

Monument and Sign: the intersections of art, advertising
and protest in the public sphere

By

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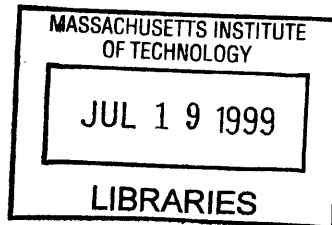
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ROTON

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ABSTRACT

In the late 20th Century, a common strategy has developed among a small but highly visible cross-section of artists. They create and enact transient events, 'interventions', in public spaces in a way that both refers to the spatial language of the site and offers a critique of its dominant values. What distinguishes their work even further is their reliance on the instruments of mass media, and their interest in redefining its capabilities: the projector, the electronic sign, and the billboard are three such instruments whose potential for communication in the city have been creatively mined in their service. By exploring the ways in which these technologies may be put to new uses within the urban domain, and doing so from an interrogative standpoint, so that values, both explicit and latent, are questioned, these artists begin a process of engagement with the viewer which works to redefine the functions of the site. The intersection of the artist, the instrument, and the public sphere act, momentarily, to challenge typical notions of public space and public discourse within it. That such strategies have been adopted by commercial interests also shifts the paradigm further, and sets forth new conditions by which typical notions of public space and social action are challenged.

I have chosen three cases through which to examine this process: the artists Krzysztof Wodiczko and Jenny Holzer, and the advertising campaign of the Benetton Group. My central questions around their work are as follows: what makes up the strategy of the artists and company when they put forward an impermanent critique in a public space? What "public" is being spoken to in a work like this, taking place as it does in the civic realm? Since the controversy surrounding many of the projects by Wodiczko, Holzer, and Benetton lies in the interplay between social values and spatial territory, this study also examines the wider community and institutional interests at work in the site. It traces the policies of institutions and municipalities and their role in granting or denying permission for the work, as well as the roles of stakeholders around the site in supporting or impeding it. The sites that I will discuss are Union Square Park and Tompkins Square Park, both in New York City, Times Square and 42nd Street, New York, and Bunker Hill and Monument Square in Charlestown, MA. Two defining features of these sites are that drastic changes to the built environment often took place not long after the artists enacted their projects in them, and that there is an existing conflict among stakeholding groups which is often centered around it. This research seeks to determine what role the artist played in the changes to the site and the struggles over it.

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INTRODUCTION

Construct for yourselves a small situation without a future.

--Anonymous, posted in 1955 on the walls of Paris. *The Situationist City*

In struggles for social change, both reformers and traditionalist know that changes in personal life are intimately linked to changes in public domains --Carole Vance, 1994, 99

Last fall, I came across a short article announcing a public projection on the Bunker Hill Monument in Charlestown, MA, and I decided, although I was not particularly engaged in the cultural life of the Boston area at the time, that I wanted to see it. The second night of the performance, on the way to Charlestown, the figures projected on the monument were visible from Storrow Drive. Seeing them in Monument Square, their ghostly quality, as humans moving through the great stones of the obelisk, was even more striking: they did indeed seem to “embody” the monument, just as the monument seemed to become a part of the image. In the course of about 20 minutes, three women and one young man spoke from their projected images about Charlestown’s code of silence, the death of their sons and brothers, and police harassment in the area. As they recounted stories of the violent deaths of young men in their families, they made references to the spaces around the square, the geography of the site, the streets leading to and from the monument. The effect was striking in both its imagery and its content, and has led, ultimately, to this research.

In the late 20th Century, a common strategy has developed among a small but highly visible cross-section of artists. They create and enact transient events, ‘interventions’, in public spaces in a way that both refers to the spatial language of the site and offers a critique of its dominant values. What distinguishes their work even further is their reliance on the instruments of mass media, and their interest in redefining its capabilities: the projector, the electronic sign, and the billboard are three such instruments whose potential for communication in the city have been creatively mined in their service. By exploring the ways in which these technologies may be put to new uses within the urban domain, and doing so from an interrogative standpoint, so that values, both explicit and latent, are questioned, these artists begin a process of engagement with the viewer which works to redefine the functions of the site. The intersection of the artist, the instrument, and the public sphere act, momentarily, to challenge typical notions of public space and public discourse within it. That such strategies have been adopted by commercial interests also shifts the paradigm further,

