

Spring 2018

Something More Real than Art: Homelessness and Alternative Tactics of Public Address, New York, 1989

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Recommended Citation

Wolf, Raphael, "Something More Real than Art: Homelessness and Alternative Tactics of Public Address, New York, 1989" (2018). *Senior Projects Spring 2018*. 365.
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Something More Real than Art:
Homelessness and Alternative Tactics of Public Address, New York, 1989

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2018

Acknowledgements

Deepest thanks to my parents, Tom and Cheryl; to my big brother Jonah; to Sancia; to Olga, my adviser; to Betsey Cawley and the wonderful Stevenson librarians; to Jan and Raymond; to all my art history instructors (Teju Cole, Laurie Dahlberg, Susan Aberth, with special thanks to those on my board: Susan Merriam, Alex Kitnick, and Julia Rosenbaum); and finally to my friends, who inspire me daily.

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Introduction: Developments

From February to July 1989 the Dia Art Foundation had printed on the door of its Soho gallery “come on in, we’re home.” More than a kitschy advertisement for passersby, the sign was an indication to what was inside. Rather than sculptures and paintings in a white cube, there were rugs and dining tables, couches in front of televisions, a row of beds lining a corridor. There was even a functioning kitchen. Any of these areas could be inhabited or used throughout the day. This unusual arrangement of objects was part of an exhibition organized by Martha Rosler called *If You Lived Here...*, which consisted of three distinct installations, three open “town meetings,” and a book of essays. The ambitious project was not a typical art exhibition. Yvonne Rainer, writing in the preface of the exhibition book, warns potential guests, “you will not find art that edifies and makes your spirit soar” nor “art that enhances and validates your superior taste.”¹ The works were instead rigorously pedagogical, overtly political, and insistently interactive in ways traditional gallery exhibitions are not.

Homelessness in New York was the subject of the project. Rosler exhibited paintings by established artists alongside works by homeless people. Text was abundant, with quotations lining the walls and books and essays available in filing cabinets. A quotation by Peter Marcuse, an urban planner and historian of housing, was transcribed prominently on one wall: “Homelessness exists not because the housing system is not working, but because this is the way it works.” Charts and fliers covered the walls with statistics on housing, including a graph which plotted a spiraling number of households with incomes under \$10,000 against a vanishing line of apartment units that rent for less than \$250 a month. The space at 77 Wooster was also the location of three meetings called “town hall meetings” or “open forums,” where community

¹ Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1991), 9.

members met with activists, professors, and artists to discuss gentrification, housing, and homelessness.

At the same time as this multifaceted project was taking place at Dia, a group of artists living in a squat on Manhattan's Lower East Side called Bullet Space were beginning their own project that addressed the issue of housing and homelessness in New York. Called *Your House is Mine*, Bullet Space's undertaking was a tripartite: a series of street posters; an artist book; and a tabloid newspaper. The chief organizers of this effort were Andrew Castrucci, a painter and printmaker who was one of the founders of Bullet Space, and Nadia Coën, a printmaker and designer. Similarly to Rosler in *If You Lived Here*, these two artists functioned more as curator-organizers than as primary producers. They commissioned over thirty poster designs from a wide range of people—popular contemporary artists, comic book artists, squatters, and graffiti painters. They distributed 10,000 newspapers filled with artists' prints, essays, charts, and graphs, a collection similar to those disparate objects found in *If You Lived Here*. The group also produced a metal-bound book version of the project, of only 150 editions, with color prints and silkscreened posters. Bullet Space began in 1985 as a squat in an abandoned storefront on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and through the 80s and 90s functioned as a gallery space and print shop without formal sanction of the city. Called *Your House is Mine*, the newspaper and book were the culmination of a four-year project that began in 1988, during which the group's members organized meetings, commissioned texts, and printed and distributed nearly ten-thousand posters. The project had over seventy contributors, many of whom also took part in Rosler's exhibition. Castrucci identifies homelessness as the chief issue confronting community cohesion. With *Your House is Mine*, the artists of Bullet Space hoped to restore this sense of community not only by raising consciousness of social issues in the neighborhood, but also by

actively enlisting Lower East Side residents to help with the production and distribution of materials such as posters and pamphlets.

Homelessness in New York

By the late '80s, the crisis of homelessness in New York was common knowledge. In 1990 there were 70,000–80,000 homeless in New York and 250,000 who were at risk of losing their homes.² The unconscionable number of people living on the street or in shelters can be explained by a number of social and economic factors. The Reagan Administration, whose second term ended in 1989, brought about drastic cuts in social spending, most dramatically to low-income housing subsidies. His first year in office, Reagan cut the budget for public housing and Section 8 rent subsidies in half. That same year, he proposed completely eliminating federal housing assistance to the poor, a move which Congress thwarted.³ A large portion of rental housing was furthermore lost to condominium conversion, often supported by tax breaks. These cuts in spending combined with an increasing rate of inflation (with a stagnating minimum wage) and a cutback in jobs. And finally, deindustrialization threw tens of thousands out of work. “Walk through any city these days and you are likely to see people living in the streets,” begins Rosler’s essay in the *If You Lived Here* book, pointing to the pervasiveness of the homeless condition.

Art and Homelessness: Precursors

Art made during this period in response to the AIDS crisis is well documented today, as evidenced by a number of recent exhibitions devoted to this subject, at the Museum of the City

² Statistics of the “Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing” (1990), cited in *If You Lived Here*, 207.

³ Peter Dreier, “Reagan’s Real Legacy,” *The Nation*, February 4, 2011, accessed December 12, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/reagans-real-legacy/>.

of New York, The New York Public Library, and New York University's 80WSE Gallery. Though, as Gregory Sholette writes, "[w]ith the exception of AIDS activism, the signal feature of New York urban politics in the 1980s centered on opposition to new forms of privatized urban renewal being undertaken by municipal government in league with finance, real estate, and insurance capital,"⁴ artistic responses to the question of housing seem less well documented.

Homelessness was a popular subject for artists in this period. A 1989 *New York Times* article by Richard Woodward surveys three concurrent projects that "address the way we see and understand the homeless."⁵ At the Marcuse Pfeifer Gallery the photographer Mark Berghash showed a series of photographs titled "Portraits of the Rooted and Uprooted," portraits of either middle-class or homeless people, cropped so close to the head as to withhold any indication of their economic status. At the same time, an exhibition called "Homeless in America" at the New York Public Library displayed documentary-style photographs of homeless individuals across the country. Photography, it seems, was one of the chief methods of understanding the homeless.

Popular artists engaged with homelessness in other ways. Andres Serrano produced large, heroic portraits of homeless individuals he found on the subway (*Nomads*). David Hammons, in his sculpture *Roman Homeless*, draped stained embroidered cloth over a piece of metal mesh. And at the entrance of the 1989 Whitney biennial, Dennis Adams placed a large barricade, printed on it a photograph of a homeless man and his possessions. This move was an attempt to bring the street inside the museum, perhaps to contradict the museum's denial of social realities. But in this case, as with the other two, the disjunct between the homeless subject and the art-savvy viewer is rarely, if ever, bridged; the objects remain in the space of the elite. Woodward's review, in fact, questions whether these images of people in trouble should be seen at all,

⁴ Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 47.

⁵ Richard B. Woodward, "Serving Up the Poor As Exotic Fare For Voyeurs?," *New York Times* (New York, NY), June 18, 1989, Art

pointing to their potential to be exploitative or condescending (the article's title: "Serving Up the Poor As Exotic Fare For Voyeurs?").

Another significant instance of artists coming together to confront the problem of homelessness was a 1984 collaborative project called *Homeless at Home*, organized by the Storefront for Art and Architecture. The Storefront was founded by Kyong Park in 1982 as "an experimental forum and exhibition space for activating and engaging emerging voices and promoting public discourse," particularly around issues concerning the built environment.⁶ *Homeless at Home* was one of the space's first projects. It was initiated by Park and two other architects, Mojdeh Baratloo and Clifton Balch, and continued for three years. The first two installments of the project followed a standard exhibition model, displaying in the gallery photographs of homeless people and shelters. Later efforts included a conference and an open (and uncompetitive) design contest for stencils that were subsequently applied throughout the neighborhood. With its variety of contributors, street element, and inclusion of multiple mediums, *Homeless at Home* is a clear forerunner to *Your House is Mine*.

The Avant-Garde's Lost Public

During the 1980s, the art world was also facing a crisis of viewership. In its January 1980 edition, *Artforum* magazine inaugurated the decade with a questionnaire to sixteen artists, asking why "so many artists are dissatisfied with the exclusive posture of the traditional avant-garde and seem to be seeking ways to extend the art audience without compromising their work." Alan Sonfist replied, "the exclusiveness of the avant-garde arose from a failure of the art to deal with issues relevant, not just to artists, but to the society as a whole," and Peter Campus, looking to

⁶ "Homeless at Home: A Public Project, Images and Words about Homelessness," Storefront for Art and Architecture Webpage, accessed December 12, 2017 <http://storefrontnews.org/programming/homeless-at-home-a-public-project-images-and-words-about-homelessness/>.

the future, responded “I hope that artists are working away from the elite view and that ‘the public’ is becoming more aware of contemporary art; that artists and art will serve some real function directed toward society.” Campus candidly states what every artist and exhibition-maker fears: “that ‘the public’ looks quickly if at all at contemporary art.”⁷ Both Sonfist and Campus point to a failure in the *content* of avant-garde art, suggesting that it is out of touch with the rest of the world—unable to reckon with “issues relevant” or have a “real function directed towards society.” But their statements also indicate a dissatisfaction with the traditional venues of display, which they see as exclusive.

Seven years later at a symposium organized by Dia, artists and critics were voicing similar concerns. The first two discussions focused on contemporary art and the public sphere. In their panel titled “The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Public Function of Art,” Thomas Crow, Martha Rosler, and Craig Owens discussed the evolution of the public as either a historical entity or an imaginary construct. In the following conversation Douglas Crimp, Barbara Kruger, and Krzysztof Wodiczko debated the potential of “cultural work that intervenes in this [public] sphere and recodes its media.”⁸ That so many artists and critics chose to address art’s role in the public sphere speaks to the pervasiveness of this crisis of viewership that artists were facing in this period.

The roots of this crisis go at least as far back as the historical avant-garde, which is where Paul O’Neill begins his recent book on the genealogy of the contemporary artist-curator. The institution of art was perceived as hermetic, he writes, and artists “began to recognize the social inconsequentiality of autonomous art.” With “subversion of exhibition designs,” artists sought to “critique the passive experience of art and its exhibition space” and reinvigorate the social

⁷ Nancy Foote, "Situation Esthetics: Impermanent Art and the Seventies Audience," *Artforum*, January 1980, 33.

⁸ Hal Foster, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* (San Francisco: Bay Press, 1987), 4.

function of art, with the goal of “reconfiguring the museum as an extension of the social world outside.”⁹ In other words, unsatisfied with the limited, bourgeois publics of the museum, artists and exhibition-makers attempted to bring the public sphere inside.

Despite radical changes in the paradigms of art display—from the typical white cube exhibition format, with the sovereign, autonomous artwork at the center, to experimental installations and happenings—these artists speaking in the 1987 panel at Dia are still not satisfied with the public function of art. Crow in the first panel, echoing Sonfist and Campus, laments the “loss of a public dimension and commitment for art.”¹⁰ Rosler follows Crow with an even more trenchant critique, pointing out the “art world’s failure to notice that it had lost its audience to the far more interesting perceptual effects of everyday life” and criticizing the conflation of art and the mass culture apparatus.¹¹ Like the artists in the 1980 *Artforum* survey, Rosler and Crow speak to the critical need for artists to engage with publics and new ways, pointing specifically to the limitations and isolation of display venues.

Thesis Overview

With *If You Lived Here*, Rosler attempted to realize what she claimed could be the only truly public form of art—an agitational work which emerges from a specific community and is staged within it. The community she chose was New York’s homeless, which she hoped to address and incorporate. *Your House is Mine* offered a distinct but overlapping model for socially-active art production that is centered around the question homelessness. Both projects

⁹ Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (n.p.: MIT Press, 2016), 10.

¹⁰ Foster, *Discussions in Contemporary*, 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

sought not only to raise awareness of a social issue, but also to facilitate an environment of discussion, production, and decision-making.

Both projects were characterized by a fluid multivalence, mediating between multiple poles: public and private, ‘high art’ and ‘low art’, reliance on the institution and institutional critique, homeless and housed, situated and mobile. Though sharing many obvious similarities (including a number of the same contributors), these two projects were in other ways inversions on one another. Whereas one sought to foster a discursive public sphere within the space of an otherwise elite institution, the other brought its discourse onto the street through the circulation of texts.

