much of the year. Alfredo Jaar nonetheless was very generous to respond to my request and took long pauses after each question, deeply considering both query and answer.

Conversation: choosing mistakes

Early decisions

KM: You studied film and architecture; you worked in the theatre; yet you chose to communicate as a visual artist from the beginning. What brought you to this decision?

AJ: I wanted to be an artist but my father thought this was a terrible idea so he convinced me that architecture was a better route. I accepted his logic and I am very grateful. I have always thought of myself as an architect making art. I use the methodology of the architect: when I approach a situation or a place, it is really the architect looking at context, site, scale, and movement. When I speak about my art and its objectives, I speak about the program I give myself just as an architect would. Everything I learned about art I learned by studying architecture.

Architecture, but also film, has always been very close to me. Recently I have been going back to my roots with projects that are really in the field of architecture and now in the field of film with *Muxima*. I think each one of these disciplines – art, architecture, and film – informs the other and it has been a fascinating process.

KM: One of your first projects after you came to the United States was to travel – you chose Serra Pelada in Brazil and you went with cameras and learned what it was to bear witness to someone else's struggles and the difficulties in being faithful to another's story. What made you choose the camera as your means to chronicle an event but to avoid a strictly journalistic approach?

AJ: Until the mid 1980s, I had been using a lot of found images. These images were already the result of manipulation of different kinds and I was re-manipulating them again. What was soon to be called *appropriation* in the art world a few years later was to me very problematic: the photographer, the editor, and the media producers already take so many decisions. Found images are already extremely manipulated. To think you are subverting them by re-appropriating them again is an illusion.

It was very natural for me to use photography, video, and film to document reality. This is not the same as representing reality. I was hoping to create a new reality. That's what we do as artists: we cannot and do not represent reality; we create a new reality, a model of how to look at the world, learn, and, perhaps, react to certain realities of the world. That is what interests me in working with images: it is the possibility of creating a new reality, a new model of thinking.

When I came back with these images from Serra Pelada, I immediately started to create certain display strategies that were not direct or frontal. I also started using public spaces like the subway or using light boxes and mirrors, and always trying to contextualize my images properly. I was trying not to throw them in your face like Sebastião Salgado started doing a year later with his images from Serra Pelada. I was

trying to protect them – that is the word – in order to precisely convey my experience as a witness. I had to protect them; I had to contextualize them. My installations created a context, a new context for a new reality. But I didn't go far enough. I was too young. Only after the Rwanda experience I went much further with the way I contextualized the images properly in order for them to really convey the experience. I can clearly identify two phases in my photographic work: before and after Rwanda.

Sight and sense

KM: Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz wrote in the 17th century: *Tengo en los ojos los dedos, y lo que miro tiento,* which suggests a problem of perception. *Slide + Sound* is a presentation making use of an economy of means. You were asked to give a slide lecture on Rwanda but still could not show images. You were, it seems to me, expressing the dilemma between seeing and knowing (a Cartesian dilemma) and also knowing by not seeing (a principle of empathy theory).

You also combined sight and sound and sensation earlier in *Opus* (1981) but, as far as I know, *Slide + Sound* (1995) is the next time you return to multiple senses for relaying information. Was this the seed for *Muxima*?

AJ: *Slide + Sound* was created at the beginning of the Rwanda Project when I was still struggling about how to convey certain information that I felt most people would rather ignore. The Rwanda Project became a series of both philosophical and practical essays of representation. I gave myself a program where I tried to use different strategies of representation during those six years: images, moving images, text, installation, objects, performance, etc…

For *Slide + Sound,* I had decided to convey the information only in a textual format. I was not ready to show images yet. Because of my background as a filmmaker, I sensed that textual narrative had to be more than text and so I naturally used a very special tempo, the lament. Later you can find similar tempos in both the *Sound of Silence* and in *Muxima*.

This tempo is also in a very early film I realized in 1985 about the Brazilian gold mines titled *Introduction to a Distant World.* A simple structure of different chapters that I call cantos or laments was there from the beginning. It is imbedded somewhere in me, and that is the only structure I have used so far in my films. I guess this confirms the notion that every artist basically repeats the same work throughout his life.

KM: Even as different as it appears.

AJ: I think of myself as a versatile artist: you look at my work and you could think that this could be the work of 50 different artists but in the end, when you start analyzing the structural elements, it is the same work – or at least the same spirit.

In *Slide + Sound,* besides this textual rhythm, I decided to add a musical component at the climatic moment in the piece where I announce why the genocide happened. I had to find a dramatic, poetic, and sad way to convey the terrible truth that the French supported the genocide to preserve the use of the French language in Rwanda.

Real Pictures uses a similar strategy: I was offering the text as a way of seeing. I had been incredibly frustrated: I felt that no one had seen these images, not in the literal sense, because they were visible, available to be seen. When I say they were not seen it is because the lack of reaction really meant that they were not recognized. I cannot believe that a human being is capable of looking at this and not react. This lack of reaction was for me a symptom of not seeing.

KM: *Muxima* is a very sensual film: of the senses, rather than sensational. You use sound but carefully, judiciously; it is a very quiet film overall, in spite of the jolt that occurs. How does this become as you, yourself, said: "The point where an image can make sense again?"

AJ: Because I believe it is very complicated to use images today, I have always tried creating an environment, a mise-en-scène to articulate the image and never leave it alone, as if I distrust the image and its capacity to communicate. I always created an architecture around the image in order for the image to communicate as effectively as possible its original meaning.

But when I found the opportunity to make a film, I felt liberated. Finally the medium itself was offering me all the contextual elements I needed. For the first time I didn't need to create this architecture around the image because context is in the nature of the film medium. Suddenly I realized that "I don't need this; I don't need that; I don't even need text now" because everything is contained within the language of film.

I realized that the language of film is the most complete of all languages. You can work with images, moving images, text, sound and, of course, all the visual vocabulary that you can imagine: color, composition, scale, light, etc…

But it is intriguing that you suggest that *Muxima* is a silent film.

KM: A quiet film.

AJ: Yes. The quietness of the film has to do with how much we edited the film down, trying to control it: control, an obsession of mine, to reach the most perfect economy of means. We filmed almost 22 hours. We ended with a 36-minute film. The process of editing was a fascinating process where I fought all the way with my technical editor. He kept saying, "But you're leaving the best stuff out! This is fantastic! Why do you want to kill this?"

I had this obsession about haikus. I wanted to test the possibility of working in film like you work in poetry with haikus. The plan was: let us try to convey the maximum with the minimum possible. We had filmed amazing scenes that were left out because they were too spectacular and I was afraid the spectacularization of a scene created the risk of the spectator going in another direction. I wanted to have her there, to hold a quiet conversation, and I felt the power of the sound and the repetition of the music worked as a stabilizing device by offering continuity, tempo, rhythm. Repetition, but without being repetitive, because I was using different interpretations of the song.

KM: You've moved on to my next question about the process of collecting and editing the images. With film, the editing process is a coupling, a piecing together, but you also

have still photographs imbedded within the film and these are distinguished through isolation. Can you talk about the play back and forth between piecing together and isolating images?

AJ: The editing process is fascinating because as you know, from the same material two different filmmakers would end up with two totally different films. If one thing characterizes my work as an artist, it is that I feel free. I am not interested in any kind of rules. In the film, a still image is a sound of silence. You will not see a still image with sound in the film. The film has a certain rhythm, structured both by sound and silence. If music is a strong characteristic of the film, so is silence. The still images helped me to convey that.

KM: You are also working with juxtaposition: for example, the scene of the landmine juxtaposed with the recording studio; the I.V. drip juxtaposed with the oil drill. These are very important conflicts of presence in the film.

AJ: This is where the haiku format comes in. For example, in Canto IX, you have three elements: the AIDS patient, oil exploration, and the church. Those would qualify as one line each of a 3-line haiku. Here, I wanted to suggest that in spite of the dire conditions of the health problems in Angola, where 10-15% of the population suffer from AIDS, and in spite of the enormous wealth generated by the exploration of oil (8% of our oil in this country comes from Angola, the second largest oil producer in Africa), they do not connect in reality. There are no funds going from here to there. In that same canto, the church comes in as a desperate solution. This is where we find solace; this is where we find our way out.

It was a simple and poetic way for me to connect what are just fragments of reality together in one idea. The same happens with the landmine canto: landmines on one side, missing people on the other, mothers and fathers searching for them in a public square every day (filmed for public TV and broadcast daily at 5 pm) and then music because life must go on, because art can still give us what reality has taken away. The presence of art. Always.

I had the most trouble with my editor in Canto IX, where we spent an entire day filming at the church. We filmed an extraordinary scene with 15 women raising their hands and moving on their knees to the altar in silence! To this day, my editor doesn't believe I didn't use that scene but chose instead the single woman who we see already in front of the altar. Perhaps it is a mistake but I am too concerned that these other images could trigger certain connections to other all too familiar spectacular and exotic images…

KM: …and give it another meaning and take it some place else.

AJ: Exactly. So even though it was an extraordinary image and it would have been legitimate to use it since it was real, I was hesitant to use it. Spectators come in with a certain cultural baggage and a certain frame of mind and they are prepared to read these images in a way that has already been set up by the media for all our lives. I have to struggle against that kind of pre-fixed interpretation and to find images that would…

KM: …negate the obvious.

AJ: Yes, exactly, to negate the obvious and take them in other directions. I don't know if I have accomplished this and it was a very painful process to edit down to the minimum but it was a fascinating and, I believe, necessary process.

Movement and time

KM: Film, of course, is also about the passage of time *as the crisis that it endures*.[8] You blame yourself for having failed to communicate the horror of Rwanda and there was an urgent need to communicate immediately but in *Muxima* you take another approach. Does witnessing perhaps begin to take place within the inexactitude of time as what we see and hear resonates very slowly, accidentally, and occasionally? *Muxima* seems to give allowance to this imperfect means of recognition.

AJ: The challenge of *Muxima*, as I tried to articulate in Canto V, is that Angola as a country does not have an image. When you say Angola most people know absolutely nothing. Very few identify Angola as an African country and even fewer think of it as a former Portuguese colony in Africa. My dilemma was: How do I start from scratch? How do I establish the most basic image in order to communicate more complex information?

If I start from zero and I am afraid the images I might use will trigger the wrong reading, then I thought: I have to go slow, I have to go in a very fragmentary way to compel the audience to have the willingness and the need to complete the picture. The tools will be sound and time. Time in *Muxima* is an essential element of the film. Each canto has a different duration. Some cantos are only 15 seconds long and some cantos last 7 minutes.

I was thinking about Deleuze who wrote two extraordinary books: *L'image-temps* and *L'image-mouvement*, where he analyzes film and discusses two fundamental dualities: image in movement and image in time. I didn't rethink the theory but thought it would be very interesting to work based on these two dualities. Certain cantos are truly about the image in movement and others are really about the image in time. In Canto I when the children appear in a still image, there is no movement. This scene is about getting to know these children, to have them on the screen for the first time. They say "muxima"[9] and touch their heart. It is really about time and not about movement.

Canto IX, I think, is perhaps the perfect balance between the two. I was able to capture the movement of the serum going down the I.V. tube; that is about movement and time because it goes at a certain rhythm. This connects visually with the movement of the pipes going down into the water for the oil exploration: again movement and time. These are two scenes that don't match but that create an explosion of meaning

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[8] In this reference, I use an expression from Carol Jacobs' *Telling Time: Lévi-Strauss, Ford, Lessing, Benjamin, deMan, Wordsworth, Rilke* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

[9] *Muxima* means "heart" in Kimbundu, one of Angola's main languages.

suggesting the effect one has on the other in spite of having no obvious direct connection.

KM: Why do you think viewers (critics, specifically) interpret *Muxima* as hopeful and non-political rather than as a witness to the consequences not only of colonialism but also of global capitalism? Not just what was but what is and what might be?

AJ: Some viewers do interpret and see all the political elements of the film but the truth is that they don't go as far as I would like them to go perhaps because I refused to include all the political information in a more obvious way. For me it is there, in a kind of poetic and veiled way. We did many different versions of the editing and I was looking for the perfect balance: sometimes it was too political and the poetics were lost; sometimes it was too poetic and there were almost no traces of the political. It was very difficult for me to strike that perfect balance.

In my view we can apply this for every single work of art. Sometimes I give myself the freedom to insist on the poetry. As you know in my work I have been rather heavy on the political/didactic side and I have always been reproached for that. So here I think it was thanks to music that I felt I could give myself the license to be more poetic. I was hoping that images, with minimum effort, would communicate the political urgency of the film.

