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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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Addresses To/Through/Within a Public Sphere:
The Politics and Performativity of Contemporary Photo-Works

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

Rachel Zimmermann

June 2015

Thesis Committee:

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Rachel Zimmermann
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INTRODUCTION

The Performativity of Publics

From Dadaist photomontages of the early twentieth century (Figure 0.1) to photo-collages like those of Barbara Kruger (Figure 0.2), artists and academics alike have been interested in the relationship between words and images, exploring how they function together to create and complicate meaning(s).¹ But what happens when our analyses of such text/image works of art—specifically the photo-collages of Barbara Kruger and the photographs of Gillian Wearing and Sharon Hayes—also consider the public spaces in which those artworks circulate? How might our understandings of these artworks—their meaning, function, and potential for enacting socio-political change within a public sphere—shift if we move beyond discussing them in terms of content and form, and instead explore the various roles (i.e. the photographer, photographed subject(s), and whom the work addresses) involved in the photographic act or encounter?

For Victor Burgin, “...the photograph is a *place of work*, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, the codes he or she is familiar with in order to *make sense*. Photography is one signifying system among others in society which produces the ideological subject in the same moment in which they ‘communicate’ their ostensible ‘contents.’”² In this sense, photographs function as

¹ See Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007) and W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays of Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

² Victor Burgin, “Looking at Photographs,” in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: MacMillan, 1982), 153.

sites where viewers draw on cultural codes to make meaning of the image and in turn are constructed by photographs as subjects within the social apparatus. Thus, photography within the context of the public sphere has produced a kind of image culture, one in which viewers and images simultaneously (and continuously) constitute one another.

The works of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes each demonstrate unique approaches to the medium of photography and its relationship to the creation of publics, while remaining grounded in the politics of their viewing publics. Kruger's photo-collages of the 1980s offer critical commentary on structures of power related to gender and consumerism through her manipulation of found images and ambiguous (but pithy) texts. *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (1985; fig. 0.2), for example, prompts viewers to question the masculine subjectivity of the boy pictured flexing his bicep as well as how physical strength has come to be associated with the heroic figure. Wearing, using the combination of hand-written signs and portraits of ordinary people in her series, *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93), picks up what Kruger is pointing out in her photo-collages and raises questions about the boundary between private thoughts and public appearance. And Sharon Hayes uses both found texts and anachronistic protest signs in the photographically documented "actions" of *In the Near Future, New York* (2005) to disrupt normative conceptions of time, space, gender, and publicity.

The primary themes of these artists' work—that is, Kruger's exploration of the politics of identity, Wearing's investigation of agency and the authenticity of speech, and Hayes' preoccupation with the instability of temporality—are undeniably linked (and, I

would argue, overlap) within the context of contemporary photography and public discourse. These artists engage critically with questions of identity—or subject formation—its relationship to language, and the roles of both within the context of the public sphere, while simultaneously illustrating how the public sphere mutates across time(s). Thus, in viewing the 1980s photo-collages of Barbara Kruger, the early nineties photographs of Gillian Wearing’s *Signs...* series, and the photographic “documents” of Sharon Hayes’s *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), we can see a number of commonalities across these works—specifically, the text/image legacy of modernism, the use of photography within a social situation, and the role of the “caption” in pinning down meaning.³ However, we also come to realize that publics, with specific historical locations (Kruger’s postmodern 1980s America, Wearing’s early 1990s London, and Hayes’s turn of the century New York City), are shaped within an ever-changing public sphere. As theoretical entities within a space they remain constant, but the particularities of a public subjectivity within a public sphere are also always in flux. In examining the performative and public aspects of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes’s work we can better understand how these photographs address underlying socio-political issues of their time, as well as how their creation and circulation correspond to a shifting understandings of publics that although complex and sometimes contradictory, are also somewhat tangible within the space of the public sphere.

³ For a discussion of captioning within the history of photography see Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 2 1927-1834*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone et. al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 507-30.

First, it is necessary to define what is meant by a terms like “public” and “public sphere,” in addition to exploring how they have been theorized over the past few decades. While this is by no means an exhaustive overview of recent literature on the public sphere, it will highlight some key texts and theorists essential in establishing the framework for our analysis of the photographs of Barbara Kruger, Gillian Wearing, and Sharon Hayes.

In 1962, Jürgen Habermas wrote the influential *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, in which he attributed the development of the public sphere to the nineteenth century liberal bourgeoisie. As historian Joan B. Landes succinctly puts it, “the bourgeois public sphere [was] conceived to be a sphere of private people coming together as a public through the ‘historically unprecedented’ public use of their reason.”⁴ Thus, the Habermasian conception of a public sphere indicates a space that is characterized by the participation of social subjects in the construction of a collective public will. However, as is indicated in the photo-works of Kruger, access to the public sphere—or a universal ability to participate in public discourse—is in fact somewhat limited or contingent. Habermas further argued that the bourgeois public sphere was ultimately lost as a result of the rise of consumerism, mass media, and an expansion of the state—all of which marked significant shifts in the dimensional boundaries of the public (i.e. those who were granted access and what they were allowed to contribute). As critic Bruce Robbins puts it, “publicness, we are told again and again and again, is a

⁴ Joan B. Landes, “The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration,” in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995), 95.

quality that we once had but have now lost...”⁵ Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, presented us with a historically-located public sphere—one which developed out of the rise of café culture and slipped away with the emergence of mass culture.

Building off of Habermas’ text, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge wrote *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* in 1972, which was then translated twenty years later. Their text focused more intently on the relationship between mass media and the public sphere, and examined the potential of television to establish a counterpublic, or proletarian public sphere. What this book and their subsequent texts reveal is that a counterpublic challenges the seeming universality of circulated (printed) texts, as well as essentialist notions of what constitutes a community. Successful counterpublics stem from recognition of the complexity of pre-existing publics, and build on the gaps and overlaps inherent in said publics to create a more open public sphere for the future. As Miriam Hansen adeptly describes it:

...a cultural politics of counterpublicity can be founded neither on abstract ideals of universality nor on essentialist, identitarian notions of community. Rather, it has to begin with understanding the complex dynamics of existing public spheres, their imbrication of global and local parameters, their syncretistic, unstable makeup, their particular modes of dis/organizing social and collective experience—gaps and overlaps that can be used for agency, solidarity, and the fashioning of a common future.⁶

⁵ Bruce Robbins, Introduction to *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), viii.

⁶ Miriam Hansen, foreword to *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward and Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xli.

In other words, a “successful” counterpublic must identify and address the contradictions, gaps, and layering inherent in (pre-) existing publics in order to create a more fluid and equitable space for people to participate in; that is, counterpublics develop out of, and demonstrate how, the tensions of other publics can be productive for future generations of people. For Negt and Kluge, this politics of counterpublicity was located in the rise of televisual media, its production of experience, and the development of a proletarian public sphere that enabled them to move “beyond individualist and rationalist conceptions of subjectivity” inherent in Habermas’ analysis of the bourgeois public sphere.⁷

While Negt and Kluge contextualize their argument for the development of a counterpublic in relation to television, we have long since moved beyond television as a novel form of media. The question thus becomes: How do we re-conceptualize public space in a post-televisual, or digital, world that is largely dependent on the internet for the circulation of texts, images, etc.? Picking up the discussion of counterpublicity is queer theorist Michael Warner’s book, *Publics and Counterpublics*, published in 2005. Warner begins with the fundamental question: “What is a public?” and proceeds to discuss the complex relationship between queer politics and the public sphere—specifically, how subcultural publics invested in queer politics result in the formation of counterpublics situated in a mutually defining relationship with those of the mainstream.

To explicate the complexity of a public, Warner lists three things that it can be: first, the public can be “a kind of social totality;” second, a public can be a bound, or

⁷ Monika Krause, “The Production of Counter-Publics and the Counter-Publics of Production,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, 119-128.

pointed, audience like that of a theatrical performance; and third, there is a kind of public that comes into existence only in relation to texts and their circulation.⁸ The third definition, unbounded and somewhat abstract, seems directly connected to the notion of a public sphere and functions as a base for the subsequent analyses of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes' photographs. First, a public sphere functions as a realm in which time and space converge. Thus, as texts circulate over time within and between spaces they construct publics (and counterpublics) within a public sphere. Second, a public performatively addressed and constituted by circulating texts, implies a three-dimensionality characteristic of the public sphere. Theoretically, texts can move multidirectionally through networks of power as they are shared, co-opted, and/or altered by people of the public, circulating within a sphere;⁹ and it is here, within the spatial realm of the public sphere, that we find both the performativity of photographs as well as the potential for a politics of counterpublicity. All three "senses" of a public apply to this discussion of the work of Barbara Kruger, Gillian Wearing, and Sharon Hayes particularly when we consider the specific publics addressed and constructed by each artist's work as historically located "social totalities" or "audiences." But it is their inclusion of written texts, their functioning as photographic texts, and their explicit engagement with the people of the public sphere that, most clearly, illustrate Warner's third notion of a public—and together offer us a more complex reading of these images.

⁸ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2005), 65-66.

⁹ Consider how certain texts, or in this case photographs, become iconic—repeatedly circulated and imbued with a common, publicly recognized meaning—as well as how the meaning of an image can change depending on who disseminates or uses it and the network in which it is circulated.

According to Warner, “only when images or texts can be understood as meaningful to a public rather than simply to oneself, or to specific others, can they be called ‘public.’”¹⁰ Kruger’s photo-collages, Wearing’s *Signs...* (1992-93) series, and Hayes’ *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), are works with layers of meaning that simultaneously address specific subjectivities within a public and a more general public sphere. For Warner, “a fundamental feature of the contemporary public sphere is this double movement of identification and alienation,” in which subjects are both directly and indirectly addressed.¹¹ And a public, fundamentally, “exists” by virtue of being addressed. Warner explains this stating, “The way *the* public functions in the public sphere (as the people) is only possible because it is really *a* public of *discourse*. The peculiar character of *a* public is that it is a space of discourse organized by discourse. It is self-creating and self-organized; and herein lies its power, as well as its elusive strangeness.”¹² Thus, Warner’s conception of publics hinges on theories of the performative, and opens up our reading of the photographs by Barbara Kruger, Gillian Wearing, and Sharon Hayes.

In 1955, philosopher J.L. Austin delivered his now-famous lecture series, “How to Do Things With Words” at Harvard University. In his lectures he proposed that we do not simply use language to make assertions, but rather we use it to actually *do* things—

¹⁰ Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 235.

¹¹ Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” 252.

¹² Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 68.

actions he later termed “speech acts.”¹³ His work, used and expanded upon by subsequent philosophers, linguists, and critical theorists, attempts to uncover those utterances that are often mistaken for statements—that is, “performatives.” Performatives, according to Austin, are neither descriptive nor can they be identified as true or false. However, they require appropriate circumstances in order to be “felicitous,” or effective performatives.¹⁴ For example, Austin argues that the utterance of “I do” by a bride or groom in the context of a wedding ceremony is a prime example of the explicit performative in that uttering it effectively commits the speaker to their partner in that moment of speech.

Austin’s theory of speech acts, or performative language, would provide the foundation for the subsequent theorization of performativity.¹⁵ Judith Butler, for example, in the more recent text *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, explores Austin’s “performatives” in the contexts of hate speech and self-declarations of identity. More generally, though, (and perhaps more boldly) Butler lays the groundwork for her analyses by explaining how language constitutes the body:

Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible.¹⁶

¹³ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 40.

¹⁴ It is difficult to determine the efficacy of a performative, without its context or proper conditions, as “the explicit performative shares with the constative utterance the grammatical form of a ‘statement.’” See Timothy Gould, “The Unhappy Performative,” in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 21.

¹⁵ Austin’s theory of performative language is referenced by numerous essays in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995) and is foundational to Judith Butler’s *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 5.

Thus, a public comprised of bodies is constituted and sustained by language—its existence as a social entity brought about through an already recognizable linguistic address. Put another way, “to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible...One ‘exists’ not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable.”¹⁷ Publics, thus, “exist” and will continue to do so as a result of the circulation of texts and images that are repeatedly addressed to the generalized totality within the public sphere (where the performativity of these texts/images/photographs takes place).

This performativity of publics is crucial to understanding the sometimes contradictory, ambiguous nature of public spheres. But it is the circulation of texts and images within the space of the public sphere, addressing and constructing multiple publics, that results in the potential development of a counterpublic. Thus, reading the work of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes in light of the overlapping theories of performativity and publics raises a number of potentially illuminating questions to consider in our analyses: mainly, how might artists in addressing socio-political issues like gender, political agency, or the efficacy of social action within the context of the public sphere foreground publics and public discourse in their works? How do the photographs’ addresses illustrate the inherent politics of performativity? Do differing levels of explicit engagement with politics—i.e. Kruger’s overt agitprop, Wearing’s portraits of the “average” person (but including the homeless), and Hayes’ amalgamation

¹⁷ Ibid.

of anachronistic protest signs, quasi-demonstrations, and photographic documentation—result in the creation of effective counterpublics? Or can a politics of counterpublicity even develop within the image culture of the current public sphere?

Chapter One takes the 1980s photo-collage works of Barbara Kruger as its subject matter, arguing that the works use conventions of public signage like pointed combinations of text and image, billboards as spaces of display/circulation, and ambiguous language to employ a rhetoric of abstraction prominent in print media. Thus, the works performatively address a normative public reminiscent of the bourgeois public sphere described by Habermas in 1962. As artist Martha Rosler notes, "...using the language of advertising or a series of 'cultural-unconscious' utterances in fact leaves their systems uncriticized and reproduces their power-seeking and anxiety-provoking gambits far too well."¹⁸ Framed this way, Kruger's authoritative mode of address falls short of critiquing the public itself or fully addressing a counterpublic, even as she challenges the individual subjectivities implicated as part of the social entity. Rosler's assertion, in other words, indicates how the use of personal abstraction does little to challenge the gendered (masculine) role of the speaker in the context of advertising. "Self-abstraction from male bodies," Warner writes, "confirms masculinity. Self-abstraction from female bodies denies femininity."¹⁹ Thus, the simultaneous use of abstraction and advertising rhetoric characteristic of Kruger's photo-collages results in a speaking subject that upholds the

¹⁸ Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 329.

¹⁹ Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," 240.

masculine authority of the public speaker and constructs bound publics within a normative (gendered) conception of the public sphere.

Gillian Wearing's large-scale photographic project, *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93), is the work discussed throughout Chapter Two. In contrast to Kruger's authoritative photo-collage works, Wearing's project *Signs...* (1992-93) draws attention to Wearing's investigation of the constructs of "public" and "private" and how the photographs attempt to make their subjects visible within the public sphere as participants, speakers, and subjects. Given the opportunity to express whatever was running through their mind in the moments preceding the photographic encounter, each participant draws our attention to the very conditions of publicness: what constitutes the "private" versus the "public?"²⁰ Therefore, Wearing's series, as a whole, investigates how these two extremely loaded terms factor into what constitutes a public body; and it constructs publics—located in London during the early 1990s and beyond—through the very ordinariness of its portraits and written sentiments. *Signs...* (1992-93), thus, embodies the political, public subjectivity to which we all belong and performs its address within the public sphere.

The final chapter, focused on Sharon Hayes' *In The Near Future*, *New York* (2005), argues that Hayes' project—in exploring the roles of protestor, witness, and public space(s) within the context of social action—repeatedly expresses a desire for concrete, political action in spite of her understanding that the public is an abstract,

²⁰ It is important to note here, however, that Wearing's project is somewhat utopian in its resistance to authority. That is, while her subjects are foregrounded as participants and speakers responsible for shaping their own subjectivities and pushing back against "signs," they are still subject to her camera.

unbounded entity. One way she does this is to point out the multiplicity of publics addressed through both the signs of *In The Near Future, New York* (2005) and the project's photographic documentation. From within a specific public, Hayes disrupts linear conceptions of time by addressing not only her "present-day" audience, but also those referenced through texts relevant to earlier political contexts and the photographic documentation of her performances. In doing so, Hayes' project emphasizes the performativity inherent within the public sphere. Yet, the photographic documentation of her "actions," also prompts one to question their definitions of art, activism, politics, and protest. As a result, Hayes' project not only emphasizes the connections between language, performativity, and the socio-political issues of a public, but also encourages us to consider the role photographs perform in relation to social action meant to incite change (or perhaps vocalize the opinion of a counterpublic). Consequently, Hayes creates a project that simultaneously speaks to and constructs a body within the space of the public sphere that is as multifaceted, complex, and political as the work itself.

In examining the early works of Barbara Kruger, Gillian Wearing, and Sharon Hayes, this thesis explores how contemporary art has performatively addressed shifts in cultural understandings of the public sphere. By using texts within their work and engaging with the very people who engage within and constitute the public sphere, Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes explicitly address publics in their art from the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s (respectively). Dependent upon the public for the circulation and creation of their works, these artists demonstrate increasingly more complex understandings of the relationship between contemporary politics and the public sphere—graduating from

making poignant, provocative statements about gender stereotypes to foregrounding the public as a “speaking subject” capable of deconstructing gendered notions of publicness to implicating oneself within the multiple, temporally-shifting publics.

CHAPTER 1

Abstraction as Authority: Barbara Kruger's Performative Address to Public(s)

Much has been written about the prolific artist Barbara Kruger—from interviews with the artist to an extensive list of articles and exhibition catalogues. Yet, little has been stated about how her works, installed as billboards or bus placards in metropolitan areas, function within the public sphere. Kruger's photo-collages, in fact, reveal quite a bit about how publics (and counterpublics) were discussed and theorized during her early career as an artist. And, more importantly, they offer a clear example of how discourses of the public sphere have shifted in recent decades, particularly when considered in relation to the work of subsequent artists like Gillian Wearing and Sharon Hayes.

While Kruger's earliest artistic work dates back to the late 1960s, it was not until the 1980s that she really started producing work with an agitprop—an explicitly propagandistic—style and agenda. Her photo-collages, deeply steeped in the socio-political context of feminism, have been widely discussed in terms of their commentary on gender roles and consumerism. “Her work,” writes Kate Linker, “has both a place and a strategic role within contemporary artistic discourse. On one hand, it testifies to the recent broadening of artistic practice, pointing to the expansion of culture into politics. But it also evinces changes, wrought in the last two decades [1970s/1980s], that are inextricably linked to the phenomenon of the postmodern.”¹ However, reading Kruger's art within the context of the public sphere also requires one to consider her means of

¹ Kate Linker and Barbara Kruger, *Love for Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 12.

display—that is, the installation of her works as public signs, or billboards. *Untitled (Surveillance is Your Busywork)* (1985; figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3), for instance, was a bus placard in Atlanta in 1985, a poster in Sydney, Australia in 1988, and a billboard in Minneapolis in 1985. “...texts cross one’s path in their endless search for a public of one kind or another,” writes Warner in *Publics and Counterpublics*, “the morning paper...movies, billboards, official postings...Your attention is everywhere solicited by artifacts that say, before they say anything else, *Hello, public!*”² By installing these works as billboards and placards, Kruger very deliberately addresses people within the spatial realm of the public sphere. Her works, before they say anything else—before they spark any sort of discourse related to gender roles and stereotypes among their audience—say “hello,” based not only on the way they look but also on their placement, or context of display. But what happens to the public when Kruger appropriates language that is gendered male and re-presents it in the public sphere? Is the result a performative address that constructs a particular kind of public—one that draws our attention more generally to the politics inherent in public space?

According to theorist Michael Warner, for an author or, in this case, an artist, “what you say will carry force not because of who you are but despite who you are...this rhetorical strategy of self-abstraction is both the utopian moment of the public sphere and a major source of domination” because, as Warner explains, the ability to abstract has always been an unequally available resource.³ Thus, the open, accessible public sphere is

² Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2005), 7.

³ Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 239.

seemingly actualized as a result of a writer's "self-abstraction;" but the question remains: what exactly is meant by the rhetorical strategy of personal abstraction? Warner discusses this in the context of early print media and the development of a public, arguing that people began to read publications like the *Spectator* and the *Guardian* as "authoritative mediations" of their own personhood, rather than as personal extensions of the text's author.⁴ Writers, whose bodily realities—including characteristics like race, gender, social class, etc.—went unmarked, were those capable of mastering a rhetoric of personal abstraction in print. Thus, it would seem that self-abstraction refers to one's ability to assume a seemingly objective, disembodied, and authoritative subject position as the author, or artist, of a circulating text. A subject position, as Warner explains, that has historically been mastered by "white, male, literate, and propertied" subjects.⁵ Furthermore, the very structure of the public sphere—an asymmetrical relationship between who does and does not have access to speak within it, or between the bodily realities that are affirmed as "universal" versus those that are "particular,"—is based on this logic of abstraction. "The bourgeois public sphere," according to Warner, "has been structured from the outset by a logic of abstraction that provides a privilege for unmarked identities: the male, the white, the middle-class, the normal."⁶ Thus, Kruger's photo-collages, which feature appropriated images and texts and are situated within the context of the public sphere, raise interesting questions about a photographer's ability to self-abstract in their address to a public, and how one may or may not succeed in doing so

⁴ Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," 238.

⁵ Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," 239.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

when discussing explicitly political issues relevant to the marginalized subjects of the public sphere.