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In addition, the ideological and creative underpinning of this kind of public-oriented work are important in understanding the questions with which the artists were concerned when they intervened in the built environment. I will look at the antecedents, both creative and intellectual, of Holzer, Wodiczko, and Benetton’s projects. This includes the writing, research, and critique of the Situationists, the ideas advanced by the Fluxus movement, the “happenings” in city parks in the 1960s, and the graphics and mass media adopted by politically engaged artists to protest various political issues in the 1980s. In addition, the built environment and the broad framework by which public space is conceived, built, and controlled is important to this study, and it is represented in a discussion of the changing standards of the public sphere, and in a critique of the theory of uneven development and the use of public space to further commercial interests.

Most of all, these cases all contain three elements arranged in different combinations: they involve a new use of media, the use and reinterpretation of both public discourse and public space, and the role of the artist taking a provocative stance. In each case, the elements are combined differently to produce a range of outcomes, and the questions raised by the authors vary accordingly: the purpose of this work is to see what happens when these elements exist together, and how, in that moment, the public sphere is redefined. The art historian Thomas Crow maintains that artists will recombine media and advance its use as an interrogative tool, and that all such interferences are pre-ordained to be adapted by the dominant culture. The unexpected combinations discovered by these artists, and their subsequent adaptation, has nevertheless produced a new vision of the public, one which has subsequently been adapted by advertising.

I argue here that in each case, the artist has presented a vision of the public that is at once universal and wholly subjective, and that each invokes this combination by subverting the accepted functions and values attached to an urban form, be it a monument, an electronic sign, or an advertisement. Wodiczko uses the specific aspects of form and history in the sites he chooses, and his tactic of transposing another story onto a monument for a short time demands that the viewer read the meanings latent in space differently, and urges a reconsideration of history as it relates to current events. Holzer, on the other hand, employs the monumental qualities of the advertising sign, the LED, to surprise and provoke the viewer with short epigrammatic phrases which ask the witness to question their own received cultural values. By offering an alternative message to those of commerce and news in the LED, and by speaking directly to the viewer, she reflected the workings of the “sites” of authority back to themselves, and suggested, ultimately, a divergent authority, that of the tenaciously subjective voice, that of the artist and, transactionally, the viewer. Benetton adapts the frameworks of Holzer and Wodiczko, however, in order to evoke a politicized group identity which the viewer may adopt by buying their products. However, Benetton also asserts the ability of advertisers to provoke social debate as well as sales, an aspect of their work which also reframes the idea of who has the right to speak in a public place, and how does one approach the mixed motivations of political concern and profit.

BACKGROUND:

INTELLECTUAL AND CREATIVE ANTECEDENTS

OF HOLZER, WODICZKO, AND BENETTON

Situationists

Fluxus

Ephemera

Graphic Activism in the 1980s

Margin to Center: Avant-Garde and Subculture

Rethinking the Public

When in September 1998 Wodiczko mounted his public projection on the Bunker Hill Monument in Charlestown, MA, he did so from a position of long-established expertise in a particular niche for urban artists in the 1990s: the activist who uses developing technology in public spaces with the intention of promoting discussion, disrupting the usual course of events, and calling attention to the meanings implicit in the urban spaces in which the work is embodied. In this trajectory he joins a group of artists who have incorporated their work into the existing built environment in order to change it ideologically: the work of the artists' collective Gran Fury, whose work took the form of bus shelter posters that were designed to call attention to the AIDS crisis in America; the artist Jenny Holzer, whose electronic signs and lettering on public benches, flagstones, and movie marquees often startled the viewer with succinct, often deliberately contradictory and jolting imagery and text. This section explores the antecedents and frames the context in which he, Holzer, and finally Benetton produced their work.