Of course, when I premiered the film in Luanda, Angola, …

KM: …they saw it.

AJ: …they saw it. This immediately confirmed to me that the information is there but we are not prepared to see it because we do not have the historic knowledge that we need to see it. And it is not my fault. In a lot of my work, I am a frustrated journalist. I am trying to inform and inform and inform. I have carried that weight on my shoulders all my life. It was great to liberate myself somewhat, not fully… but somewhat. I said, "OK, well, come on; just stop it; be lyrical, be poetic; just fly a little, enjoy it, the meaning is there." It was confirmed in Luanda when they clearly understood what I intended and it was sadly confirmed in New York that most people could not read it. That is the reason why I wrote a few notes on the film where I describe and explain each canto. These notes are available to the audience before entering the space but I prefer that they read them after.

Anger, protest, and ethics

KM: *Muxima* seems to me to be a film about departure and saying good-bye as much as it is about giving presence to Angola. Can you discuss the mourning that pulsates through the film?

AJ: Unfortunately everywhere I go I find too many reasons to mourn and Angola is no exception. A million people died during the civil war; Angola has the largest amount of amputees in the world because of some estimated 12 million landmines still in the ground; sadly, there are only 3 NGO's working to remove them. This is yet another war that the world didn't even notice, like so many other tragedies that are happening right now as we speak.

I had to struggle: how do I mourn, how do I acknowledge this, but without articulating a scream so that I could connect with the audience in a more poetic, touching, and sensual way? I was afraid the hard, political information would create a distance: people would feel totally ignorant, disconnected, and guilty – which they are – but to throw that into their face in this case was not conducive to have the music poetically enter their consciousness. You leave the theatre with the music in your brain and heart. You cannot remove it; you have to listen to that song ten times! I think it was a simple but effective device to make the audience enter that world.

I hope the mourning is there; it is always there; the song is the sound of mourning in spite of the joy of certain elements of the sound. It is in the images too. The film is filled with melancholy: what the Portuguese call *saudade*, which is an extraordinary concept. Fernando Pessoa, one of my favorite poets, wrote that if you are not Portuguese you could never understand what *saudade* is. *Saudade* has been translated as nostalgia, as melancholy, as longing. The most beautiful definition I have read about *saudade* is that you feel *saudade* at the precise moment when you realize that everything in life is ephemeral…

That element was there; it is ironic because most people don't know Angola so what do you long for? Perhaps I managed to convey an image of a country or a place that you wish you had known before because it communicated to you certain things, perhaps certain warmth, certain sounds, certain ideas, certain images that you thought: "Oh, this is beautiful, what am I missing? Why didn't I know about this?" It is a strange thing.

KM: It is the recognition of a parent or lover – the longing, the knowledge of accountability for someone else.

AJ: [A long pause…]

KM: What is the biggest misunderstanding about your work over the years?

AJ: I think there are two. One of them is that people think my work is about the *others* while it is really about *us*. I have always tried to suggest that I am not speaking for anyone but myself, that I am trying to articulate the relationship I see between different communities: it is about "us" *and* "them." How do *we* relate to them and convey information about them? That is the first misunderstanding: It is not about the *others*; it is about *us.*

The second misunderstanding is when people attack me for dedicating resources to these situations that are tragic. As if these issues were not worth a certain amount of dedication, which requires a certain amount of funding! As if we should condemn these situations to invisibility! I have always thought that these issues are important; they deserve our attention. I am dignifying my subjects by dedicating time and resources to make them visible. It seems that artists can spend fortunes creating works about nothingness but that's ok. The logic of that thinking escapes me, honestly.

KM: I heard you speak at the Atrocity conference. Someone in the audience attacked you as if your dedication was exploitative.[10]

AJ: Right, but what can you do? If you take that line then you say, "OK, in that case, let's not talk about this. Let's condemn these situations to invisibility." Why? Because I am white? Because I am privileged? Because I live here? Why bother with this? I prefer to fail rather than ignore these situations.

The kind of feedback that I get from the people I work with makes me feel it is worth it. That is why I have always quoted the East German poet and dramatist, Heiner Müller and his concept of "choosing mistakes." With my experience, I am aware of what I am doing and where the critique will come from and I can live with it. I can choose my own mistakes.

I know as well the positive elements of what I am trying to do. The reactions I got in Angola and in Namibia with *Muxima* were mind-blowing! People were fascinated that a white guy who lives in New York and who was born in Chile was able to do a film like *Muxima*. They couldn't believe it. They thought I had consultants in Angola or that I lived there. No, it is possible to do something that is deep and on target about certain realities.

Muxima was shown in the African pavilion in the Venice Biennale last year.[11] I was one of the few non-African artists invited by Africans themselves to represent Africa in Venice. So people would ask me, "What are you doing in the African Pavilion?" This was a beautiful recognition by African intellectuals and African culture that I have managed to convey a certain, perhaps "corrective image" of Africa to the Western world; it is also of course a critique of how the West has treated Africa in images and representations. The kind of recognition that I received from Angolan intellectuals suggested to me that perhaps, yes, I may be right.

> Recognizing the intolerable means casting doubt on our own identity.
> It is necessary to assume the responsibility of deciding what is intolerable
> and then taking action, ready to pay the price of error.
> Umberto Eco, *Five Moral Pieces* (1997)

Reflection: a messenger of silence

A voice charged with all our listening…

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[10] This conference is discussed in the introduction: "Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis," City University of New York Graduate Center, December 9, 2005; co-sponsored by the Humanities Research Institute, University of Leeds, UK; The Center for the Humanities, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York; The British Academy; and Amnesty International, USA.

[11] "Check List: Luanda Pop," African Pavilion, 52nd International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy.

It should be no surprise to the reader at this point of the story of these three artists and these three works that my attraction to them is equally visceral, intellectual, and subliminal. It has been a continual surprise to me, as author, however, the chance surfacing of long buried memories prompted by seemingly nothing whatsoever – the scar on the bark of a tree, the discovery of a Hiroshima monument (witness to the bomb) now hidden in a quiet corner of upper Manhattan – but in fact arising in very specific relation to my research. The overwhelming surge of memories led me to the commitment of therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder: stories gaining new shape in parallel formation to my dissertation chapters. One of the darkest came back to me as I spoke with Alfredo Jaar in his studio. It dated from a period of five weeks during the cusp of December 1985/January 1986 when I traveled to Haiti with a Swiss journalist to cover the conditions on the island that would lead to the fall of the Duvalier regime, riots, and chaos while we were there. I did not recite the story then but I hinted to the artist during our conversation that I too had witnessed and been endangered by conflict. Thanks to quick thinking on the part of my journalist companion, I avoided rape and death at the hands of a tonton-macoute, reputed for indiscriminate brutality.[12] For nearly a quarter century, I closed that story in a box. What would it have meant to anyone? Who would have believed me?

It did not help that the magazine editors spat at us on our return: "Where are the riots? Where's the blood? There's a war going on over there! I can't sell this!" We had covered the conditions not the conflict itself – no one was interested and so the images, too, went into boxes. I was reflecting on this as I considered Alfredo Jaar's *Real Pictures* from 1995, part of *The Rwanda Project* (1994-2000), which consisted of an arrangement of boxes, each containing one printed image and bearing on the lid a description of the image closed within and the conditions of its making (fig. 3-5).

> Ntarama Church, Nyamata, Rwanda
> 40 kilometers south of Kigali
> Monday, August 29, 1994
>
> 400 Tutsi men, women and children who had sought refuge in a Catholic church were systematically slaughtered by a Hutu death squad during Sunday mass. Churches were one place that the Tutsi fled to when Hutus pursued them, and they are the place where thousands were trapped and met their deaths. In southwestern Rwanda alone, 22,000 Tutsi were killed in Roman Catholic churches.
>
> This photograph shows the church in the background. It is a modest, one room brick building set in a quiet country landscape of trees, grass, flowers and sunlight, A simple wooden cross juts into the tree line and catches the rays of sun. A woman is standing in front of the church. She has witnessed the massacre. Her gaze hits the ground at the bodies of her neighbors, friends and family.

[12] Tonton-macoute was the common name for the Haitian paramilitary force created in 1959 by François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. After his death in 1971 they reported directly to his son and successor Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier until his ouster, February 6, 1986.

The masses of boxes, installed in subdued light became funereal marking the conditions of genocide and its aftermath. They were simultaneously testimony of survivors and memorials to their losses. While Alfredo Jaar and I had encased our images under different circumstances and for separate motivations, my defeat in communication recognizes his own insistence on failure. Jaar speaks of the failure of his strategies and his audience is known to respond with suggestions.[13] This is not the point. His failure is not functional, capable of compensation through an adjustment of means; it is a failure locked into the deepest remorse of bearing witness when no matter how bitter the scream, how sweetened the fear, there is ultimately no one to hear – the screen is blank (fig. 3-6). I find my way into Jaar's work through my own fear and a most profound mental suffering – small in relation to those in the midst of conflict, seismic in relation to the repercussions to my own consciousness. I enter his work through silence.

Does my personal story serving as an entry point into another's work pollute the integrity of that work?[14] I cannot deny the possibility but I also claim as witness the right of shared recognition. When I approach world conflicts such as Bosnia and Rwanda, I return psychically to January 1986 when, standing face-to-face with a machete-bearing tonton-macoute with my passport and life in his hand, I was saved through a public act of sexual humiliation, while many others were lost both before and after my brief interlude in the country.[15] I return to the "freezing moment of failure" as repression is sometimes referred to in psychoanalytic discussions of trauma: witness to the fragility of life not in relation to nature but in relation to the brutality of power leaves one in a vulnerable space of yet another kind of repression. The repression caused by power struggles or the repression caused by psychic defense must both be confronted but as Jaar has discovered over the years, the confrontations must be tactical – at times abrupt, at other times circuitous, but ultimately persistent. He does not freeze; on the

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[13] One such example is the Q&A of the public presentation sponsored by The Aperture Foundation and held at their NYC gallery, "Susan Meiselas in conversation with Alfredo Jaar," October 8, 2008.

[14] This question first arose in a theoretical discussion between the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko and myself but I would like to place it for the moment in the critical lens of Dominick LaCapra's notion of 'surrogate victimage' and the necessity of ethical, social, and historical specificity in being critical of any extreme identification with the victim or survivor. However, as LaCapra explains "…it is very important to distinguish empathy from identification and to explore the specific ways it may and should be articulated with such [ethical] demands and responsibilities." See LaCapra, "Writing (about) Trauma" in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 211-213.

[15] In fact, within a few days, the political tides turned and it was the *tonton-macoutes* who were desperately trying to save their own lives.

contrary, he admits in a 2005 discussion, "I'm a believer in the power of ideas […] No technical or domestic or administrative problem will stand in my way […] I have a project that waited ten years to become technically feasible." That project is entitled *The Sound of Silence*.[16]

Jaar describes a distinct transition: pre- and post-Rwanda. I would like to consider this transition in the role of the artist as messenger as it relates to the development of an ethical subject in the work of Alfredo Jaar. I will reflect on silence and the absent image as well as the tactics of movement, time, and the presence of song as *saudade* – sensual longing – to create an impetus for involvement as a political subject cognizant of the consequences of the *geography of anger*.[17]

The oeuvre of poet and philosopher, Edmond Jabès, speaks of the pain of bearing witness and it is to his sensibility that I turn for theoretical grounding: "…it is because I have reached a crucial point in the practice of writing, the heart – and often darkest night – of an incessant questioning of letter and sign (caught at the perilous point of becoming word and book) where I can speak to – or of – others only in the intimate voice of dialogue, a voice charged with all our listening for a voice that, as we know, once broke the silence for itself."[18] This is the voice of witness, the voice *charged with all our listening,* the voice of the messenger. As we saw with Krzysztof Wodiczko, silence – an unwillingness to hear – implies an illegitimacy of voice. The fascination of the worst: the invisible. To be silent, to be without voice, is to be invisible. Silence can also be a form of complicity, the guilt of non-contestation. To a question posed by his editor, Jabès responded: "…As I probed more deeply, I began to realize that Judaism is an extended lesson in reading, which involves an endless questioning of the writer. Adorno once said that after Auschwitz we can no longer write poetry. I say that after Auschwitz we must write poetry but with wounded words."[19]

We can speak *to – or of – others* only when we are also able to listen. While silence can suggest the illegitimacy of voice it can also reflect the space of listening.

> To fall silent in turn, with the
> Hope of dissolving into it.[20]

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[16] I describe this project briefly in the Conclusion. The quote is from Alfredo Jaar, "Conversations in Chile" (with Sandra Accatino, Pablo Chiuminatto, Bruno Cuneo, Ana María Risco, Adriana Valdés, Rodrigo Zúniga, 2005) in *Jaar SCL 2006* (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2006), 77.