Using what we now commonly recognize as characteristic gestures of postmodernism⁷—i.e. appropriation, re-photography, and stylistic pastiche—Kruger adeptly made a name for herself by creating works that simultaneously draw in and confound the viewer. Her skill with these techniques was in part developed while studying at the Parsons School of Design. There, she studied under the renowned photographer Diane Arbus and noted graphic designer Marvin Israel. However, Kruger’s choice of images also stems from her decade-long career as a graphic designer for Condé Nast Publications, where, as head designer of *Mademoiselle* magazine, she was exposed to the advertising and fashion industries. While working as a graphic designer, Kruger developed an awareness of the ways that images and language construct subjects—an awareness that she uses critically in the creation of her own works. Often, the formal strategies of her work are discussed in terms of advertising.⁸ Kruger’s art, with its consistent use of pronouns and succinct textual statements, certainly reflects an approach similar to that of advertisers. Yet, her works—particularly those on billboards—are not to be considered advertisements in the conventional sense of word, as they do not promote

⁷ For discussions of postmodernist theory and art see Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1998).

⁸ See, for example, Linda Weintraub, Arthur Danto & Thomas McEvelley, *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art’s Meaning in Contemporary Society, 1970s-1990s* (Litchfield, CT: Art Insights, Inc. 1996), Lisa Phillips, “The Money Shot” in *Money Talks*, ed. Barbara Kruger and Lisa Phillips (New York: Skarstedt Fine Art, 2004): 5-8, and Kate Linker, *Love for Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996).

commercial interests, but instead draw our attention to the role money plays in various hierarchies of power (Figure 1.4).⁹ As Lisa Phillips puts it, “Kruger’s work demonstrates that business, sex, charisma, culture, knowledge, etc. are all quantifiable and susceptible to corruption by greed.”¹⁰ Uniquely and very effectively, Kruger exploits the visual strategies of advertising and the fashion industry, to distinguish herself and her work from their purposes. But Kruger’s artworks are considered postmodern for more than just their incorporation of appropriated imagery or stylistic pastiche.

Hal Foster, for example, has regarded Kruger’s art as an example of “critical postmodernism.” For Foster, postmodernism marks a significant change from the historically-fixed ideology of modernism, which he regards as “a cultural construct based on specific conditions;” one that “*has* a historical limit.”¹¹ Kruger’s work, gaining prominence in the 1980s, demonstrates a paradigmatic shift away from the “conditions” of modernism, namely its emphasis on originality, or newness, its logocentrism, and the elitist exclusion of certain groups of people from public discourse.¹² Yet, the criticality of Kruger’s art also lies in its very ability to address specific stereotypes and cultural issues.

⁹ In one sense, they function as a kind of “meta-ad.”

¹⁰ Lisa Phillips, “The Money Shot,” in *Money Talks*, edited by Barbara Kruger and Lisa Phillips (New York: Starskedt Fine Art, 2004), 5.

¹¹ Hal Foster, introduction to *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essay on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1998), x.

¹² Modernism, in the context of the visual arts, was in part characterized by a shift away from the logic of perspective that had governed artistic production since the Renaissance. Additionally, artists experimented with form and color, as they were no longer compelled to make works preoccupied with capturing visible reality. More generally, modernism flourished in consumerist, capitalistic societies and is often critiqued as elitist. For explicit discussions of modernism and the arts see, Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1965), Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1995).

Kruger raises pointed questions with her photo-collages, prompting viewers to think about the status of various subject positions in culture and politics.

Postmodernism, as expressed in the works of Barbara Kruger, is not just an identifiable style, but also a historical condition characterized, in part, by a de-centering of the self. If analyses of visual representation in the early 1980s confirmed that traditional representational systems of the West “posit the subject of representation as absolutely *centered, unitary, masculine*,” then postmodern artwork like Kruger’s attempted to disrupt that “mastering position” by destabilizing the male subject position.¹³ Consider *Untitled (You Destroy What You Think is Difference)* (1983; figure 1.5), for example, in which Kruger appropriates the rhetoric of advertising to make a pointed statement that is directed at a male audience. Running diagonally through the black background of the work, from the top right to the bottom left, is a wide strip of white containing the words: “you destroy what you think is difference.” To the right of the text is a grainy profile of a face from the bottom of the nose to the top of the hair, with eyes closed and hair pulled back from their forehead. To the left of the words, and extending from the top left corner, is another grainy image of a person’s face. This figure is even further truncated, recognizable only by the nose and eyes, which appear to be closed like those of the figure in the bottom right. The fragmented faces of those included in this work are non-specific in terms of their gender, sex, and even ethnicity, emphasizing the accusatory statement communicated by the text: the charge of destroying difference that dominates this photo-collage. The subjectivities of those represented in

¹³ Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1998), 67; see Note 3.

Untitled (You Destroy What You Think is Difference) are ambiguous and unstable, but the appropriation of advertising rhetoric evident in the image implies that this work is oriented toward a (patriarchal) capitalist public. Additionally, in using the pronoun “you,” the abstract, invisible speaking subject of the work is situated in opposition to the receiving public, the “listeners.” Recall, here, Warner’s discussion of abstraction within the realm of the public sphere and the circulation of texts—mainly that the self-abstracted figure within the bourgeois public sphere was actually characterized by his maleness, whiteness, etc. Kruger thus attempts to co-opt the masculine role of the public speaker (using the rhetoric of advertising and self-abstraction) to address a general public audience within the space of the public sphere. But as an explicitly feminist artist working in the 1980s and through her use of the oppositional “you,” she addresses a *particular* male public subject within the performatively constructed public sphere. While utilizing the authoritative position of the masculine public speaker to issue an accusatory statement, Kruger remains distinct from her masculine audience by using the pronoun “you” instead of “we.” As a result, she complicates the conditions of the masculine, “mastering position” of the photographer as public speaker and directly addresses a male public. Furthermore, her use of the words “what you *think* is difference” addresses the false nature of constructed patriarchal hierarchies of power. *Untitled (You Destroy What You Think is Difference)* illustrates how Kruger’s photo-collages attempt to destabilize the position of the modern subject—to de-center the self through language and representation.

Through the conventions of public signage, that is, striking combinations of text and found image; non-traditional spaces of display; and the use of ambiguous language for a general audience, Kruger's photo-collages use a rhetoric of abstraction in order to simultaneously create and address publics that are determined by cultural stereotypes and the structures of power that keep them in place within the public sphere. In doing so, Kruger's work, while controversial in terms of gender roles and consumerism, falls short of critiquing the historically naturalized notion of a modern public as Habermas conceived it.¹⁴

For Kate Linker, postmodernism fundamentally “inquires into the ways in which our identities are constructed by representations in society”—an aspect characteristic of Kruger's work, which challenges cultural stereotypes, particularly those related to gender.¹⁵ Discourses in the 1980s, especially among those of the art world in the United States, frequently addressed shifting definitions of feminism, as well as its effectiveness as a social movement. While Kruger is widely considered a spokeswoman for feminism, “she is also its barometer, for beginning in the early 1980s her work registers a profound change within the women's movement.”¹⁶ For Kruger and other feminists, gender was not regarded as innate or “essential,” but rather as a construction produced through representation. Women artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly those on the West Coast operating under essentialist feminism, valorized characteristics of femininity

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Linker, *Love for Sale*, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59

in their works in an attempt to obtain recognition for the experiences and conditions of being a woman; they were, according to scholars Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, “concerned with exploring issues of aesthetics and female consciousness.”¹⁷ Artists such as Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and Faith Ringgold, for example, created works, like *The Dinner Party* (1974-79; figure 1.6), that aimed to place women’s “crafts” into a high art context. Kruger, by contrast, is primarily interested in disrupting the centrality (and thus, authority) of the masculine subject, which she does by raising questions about the naturalization of gender. In the 1980s, artists like Kruger interrogated the seemingly inherent correspondence between gender and sex—i.e. the associations of feminine/female and masculine/male—positing instead that our images, our language, and especially combinations of the two (often found in advertisements or fashion spreads) reinforce and perpetuate the essentialist belief that gender is a condition of biological sex.

Kruger’s interrogations of representation, through text-image works like *Untitled (We Have Received Orders Not to Move)* (1982; figure 1.7), effectively launched a re-oriented “campaign for gender equity.”¹⁸ In *Untitled (We Have Received Orders Not to Move)*, we see the blackened silhouette of a woman who appears to be seated, although there is no chair represented. As she bends over, a hand resting on her thigh and her face pointed downward to look at her knees, her body is immobilized by the pushpins that outline the back of her body from neck to ankle. The words “we have received orders not to move” are superimposed on the legs of the woman with “not to move” printed in a

¹⁷ Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” *The Art Bulletin* 69 (Sept. 1987): 329.

¹⁸ Linda Weintraub, Arthur Danto & Thomas McEvelley, *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art’s Meaning in Contemporary Society, 1970s-1990s* (Litchfield, CT: Art Insights, 1996).

larger font. This work clearly seeks to address the constraints placed on women in the West by a patriarchal society. In using the pronoun “we,” Kruger situates the “speaker” and the figure represented as female, corresponding to her own identity and her role as the creator of this image. However, while the speaking subject of this photo-collage is part of a broader female subjectivity, one that affirms to the femaleness of the figure represented in the image, she is still an abstracted (i.e. disembodied) figure speaking for a collective public of women. Thus, Kruger’s photo-collage, with its abstracted “speaker,” addresses a more generalized public performing within the space of the public sphere.

In one of her many interviews, Kruger explicitly identifies herself as a feminist: “I don’t think in binary terms. These are all elements of the male approach. As a feminist I question these terms. I wish to open things up.”¹⁹ Certainly Kruger “opens things up” for reassessment or consideration—things like gender, the role of capitalism in Western societies, and what kind of power (or lack thereof) a person has based on their position in

¹⁹ Weintraub, Danto, and McEvelley, *Art on the Edge and Over*, 196; Ferdinand de Saussure, a figure responsible for the emergence of structuralism, developed a theory of structural linguistics that distinguished between *langue*, or the idealized abstraction of language, and *parole*, or language as it is used in everyday lives. He argued that a “sign,” made up of both an abstract concept (the signified) and the perceived visual (the signifier), gains meaning from its relationship to other signs. His argument, in the context of cultural categories like gender or race, frames binary language—i.e. masculine/feminine, white/black—as not just dichotomies, but as oppositions arranged according to underlying hierarchies of power. Thus, in the case of gender, the marked (valued) concept of “masculine” contrasts the unmarked “feminine” in a way that defines “feminine” as simply the absence of “masculine,” effectively casting the unmarked “feminine” as subordinate. For further discussion of structuralism and semiotics see: Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), and Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

society.²⁰ However, by using a rhetoric of advertising and the rhetorical strategy of abstraction, Kruger creates photo-collages that explore the role of the (powerful, male) public speaker without completely dismantling the bodily realities historically associated with the figures that assumed, and continue to assume, said role. For art historian Linda Nochlin, as well as other second-wave feminists, reversing the roles of men and women, exemplified in Kruger's appropriation of images and language, is enough to offer a valid critique to patriarchal structures of power.²¹ Yet, Kruger's 1980s photo-collages performatively address publics within a space that to present-day viewers might still seem somewhat bounded.²² *Untitled (We Have Received Orders Not to Move)*, for example, makes us question the limited capabilities of women: Where are these orders coming from? How do they manifest themselves? In what ways are women immobilized? Why are they constrained? But beyond implying men, or the patriarchy, is the source of the "orders not to move," this work does little to tangibly deconstruct the categories of "male" and "female." That is, viewers are still directed to read the image, as ambiguous and "open-ended" as it might be, through the binaries of gender and sex. As a result, Kruger's photo-collages remain addressed to a public of 1980s America, but (understandably so) do not necessarily reach forward to performatively construct public spheres of the future (i.e. present-day and beyond).

²⁰ For example, in Kruger's works explicitly related to gender roles, she raises questions about who has the power to speak, act, shop, etc.

²¹ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, ed. Linda Nochlin (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

²² Here, I am referring to contemporary critiques of feminism—those that aim to distinguish themselves from "mainstream" feminism based on different experiences of race, socio-economic status, sexuality, etc. that one feels are not (adequately) addressed by prominent feminist figures or organizations.

Furthermore, what Kruger's photo-collages like *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (1989; figure 1.8) emphasize is that the audience of these works—i.e. those displayed as posters and billboards—is the public, a social formation that, if we recall Michael Warner's discussion of abstraction and early print media, is historically rooted in normative understandings of gender, the body, and power. As Warner explains, "The bourgeois public sphere claimed to have no relation to the body image at all...yet the bourgeois public sphere continued to rely on features of certain bodies. Access to the public came in the whiteness and maleness that were then denied as forms of positivity, since the white male qua public person was only abstract."²³ Here, Warner argues that despite its claims of inclusion, the abstract, unspoken identification of the public with certain (i.e. white, male) bodies in fact denied many people accessibility to and agency within the public sphere. In spite of the fact that Kruger was working at a moment characterized by shifting definitions of feminism, art, and culture—shifts prompted by growing social concerns with inequity and political injustice—it is clear that this (white, male) conception of the public sphere was still the norm for Western societies in the 1980s. Ultimately, the public situation, or context, of these works plays a key role in how they function.²⁴ But what has yet to be discussed in relation to Kruger's art is the way in which her address *to* an audience—i.e. the public of the late 1980s—reinforces a hierarchical view of the public sphere and a historically inaccessible public.

Kruger creates text-image works that ask the people of the public sphere to grapple with representations of specific stereotypes and the industries that perpetuate

²³ Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," 239.

²⁴ Carol Squiers, "Barbara Kruger," *Aperture* 138 (Winter 1995): 58-67.

them. While she raises questions regarding hierarchies of power as they relate to individuals, representations, and capitalism, Kruger does not raise questions about the collective public she addresses, or how that public is performatively constructed as a result of her use of found imagery and the personal abstraction of a public speaking subject—both of which are necessary to discuss in the postmodern, feminist cultural context of the 1980s.

Kruger's famous image, *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (1989; figures 1.8 and 1.9), in both its original and its poster form, serves as an example of the way in which Kruger appropriates various elements of her photo-collages and attempts to address a "universal" public in the creation of her art. In this case, not only is the image appropriated—it is a facial portrait of a dark-haired Caucasian woman with the left side of her face depicted as the photographic negative of her right half²⁵—but the superimposed text is, as well. The slogan, "your body is a battleground," was a political slogan previously used by Vietnam War protestors of the 1960s.²⁶ Undoubtedly, it is this explicit association between body and government, created through Kruger's appropriation of the slogan, which made this work so poignant as a political poster in 1989. Kruger's work as a poster plastered around New York City was used to promote a march on Washington in the spring of 1989 opposing the Bush Administration's attempts

²⁵ The implications of this appropriated "China Girl" photograph and its negative are even more complex when one considers the fact that film industry lab technicians used such images to calibrate color when processing film prior to the mid-1970s. Thank you to Dr. Judith Rodenbeck for pointing out the original function and context of this image and encouraging me to think about how this factors into Kruger's public address and the implied interchangeability of whiteness with "neutrality."

²⁶ Special thanks to Dr. Susan Laxton for pointing out this connection between Kruger's appropriated slogan and the protests of the Vietnam War.

to overturn the *Roe v. Wade* ruling.²⁷ While the original photomontage consists of only the slogan and facial image, as a poster, this work features additional text which reads: “Support Legal Abortion Birth Control and Women’s Rights” and more explanatory text beneath the image, providing viewers with instructions on where to meet prior to the start of the March.²⁸ It directly addresses the topic of reproductive rights, but circulates within the public sphere as a poster spoken into existence by an (again/always) abstracted subject—a performative address that recalls Warner’s description of the functioning of publications in the bourgeois public sphere.²⁹ Making reference to the highly controversial, and widely protested, Vietnam War in a poster directly related to the fight for women’s reproductive rights—particularly in the 1980s when the reference would have been more easily understood—allows Kruger to address a public theoretically constructed of both men and women from a variety of backgrounds. However, the additional text in the poster—text that identifies its function as a political poster—as well as the severe facial portrait of a white woman, limits the subject to whom she speaks (i.e. a white, heterosexual woman of child-bearing age capable of voting) within the broader context of a public sphere. Thus, Kruger’s photo-collages of the 1980s demonstrate a

²⁷ Referring to the administration and presidency of George W. Bush, Sr. and the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling, which legalized abortion in the United States.

²⁸ The text reads: “On April 26 the Supreme Court will hear a case which the Bush Administration hopes will overturn the Roe vs. Wade decision, which established basic abortion rights. Join thousands of women and men in Washington D.C. on April 26. We will show that the majority of Americans support a woman’s right to choose. In Washington, Assemble at the Ellipse between the Washington Monument and the White House at 10 am; Rally at the Capitol at 1:30pm”

²⁹ See pages 236- 243 of Michael Warner’s “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) for his discussion of self-abstraction in print media, specifically the eighteenth century publication, the *Spectator*.

fluctuation in their performative address within the public sphere as they move back and forth between constructing a masculine/male public and a feminine/female public.

This oscillation of Kruger's photo-collages between addressing a masculine/male public and a feminine/female public is further emphasized by the texts' shifting language and the images' varied sites of display. Works like *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (1985-7; figures 0.2, 1.10, and 1.11), which appeared as a billboard in multiple cities with slight shifts in the orientation and proximity of the image, demonstrate how Kruger manipulates the photographs she repurposes for her work—pairing and positioning them with words and phrases meant to spark a series of questions within a specific public. In an installation view of this work (Figure 1.10) as it was displayed in the streets of Berkeley, CA, we see on the left a young girl pictured from the waist up, with pigtails in her hair. She is positioned behind, yet leaning toward, a young boy on the right who is shown flexing his right arm, his lips pursed as the girl grazes his little bicep with her pointer finger and looks on with rapt interest. This image, paired with the text “we don't need another hero,” directly comments on the gender roles assigned to young boys and girls, and connects the word “hero” with the act of flexing one's bicep and physical strength. As one scholar put it, this work offers an “assault on sexist mythologies.”³⁰ However, by looking at it in all its forms—from gallery print to billboards in Berkeley, CA and London, England—*Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (Figure 1.11) also offers us a clear example of how Kruger herself manipulates the

³⁰ Linker, *Love for Sale*, 79.

images she appropriates for the construction of her own works, creating works that performatively address different publics of the 1980s.

To Kruger, power “exists less as a ‘body’ than as a network of relations unifying social apparatuses and institutions.”³¹ Kruger’s poster for the March on Washington in 1989 demonstrates an understanding of this “network” of power as it comments on the relationship between government, the agency of female bodies, and the role of the public in democratic politics. Its very function as a provocative public statement, a pseudo-“call to arms,” attempts to shift the locus of power within this “network,” creating a more equitable distribution through the active participation of people informed of the March via this poster. With the montage poster, Kruger provides a pointed statement about the politicization of the white, female body—i.e. that it is still caught up in a battle with the U.S. government over agency. And yet, despite its public mode of display, which attempts to reach and involve a mass public, the poster confines our questions regarding the photo-text work to those related to a heteronormative, white, female body. In other words, the subject to whom Kruger is most explicitly speaking—the one whose body she has declared is a battleground—is a Caucasian female involved in a heterosexual relationship.

If we look at the original photomontage (with its less directed reading, in part due to its different context of display—i.e. the gallery space), or *Untitled (We Don’t Need Another Hero)* (Figure 1.10), one can see that the “rhetoric of pose” found in Kruger’s photo-collages is not only illustrated by the appropriated posed images, but also indicated

³¹ Ibid., 27.

through the subjectivities formed and addressed through language. As Craig Owens points out:

‘Pose’ appears in her work in other guises as well: for instance, in the *positionality* inscribed in language by the personal pronouns ‘I/we’ and ‘you,’ which do not designate objects that exist independently of discourse, but manifest the subject positions of partners in a conversation...Personal pronouns have appeared in all of Kruger’s works since 1980, and she uses them to incorporate the spectator.³²

As individual viewers, the language and use of pronouns draws you into Kruger’s photo-collages; the use of “you” and “we,” words only capable of signifying in concrete discursive situations in which the subject is constituted and drawn into conversation, ensures that each viewer of the public is addressed.³³ But the question remains: what, or who, is each viewer put into conversation with? In *Untitled (We Don’t Need Another Hero)*, the disembodied “speaker,” the one with agency and therefore power, provides a voice for a collective of women. And yet, the very abstract nature of the speaking subject—emphasized by Kruger’s approaches to the creation of her works (i.e. her use of appropriation, the inclusion of pronouns dependent upon a discourse, etc.)—reaffirms the authoritative, agential role of the falsely disembodied public subject in sparking a discourse (as limited as it may be), rather than “opening things up” to the other bodies present within the public sphere.

In a discussion of the pronouns common throughout Kruger’s work, Jane Weinstock writes, “Kruger’s work may thus be described as imaginary. By creating

³² Craig Owens, “The Medusa Effect, or, The Spectacular Ruse,” in *We Won’t Play Nature to Your Culture*, ed. Barbara Kruger (London: ICA, 1983), 6.