The first chapter of this essay is devoted to *If You Lived Here*. This includes a brief history of the institution that hosted and funded the exhibition, the Dia Foundation for the Arts. This history makes clear how normally invisible workings within the museum’s administration can have a direct impact on its program and the way it engages different publics. Subsequently, a survey of Martha Rosler’s extensive body of writing leading up to her exhibition at Dia reveals an ongoing grappling with questions of art’s accessibility, *If You Lived Here* being an attempt to actualize her theories about expanding beyond her usual art-going public. A detailed description and analysis of the actual exhibition shows that *If You Lived Here* in many ways foreshadowed the popularization of research-based art projects and other forms that emphasize pedagogy and participation; unlike the relational structures that thrived in the ‘90s and 2000s, however, social interaction was not the ultimate objective of this exhibition. Rather, *If You Lived Here* was firmly grounded in different kinds of representational media, reflecting Rosler’s investment in the way images can shape public perception and further marginalize groups. Image adjustment is thus one of the key goals of the project. The exhibition was more than the sum of the art works included;

in this sense, it was an exercise in curating as resistance. With certain organizational and curatorial decisions, Rosler sought to establish an “oppositional public sphere” (Alexander Kluge’s term), in which lines of communication and the articulation of experience create a “factory of politics.”¹²

The following chapter focuses on *Your House is Mine*. Before retelling the story of the founding of Bullet Space, it is important to lay out the economic and political conditions that made squatting possible in New York, as well as the aesthetic and political principles associated with the movement. The Lower East Side, the neighborhood in which *Your House is Mine* was produced and distributed, already had a rich network of underground artist collectives like Colab, ABC No Rio, and the Rivington School. This chapter expands on these precursors to the Bullet Space project, going into most depth about the seminal 1980 *Real Estate Show*. Then, a close look at the actual materials of the project—the silkscreened posters, the artist book, and the tabloid newspaper—sheds light on the diverse visual language the artists created to address a specific political issue. Finally, looking at the methods of distribution and circulation Castrucci and

As a comprehensive genealogy and critique of participatory post-studio art, Claire Bishop’s book *Artificial Hells* is crucial for contextualizing *If You Lived Here* in the development of these practices and for differentiating its many subcategories (“socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, interventionist art, participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art and [...] social practice”).¹³ As already mentioned, the collection of Martha Rosler’s essays *Decoys and Disruptions* is key in grasping

¹² Alexander Kluge, "The Public Sphere," in *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism*, by Martha Rosler (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1991), 68.

¹³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 1.

the development of many of her ideas. Most of the details about *If You Lived Here* was gleaned from sorting through archival material that the folks at Dia were kind enough to share: exhibition checklists, photographs, and press releases. Since the primary argument of this essay deals with how these two projects negotiated between the private and public spheres, it draws implicitly on the following foundational texts: Hannah Arendt's "The Public and the Private Realm," Jürgen Habermas' "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere," and Nancy Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere." Michael Warner's "Publics and Counterpublics," which draws on Fraser's essay, is particularly instrumental in analyzing Bullet Space's use of text. For understanding the community of alternative art spaces and groups in New York before Bullet Space, Julie Ault's *Alternative Art New York* is helpful, though its story ends in 1985, the very beginning of the period analyzed in this thesis. Without Amy Starecheski's ethnographic history of the New York squatter movement, it would have been impossible to obtain such a thorough image of squatter life, or such a clear understanding of the real estate logic that produces abandoned buildings. Finally, much of the specific history of Bullet Space and *Your House is Mine* was collected by two interviews between the author and Andrew Castrucci and Nadia Coën.

Chapter One: Homelessness, Dia, and an Oppositional Public Sphere

In 1987 the Dia Art Foundation invited Martha Rosler to organize a project at their space in Soho. For those only peripherally aware of Dia at the time, this would have been seen as an uncharacteristic move. Dia, since its founding in 1974 by the wealthy de Menil family, was known for patronizing established modernist painters and sculptors: Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, John Chamberlain, and some other white men. Rosler was, in contrast, a feminist conceptual and video artist whose works were critical of art institutions. Dia's inclusion of Rosler was part of the institution's desperate attempt to change its role and image in the art world—to make itself relevant in an art environment increasingly disillusioned with the sovereign art object and the genius individual artist.

The project Rosler proposed, *If You Lived Here...* satisfied Dia's need to question its relationship to the public and involve itself in critical social issues. It also afforded Rosler the opportunity to produce a large-scale exhibition that synthesized a number of concerns that had been in play in both her writings and her art works: the production of space within a city (a Lefebvrian notion); the increasing isolation of the artist in relation to society; how to represent society's margins; the differentiation of public and private space; activism as art; 'high' versus 'low' culture; the conflation of mass culture and art; and the elitism of art institutions/museums.

If You Lived Here..., which ran for six months in the winter of 1988, was a three-part exhibition that addressed housing and homelessness in New York City. Thanks in large part to decisions at the federal level during the Reagan administration, such as the reduction of Section 8 rent subsidies by half, homelessness peaked in the late 1980s and was a legitimate social and

political crisis.¹⁴ Homeless people are daily marginalized and ignored to an extreme degree; incorporating them into a space like Dia, which prides itself on its “public engagement,”¹⁵ exposes how exclusive these supposedly art spaces really are. Many homeless people live simultaneously public and private existences, performing their intimate lives in the most public, that is visible, spaces. Rosler attempted to blur the distinction between public and private, bringing things associated with the private realm into the ‘public’ space of the gallery and vice-versa.

The form of the installation was unlike any previous Dia exhibition, as Rosler sought to transform the gallery space and destabilize the traditional white cube exhibition model to which previously Dia abided. She cluttered the space with charts and graphs about homelessness, showing unrecognized artists alongside more established ones, and creating spaces for participation like a reading room. In addition to the installation, Rosler organized four events called either “open forums” or “town hall meetings” in which the public (Soho neighbors, art people, and homeless people) was invited to a conversation with artists, activists, and scholars about homelessness and housing politics.

With its emphasis on pedagogy, rejection of a hierarchy of mediums, and attempt to have a direct social impact, *If You Lived Here...* has many similarities with contemporary participation art or “social practice.” But whereas the ultimate goal of this sort of work is to use interaction to repair the social bond that has been fragmented by consumer society, as Claire Bishop argues in *Artificial Hells*, Rosler’s work is more firmly entrenched in the visual. Rather than embracing dematerialized practices like happenings, Rosler used video, installations, and other representational forms. At the core of *If You Lived Here...* is not interaction itself, but questions

¹⁴ “The Koch Years and Worsening Homelessness,” Coalition for the Homeless, last modified December 7, 2016, <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/the-catastrophe-of-homelessness/why-are-so-many-people-homeless/>.

¹⁵ “About Dia,” Dia Foundation for the Arts, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://www.diaart.org/about/about-dia>.

of representation, visibility, and mediation—specifically with regards to images of homeless people. Through the exhibition Rosler sought to contest stereotypical depictions of homeless people and re-assert their presence in public life. Her goal was not “discreet charity,” but to expose and confront the systemic causes of homelessness and reshape the image of homeless people.¹⁶

The Institution

The Dia Art Foundation is today associated most strongly with monumental minimalist sculptures of the 1960s, its massive factory-museum in Beacon, upstate New York, often thought to be its most emblematic (or only) space. But between its founding and the opening of the Beacon museum in 2003, Dia has had a much more varied history than is reflected at Beacon. Tracking this behind-the-scenes history—the changes in chairmen and directors and trustees—reveals lots about the institution’s decisions. In 1985, long before the opening of their space in Beacon, Dia faced a financial crisis that led its board to reevaluate the institution’s role in New York’s art environment.¹⁷ Over the following ten years, Dia shifted from an institution focused on cultivating already established artists to one entrenched in the social aspect of contemporary art.¹⁸ During this period, Dia developed a discussion series that interrogated various critical issues in art and culture, like the representation of black people in popular culture, vision and visibility, and masculinity. This shift was an attempt to make the foundation more relevant in a

¹⁶ Rosler, “Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint,” chapter in *If You Lived Here*, 22.

¹⁷ Michael Kimmelman, “The Dia Generation,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 6, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/06/magazine/the-dia-generation.html>.

¹⁸ Gary Garrels, “Oral history interview with Gary Garrels,” by Linda Yablonsky, Archives of American Art, last modified September 12, 2016, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-gary-garrels-17418>.

changing art environment that increasingly valued egalitarianism and social engagement over solitary geniuses.

In 1985, Dia underwent a major personnel shift. After years of unrestrained collecting (which made its impressive collection today possible), Dia was on the verge of financial ruin. The board of trustees ousted its founding chairman, Heiner Friedrich, and hired as director the thirty-year-old lawyer Charles Wright, the son of influential art collectors in Seattle, whose only pertinent experience was as an intern at the Metropolitan Museum.¹⁹ Wright immediately brought on Gary Garrels as director of programs. Garrels had a slightly more extensive pedigree, having begun his career at the Hayden Gallery at MIT, and continued to work at a commercial gallery in Soho, and then at the auction house Christie's.²⁰

Despite having experience at traditional art institutions, the two developed a program that emphasized discourse and participation. In an interview at the time, Wright reflected on this paradigm shift: “[P]eople of my generation are looking for ways that the artist can come back down and plug directly into the social context [. . .] to make art more a part of a whole way of life and less of a removed, ivory-tower activity.”²¹ Wright here upholds the notion that art is separate from “everyday life,” from the social. He seems to have caught onto the concerns that many artists were expressing at the time, as discussed in the introduction. Wright, like these artists, says his hope is to demystify art and to integrate it into everyday life. His first step in this direction—his first project as director—was a series of critical symposia called *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, which he invited art historian and critic Hal Foster (who was also his childhood friend) to program. Foster at the time served as the Director of Critical and Curatorial

¹⁹ Calvin Tomkins, "The Mission," *The New Yorker*, May 13, 2003, 47, accessed May 19, 2003, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/05/19/the-mission>.

²⁰ Garrels, "Oral history," interview, Archives of American Art.

²¹ Kimmelman, "The Dia Generation."

Studies at the Whitney Museum. By early 1987, Foster and Wright had developed an impressive group of artists and theorists to participate in the first symposium. This first event focused broadly on questions of art's publics and the politics of representation. This sort of self-reflexive questioning of art's public function was popular at the time,²² but that Wright and Garells were so quick to address these questions reflects their own struggles with identifying and broadening Dia's audience. Dia's new guard, facing a financial crisis that required it to reevaluate its relationship to the public, chose as its first project a series that interrogates more broadly art's relationship to the public.

After the first *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* concluded, Dia published transcriptions of the talks in a book; in Wright's preface to the series it is clear that he hoped the project would be a crucial turning point for the institution: "the discussions were the first efforts of the Dia Foundation to establish an ongoing commitment to intellectual discourse for and with a predominantly visual art-oriented audience." Wright also stresses diversity as a key tenet of the series: "Participants were both engaged by the opportunity to converse on certain issues and at times frustrated by the diversity of critical approaches which were brought to bear on the topics. The richness of this diversity, in fact, and the lack of guiding doctrines made the series interactive and proactive, and contributed to its success."²³ Clearly Wright sought to fundamentally shift Dia's ethos and make it more relevant to contemporary matters in the arts. A commitment to both intellectual discourse and diversity stands in contrast to the old Dia's endeavors, which were focused on the inherently abstruse collecting and displaying of prominent artists. This move was largely successful, as a *New York Times Magazine* article suggests when it reflects on this period and concludes, "Dia established itself as a serious and chic gallery,

²² Nancy Foote, "Situation Esthetics: Impermanent Art and the Seventies Audience," *Artforum*, January 1980, 82.

²³ Wright in Foster *Discussions in Contemporary*, xvii.

although attendance was dismal.”²⁴ However noble or magnanimous this move might seem, it is important to keep in mind that it was made during a period of financial crisis. Wright and Garrels identified a popular trend in the arts and incorporated it into the museum’s program: addressing social issues was Dia’s way to rebrand itself as an institution.

Rosler and the Audience

The Discussions in Contemporary Culture series continued for several years, with the second installment, “Vision and Visuality,” followed by “The Works of Andy Warhol,” and then “Remaking History.” By this time, Wright and Garrels had assembled a sort of advisory board of five gallerists and curators: Kasper König, Kathy Halbreich, Harald Szeemann, Richard Bellamy, and the dancer/filmmaker Yvonne Rainer. When the group was discussing the fifth series, in 1987, Rainer (the only practicing artist of the group) pointed out a contradiction in Dia’s programming: Dia had the wonderfully engaged lecture series, but none of the issues addressed in the talks were reflected in their exhibitions.²⁵ At the time, Dia had three spaces in Lower Manhattan. They had just opened their first full museum in the Chelsea neighborhood, a four-story converted warehouse at 548 West 22nd Street, called the Dia Center for the Arts. Its inaugural show continued the institution’s initial mandate, showing the work of three prominent white men: Imi Knoebel, Blinky Palermo, and Joseph Beuys. The Art Foundation also had two spaces in Soho proper: offices at 155 Mercer Street, and an exhibition space at 77 Wooster Street, just a few blocks away. Rainer proposed that instead of another lecture series disengaged from the exhibitions, the foundation should facilitate an exhibition more in line with the radical

²⁴ Kimmelman, "The Dia Generation."