[17] The term "the geography of anger" is taken from Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[18] Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Margins* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 39.

[19] Jabès, quoted in the Series Editor Forward, *The Book of Margins,* ix-x.

[20] Ibid., xv.

When we fall *silent in turn* we yield to another. We yield to the existence of pain, suffering, and impotency. We yield to the motion of writing and the intimacy of dialogue. We yield to time as the evolution of thought and movement as the passage of time. "In order to see, to understand, you start from what does not immediately yield to eye and ear."[21] You yield to absence. Jabès saw freedom in writing but also violence in truth. "The *involuntary* has always, for us, been the *inevitable,*" he writes. Death is of course both involuntary and inevitable. Death is "violence come to its end."[22] "Death's shadow is white."[23]

An emergency exists…

In *Muxima,* Jaar embraces the ephemeral by emphasizing absence, incompleteness, and transience. There is the image of the white screen in Cantos V and X, the frame within the frame, turning inside out the very medium he writes so eloquently upon. The empty frame is a motif of the film but also of his oeuvre. It represents failure. Elaine Scarry writes, "Alarmed and dismayed by his or her own failure of language, the person in pain might find it reassuring to learn that even the artist – whose lifework and everyday habit are to refine and extend the reflexes of speech – ordinarily falls silent before pain." We are inadequate to the task of ethical engagement and Jaar feels this inadequacy deeply. He asks the question Scarry discerns through the relationships in Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers:*

> But the implicit question that is being asked here, 'How is it that one person can be in the presence of another person in pain and not know it?,' leads inevitably to a second question…, 'How is it that one person can be in the presence of another person in pain and not know it – not know it to the point where he himself inflicts it, and goes on inflicting it?'[24]

The empty screen represents not only the failure of representation but also a broader failure of responsibility. Jaar sets himself an impossible task: to change our awareness and our response to the world. This is a philosophical task of infinitely demanding principles.[25] It is a functional task that is doomed to failures. In *Muxima,* Jaar has accepted the poet's response to atrocity as *writing poetry with wounded words.*

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[21] Jabès, *The Book of Margins,* 30.

[22] Ibid*,* 5.

[23] Ibid*,* 7.

[24] Scarry, Elaine, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 12.

[25] The concept of infinitely demanding comes from Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London, New York: Verso: 2007/08). I will discuss his ideas further along in the chapter.

"To have pain is to have *certainty;* to hear about pain is to have *doubt,*"[26] confirms Scarry. It is very difficult to believe what is beyond our experience but Jaar refuses to accept this as a limitation. Silence is unknowing but accepting unknowing is opening oneself to a broader form of understanding, one that does not fill the space with facts and opinions but with questions. This for Michel Foucault is the passion of philosophy, an activity that "…rather than legitimating what is already known, […] undertak[es] to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think in other ways (*penser autrement).*"[27] Alfredo Jaar in his aesthetic practice opens his viewers to both the fear and the art of silence as well as the displacement of certainty into other ways of thinking. This is an understandable position for an artist who began his career as an activist on the streets of Santiago during Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship (1973-89). He began with a question: "Are you happy?"

Although born in Chile in 1956, Jaar's family moved to Martinique when Jaar was five years old and then returned a decade later to Santiago where Jaar completed his secondary education and entered the university to study film and architecture. Between 1979 and 1981 Jaar carried out his project, *Studies on Happiness,* and then left Chile for the United States. No one leaves a state of siege – and one can characterize Pinochet's entire sixteen-year regime as a perpetually brutal and continuous state of siege – with an unburdened conscience. Jaar's leaving was in exile and he maintains to this day the restless urgency of one who left behind those who suffered. Yet he also took with him a gift of political irony that becomes a necessary tool in engaging with oppression: a slight of hand trick to get your audience to see what they are disinclined to accept. Let me explain.

In 2007 Jaar conducted an interview for the public television program, *Art21,* in which he reveals a story from his childhood: his father hoping to cure Alfredo of acute shyness buys for him "a little box of magic" and Jaar takes up the challenge with great vigor. He recalls, "And to be a magician helped me to confront the audience. To do something when they knew that I was trying to hide something; but they don't see it, what they see is the magic."[28] This is a technique of crosscurrents. Like Wodiczko in Poland in 1969, to make obvious what is hidden one must instead emphasize the limitations of the obvious. Wodiczko emphasized selective listening in a public environment where speech is severely limited. Jaar questioned happiness in a political environment where one was desperate to, but cannot possibly, call attention to pain.

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[26] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 13.

[27] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (1986), 9, quoted in John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 122, translation modified by Rajchman.

[28] Art in the 21st Century, PBS, Season 4, Episode: "Protest". See http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/jaar/index.html (accessed 3/11/09).

In 1970, the physician and socialist, Salvador Allende, as leader of the Popular Unity (Unidad Popular) center-left coalition won the election for president of Chile. He instituted worker programs and agrarian reform reorganizing the national economy, which increased tensions with the Nixon administration because of the nationalization of foreign-owned industry. Foreign pressure came in the form of restricted economic credit. By 1973 the economy was crippled and Pinochet staged a coup in what Naomi Klein characterizes as "a Chilean precursor to Shock and Awe"[29] during which President Allende either took his own life or was assassinated in the presidential palace, a fact to which Jaar would pay homage thirty-three years later in his first exhibition in Chile since his 1981 departure. During the first year of Pinochet's take-over, one thousand civilians were executed; over the next sixteen years two thousand more were killed or disappeared. For a country that had developed in peace since the expulsion of the Spanish in 1810, it was, according to the Rettig (February 1991) and Valech (November 2004 and June 2005) Reports, one of the bloodiest chapters in Latin American history with tens of thousands detained and tortured and some 30,000 driven to exile.

A question – "Are you happy?" – affords a wonderful entry into conversation and *Studies on Happiness* (1979-1981) (fig. 3-7) consisted of a series of seven interventions into public perception and public discussion – communication in the midst of authoritarian censorship and fear. A survey, its presentation to the public, the filming of individuals speaking either of happiness or of unhappiness, the question itself printed simply but boldly on advertising billboards throughout Santiago are some of the projects through which Jaar worked out his idea. He remembers: "I was reading Bergson at the time, his studies on laughter, which I liked a lot, and that's what led me to 'studies on happiness.' I thought: 'it's watertight, it's poetic, it's naïve; they're not going to do anything to me.'"[30] He is referring to the authoritarian crack down on political dissidence and the necessity of forming a discussion that would appear ordinary, banal, and even facetious. He attacked censorship and self-censorship obliquely and, in so doing, also effaced the significance of this work in the art community of Santiago. Art critic Adriana Valdés, reflects back a quarter century later understanding the difficulty his work presented at the time: "Sometimes things don't get through just because people lack the tools for reading them… because there are blind spots, places that are not on their mental map."[31] Jaar continues to negotiate his public's blind spots to this day, but for

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[29] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 76.

[30] Alfredo Jaar, "Conversations in Chile," with Sandra Accatino, Pablo Chiuminatto, Bruno Cuneo, Ana María Risco, Adriana Valdés, Rodrigo Zúniga in *Jaar SCL 2006* (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2006), 69.

[31] Adriana Valdés, "Conversations in Chile" in *Jaar SCL 2006*, 70. The awareness of 'blind spots' in perception likely evolves from Jacques Derrida's Musée du Louvre exhibition and resulting publication *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other*

Jaar, the critical position is not the framing of his work in the context of art but in the context of life.

How does one speak, as described in the last chapter, *to or of a population cast into bare life*, *an unprotected exposure to state violence*?[32] In these early seminal pieces, Wodiczko (*Personal Instrument,* 1969) and Jaar (*Studies in Happiness,* 1979-81) place themselves in the public sphere and both use a metaphoric slight of hand to emphasize the opposite of what they outwardly describe: explicit is listening/implicit is speech for Wodiczko; explicit is happiness/implicit is suffering for Jaar and his Chilean public. The Valech Report uses the same language of secrecy and denial that I have chosen here:

> *Consciously or unconsciously*, a conspiracy of silence about the torture spread slowly through the country. Political prison and torture constituted a state policy during the military regime, defined and promoted by the political authorities of the period which mobilized personnel and resources of various public organizations and issued decrees and laws that protected such repressive behavior. And this had the support, *explicit sometimes but almost always implicit*, of the only power that was not a member of that regime: the judiciary.[33]

Although Wodiczko and Jaar would diverge in methodological practice, Wodiczko choosing a micro approach to social justice where he focuses his impact on small community groups and Jaar taking a macro approach whose goal is to change public awareness and response, in their early projects they both play upon the workings of ideology as values constructed by the ruling class to maintain legitimacy. As defined by Louis Althusser, ideology makes up the social and political ideas we accept reflexively and automatically into our sense of self. Drawing on Freud's theory of the unconscious and Lacan's concept of the mirror phase, Althusser describes the institutional influences that create the value system the human subject accepts as natural and unquestioned. For Althusser ideology is the ruling class's value system; for Antonio Gramsci cultural hegemony is the means by which ideology is disseminated and enforced.[34] The

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Ruins, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).

[32] See chapter 2, footnote 51, re: Judith Butler's reference to Giorgio Agamben.

[33] The Valech Report, officially The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report, issued on November 29, 2004 and on June 1, 2005. Excerpts of the Reports were translated by *The Miami Herald* (no longer available on line). Emphasis mine.

[34] Alfredo Jaar pays homage to this political thinker in the *Gramsci Trilogy*, a succession of five projects carried out in Italy in 2004, his reflection on the repression of political dissent both in contemporary Italy led by Silvio Berlusconi's center-right government and during Mussolini's Fascist regime when Gramsci died after eleven years of imprisonment.

emphasis on how social systems are inscribed, rendered natural, and then re-inscribed critically through the minutia of detailed information as well as the process of a survey, are the same means used by Hans Haacke as he moved from his investigation of physical systems to social systems, particularly his visitor profiles, surveys, and questionnaires. Jaar admits: "At the time I was citing Haacke. Ironically, I found out later that Haacke was citing David Lamelas, an Argentine, who still hasn't been give his due in the art scene."[35]

Like Haacke, Jaar questions the legitimacy of hegemonic values in relation to actual social practice; in Haacke's case the relation between demographics, cultural values and access, for example; in Jaar's case the relation between social values, political repression, and individual wellbeing. But while Haacke's work depends heavily on the factographic – the information that is at play – Jaar's work includes the psychological. The significance of the denial of suffering in *Studies on Happiness* is critical to the questions he consistently poses from this point forward in his career. Although developing different means, Jaar uses the same methods he developed for *Studies*: first an idea and then a project-based approach to a problem, carrying out multiple projects over a period of time, attacking a problem again and again in as many ways necessary to communicate. He feels an urgent need to inform and he often works with photographs in spite of an inherent distrust of the medium: how it is used and our almost childlike belief in its completeness. The aphorism – "a picture is worth a thousand words" – cloaks a failure to admit that, in the end, the picture *does* nothing. While it might communicate, it cannot act and far too often we accept it as 'the final word' on a subject, complete in and of itself.