Each of these artists or collaboratives of artists uses the built form and new methods of dispersion and visibility developed for the most part by the mass media for commercial purposes: video, billboard, poster, LED sign. But they appropriate this machinery, so to speak, and use it in turns to camouflage their work and to heighten its visibility. It is no wonder that the language of many of these artists is peppered with militaristic language: the "attack," the "terrorist activity", the "weaponry" of some of their images¹. By

¹ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *Public Address*. 1993. pp. 148-163.

the “attack,” the “terrorist activity”, the “weaponry” of some of their images¹. By appropriating the spaces and tactics of mass advertising, mass media, and consumerism on the one hand, and by doing so within a “public space” whose conception and form draws from Plato’s Republican virtues on the other, they are knowingly engaging in an interrogation with widely accepted cultural mores². That their work is ephemeral, a drive-by-shooting of message and image, makes it all the more potent in its commentary on the built environment and the functions it supports, be they architectural, social, or economic. But to understand the mechanism of this technique and its impact on the urban forum, as well as on those who witness it, it will help to understand the roots of this persistent strand of modern and contemporary art.

Situationists

Most of these forms of artwork have some basis in two related art/theory movements: the Situationist and Fluxus Movements of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The Situationists were a loose group of artists, writers, and thinkers which formed originally in Paris in the late 50s as a reaction to what was seen as the overbearing rationality and antisepticism of Modern art, architecture, and planning. Led by the French artist and filmmaker Guy Debord (and claiming, as its members at various epochs, Henri Lefebvre, Michel De Certeau, and Jacques Derrida), the Situationists maintained an “active engagement with urban issues and the psychological impact of the built environment”³. Their name derived from their mission of creating “situations:” spontaneous street events and transformation of familiar images, events, and concepts through changes in context⁴. “The construction of situations begins in the ruins of modern spectacle,” Debord declared, and specified that this construction should take place in urban life and form. “We must develop a methodical intervention based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the compartments which it gives rise to and which radically transform it.”⁵

¹ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *Public Address*. 1993. pp. 148-163.

² Boswell, Peter. “Krzysztof Wodiczko: Art and the Public Domain”. *Public Address - Krzysztof Wodiczko*. 1993. P. 18, 20, 44.

Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. 1998. P. 44, 44.

³ Boswell, Peter. “Krzysztof Wodiczko: Art and the Public Domain”. *Public Address - Krzysztof Wodiczko*. 1993. P. 18

⁴ *ibid.* p. 19

⁵ *ibid.* p. 19

Debord and his cohorts identified several factors in the Modernist project which fueled their ideology; their chosen way of reacting to them have continued to be influential in art and theory. For one thing, Debord explicitly identified what Sadler, author of *The Situationist City*, calls “the veil of refinement draped over [the city] by planning a capital... this official representation of modernity and urbanism,.. the collapse of reality into the streams of images, products and activities sanctioned by business and bureaucracy” as a *spectacle*, and determined that the appropriate way to publicize their insight and work to reverse the malignancy of the spectacle was by enacting a *counter-spectacle*⁶. Further, their tools were often satire and subversion. They produced trenchant responses to the planning and building efforts of the early sixties—the heyday of Corbusier’s Radiant City models⁷, and reacted with distrust to the ability of new technology like “the telephone, television, the recording of music on long-playing records, mass air travel, etc” to enhance the spectacle⁸. But they dealt with their distrust with a signature reaction whose logic reflects that of Holzer and Wodiczko: they enacted a “detourne”—a detour—in the impact of new technology. A good textual example is in the pages of the *Fin de Copenhague*: “Whatever you want, it’s coming your way—plus greater leisure for enjoying it all. With electronics, automation, and nuclear energy, we are entering on a new Industrial Revolution which will supply our every need, easily.. quickly....cheaply...abundantly,” it begins, and in an abrupt reversal of consumerist schtick, finishes with: “and voila, you life is transformed! WORDS TAKE ON A NEW SENSE.”⁹

But Situationism did not wish to limit itself to textual subversion. It was, first and foremost, a tool for revolution in the Marxist tradition, and one which defined itself by activity within the urban realm. As Sadler writes, “the ambition was admirable and preposterous, carrying no clear notion of how situations would work or what they should look like. The constructed situation would clearly be some sort of performance, one that

⁶ Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. 1998. p.15

⁷ In his satire of the Athens Charter’s functionalist urbanism, Debord’s 1959 “Situationist Theses on Traffic” slyly contended that “the mistake made by all urbanists is to consider the private automobile...essentially as a means of transportation.” Situationist Januz Deryng went on to design a “core-garage” which would place massive underground parking beneath Paris, since, after all, “the parking lot dictates urban planning.” As the *Internationale situationniste* noted laconically, “each of the one hundred million Frenchmen that De Gaulle anticipates by the end of the century will find his car at its designated spot” (Sadler 24-25).