²⁵ “Artist on Artist Lecture - Andrea Bowers on Martha Rosler,” interview, Dia Art Foundation, last modified October 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVwW6g2fUyI&t=1366s>.

symposia. She proposed two artists she deemed ‘socially engaged’: Group Material and Martha Rosler.²⁶

Rosler was known mostly as a video and conceptual artist, and her early works reveal a consistent fascination with domestic life.. Her very first series, *Bringing the War Home*, from 1967-72, employed mass media: collages of photographs from the popular magazines *Life* and *House Beautiful*, splicing dramatic snapshots from the Vietnam war and affluent homes. Her best known piece is a video from 1975, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, in which she performs the alphabet as a despairing housewife, each letter corresponding to a kitchen tool. In *A Simple Case For Torture, or How To Sleep at Night* (1983), Rosler records a voiceover on top of editorial pages of Newsweek magazine and argues that torture is inherently totalitarian.

Though she employed a wide variety of media, consistent in her oeuvre is a desire to branch out of typical methods of distributing and displaying art. Rosler was also a prolific writer, and in her early writings it is easy to discern an emerging concern with identifying and defining the audience of her work. This passage from her first published essay, “For an Art against the Mythology of Everyday Life” (1979), is an explicit expression of her hopes regarding the distribution of her art:

There is another critical issue to consider: the choosing or seeking of an audience. I feel that the art world does not suffice, and I try to make my work accessible to as many people outside the art audience as I can effectively reach. Cultural products can never bring about substantive changes in society, yet they are indispensable to any movement that is working to bring about such changes. The clarification of vision is a first step toward reasonably and humanely changing the world.

What stands out here is Rosler’s interest in accessibility (ensuring a large reach) and catalyzing social change (changing the world).

²⁶ Brian Wallis, ed., *Democracy: A Project by Group Material* (Seattle: New Press., 1998), xvii.

The complex network of the production, distribution, display, and sale of art commodities is addressed in her next essay from 1979, “Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers: Thoughts on Audience,” which combines remarkable statistical analysis with a Marx-inflected critique of the class and social relations surrounding the art industry. In addition to breaking down the complex workings of the art market (collectors, dealer, corporations, etc.), Rosler addresses the concerns of artists who want to reach a different audience from “the usual high-culture-consuming public.”²⁷ She historicizes the current moment, pointing out that the lack of concern with audience can be traced back to the Romantic movement in early-nineteenth-century Europe, with the decline of secure patronage from aristocracy and the State; concerns with marketing were considered vulgar. She also interrogates the “protocols of taste” and the inherent elitism of this supposedly natural construction. As with “For an Art against the Mythology of Everyday Life,” Rosler ends her analysis with the question of constructing an audience—how to repudiate the gospel of genius, isolation, and formalism—how to break the passivity of artists’ relation to their audience. On the prospects of a truly oppositional art practice, Rosler concludes,

We must inventively expand our control over production and showing, and we must simultaneously widen our opportunities to work with and for people outside the audiences for high art, not as annunciatory angels bearing the way of thought of the *haute monde*, but to rupture the false boundaries between ways of thinking about art and ways of actively changing the world.²⁸

We can see a development in her thinking by comparing this statement to that quoted above, from the vague desire to expand audience to seizing control of production and display, and the ambitious hope to change ways of thinking about art. What remains is her ambition to *actively change the world*.

²⁷ Martha Rosler, “Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers: Thoughts on Audience,” in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, New York, 2004), 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

Years after the publication of this essay, Rosler was invited to participate in Dia's first Discussions in Contemporary Culture in 1987, and it is here that we see her most developed articulation of her ideal method of display. In a panel titled "The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Public Function of Art," she delivers a scathing critique of the state of art production and distribution. She derides artists for their "isolation and impotence," artists who have become predictable as they continue to operate within a "productive system whose social meanings and standings are evaporating and whose venues are being transformed into specialized sites of its supposed adversary, mass culture."²⁹ She concludes, at the end of her speech, that "it may be only ... agitational works which emerge from a specific community and are staged within it that we can speak about the building of a public in art."³⁰ After years of reckoning with the question of audience, it seems here Rosler reaches a solution: an art directed neither to the abstract audience-at-large nor to a bourgeois marketable audience, but to a specified group of people for whom the art was produced.

The Exhibition

The fifth and sixth installments of Discussions and Contemporary Culture were together called "Town Meeting," pointing to Dia's continued attempt to appeal to the community through discourse. Group Material (1979-1996), the artist collaborative that Charles Wright invited to participate, along with Rosler, was first to exhibit. Their show was called *Democracy*, and it interrogated issues relating to the democratic process in the U.S. including "AIDS and democracy," "politics and election," "education and democracy," and "cultural participation."³¹

²⁹ Martha Rosler, "The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Public Function of Art," in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, by Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1998), 34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹ Wallis, *Democracy: A Project*, 4.

Like Rosler, the members of Group Material were often as concerned with networks of communication and distribution as the content of what they produced, which was always somehow socially-oriented. They were early champions of street art, employing billboards and brochures. Their exhibitions, like their 1989 *AIDS Timeline* at the U.C. Berkeley Art Museum, attempted to contest both the traditional white cube exhibition model and typical value systems; they achieved this by filling the walls with images and text, and by incorporating mass media objects alongside works of fine art.³² With *Democracy*, they similarly attempted to transform the space by painting the walls with chalkboard paint and inserting desks that one would find in a high-school classroom (Fig. 1.1).

Rosler's *If You Lived Here...* opened just weeks after *Democracy* came down, and Rosler decided to follow the framework Group Material established. "Because my shows were to follow Group Material's project, *Democracy*," said Rosler, reflecting on the exhibition in a 1993 symposium in Amsterdam, "it seemed consistent to adopt their model of combining work of gallery artists with mass-culture artifacts and the work of unrecognized artists."³³ Indeed, the exhibition checklists for *If You Lived Here...* include a wide range of contributors: established artists like Mark Berghash, Dan Graham, and Allan Sekula displayed alongside homeless artists like Ramon Rivera, Anthony Grimes, and Victor Hazzard (Fig. 1.2). Rosler also invited many local shelters, schools, and activist groups to participate, including the Border Art Workshop (Taller de Arte Fronterizo), Downtown Community Video Center, students from PS 261, and members of the Third Street Men's shelter. Rosler took on an assistant for the project, a young

³² Claire Grace, "Group Material, "AIDS Timeline," 1989: The Artist As Curator #4," *Mousse*, October 2014, accessed May 2, 2018, <http://moussemagazine.it/taac4-a/>.

³³ Ine Gevers, *Place, Position, Presentation, Public* (La Haye: Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1994), 82.

artists named Dan Wiley who had studied urban planning and had many connections in the housing-activist network.³⁴

The exhibition was divided into three distinct installations, each having a specific focus. “Home Front,” which opened on February 11, 1989, focused principally on the causes of homelessness through the lens of housing politics: “housing policies, gentrification and displacement, and tenants’ rights, struggles, and organization.”³⁵ It also looked at ‘reactive’ matters—how people responded to the threat of deteriorating housing, focusing particularly on representations of contested neighborhoods. The title of this installation, “Home Front,” evoked military language. In her text in the exhibition reader, Rosler writes that the exhibition was “meant to establish an ambiance quite different from that of the usual art gallery.”³⁶ Rosler activated the gallery’s “waste space,” plastering graphs and charts above eye level. In one corner of the gallery, someone painted in large red letters “IF YOU CAN’T AFFORD TO LIVE HERE MO-O-VE!,” quoting New York’s then mayor Ed Koch, at whom much of the show’s vitriol was directed (Fig. 1.3). Alongside these incendiary political agitations were depictions of neighborhood life, like Willie Birch’s gouache *Every Saturday the Men Play Dominoes* (Fig. 1.4), which plays off of Impressionist paintings of bohemian life, but replaces bourgeoisie sitting outside of Paris cafes with men playing dominoes outside a bodega. One of the most striking features of this installation was a tenement kitchen that the Chinatown Historical Society recreated (Fig. 1.5). The insertion of this kitchen, the archetype of domestic space, into a high modernist gallery not only alters visitors’ expectations for what is found in a gallery.

³⁴ Gevers, *Place, Position*, 82.

³⁵ Martha Rosler, “Exhibition Checklist” (Dia Foundation for the Arts, New York, NY, June 1989), 3.

³⁶ Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1991), 35.

Each of the three installations lasted roughly one month, so in mid-March “Home Front” was replaced by “Homeless: The Street and Other Venues,” which addressed the visible and invisible homeless of streets and metro stations, “because people who are living doubled up or couch-surfing or whatever are also homeless.”³⁷ Crucial here was fostering an understanding of the causes and conditions of homelessness. (The Ed Koch quote from the previous installation was replaced here with one by the professor of urban planning Peter Marcuse: “Homelessness exists not because the system is not working, but because this is the way it works” [Fig. 1.6].) This portion of the exhibit also hoped to offer some direction forward. The centerpiece here was a large wooden hut that a group of activist designers and architects from Atlanta, who called themselves the Madhousers, constructed as a prototype for an easily reproducible shelter (Fig. 1.7). They built two others and gave them to homeless people in Brooklyn. A second group of activists took up lots of space in this show: Homeward Bound Community Services of New York, whom Rosler invited to set up offices and provide counselling for the duration of the show (Fig. 1.8).

Finally, “City: Visions and Revisions” aimed at developing, with the aid of architects and planning groups behind initiatives for the homeless, alternative urban planning strategies. Reproduced here were portions of the group exhibition in Harlem from a year prior, “Reweaving the Urban Fabric,” organized by Ghislaine Hermanutz, Richard Pluntz, and Marta Gutman, which offered examples of successful moderate-income housing.³⁸ This segment was the most international, showing attempts to overcome housing issues from around the world, like the inspiring resistance of a group of residents in London’s East End against the destruction of their housing projects. In this installation, the viewer also found an abundance of doors (Fig. 1.9). The

³⁷ “Artist on Artist,” interview, Dia Art Foundation.

³⁸ Gevers, *Place, Position*, 91.

prevalence of doors powerfully echoes the precariousness of a homeless person's situation, at the threshold of inside and outside, public and private. The average art-scene attendee of the exhibition does not hesitate to open a door. This is a privilege many homeless people do not enjoy. Not only do they lack a door to call their own, to demarcate their own space as separate from the outside, but also, as perpetually stigmatized individuals, they must hesitate before entering. The doors in "City," some closed, some placed against a wall leading nowhere, bring into questions this disparity.

Punctuating each installation were events which Dia billed as "town meetings" or "open forums."³⁹ These meetings were considered by Rosler to be as important as the exhibitions. They were: "Housing: Gentrification, Dislocation, and Fighting Back;" "Artists' Life/Work: Housing and Community for Artists;" "Homelessness: Conditions, Causes, Cures;" and "Planning: Power, Politics, People."⁴⁰ A range of moderators and participants were invited, including the theorist Marshall Berman, the local filmmaker Bienvenida Matias, and the professor of geography Neil Smith. Rosler described the meetings as consisting more of brief, open conversations than panel lectures. These conversations are transcribed and truncated into the book *If You Lived Here...* which was printed two years after the exhibition. The book functions not as a catalog but as a reader—not meant to represent the objects and conversations that were part of the exhibition, but were meant to expand on these ideas.

A significant clue to what Rosler was seeking to achieve with this exhibition is her inclusion of an interview with Alexander Kluge, the German filmmaker and philosopher who authored (with Oskar Negt) the book *Public Sphere and Experience*. Unlike the other materials

³⁹ Rosler, *If You Lived*, xvi.

⁴⁰ Martha Rosler, "Exhibition Press Release" (unpublished manuscript, Dia Foundation for the Arts, New York, NY, June 1989), 2.