An image is a powerful tool in Jaar's "little box of magic" but it is only a tool, one of many, which also include time, movement, space, and context. Images slip in and out of Jaar's practice, their absence often more poignant than their presence as in a small public intervention entitled *Shelter (Please Close Your Eyes)* (1996)[36] whose portraits (represented by text description and a blank rectangle of light) of two African writers (Chinua Achebe and Ken Saro-Wiwa, recently executed by the Nigerian military leadership for his activism) and an African musician (Fela) underscores their absence as intellectual and creative influences in Western culture. In much the same way, *Lament of the Images* (2002) utilizes the denial of vision as both methodology and subject to

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[35] *Jaar SCL 2006,* 69. David Lamelas (Buenos Aires, 1946) currently lives and works between Paris, Berlin, and Los Angeles. Over the last three decades his work has included installations, photography and films, such as *L.A. Friends, Time as Activity*, and *People and Time.*

[36] A discussion of this intervention can be found in Alfredo Jaar, *It is Difficult, Ten Years,* with contributions by Patricia C. Phillips and Rick Pirro (Barcelona: ACTAR, 1998), 306-315 and Alfredo Jaar, *The Fire This Time: Public Interventions 1979-2005,* with contributions by Mary Jane Jacob and Nancy Princenthal (Milano: Charta, 2005), 70-71.

create a glaring acknowledgment of the selectivity of visual information, lost through our systems of image archive and distribution. In *Lament of the Images* (fig. 3-6), Jaar gives his viewers three backlit text panels (black ground, white letters) along a corridor describing three specific instances of the loss of images to history and then leads his viewers into a large open space graced only with the projection of a white screen, representing silent memory, the erasure of the historical record, and the resulting failure to bear witness. Pre-Rwanda Jaar consistently upset our expectations of images. During the six years he evolved *The Rwanda Project*, he worked feverishly to protect his subject through the careful and respectful framing of his images, avoiding sensationalism even while demanding attention. He also intensified his advocacy of a critical awareness of the visual systems that prioritize some cultural subjects over others. The image became for Jaar an open wound and so, as in Greek tragedy, he left the crime off-stage, its presence intimated through absence.[37]

Finally post-Rwanda, Jaar embraces images, basking in their luscious colors, warm tonality, and descriptive powers but he never lets them gain a fullness that could be interpreted as complete, working with them as a component of language, seeking veracity rather than establishing truth. Images, post-Rwanda, are active but transient, vivid but vulnerable, suggestive but incomplete – never telling a whole story, demanding instead the will to question and to discover. As much as his aesthetic practice has gained insight over the years, Jaar began with the realization that only through dialogue can one speak *to – or of – others*. As Jaar himself has come to realize, his work is not about the Other but about our relationship to the Other and theirs to us – the known relationships but, above all, the relationships denied. It is a relationship of exchange. Jaar began in 1979 with a question and continues to this day in three decades of projects to ask questions, many questions, particularly: "Do you have the heart to hear and to see?"

Reasons to mourn, both visible and invisible…

Muxima – "heart" in Kimbundu, one of Angola's main languages – opens in silence: six boys, half are standing, half are kneeling, each with their hands on their heart. First stillness and then rapid, urgent motion punctuated by energetic music, a lively full band version of our eponymous song. A boat cuts the water of the Kwanza River. We see the bow of the skiff, a pan of the coast, the wake of the water, trees, grasses, and over cast skies. We are on a journey portending destiny when the film jump cuts to a sign that reads in Portuguese that what is most important is to solve the problems of the poor.

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[37] Abigail Solomon-Godeau writes insightfully about both *Lament of the Images* and *The Rwanda Project* in "Lament of the Images: Alfredo Jaar and the Ethics of Representation", noting that off-scene is the etymological root of the word obscene. See *Aperture* 181 (Winter 2005), 36-47. For more on *Lament of the Images* see also Margaret Sundell, "Alfredo Jaar at Galerie Lelong," *Artforum* (January 2003), 137.

It is curious how in description Jaar's work risks being reduced to dogma and cliché, while the experience of the film is anything but didactic simplicity. Herein lies the difficulty of interpretation: how to be clear without limiting understanding? Jaar was aware of this difficulty in editing the film: too powerful an image and he risked sensationalism, too little subtlety and he risked cliché, too much information and the poetry would be lost, too much poetry and the viewer would miss the political import of his intentions. His solution is attention to detail and sensitivity to vision – one that is lowered to the horizon line reflecting the point of view of the participants in the film more than his own experience. Rather than insert himself into his picture, a technique heralded by such radical European social-documentary photographers as Luc Chessex and Raymond Depardon as a means to efface the false promise of objectivity (hegemonic practice of mainstream media), Jaar instead consistently holds a dialogue with and between the various subjects of his film: the peoples and the country of Angola. Jaar balances a caressing camera eye with a discretely distant camera eye, one that avoids overwriting the African subjects.[38] How does he do this?

Take for example the opening image of the young boys: it is a still image without soundtrack or movement but Jaar lingers on the image long enough for us to realize the simplicity of their gesture, the openness of their expression, their presentation of the city of Luanda down the hill behind them. Their image holds viewers as listeners to a tale opening with the question: what is *Muxima*? Absent is the documentarian authoritative narration. There is no "voice" to this tale, no overview. As a means to relay his message, Jaar works quietly with movement and time to create a structure that can exchange his audience's automatic response for a reconsideration of what they think they know in order to replace it with a curiosity to discover what they in fact know nothing about, yielding to his subject the right of description.

Jaar claims inspiration from Gilles Deleuze's two volumes on cinema: *The movement-image* (1986) and *The time-image* (1989). Owing to his interest in both Bergson (process philosophy) and Foucault (critical thought), Deleuze pondered the question of practice over being (or in the establishment of being). Thus in regards to cinema, he didn't ask: what does this represent but how does it work and what does it show? This reverses an analysis of cinema as the visualization of reality by denying cinema as a constructed logical succession of images in time in order to sequence a story. Instead movement creates the cinematic entity – the figure or the image of the film – through the difference between situations and/or actions established by frame, shot, and montage (editing). In other words, it is not the flow of action creating an impression of cause and effect that is cinema, according to Deleuze, but the juxtaposition of situations and the difference this makes on our perception that in turn

[38] "Overwriting" is a term used by Nicholas Mirzoeff in his discussion of discursive inscription as a means to render certain bodies invisible by overlaying them with prescriptive description. See Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

shapes our experience. Thus the organization of movement (primarily in prewar cinema) and time (postwar cinema) are, for Deleuze, the two fundamental principles of the cinematic image. This is the conceptual starting point for Alfredo Jaar's working method in the editing of *Muxima* rather than any strict methodological adherence to the complex analysis Deleuze establishes in terms of point of view, cause and effect, and affect.[39]

Movement for Jaar is created both through the juxtaposition of images, emphasizing the difference between situations and thus shifting our perception to an unexpected response – a thought to which we will return – and the flow of poetic metaphor. Take for example, the journey by skiff that begins in Canto II and resumes in Canto VII (fig. 3-4). It is evocative of any journey in literature, a travel in time that becomes a metaphor for a development in consciousness. I recall the *Barque of Dante,* also known as *Dante and Virgil in Hell,* the first major painting executed by Eugène Delacroix for the Salon of 1822 whose idea is taken from Canto VIII of Dante's *Inferno* in which Dante, escorted by the poet Virgil, crosses the River Styx.[40] Jaar avoids Delacroix's dramatic flair preferring instead a cool, placid, almost trance-like flow as he focuses on the faces of the skiff's passengers in Canto VII. To the viewer who knows of Angola's 27-year civil war, which followed the 14-year war for independence from Portugal, the river represents both a country awash with corpses as well as the undertow of psychic memories of trauma only recently submerged and in many respects ongoing.

"Unfortunately everywhere I go I find too many reasons to mourn and Angola is no exception," affirms the artist.[41] The history is long, complicated, and reaches globally, entwining a Cold War struggle with subsequent power monopolies over global economic control of local resources. We, the Western audience, not only know nothing of the local context within Angola, we also have no idea how our Western involvement has left the Angolan people so destitute and vulnerable. The fourteen-year Angolan War of Independence against the Portuguese ended in 1974 when a left-leaning military coup that began in Lisbon on April 25, 1974, known as the Carnation Revolution (so-called for the red carnations, symbols of socialism and communism, the populace carried in the streets in support of the coup), toppled the authoritarian regime that had governed

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[39] See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the movement-image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam and *Cinema 2: the time image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986 and 1989); for an interesting analysis of Deleuze's cinematic theory see Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2000).

[40] The connection I make to Dante's *Inferno* is supported both by the canto format as well as by the concept and title Jaar used for a 1999 exhibition he curated for the BildMuseet, Umeä University, Sweden, entitled *Inferno e Paradiso.*

[41] From this point forward, all quotations from the artist, unless otherwise noted, refer to the conversation transcribed within the chapter itself.

Portugal since the 1920s. As Portugal transitioned to a democracy, the new leadership released political prisoners, abolished censorship, drafted a constitution that guaranteed free speech, and ended colonial rule in Sub-Saharan Africa. There were, however, three different factions fighting for Angolan independence from Portugal: the National Front for the Liberation of Angola led by Holden Roberto and backed by Western powers and Angola's neighbor to the north, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) (FNLA), the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, led by Agostinho Neto and backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba (MPLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, led by Jonas Savimbi and backed by Western powers and Apartheid South Africa (UNITA). Both Agostinho Neto of the MPLA and a coalition between the FNLA and the UNITA declared Angolan's independence in 1975 effectively shifting the struggle for independence to an internal civil war with Cold War repercussions played out in power struggles between the United States, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and to a smaller extent China. In addition, strife with Angola's neighbors resulted in territorial incursions as foreign-backed regional militias supported one faction or another.

While Agostinho Neto had been appointed President of the People's Republic of Angola by the MPLA and governed from the capital Luanda on the northern coast, Holden Roberto and Jonas Savimbi shared the presidency of the Social Democratic Republic of Angola based in Huambo in central Angola. Neto also had to manage divisions within his own government, those favoring either Cuban or Soviet influence. When Agostinho Neto died of cancer in 1979, he was succeeded by José Eduardo dos Santos. The civil war, spanning the Ford, Carter, Reagan, G. H. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush administrations, continued well beyond the end of Cold War divisions in 1989 and the end of the apartheid era in South Africa in 1995 until 2002 when Savimbi was killed by the Angolan military. Blood diamonds had kept Savimbi's army supplied by the US (through its surrogate allies Israel and South Africa), while petro-dollars held up the government of the MPLA bolstered by Cuban military and Soviet weapons. In the new millennium after a national death toll of at least 500,000 civilians with landmines peppering the entire nation, Angolan resources have become the target of global economic interest.

Failure to see, failure to react, failure to act

It is both the legacy of the armed struggles and the continuing foreign claim on Angolan resources that is the context of Alfredo Jaar's eulogy to the peoples of Angola. The peoples, colonially divided into *assimilados* (mixed race groups) and *indegenos* (black natives) and traditionally divided into various ethnic tribal identities, are also united as survivors of the trauma of armed conflict. This was an armed conflict that began as I reached adulthood and ended decades later but of which I personally knew very little. Those of us in the West interested in social justice responded or acted in greater solidarity with the conflicts in Latin America than of Africa and, of course, Western nations were still focused on Vietnam when the Angolan civil war broke out.

Still Angola is a weighty example of the consequences of the failure to see serving as a strategic waste-product of larger global power struggles, first of Cold War and later of global capitalist economies; but to Angolans, the history, the memories, and the present day reality are something very different. Alfredo Jaar sets out to give credit to a complex historical past as well as present conditions worthy of our attention today.

This is the empty screen in Canto V – an emergency – but it is also the symbolic nature of the journey along the Kwanza River – a journey in search of salvation. As Jaar concedes, the absence of any precise knowledge of Angola causes the viewer to fill in with assumptions of the worst clichés. Where do we get the mind's image we fill in for reality? Nicholas Mirzoeff points out in his seminal text on visual culture, *bodyscape* (1995), the first images 'out of Africa' were colonial photographs – produced as "a *motivated sign,* a sign which is supposed to look like something […] to show racial difference marked upon the bodies of his African subjects."[42] These visual distinctions between the civilized Western world and the sub-Saharan African continent made by colonial explorers, military, and government administrators continue to be made in *National Geographic* magazine, for example, as well as in Hollywood films such as *Out of Africa.* Jaar seeks to avoid such clear-cut tropes of spectacle and exoticism through the fragmentation of his editing techniques, the Spartan nature of his visual style, and his attention on the ordinary as opposed to the exemplary.

Like the mine detonator within Canto VI of the film, however, Jaar is himself walking a minefield. He is aware how easy it is to substitute visualization for deeper understanding and he guards judiciously and selectively against this tendency.[43] "Any reading of photography is dogged by the cultural construction of the photograph as either observed truth or transcendent art," warns Mirzoeff.[44] I would add that the sensual, visual medium of film is equally prone to becoming a metonymic stand-in for the subject, reductive as a simple image replaces a complex set of conditions. Jaar is aware of this dilemma of substitution: while he wishes to inform, he avoids declarative documentation and while he constructs his work as art, he guards a connection to the conditions of its making.

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[42] Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape,* 159.

[43] Anthropologist Johannes Fabian observes: "the ability to visualize a culture or society almost becomes synonymous for understanding it" (Fabian 1983: 106) quoted in Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape,* 136. For understanding the relationship between "the foreigners' strangeness" to our own sense of self, see Julia Kristeva's seminal text, *Strangers To Ourselves,* particularly chapter six "The Renaissance, 'so Shapless and Diverse in Composition…'" transl. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 105-126.

[44] Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape,* 140.