⁸ Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. 1998. p. 10, citing Debord.

⁹ *ibid.* 19.

would treat all space as performance space and all people as performers”¹⁰. Regrettably, the group never did enact any situation in the city; they instead tendered text, analysis, artwork, and proposals for large-scale architectural designs intended to create and sustain the Situationists’ urban ideals: chance encounter, drifting—walking with no clear aim—mixing “high” and “low” architectural elements and creating an eternally playful, social and active space, one which would free the public to such an extent that they would be sure to enact the revolution¹¹.

Although the Situationists scoffed at the “happenings” going on in New York City in the late sixties (because they thought they would not further the revolution) the two approaches to urban space and human intervention came from similar sources: resistance to the predetermined, sanctioned public event and the desire to subvert the spectacle through changing the relative power of participants. Happenings in Central Park are important in exploring the sources of works which depend on urban spaces for their power. Indulged and even encouraged by Parks Commissioners Thomas Hoving (1966-67) and his successor, August Heckscher (1967-1973), events in Central Park ranged from anti-war protests—the first political protests in the park since 1914—to “love-ins” and “be-ins” organized by radical leftist groups and hippies¹². Hecksher’s (as well as Mayor Lindsay’s) conception of the public park as a place for a much broader audience, a place where a different sense of the “public” might constitute itself, was key in the success and proliferation of these events. Again, the classic idea of “earned citizenship,” where political and social action may take place only through existing institutional forums, and where those with recognized institutional, economic, or community authority are the ones who speak, was being reconsidered. “When Heckscher spoke about considering the ‘public benefit’ of proposed uses of the park,” Blackmar and Rosenzweig write in their history of Central Park, *The Park and the People*, “he was embracing a much broader concept of the public than had any previous park commissioner”¹³. The park was no longer seen as a landscaped courtyard for the city’s wealthy, nor as a place of pure landscape and relaxation: through Hecksher’s sympathy with the youth and counterculture movements of the 1960s and 70s, and through the imperatives of the movements themselves, the Park came to be redefined in

¹⁰ *ibid.* 105.

¹¹ *ibid.* 105-150: citing the *New Babylon Plan* by Constant.

¹² Blackmar, Elizabeth, and Roy Rosenzweig. *The Park and the People*, 1992.

this period as a space in which “free expression and democratic dissent” were one of its primary functions¹⁴. Even in the history of New York City happenings, we can see that it was the intersection of 60s counterculture with institutional leaders that were critical to the successful redefinition of the public sphere.

Fluxus

A related movement in New York in the sixties and seventies came to be called Fluxus: it, too, emphasized impermanence, chance encounter, and the breakdown of formal audience, but rather than holding the Situationists’ preoccupations with urban life, design, and planning, its agenda and methods were more concerned with opposing the validity of “fine art,” its cultural economy and spaces. Fluxus members organized “happenings” or events (they preferred to call them *events* and also distanced themselves from the flourishes of hippie gatherings) of their own, often preferred city spaces to traditional galleries, and incorporated random street interaction into their work¹⁵. Fluxus claimed Dada as one of its “grandparents,” thus situating itself within a lineage of avant-garde art¹⁶. Of course, like Dada, it was emphatically anti-art even as it recognized its products as being, inevitably, a form of artwork. Its members included George Brecht, Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Yoko Ono, Ken Friedman and George Marcianus, its proto-leader; the collaborative group comprised, as we can see, a broad range of practices, from theater to music to performance and installation, all of which overlapped each other in Fluxus enterprises. Fluxus membership was loose and, like the Situationists, participants frequently shifted into and out of the movement; when Fluxus was finally incorporated into the curatorial cannon with a retrospective in 1975, both its membership and its defining features were the subject of some debate¹⁷.

Three aspects of Fluxus projects are relevant to the works of Holzer and Wodiczko, and to the eventual appearance of Benetton at this intersection of art, media, and urban

¹³ Ibid., p. 497. See the chapter “Scenes from a Park, 1941-1980” for a thorough and insightful study the redefinition of the park in this period, with an emphasis on institutional and stakeholder roles.

¹⁴ Ibid. 497.