³³ Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971).

fictions, different ‘yous,’ she puts you, the spectator, in another position. You are not yourself.”³⁴ Your role, in relation to the work, fluctuates, but of course it does so according to the speaking subject’s directions. Take *Untitled (Surveillance is Your Busywork)* (Figure 1.1), for example.³⁵ This billboard, installed in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1985, shows a close-up facial shot of a man holding a magnifying glass up to his right eye with the words “surveillance is your busywork” superimposed across the center of his face. “Surveillance” in bold black letters is given a line of its own against a solid white background, with “is your busywork” beneath it in a smaller, reverse contrast of colors (i.e. white text on a black background). The text about surveillance seems to clarify the action of the man depicted, but it also addresses “you,” the spectator. You, according to Kruger and her work, are no longer yourself. Rather, she asserts, you are the intrusive one. So, are you as a viewer of the work and reader of the text, regardless of gender or sexual identification, placed in the role of the man depicted—the one conducting the surveillance? Or does Kruger’s photo-collage, once again, performatively address a male public subjectivity within the space of the public sphere? How exactly do these pronouns operate in the context of public discourse where the subjects involved are numerous and varied?

To answer these questions let us first take a look at some of Kruger’s works that use the plural pronoun “we”—works like *Untitled (We Won’t Play Nature to Your*

³⁴ Jane Weinstock, “What she means, to you,” in *We Won’t Play Nature to Your Culture*, ed. Barbara Kruger (London: ICA, 1983), 16.

³⁵ Some installations of this work use the pronoun “their” instead of “your”—i.e. “Surveillance is their Busywork”—which again shifts the public subjectivities addressed through the photo-collage.

Culture) (1983; figure 1.12) and *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (Figure 1.10) which may offer an easier way to begin to understand a collective entity like the public through their plural pronoun usage. Weinstock concludes her essay on the pronouns of Kruger's texts stating, "In the slogan... 'we won't play nature to your culture,' the 'we' literally shifts as it is transferred from the gallery to the cover of this publication."³⁶ Here, she refers to the changing orientation and color of the "we" included as the first word of the text. However, it is also important to take note of how the semiotics of the "we," and thus the public it addresses, shifts with the change in viewing context. Those who saw the original print in the gallery may or may not have seen the transformed cover image for the catalogue, and vice versa. The target audience for the publication is unquestionably broader than that of the original exhibition. The cover image for the catalogue, by nature of it being printed as part of a book and then widely circulated (in libraries, private collections, etc.), reaches a public beyond the location of the gallery and the historical moment of the show. Thus, the "we"—the public entity—addressed shifts depending on the form and context of the work. The same is true for works like *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (1985-88; figures 0.2, 1.10, & 1.11), which shifts the "we" that is addressed as it moves from gallery wall to billboard, from city to city.

Explicitly connecting the use of ambiguous pronouns in Kruger's photo-collages with her political intentions, Lisa Phillips argues, "Kruger propositions us with floating signifiers—us, we, me, I, you, our, your—as a social commentator and political

³⁶ Weinstock, "What she means, to you," 16.

agitator.”³⁷ Critics Linda Weintraub and Arthur Danto suggest that she assumes this role of political agitator, ultimately propositioning us and sparking discourse, through the inversion of implied gender roles associated with the speaker, or voice, of print media. They state, “Kruger interrogates the sexual provocations contained in media texts and imagery by incorporating into her work pronouns, ‘we,’ ‘my,’ ‘I’...in official media, their implied gender is masculine/male. Kruger’s statements, however, represent a female point of view.”³⁸ It would seem here that Weintraub and Danto consider Kruger’s statements to be reflections, to some extent, of her identity as a female artist. They continue their argument writing, “Her ‘you’ is directed at men who become recipients instead of the dispensers of public pronouncements.”³⁹ Following the vein of this argument, *Untitled (Surveillance is Your Busywork)* (Figure 1.1) can be understood as a criticism of male privilege or entitlement. However, the rhetorical strategy of abstraction evident in Kruger’s photo-collages allows the disembodied speaking subject (an extension of Kruger, or not) to merely displace the male speaker of print media—the Habermasian subject—rather than dismantle the structures from which he draws his authority. Thus, Weintraub and Danto’s argument demonstrates how the ‘you’ of Kruger’s works address, and simultaneously reinforce, the notion of an abstractly white, male public despite their engagement with socio-political discourses of gender, sex, and power.

³⁷ Lisa Phillips, “The Money Shot,” 6.

³⁸ Weintraub, Danto and McEvelley, *Art on the Edge and Over*, 194.

³⁹ *ibid.*

Further contradicting this notion that Kruger's texts stem from a female perspective, some scholars argue that Kruger's work demonstrates a removal of the artist from the creation of it. "By using language and images derived from other sources Kruger developed a culturally informed practice that eliminated the personal elements of art making."⁴⁰ Read this way, *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (Figure 0.2) suggests a "we," that is ambiguous in terms of its subject. The subjectivity of the "we" speaking could be that of the general public, it could refer to the United States as a nation, or it could be women. According to Weintraub and Danto's argument, the "we" of this work, regardless of its public context, would reflect the collective voices of women no longer in need of "strong" men to fulfill the role of "hero." But it is the very ambiguity of this text and its discursive subjects (in terms of gender and sexual identity) that uphold the abstract nature of the speaking subject and contribute to the performative construction of a Habermasian public sphere.

In order to address a public, Warner argues, one must forget or ignore the fictional nature of the entity one addresses.⁴¹ Kruger's photo-collages do this through their deployment of language (i.e. pronouns) and the creation of a discourse related to subjectivities that, although unstable, are ultimately associated with people—people who speak and listen within a shared space. In *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)*, particularly its multiple iterations as a billboard, the collective subjectivity addressed—the "we"—is unstable and undefined, much like the mass subjectivity of the public sphere. But the "we" remains a reference for people; bodies that, although invisible in the

⁴⁰ Linker, *Love for Sale*, 16.

⁴¹ Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, 12

work, are implicated in the language used and its resulting discourses. According to Judith Butler, “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body.”⁴² Butler bases her argument on the understanding that sentences and language do not simply describe a given reality; rather, they actively change the social reality they describe as they are uttered, written, used, or performed.

This understanding of the performative is distinct from the theatrical performative quality of Kruger’s work as is mentioned by Craig Owens in *The Medusa Effect*. For Owens, Kruger’s manipulations of the appropriated, posed images emphasize how each representation performs a certain stereotype. *Untitled (We Don’t Need Another Hero)*, for example, with its illustration of the young boy flexing his little arm muscle performs a stereotype of masculinity—flexed bicep is equated with strength which is thus associated with masculinity and this notion of a “hero.” By cropping the image and overlaying it with text, Kruger underlines the theatricality of these representations—their presentation to an audience, how they are subject to interpretation, etc. But a discussion of Kruger’s invocation of the performative must extend beyond the theatricality of the representations themselves. According to Butler, “a performative ‘works’ to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized...”⁴³ Consider, here, works like *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (Figure 1.9) and *Untitled (We Don’t Need Another Hero)* (Figure 0.2) which, in light of Butler’s theories of the

⁴² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xv.

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 51; emphasis placed on “it draws on and covers over” by Butler.

performative, exemplify a performative address to the public. Each work, situated within the public sphere as various forms of signs (i.e. billboards, posters, placards) does not simply describe the reality of public identity. Instead, they repeatedly engage people in a discursive situation within the public sphere, situating viewers in relation to an abstract speaking subject. Thus, Kruger's photo-collages construct a public naturalized in the context of a phantasmagoric body—that of “the phantom public sphere.”⁴⁴

As Michael Warner states, “when people address publics, they engage in struggles over the conditions that bring them together as a public.”⁴⁵ Thus, Kruger's works are not just about binary structures of power, cultural stereotypes, or the efficacy of her “challenge” to representation itself, but also about the very notion of the public. Works like *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (Figure 1.9) reflect a struggle with the issues of gender and sex that are relevant to the publics Kruger addresses with her 1980s photo-collages. Thus, Kruger's art and her address *to* the public reflect a concern with the social and political issues of the 1980s; but they also demonstrate a normative understanding of, and approach to engaging, the public sphere in performative discourse.

⁴⁴ Bruce Robbins, introduction to *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), vii-xxvi.

⁴⁵ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 12.

CHAPTER 2

Through Her Subjects: The Performative Address of Gillian Wearing's Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say (1992-93)

Barbara Kruger's postmodern works of the 1980s, discussed in the previous chapter, illustrate an artistic and political interest in the "hot-button" issues of gender, sexuality, consumerism, and abortion. This preoccupation with identity politics continued to dominate the art scene of America in the early 1990s and developed into what we now refer to as the "Culture Wars." During the early 1990s, Britain's public press and art world were predominantly concerned with the "perceived absurdities" of the emerging group of young artists known as the YBAs, or young British artists.¹ Well-known for their "shock-tactics," use of throwaway materials, and simultaneously "oppositional and entrepreneurial" attitudes, the YBAs are said to have created works that emphasized the spectacular rather than the political.² Gillian Wearing, among this group of visual artists emerging out of the Goldsmiths Fine Arts program in the late 1980s and early 1990s, displays a propensity for escaping the confines of "high art" characteristic of the YBAs,

¹ Jessica Morgan, "Un-American, but Post-British," in *Just Love Me: Post/Feminist Positions of the 1990s from the Goetz Collection*, ed. Rainald Schumacher and Matthias Winzen, trans. Isabelle Verreet (Köln: Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002), 36.

² Kate Bush, "Young British Art: the YBA Sensation," *Artforum* (June 2004): 91. Also see: Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite* (New York: Verso, 1999). While this may be the general perception of yBas and their work in current scholarship on British Contemporary art, I am indebted to Dr. Judith Rodenbeck for pointing out that this reading is not the *only* way to understand the work of artists like Damien Hirst, Gillian Wearing, Tracey Emin, etc.; rather, this understanding stems from an American inability to parse and understand the history and structures of British class. This point, although related, is a tangential to the focus of this thesis; yet, it is important to keep in mind as it speaks to the purpose of my own project—that is, to open up discussions of Gillian Wearing's *Signs...* series (1992-93) and examine its political import within the public sphere.

particularly through her direct interactions with those she photographs or records on video, and the use of herself as a photographed subject. However, Wearing also set out to create works that overtly explored the boundary between “public” and “private,” terms that are deeply mired in discourses of masculinity and femininity and have explicit political connotations.³

In a discussion of these terms “private” and “public,” Michael Warner states, “they are bound up with meanings of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity, at least in Western cultures, is felt partly in a way of occupying space; femininity, in a language of private feeling.”⁴ His statement, in addition to pointing out the connection between discussions of publicness and gender, also implies that Wearing’s work—which concerns itself with collapsing these notions of “public” and “private” within the space of the public sphere—makes a political statement that some scholars would argue is absent from the work of the YBAs.⁵ As a result, Wearing distinguishes her work, in terms of both content and political relevance, from that of other YBAs like Damien Hirst whose *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991; figure 2.1) highlights the absurdity and the spectacular aspects of contemporary British art.⁶

³ Wearing is also well-known for her video works, which explore similar topics of interior/exterior, private/public, and identity; and in 1997 she won the Turner Prize, Britain’s prestigious Contemporary Art award.

⁴ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002), 24.

⁵ Here, I am referring to Julian Stallabrass and his description of the art of the yBas in his book: *High Art Lite* (New York: Verso, 1999). His arguments will be discussed more in depth, later in this chapter (see pages 14-15).

⁶ Hirst’s canonical work of art features a shark, purchased at an exorbitant price by the artist, submerged in a tank of formaldehyde for the sole purpose of exhibiting it in an art gallery. See Kerrie Davies, “The Great White Art Hunter,” *The Australian*, April 14, 2010, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/subscribe/news/1/index.html?sourceCode=TAWEB_WRE170_

In 1992, Wearing began work on one of her most well-known pieces to date, the large-scale photographic project *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say*, which catapulted her to fame (Figure 2.2). Consisting of over 300 images, this series purports to capture the private thoughts and feelings of random people around London. For two years, Wearing moved around the varying neighborhoods of London, asking individuals from the streets if they would like to be a part of her project. Wearing then handed a piece of paper and a black marker to those who agreed to participate. She instructed them to write whatever thought was running through their minds at that moment. *Signs...* (1992-93) offers us a shining example of Wearing's interest in exploring the distinction between the public and the private. It inserts the thoughts and feelings typically understood as "private," into the spatial realm of the "public" by offering people on the streets of London the opportunity to "speak their minds."⁷

Wearing, in the very solicitation of people and their thoughts, makes public speech among the streets of London a topic of her series, *Signs...* (1992-93). In his text *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner writes, "with public speech, we might

a&mode=premium&dest=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/the-great-white-art-hunter/story-e6frg8h6-1226324791182&memtype=anonymous.

⁷ Wearing's complication of the "public" and "private" binary in *Signs...* (1992-93) is arguable when considered in light of socio-economic class and psychoanalysis. The phrase "speak their minds" has the connotation of giving voice to the subaltern, yet most of the people featured in her series are middle-class individuals from around London. Furthermore, soliciting people to "speak their minds" implies a kind of speaking of truth into power, but because Wearing asks that they write whatever thought was running through their minds at that particular moment, it also implies a kind of solicitation of automatic response – an expression of the unconscious. Thus, the "truth" of each subject's written expression becomes questionable when considered as a result of the circumstances of participation and one's psyche. However, even if Wearing's *Signs...* does not fully collapse the two categories, the investigation of that boundary still makes apparent the performativity inherent in her address through the people of a public within the public sphere.

recognize ourselves as addressees, but it is equally addressed to indefinite others, that in singling us out it does so not on the basis of our concrete identity but by virtue of our participation in the discourse alone and therefore in common with strangers.”⁸ Wearing’s *Signs...*, with its participants who engage in “public speech,” addresses not only individual viewers (i.e. Wearing, who first captures the moment in a photograph, or those who see it afterward), but also an indefinite public constructed by one’s very participation in—that is, their reception and continuation of—a discourse prompted by their encounter with the photographs of *Signs...*⁹ Thus, in utilizing public speech through the signs of her photographs, Wearing establishes the “public” as an audience of her work.

However, Wearing characterizes this public as a somewhat unbounded, fluid entity by drawing the viewer’s attention to the very anonymity of her subjects. Wearing’s *Signs...* series relates to *vox populi*, a concept of “unscripted-ness,” or randomness characteristic of 1970s British reality television. Such a reference only serves to emphasize the indefinite public that Wearing addresses—one where any commonality we, as viewers, have with those photographed lies in the random, ordinariness of their written statements and the anonymity of each subject.¹⁰ Figure 2.3, for instance, depicts a man dressed as a British police officer, recognizable by his uniform, holding a sign that simply reads, “HELP.” While we are able to identify this man’s occupation, little else is known about who he is or why his thought at that moment was to solicit “help” from a

⁸ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 77-78.

⁹ Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone, 2008), 11.

¹⁰ A popular example of such British reality television is the 1974 series, *The Family*, which was a “fly-on-the-wall” documentary show that followed the daily lives of the Wilkins family, a working-class family of six from Reading.

future, unknown audience. He remains an anonymous, (somewhat) empowered subject/participant who is enabled to speak to an equally (partially) agential and unspecified public consisting of other participants of the series, past/present/future viewers of the photographs, and Wearing herself. But Wearing's address to a public includes those viewing her work (past, present, or future) not merely through the anonymity of her participants, but also because her photographs performatively construct publics, within a space, that, by definition, are simultaneously created by and dependent upon language.

While the naturalization of a public's existence occurs through the repetition of it within the context of bodies, these bodies also operate and function within the space of the public sphere where the performativity of Wearing's address takes place. Wearing's *Signs...* series, with its use of language and signs repeatedly held up by individual bodies, draws attention not only to the "naturalized" dimension of the privacy of thoughts and/or feelings and its construction in opposition to the publicness of a body, but also the very performativity of a public entity. In *Signs...*, Wearing foregrounds those photographed as subject/participant/speaker not merely to reference a *vox populi* aesthetic, but to implicate individual participation and language as necessities for the existence and construction of the public sphere; thus, Wearing performatively addresses the public through the very people that make up its collective body and creates a photographic project that embodies the inherently political, public subjectivity to which we all belong, are accountable for, and struggle to understand.

Wearing's *Signs...*, in the context of art historical and photographic discourses, is often considered in relation to the genre of documentary photography. Specifically, scholars and critics emphasize how Wearing, in the very process of creating *Signs...*, destabilizes the seeming objectivity of the documentary photograph.¹¹ According to Dan Cameron, "Wearing set out to undermine the hidden dynamics of documentary, in which the purported objectivity of the form is in fact a subtle means of manipulating the subject while the author remains safely off-camera."¹² Cameron's argument prompts questions regarding the role Wearing assumes as the "photographer" and the strategy she uses in creating her series, such as: what is Wearing's approach to addressing the public that she is photographing? And, how does the inclusion (and/or exclusion) of particular subjects shape the kind of publics Wearing constructs? While Wearing remains physically outside of the frame of each photograph in *Signs...* (as is typical of other documentary photographers), her deliberate relinquishing of (some of) the authority of the artist by asking subjects to participate and giving them the materials to create their signs inscribes her presence within the image. Although Wearing does not physically appear in the final photographs of *Signs...*, her actions of soliciting participants, providing them with instructions and materials, are inherent to the project itself. Thus she is implicated, rather

¹¹ Wearing's approach, however, differs from that of other contemporary photographers who are also interested in critiquing the tradition of documentary photography—artists like Martha Rosler.

¹² Dan Cameron, "'I'm Desperate': Gillian Wearing's Art of Transposed Identities," *Parkett* 70 (2004): 99.

than directly represented in the frame as a force responsible for orchestrating and directing the subjects of *Signs...* (1992-93).¹³

Perhaps this is most apparent when we consider the materials used by each photographed person to create their signs. The incongruous materials and sloppy writing, consistent from image to image, supports Wearing's account of her process: she has obviously supplied her subjects with the sign-making materials and they have written spontaneously. Each photograph bears the trace of this process, and therefore of Wearing's orchestration of the scenario. Thus, the very materiality of the signs, and their repeated inclusion in the photographs of the *Signs...* series, implicates Wearing within each image and creates an archive of this interaction between photographer and photographed subject. As Cameron points out, we, as viewers, become "implicitly aware of the negotiations that took place behind the scenes."¹⁴ As a result, *Signs...* challenges the subject/object relations typical of documentary photography and fundamentally deviates from the photographic genre that has a longstanding history of "informing" the public, and/or inciting social reform.¹⁵

However, scholars also discuss Wearing's *Signs...* in relation to forms of popular media like television. While Kruger's work is largely discussed in terms of its

¹³ This raises issues regarding intentionality (on the part of Wearing) and seriality (of the process of participation, of participants, and of photographs) in relation to Wearing's *Signs...* series, which will not be addressed here, but are important to keep in mind when considering Wearing's project and its relationship to the performativity within the spatial realm of the public sphere.

¹⁴ Cameron, "I'm Desperate," 100.

¹⁵ Consider the work of Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, etc. who were employed by the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s as photographers meant to document and thus "inform" the public of rural and urban conditions during the Great Depression. The genre of documentary photography has undergone a number of shifts and re-definitions since the 1930s (particularly during wartime in the 1940s and 1950s, and again in the 1970s and 1980s), but it remains a type of photography specifically oriented toward politically conscious publics.

appropriation of images and texts from print media and the advertising industry, Gillian Wearing's *Signs...* series is often regarded for its relation to *vox populi* and British reality television. British shows such as the 1974 series *The Family*, for example, were popular for their "fly-on-the-wall" documentary style and the overall unpredictability of the actions and lives of those featured on the show.¹⁶ Wearing emphasizes a similar unpredictability throughout *Signs...* in an attempt to underscore the fluidity of individual subjectivities and open up our understanding of the collective public.¹⁷

Additionally, *vox populi*,¹⁸ a kind of unscripted interaction common to 1970s British reality television, refers to the concept of asking people questions without knowing their response or what one will get in return. In *Signs...* *vox populi* is cited not just by the interaction between Wearing and subject, occurring outside of the frame, but also by the very statements expressed on the handheld signs of each participant. Ranging from the unexpected, "I'm Desperate," (Figure 2.3) to the facetious, "Me," (Figure 2.4) each photograph presents us with a new sign to read and a new sentiment to try and understand in relation to the subject's portrayed. As a result, Wearing attempts to open up the public (beyond the entity constructed solely through print media) while simultaneously stripping the televisual referent of its spectacularity.

¹⁶ Anita Biressi, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005). For more about the history and reception of reality television (particularly in the US and UK) see: Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (New York: Routledge, 2005), *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, edited by Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray (New York: NYU Press, 2004), Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), and L. Baruh, "Publicized Intimacies on Reality Television: An Analysis of Voyeuristic Content and Its Contribution to the Appeal of Reality Programming," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 53(2).

¹⁷ See footnote 10, above.

¹⁸ Keep in mind that, literally translated, *vox populi* means "voice of the people."