Either documentation or autonomous representation would separate the message from the original subject, abandoning the subject in favor of cliché or artistic expression. The visual references of exoticism and racial difference that Jaar seeks to avoid are fairly blatant in their prevalence in mainstream media; literary references are much more subtle, however. Metaphors of silence, the river journey, and invisibility that are the heart and key to *Muxima* are equally essential to Joseph Conrad's 1899 colonial novella, *Heart of Darkness,* and, as Mirzoeff points out, subsequent travel writing on Africa that relies on tropes of difference and invisibility: the dark impenetrability of the interior, its silence, isolation and indescribable strangeness. "Encountering the heart of darkness," Mirzoeff continues, "was thus a visual problem from the outset. It was, in Conrad's phrase, 'the threshold of the invisible'. In order to make the darkness visible, three ways of seeing – and not seeing – were possible in the Congo of the period."[45] These three ways of seeing included the indifferent, disciplinary, and autocratic gaze of ownership, the overview of the omniscient, all-seeing eye, and the anthropologist's obsessive record of detail.[46] The last is the fetishist's gaze, which Mirzoeff traces to the origins of colonial interventions.

> The very term "fetish" takes its origin from the name *feitiçaria* given by sixteenth-century Portuguese explorers to African figures, so that fetishism was literally unimaginable without the colonial intervention of Europeans into Africa.[47]

It is in defiance of traditional fetishism that Jaar takes on the challenge of envisioning Angola, acknowledging the blind spot within every field of vision, both physiological and cultural. We experience "being" from the first person point of view, a position that, as discussed in chapter two, has distinct limitations in terms of our understanding of the Other. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty tells us:

> When I say that everything visible is invisible, that perception is imperception, that consciousness has a "blind spot", that to see is always to see more than one sees – this must not be understood in the sense of a *contradiction* – it must not be imagined that I add to the visible…a non-visible. – One has to understand that it is visibility itself that involves a non-visibility.[48]

In Jaar's own words:

> *Real Pictures* uses a similar strategy: I was offering the text as a way of seeing because I had been incredibly frustrated: I felt that no one had seen these images, not in the literal sense, because they were visible, available to be seen.

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[45] Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape,* 143. The internal quotation is from Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1969: 593).

[46] Ibid., 143-5.

[47] Ibid., 114.

[48] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1968), 247, quoted in Derrida (1993), 51, quoted in Mirzoeff, Bodyscape, 37.

> […] I cannot believe that a human being is capable of looking at this and not react. This lack of reaction was for me a symptom of not seeing.

There are at least two issues imbedded in invisibility: one is the inability to absorb the content or the import of what is before our eyes, the other is our propensity to overlay a preconceived image on the image that is actually present and available – replacing the fetish for the real. Jaar used various tactics in *The Rwanda Project* to counteract the negative consequences of this form of problematic appropriation, moving increasingly towards the exclusive use of text in visual form to underscore a simultaneous over-reliance on and under-appreciation of images and the messages they convey. His very first act upon arrival in Rwanda was an intervention – a dispersal of messages – an acknowledgement that certain individuals had lived, their names hand-written on tourist postcards conveying the unspoken message that many others had not. Recto: a cliché image of the African "wild" – Verso: a real presence rescued from trauma's oblivion. Yawning lions, sweeping vistas, filtered dappled light diffusing a flock of impalas, dancers in ceremonial attire – these are the images we expect to see "out of Africa". In his project, *Signs of Life* (1994), Jaar reminds us of the individuals impacted by events hidden on page A5 of the New York Times – as so many major news outlets failed to give significant coverage to the Rwandan genocide when it mattered the most.

In *Untitled (Newsweek)* of that same year, he depicts only the weekly covers of one of America's most popular news magazines adding text alongside referring to the extent of the genocide in Rwanda from its beginning on April 6, 1994 when the plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi is shot down above Rwanda's capital, Kigali, until August 1, 1994 when Newsweek devotes its first cover to the Rwandan genocide after nearly one million people had been slaughtered and four million displaced as internal refugees or in exile – a crisis of enormous proportions in which the international community failed. Failure to see, failure to react, failure to act.

As for his own images, Jaar knew that he needed to protect them and the individuals he met from post-trauma tourism – a kind of voyeuristic gawking that can only serve the conscience of the viewer but be ineffectual to the destiny of the subject.

> Because I believe it is very complicated to use images today, I have always tried creating an environment, a mise-en-scène to articulate the image and never leave it alone, as if I distrust the image and its capacity to communicate. I always created an architecture around the image in order for the image to communicate as effectively as possible its original meaning.

Real Pictures (1995) and *Slide + Sound* (1995) relied on text, as their primary means of protection by suggesting the content of the image without abusing the subject of the image. Setting and sound were secondary means used to add depth to the tale. When Jaar undertook his film project he realized that film gave him a flexibility that could reduce his reliance on mise-en-scène. He could use film language as text knowing that

the juxtaposition of images creates a language that could say much more than the images themselves.

It is difficult to get the news from poems…

Let us return to the three ways of seeing that appropriate the subject for the colonial gaze: the disciplinary gaze, the overview, and the record of detail. The disciplinary gaze circles around the subject locking him in place, forcing a position, exacting a price for non-compliance. The overview takes in the big picture in a sweeping, all-inclusive but distant bird's eye view. The record catalogs the minutia as a means of setting up categories, delineating boundaries, and controlling inventory. The disciplinary gaze of ethnography, that became a feature of the earliest examples of photography to categorize humanity into body types, racial features, and behavioral pathologies, strictly limited gesture to rigid frontal, profile, and often back view depictions of human form and expression. Jaar begins his film with a posed image but there is a looseness to the posture of the Luandan boys. They seem to pose themselves as if to say: this is how one speaks to a camera, here is the image we collectively and individually present, we make this statement to the world. From the outset, *Muxima* is their story and everyone in it is *equal before the image*.

Paul Virilio, in *The Vision Machine,* quotes from Rossellini's autobiography: "The film-maker must gather as many facts as possible in order to create a total image: he must film cold so that everyone is equal before the image."[49] Jaar, as an avid student of cinema, would be well versed in the methods and intent of European filmmaking. This tactic would not only be familiar but its motive would serve his filmic dialogue. As for the omniscient overview, it is very rarely used and appears in only a few shots of short duration, principally in Canto VII when we arrive at the Church of Nossa Senhora da Muxima, looking at a distant view from above on the hill but then, to quickly ground our vision once again, the film cuts to a close-up of sandals left on the steps by worshippers who have come here to offer thanks and to pray. Again in the following canto of the bathers along the shoreline, the theme is established by stepping back far enough to encompass boys performing acrobatics in the sand against a background of oil tankers anchored offshore waiting to load the fuel that maintains the life-style of developed nations but returns little to the peoples of Angola. The distant view is problematized by the acute discrepancy between the tankers, synecdoche for the global oil industry, and the local inhabitants making use of some of the few resources available to them – the shoreline.

Neither is there anything like the obsessive fetishistic gaze – no inventory of objects, peoples, or scenes – rather a lingering eye reminiscent of Ingmar Bergman's opening to *Cries and Whispers,* whose prolonged still shot of the trees on the grounds of

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[49] Roberto Rossellini, *Fragments d'une autobiographie* (Paris: Ramsay, 1987) quoted in Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine,* trans. Julie Rose (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 51.

the estate allows the wind-rustled leaves to reveal movement, whose slow pan of the clock in the parlor establishes the passage of time with a gentle tick-tock in an environment otherwise poised to remain still. So too, in Canto III, Jaar's camera eye moves gradually over the tiled wall coverings of the ruined palazzo, the decaying sculptures of Portuguese soldiers, bereft by time's decay of feet or hands, or the bricks and stones holding down the roof tiles of Angolan homes. Cries and whispers, indeed! – forever in contrast to the discrepancy of wealth and the disparity of opportunity.

The pose, the overview, and the record – is it any wonder Jaar is suspicious of the image? Both its presence: the narrowness or generosity of its portrayal – and its absence: the recognition of an emergency, the control of the image archive, and the invisibility of the subject – are at stake. *It is difficult to get the news from poems…*[50] but Jaar has decided the effort worth *the price of error*. *Muxima* is a poem. After a decade of projects, in which Jaar emphasized the importance of images to our consciousness precisely by removing them from view, the artist returns to a generous embrace of descriptive imagery in *Muxima…* but he is careful. First he develops the structure of cantos, the working concept of haiku, and the presence of song to become the essential framing mechanisms of the film. Then he uses movement and time as vocabulary in a language to enunciate his tale. He layers his vision just as age creates a patina suggesting a palimpsest of multiple dimensions to vision, accomplishing this through framing and contrast. Finally he uses song to stabilize the experience as the weft thread weaves together the warp thread in a (text)ile. While he attributes his working methods to the analysis of an architect – "when I approach a situation or a place, it is really the architect looking at context, site, scale, and movement" – he is doing this with the sensitivity and awareness of a poet.

Muxima begins in silence, with text – the lines of a poem by Agostinho Neto, the first president of Angola (1975-1979) who led the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) during the War of Independence and also during much of Angola's civil war. Text dots and dashes across the field of vision appearing as street signs in the capital of Luanda. As such, text provides a few markers but that is all; for the most part, Jaar's finesse as an editor creates a visual language that sweeps over his viewers. He does this through simplicity – an economy of means – a method that has always been part of his practice – visualization inspired by the imagery of Ingmar Bergman, Jean Luc Godard, and Michelangelo Antonioni – language fine-tuned through the incessant reading of poetry. He chooses a structure: ten cantos, each canto creating an image of one aspect of Angola. Each canto made up of the tripartite elements of haiku: one

[50] This is a line from William Carlos Williams' poem entitled "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower", which opens Alfredo Jaar's web site: *It is difficult / to get the news / from poems / yet men die miserably / every day / for lack / of what is found / there.* The artist also used the initial line of the poem as a title of a publication highlighting examples from ten years of work. See Alfredo Jaar, *It is Difficult, Ten Years,* exhibition catalog with contributions by Patricia C. Phillips and Rick Pirro (Barcelona: ACTAR, 1998).

principal element flanked by two contrasting ones. Each canto except for Cantos I and V featuring a version of the song *Muxima.*

Canto I: the heart, the over-riding theme of the film, Jaar's love of the people, their sincerity. Canto II: a journey, necessity, motion, action, the passage of time, men in a skiff, stalwart and self-possessed, a directed goal. Canto III: vestiges of the history of Portuguese colonial occupation, an obtuse reference to the slave trade, global economic connections dating back centuries, abandoned colonial property.[51] Canto IV: a boy filling a pipe, the action creative but useless; a limitless spilling of reverie and dreams going nowhere, recycling back to the sand, a constant *fort/da* of promise and abandon. Canto V: the empty screen, the failure of recognition that an emergency exists, the footsteps heard, the audible but invisible presence of being, evident but unacknowledged. Canto VI: the slow, methodical hunt for landmines, a search of the land as sensual as the caress given to a loved one, lives are at stake, we are jolted through an explosion into recognition of the emergency. Canto VII: the journey continues to the church, bare feet climb the steps, ants crawl across the stuccoed floor, evidence of the minutiae of life – *what does not immediately yield to eye and ear* – should not be ignored.[52] Canto VIII: the ever-present contrast: children play against a background of oil tankers in the harbor, economic resources provide nothing to the people themselves: "It is important to solve the problems of the poor." Canto IX: The contrast of an AIDS patient with the nation's oilrigs, the exploitation of resources without sustaining human life. Canto X: a lone pianist plays a melancholy fugue, a song of mourning and of longing, the voice of a country and its peoples.

This is the *saudade* of the music and the dialogue Jaar has with the peoples of Angola, speaking to the ephemeral nature of existence but also to the political realities that have produced such vulnerability and need. How does one implicitly describe the impact of global economics on peoples – not one person, not a specific "folk" or class of people, not on people in general – but on specific groups of peoples defined by a mixture of local and global contexts? Jaar has chosen to do this through the principles of melancholia – that there are times when it is critical to hold on! This is a situation worthy of our attention and our mourning. It is a three-fold loss: subject, object, and viewer. It is the price exacted on the messenger for telling the truth. It is the invisibility of the subject in the broader context of exploitation and abandonment. It is the

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[51] Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Another Day of Life* (New York: Penguin, 1975 and San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), a Polish journalist's memoir of the last months of fighting in the struggle for liberation; the author notes consistently how the warring factions would not touch Portuguese property, making use of broken down jeeps over fast paced Mercedes, for example. "They do not belong to us," they would comment plainly.

[52] Jabès, *The Book of Margins,* 30.

ignorance of the cultural spectator, the reader of news, cognizant or not that choices must be made. In this way, Jaar chooses to extend this dialogue to his viewer.