¹⁵ Anderson, Simon. “Fluxus, Fluxion, and Fluxshoe” in *The Fluxus Reader*, Ken Friedman, ed. 1998. p. 22-27. Also on disparagement of the happening: Saper, Craig. “*Fluxus as Laboratory*”, *ibid.* p. 149.

¹⁶ Milman, Estera. “Fluxus History and Trans-History: Competing Strategies for Empowerment,” in *The Fluxus Reader*, Ken Friedman, ed. 1998. p. 155.

¹⁷ Anderson, Simon. “Fluxus, Fluxion, and Fluxshoe” *ibid.* p. 22-24.

intervention: Fluxus experimentation with defined roles of spectator and public; its interest in using technology in new ways to advance the capabilities of its works; and its incorporation of chance and transience, which itself reflects back to reconfiguring the roles of artist, subject, and viewer.

One of the primary agendas of Fluxus was to question the arbitrary division between artwork and spectator, and to do so in playful, humorous ways. Ken Friedman's text, *Personal Space* (1972) is a good example of the Fluxus technique, which advises the reader:

Immediately after reading this instruction, close the book. Strongly visualize two (2) inches of space around the book in all directions. Fill this space with any ideas or material you may wish. This space is your Personal Space. As such it is not only personalised, but portable – that is, it may be unwrapped from around this book and used anywhere... Remember when you set up this Personal Space to construct it carefully so that it does not collapse¹⁸.

Here Friedman is making the relationship between the viewer/reader and the author explicit, first by giving a set of instructions and speaking directly to the reader, and then by formulating a work which is by definition subjective to the viewer: it contains whatever the viewer wishes it to, it surpasses the boundaries of the text itself and “mounts” itself in the realm of the subject, and it asks to be invoked in situations outside of the one inherent in the reader and the author. The fact that Fluxus defined their audience not as spectators but rather as *participant-users* speaks to the transactional quality of their work, wherein the viewer's agency in interpreting a work, the subjectivity of such interpretation, and the quality of usefulness or instrumentality of the work in the lives of the viewers is embedded in the process of making it¹⁹. These elements are present in each of the cases in this study, but most apparently so in Holzer's work, which she enacted with similar objectives.

The second aspect of Fluxus work, the interrogational use of technology and the recombination of media, was one which set the groundwork for the later work of Holzer and Wodiczko. Fluxus artists were interested in a new kind of collage, that of the disparate juxtaposition of new forms of communication with old. Fluxus figures attracted attention

¹⁸ Zurbrugg, Nicholas. “A Spirit of Large Goals: Fluxus, Dada, and Postmodern Cultural Theory at Two Speeds,” in *The Fluxus Reader*, Ken Friedman, ed. 1998. p. 173.

in the seventies with such activities as walking around Soho with a radio transmitter, giving a running monologue of what they saw and who they talked to, and thereby enacting the redistribution and subversive reuse of technology which was the darling of the Fluxus. Zurbrugg has traced the initial skepticism and eventual acceptance by postmodern academics of the kind of creative reuse of technology which defined Fluxus. He notes that Frederick Jameson “insists that multimedia texts such as video art ‘ought not to have any ‘meaning’ at all,’” while Baudrillard initially argued that “we shouldn’t presume to produce positive solutions”—a stance that precluded the ability of technology to be used for positive innovation²⁰. But Baudrillard’s eventual rethinking of this stance, which I will paraphrase below as it appears in Zurbrugg’s essay, points to a more positive view of the potentials of technology and suggest that the contributions of artists from Fluxus to Holzer in advancing the uses of technology may act as a positive cultural force:

Describing his ‘rather critical or pejorative vision of technology as a ‘first position’ shared by almost all cultural theorist, because ‘everybody speaks of technology in this way’ and ‘feels obliged to do this’, Baudrillard now hints that a ‘second position’ and a ‘more subtle form of analysis’ might consist of ‘seeing technology as an instrument of magic’²¹.

Finally, the Fluxus interest in chance and ephemera, or situations, is a significant factor in its later influence on the works of Wodiczko and Holzer. The importance of ephemera here lies in its inherent questioning of both the role of artist and typical visions of the public sphere. The most traditional notion of public art is not of events taking place in urban spaces, but rather of static and permanent sculptural elements or monuments which serve to define or ornament a space. These are usually deployed, as Sharon Zukin has noted, as way to convey the fundamental values of the groups who have erected them and who control these spaces²². An impermanent artwork is neither fused to the lasting power structures of a space, nor does it always require them for its occurrence. In this sense, then, an impermanent work is by its nature situated to counter or question the existing values latent in an urban form, and by its very occurrence challenges the traditional order and structure (literally) of building public space. The Fluxus response to such potentials for

¹⁹ Saper, Craig. “Fluxus As Laboratory”. *Ibid.* p. 136.