Rosler included in the book, neither this text nor Kluge had any direct relation to *If You Lived Here*. That Rosler included it in the book indicates that it was significant to her thinking about the exhibition. In the interview, Kluge presents the notion of an “oppositional public sphere,” one that is “changing and expanding, increasing the possibilities for a public articulation of experience. The right to intimacy.” This realm is responsible for the production of politics, and it can be established only through “lines of communication.” The excerpt that Rosler included concludes with Kluge saying:

We must consider the degree to which it is essential that people live with one another in a society, and that community is not something alongside work for special occasions and future hopes, but rather that community is itself an element of social change.⁴¹

That this sentiment had a profound influence on Rosler’s thinking about the exhibition is clear. With *If You Lived Here*, Rosler attempted to form a kind of oppositional public sphere and actualize her ideas about forming a public through art that she articulated in her writing. To encourage visitors to spend time in the space, she made the gallery as comfortable and welcoming as possible, primarily by making it feel like a home or a living room, a key thread that ran through all three exhibitions. Rosler inserted into the gallery things typically associated with domestic life. In “Home Front,” there was the kitchen created by the Chinatown Historical Society, which was so thorough that it appeared fully functional, like it had always been part of the building (it included a refrigerator, a stove, formica flooring, and a fully-stocked pantry). There were also many couches with blankets, a reading room, benches, televisions, and tables (Fig. 1.10, 1.6, and 1.5).

These signs of private life making their way into the gallery are all attempts, as Rosler has later said, “to blur ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ to abolish the distinction between the gallery space

⁴¹ Alexander Kluge, “The Public Sphere,” in *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism*, by Martha Rosler (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1991), 68.

as a large, squareish room and as a world apart, a zone of aestheticism.”⁴² In her text in the exhibition reader, “Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint,” Rosler laments the commodification of the museum; the museum, she argues, has turned into something like a mall, “as public or private as any transitional space through which people must pass. The few seconds of regard budgeted to each static work.”⁴³ This stasis is what Rosler attempted to dispel with *If You Lived Here...* While the elements of private life may have meant to remind the viewer of her relative privilege, they were also there to make the inhabitants of the exhibition comfortable. Rosler began with an issue that called for social change, i.e. homelessness. Though some might argue that concrete changes in municipal policy are the only ways to enact change, Rosler here makes an argument for the establishment of an oppositional public sphere. Her goal was to create a community through the “articulation of experience,” particularly for those normally without a voice.

Though the incorporation of homeless people’s voices was necessary for the success of this project, the line between inclusion and exploitation is a dangerous and fine one, particularly in these kinds of participatory practices. Voluntary participation is also unpaid labor, and audiences’ bodies can become commodified as part of the art work just as easily as they can become co-producers of it.⁴⁴ This distinction becomes far more dubious when the participants are a group of people typically deprived of agency. Rosler’s inclusion of a row of six cots taken from a homeless shelter (Fig. 1.11) is ethically questionable; though the owners of the building did not allow for people to sleep there overnight, including sleeping homeless people in a gallery risks further sensationalizing and othering their situation, the opposite of what Rosler intended.

⁴² Rosler, *If You Lived*, 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19

⁴⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 277.

Homelessness and Visibility

Looking back at the arc of Rosler's work preceding *If You Lived Here...*, we see a longstanding struggle with coming to terms with documentary photography, and more broadly with issues of the visibility and representation of the poor. Rosler's decision to devote the project to looking at New York's homeless comes directly out of this struggle with visibility and representation, not merely out of a desire to include the traditionally excluded. In terms of their visibility, the homeless are unique subjects, their relationship to visibility at times paradoxical. Their lives are simultaneously at the extremes of public and private. On the one hand, they live their lives in public, that is, in state-owned space that is accessible to everyone: on the street, in the subway, in the park. On the other hand, they live lives of utmost privacy, hidden from popular sight.

Hannah Arendt's writing on the private and public realms in *The Human Condition* sheds light on the unique way the homeless fit into society. Arendt begins the fourth chapter, "The Public and the Private Realm," looking at Classical conceptions of the public and private realms. In the Classical world, the private realm grew out of the household and was a vulgar domain associated with the maintenance of life, driven by man's wants and needs. The public realm, on the other hand, was a privileged space where men were granted a second life, a common world of logic and persuasion.⁴⁵ To be free meant to reside in this public realm, the sphere of the social. "Public" has another sense for Arendt, one that corresponds more closely to our understanding: everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity.

⁴⁵ It is illuminating to look at the way the Greeks and Romans wrote about slaves who, in their lack of property, resemble the contemporary homeless: "Without owning a house a man could not participate in the affairs of the world because he had no location in it which was properly his own" (Arendt, "The Public," 30.)

It is here where she takes up concepts of visibility that Arendt can be particularly useful for discerning what is at stake in Rosler's work. For Arendt, visibility and reality are codependent: "For us, appearance ... constitutes reality."⁴⁶ It is only through mutual recognition that we can be sure of something's existence. Arendt even looks at the role of artistic practice in this process of recognition, in which people agree to acknowledge something as being real:

Even the greatest forces of intimate life ... lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless they are transformed, deprivatized, and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such transformations occurs in storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences. But we do not need the form of the artist to witness this transfiguration. Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves.⁴⁷

Without public appearance and recognition, forces, things, and even people are banished to a realm in which their very reality is in question.⁴⁸ This is one sense of the private realm, and a look at the word's etymology helps our understanding of it; 'private' came to English from the Latin *privatus*, withdrawn from public life, which in turn comes from the verb *privare*, to bereave or deprive.⁴⁹ Arendt retains this early definition of the word in her description of the private realm:

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an 'objective' relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a

⁴⁶ Hannah Arendt, "The Public and the Private Realm," in *The Human Condition*, 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 50

⁴⁸ Again, the association of the homeless and slaves is suggestive: "This is also the reason why it is impossible 'to write a character sketch of any slave who lived. . . . Until they emerge into freedom and notoriety, they remain shadowy types rather than persons.'" (Arendt, "The Public," 33.)

⁴⁹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 242.

common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself.⁵⁰

This is undoubtedly the realm of the homeless person, who every day is dismissed by hundreds of passersby, and who is actively rendered invisible by the state. Through storytelling and artistic production, as Arendt suggests, it is possible to transform a shadowy existence into a concrete one—to assert its reality. This is what is at stake when Rosler asks, “How can one represent a city’s ‘buried’ life.”⁵¹

Conclusion

Dia and Rosler were perhaps unlikely collaborators, but each party was happy to take advantage of the other—Dia, by sponsoring an experimental exhibition they thought aligned with popular trends in the art world, and Rosler by using the institution’s resources to create a project that actualized her theories about art and publics. The exhibition did not receive many full reviews, and where it was mentioned, critics had trouble evaluating it using their usual vocabulary. Roberta Smith, writing for the *New York Times*, emphasized its “overtly political” nature, focusing on “Martha Rosler’s sobering and informative examination of the facts.”⁵² Richard Woodward, writing for the same publication, criticized the show for the same reason, writing “for an art show it relied very little on images. It seems that Martha Rosler would gladly have dispensed with anything that might look like art in favor of harder information.”⁵³ What Woodward failed to grasp was that Rosler’s artistic gesture was the collection and the space itself, not simply the combination of graphics and art objects.

⁵⁰ Arendt, “The Public,” 36.

⁵¹ Rosler, *If You Lived*, 31.

⁵² Roberta Smith, “Review,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), April 14, 1989, Art.

⁵³ Woodward, “Serving Up the Poor,” Art.

It is clear that Rosler cared deeply about the issue of housing, which she saw as the primary source of and potential solution for homelessness; she took every opportunity she got to flood the viewer with information on the subject as possible. Even her artist statement in the official press release, a place where the artist would usually reflect on the exhibition, begins with an explanation of the phenomenon of gentrification. But in a way, the subject of homelessness and housing was secondary to the form the exhibition took, through which Rosler attempted to create a sphere for community engagement, an oppositional public sphere. She could have conceived of a show following the same structure (nonhierarchical collaboration, reading rooms, town hall meetings) about AIDS or mass incarceration or gun control. What was important was her identifying and reaching a specific public; homelessness was a perfect subject because it is already deeply connected with questions of public, private, and exclusion.

Chapter One Images



Fig. 1.1, installation shot of Group Material, *Democracy*, 1989, Dia Foundation for the Arts.

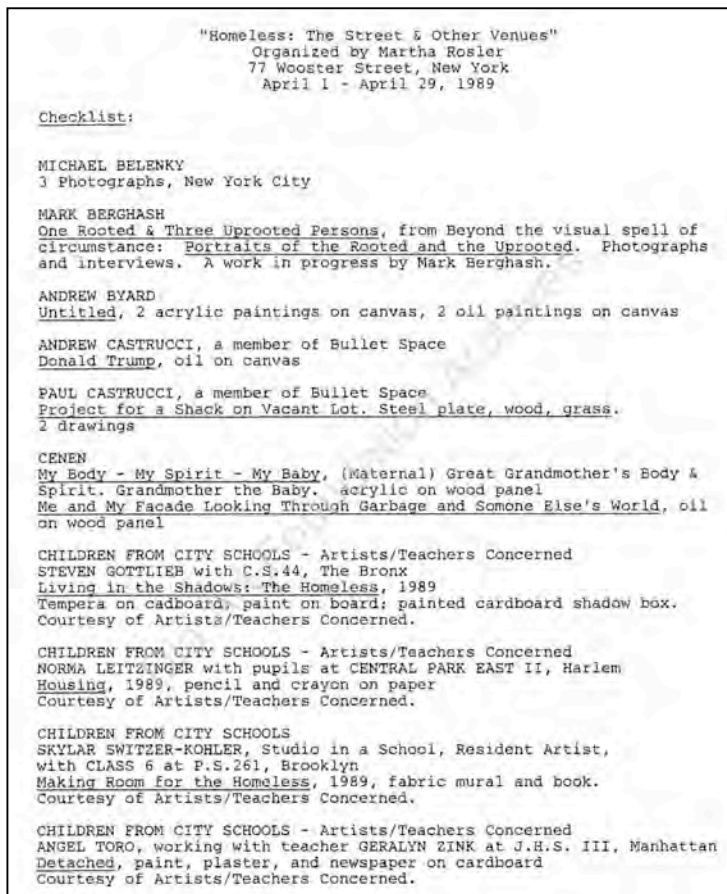


Fig. 1.2, Exhibition checklist for Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.



Fig. 1.3, installation shot, Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.



Fig. 1.4, installation shot, Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation (showing Willie Birch, "Every Saturday the Men Play Dominoes," 1988).



Fig. 1.5, installation shot, Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.



Fig. 1.6, installation shot, Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.



Fig. 1.7, Madhousers constructing a shelter at Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.



Fig. 1.8, Homeward Bound Community Services at Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.



Fig. 1.9, installation shot, Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.



Fig. 1.10, installation shot, Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.



Fig. 1.11, installation shot, Martha Rosler, *If You Lived Here*, 1989, Dia Foundation.

Chapter Two: Squatting, the City, and a Textual Counterpublic

Late on a cold March night in 1985, a couple of twenty-year-olds snuck around the back of an abandoned apartment building on East Third Street and, wielding a sledgehammer one of them carried in a guitar case, busted through the wall. Weeks prior, one of the youngsters by the name of Tenesh Webber had checked the city records of the destitute building that they had been eyeing for months and learned it was owned by the city. The next day she returned with six others, crawled through their hole, and began gutting the space. For the next three months, they labored each day to make the space habitable; working by candlelight, they smashed holes on each floor for ventilation; for water, they opened a hydrant outside the building; they added a new roof; they eventually pirated electricity from outside. They called the squat Bullet Space, named after a popular brand of heroin sold on the block.⁵⁴

Though it may be hard to imagine today, now that the Lower East Side seems saturated by commercial spaces, just a few decades ago this same area was practically barren—“a virtual ghost town of boarded-up storefronts and gutted tenements.”⁵⁵ Unoccupied space was so prevalent that people began fixing up and inhabiting this excess, squatting in unused buildings. Artists, pushed out of nearby neighborhoods with rising rents, found cheap living here. But however well these artists integrated themselves into the community, they were, as they often are, the first signs of a changing neighborhood, unknowingly uprooting themselves through gradual gentrification.

By the early '80s, developers began buying up buildings, and rents started increasing steadily. When in the summer of 1988 the police enforced a curfew for the first time on Tompkins Square Park, the geographical and cultural nexus of the neighborhood, many members

⁵⁴ “About Bullet Space,” Bullet Space, accessed May 2, 2018, <http://bullet-space.org/site/about>.

⁵⁵ Luc Sante, introduction to *War in the Neighborhood*, by Seth Tobocman (New York, NY: Autonomedia, 1999), vi.

of the community saw it as an aggressive representation of the City's pushing longstanding members out of the area. They responded in a large demonstration, and after somebody threw rocks at some police members, the police responded by indiscriminately attacking demonstrators.