What Jaar shows us is not our experience of the world, nor even our relation to the Other, but an awareness that the Other experiences the world long before we come on a scene and that both our visions are to some degree pre-determined, neither of us alone as singular entities but bound to each other by forces we fail to witness.[53] These forces are historical, political, and economic – visible but not seen as Jaar became so painfully aware in regards to Rwanda. To the messenger who bears witness, there is always a marathon, a race against time in order to tell one's tale before it is too late. This haste is reflective in the running camera shot of Canto V through the outdoor auditorium up to the empty screen or the rapid-fire speed of the rack-zoom shot from the skiff on the river to the Church of Nossa Senhora da Muxima along the banks in Canto VII. But the sense of time evoked by the film is varied because there is also the slow, methodical drip of the I.V. tube of the AIDS patient in Canto IX and the slow pan across the backs of bathers warming themselves in the sun as they sit along a wall by the shore in Canto VII or the languid stroll of the pianist as the coda to the Angolan portrait. The search for the landmine of Canto VI is also a gentle, cautious motion as if a gradual discovery of pain, the indirect perception of trauma: time as an evolution of thinking, revelation being both an explosive jolt and a slow yielding to reality.

Saudade is the subtle realization of loss and mourning. Song is a renegotiation of place in society. Seduction draws attention. Jaar recognizes the power of *saudade* and so uses both song and images, creating a palpable sensuality to seduce the audience into hearing a tale that one prefers to sidestep. To be the messenger of trauma is to be condemned. The messenger appropriates guilt from the actions to which s/he bears witness and in turn becomes the victim of denial. Judith Herman reminds us that "[i]n their refusal to see the crime that was documented before their eyes, we can recognize the familiar defenses of denial, distancing, and dissociation."[54] She also underscores that bearing witness "is an act of solidarity… [in which] moral neutrality in the conflict between victim and perpetrator is not an option."[55]

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[53] This idea is inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the relation between thought and its object – the *cogito* and the *cogitatum* – and the preexistence of reality to awareness and our dependency on sensibility to form a reflective relation to the world. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 35-36.

[54] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992/97), 244. Herman refers specifically to the Rodney King trial in which the jury identified with the perpetrators rather than the victim but she gave this as an example of a wider phenomenon of witness.

[55] Ibid., 247.

The world is infinitely demanding on our conscience, according to philosopher Simon Critchley, causing a conflict between a desire to respond and a fear of being overwhelmed.[56] This creates a split in our psyche because we cannot possibly meet the excessive demands placed upon us. There is consequently an inherent difficulty in building a subjectivity that might be described as an ethical subject. To the world at large we respond with either active or passive nihilism, the former of a terrorist, destructive nature, the latter of an escapist tendency either spiritual or hedonist. This reaction leaves us with a motivational deficit in responding to the suffering of others. Critchley looks to Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Lacan, among others, to shape what he calls an ethics of commitment, understanding the infinitely demanding crush on our conscience as requiring sublimation as an appeasement of the super-ego, always excessively demanding of perfection. Critchley also looks toward the polar examples of Greek tragedy and comedy to provide a solution, suggesting that while tragedy yields to the sado-masochistic nature of the judgmental and oppressive super-ego, comedy (humor in Critchley's analogy) gives the self the necessary distance to pause, taking the demands upon it less seriously but no less effectively.

One can see Alfredo Jaar's *The Rwanda Project* as a tragic response to horror but *Muxima* does not become its comedic opposite. Nonetheless, what Critchley is underlining is the necessity of assuming a detached and critical position in relation to conflict, focusing on mindfulness as crucial to the formation of an ethical subject. Like Hans Haacke and Krzysztof Wodiczko before him, Alfredo Jaar also absorbs the lesson of Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect, destabilizing the familiar in order to necessitate a new consideration. We cannot forget that our relation to the world is mediated by that which shapes our worldviews: print media, television, film, internet, sermons at church, lectures and discussions, relationships between friends and colleagues, etc. The kind of information we have already absorbed shapes the preconceived notions with which all subsequent information must contend. Jaar is particularly sensitive to the need to counteract these often subliminal images that shape his viewers' expectations.

For Jaar, one must lead the way to an open-mind via the unexpected. Rather than rely on evermore shocking imagery to jolt us out of complacency, Jaar creates a sensual dimension to his work that refuses the multiples of raising horror to the n^{th} power. While Jaar's politics of resistance are forcefully insistent on our collective guilt, in *Muxima* the artist refracts the horrific circumstances of his subject to produce a humanizing appeal for understanding. "[B]ecause art can still give us what reality has taken away," the artist claims, reminding us that this includes dignity, respect, recognition, and a will to action. He uses the example of Agostinho Neto to create his own epic eulogy as a "rhythm in light / rhythm in color / rhythm in movement / rhythm in the bloody cracks of bare feet / rhythm on thorn nails / but rhythm / rhythm / Oh painful

[56] Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London, New York: Verso, 2007/08).

African voices!" Alfredo Jaar speaks *to – or of – others only in the intimate voice of dialogue* and shows us that there is something to be gained from a willingness to fail.

Conclusion: *Tactical Response*

Cries that chill the soul from the neighboring zoo
The spasmodic interval of time
between making a decision
and its refusal
Fainting at the sight of a drop of blood
Like last time – nothing
Dmitrï Alexandrovich Prigov, Fifty Drops of Blood

Towards an ethics of seeing

Imagine the world without pictures. No television, no billboard advertising, no picture magazines, a return to the pre-image Wall Street Journal and LeMonde as news delivery media, no film, a 1980s-style text-only internet, no art museums, no galleries, no visual pornography, no sports coverage in pictures, no tabloids. You get the picture: there is none other than what we might imagine.

All right, now make the decisions: what kind of images would you allow back into your world? What set of criteria will you rely upon? Are you going to make your choices based on medium, subject matter, stylistic criteria, function, aesthetic or ethical considerations? A predetermination of what is acceptable or unacceptable is a form of censorship, whether self-imposed or regulated by society and government. Rather than certainty that images are determined and function exclusively one way or another or that there is only one way to read an image and to consider its value, would it not be more fruitful to understand how images produce meaning and how that meaning influences culture, broadly and specifically? The position we take, as a viewing public, in relation to the production and use of images is critical.

Rather than condemn Dorothea Lange with ethical hindsight, why not see how "Migrant Mother" was made, what considerations were important at the time, what decisions were made by producers other than the photographer, and how the image became embedded in popular consciousness? De-mystification has morphed into righteous indignation – how *could* she have been so exploitative? Sebastião Salgado has been condemned for following her example of "concerned" documentary gone-awry rather than considered for the leverage his images have given aid organizations.[1] His images present significant dilemmas in representation, as artist Alfredo Jaar points out, but should Salgado become emblematic of exploitation as others suggest?

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[1] One can still argue the efficacy of certain kinds of images particularly in regards to methodological practice, Alfredo Jaar having performed an extremely powerful and helpful intervention for the NGO, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) entitled *The Gift* (Stockholm, Sweden, 1998). See Alfredo Jaar*, The Fire This Time: Public Interventions 1979-2005* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2005), 82-85.

Photographer Zana Briski grew weary of involving herself in the plight of others because she was heavily criticized for the recognition she personally gained from her film *Born into Brothels* (2004) – recognition assumed to be accompanied by financial gain (often a misguided deductive leap of a much harsher reality faced by media producers).

The critique of images is equally important to the production and use of images. Without it we would move blindly in a visual world, our consciousness impaired. But with the censoring condemnation of images, we are without a valuable means of disseminating information, meaning, ideology, and passion. Allowing for layers, encouraging a varied range of interpretation, and questioning how we respond, determines the impact of witness. "[Photographs] are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing," writes Susan Sontag in *On Photography*.[2] She clarifies that "[w]hat determines the possibility of being affected morally by photographs is the existence of a relevant political consciousness. Without a politics, photographs of the slaughter-bench of history will most likely be experienced as, simply, unreal or as a demoralizing emotional blow."[3]

It is less a matter of reforming photography as a medium of expression as informing ourselves, politically, historically, culturally, socially, and economically. What kind of representation (images, words, and narratives) is readily accepted as truth when it lies and what kind of representation jolts us into recognition of reality, however difficult? Fred Moten asks: "What if the beholder glances, glances away, driven by aversion as much as desire? This is to ask not only, what if glancing is the aversion of the gaze, a physical act of repression, the active forgetting of an object whose resistance is now not the avoidance but the extortion of the gaze?"[4] Certain images demand that we look when we would rather avert our eyes. In describing the relationship between things and our perception of them, Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, "We can effect the passage by *looking,* by awakening to the world; we cannot witness it as spectators. It is not a *synthesis;* it is a metamorphosis by which the appearances are instantaneously stripped of a value they owed merely to the absence of a true perception."[5] Whether our response is one of enjoyment, deep sorrow, or refusal is significant. *How we behold* makes a difference to what we behold.

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[2] Susan Sontag, *On Photography,* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1973, 1974, 1977), 3.

[3] Ibid.*,* 19.

[4] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 14-15.

[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 8 (emphasis within the text).

The difficulty with documentary photography is that it is *governed by the external order of things.* The image has a direct correlation to its subject in the real world[6] but at the same time that correlation is mediated. The subject is represented by a third person (photographer, publisher/exhibitor, and, by extension, viewer) rather than the subject him- or herself. In images of atrocity, this establishes a relation between the primary witness and the interpretive witness whose ethics are mitigated by a multitude of other factors including social consciousness, racial sensitivity, political awareness, as well as concern for the production and dissemination of the image. Why is the image being made? What is the outlet? Who controls the context? Etc. All too often this leads to the infantilization of the subject, the exploitation of the subject (often already in a position of victimization), or the universalization of the subject (generalized to represent not an individual but a symbolic notion). At issue is degradation: of the mind, the subject, and the original event. Only by avoiding this degradation, according to Adorno, can one avoid a direct link to the act of atrocity.[7] For Adorno, this is done through a tight scrutiny of content; for the artists I have discussed, it is achieved through context and a tactical engagement with symbolic language as communication.

Artist Alfredo Jaar has straddled the borders not only of visual language within art practice but has also done his best to obliterate disciplinary borders between practices of journalism, art, and politics. He uses whatever means necessary in the struggle for social justice and, within the thorny debate of photographic representation, his efforts to understand the complexity of the problem has removed the moral righteousness so often reflected in the meaning produced by photographic display. With judicious tension between visual language, voice, and sound, Krzysztof Wodiczko transmits intimately personal content with political overtones powerfully underscoring the still radical notion of the speech act as legitimizing agency – rendering an overlooked presence visible. Hans Haacke floats seemingly disparate elements in relation to one another as a means of creating a new reading from old icons, inserting critique into the reflexive use of symbolic language.

E. H. Gombrich long ago discovered that artists teach us to see. In conducting my research, I review the early work of these three artists and forget, in the ease of my visual literacy, how difficult it was to confront their work originally. When stumbling

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[6] See the theory of indexicality of C.S. Peirce, "A Syllabus of Certain Topics of Logic," *The Essential Peirce, Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 2 (1893–1913)*, Peirce Edition Project, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998.)

[7] See Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* edited by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982 (1978) and 2000), 318. Here Adorno states: “The content of works of art is never the amount of intellect pumped into them: if anything it is the opposite… The feigning of a true politics here and now, the freezing of historical relations which nowhere seem ready to melt, oblige the mind to go where it need not degrade itself… [I]t is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics.”

across (camera around my neck) Krzysztof Wodiczko's projection in the Campo Santa Maria in Formosa during the 1986 Venice Biennale (fig. 2-11), I was flustered, confused, even embarrassed. His monumental hands holding a camera as if at the moment of taking a shot, I assumed referred to the plethora of tourist fanatics – the takers of scenic views – but there I was a struggling photojournalist, a great deal of whose work was executed precisely to attract tourists to distant locations by my own views. I was unsettled – both by my professional compromise and by this phantom "superego" looming overhead.

In a near-by location, as part of the *Aperto* of the Biennale, Alfredo Jarr had created his installation *Gold in the Morning* (fig. 3-9). Here were images any photojournalist might aspire to but they were being denied their documentary impact. Images of the miners of the Serra Pelada were installed in light boxes with ancillary metallic gold boxes of the same shape placed at right angles to the images so as to reflect their light and shadow. These were then placed incongruously throughout the massive, cellar-like space – floor, ceiling – any place except on the visual horizon line as might be expected. On the floor was additionally a baroque, gold frame containing not an image but gold nails and it was centered in a larger rectangular mass of black nails as a carpet on the floor.