In its citation of *vox populi* through diverse, unexpected signs, Wearing's *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Other People Want You to Say*, attempts to highlight the agency given to each participant of the series (although a bit naively)¹⁹; the title itself purports that each statement, as well as each photographed person, deviates from social scripts or norms. Yet, as viewers, our expectations undeniably color our interpretation of those statements and of the series, more generally. Consider the iconic photograph, "I'm Desperate" (Figure 2.4). Dressed in a suit and tie, with the chain of what one could presume to be a name, or ID, tag hanging around his neck, and a subtle half-smile on his face, the man's appearance presents a stark contrast to the candid sentiment written on his sign. Desperation is not something we, as observers, would typically associate with such a "put-together" individual. For all intents and purposes, this man's outward appearance, particularly the small smile evident on his face, masks whatever is happening internally, creating a disconnect between what we see in his portrait and what we read from his sign. Thus, we see a work like "I'm Desperate" and are struck by how strongly it contradicts our expectations of the man photographed. It is that contradiction, resulting from a dependence on the photograph's viewers for interpretation, which limits the agential potential of each subject in the series. As a result, *Signs...* makes us explicitly aware of the inability of each photographed subject to escape hegemonic ideologies (or apparatus), while simultaneously foregrounding them as participants of the series (and of a public).

¹⁹ At the very least, Wearing's photographic project (and specifically its title) emphasizes the role of the photographed subject as participant/speaker in the moment(s) of their encounter(s) with Wearing, the camera, and the viewers of the photograph.

Yet, while our expectations as viewers factor into our understanding of Wearing's series, they have no bearing on what each participant, *in their own moment*, decided to write. Thus, the connection between Wearing's *Signs...* series and *vox populi* does not merely reflect the unpredictability of the photographed subjects, themselves. Rather, it also has implications for the viewers of Wearing's work and how we are to understand her address *through* the public. For Gianmarco Del Re, it is the chance element of *vox populi* that "dislodges the perception of what is in front of your eyes," poignantly affecting the viewer of Wearing's photographs as we look at them.²⁰ It is the element of chance, inherent to the concept of *vox populi*, (as well as the anonymity of Wearing's subjects) which draws us into the series alongside Wearing and her photographed participants. Thus, the *vox populi* reference in *Signs...* further emphasizes how Wearing's series re-distributes some of the "power," or authority, of the photographer in favor of a more participatory practice—one that not only attempts to empower (to some extent) those photographed, but also implicates the viewer in the construction of (public) subjectivities and meaning. As a result, Wearing creates a project that addresses the public *through* the very people that construct it; and the signs—expressing thoughts, feelings, and subjectivities—use language inevitably oriented towards a public, an entity of which we are all a part.

The anonymity of those photographed as part of the series allows Wearing to performatively address and construct a public subjectivity in which we are all implicated—one that is not necessarily bound by the context of her photographs. In

²⁰ Gianmarco Del Re, "Confessions: Why Would a Businessman Say 'I'm Desperate'?" A-Z of Gillian Wearing," *Flash Art* (March/April 1998): 89-90.

foregrounding the individual as not just a passive subject, but also a participant and a speaker who uses language to express the self, Wearing performatively addresses a public that implicates us all in its open-endedness. In a catalogue essay for the 1996 exhibition, *Imagined Communities*—an exhibition that included works from Wearing’s *Signs...* series—Kobena Mercer writes, “if these are anonymous images of everyone and anyone, then it could be you.”²¹ This is not to say that we, as viewers of *Signs...*, are simply interchangeable with those who were photographed by Wearing. For instance, the older gentleman of “ME” (Figure 2.10) cannot simply be replaced by myself (or anyone else, for that matter) to create the same image and message. Rather, Mercer’s point emphasizes the randomness inherent in Wearing’s selection process for creating *Signs...* and alludes to the chance element of *vox populi* evident throughout the series. Those included in *Signs...* are not similarly characterized by anything but their presence in the large city of London and the use of a sign to say what they wanted to say. Moreover, the statements of each person’s sign reflect unexpected sentiments that “everyone and anyone” can understand—their very ordinariness contributing to the anonymity of the portraits and the public subjectivity constructed by Wearing.

Furthermore, Mercer’s argument seems strengthened by the very quantity of photographs in the *Signs...* series. With over 300 anonymous portraits, it is inevitable that viewers will find something within the project to relate to, be it a place, a sentiment expressed on a sign, or a particular person’s appearance. Wearing’s art, as Dan Cameron puts it, “opens up the possibility of greater benefits (but also heightened uncertainty) to

²¹ Kobena Mercer, “Imagine All the People: Constructing Community Culturally,” in *Imagined Communities*, ed. Richard Hylton (London: Beacon Press, 1996), 16.

be derived from the possibility that one is a composite of many people at once, including the anonymous stranger in the street.”²² Thus, the anonymity and sheer number of participants in *Signs...*, allow us to envision ourselves as part of the public addressed by Wearing through her subjects. So not only is Wearing constructing a public through *Signs...*, but she is also opening up the possibility for viewers to construct their own subjectivities through the collective portraits she presents.

So then, what is a public? How is it influenced by, constructive, and/or reflective of language? And how, or where, is it found or located? For Michael Warner, “...a public is never just a congeries of people, never just the sum of persons who happen to exist. It must first of all have some way of organizing itself as a body and of being addressed in discourse.”²³ Thus, a public is the entity to which all texts, visual or otherwise, are addressed. It is not a mere conglomeration of individuals, but necessitates the engagement of those people in common discourses and their reception of texts. And these “texts,” oriented towards and constructive of publics, circulate between, within, and across spaces—that is, the realm of the public sphere.

Thus, there is a definitive relationship between public formation and language that is evident in Wearing’s *Signs...*—that is, how the use of text and signs in Wearing’s series performatively addresses a public. According to Warner, “public language addresses a public as a social entity, but that entity exists only by virtue of being addressed...”²⁴ In other words, texts circulated within the public sphere are oriented to

²² Cameron, “‘I’m Desperate,’” 101.

²³ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 68.

²⁴ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 129.

audiences in a somewhat generalized manner, in order to address the public as a single, tangible entity. Yet that body of people only “exists” as a result of being addressed through language in the first place. Thus, this cyclical logic of performativity, occurring within the public sphere, has key implications for Wearing’s *Signs...* series. Specifically, it helps illustrate how the use of language in *Signs...*—written into being by random people from around London—addresses a public as a tangible, social entity comprised of those who participate(d) in the series (as either photographed subject, artist, or viewer); as well as how the very creation of Wearing’s series results in the construction of that collective body of people within the public sphere.

Like Kruger’s public photo-collages from the 1980s, Wearing’s *Signs...* series uses signs in the context of the public sphere as a form of address. But there is a distinction between the function of texts and signs in each artist’s work that corresponds to their divergent performative addresses of the public, and reflects shifts in the contemporary understanding of publics. In *Signs...* (1992-93), the unscripted text of the signs—written and photographed among the streets of London—offers a tangible example of how language is inherently oriented to, and constructive of, individual subjectivities as well as the public. Like Kruger’s text-image works, Wearing’s neo-conceptual art, “plays with the tradition of captioning.”²⁵ For Kruger, the texts and

²⁵ Rebekah Modrak and Bill Anthes, *Reframing Photography: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 372. Modrak defines neo-conceptual art as that which communicates ideas, rejects art as a commodity, and offers social/political critique. It is also important to keep in mind Walter Benjamin’s “Little History of Photography,” *Selected Writings, Vol. 2 1927-1934*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone, et. al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 507-30, in which he discusses the role and importance of the caption in relation to photography. He writes, “The camera is getting smaller

images of her photo-collage works play off each other to raise questions regarding whom she is addressing and what message she is trying to convey. But for Wearing, the photographs of *Signs...* (1992-93) suggest an explicit connection between the text of the sign and the subject(s), or person(s), photographed. Take, for example, the portrait of a woman whose sign reads, “My grip on life is rather loose!” (Figure 2.5). Again, her handwriting is unique, differing from that of other signs in the series. Casually leaning on the fence to her left, holding a bag in her right hand, and offering a closed-mouthed smile to the camera, the woman appears content not only with her statement, but also with her participation in Wearing’s project. Even when there is a seeming disconnect between what is written on one’s sign and the photographed subject, like the one found in the “I’m Desperate” image (Figure 2.4), we accept what is on the sign as written by the individual in the image. We read, “I’m Desperate” as a statement written, or uttered, into existence by the businessman photographed, as opposed to understanding it as a sign that was given to him to hold by Wearing or someone else. We simply understand the instability of meaning in the image—our having to reconcile his desperate sentiment with his composed, presentable exterior—as evidence of the subjective quality of perception and cultural, as well as personal, expectations brought to bear on the photograph by its viewers. Thus Wearing’s *Signs...* series demonstrates a use of language and text that marks a slight shift (from that of Kruger’s work) in the performative address of publics.

and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms in the beholder. This is where inscription must come into play, which includes the photography of the literarization of the conditions of life, and without which all photographic construction must remain arrested in the approximate,” (527) emphasizing that without captioning we fall short of fully understanding the photographs full meaning.

There is also a distinction to be made between the typography of Kruger's works and the look of the texts in Wearing's *Signs...* series—one that, again, reflects a shift in the contemporary understanding of publics, including how they are addressed and constructed by visual and textual languages. Kruger consistently uses a futura bold italic font to create the textual banners in her photo-collage works. This typography, reminiscent of news headlines and early advertising aesthetics, addresses a public constructed by the discourses and circulation of print media, and merely reflects a substitution of female for male in terms of who has the authority to “speak.”²⁶ The writing in Wearing's *Signs...*, on the other hand, is as diverse as those photographed and the thoughts they reveal. And the series, as a whole, promotes a more egalitarian view of “public speech,” almost to the point of leveling the individual ideas and subjectivities portrayed. The businessman in “I'm Desperate,” for instance, holds up a neatly written sign with letters all uniformly capitalized and somewhat centered. In comparison, “We are the Hardcore,” (Figure 2.6) depicts two teenagers—one male, one female—with the boy holding a sign that refers to them both. “We are the Hardcore” is not written in all capital letters like the text of the businessman's sign. Rather, it is accompanied by an anarchy symbol in the bottom right corner of the paper, and the word “hardcore” droops toward the bottom a bit more with each letter written. The look and content of the signs in these two images alone are dramatically different, even while the white of the paper acts

²⁶ This typography, as Dr. Judith Rodenbeck adeptly pointed out over the course of my research and writing, is also an explicit reference to Modernism.

“like a uniform.”²⁷ The signs, like the subjects themselves, have little in common except for the opportunity, extended to them by Wearing, to say whatever it is that they want to say; and the writing is expressive, acting as a sort of signature—a “sign” of individuality rather than institutional, bureaucratic, or corporate impersonality. It is through the inclusion of handwritten signs, that Wearing’s *Signs...* photographs acknowledge a specific “speaker” rather than a generalized one like that of Kruger’s 1980s photo-collages.

Signs..., consequently, addresses and constructs multiple publics within the public sphere. First, let us consider the photographs of *Signs...* in terms of not only their individual creation, but also their collective display and reception. Although Wearing incorporates a public informed by televisual media, she also addresses a public constructed through the circulation of print media, by quite literally constructing her own public through the accumulation of hundreds of images. Literature on the series reveals conflicting information about how many photographs actually make up Wearing’s project, but scholars and critics generally agree that it consists of over 300 portraits.²⁸ Individually, each work is said to reflect an “anonymous portrait emblematic of contemporary life”—from a candid of best friends (Figure 2.7) to a shot of a homeless

²⁷ Donna De Salvo, “Conversation with Gillian Wearing,” in *Gillian Wearing* (London: Phaidon, 1999), 12.

²⁸ Some sources say 300, some say 600. For example, the series is said to contain over 600 images in Barry Schwabsky, “The Voice Estranged,” in *Gillian Wearing: Mass Observation* (Chicago: Merrell, 2002), 27-39. However, the series is described as having roughly 300 images in Katy Siegel, “Gillian Wearing: ‘I’m Desperate’ from *Signs that say what you want them to say and not signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (1992-93),” in *Subjective Realities: Works from the Refco Collection of Contemporary Photography* (Chicago: Refco Group, 2003).

woman (Figure 2.8).²⁹ But together, the series embodies an understanding of the public marked by a recognition of new media advancements, their increased potential for circulation, and a shift in who has the authority, or right, to participate within the space of the public sphere.

Wearing takes that address and construction of a public a step further by re-presenting the individual portraits as a collective entity in book form. As a printed material, some images from the series are given their own page, as is the case with Figure 2.9. Opposite a blank white page, the photograph depicts a black man in a striped shirt and jeans. Set against an unfocused background of people and architectural structures, the man holds up a sign with the written question, “Will Britain ever get through this recession?” Turn the page, and you get another blank white page on the left opposite an additional image from the series. The photographs are presented separately, page by page, but as a book must be read in relation to one another, one after the other. Additionally, Wearing’s *Signs...* books also feature multi-image pages in which a variety of photographs from the series are situated on a single page, presenting a much more explicit example of Wearing’s project as a construction of the public. Some pages feature four of the photographs from *Signs...*, while others contain nine (Figures 2.10 and 2.11). Regardless, the images are to be read in relation to one another. They are not merely a collection of disparate individuals or distinct portraits. Instead, as a book, they create a new body to be circulated, a visual language to be received by future viewers of the series. Wearing’s series in book form is not just a summation of photographs from

²⁹ Sandy Nairne and Sarah Howgata, introduction to *The Portrait Now* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 7.

Signs... (1992-93), but a new body to be circulated among libraries, galleries, and collections, and ultimately addresses publics of the past, present, and future.

We know from interviews with Wearing that the photographs of *Signs...* were taken specifically around London during the early 1990s. But there are some images of the project that explicitly articulate this historically and spatially located public through the statements written on the participant's sign. The photograph of an older woman dressed in a periwinkle coat, matching shoes, and a navy blue skirt holds up a sign that explicitly identifies the space—the city of London—in which Wearing is constructing a public (Figure 2.12). Her sign, which states, “I really love Regents Park,” references the well-known park located in Central London. There is a locational specificity to this woman's sign that is not present in a lot of the photographs of *Signs...*, but it also presents a moment in which this woman shares her opinion about Regents Park publicly. Thus, it demonstrates how Wearing's work performatively addresses publics within the space of London in the early nineties. For Dominic Molon, *Signs...* “is both a cumulative portrait of city life as well as an on-the-spot sampling of collective urban unconsciousness.”³⁰ In other words, the photographs of Wearing's series offer us a map of London's public body in a specific time and place, a sort of archive of subjective expression from within the public sphere.

But what differentiates this collective body—this public—from other terms indicative of groups (terms like “audience,” “people,” “crowd”)? Warner argues,

³⁰ Dominic Molon, “Observing the Masses,” in *Gillian Wearing: Mass Observation* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 14.

“...the idea of a public, unlike a concrete audience or the public of a polity, is text-based—even though publics are increasingly organized around visual or audio text. Without the idea of texts that can be picked up at different times and in different places by otherwise unrelated people, we would not imagine a public as an entity that embraces all the users of that text, whoever they might be.”³¹

Thus, a text-based public, according to Warner, extends beyond a specific time or place; it incorporates past, present, and future “users” of a text, much like Wearing’s *Signs...* photographs speak to past, present, and future viewers of the project.

The photographs of *Signs...*, as both separate images or compiled within a book, are a “text-based” project that performatively addresses and constructs publics within the public sphere—entities characterized by a tension between historical/locational specificity and an imagined/unbounded existence. The *Signs...* images, like the one of the older man featured in the bottom left corner of a page in Wearing’s book (Figure 2.10), are primary examples of “texts” that can be picked up and re-visited by different people, at different times, and in different places, yet continue to be received and discussed. While the man’s appearance—his bright yellow shirt, beige jacket, and large-framed glasses—has come (and will continue) to look dated, his sign which very simply states, “ME,” will resonate with a variety of people well into the future. And while we know that the photograph is a result of a specific encounter between this man, Wearing, and her camera in London during the early 1990s, we continue to encounter the photograph (as well as Wearing, her camera, and the photographed subject) as viewers today. As a result, this “text”—the photographs themselves—simultaneously addresses and constructs publics beyond that which is represented in the series, or constructed in its book.

³¹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 67-68.

For further explanation of how Wearing's series simultaneously addresses and constructs a public beyond the one she literally creates in the book or the series itself, consider Judith Butler's notion of performativity. As Butler argues, "...the performative would be an exercise of articulation that brings an open-ended reality into existence."³² That is, in the creation of *Signs...* Wearing converts the abstract, indeterminate entity of a public—one characterized by a multiplicity of distinct temporalities—into a tangible body. However Wearing performatively addresses a public not only by constructing one with her photographic series, but also by repeatedly circulating those photographs as pieces in exhibitions and as a book. Here, Butler's "exercise of articulation" and Warner's text-based characterization of a public converge—that is, the texts in the images, themselves, perform upon the photographed subjects, constructing them as participants in Wearing's series and "speakers" within the public sphere.

Consequently, Wearing's project—which continues to circulate and address viewers today—implies that we are all active participants in a public constructed through her performative address. In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Warner writes, "Public discourse craves attention like a child. Texts clamor at us. Images solicit our gaze...In doing so, they by no means render us passive. The modern system of publics creates a demanding social phenomenology."³³ As viewers, consumers, citizens, and individual bodies constructed and dependent upon language, we are all active participants in the discursive space of the public sphere. But why does our inclusion in Wearing's project—

³² Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 130.

³³ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 89.

our presence in this space of a public—even matter? Because Wearing is performatively dealing with notions of publicness, what other issues arise in *Signs...* and thus demand our attention as part of the public constructed?

The politically charged concepts of gender and sexuality are topics that are inescapably related to discourses of the public and private. In his discussion of the terms “private” and “public,” Warner writes, “they are bound up with meanings of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity, at least in Western cultures, is felt partly in a way of occupying space; femininity, in a language of private feeling.”³⁴ While Wearing is not necessarily successful in deconstructing the gendered associations of the masculine with the public sphere and the feminine with the private sphere in her *Signs...* series, she does draw our attention to those relationships. And in a project preoccupied with exploring that boundary between the “public” and “private,” she makes us question the gendered politics underlying such a distinction. Thus, Wearing’s *Signs...* series, understood within the context of performativity, constructs publics within a space that is inherently political. The result is a photographic project (or, British contemporary art in general) that is perhaps more politicized than scholars like Julian Stallabrass would have us believe.

Stallabrass defines work created by the YBAs—including Gillian Wearing’s *Signs...*—as “one-liner works of art,” in which the work makes its point swiftly and does not require viewers to engage with it for hours.³⁵ While I agree that there is a certain swiftness of meaning to Wearing’s *Signs...*, it is limiting to dismiss the project as work that only operates as “high art lite,” a phrase Stallabrass uses to describe the more

³⁴ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 24.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

visually accessible art of the YBAs—that is, “an art that looks like but is not quite art, that acts as a substitute for art.”³⁶ Stallabrass’s argument, which regards Wearing’s work as a combination of conceptualism and the spectacular, implies that artists like Wearing do not create art that is easily associated or concerned with the political. But since when is the meaning of a work of art so one-dimensional? Just because, upon first glance, Wearing’s photographs deliver a swift message, does not mean that the spectacle she is engaging with is the only layer of meaning to be found within her project. Perhaps Wearing is simply responding to the speed with which her generation expresses itself; thus, the structure of her project reflects the nature of the public she is at once describing and constructing. And while Stallabrass may critique Wearing’s construction of the public as an affirmation of a socio-cultural problem rather than a negation of it, *Signs...* remains involved in an investigation of the public/private divide and the inherently political characterization of the public sphere.

While understanding Wearing’s political, performative address to a public through the participants of *Signs...* requires more than a passing glance on the part of the viewer, that does not mean that such a (political) layer of meaning is absent from Wearing’s project. In fact, when asked if her work, specifically the *Signs...* series, is political, Wearing’s response was:

“We all feed off what is happening. My work doesn’t ignore politics, but its not agit-prop [political propaganda]. Body politics runs through the work. Offering people the chance to talk back is political; what people have to say is itself political. There are many homeless people in the *Signs* works. It maintains an

³⁶ Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite* (New York: Verso, 1999), 2.

agenda that emphasizes that homelessness is escalating in this society...I want the work to have content-meaning. Form varies in relation to this.”³⁷

In her interview, Wearing is careful to distinguish between art that contains threads of politics—i.e. work like her own—and that which is overtly propagandistic. Here, we see another aspect of Wearing’s approach that distinguishes her *Signs...* series from the photo-collage works of Barbara Kruger. While Kruger very explicitly cites the aesthetics of political propaganda in order to address a public, Wearing’s work demonstrates that the address itself and the very representation of an active subject occur within a public space that is inherently political.

So, while the series as a whole is not about gender and sexuality (as they relate to the public and private) or the reality of homelessness in Britain during the early nineties, Wearing addresses them as discourses that are part of the public sphere. Figure 2.8 is just one example of the homeless people featured in *Signs...* (1992-93). In the photograph we see a woman dressed in jeans and a burgundy sweatshirt holding up a sign that reads, “Give people houses there is plenty of empty one’s OK!” Continuously critical of Wearing’s project, and the yBas more generally, Stallabrass points out the distinction such works reinforce between the subject photographed and the viewer. He writes, “that Wearing makes her subjects write their statements...reinforces the distance the polite viewer has from the people represented, who mark the authenticity of their statements but also undermine them with their mistakes.”³⁸ For Stallabrass, the agency afforded to the individuals of *Signs...* is limited in that they are only granted the choice to present

³⁷ Walker, “Signs of the Times,” 37.