This violent, traumatic confrontation inspired a pair of artists from the neighborhood, Nadia Coën and Andrew Castrucci, to begin a campaign of street posters addressing the precarious state of housing in the neighborhood. They recruited a range of artists from the city, from the Bronx graffiti artist Lady Pink to the photographer and painter David Wojnarowicz. What began as an impulsive reaction continued to grow into a much larger project. Over the course of the next four years, from 1988 to 1992, Coën and Castrucci helped thirty-three artists silkscreen color poster, which they plastered across the city. They called the project *Your House is Mine*, after the title of an album by the band Missing Foundation, whose frontman, Peter Missing, was a squatter in New York.

The project unfolded in three distinct forms: the explosion of artist posters across the city, though principally on the Lower East Side; a subsequent artist book of 150 editions, including one of each poster, alongside a series of essays; and finally the distribution of 10,000 tabloid newspapers identical to the books. Through this ambitious undertaking, Coën and Castrucci hoped to construct a counterpublic of community members in opposition to the oppressive state.

Squatting in the City

These were not the first to inhabit an abandoned building in the area, of which there were many at this time. Amy Starecheski's 2016 *Ours to Lose* offers an ethnographic history of the squatter movement on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Though many histories of urban

squatting have been published in the last five years,⁵⁶ Starecheski's is the the only one focused entirely on New York (the others concern themselves more with European cities). Starecheski provides an intimate reflection of the period through dozens of interviews that make clear the perpetual struggles of being a squatter, from petty disagreements with neighbors to run-ins with the police, as well as the advantages, like the deep sense of community. Along with these descriptions of squatter life, Starecheski incorporates sociological research to explain the mechanisms of housing and real estate that make squatting possible. After decades of disinvestment in the working-class inner city, the land on which these run-down, outdated tenements sat became worth less than if they were empty. This is a phenomenon the urban geographer Neil Smith calls a "rent-gap."⁵⁷ Owners whose tenants did not have the means to pay rent had an incentive to push out tenants and let buildings decay, first delaying maintenance, withholding heat and water, and eventually abandoning them.⁵⁸

Starting in the mid-1960s, each successive wave of squatters aligns roughly with a distinct demographic. In the early 1970s Nuyorican residents of the Lower East Side, building on a base of a relatively long-standing community, organized to occupy these abandoned buildings. Slightly later, and occupying an area west of the Nuyorican community, Yippies sought to create anticapitalist countercultural institutions, squatting being a part of this.⁵⁹ There was even a community of international squatters, Europeans who played a significant role mentoring green New York squatters. One of the later groups to start occupying abandoned building were young artists who, after being pushed out of the newly commercialized Soho, found no other place in the area to settle.

⁵⁶ Such as Alexander Vasudevan, *Autonomous City* (New York: Verso, 2017).

⁵⁷ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁵⁸ Amy Starecheski, *Ours to Lose: When Squatters Became Homeowners in New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 46.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 57.

By the 80s, squatting had become tied up with a distinct anarchist-punk aesthetic and culture that was centered in the Lower East Side and East Village neighborhoods. As Starecheski elucidates, anarchism here refers to “a political philosophy of egalitarianism and the use of nonhierarchical, consensus-based forms of organization,”⁶⁰ and DIY a movement towards self-sufficiency and noncommodified culture. These punks also developed their own forms of media. Modifying the graffiti form that was already popular in the city, they employed stencils to spray-paint reproducible images. Some designs became associated with a specific individual or group, like the band Missing Foundation’s signature image of an upside-down martini glass (Fig. 2.1). Print media was also very popular, as independent zines started spreading and silkscreened posters started going up around the neighborhood. It was in this environment of punk music, stencils, zines, and posters that Bullet Space began.

Before Bullet Space

Andrew and Paul Castrucci had come to the Lower East Side in 1984, as part of a second wave of artists who ventured to the burgeoning neighborhood to establish self-organized artist-run spaces styled as businesses emulating traditional art dealerships. Theirs was called A&P Gallery and ran from 1984 to 1986 on East Fourth Street. They organized shows of artists in the neighborhood and friends of theirs. A photo of one of their final shows, “Fresh Fruit for Rotten Vegetables,” points to their aesthetic program: blunt political critique and mockery that spills onto the street. In this photo of the gallery’s façade, Andrew’s portrait of a pale Donald Trump, then a villainous real estate tycoon, hangs in the gallery’s storefront window, looming over a group of playing children who are unaware of his domineering presence behind them. There is a

⁶⁰ Ibid., 61.

baseball-sized hole in the window, patched up roughly with sealing tape, an unlikely sight in a Chelsea gallery (Fig. 2.2).

The gallery closed just as Andrew and Paul were developing their squat on Third Street in 1986. By this time, most of the founding members had moved on (squat living is tough, and turnover is high and rapid). The brothers converted the ground floor, which had been a storefront, into a gallery modeled after A&P. In the basement Andrew set up a small makeshift print studio where he invited artists to make silkscreens.

Tenesh Webber, Maggie Wrigley, Sandra Koponen, and others who lived in Bullet Space in the early years were also young artists when they decided to occupy 232 East Third Street. Webber was a photographer from Canada, Paul Castrucci had just graduated from college with a degree in architecture, Koponen was a painter, and Andrew was just out of art school. Some, like Wrigley, were on the verge of homelessness before they attempted squatting. For others, squatting was significant for cultural, social, and political reasons—an active protest of commodity culture, a way to eschew the market.

Art and Squatting

Whether or not they knew it, these young artists were inserting themselves into an already rich history of underground, alternative art production on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Starting in the mid-sixties, there were countless collectives, collaboratives, and self-run galleries, and there was intense cross-pollination between groups. Alan Moore, an artist and art historian who, as an original member of ABC No Rio and Collaborative Projects (Colab) was deeply involved with the cultural production at this time and place, reflects on the period in a recent book *Occupation Culture: Art and Squatting in the City from Below*. He writes about a

group of people who saw their position in society as “occupying vacancy and producing cultures off the economic grid.”⁶¹ Moore and others (like Julie Ault, whose 2002 *Alternative Art New York* is another useful guide to this period) cite the *Real Estate Show*, which took place on the eve of 1980, as an influential turning point in the collaborative artistic production and organization of this time. Reflecting on the impetus for the show, Moore, who organized the show along with other members of Colab, says that artists in Tribeca and Soho were being pushed out, leaving the Lower East Side as the only viable option. “The *Real Estate Show*,” he writes, “would start a public discussion about the arrival of artists in the neighborhood.”⁶² Mirroring the fateful night of the foundation of Bullet Space, on December 30, 1979, Alan Moore, Tom Otterness, Becky Howland, and a couple other Colab artists arrived at the abandoned storefront at 123 Delancey Street wielding a guitar case, this one containing bolt cutters. They broke into the space that had been abandoned for over a year and started haphazardly installing works that somehow addressed real estate in the city (Figs. 2.3 & 2.4). As is evident in these photographs, the artists and organizers did not attempt to clean up the space and replicate the formal logic of the white cube, but instead left the space as it is; that they left the space a cluttered mess shows that occupying and highlighting disused space was as much a statement as any work of art.⁶³ Rather than dominating the space, the small works are integrated throughout. When the artists returned the following day (January 2nd) they found the door padlocked by the city.

⁶¹ Alan Moore, *Occupation Culture: Art and Squatting in the City from below* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2015), 2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶³ This destructiveness makes clear Boris Groys’ distinction between design aesthetic and artistic aesthetic: “The goal of design is to aesthetically improve the status quo—to make it more attractive. Art also accepts the status quo—but it accepts it as a corpse, after its transformation into a mere representation.” **CITATION**

The *Real Estate Show* set the tone in a number of ways for collaborative, political art organization in the coming years. It was the first explicit critique of the City's housing policies by a group of artists. Artists have an interesting relation to real estate; typically low-income, they often converge in poor, working class neighborhoods, where, due to their racial and social privilege, they unwittingly pave the way for gentrification. The *Real Estate Show* and other exhibitions (such as *If You Lived Here...*) are artists' attempts to reckon with their complicity. It was the first instance of occupying vacancy as an artistic act. The show also set the tone for anti-hierarchical collaborative projects, incorporating art by not only multiple artists, but also by children in the neighborhood who happened to come across the space that night. Finally, with its employment of posters and stencils, the show pioneered the use of easily reproducible print media to advertise to the neighborhood at large, not just a specific mailing list. One poster (Fig. 2.5) enthusiastically encourages readers to "Drop in! Say Hey! Win a Prize!" At the center of this poster is an image of the Statue of Liberty, an easily recognizable symbol of hospitality and inclusion, buffered by wooden buoys.

However subversive this act of seizing a building might have been, there is no denying that the artists benefited from privilege that other residents of the neighborhood did not. Reflecting many years later on the *Real Estate Show*, Ann Messner, who participated in the show, says though there were unpleasant "direct and forceful dealings with the city, although remaining non-violent," they seemed to have avoided more severe consequences of the break-in because of Joseph Beuys, whose presence, as an art star, intimidated city officials.⁶⁴ We can easily imagine an alternate outcome had the group that broke into an abandoned building been, say, comprised of black men.

⁶⁴ Max Schumann (ed.), *A Book about Colab (and Related Activities)*, (Printed Matter 2016), 110.

In the wake of the show, a number of artist collectives settled for good in buildings in the same area. After kicking them out of the space on Delancey Street, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development negotiated with the artists of the *Real Estate Show* and granted them use of a building on Rivington Street.⁶⁵ Just four blocks east, two groups of artists had occupied a complex of abandoned lots and converted them into studios, meeting places, and exhibition spaces, calling the whole complex the Rivington School. It was here that Tenesh Webber, Paul and Andrew Castrucci, and others first met in 1985 to discuss their plan to take over 292 East Third Street.

The Poster Project

In the late summer of 1988, the New York Parks Department, at the request of some members of the neighborhood community board, imposed a 1 a.m. curfew on the previously twenty-four-hour Tompkins Square Park. In the words of then-Mayor Ed Koch, the park “had been taken over by squatters, drug pushers, drug users, and vagrants, and they kept it going twenty-four-hours a day.”⁶⁶ Though the park did have a reputation for being dangerous, many members of the neighborhood saw this move by the Parks Department as an unforgivable encroachment on the rights of squatters and homeless people who had been part of the neighborhood for years—a sure sign of the City’s collaboration in gentrification. Squatters and other members of the community organized a small protest one night. The following week, on August 6th, an estimated 700 people gathered to protest the closing of the park, which they saw as a ruthless eviction of the park’s inhabitants (Fig. 2.6). At some point in the night, protesters began hurling projectiles at the 100 policemen who had been mustered in preparation for the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁶ “Mayor Ed Koch on the Tompkins Square Park Police Riot of 1988,” video file, 02:30, YouTube, posted by The Daily Beast, November 30, 2010, accessed May 2, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nR_cbK7Gz1w.

demonstration. The police responded by rounding up and beating demonstrators with their batons, injuring thirty-eight and arresting nine.⁶⁷ Though of course accounts vary as to who started the violence, there is now consensus that the police were out of control in their beating of both protesters and bystanders.

It was directly in response to this violent police riot that Nadia Coën and Andrew Castrucci decided to organize an artistic response to the incendiary (quite literally) topic of housing and homelessness on the Lower East Side. Coën was a printmaker and designer who had been represented by A&P Gallery in the early years, and who became Andrew's chief collaborator, his "invisible partner in crime," as she told me in a recent interview.⁶⁸ They had been making posters together for a few years, but after the riot Coën went to Castrucci and proposed they do a larger project of social outreach. She wanted to include multiple voices, to reflect both the breadth of the issue of housing and the diversity of artists in their circle. So they began calling artists to invite them to collaborate and contribute a poster design. Eventually thirty-three artists agreed to make posters.

They invited a wide range of people to design posters—successful contemporary artists, graffiti artists, activists, children from the neighborhood. The posters' form forced each contributor to flatten his or her style to conform to the medium, making it fit onto the paper (twenty by twenty-three inches) and be easily reproducible. That said, each poster represents a very different approach to visual language. Some, like Day Gleeson's design (Fig. 2.7), which simply reads "HOMELESSNESS AT WORK" on an orange background, rely on the force of words, emulating the directness of construction signs. Other designs, like Castrucci's (Fig. 2.8),

⁶⁷ Howard W. French, "Melee in Tompkins Sq. Park: Violence and Its Provocation," *New York Times* (New York, NY), August 14, 1988, Front Page, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/14/nyregion/melee-in-tompkins-sq-park-violence-and-its-provocation.html>.

⁶⁸ Nadia Coën, telephone interview by the author, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, March 21, 2018.

are more abstract in their iconography. His shows a fishing hook on a black background, representing the desolate draw of addiction.