I was unfamiliar with contemporary art, having studied art history up to World War I in college. 'Installation' was a term that would only become familiar to me when I attended art school a year after the 1986 Biennale exhibition. There, Hans Haacke came to talk to my contemporary art class overwhelming us all with the exactitude of his research and his sparse but punctuated visual vocabulary. A few years earlier he had executed *Oil Painting: Homage to Marcel Broodthaers* (1982) (fig. 1-8) for Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany. Presented in a classroom environment, the work held a certain fascination as a problem – something to ponder or to solve. Later, I had the benefit of seeing the work installed in the exhibition, "Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures," at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in February 2009. There is no comparison between a textbook or catalog reproduction and the experience of "being there." The work's mise-en-scène carried by the space of installation, by its proportions, and by the viewer's gestured relation to the images, precipitates an energetic response equivalent to a rise in heartbeat, a rush of adrenaline, or a surge of spirit. Following the line of the red carpet to draw up face-to-face with the portrait painting of President Reagan, then turning my back as I might in affront to the person in order to cross the room and lose myself in the crowd of protesters that the documentary image presents – such an experience activates a willingness to register difference between mediums, politics, and response. While the oil painting becomes an icon of institutional portraiture, the photograph – blown completely out of proportion to common usage – ushers in a dimension of collective inclusion with the effectiveness of immediate and substantial presence. No other work in that large exhibition did the same.

Jean Luc Nancy sees representation as "a presence that is presented, exposed, or exhibited." He continues, "It is not therefore, presence pure and simple: it is precisely *not* the immediacy of the being-posed-there but is rather that which draws presence out of this immediacy insofar as it puts a value on presence *as* some presence or another."[8] If we think of Hans Haacke as presenting us with a face-to-face encounter that reflects a presence through confrontation, Krzysztof Wodiczko as exhibiting within a space what is usually guarded without, making emphatically present what is so easily ignored, and Alfredo Jaar as exposing the day-to-day consequences of global manipulations with an immediacy that vibrates stronger than the present tense of our own dull lives, then we can say that they successfully expose (again in Nancy's words) its "value or sense of being there" – legitimately being there as a subject that demands our consideration.

When I spoke to Alfredo Jaar about *Muxima,* I also digressed to speak about a more recent work entitled *The Sound of Silence* (1995/2006) (fig. 3-8), an architectural installation as prose poem sparsely outlining the career and dilemmas of South African photojournalist Kevin Carter, his eye no stranger to injustice. An image by Carter, taken in the Sudan in March 1993, became the centerpiece of a controversy over a supposed callous representation of suffering versus the magnanimous saving of lives. It showed an emaciated child crawling in the African bush, seemingly alone, a vulture hovering just feet away. The controversy unraveled from the moment the image was published in *The New York Times,* March 26, 1993 until the photographer was awarded a Pulitzer Prize on May 23, 1994 and then committed suicide on July 27, 1994. Kevin Carter could no longer survive the trauma of what he had recorded through his lens – the distance the lens creates insufficiently protective, the soul's archive less successfully edited than an archive of film – he ended his own life because of his connection to (not his complicity with) horror. In *The Sound of Silence,* Jaar directs us through a powerful experience expressing in few words and a minor chord the naïveté of moral righteousness and questions the condemnation of the messenger over the message he delivers:

> I do not think Kevin Carter failed; I think he was condemned… Kevin Carter's image is an extraordinary image that conveys how we have abandoned large parts of the world to their fate. We live in a culture of total excess, obscene excess. We throw away so much stuff here that could feed people around the world. When an image becomes an icon for that guilt, of course, we have to kill the messenger because we don't want to recognize ourselves in that guilt.[9]

Does our denial of representation serve as an avoidance of guilt? The experience of Auschwitz denied representation and successive generations understood Adorno's famous essay on commitment to mean that representation is forbidden. Writers Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski, and Jean Améry, survivors of Auschwitz, and

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[8] Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 36.

[9] In conversation with the author, June 13, 2008.

photographer, Kevin Carter, survivor of racial apartheid, did not survive their role as messenger; each eventually ending his own life. The act of witness is fraught with fragility and failure, in which our interior *thanatos* overwhelms the *eros* of our aesthetic means. Nancy relays to us the testimony of Améry before his death:

> The first result was always the total collapse of the *aesthetic* view of death… For death in its literary, philosophic, or musical form there was no place in Auschwitz. No bridge led from death in Auschwitz to *Death in Venice.* Every poetic evocation of death became intolerable, whether it was Hesse's 'Dear Brother Death' or that of Rilke, who sang: 'Oh Lord, give each his own death'… the death of a human being finally lost so much of its specific content… Dying was omnipresent, death vanished from sight.[10]

I am not suggesting that we build a bridge of representation to Auschwitz; I am suggesting that we not let death vanish from sight. In our avoidance of direct confrontation, we manipulate, contrive, mask, and glance aside as a means to belie the efficacy of the *aesthetic* view of death. Nancy reveals through Améry the significance of the *mise-en-scène* of the torturer: "…in the world of torture man exists only by ruining the other person who stands before him."[11] The victim loses his space of representation and the torturer has no representation other than himself.[12] He is the specter whose existence relies on destruction, whose spectacle feeds on death, who is death.

By denying representation of the victim, we deny the victim presence and ourselves the experience of representation that shapes a space opening the potential for a different arrangement of values and substantiating beliefs. The curator who walked into Galerie Lelong in September of 2005 and saw nothing more than the washing of windows failed to give way to the possibility that insignificant occurrences change lives.[13] Hans Haacke, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Alfredo Jaar lend credence to the value of representation for placing us face-to-face not with horror but with the difference *between making a decision and its refusal.*

Trauma works like torture as an uncreating, a breaking down of the building blocks of consciousness. While Haacke addresses torture and the divisive nature of pain on a metaphorical level in his composite installation, Wodiczko understands that the

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[10] Jean Améry quoted in Nancy, *The Ground of the Image,* 44.

[11] Ibid., 45.

[12] Nancy, *The Ground of the Image,* 45. The use of torture to destroy representations of our worldviews and thereby destroy the victim's space in relation to the world is also expressed by Elaine Scarry. See particularly Chapter One in Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 27-59.

[13] See conversation with Kryzsztof Wodiczko, chapter two, page 155. In his projection, Wodiczko included everyday occurrences, some with conversation and some, including the window washer, without conversation.

trauma of displacement created by the politics of globalism undermines individual consciousness and with it our creative extension into the world. Finally, Jaar sees our own ignorance as a breaking down of civilization, which needs active models of response to reverse the course of global degeneracy. The failure to see has consequences. It is as if Hans Haacke states the case for us, identifying trauma. Krzysztof Wodiczko initiates healing, by first demanding a critical regard to circumstance and then focusing on the necessity to project oneself into a world altered by the act of sharing. Alfredo Jaar presents models of difference, showing how we might in fact recreate a world where pain is unnecessary as tactical dominance (dominance itself being eliminated as a useful strategy).

There is still another question to ask: what myths overtake the artists as individuals as they assume the burden of ethical engagement?[14] What do we expect of the messenger? Is ethical engagement tied to ethical behavior and how much of that becomes a question of morality? In other words, at what cost to themselves do the artists envision mythic standards that must be upheld through a model of sensitivity and correctness that becomes in its application super-human? Can these artists afford to be fallible, imperfect, ambiguous human beings prone to failure or must they mask these almost certain imperfections by perpetuating an image of generosity, humility, and consideration? Time and time again in discussing this project, individuals asked me about the private lives of these artists. Did they live up to the standards they set in their work? I did not venture a biography, either professional or private.[15] Have I been touched personally by them? Yes, deeply and irrevocably, in the exchange of ideas, intersecting purposes, and shared interests to provoke the kind of questions that change lives. Have I made a difference to them or their practice? If there is any definitive lesson, it is the lesson of proportion and boundaries: that knowledge is never found but only sought in a series of reverberations that I extend in turn to my readers.

The personal ethics of these artists rests between them and discretion; the image they project is as much our own desire as their own making. In other words, whose expectations craft the myth? The messenger bears the guilt of his or her message and mediates the blame society projects outward rather than accepting as its own. The act of bearing witness is a double wound, an accountability born within the message. "The question, whatever its content, is an act of wounding; the answer, whatever its content,

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[14] Thanks to Allison Thompson for prompting this discussion.

[15] I am not convinced that the biography of an artist would not be infused automatically with blind spots effaced in an effort of unity and autonomy, its own failure to recognize *the discontinuity that is always there*, as a form of autopoeisis. My thoughts here are extrapolated from a discussion of the biological roots of systems theory. See Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston and London: New Science Library, 1987), 15-30.

is a scream."[16] Within the context of interrogation and torture, Elaine Scarry sees words (and by extension representation) as an expression of pain, inflicted and received. Painful questions and answers are also imperative within Foucault's concept of critical inquiry: at what cost do we tell the truth of ourselves? Or to Edmond Jabès' *wounded words.* The act of wounding is the metaphor that Hans Haacke creates through his torn, shredded, and smashed icons of national pride. It is the crucial necessity in the voices of Krzysztof Wodiczko's *inner public.* And it is the cause and tenor of Alfredo Jaar's lament. Again, from Scarry's perspective:

> Pain annihilates not only the objects of complex thought and emotion but also the objects of the most elemental acts of perception. It may begin by destroying some intricate and demanding allegiance, but it may end (as is implied in the expression 'blinding pain') by destroying one's ability simply to see.[17]

Haacke's hooded figure, Wodiczko's foggy window, and Jaar's empty screen all evoke *the failure to see* and the intervention necessary to circumvent the consequences.

A parable of ships and troubled waters…

When I met each artist individually, almost the first statement shared was, "Do you know: we are all very close friends?" I was not surprised: in fact, considering their status and their sense of political urgency, I should have suspected as much, although it had not occurred to me as I structured my thesis.[18] As friends, they share conversation and influence but both Krzysztof Wodiczko and Alfredo Jaar are quick to attribute the strength of their practice to Hans Haacke's example of re-scandalizing the scandal. This precipitated my question to Haacke regarding the legacy of Romanticism's Géricault and Realism's Manet. Tremulously, I connect an artist so grounded in real time to the past, especially with any notion of a discernible (let alone evolving) legacy or, worse, with any connotation of the artist as romantic martyr.

When I say "real time" I am referring to Haacke's emphasis on the production of art that is specific to the context of time and place of its exhibition. The artist coined the term in reference to his real estate projects that precipitated the cancellation of his 1971 Guggenheim exhibition: *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real-Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) and *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*

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[16] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 46.

[17] Ibid., 54.

[18] There is a fourth friend and colleague who might have played a part in this analysis had I begun from an art historical perspective rather than a phenomenological one and that is the artist Dennis Adams.

(1971).[19] While all of Haacke's projects are firmly based in the present, they also freely reference the past, whether obtuse art historical references often overlooked or concrete historical, social, or political references that form the basis of his audience's response. For example, there is the link between the lockers in Untitled #2 (2005) and *Eagle and Prey* (1992) as described in the "Preamble" of the first chapter. The eagle perched on the top of the staff but left discarded as debris after an angry rampage or when floodwaters break the levies, beams more smugly as a gilded predator framing the first George Bush's portrait in the earlier work. The similarity between this frame and Marcel Broodthaer's *Object* (1973) would not be coincidental for Haacke has felt indebted to the artist not only for his pioneering conceptual work but also for his staunch support subsequent to the cancellation of his Guggenheim exhibition.[20]

Haacke has freely quoted both Marcels (Broodthaers and Duchamp) in observance of the impact each artist made to the dislocation of art from its sacred context but also in laying claim to his own emphasis on what has become known as "institutional critique" – the importance of questioning art's relationship to the institutional framework that lays claim to it.[21] Given these obvious connections to art as an expression of dissent and contradiction, why look back to a more nebulous point of inspiration such as Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa,* for example, or Romanticism's prolific use of the metaphor of the deluge? Frankly, artists regard art and its impact differently than do academics, curators, and art historians. While the latter might establish an overview seeing the Romantic period as fraught with problems of exoticism, sentimentality, and emotion, the former might isolate the qualities of international curiosity, vibrant aesthetics, and ethical commitment. When it comes to being inspired by the works of Goya, Géricault, and Delacroix, they see not the insipid pretensions of the troubadour genre, for example, but the gritty challenge of *Désastres, The Raft of the Medusa*, and *The Massacre at Chios* or *The Barque of Dante*. Romanticism is also Nietsche and late Beethoven, not only Strauss and *Les Sylphides.* Artists such as Haacke, Wodiczko, and Jaar make use of dissident Romanticism as anger and provocation. The bottom line is not what is being exploited but what is being explored.