³⁸ Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 249.

themselves in front of the camera. Furthermore, they are constructed in opposition to their viewer who can recognize the errors on their sign—mistakes like “there is” instead of “there are.” While there is certainly room to argue his point, Wearing’s *Signs...*, considered as an embodiment of the public, draws attention to a socio-political issue that we must address; it portrays homelessness as a reality of London’s public in the early nineties. And it collapses the “distance” between photographed subject and viewer in the very ordinariness and diversity of those included in the series—the very anonymity of those photographed making the series a reflection of everyone and anyone. And while the grammatical errors of some of the signs are recognizable by “polite” viewers, this is not necessarily true for all who view Wearing’s photographs.³⁹ Furthermore, the absence of the homeless (or any other marginalized group of people) from Wearing’s *Signs...* would raise its own set of questions and concerns, like why such people were excluded from her project.

Aside from being “an essential fact of the social landscape,” publics are responsible for world making.⁴⁰ As Warner states, “...world making unfolds in publics that are, after all, not just natural collections of people, not just ‘communities,’ but mediated publics.”⁴¹ These publics, described by Warner, are mediated by the circulation and continuous reception of texts, which include photographic images like those of *Signs...* where photographer, photographed subjects, camera, and viewer(s) encounter

³⁹ Perhaps, the spelling and grammatical errors evident on certain signs in Wearing’s series should be considered mere reflections of human subjectivity. In this sense, they would simply add to the “diversity” inherent in a public.

⁴⁰ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 65.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 61

one another. Through the use of handwritten signs, citations of both print and televisual media, and a random selection process, Wearing foregrounds those photographed as subject/participant/speaker and constructs a public dependent upon language and the participation of individuals for its formation. In doing so, Wearing performatively addresses the public and creates a photographic series that embodies the inherently political, public subjectivity—one that includes not only Wearing and those photographed, but also those of us viewing the series over a decade later. Thus, Wearing's *Signs...* photographs function performatively within a public sphere—one characterized by shifting socio-political discourses, that we shape, and are, in turn, shaped by.

CHAPTER 3

From Within: The Performativity of Photographic “Documentation” and Publics in Sharon Hayes’s In the Near Future, New York (2005)

The 1980s photo-collages of Barbara Kruger (Figure 3.1), with their citation of print media and the corresponding strategy of personal abstraction on the part of the “public speaker,” issue a somewhat authoritative address to their audience and result in the performative construction of a normative public reminiscent of that which operated in the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere. Gillian Wearing’s *Signs...* series (1992-93; figure 2.10), in an exploration of “private” and “public” within the public sphere, references a specific genre of televisual media—that of early British reality television—to performatively address and constitute less individualized, or identitarian, conception of publics. Ultimately, the photo-works of these artists demonstrate the politics and performativity inherent in addressing publics with images; but the more contemporary work of Sharon Hayes reveals further shifts in both theoretical understandings and practical applications of publics and language within a politicized public sphere.

Performance art, which began its rise to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, was often used as a means for artists to engage directly with their audience; and it is this contemporary art form that typically provides the framework for discussions of Sharon Hayes’s *In the Near Future*, New York (2005).¹ However, Hayes’s project is much more

¹ See, for example, Elizabeth Freeman’s discussion of Hayes’ project in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): “In her ongoing project *In the Near Future*, the New York performance artist Sharon Hayes performs yet another

than just a performance piece in which the artist stages quasi-demonstrations using historically referential signs. In order to fully understand the performativity of her address from within publics, one must also consider the concurrent photographic documentation of *In the Near Future, New York*—which oscillates back and forth between obscuring and foregrounding the project as a performance—and its installation in the exhibition space of Art in General in 2005. Through Hayes’s actions from within a public and their concurrent photographic documentation, *In the Near Future, New York* demonstrates the performativity inherent in addressing multiple publics within the realm of the public sphere—that is, the project simultaneously speaks to and constructs a body (and bodies) that is as multifaceted, complex, and political as the work itself.

The art of Sharon Hayes, particularly her iterations of *In the Near Future* (2005-2008), largely explores the intersections between art, politics, and emotion, as well as their connection to the concepts of time and space. The initial series of public actions and photographs took place in and around New York City, while later iterations were created in Vienna, Warsaw, and London between 2006 and 2008.² In August 2009, Hayes presented a keynote address for the Creative Time Summit in New York City on these very themes.³ Focusing on her own experience as an artist, Hayes discussed the

series of collisions between bodies past and present, but this time in spaces ghosted by bygone political movements...” (59).

² The project was commissioned by the non-profit organization, Art in General, which was founded in 1981 as a contemporary art exhibition space in New York geared towards helping artists with the production and presentation of new works. For more information see: *Art in General*, February 15, 2015, <http://www.artingeneral.org/about>.

³ Creative Time, a non-profit organization based in New York, which is committed to exploring the relationship between art and social action and stresses the role artists’ play in shaping society. At the Summit in 2009, Chief Curator, Nato Thompson, raised the following question, demonstrating the organization’s ongoing concern with the development and consequences of art

importance of what she calls “postionality,” or “generational specificity” when addressing socio-political issues regardless of whether one is creating works of art that take on these issues, or writing critically about such artworks. For Hayes, as is evident in her works, time is to be regarded paradoxically as both specific and fluid, and requires one to discuss it in relation to space. In other words, the present is precise moment simultaneously tied to both the past and future; and the present is not just a point of connection on a linear progression of time, but a period that can move multidirectionally, influencing and influenced by the possibilities of the future and the conditions of the past. Thus, as artists and critical writers producing works that circulate within the shared space of a public sphere, we must be cognizant of our own locations within time when discussing cultural or political topics like war or pieces of legislation, as our perspectives both inextricably shape and are shaped by the past and future.

In her talk Hayes explicitly tied this “generational specificity” to a nearly literal sense of place—that is, her location in a particular neighborhood during a specific moment in time. In 1991, Hayes moved to New York’s East Village, a neighborhood that she has described as, “decidedly political, decidedly feminist, decidedly queer, and performance oriented.”⁴ It was during her four years as a resident there that she became an active participant in the political and artistic communities of New York City, attending shows and performances as well as WAC and WAM meetings.⁵ Those initial years in

discourses: “In what ways is even our open-endedness extraordinarily limited by the privileges and problematics of a contemporary art discourse?”

⁴ Sharon Hayes, “Revolutions in Public Practice” (keynote address, Creative Time Summit, New York, NY, October 24, 2009).

⁵ The Women’s Action Coalition (WAC) and Women, Action, and the Media (WAM!).

New York City, according to Hayes, were characterized by a sense of being “part of something at the same moment [she] realized [she] belonged there,” giving voice to this collapsed sense of time and its relation to subjectivity formation within a public entity.⁶ Furthermore, she emphasized the role played by her participation in various organizations and communities around New York in shaping who she was during that time—specifically, how her attendance at the meetings of political activist groups and the shows of queer performance artists shaped her political consciousness during the early 1990s and who she subsequently became as an artist. Ultimately, had different people, in a different time and place, surrounded her during the early 1990s, she and her work would not be the same.

For Hayes, temporality is not only something to be considered in relation to herself as a person and an artist, but also plays a significant role in the development of individual subjectivities, communities, and politics. Hayes’s works, for instance, repeatedly acknowledge the connection between temporalities and our subjectivities by making explicit references to time in the titles of her performance and video works—as seen in projects like *After Before* (2005; figure 3.2), *10 Minutes of Collective Activity* (2003; figure 3.3), and *In the Near Future* (figures 3.4-3.7), which investigate the intersections of history, space, and publics. For Hayes, “precise locations and historical conditions linger with us, are carried along in our bodies.”⁷ As we move through time and space (within the realm of the public sphere), the memories of past experiences (both personal and collective) travel with us, shaping both our present and future. These

⁶ Hayes, “Revolutions in Public Practice.”

⁷ Ibid.

memories and traces of the past, in constructing the subjectivities of people situated in present and future moments, are located in the bodies of those whose subjectivities are marked by them and function performatively within the public sphere. Thus, moments in time are never exclusively their own. Rather, each is informed by what precedes it and the anticipation of what may follow, with time constantly projecting both forwards and backwards. This is particularly important to keep in mind when considering the signs used throughout Hayes' performances (and the political contexts they reference) and the continued existence of *In the Near Future, New York* resulting from its photographic documentation.

Literature on *In the Near Future, New York*, frequently addresses the application of speech act theory to Hayes' work, albeit in a limited capacity—that is, Hayes' project deploys the speech act in the form of a protest sign. Philosopher J. L. Austin, in his famous lecture series, *How to Do Things With Words*, defines performatives as, “utterances that accomplish, in their very enunciation, an action that generates effects.”⁸ For Austin, statements like “I do” and “I bet...” function as explicit performatives, or speech acts, because speaking the words performs the very act that is uttered. Certainly, Hayes's *In the Near Future, New York*, particularly the sign she held on November 1st, which reads “Actions Speak Louder Than Words,” is related to this notion of the speech act (Figure 3.4). But the photographs taken at Union Square, which capture Hayes and her sign from multiple angles, seem to complicate the current understandings of Hayes's project (Figures 3.4, 3.8, & 3.9). The statement on this sign distinguishes between actions

⁸ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

and speech, valuing acts above words and upholding a dichotomy that speech act theory, or performative language, ultimately collapses. It prompts the question: Is Hayes's action of holding the sign at Union Square more effective or more important than the words themselves? Or more importantly, what action would there be without the sign, or the very words printed on it? Ultimately, there is a contradiction between the statement on Hayes's sign and the very act of holding it up—an incongruity that is collapsed by the very performativity of language within the public sphere. While critics⁹ have routinely considered her use of handheld signs as performative, this argument, rooted in understandings of protest actions and activism, fails to take into account the fact that Hayes's signs are not "true" protest signs—that is, she has no single, expressly political cause in the conventional sense of the word.¹⁰ Thus, according to Austin's definition, they are not explicit performatives.¹¹ What exactly is she "protesting" with a sign that

⁹ For discussions of Hayes's performances of *In the Near Future*, *New York* in the context of performative language see Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*; Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Julia Bryan-Wilson on Sharon Hayes," *Artforum* (May 2006): 278-279; "Press Release: Sharon Hayes—In the Near Future," *Tanya Leighton Gallery*, Summer 2008.

¹⁰ Compare the "cause" of her works to the more explicitly political issues of gender/reproductive rights and homelessness, which are addressed by Kruger and Wearing, respectively. Consider the conversion of Kruger's iconic *Untitled [Your Body is a Battleground]* photo-collage into a political poster advertising a March on Washington and protesting an administration that wanted to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, as well as Wearing alluding to the socio-economic reality of homeless in London during the early 1990s in her *Signs...* series. The result is that Hayes attempts to highlight the political nature of public discourse, itself.

¹¹ Although there is some debate about the appropriate conditions necessary for a "felicitous," or explicit, performative. As Timothy Gould points out, there is such a thing as the "unhappy performative," which is defined as such by either the absence of a proper intention or lack of external consequence (i.e. the utterance is not followed through on). This, however, does not negate the utterance's performative quality, it simply means that explicit, or "happy," performatives make apparent in the very words of the utterance, the act that is being performed as it is spoken into being. Timothy Gould, "The Unhappy Performative," in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19-44.

reads “Actions Speak Louder Than Words”? There is nothing else on the sign or around her, as the photographs illustrate, that would narrow down such a broad statement. In actuality, Hayes could be referring to any number of contexts in which action is preferred over talking, or, more likely, she is making a statement about the efficacy of protest action in and of itself within the space of the public sphere. Thus, while Hayes’s anachronistic protests somewhat fail as “true” protest actions, that failure serves to disrupt our normative, linear understandings of time and space and blurs the categorical distinctions between art and activism. Her diverse (in terms of time, location, “cause,” and written text) performances within public space appear to be the very “cause” of her project—investigating how temporality, politics, people, and language interact to performatively construct publics.

As Brady Welch has argued, “Hayes is primarily engaged in performance and installation work exploring the interstices of public and private speech within the realm of political activism.”¹² While it is true that Hayes’s actions mimic those of a protest, her project somewhat deviates from the realm of political activism in its lack of a central cause. However, that is not to say that her work is a-political. In fact, Hayes appropriates texts from past protest actions and historical archives, contextualizing them to look like a protest, but ultimately resituating them in a new time and place. Take, for example, the November 2nd images from *In the Near Future, New York* (Figures 3.10 & 3.11). Standing on Broad Street between Exchange Place and Wall Street, Hayes holds up a rectangular sign stating, “Ratify E.R.A. Now!” referring to the Equal Rights Amendment

¹² Brady Welch, “From NY: There’s So Much I Want to Say to You,” *Art Practical*, June 27, 2012, http://www.artpractical.com/review/theres_so_much_i_want_to_say_to_you/.

originally proposed in 1972. While this amendment, which promotes equal rights for women and challenges traditional gender roles, has been reintroduced in every session of Congress since 1982, it has yet to be ratified. In this photograph on the right we see Hayes with her sign standing slightly to the left of center (Figure 3.11).¹³ Behind her is the New York Stock Exchange building with a banner of its own—one that advertises the annual ING New York City Marathon. While the building itself (recognizable façade and all; figure 3.12) is layered with meanings, and connections may be made between the status of the Equal Rights Amendment and the prominent financial district of the United States, the sign and Hayes’s action are somewhat out of place.¹⁴ One could argue that a demonstration dedicated solely to promoting the ratification of the E.R.A. would be more likely to occur in a place like Washington D.C., the nation’s capital for policymaking, rather than a financial district in New York. For example, more contemporary rallies committed to repealing the amendment’s deadline, like the one that took place on the West Lawn of the Capitol Building during September 2014, continue to be held in the

¹³ The imperative on Hayes’ sign is anachronistic in the sense that the E.R.A. was originally proposed in 1972. While the amendment has been reintroduced in every session of Congress since 1982, it has yet to be ratified. And the level of visible political action (i.e. protest demonstrations) in support of its passing has waned since the 1970s.

¹⁴The Façade of the U.S. Stock Exchange building was constructed to resemble classical architecture. Thus, it carries with it all of the ideals and values associated with it—specifically civic virtue, etc. For examples of scholarship on this topic see essays by Michael Greenhalgh and Henri Zerner in *Critical Perspectives on Art History*, ed. John C. McEnroe and Deborah F. Pokinski (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2002); connections between the ERA and Wall Street, or financial climate of the United States could include things like the disparate roles of women and men within the finance industry, a questioning of who indeed has control over the ratification of such amendments, or even where U.S. priorities lie as a nation (i.e. commerce or civil rights). Perhaps, with this choice of site, Hayes is implying that law resides with the 1%, not with the seat of democratic government. As a result, she performs a kind of oblique protest, but I think it is more important to acknowledge that in making such an oblique reference Hayes is drawing our attention the significant role a specific site, or place, can play in the enactment of a protest.

nation's capital.¹⁵ Thus, *In the Near Future, New York* looks like, or obliquely enacts, political protest actions, but in doing so it directs our attention away from a specific, contemporaneous cause toward the very performativity of protest actions within a public sphere.

Hayes's actions, in this sense, stand in for public discourse among the people of New York City. Yet, while the black and white placards she holds fail to explicitly fulfill the performative element of the protest-sign-as-speech-act argument, a theory of performativity is necessary for a thorough analysis of Hayes' *In the Near Future, New York*, particularly when we consider the documentation of Hayes's project, her role as a photographed subject, and how subjects engage within the public sphere.

In his text, *Publics and Counterpublics*, scholar Michael Warner emphasizes the relationship between language and our notion of the public, stating that there is a, "circularity inherent in all publics: public language addresses a public as a social entity, but that entity exists only by virtue of being addressed."¹⁶ This circular logic echoes J.L. Austin's definition of the performative in which the very articulation of an utterance does something. Thus, for Warner, the "effect" of the public enunciation is the very creation of said public. The question then becomes: Is the public that Hayes simultaneously addresses and constructs one that upholds a normative, identitarian understanding of public subjectivity? Or does *In the Near Future* reflect a theoretical and social shift away

¹⁵ Nicole Gaudiano, "Fight to ratify Equal Rights Amendment draws new interest," *USA Today*, September 12, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2014/09/12/equal-rights-amendment-rally/15508713/>.

¹⁶ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, (New York: Zone, 2002), 67.

from that understanding of the public toward one that is more multifaceted, plural, and somewhat tenuously grasped?

In 2005, Hayes created the first iteration of her project, *In the Near Future* in which she staged “failed” protest actions in prominent cities around the world. While holding various “protest” signs,¹⁷ Hayes had collaborators and friends photograph her quasi-protest actions. She, then, installed the photographic “documentation” in exhibitions as projections on a gallery wall. *In the Near Future, New York* (Figure 3.4) consists of nine durational public performances in which Hayes occupied highly coded sites around New York such as St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the site of an important 1989 ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) protest (Figures 3.13 & 3.14).¹⁸ Other sites included Union Square, Wall Street, Madison Square Garden, and Times Square, each of which is the location of “an important activist scene or public speaking event” (Figures 3.4, 3.10-3.12).¹⁹

However, the diversity of Hayes’s performances is not only apparent in her choice of location or slogan, but also found in the times of the day she chose to occupy each site. Rather than occurring at the same time of day, Hayes’s hour-long performances were scattered throughout the mornings and afternoons according to a common schedule of

¹⁷ Hayes’ placards had a new slogan each day: “Actions Speak Louder than Words.” “We Are Innocent.” “Strike Today.” “Who Approved the War in Viet—Nam?” “Abolish H.U.A.C.” “The American President Might Have to Call in the National Guard to Put This Revolt Down.” “Nothing Will Be as Before.” “I AM A MAN.” “Ratify E.R.A. NOW.”

¹⁸ Johanna Burton, “New York, Beside Itself,” in *Mixed Use, Manhattan: Photography and Related Practices, 1970s to the present*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Douglas Crimp with Kristin Poor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 216. For another, perhaps more comprehensive, description of the performances of this project see: Elizabeth Freeman, “Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism,” in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 59-93.

¹⁹ Freeman, “Deep Lez,” 59.

labor.²⁰ For example, Hayes’s quasi-demonstration at Madison Square Garden on November 3, 2015 (Figure 3.15) began at noon and ended at one in the afternoon—a block of time during the day in which many people leave work to get, or at least take a break for, lunch. The following day, Hayes chose to perform in Times Square at the highly trafficked hour of eight o’clock in the morning when a number of people are on the streets commuting to work (Figure 3.16). Spread around the city of New York at various times of the day, Hayes’ performances highlight her role as the “protestor” amidst the busyness of the city and the fluctuations in crowds depending on the space and time in which she is located. Consider the images of her November 7, 2015 performance on the sidewalks of the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building on 125th Street and 7th Avenue, in which Hayes holds a sign stating, “STRIKE TODAY!” (Figures 3.17 & 3.18). Hayes’ action and sign seem particularly out of place in front of the office building in that her singularity as the only “protestor” is emphasized by the lack of people around her. This raises questions about her role in the political construction of public space: If there is no one there to address—no one who sees or hears her call for a strike—is she contributing to the public space in which she finds herself? How do individuals, or single protestors, voicing their opinion in public influence (or not, as the case may be) a collective public will? Does an effective politics of counterpublicity depend upon the size, the networks of circulation, or both, of the public entity meant to challenge normative publics? Contrast these images with those from November 6, 2015 and one can

²⁰ It is also important to note here that her choice of hours during which she performed her “failed” protest actions correspond to a schedule of labor, or an average workday—mainly, the times of day that people are more likely to be on the street (commuting to/from work, lunch breaks, etc.) rather than inside their office.

see not only more people engaged with Hayes and her “protest,” but also another person holding an unrelated sign—perhaps, protesting for a cause of their own (Figure 3.19). Scattered around the various sites and neighborhoods of New York City, Hayes’ performances investigate the role of the political protestor in the construction of public space. And, perhaps, it is for this reason that most people classify Hayes as a performance artist and more consistently focus on the “actions” of *In the Near Future, New York* when discussing this particular project.

However, such a performative address in *In the Near Future, New York* also demonstrates that a politicized public sphere, one that remains open to (and perhaps places more value on) a discussion of labor through historically located participatory practices like protest actions, also necessitates the circulation of images and texts—with their capacity to move across time(s) and space(s)—for its very existence. Put another way, the photographs of Hayes’s actions, along with their informative captions, allow us to think about her role and the conditions of her performances in the present, ten years after its completion, in a way that the original performances could not.

Thus, the performances of *In the Near Future, New York* are only a part of Hayes’ project. The other aspect of this work—the one that we are forced to draw from now that we are almost a decade removed from Hayes’ original actions—is the photographic documentation produced by Hayes’s collaborators, her personal friends, and fellow artists. Most critical attention that has been given to Hayes’s *In the Near Future, New York* has treated the photographs themselves as mere documentation

subordinate to the “authentic” performances of the project.²¹ While the photographs do function as documents of the “failed” protests, they also serve as “texts” to be displayed and circulated, prolonging the life of the project as they address publics past, present, and future. Through the photographs of *In the Near Future, New York*, Hayes performatively addresses a public that at the time of her performances had yet to be determined, and creates space for other publics that are “in the near future.”