Some of these artists, like Lady Pink and Lee Quiñones, were already expert street artists. Both Lady Pink, who was born in Ecuador, and Quiñones, originally from Puerto Rico, were pioneers of subway car graffiti. Though they were based in different neighborhoods (Lady Pink in Astoria and Quiñones on the Lower East Side), their colorful, explosive murals could be seen all over the city. Masters of aerosol, these two artists were forced to adapt their style to fit onto the 20 by 23” poster. Lady Pink’s somber print for *Your House is Mine* (Fig. 2.9), mostly black and white with some yellow detail, is in stark contrast to her other work, which is characterized by its use of vibrant colors. The scene is divided into three lateral registers: on the top, the tower of the Brooklyn Bridge glows among thick clouds, lit by the crescent moon behind it; in the middle register is a dense horizon of apartment buildings, their television antenna and fire escapes jutting out, characteristic of Lower East Side tenements; in the bottom register, the foreground, a small girl spray-paints an archetypal, cartoon-like suburban house. The girl seems to be living in a small homeless settlement underneath the bridge; she paints not on a wall, but on the side of a large cardboard box that functions as shelter. The house the girl draws is doubtless the one she longs for. The way Lady Pink renders the tenements towering above the girl—in all black without any detail—reflect how they might appear to the girl so alienated from such housing, which is to say unfathomable.

Though their street work has clear similarities, Quiñones’ poster design (Fig. 2.10) could not be more different from Lady Pink’s. His is dense with text, with seven paragraphs he excerpted from the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano’s three-volume radical, mythological history of the Americas *Memoria del Fuego*. At the bottom, Quiñones wrote his own

paragraph—a sort of addendum to Galeano’s text—about contemporary New York, in which he seems to collage dismal stories from the news ranging from violent police to vacant buildings, homelessness, and even Donald Trump (“Trumps [sic] a material guy with a material girl. His empire and marriage are a news soap-opera swirl.”) The penmanship of the text (hand-written by Quiñones), scrawled in all capital letters, evokes desperate wall writing. At the center of the poster is Frankenstein’s face. Quiñones’ poster represents well the combination of intellectual rigor and rough street aesthetic that characterizes these posters.

Of the 9,900 posters that were printed by hand (300 for every one of the 33 artists, and one of the reasons the project spanned four years), half of them were wheat-pasted on walls across the city by Coën and Castrucci. This viral method of distribution is yet another enactment of Moore’s maxim “occupying vacancy and producing cultures off the economic grid.” Appropriating the language of graffiti artists, Castrucci refers to the walls of abandoned buildings as canvasses (“with all the evictions going on, there were a lot of canvasses in the area”).⁶⁹ The posters had a dual function: beautification and political outreach. Some were used as signs in protests, as one photo (Fig. 2.11) shows a group of protesters preparing to march against evictions. This photo demonstrates the versatility of the project, which conjoined contemporary art and direct protest.

The Book

Once the posters are thrust into the street, they are incorporated into the palimpsest that is the fabric of New York, out of artists’ control. Andrew Castrucci said he embraced this cycle of decay in which the posters are either torn down, spraypainted over, or weathered over time (Fig.

⁶⁹ Andrew Castrucci, interview by the author, Bullet Space Gallery, New York, NY, April 8, 2018.

2.12). One of Claire Bishop's critiques of participatory art practices is that the artists have little concern for secondary viewers, i.e. those who were not able to participate, or those who are looking back from the future.⁷⁰ Castrucci and Coën had more of a vision for the preservation of their efforts. For these secondary viewers, the artist-squatters designed an artist book of 150 editions which Paul Castrucci, Andrew's architect brother, designed. If the posters were meant to flow freely into the world, these books were intentionally unwieldy. They are massive: 24 by 21", weighing sixteen pounds—"like tombstones," Andrew told me.⁷¹ The front and back covers are made of panels of wood encased in metal (Fig. 2.13). The spine is held together by metal screws. Making the books so extremely cumbersome reminds viewers and owners of the symbolic weight they carry as memorials of the struggle for housing on the Lower East Side.

The book was a significant expansion of the original poster project; Castrucci and Coën enlisted dozens of writers, their pedigrees as various as the poster contributors', to submit essays, poems, or illustrations. This written portion of the book shares many formal qualities with the zines that were so popular at this time. Coën laid the whole book out using a process of paste-up mechanical. No two pages follow the same organizational logic; in some, sections are demarcated vertically in columns, while in others the text flows in rows (Fig. 2.14). There are illustrations (drawings, photographs, charts) dispersed throughout. Some are complete academic essays, like Neil Smith's history of Tompkins Square Park, whereas others are more abstract and poetic, like Jonathan Leake's manifesto-poem "Graffiti and Gnosticism." There is a section arguing against the introduction of methadone clinics; there is a poetic text by David Wojnarowicz on healthcare and AIDS in the U.S.; there is a section on the social threat of mass media and the culture industry, which erodes a sense of community. One of the most striking

⁷⁰ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 9.

⁷¹ Castrucci, interview by the author.

columns is a list of the addresses of all buildings demolished on the Lower East Side from 1978 to 1988, close to 300 buildings. Citations throughout the book range from Public Enemy to George Bataille, again reflecting the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that characterizes this entire project.

The book's introductory text, "Disappearances," was co-authored by Castrucci and a Ph.D. candidate at Columbia, Kostas Gounis, who at the time was working on his dissertation *The Domestication of Homelessness*, on New York City shelters. The opening paragraph sets the tone for the rest of the book:

All across the globe, the rhetoric of capitalist domination barely conceals the blatant surrender of all state mechanisms to the interests of the money-making classes. Fragmentation, xenophobia, and separatism instead of democratization, and corporatism instead of a unified social movement are the perverse effects of the new world order where fascism is gaining new legitimacy.⁷²

Indeed, this introduction, and the rest of the book, is characterized by strong anticapitalist rhetoric; it reads like a powerful rallying speech, one grounded in a Marxist intellectual tradition, drawing heavily on Fredric Jameson. It is a fiery, inspiring text, but it lacks a clear political direction; instead of focusing on a single goal (for example, the reform of homeless shelters), it reads like a dystopian critique of contemporary life. Notice how many explosive political words are employed. Castrucci and Gounis continue address a number of desperate (and disparate) social issues: The brutality of marginalization; the effects of automation on the working class; an increasingly illusory sense of community membership; public health crises (namely AIDS and tuberculosis); "the transformation of public space into contested territories;" growing surveillance and an "infernal disciplinary apparatus;" and urban decay. Though these issues are

⁷² Coën and Castrucci, *Your House*, 2.

all interconnected, the text ends up feeling like a list of all the social issues plaguing the nation at the time rather than a coherent prescription.

On the next page is Castrucci and Coën's "Foreward" to the book. In contrast to the previous page, "Disappearances," here they focus more on housing as the core of a wide range of problems. They write, "housing is the fundamental foundation from which this project stems; if this foundation isn't secure, our entire society crumbles."⁷³ In the center of the page is a diagram that illustrates this claim (Fig. 2.15). It is a sort of matrix; the horizontal axis goes from "dehumanization" on the left to "human rights on the right," and the vertical starts at the "AIDS epidemic" on the bottom and progresses to "health care" at the top. In the epicenter is a house, labelled "foundation" and "shelter." Spiraling around this center figure are two concentric rings. Both rings are broken into four segments that flow into each other reciprocally: the first begins with segregation→racism ↔ gentrification ↔ warehousing ↔ segregation; the second begins with unemployment and follows → homelessness ↔ education ↔ drugs ↔ unemployment. If it is unclear from this description how exactly these disparate issues relate to one another, and more crucially how they are all brought together by housing, that is because the chart itself gives no explanation. Similarly, the rest of the book at times seems to stray from "the fundamental foundation from which the project stems," i.e. housing.

Evaluating the efficacy of this sort of activist project is difficult, but knowing the artists' intentions helps. In a few places in this "Foreward," Coën and Castrucci reflect on the impetus and goals of the project:

"Your House is Mine" is a somber reminder that the city is not a community of accommodation but an arena of confrontation. It is a record of disappearances and it testifies to our existence. ... [It] is a collection of images and texts concerning the broad and essential issue of housing on the

⁷³ Ibid., 4

Lower East Side. The project is an implicit demonstration that art can function as a means of resistance. We are presenting works that are critical of the status quo in order to provoke and incite the public.⁷⁴

This desire to “provoke and incite the public” into changing the world is one the philosopher Jacques Ranciere discusses in his essay “The Paradoxes of Political Art.” He calls this specific paradigm of art’s efficacy the “pedagogical model,” and writes,

Underlying is the assumption that art compels us to revolt when it shows us revolting things, that it mobilizes when it itself is taken outside of the workshop or museum and that it incites us to oppose the system of domination by denouncing its own participation in that system.⁷⁵

At the core of this model is a specific belief in the relationship between cause and effect, intention and consequence. Ranciere claims that this is an outdated model, that we stopped believing long ago in art’s edifying capacity.

It is impossible to say how many people this project educated or inspired to act against destructive urban renewal projects. It seems unlikely that more than a handful of passersby stopped and approached Quiñones’ poster close enough and for long enough to actually read it. Had the organizers’ goal been substantive social change, their campaign was far too fragmented. But there is something beyond the desire to change the neighborhood in this passage by Coën and Castrucci: the will to resist. The word “resistance” comes up again and again in Castrucci’s writing on the project and his work in the squat more generally, and it embodies how he sees his work. Resistance implies an encroaching threat, something that is changing. Resistance can take many forms, but simply persevering, staying the same in the face of adversity, is one of them. Continuing to live in the squat, to mark walls with radical posters, to promulgate an ethos of anti-

⁷⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁵ Jacques Ranciere, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 136.

state self-sufficiency while the neighborhood becomes rapidly gentrified and commercialized is itself a political gesture.

Reaching a Public

That the book is now in the permanent collections of dozens of the most prestigious art institutions in the world (the Metropolitan Museum, Whitney Museum, Getty Museum, Walker Arts Center, Victoria and Albert Library, Stadtmuseum Berlin, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, to name a few) is a source of great pride for Castrucci and Coën, and rightfully so. Having a work in any one of these institutions is a remarkable achievement for anyone, but even more satisfying for Castrucci are the conditions under which the project was conceived. For him, the inclusion of the book in these collections is not just a recognition of its quality; it is a subversive infiltration of the institution—squatting within the museum. But it can just as easily be seen as the inevitable absorption of a product of counterculture into the mainstream.

Castrucci's desire for the book to be made accessible to future publics is admirable, but he and Coën were surely aware that the quality of the books and their limited release would soon render them rare and expensive. Today, one of these books—the product of a squatter insurrection against economic inequality uneven development—sells for \$10,000. What also complicates the project's DIY-punk-squatter ethos is that Castrucci and Coën received generous funding from a range of institutions, including the Warhol Foundation (then in its infancy), Art Matters, and the New York Foundation for the Arts.⁷⁶ Reliance on State money would seem to contradict the self-sufficiency that is at the core of Bullet Space's identity.

⁷⁶ Coën, telephone interview by the author.

Another way Castrucci and Coën sought to distribute the project was through readings of the texts (Figs. 2.16 and 2.17). Two of these readings were held at Exit Art, a non-profit alternative art venue in Soho that was known for its daring program and that exhibited works by artists involved with *Your House is Mine* like Martin Wong and David Wojnarowicz. Given this overlap, the decision to house the readings at Exit Art makes sense. The Bullet Space people would want to express solidarity with a like-minded art institution. But if one of the principal goals of the project was to encourage community membership, would it not behoove them to hold readings and other events at Bullet Space, the core of the project, or another space on the Lower East Side?

The multifacetedness of distribution is one of the reasons this project is unique—not just for the diversity of artists who contributed, but also for the multiplicity of ways Castrucci and Coën sought to circulate the project. To compensate for the inherent inaccessibility of the books, they also printed the book in cheap tabloid newspaper form. The contents are identical, but the tabloid is black and white and does not contain any of the posters. Castrucci and Coën printed 10,000 of these and sent them into the world by either giving them to homeless people to sell for a dollar (Fig. 2.18) or by simply leaving heaps on street corners.

With these three distinct methods of distribution—the posters, the tabloids, and the artist books—Coën and Castrucci attempted three different ways of reaching a public. Rather than establishing a discrete exhibition or forum space, they sought to form a public through a network of print media. In his book *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner, who comes from a background in literature as opposed to visual arts, attempts to break down what constitutes a public. He identifies three senses of the word. The first two are colloquially understood: a social totality (the people in general) and a concrete audience capable of witnessing itself in visible

space (a theatrical public). The third category is a more indeterminate, fluid body: “the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation.”⁷⁷ This is a self-organized public of strangers operating within a space of discourse. Specifying more on the parameters of this collectivity Warner writes, “Belonging to a public seems to require at least minimal participation, even if it is patient or notional, rather than a permanent state of being. Merely paying attention can be enough to make you a member.”⁷⁸ It is clear Castrucci and Coën were aware of this quality of a public, since they clamored for attention, using striking images and large text to catch the gaze of a passerby. Unlike other newspapers, the whole front page looks like a poster (Fig. 2.19), reading in giant capital letters YOUR HOUSE IS MINE. The words would be visible from far away, and the confrontational second person address helps to grab attention.