There is a serious sense of urgency imbedded in the methodologies of the three. Some critics, even other artists, often interpret their methods as moralizing polemics but I am convinced these artists are not telling us what to think as simply urging us *to think* – actively and aggressively. Even so, there are moments of calm, even tenderness, in

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[19] The former exhibited in Haacke's 2006 retrospective in Germany and the latter in 2008 at the Paula Cooper Gallery.

[20] See Stefan Germer, "Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys," *October* 45 (MIT Press) (Summer 1988), 63-75.

[21] For an excellent overview of this subject with references to essays significant to the development of this discussion, see Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* (September 2005), 278-283.

their practice. Can we think of Hans Haacke, for example, as using "parallel convergences" in his artistic vocabulary (as Eco accused his Italian press speaking to an intended few) in order to achieve a rapprochement of incompatible units? If we consider this form of "indirect address" in his obtuse art historical references paired with the "direct address" of his surveys and his use of iconic symbols, so familiar to us all, we understand that Haacke is interested in addressing multiple audiences not just a particular one. The willingness on the part of Krzysztof Wodiczko to work with survivors of extreme trauma is accompanied by a delicate honesty on his part to know the limitations of his role as cultural mediator. His is not a Pygmalion project to transform the lives of his participants or to change the outlook of his viewers. His is a catalytic engagement, pulse waves initiating from a visual understanding of the space in-between architecture and the human body, in-between physical and psychological consequences, in-between real life and ethics. Alfredo Jaar asks us to remove the expectation of transcendence from the work of art and replace it with transformation – how we operate in the world, the choices we make, and the impact our decisions have on others. For Jaar, there is a belief in the possibility of momentous change; for Wodiczko, a hope in the resonance of sound waves, from gentle to sonic – a stirring, undermining of expectation as a means to disrupt complacency; for Haacke, it is a belief that complexity made apparent yields awareness. This is what it means to "re-scandalize the scandal" - lessons learned from Géricault, Manet, Brecht, Duchamp, Broodthaers, Haacke, Wodiczko, and Jaar – not as one clean, definitive line or evolution but as indissoluble grains of difference, that 'magmatic entity' known as artists and their production.

Stephen Heath states, "Any discourse which fails to take account of the problem of sexual difference in its own enunciation and address will be, within a patriarchal order, precisely indifferent, a reflection of male domination."[22] I imagined at the outset of my endeavor to submit the work of these three male artists to the exigencies of a feminist critique. Here, too, I have failed. For while I have scrutinized their work, I have not maintained a strict reliance on feminist theory. Nevertheless, I have shared the page with them, not only inviting their input but also inserting my own experience in a voice that is not strictly academic but offers its own creative act of bearing witness. I have cloaked myself in their art, assumed their methodologies, and relayed an impression of what it means to overcome the consequences of failure. In this process, our voices share space in dialectical exchange, no one dominating the other. Thierry de Duve claims that "the crisis in representation is a crisis in representivity"[23] – whose voice becomes legitimate? I have tried to show implicitly that I do not see Haacke, Wodiczko, and Jaar as three, white, male artists but as three artists who do not easily fit a

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[22] Quoted in Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms* (Brooklyn: UDP, 2009), 27.

[23] Place and Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms,* 34.

prescribed mold of either struggle or success. Moreover, voices given presence in their work have been written on these pages. It is their story and their truths that matter. This is art.

Let me apply to all three atists what the critic Jan Avgikos wrote of Wodiczko's "clear intention – a commitment to resistance and truth-telling that, while often derided as outmoded or impossible, remains a basic human impulse – [that has] survived and flourished."[24] What they share in common: a recognition of history in the present, a concept of life as a process of inquiry, the sense of multiple audiences as 'publics' to be shaped by critical thinking, relating to participants in the creative process as actors rather than viewers, and understanding the communicative symbolism of space and images – these form the basis of their commitment to art and its participants. The little blue flower referred to, in my conversation with Hans Haacke, as symbolic in Romantic literature of the whole world is one small mosaic in a larger assortment of images, comprising beauty and suffering.

Susan Sontag writes, "In each instance, the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look."[25] I have proven myself to be a coward, unable to look, squeamish in films, a radio listener rather than a television viewer, one who buys newspapers only to leave them accumulate, unread, under my desk, a photojournalist who could no longer pursue a dangerous career. Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* has given us an invaluable analysis of the position of the viewer vis-à-vis the representation of atrocity. She has translated into everyday language a debate that has raged since the rise of the penny press in the nineteenth century and the interest among readers in the coverage of horrific events worldwide. She has synthesized for us complex arguments on the issues of representation that have been posed by Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Sigfried Kracaur, Roland Barthes, Victor Burgin, Mary Kelly, Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, and others. I have read the book many times, often disputing the overly summary nature of her argument; other times in awe of her ability to synthesize, but never have the ideas taken hold (hence the constant re-reading). I have needed the experience of art to receive the kind of catalyst that can pull together long forgotten experiences and create a recognition that can truly admit, yes, this makes a difference to my consciousness and my will to respond.

Paul Virilio reminds us "as Rudolf Arnheim understood, [that] sight comes from a long way off. It is a kind of dolly in, a perceptual activity that starts in the past in order to illuminate the present, to *focus on* the object of our immediate perception."[26] The works

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[24] Jan Avgikos, "Kryzysztof Wodiczko: Galerie Lelong." In *Artforum International* (December 1, 2005).

[25] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 42.

[26] Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 62.

of Haacke, Wodiczko, and Jaar have opened a wound through an experience that unsettles human conscience and uncovers an inherent failure to comprehend trauma. Along with my intellectual interest, my *studium,* I have felt a punch to my solarplexus, a *punctum*, that re-opened traumatic experience to investigation.[27] As I worked my way through this material, metaphors of ships adrift at sea, boats in troubled waters, and vessels in danger of collapse persistently appeared in dreams and in my interpretation of the works I was studying. Hans Haacke provided rising floodwaters, Krzysztof Wodiczko shipwrecked individuals, and Alfredo Jaar a bark descending the depths of hell but also reaching the shore, finding a way out. These are images from Romanticism: episodes of upheaval, re-scandalizing the scandal as a visual path acknowledging the pain of others. Looking is only the first step, responding is the next; but these are just the beginning in a process that asks us to be present within our own lives as well as accountable for the lives of others, contemporary ethics updating *out-moded*, utopian goals.

Strategic – slash – tactical: positions both related and relative to one another, positions against which one must always be critical. On the whole, strategy has been considered in this text as an overriding set of rules or principles to be challenged with carefully selected tactical procedures. As Brecht set forth: keenness, courage, skill, judgment, and cunning, to which Haacke adds: skepticism, Wodiczko: critical inquiry and Jarr: poetic intervention. These are simultaneously modes of being and means of action connoting strength rather than power. Strategy became for me a metaphor for trauma: the trauma of war, violence, torture, and degradation, whatever means used to subjugate one in fear of another whether speaking individually, in groups, or by nations. To heal from trauma requires a slash/a crossing-out/an annihilation of its own destructive fantasy (the "without" that has come to reside "within"). But while aggressive, this action is also constitutive as it builds a worldview, offers a position for the other at one's side, and accepts memory as a restless guide where the waters of comprehension and incomprehension meet.

Haacke, Wodiczko, and Jaar eschew iconicity in favor of complexity. They do not deny the viability of visual representation but they frame it tightly within the context of production. They avoid one-liners. If they do not provide more information, they trigger adequate curiosity to prompt questions, substantial self-consciousness to promote reflection, and sufficient unease to push us into the grey zone of trauma – an uncomfortable zone of unfamiliarity. They also suggest the advantages of getting lost in such a space of incomprehension for learning is not an arrival but a process we adopt in order to understand. Comprehension can better be described not as what we achieve but as how we live; this is the example Foucault offers: a life devoted to questions. It is

[27] *Studium* and *punctum* are well-known from Roland Barthes' essay-cum-memoir, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

the eros of philosophy, a passion for uncovering the not-knowing in knowing.[28] So too, the artist, Jalil Toufic, intimates that a complex incomprehension is far superior to a simplistic comprehension that reduces conflict to "good" and "evil".

Why do we avoid the recognition of atrocity? Self-preservation, guilt, denial are all understandable human reactions in the presence of danger or within the danger of memory. But we cannot survive in a state of exception, one that is fundamental to the ideological position that evil is always *there*[29] and that Americans can perpetrate no harm and need at all cost to be protected from harm. It is not by chance the artists I have selected were not born in the United States. When I heard Sarah Palin in her vice-presidential nomination acceptance speech say that she was not worried about what Barack Obama took to Europe but what he brought home from Europe, "European ideas" (foreign ideas), I realized how radical it remains to look outside American culture for answers. It also remains a radical proposition to be critical. But what strikes me the most about these artists and others working with equal unease is the gift they offer. Rather than present simple, didactic statements, their works are complex activities that extend beyond their own limited engagements in Chelsea galleries moving into a tessellated expansion of cause and effect. This is the process of their lives: asking questions and insuring that the method of their work matches the meaning and impact of work – prodding, cajoling, and maneuvering its way into your thinking.

"Narratives can make us understand," Susan Sontag has emphasized, "Photographs do something else: they haunt us."[30] These works have, for me, done both: they have haunted me for four years leading me to an understanding that is far stronger than when I first encountered them. Ultimately, they have encouraged me to act on my ideas, developing a purpose to my practice. Sontag reviews the futility of the photographer's intention vis-à-vis the space of exhibition and concludes that the best films and sometimes art can create the context necessary to the secondary witness of trauma. But she adds, "We can't possibly imagine what it was like. We can't imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is; and how normal it becomes. Can't understand, can't imagine." To which Wodiczko confirms, "It is the impossibility of knowing that is being projected."

While these artists do not document war, terror, and atrocity, they speak to the conditions of its existence and the impact of its experience. Accepting the inability to

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[28] John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), Introduction, 1-27. 'Not-knowing' is also a concept developed by Emmanuel Levinas.

[29] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 88. This idea, derived from Carl Schmitt's political theology, is also delineated by Giorgio Agamben who published his *Stato di eccezione* in 2003, later translated by Kevin Attel into English and published as *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[30] Ibid., 89.

translate experience is perhaps the first step to addressing rather than appropriating it. It is not a question of what can I learn from art – what does it offer me – but what I can add to the discussion. Rather than an ethics of position – "Where do I stand?" – we could confront an *ethics of involvement* – "What is my participation?" Hans Haacke, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Alfredo Jaar begin the confrontation by asking questions, continue with a complex interaction with their subjects, and end by sharing a model of another kind of reality. At the same time their process of intervention effaces the transitions between beginning, middle, and end of a project: they invite us to become lost in the engagement of an event that started long ago and may never finish, where multiple voices converse. It is an open body of water where we must have faith in our ability to navigate and a willingness to bear up under pressure by getting our hands dirty and risking mistakes. We call this *conviction* and if it becomes a means to disrupt the repetition of pain, of trauma, and of the past, then it has *broken the silence* for others and ourselves.

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I have divided the bibliography into sections with texts pertinent to each individual artist following the texts that have shaped the historical and theoretical context of the dissertation as a whole. The selection, while not a complete record of all the works and sources I have consulted, gives a sense of the range of texts that have been useful in writing this dissertation. It would be impossible, for example, to list the numerous news reports both print and media that contextualized the particular socio-political environment prompting both the making of the works of art and the writing of this dissertation. I also have avoided listing the contents of the artist files I perused at the Museum of Modern Art archives in Queens, New York.

In the section "Selected solo exhibition catalogs, monographs, and artist publications" I have listed only those catalogs that were useful to my research and I have not listed separately the artists' own writings, including some of them as full texts under "Selected solo exhibition catalogs…" and some under "Selected reviews, interviews, and essays." For Hans Haacke, *Werkmonographie* contains his early texts, interviews, and essays and his two most recent publications from 2004 and 2006 contain reprints, translations or excerpts of many of his own statements. The 2004 publication lists his texts in the chronology. For Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles* remains the single most comprehensive record of his writing although his newest publication *City of Refuge: A 9/11 Memorial* (2009) is the artist's ethical consideration of Emmanuel Levinas' Judaic notion of the individual as inherently 'half-innocent, half-guilty', a post-September 11 tactics for promoting peace through controlled conflict. For Alfredo Jaar the artist interview whether in print or media recording is perhaps secondary to the portrait one gleans of the artist from his own multimedia website, www.alfredojaar.net.

While the content of the bibliography shifts freely from sources that are specific to the mediums of photography, video, and sculpture to those that deal more generally in the psychology, philosophy, and theory of perception, I hope the entries serve the reader who wishes to continue this line of inquiry into ethics, representation, and a critical production and consideration of art.

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