According to Michael Warner, using the term “public” can indicate a very specific “kind of social totality,” or a bounded audience like that of a theatrical performance.²² However, as recent critical analyses of the concept have revealed, “public” also refers to the entity that comes into being as a result of the circulation of texts. Thus, contemporary theorists (as well as artists like Hayes) seem to have settled (for now) on the understanding that a public is at once a real and fictive entity—“real” in the sense that it is grounded in a collective group of people and necessary for the circulation of texts, goods, etc., but “fictive” in that what constitutes it as a public is constantly changing and thus not concrete or identifiable. In his essay, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” Michael Warner writes, “A public, after all, cannot have a discrete, positive existence; something becomes a public only through its availability for subjective identification.” He describes, that is, a subjectivity constructed by language

²¹ See, for example, *After Before: In the Near Future, Sharon Hayes* (New York: Art in General, 2007); Jeff Edwards, “Sharon Hayes/Love is Just a Battlefield Away,” *Art Pulse Magazine*, <http://artpulsemagazine.com/sharon-hayes-love-is-just-a-battle-away>; *More Love: Art, Politics, and Sharing since the 1990s*, ed. Claire Schneider (Chapel Hill, NC: Ackland Art Museum, 2013); and Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*.

²² Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 65-66.

and discourses accessible within the public sphere—discourses like those used and referenced throughout Hayes’s part performance, part photographic project.²³

In comparison to Kruger and Wearing, whose photographic works also performatively address specific audiences within the public sphere, Hayes’s *In the Near Future, New York* differs in its performative address and constitution of publics. Hayes performs her actions—unfulfilled speech act or not—from within a public, situating herself as a part of the collective body she is addressing (Figure 3.19). She explicitly performs the role of the “protestor,” a public speaking subject that by definition offers a challenge to something (often authoritative or powerful in the context of social action).²⁴ Thus, Hayes situates herself within the frame of each photograph taken as part of *In the Near Future, New York*, and indicates the implicit participation of the rest of us in the public sphere when engaged in public discourse. Rather than take an invisible, authoritative position (like that of Kruger in the construction of her 1980s photo-collages) or one that foregrounds the individual figures within a public but affords the subjects only a semblance of agency (like Wearing with her *Signs...* series [1992-93]), Hayes steps into a multifaceted role reflective of how she perceives and constructs the public—a role that is seemingly open to all of us.

²³Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 245.

²⁴Take, for example, the protestors of ACT UP (discussed earlier in this chapter), who disrupted a Mass service at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City on December 10, 1989, challenging the Catholic Church’s, and more specifically the diocesan bishop’s, stance on contraception, sex education in NYC public schools, etc. In this case, protestors publicly demonstrated their objection to the power/authority of the Catholic Church.

As the (en)actor of each performance, Hayes is also a subject of each photograph documenting her public intervention; but these “documentations” become an essential part of the project—and are crucial to understanding how *In the Near Future, New York* as a whole performatively addresses publics within the public sphere—once they are projected on the walls of gallery spaces and are reproduced in book form by Art in General (Figure 3.20.). On November 9, 2005, the final day of Hayes’s performances, she exhibited the photographs of *In the Near Future, New York* within the gallery walls of Art in General using multiple projectors, effectively concluding the performance aspect of her project. However, in 2007, Art in General also published a number of the photographs of *In the Near Future, New York* in the book, *After Before*—the first in a “series of publications that allow the commissioned projects to live beyond the time of their immediate presentation.”²⁵ Like Wearing, who published select images from her *Signs... (1992-93)* series in a book format, Hayes performatively addresses a public of the present as well as those “in the near future” through a continued circulation of the photographs of *In the Near Future, New York*. Thus, through its multiple media components and networks of circulation, the project artfully blurs boundaries between past and present, participant and observer, public and private, art and activism—a blurring that emphasizes the ambiguous nature of a public, its inherent relation to language, and the performativity involved in at once addressing and constructing such a “body” within the public sphere.

²⁵ Anne J. Barlow, foreword in *After Before: Sharon Hayes*, ed. Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy and Miguel Amado (New York: Art in General, 2007), 7.

In each action and photograph Hayes is at once the artist, a resident of New York City, *and* part of a larger public subjectivity. “Hayes, as performer and first person, ‘I,’ simultaneously marks the space of the ‘we,” writes Hayes’s colleague Johanna Burton.²⁶ By situating herself within the frame of each photograph and addressing a public of which she is a part, Hayes makes a performative and visual statement within the public sphere that supports Warner’s ambiguous, discursively based definition of the public—a definition that opens things up to a politics of counterpublicity. The very inclusion of Hayes’ body among other bodies grounds the ephemeral notion of the public in the very materiality of the body, not to reduce such a complex entity as the public to the specificity of one person or group of people, but to demonstrate each person’s role in the performative construction of publics within a public sphere.

As stated previously, an examination of the photographs of *In the Near Future, New York* reveals complex, political aspects of the performativity of this work—that is, Hayes’ inclusion and construction of multiple publics or subjectivities, the necessity of reception for a public’s existence, and the understanding that although publics and social issues are temporally-situated, they are also interconnected and constantly changing. First, let us consider how Hayes addresses and constructs multiple publics with the signs she uses in *In the Near Future, New York*. As we have already seen in the November 2nd images from the project, Hayes appropriates texts from historical contexts referencing the past and by extension addressing the people from that time (Figures 3.10 & 3.11).²⁷ In

²⁶ Burton, “New York, Beside Itself,” 219.

²⁷ For further examples and explanation of how *In the Near Future, New York* demonstrates this idea see Freeman, “Deep Lez,” 60. For example, Freeman writes: “The more generic ‘Strike

this case, she addresses a public invested in the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. However, Hayes also references other times periods, be they past or future, with the statements she constructs herself. Take, for example, the November 5th images from *In the Near Future, New York*, which were taken in Central Park at 59th Street and Columbus Circle (Figure 3.21). Standing at the entrance to the park and largely ignored, Hayes holds up a sign stating: “Who Approved the WAR in—Vietnam??” Such a question is undoubtedly dated as U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War ended in 1973 and the conflict itself ended in 1975. But the inclusion of such a controversial moment in U.S. socio-political history inevitably references a public of the time—one that may have asked such a question—and speaks to those people still alive today who can recall the social and political climate of the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, the dash between the “in” and “Vietnam” on the sign, alludes to a hesitation on the part of Hayes, the speaker—a hesitation indicating that she may not be speaking about the Vietnam War, after all. Perhaps, Hayes’s address within a contemporary public—the public of New York City in 2005—is really a reference to the more contemporary “War on Terror”—a “war” that began after 9/11 and continues today.²⁸ *In the Near Future, New York* raises

Today’ and ‘Actions Speak Louder than Words’ (the latter help up in Manhattan’s Union Square) remind us of the labor movement gutted by Reaganism and of silent protests from lunchroom sit-ins in the civil rights era to ACT UP’s die-ins, even as they call for a response to current economic problems” (60).

²⁸ The phrase, “War on Terror,” first used by US President, George W. Bush shortly after the 9/11/2001 refers to the international military campaign launched in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Initially oriented toward Muslim countries with known Islamic terrorist associations, the Defense Department and President Barack Obama officially requested a shift in its name to “Overseas Contingency Operation.” It is interesting to consider the role and import of language in relation to this political, military campaign and its performative effects within a 21st century, American public sphere. See Scott Wilson and Al Kamen, “‘Global War On Terror’ Is Given New Name,” *The Washington Post*, 25 March 2009, A04,

questions about the meaning behind Hayes's texts and whom she is in fact addressing, and like many other contemporary artists working with text and image within the public sphere (consider the works of Barbara Kruger, here), those questions are often left unanswered or unresolved. In this case, however, there are multiple ways to interpret Hayes's sign from November 5th. Thus she is demonstrating not only the complexity of language and meaning-making, but also the multiplicity of publics addressed and constructed as a result.

Hayes's project also performatively addresses multiple publics in the way it constructs and combines site-specific references with those of differing time periods.²⁹ On November 6th, Hayes stood in front of the St. Patrick's Cathedral on 5th Avenue in New York City. Situated between 50th and 51st Street, Hayes holds up a sign, which reads, "I AM A MAN" (Figure 3.14, 3.19 & 3.22-3.24) As mentioned earlier, the Cathedral was the site of a prominent ACT UP protest in 1989 in which thousands of protestors gathered outside of the church while others went inside to disrupt the mass being performed. ACT UP, a prominent advocacy organization formed in 1987 is a, "group...committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis."³⁰ The protest of 1989 was a response to the Church's opposition to safe sex education and condom distribution in New York Public Schools, among other things. Thus, as Elizabeth Freeman succinctly puts it, "'I AM A MAN' sutures the 1968 Memphis sanitation strike to contemporary

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/24/AR2009032402818.html>.; Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics, and Counter-terrorism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005).

²⁹ Hayes's project uses what historian Elizabeth Freeman refers to as a kind of "temporal drag." Freeman, "Deep Lez," 62.

³⁰ *ACT UP*, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.actupny.org/>.

lesbian and transgender activism.”³¹ With *In the Near Future, New York*, Hayes attempts to address particular publics not only through her signs and texts, but also through her choice of site. In this particular iteration, Hayes addresses, or incorporates, the publics of the 1989 ACT UP protest—those who may have been there, or were involved with the organization throughout the 1980s—along with a public of touched by the 1968 sanitation strikes in Memphis. However, she also combines the publics of those historic events and political organizations with that of New York around St. Patrick’s in 2005, and an art public of our present day (addressed through her photographic documentation). *In the Near Future, New York*, with its inclusion of highly coded texts and sites, addresses multiple audiences associated with differing time periods, spaces, and events and indicates the discursive relationship they have to each other within the public sphere.

However, the photographs of *In the Near Future, New York* also necessitate that we discuss the people represented within the images, their varying degrees of reception, or engagement, and how the subjects included further demonstrate the discursive constitution of a public sphere. In some photographs taken on the sixth day of *In the Near Future, New York*, Hayes is clearly the subject, the one performing and being photographed. Figure 3.22, for example, captures Hayes and her sign taking up the left foreground. The church provides a backdrop, and while some people are engaged elsewhere, a blonde woman to the right of the frame, arms crossed, looks at Hayes, who is standing to her right. This photograph emphasizes the action performed by Hayes and seems more like a snapshot of the moment than an address to a public. Nonetheless, the

³¹ Freeman, “Deep Lez,” 60.

image marks an encounter between Hayes, those in her immediate vicinity, the anonymous photographer, and the photograph's viewers, past, present, and future.

Additionally, other photographs from this project confirm that there are multiple levels of engagement among the people who participate within a public sphere. Figure 3.24, for example, emphasizes the people surrounding Hayes, while the artist is only indicated in the photograph by the presence of her placard hovering those making up this public crowd.³² The image, obscuring *In the Near Future, New York* as a performance piece, seems more like a representation of collective public action, foregrounding those subjects drawn into the image by a multitude of forces—their mere presence outside of St. Patrick's, Hayes's (implied) performance, the photographer's action of taking the shot, and perhaps, even a curiosity on the part of the subject to read the sign's statement. Thus, the photograph includes within it: Hayes as protestor, or public speaking subject, those in the upper right quadrant who have already passed the action taking place, those in the foreground who are seemingly directing their attention toward the sign and its text, and the man on the far left of the image who, gazing to his left as he walks forward, appears curious about what is written on the sign. Thus, the photographs of *In the Near Future, New York* illustrate the complexity of publics at the same time that they function as performative addresses to publics not represented within the work. In Figure 3.24 Hayes, quite literally, speaks to and becomes part of a body of people from the New York

³² Furthermore, we can only assume it is Hayes holding the sign when this photograph is viewed in the context of the other photographs of *In the Near Future, New York*. Otherwise, this could be a photograph of any other public protest, event, or congregation of people (and not one necessarily located in New York City).

community in her present moment of 2005, but she also addresses those of us temporally displaced from the moment of her actions.

Consider also, the photographs of Hayes on November 2nd, which again explicitly illustrate the multivalent construction of public spheres (Figure 3.10 & 3.11). For many, Hayes and her sign are something to merely walk past and ignore. Some individuals are captured on film glancing in Hayes's direction while others simply walk past looking ahead of themselves. On the other hand, some people appear intrigued, but confused about what she is doing. According to Jeff Edwards, the "burden of decoding these obscure protests was placed upon random, uninitiated passersby."³³ The choice was theirs as to whether or not they would engage with Hayes herself. But, as the images show, regardless of how much attention they paid to Hayes's performance (a half of a second, a minute, five minutes, etc.) they were a part of the action photographed (Hayes's public performance), as well as the photographic act (the encounter between photographed subject, photographer, and camera). Furthermore, as participants in the photographic encounter, passersby also became part of the public addressed by the text of Hayes's signs, and are performatively constituted within the public sphere through the continued circulation of *In the Near Future, New York*.

Figure 3.11 is also significant in that it is a photograph of someone else taking Hayes's picture. In the central foreground, we see an individual wearing a backpack, squatting down next to the sidewalk, with their left arm cocked out to the side as if they are holding a camera up to their face to take a picture (Figure 3.11). Considering the

³³ Edwards, "Sharon Hayes/Love is Just a Battle Away."

figure's placement and the way they are facing Hayes as she holds up her sign, one can assume that they too are documenting her action while they are being documented as part of it. As Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy points out, this had a significant impact on the reception of Hayes' project: "documenters...helped shift her placard's message from a question of cause to consequence"—that is, documentation raises questions for viewers about how the photographs oscillate between foregrounding and obscuring Hayes's project as a performance and what that means for the project's future.³⁴ For example, what is at stake in *In the Near Future, New York* if the protests are anachronistic, "unhappy" performatives? This photograph taken by one of Hayes' collaborators indicates that Hayes's performative within *In the Near Future, New York* is not only oriented toward the present public of Wall Street and a historical public familiar with the politics of the Equal Rights Amendment (addressed by the artists quasi-demonstration), but also the art world who participated in and will see the photographs of her actions.

According to Johanna Burton, Hayes's project "asks that we question our identifications even as we embrace them"—identifications rooted not only in individual subjectivities, but also in relation to the subjectivities of others within the public sphere.³⁵ Judith Butler, in her oft-cited book *Gender Trouble*, writes, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its

³⁴ Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy, "Nothing Will Be As Before," in *After Before: In the Near Future, Sharon Hayes*, ed. Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy and Miguel Amado (New York: Art in General, 2007), 35.

³⁵ Burton, "New York, Beside Itself," 216.

naturalization in the context of a body.”³⁶ Although mainly focused on the performativity of gender, Butler bases her argument on the understanding that language does not simply describe a given reality; rather, it actively changes the social reality it describes as words are uttered, written, or used. Moreover, in his well-known text, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, John Searle argues that we, as humans, act out rules of speech as conventions—conventions so deeply ingrained that we often do not even know that we know them.³⁷ This is why, despite a spectrum of gender identifications and sexualities, the normative binary distinctions between male/female, masculine/feminine, hetero/homosexual remain dominant while counterhegemonic (re: counterpublic) communities actively strive to construct a language that applies to more experiences along the spectrums of sex, gender, and sexuality. Thus, per Butler’s argument, language plays a significant role in the construction of subjectivities (and I would argue, both individual and collective) just as those subjectivities reinforce and reify language. Hayes’s *In the Near Future, New York* draws our attention to such conventions and “rules of speech”—that is, the performativity of language—as well as their political nature, in the ways it connects texts (written and visual) with performance art and social action in the context of the public sphere.

So, while *In the Near Future, New York* as a whole does not primarily investigate gender or sexual identifications in the same way as Kruger’s photo-collages, Hayes does set out to disrupt linear conceptions of time and binaristic understandings of

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xv.

³⁷ John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

subjectivity—that is, the dichotomy of subject and object. As a result, we might consider Hayes’ project in light of Butler’s performativity and the questions she raises by performing in front of an explicitly heteronormative institution like a Catholic Church. The November 6th images discussed earlier depict Hayes in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral holding a sign stating, “I AM A MAN.”³⁸ Hayes’s somewhat androgynous appearance—illustrated through the short hair, rather loose, non-descript clothing, and firm stance—neither completely supports, nor fully disproves the statement on Hayes’ sign as a self-identification of the artist.³⁹ However, the ambiguity does draw the public(s)’ attentions to the relationship between identification, language, and politics—in basic terms, that language constructs and is constructed by people within a shared space and that this performativity is inherently political. As Butler points out, “the category of sex and the naturalized institution of heterosexuality are *constructs*, socially instituted and socially regulated...not *natural* categories, but *political* ones.”⁴⁰ Thus, the politics of Hayes’ *In the Near Future, New York* do not lie solely in her use of artificial protest signs or the references she makes to politically charged times and places, but in the very performativity of her address from within the specific public of New York in November

³⁸ A statement that carries with it racial connotations and references the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike (mentioned earlier in this chapter).

³⁹ As Elizabeth Freeman writes, “In ‘Ratify E.R.A. NOW,’ though, not only the slogan but also Hayes’s very body turn into a vintage display. Dressed in drab but contemporary clothing and sporting an androgynous hairstyle, standing with legs planted firmly and slightly apart, expression grim and vaguely sad, Hayes looks a bit like the archetypal humorless lesbian feminist. Yet, born in 1970, Hayes would likely have come of age as a queer activist not within the lesbian feminism of the mid-1970s to mid-1980s but rather within the late 1980s emergence of the gender-coalitional ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Women’s Health Action Mobilization (WHAM), or within the butch/femme, S/M, pro-sex lesbian subcultures of the late 1980s and 1990s,” in “Deep Lez,” 61.

⁴⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 172.

of 2005—an address which not only constructs political, complex publics, but also implicates herself (as well as the rest of us—past, present, and future) as part of the public sphere.

In her essay, “New York, Beside Itself,” Johanna Burton writes, “Picture a city as it is imagined and re-imagined in relation to itself, its past lives placed alongside—in dialogue and tension with—its current and future possibilities...New York, beside itself.”⁴¹ Hayes’s project, while it illuminates the complex relationship between time and place, is also grounded in the very people who inhabit the city. *In the Near Future, New York*, not only combines references to incongruent times and places, but also constructs the publics associated with each, demonstrating the interconnectedness and complexity of temporality, language, and public formation within a spatial realm. The project, often discussed in terms of Hayes’s actions, is fundamentally shaped by its photographic component. For Edwards, Hayes’s collaborators were essential to making *In the Near Future, New York* what it is. He argues that without them the piece “would have remained nothing more than a transient event, variously interpreted by onlookers as political action, artwork, or just another bit of insignificant cultural noise to be seen and quickly forgotten.”⁴² It is this collaborative effort, combined with Hayes’s performative addresses from within a specific public, which establishes us all within a public sphere that we must understand as temporally fluid, politically oriented, and constructed of subjects that are at once, actors and those acted upon—a public with the power (and responsibility) to shape its discourses and change its landscape.

⁴¹ Burton, “New York, Beside Itself,” 225.

⁴² Edwards, “Sharon Hayes/Love is Just a Battle Away.”

CONCLUSION

The 1980s photo-collages of Barbara Kruger, Gillian Wearing's *Signs...* (1992-93) series, and the "documentation" of Sharon Hayes's *In the Near Future, New York* (2005) all use a combination of text and image that raises questions about the relationship between language and photography as a medium, the address to publics that such works perform, and the politics inherent in the circulation of artworks within a public sphere. These contemporary works, while most often discussed independently, necessitate that we shift frameworks a bit and consider them in relation to one another. In doing so, the photographic works begin to demonstrate clear shifts in contemporary understandings of (political) publics and how those involved in the photographic act (i.e. photographer, photographed subject(s), viewers) are performatively addressed through each work of art.

During the 1980s, the well-known contemporary artist Barbara Kruger created a number of photo-collages engaged in discourses of gender, consumerism, and power—images that, as of today, have been widely discussed by critics, academics, and other art professionals interested in theories of postmodernism and photography. Specific works like *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)*, *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)*, and *Untitled (Surveillance is Your Busywork)*, situated and circulating within the public sphere as posters, billboards, and bus placards, require us to consider how such works functioned as "texts" addressed to publics by an abstract speaking subject. The consequence of using such a rhetoric of abstraction—further emphasized by the appropriation of found images, the performative language of shifters, and the employment of textual "captions" reminiscent of advertising—within the realm of the

public sphere, was the constitution of a normatively gendered public in a performative space reminiscent of Jürgen Habermas's bourgeois public sphere.¹

Similarly, Gillian Wearing's series, *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say*, and *Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* engages with the text/image legacy of modernism, using photography in a social situation, to explore the role of the "caption" in pinning down meaning. The project featured photographs of random people on the streets of London during 1992 and 1993 in which each person, holds up a handwritten sign revealing the inner thoughts and/or feelings they had in the moments leading up to the photographic act.² The photographs of *Signs...* explore the boundary between "public" and "private"—two constructs crucial to understanding and articulating the very notion of a public sphere, particularly in terms of its openness (or lack thereof) to individual agency, or their ability participate in social discourse. By foregrounding those photographed in *Signs...* as subjects, speakers and participants (a reference to the *vox populi* of early British reality television), the series performatively constructed a historically specific public that was at once political, discursively informed, and in flux.