Alison Piepmeier, writing specifically about feminist media of the 1990s, argues that there is something inherent in the materiality of zines that contributes to the formation of an embodied, as opposed to imagined, community. “With zines,” she writes, “there are fewer layers of separation between the reader and the creator [...] their materiality functions not simply as another component of their meaning but also as a means of linking creator and reader, creating a community.”⁷⁹ The same is true for the handmade objects of *Your House is Mine*, and that Bullet Space was a fixed locale in the neighborhood strengthened even further the link between creator and reader—the reader could trace the material back to its source, which was likely just a few blocks away. Castrucci in the book’s introduction speaks directly to this connection between materiality and community: “The hands-on approach and the labor that over the past four years

⁷⁷ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 66.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 71

⁷⁹ Alison Piepmeier, “Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community,” *American Periodicals* 18, no. 2 (2008): 211, accessed May 2, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41219799>.

went into constructing the book, like a house, signals the collective will to persist and to recapture, however partially, the content of community membership.”⁸⁰ Castrucci recognizes that, contrary to popular belief, community is not a default. Belonging to a community takes work, and *Your House is Mine* was his attempt.

Conclusion

In my interview with him, Castrucci suggested that compared to other artists’ projects about homelessness, his was more authentic because he was actually living in the streets to a degree (“this was not a choice. We *had* to do this.”)⁸¹ Though his living condition did give more urgency to the question of housing and implicate him much more directly in the neighborhood, in a number of ways he was coming from the same place as Rosler and other artists. He was a recent settler in the neighborhood, and he needed to figure out his role in the community. *Your House is Mine* was a multilayered project, and some of Coën and Castrucci’s decisions seem to contradict one another, revealing an ambivalence with regards to art institutions: they were self-sufficient squatters, but they relied on institutional money to fund their project; they wanted the project to be for the community, but in addition to cheap newspapers they made expensive, limited artist books and sent them to the most powerful museums in the world.

Castrucci and Coën write in the book’s introduction about the vital need for community membership, which was being assaulted as the neighborhood was becoming increasingly commercialized. *Your House is Mine* was their attempt to insert themselves into the community while organizing others into a public through counterdiscourse.

⁸⁰ Coën and Castrucci, *Your House*, 3.

⁸¹ Castrucci, interview by the author.

Chapter Two Images



Fig. 2.1, Missing Foundation graffiti, photographer unknown



Fig. 2.2, façade of A&P gallery showing Andrew Castrucci portrait of Donald Trump, photographer unknown, 1985.



Fig. 2.3, installation shot of Colab, *Real Estate Show*, 1980, photographer unknown.



Fig. 2.4, installation shot of Colab, *Real Estate Show*, 1980, Ann Messner.

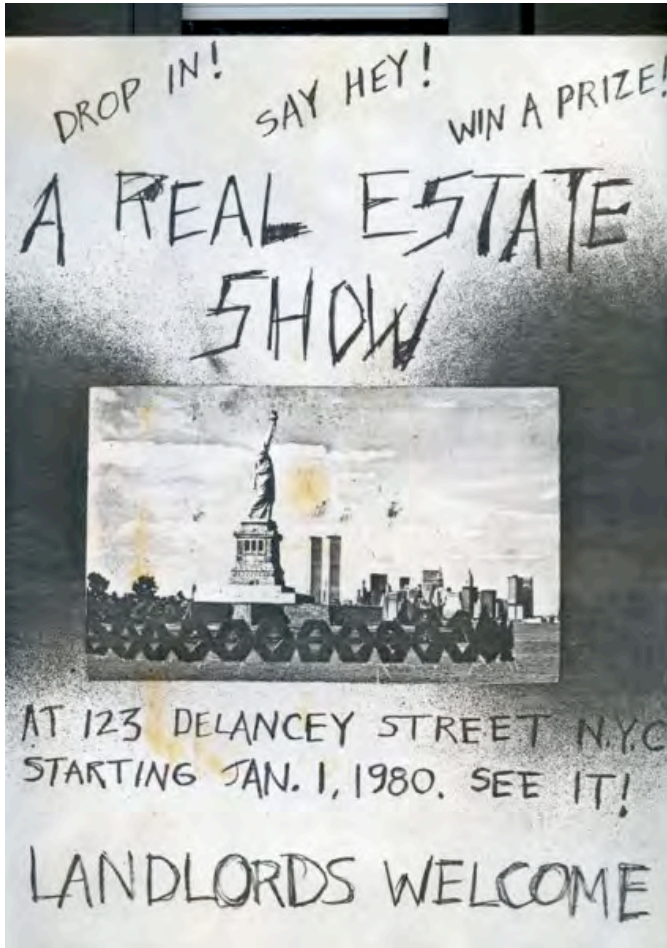


Fig. 2.5, poster for Colab *Real Estate Show*, 1980.



Fig 2.6, photograph of Tompkins Square Park Riot, 1986, photographer unknown.

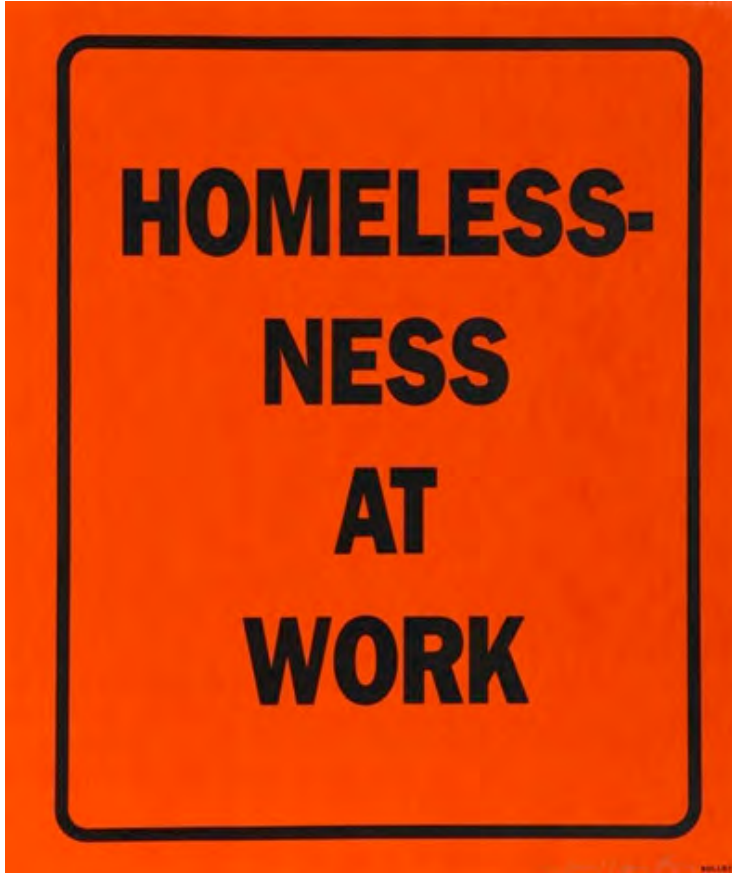


Fig. 2.7, Day Gleeson,
"Homelessness at Work," from the
series *Your House is Mine*, 1989.

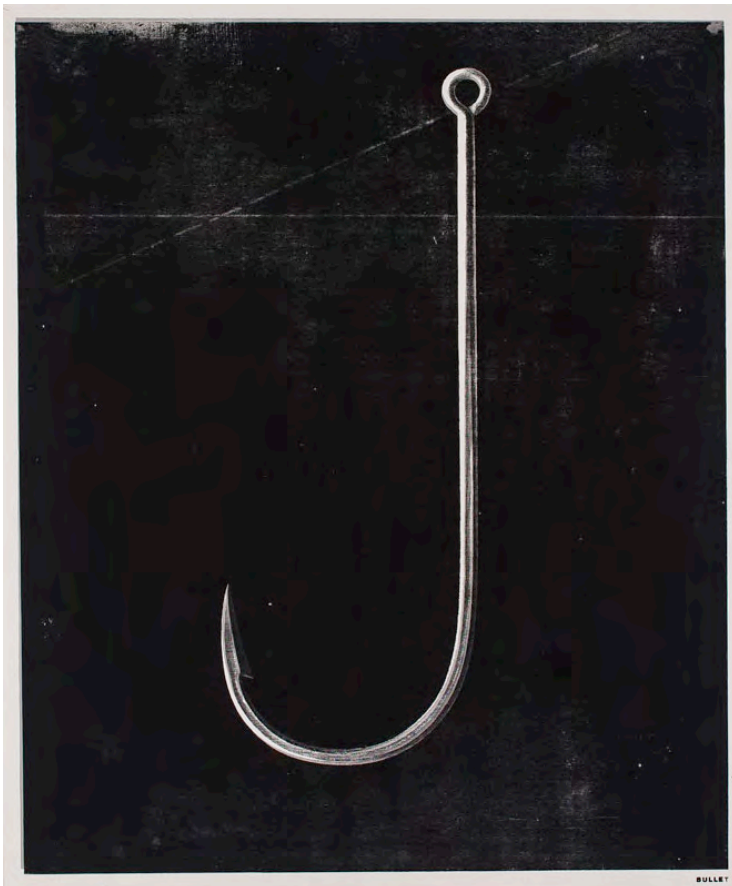


Fig. 2.8, Andrew Castrucci,
"Fishhook," from the series *Your
House is Mine*, 1989.



Fig. 2.9, Lady Pink, "Under the Brooklyn Bridge," from the series *Your House is Mine*, 1989.

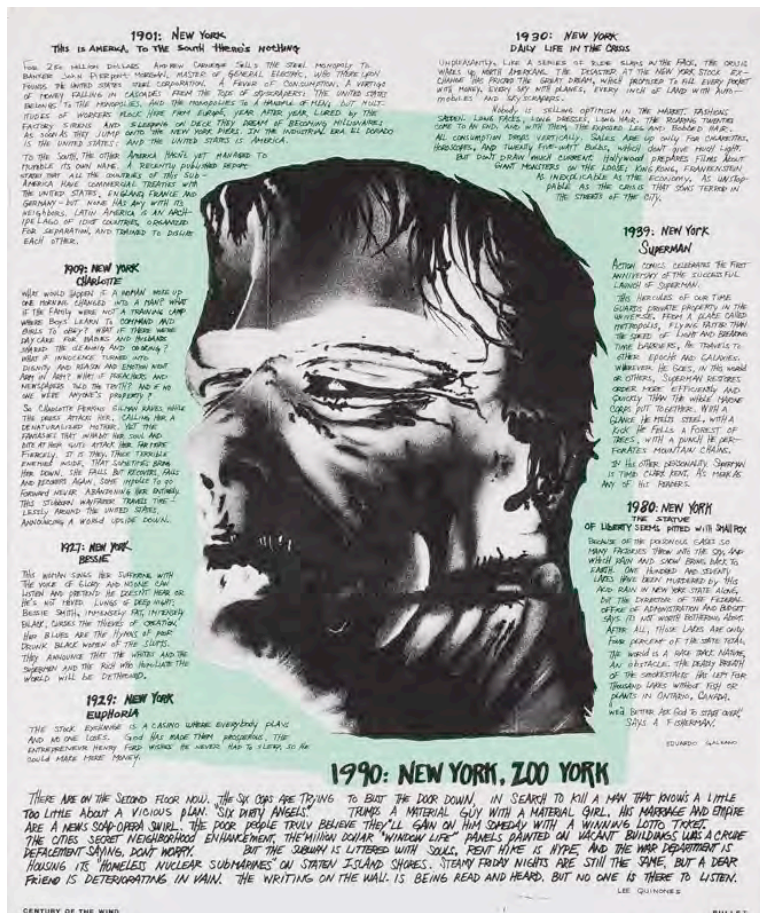


Fig. 2.10, Lee Quiñones, "Century of the Wind," from the series *Your House is Mine*, 1989.



Fig. 2.11, photograph of *Your House is Mine* in protest, photograph by Andrew Castrucci, 1992.



Fig. 2.12, *Your House is Mine* posters on the street, photograph by Andrew Castrucci, 1991.



Fig. 2.13, *Your House is Mine*, artist book, Andrew Castrucci and Nadia Coën, 1992.