Sharon Hayes's *In the Near Future*, New York, created in 2005 as a part-performance, part-photographic project related to exploring the connections between

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

² There is room for debate about how "revealing" the signs and/or photographs themselves are of the "interiority" of these individual subjects. But regardless of their "truth" value, the use of language and each person's participation in the social project reveals the ways in which Wearing's series performatively addresses and constructs publics within a shared space.

social action, discourse, and history revealed yet another shift in the contemporary understanding of the idea of the public sphere. By exploring the roles of protestor (public speaking subject), witness (participants), and space in the enactment of social actions, Hayes's project emphasizes the tension between a desire for concrete political action and the abstract, unbounded nature of multiple publics within the space of the public sphere.³ However, Hayes also explores the interconnectedness of language, time, and publics by repeatedly citing significant historical events like the 1968 Memphis sanitation strikes and the 1989 ACT UP protest at St. Patrick's cathedral in New York City. By documenting her "actions" photographically, images have come to stand in for the original performances of 2005, and continue to performatively address publics of the past, present, and future.

Together, Kruger's 1980s photo-collages, Wearing's *Signs...* series, and Hayes's *In the Near Future, New York* reveal how contemporary art has performatively addressed shifts in cultural understandings of a public sphere. If a public sphere can be defined as "a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk," then the constant invocation of speaking subjects by the text/image photo-works

³ Even if, in Hayes's project, the social actions are anachronistic and "infelicitous," or failed performatives according to J.L. Austin's theory of performative language. Judith Butler significantly points out that the "success" of performatives is always and only provisional in "Critically Queer," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 1 (1993): 17-32: "If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that 'success' is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes a prior action, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior authoritative set of practices*" (19).

of these three artists address questions of political agency within a public sphere.⁴ But the question remains: How effective have these works been in making space for a politics of counterpublicity—one that begins with an understanding of the complexity of existing public spheres?⁵ If counterpublics (originally conceived in relation to the Habermasian public sphere), as Fraser argues, “contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech,” to what extent do the works of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes reveal a politics of counterpublicity?⁶ Do the photo-works of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes “successfully” function as alternative forms of public speech? Does their combination of contemporary art and politics within the context of the public sphere constitute an “alternative style of political behavior?”

Part of the significance (although from a somewhat essentialist perspective) of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes’s photo-works—as well as, of this project—lies in the very fact that these artists created and displayed their works in a spatial realm traditionally denied to women based on gender and sexual identifications. For example, when Barbara Kruger imitates high cultural masterworks (Figure 3.1) and the codes of popular genres (Figure 1.9), she forces “viewers to speculate on what female (re)authorship...might reveal about [the] ostensibly universal representational stakes” of such frameworks. Put

⁴ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁵ This “complexity” refers to the overlapping of global and local publics within a public sphere, the consistent instability of both a public entity and its spatial realm, and how public spheres do, and do not, organize collective experience.

⁶ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere.”

another way, Kruger's photo-collages raise questions about which subjectivities are actually empowered to participate in discourses of the public sphere.⁷ But the potential of Kruger's works to effectively create a politics of counterpublicity seems somewhat stunted by her use of abstraction and advertising rhetoric. In other words, she starts a conversation about the asymmetries present in her public of 1980s America—pointing out a need for a politics of counterpublicity—but does not fully develop an alternative to the norms of public speech.

However, if we move beyond examining Kruger, Wearing and Hayes's works in light of the subjectivity of the artist, what other possibilities do these images present to us for understanding the publics and counterpublics of a contemporary public sphere? Do the works of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes create counterpublics located in their respective moments of production? Does a true politics of counterpublicity insist that it extend beyond a specific temporal location, and thus necessitate that the works incorporate references (re: addresses) to past and future publics? Or is an openness to, and acknowledgment of, a constantly fluctuating public sphere enough for the constitution of a counterpublic?

Most critical attention that has been given to Sharon Hayes's *In the Near Future*, *New York* has treated the photographs themselves as mere documentation subordinate to the "authentic" performances of the project.⁸ In other words, value remains concentrated

⁷ Elizabeth Freeman, "Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism," in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 72.

⁸ See, for example, *After Before: In the Near Future, Sharon Hayes* (New York: Art in General, 2007); Jeff Edwards, "Sharon Hayes/Love is Just a Battlefield Away," *Art Pulse Magazine*, <http://artpulsemagazine.com/sharon-hayes-love-is-just-a-battle-away>; *More Love: Art, Politics*,

in the performative action of social protest. But this emphasis, as I've argued, limits our understanding of how publics are addressed and constructed by Hayes's project. While the photographs do function as documents of "failed" protests, they also serve as "texts" to be displayed and circulated, prolonging the life of the project as they address publics past, present, and future. Through the photographs of *In the Near Future, New York*, Hayes performatively addresses a public that at the time of her performances had yet to be determined, and creates space for other publics that are "in the near future." It would seem, then, that Hayes's project (intentionally, or not) makes room for a politics of counterpublicity by disrupting hegemonic understandings of temporality, politics, and production. It is important to keep in mind that as publics shift, so do the conditions in which an "effective" politics of counterpublicity can develop. Thus, what remains to be discussed in relation to Kruger, Wearing, and/or Hayes's works is the specific characterization of the counterpublic(s) they do or do not address within their respective public spheres.

Future avenues of research for this project would include exploring the trans-national, trans-cultural, trans-media politics of these works. Consider, for example, the textual manipulations and installations of Kruger's *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* as billboards and posters in a variety of nations (Figure 1.1), or the Warsaw, London, and Vienna iterations of Sharon Hayes's *In the Near Future* (Figures 3.5-3.7). How does this variety in sites and languages affect our theoretical and pragmatic understandings of publics and public spheres? Are there formal shifts in these

and Sharing since the 1990s, ed. Claire Schneider (Chapel Hill, NC: Ackland Art Museum, 2013); and Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*.

photographs that demand a discussion of other politics not addressed here? Furthermore, with the development of the Internet and a digital realm, what happens to these photographs and the performativity of publics? What has our current “selfie” culture done to Benjamin’s argument for the photographic “caption”? And how have the structure, location, and accessibility of the public sphere changed as a result of the Web?

A larger project would also seek to more concretely characterize the publics addressed through each artist’s work by providing more historical background for each decade and event cited. For instance, this project could use a more thorough contextualization of the “found” images used in Kruger’s 1980s collages, tracing some of them (if possible) back to their original space of publication and circulation. Moreover, a political analysis of Wearing’s *Signs...* series, would greatly benefit from a discussion of British class and the socio-economics of London in the 1990s, further exploring the reality of homelessness and the financial recession mentioned within a number of images from the series. Lastly, the discussion of Hayes’s *In the Near Future, New York* requires more discussion of the specific events cited by Hayes’s signs. For example, what is at stake in Hayes’s choice to reference the Memphis sanitation strikes of 1968 in her present-day 2005? How were those images received by those on the streets of New York, as opposed to their reception by viewers in the Art in General gallery space? Why did Hayes decide to cite certain significant events from history rather than others? Is there a commonality to those references aside from being instances of political action and public speech?

The works of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes each demonstrate unique approaches to the medium of photography, its incorporation of language, and their relationship to the performative construction of publics. Yet, these artists' photo-works also remain grounded in the politics of their viewing publics and illustrate a shared history of art and photography. For example, there are a number of commonalities across the photo-collages of Kruger, Wearing's photographs, and Hayes's photographic "documentation"—specifically, the text/image legacy of modernism, the use of photography within a social situation, and the role of the "caption" in pinning down meaning. However, the works of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes also reveal that publics, with specific historical locations (Kruger's postmodern 1980s America, Wearing's early 1990s London, and Hayes's turn of the century New York City), are shaped within an ever-changing public sphere. As theoretical entities within a space they (re: publics) remain constant, but the particularities of a public subjectivity within a public sphere are also always in flux. In examining the performative and public aspects of Kruger, Wearing, and Hayes's work we can better understand how these photographs address underlying socio-political issues of their time, as well as how their creation and circulation correspond to shifting understandings of publics that although complex and sometimes contradictory, are also somewhat tangible within the space of the public sphere. This project demonstrates the inherently political and performative function(s) of photography as a medium, and proposes that there is generative (counterhegemonic) potential within the abstract, complex entity of a public.

FIGURES



Figure 0.1. John Heartfield, *Untitled* (1919), photomontage.



Figure 0.2. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (1985).



Figure 1.1. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Surveillance is Your Busywork)* (1985), billboard project organized by Film in the Cities and First Banks, Minneapolis.

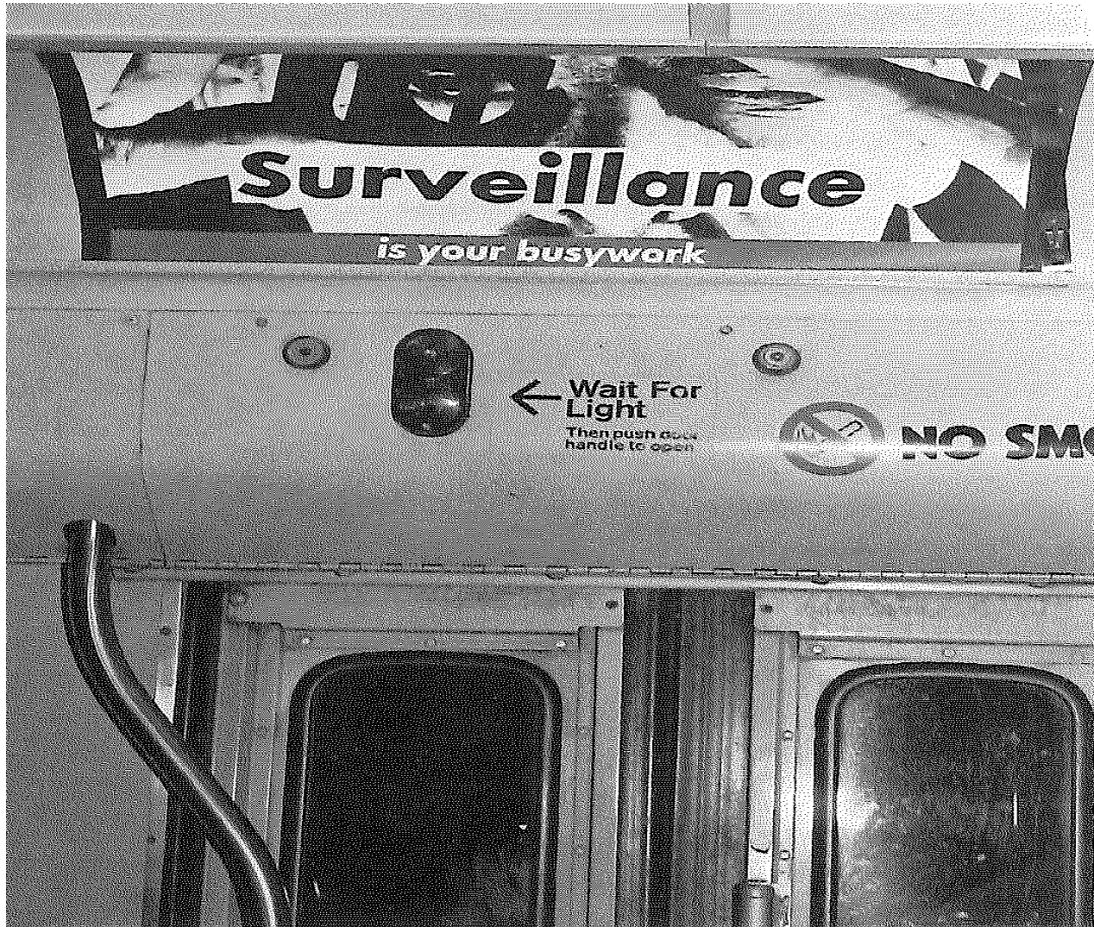


Figure 1.2. Barbara Kruger, *Surveillance is Your Busywork* (1985), bus placard for Nexus project Atlanta, GA



Figure 1.3. Barbara Kruger, *Surveillance is Their Busywork* (1988), poster Sydney, Australia



Figure 1.4. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am)* (1989)

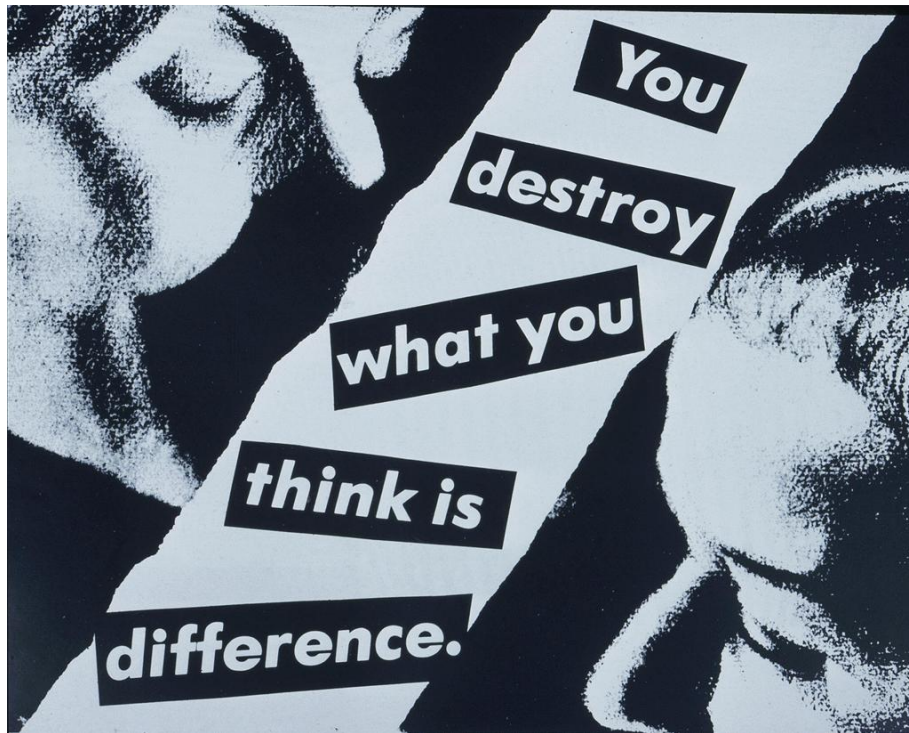


Figure 1.5. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (You Destroy What You Think is Difference)* (1983)



Figure 1.6. Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), installation view.



Figure 1.7. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We Have Received Orders Not to Move)* (1982)



Figure 1.8. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (1989), poster, New York City, NY



Figure 1.9. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (1989)



Figure 1.10. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (1986), billboard, installation view Berkeley, CA



Figure 1.11. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We Don't Need Another Hero)* (1986-88), posters

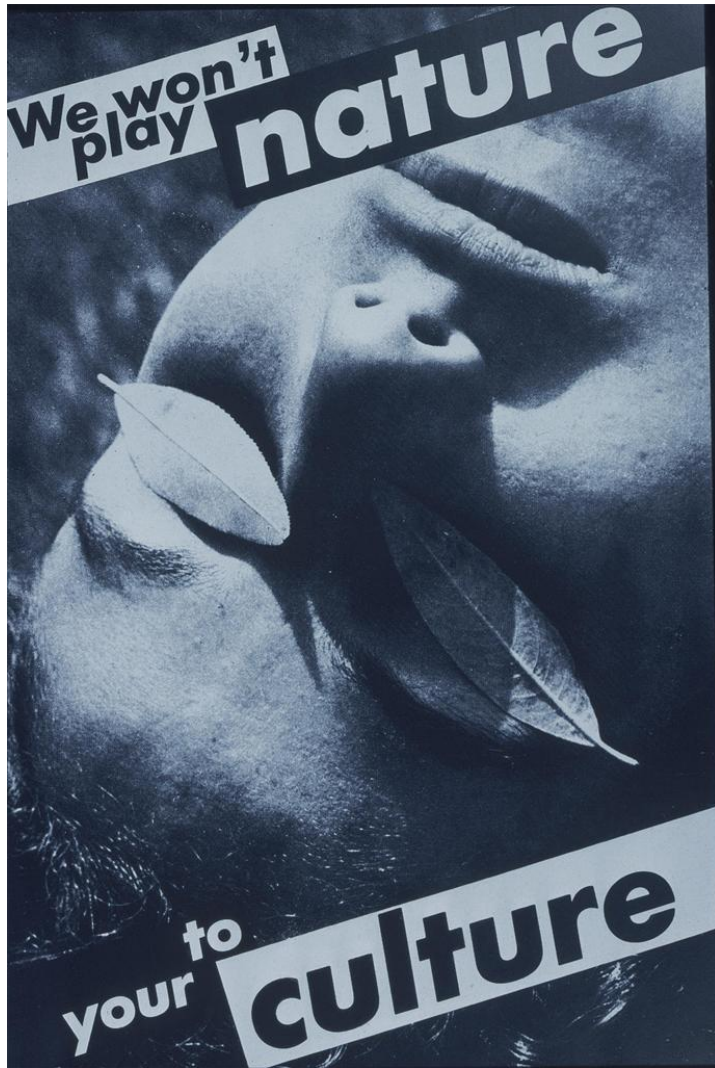


Figure 1.12. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture)* (1982)

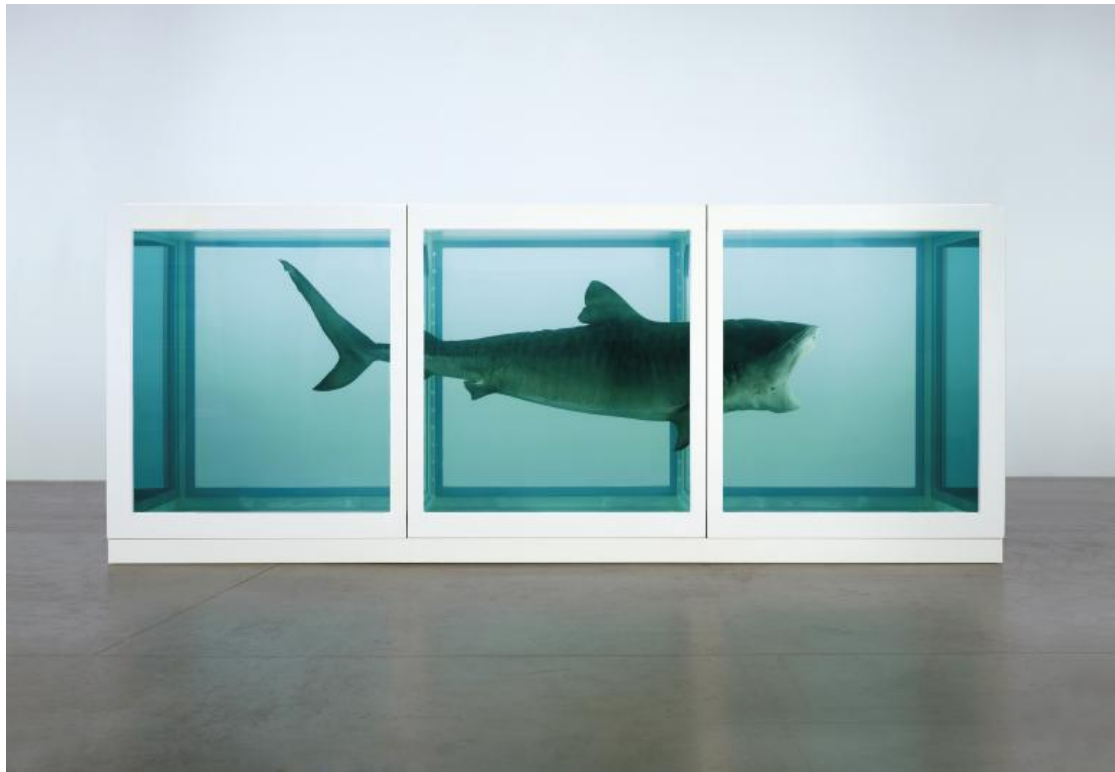


Figure 2.1. Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991).



Figure 2.2. Gillian Wearing, *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93), installation view of select images from the series at Whitechapel Gallery for *Gillian Wearing*, March 28-June 17, 2012.



Figure 2.3. Gillian Wearing, “Help” from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93).



Figure 2.4. Gillian Wearing, “I’m Desperate” from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93).



Figure 2.5. Gillian Wearing, “My Grip on Life is Rather Loose!” from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93).



Figure 2.6. Gillian Wearing, "We are the Hardcore!" from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93).

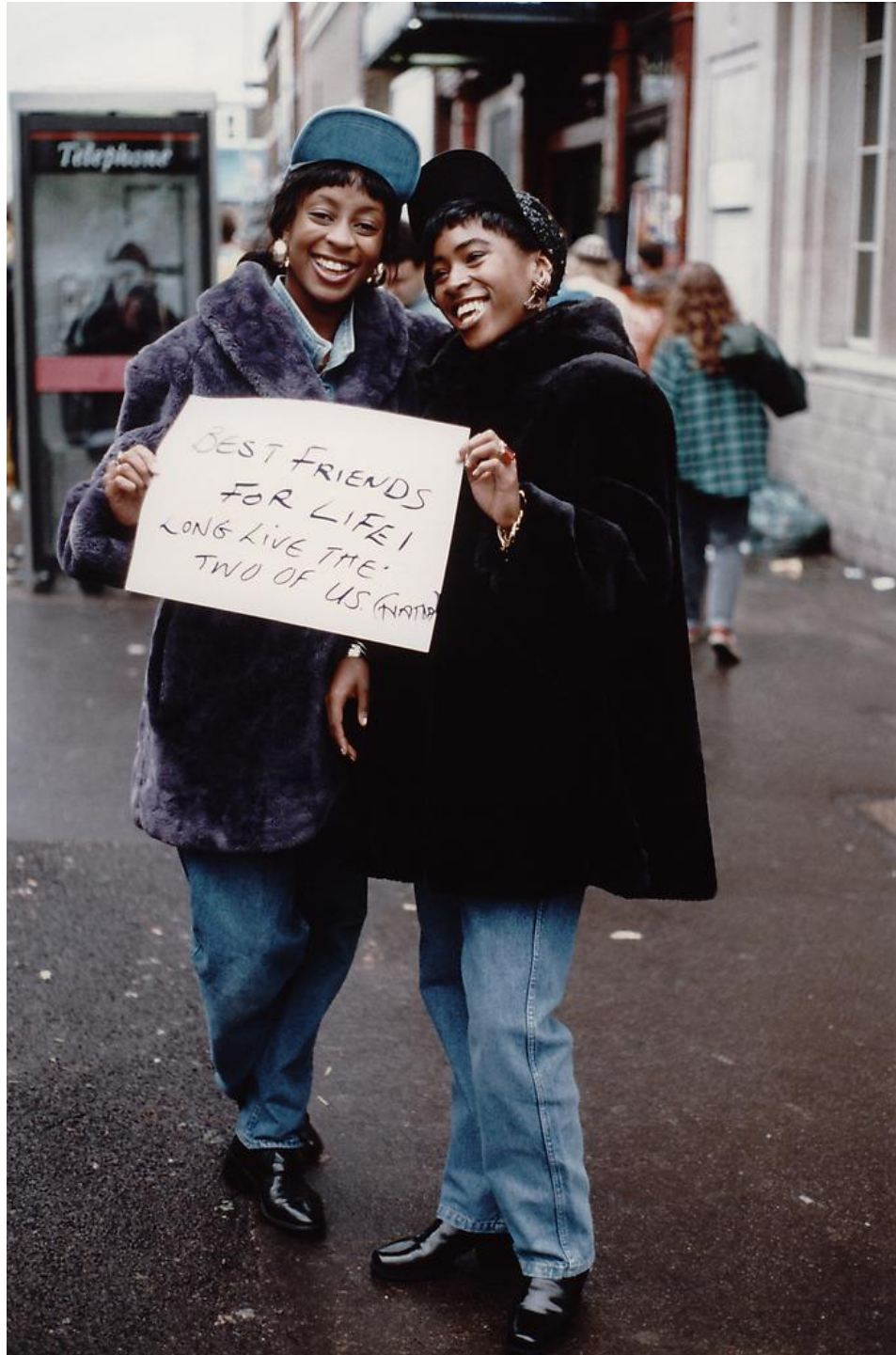


Figure 2.7. Gillian Wearing, “Best friends for life! Long live the two of us” from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93).

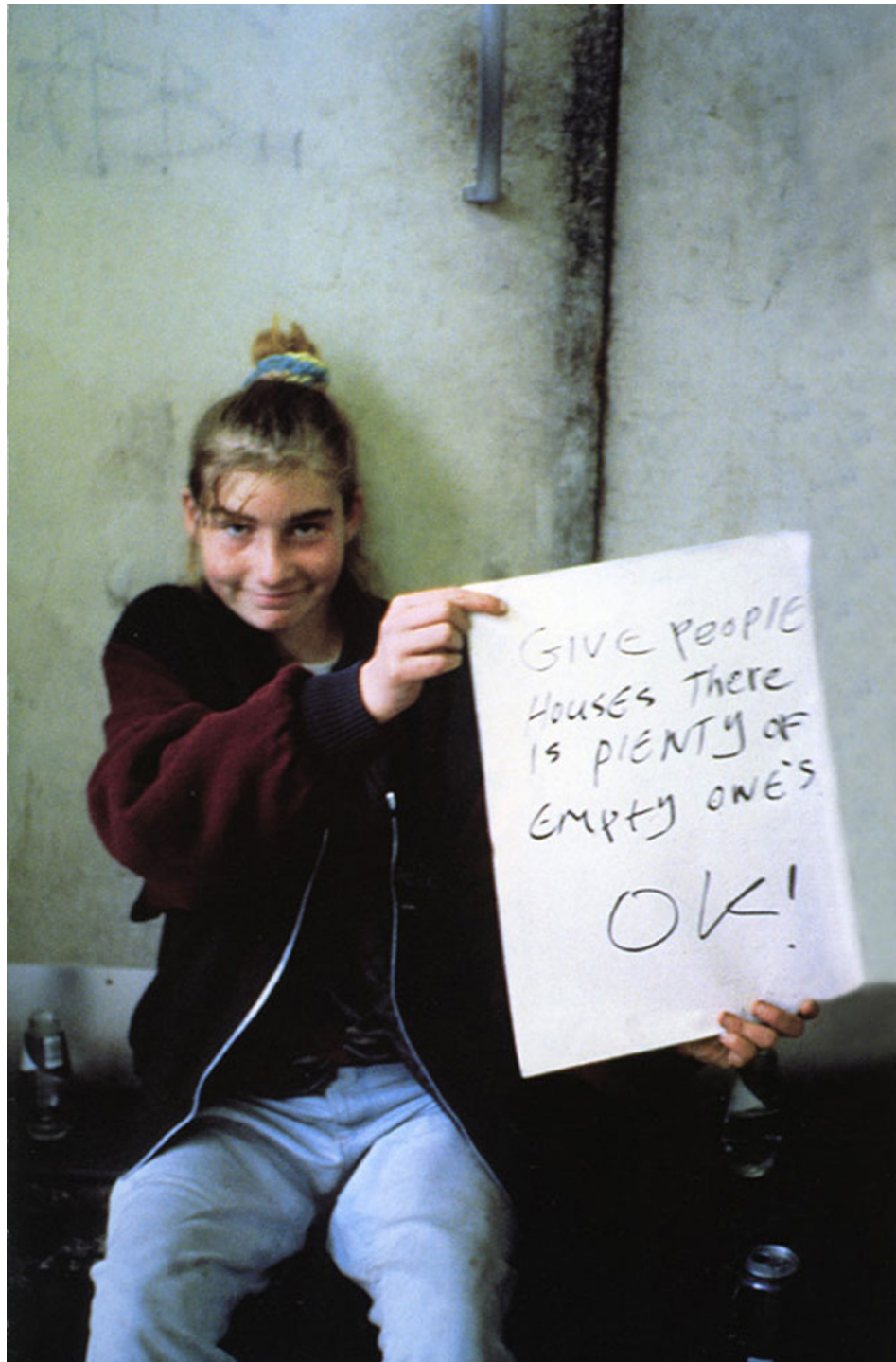


Figure 2.8. Gillian Wearing, “Give people houses there is plenty of empty one’s ok!” from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93).

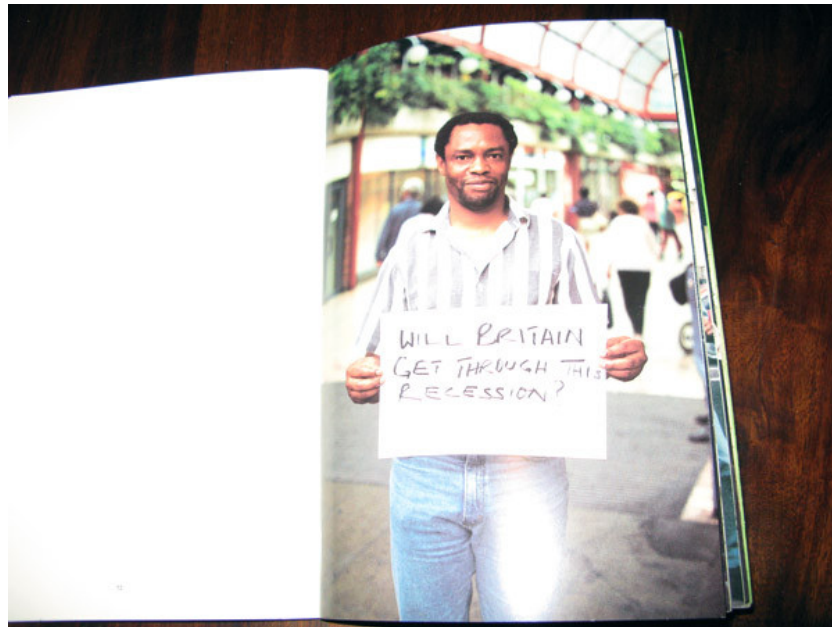


Figure 2.9. Gillian Wearing, “Will Britain get through this recession?” from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93), picture of the single-page book format.



Figure 2.10. (Bottom Left): Gillian Wearing, “ME” from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93).



Figure 2.11. Gillian Wearing, *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93), facing pages from the printed book form of Wearing's series.



Figure 2.12. Gillian Wearing, “I really love regents park” from *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say, and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-93).

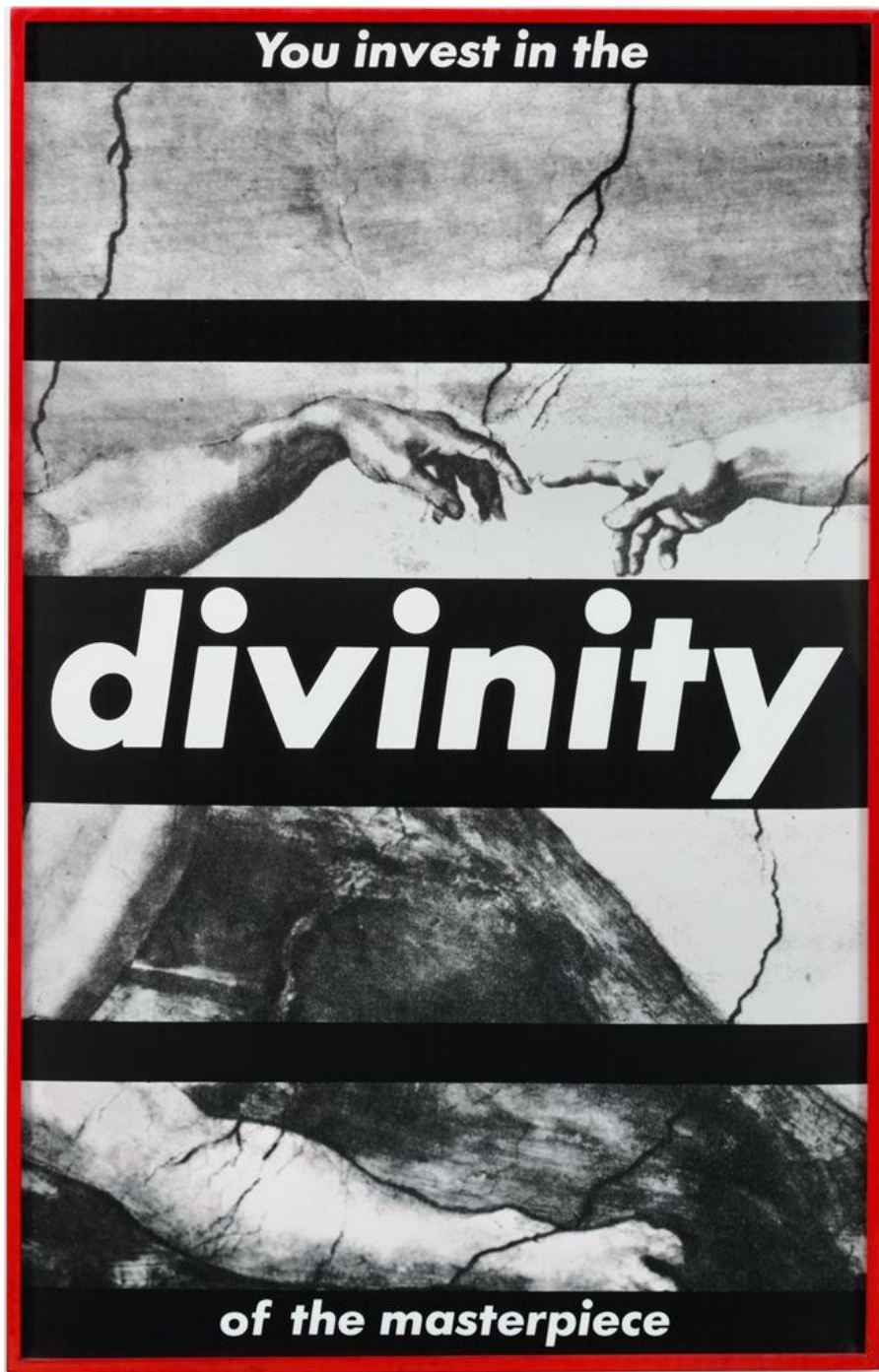


Figure 3.1. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (You Invest in the Divinity of the Masterpiece)* (1982).



Figure 3.2. Sharon Hayes, still from the video project *After Before* (2005).



Figure 3.3. Sharon Hayes, installation view of *10 Minutes of Collective Activity* (2003).



Figure 3.4. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken at Union Square, New York City on November 1, 2005, 3-4pm.



Figure 3.5. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, Vienna* (2006).



Figure 3.6. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, Warsaw (2007).



Figure 3.7. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, London (2008).



Figure 3.8. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken at Union Square, New York City on November 1, 2005, 3-4pm.

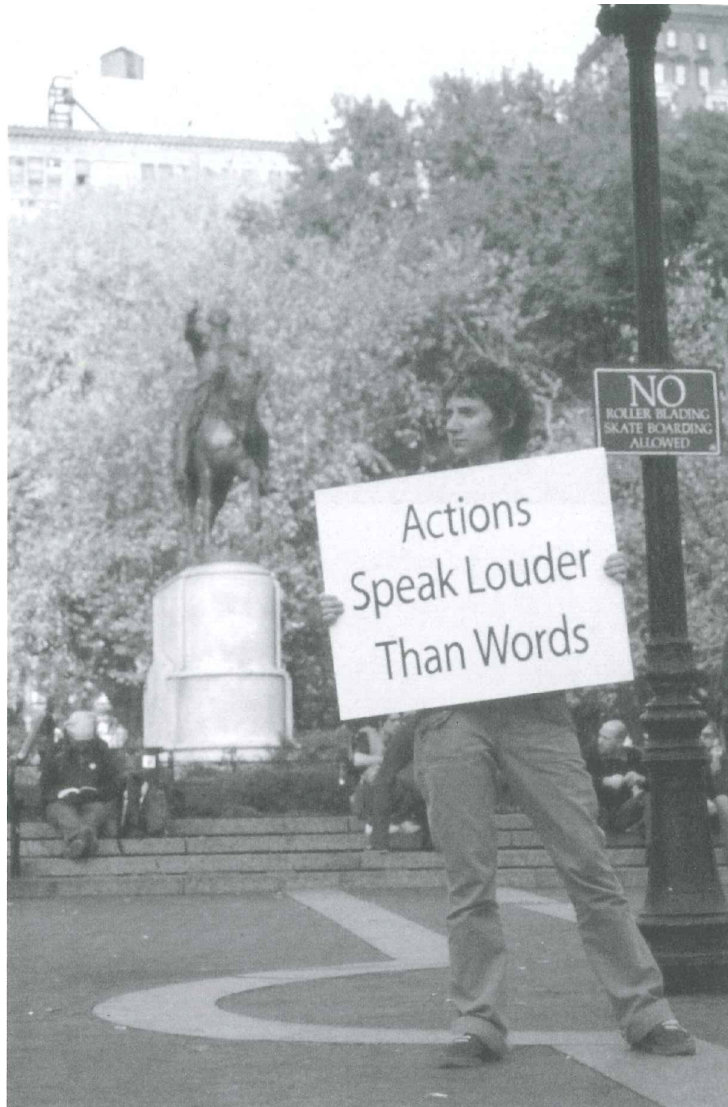


Figure 3.9. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken at Union Square, New York City on November 1, 2005, 3-4pm.



Figure 3.10. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph shot near Wall Street, New York City on November 2, 2005, 9-10am.



Figure 3.11. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph shot near Wall Street, New York City on November 2, 2005, 9-10am.



Figure 3.12. Photograph of the Front Façade of the New York Stock Exchange Building on Broad Street between Exchange Place and Wall Street, New York City.



Figure 3.13. Protestors in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral on December 10, 1989.

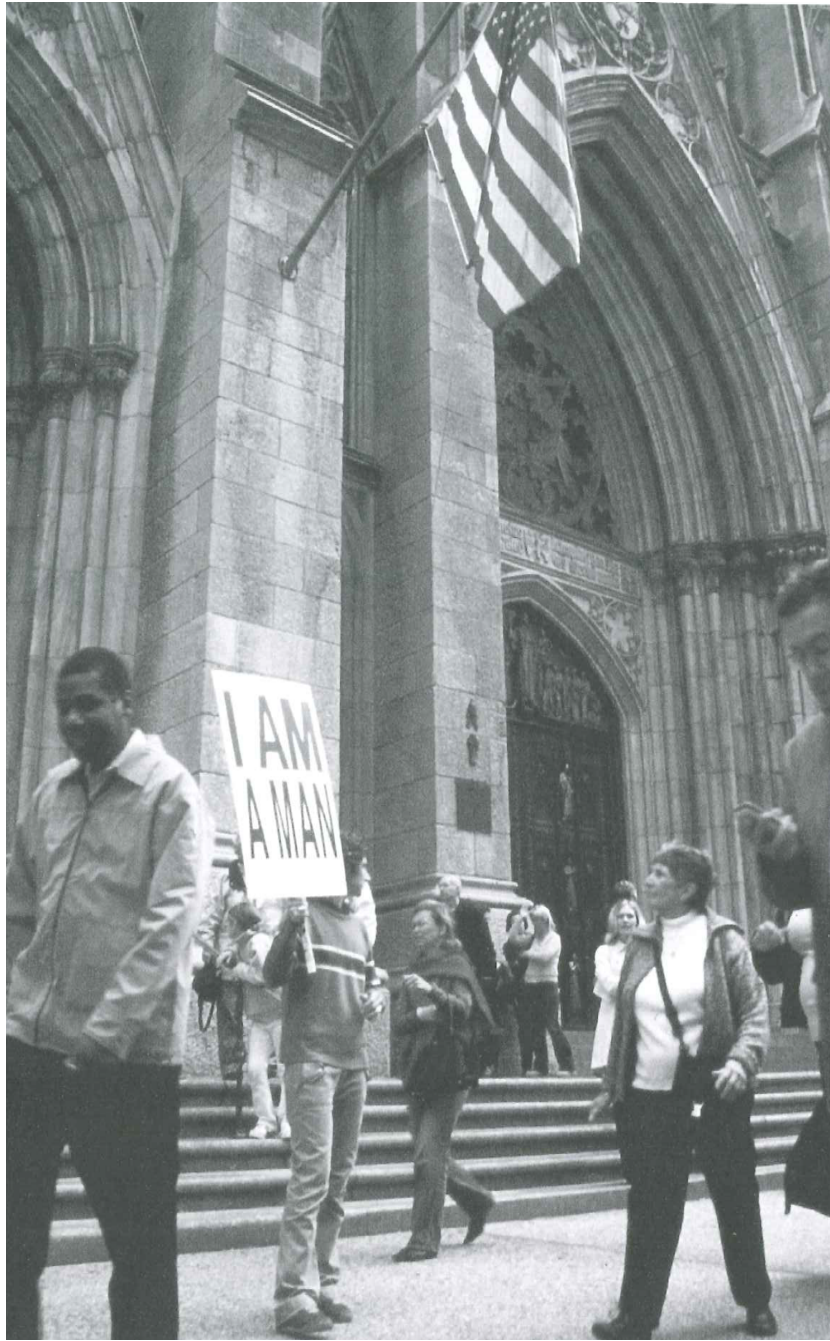


Figure 3.14. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, 5th Ave. New York City on November 6, 2005, 11-12pm.



Figure 3.15. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph of the artist at Madison Square Garden on November 3, 2005, 12-1pm.



Figure 3.16. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken at Times Square, New York City on November 4, 2005, 8-9am.



Figure 3.17. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken at 125th Street and 7th Avenue, New York City on November 7, 2015, 11-12pm.



Figure 3.18. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken at 125th Street and 7th Avenue, New York City on November 7, 2015, 11-12pm.



Figure 3.19. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, 5th Ave. New York City on November 6, 2005, 11-12pm.



Figure 3.20. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), an installation view of the photographs from the project as they are projected onto multiple walls of the Art in General gallery space.



Figure 3.21. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken in Central Park, New York City on November 5, 2005, 3-4pm.



Figure 3.22. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, 5th Ave. New York City on November 6, 2005, 11-12pm.



Figure 3.23. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, 5th Ave. New York City on November 6, 2005, 11-12pm.



Figure 3.24. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future, New York* (2005), photograph taken in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, 5th Ave. New York City on November 6, 2005, 11-12pm.

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