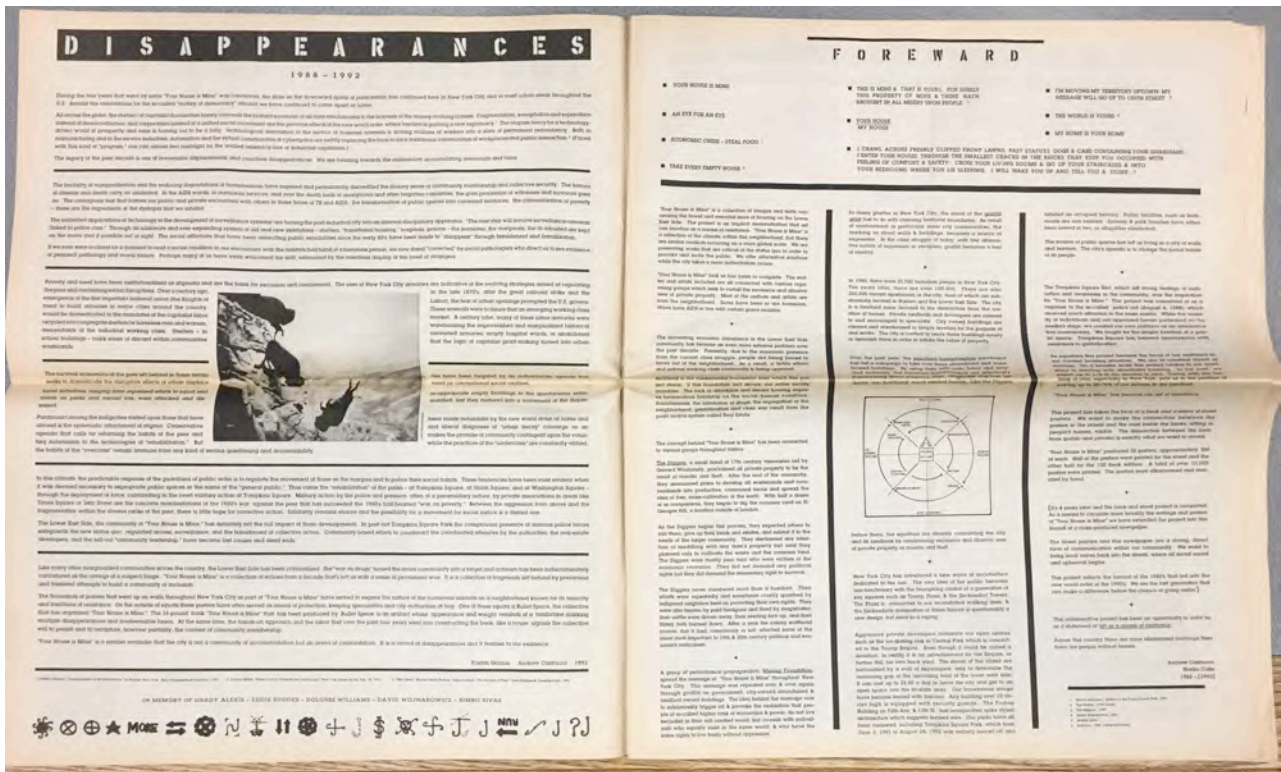


Fig. 2.14, *Your House is Mine*, tabloid newspaper, Andrew Castrucci and Nadia Coën, 1992.

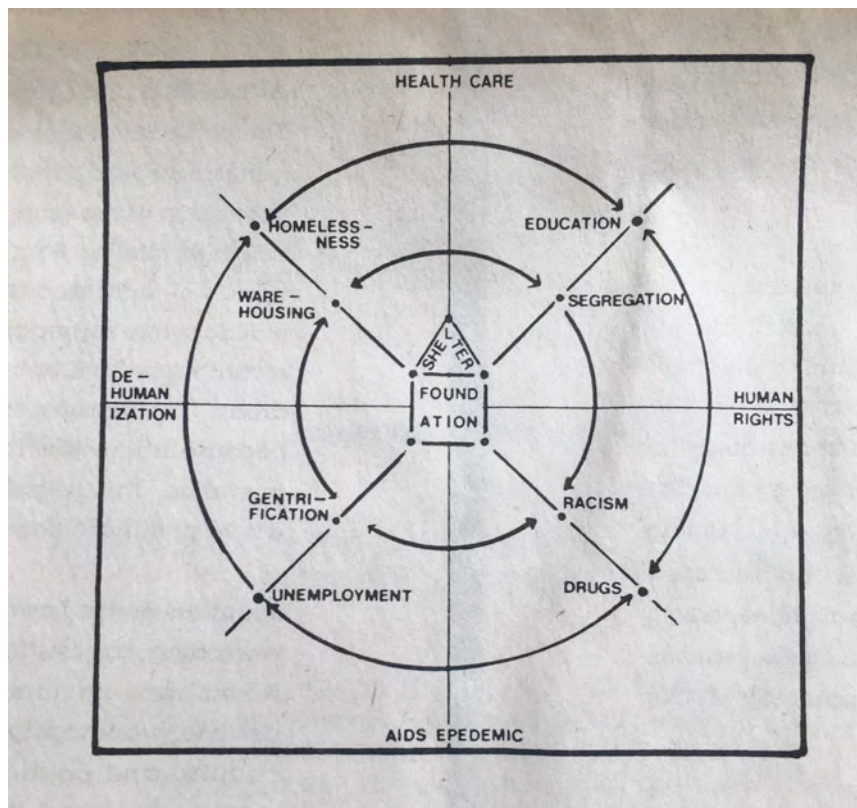


Fig. 2.15, detail from *Your House is Mine*, newspaper tabloid, Andrew Castrucci and Nadia Coën, 1992.



Fig. 2.16, Lee Quiñones reading from *Your House is Mine*, photograph by Andrew Castrucci, 1992.



Fig. 2.17, Bimbo Rivas reading from *Your House is Mine*, photograph by Andrew Castrucci, 1992.



Fig. 2.18, Andrew Castrucci and unidentified individual carrying stacks of *Your House is Mine* tabloid, 1992.



Fig. 2.19, cover of *Your House is Mine* tabloid newspaper, Andrew Castrucci and Nadia Coën, 1992.



Fig. 2.20, façade of Bullet Space covered from posters from the series *Your House is Mine*, 1992.

Conclusion: Art and Resistance

Epilogue

After *If You Lived Here...* came down in June of 1989, Dia continued with the Discussions in Contemporary Culture book and lecture series (following Rosler's with The Politics of Imaginative Writing and Ideologies of Technology), but never again had an accompanying exhibition. Wright and Garrels experimented with a few more attempts to reach the world outside, like Dan Graham's *Rooftop Urban Park Project* (just as it sounds, on the roof of Dia's Chelsea gallery) and the facilitation of Maria Nordman's sculpture project in Central Park. In 1994, Wright and Garrels both left, and in 1996 the administration had "a second coup d'état" in which its chairman and much of its board were replaced.⁸² After this shakeup, the Foundation returned to its high modernist core, seeming to have forgotten about its brief stint experimenting with alternative modes of display and ways to involve different publics.

Martha Rosler continued to create installations similarly cluttered and decentered as *If You Lived Here...*, like her travelling library and her series of garage sales. She did not return to the issue of housing, but her concern with publics remains consistent, from her 1995 billboards in Los Angeles, *Lessons for Today*, to her 2014 series of airport photography *In the Place of the Public*.

In the past ten years, *If You Lived Here...* has been revived as a significant work presaging the popularization of new institutionalism, post-studio practices, and participatory projects that would come in the following decades.⁸³ In a recent essay "Exhibition as Social

⁸² Bob Colacello, "Remains of the Dia," *Vanity Fair*, September 1996, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/1996/09/colacello199609>.

⁸³ Nina Möntmann, "Martha Rosler: If You Lived Here Still," *e-flux Announcements* (blog), entry posted August 2009, accessed May 2, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/program/65408/martha-rosler-if-you-lived-here-still/>.

Intervention,” David Morris and Paul O’Neill write that the project “came into being as the defining exhibition category of the time.”⁸⁴ In 2009 *e-flux*, the publishing and curatorial platform, organized an exhibition of the project’s archives at their office space on the Lower East Side. The exhibition travelled to Barcelona and Utrecht.

Your House is Mine was also revisited in later years. In 1998 the New Museum held an exhibit called “Urban Encounters,” highlighting six activist artist collectives from Manhattan. Bullet Space was one of them, and they designed their own room in the museum, at the center of which was the metal-bound book (Fig. 3.1). Other than this brief reappearance, the project has enjoyed a less storied afterlife. Bullet Space continues to operate. In 2008, the squat became the first to be legalized when the city turned it over to the residents for a dollar. The ground floor remains a gallery, which Castrucci still runs.

Though it does not seem to be discussed as much as it was then, homelessness in New York remains a serious problem, as homelessness has reached its highest levels in recent years since the Great Depression.⁸⁵

Comparison

The two projects discussed here share many obvious similarities. They took place less than two miles apart; they are both products of the Reagan era, a period whose domestic crises fueled blatantly political artistic production as protest; they both take the problem of housing and homelessness as their subject matter. In both cases, the artist’s role is changed from primary

⁸⁴ David Morris and Paul O’Neill, “Exhibition as Social Intervention,” introduction to *Exhibition as Social Intervention: ‘Culture in Action’ 1993*, by Joshua Decker and Helmut Draxler (London: Afterall Books, 2014)

⁸⁵ “Basic Facts about Homelessness,” Coalition for the Homeless, last modified December 7, 2016, <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/the-catastrophe-of-homelessness/why-are-so-many-people-homeless/>.

producer to organizer or curator. The two projects shared a number of collaborators: Krzysztof Wodiczko, Anton Van Dalen, and Seth Tobocman were included in both. Rosler and Bullet Space both destabilized typical hierarchies of mediums: on the one hand, Rosler made equal a wide range of objects by displaying them together, and on the other, Castrucci and Coën forced different kinds of artists—oil painters, graffiti artists, comic book illustrators—into the same medium. Both projects used text extensively, from large and loud slogans to sociological articles. Both produced a book. By including so much text, both artists demonstrated an inclination towards pedagogical practices that inform the audience about social issues, the primary end goal being to inspire the audience to act. The inclusion of so much text also destabilizes the sovereignty of the art object, which is no longer imbued with a special aura, but is instead another piece in a network of objects. Finally, both projects are artists' attempts to reckon with their ambivalent role in the community, on the one hand as first-stage gentrifiers who unwittingly break ground for urban revitalization projects, and on the other hand as a crucial voice of the community.

How similar these two projects are makes their divergences even more striking. Just looking at their titles juxtaposed here—*If You Lived Here...* and *Your House is Mine*—reveals their differences. Both address the reader, indicating a heightened concern for her relation to the work. Rosler's tense is conditional, and appropriately the strength of her project is in imagining potential alternative solutions to housing and images of homeless people. The ellipsis at the end of the title leaves the statement open-ended, giving the viewer/reader room to imagine her own phrase; the exhibition was also more open-ended than most, with its reading rooms and open meetings. The title of Bullet Space's project is confrontational, assuming the voice of an evicting

agent of the state; appropriated by anarchist squatters, it becomes a statement of reclamation. This voice reflects the unapologetic tone of the posters.

Though issues of housing were at the core of both projects, Rosler's had a far more coherent political agenda. She identified a problem, homelessness, and its cause, housing, and proposed concrete solutions in both architecture and policy. Thus, she proposed a teleological model of art, where the end goal is some sort of 'real' change. The project at Bullet Space also upheld the real world - art distinction,⁸⁶ but for them the act of producing and distributing art was a sufficient act of resistance in itself.

The most crucial difference in these two projects is in the way they sought to construct their publics and stake out space in the city. *Your House is Mine* was an archetypal example of what Nancy Fraser calls counterpublics: "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."⁸⁷ Castrucci and Coën sought to create this counterpublic through the circulation of texts (newspapers and posters). There was no spatial sphere of discourse that they enabled; instead, their goal was to claim and activate the street. Rosler's tactic was a near inversion of this one. She sought to bring the street into the Dia gallery, confusing public and private.

There seems to be a renewed interest today in the period written about in this thesis (the most recent issue of the *New York Times Style Magazine* contains an article "Why Early '80s New York Matters Today," and last year the Whitney Museum held a massive show about painting from the '80s). One of the reasons the decade is particularly interesting now are

⁸⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁷ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 122-123.

similarities between Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump's presidencies, both of which seem characterized more than others by astounding social crises. The language of resistance that is so strong in *Your House is Mine* and *If You Lived Here* now sounds familiar, as we see a revitalized political urgency in the arts. With an increased conflation of art and protest, it will be fascinating to see if artists return to Kluge's belief that an oppositional public sphere is "just as important as direct action, the immediate on-the-spot struggle."⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Kluge, "The Public," 70.

Conclusion Images

Fig. 3.1, installation shot of "Urban Encounters" curated by Gregory Sholette, New Museum, 1998, photographer unknown.

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