²⁰ Zurbrugg, Nicholas. *Ibid.* p. 176.

²¹ *Ibid.* p 177, citing Baudrillard’s interview with the author in *Continuum*, 1994.

²² Zukin, Sharon. *The Culture of Cities*. 1996. pp. 1-49.

redefinition through impermanent activity was framed around the performance of “neo-haiku events,” or “Zen vaudeville”. The terms, coined by Ken Friedman, were intended to evoke “both the meditation and humor in Fluxus pieces” and their function as “poetry on our current cultural situations”²³. In pieces that were performed variously in Central Park, in urban streets and stations, as well as in theaters, Fluxus artists “downplayed... indeed sought to eliminate- the artist’s traditional role as unique producer of unique objects, instead creating *situations* in which objects, often object of daily use, would be allowed space in which to reveal themselves,” and these situations relied on chance encounter²⁴. As David Doris notes,

In Zen thought, subject and object are interdependent, and this is clearly the case in Fluxus as well. Fluxus works are singularities, each moment of performance identical only with itself, subject to the intervention of an infinite number of potential, temporary forces. Lines of force and transformation can be drawn between any number of works, realisations, participants, available materials, points of view. There is thus no repetition, no re-presentation, in the space of the Fluxus nomad...Nothing lasts long enough, or speaks with enough authority, for it to be represented²⁵.

By allowing themselves just enough agency to begin an event, the Fluxus performer redistributed the roles of actor, viewer, and participant, and began a process of rethinking the public spheres which held them. The tension between the Fluxus ideal to allow their actions to disperse themselves and the need to be remembered is often resolved with the intervention of other media to document the activity. In another sense, these artists recognize that the only way, in many cases, that they can successfully proceed with an intervention in a public space is to do it only temporarily. Before I speak more about the Fluxus interest in chance and temporality as it relates to the work of Holzer and Wodiczko, I give a few “instruction sheets” or scores, for temporary Fluxus situations²⁶:

²³ Saper, Craig. “Fluxus as Laboratory.” *The Fluxus Reader*. Ken Friedman, ed. 1998. p. 149

²⁴ Doris, David. “Zen Vaudeville”. Ibid. p. 128.

²⁵ Doris, David. “Zen Vaudeville”. Ibid. p. 129.

²⁶ All save *Time Table* from Doris, David. “Zen Vaudeville,” pp. 106, 118, 126. For list of site-specific works, see “Fluxus Chronology” pp. 257-282.

Brecht's *Time Table Music*, 1959 and 1961: "indicates a railway station as a performance area, where a railway timetable works as a basic instrument for distributing the actions of the performers... by 1961... all that remains is the railway station (any railway station) and a duration to be chosen from a timetable. Apparently this piece consists of anything happening within that duration. It is simply a found temporal object: the railway station is a place marked in its foundation by the 'when' of waiting"²⁷.

Ben Vautier, 1967:

TOTAL ART SCULPTURE

Pick
up
anything
at your
feet.

Robert Watts, 1963:

F/h Trace

Fill French horn with rice
bow to audience

Yoko Ono, 1962:

Wall Piece for Orchestra

Hit a wall with your head.

Brecht, 1962:

Saxophone solo

- Trumpet

And 1961:

Word Event

- Exit

Ken Friedman, 1956 & on:

Scrub Piece

On the first day of Spring

Go unannounced to a public monument.

Clean in thoroughly.

²⁷ Bloom, Ina. "Boredom and Oblivion" *ibid.* p. 66.

Ephemera:

Wodiczko and Holzer

“Eternity is the grossest idea a person can conceive of in connection with his acts,” Wodiczko stated memorably in connection with his work²⁸. In the Fluxus tradition, the fact that the images and texts of his and Holzer’s work are impermanent is central to both their message and their impact. For one thing, as images they run the risk of being incorporated into the decorative aspects of the monument or building if they are left upon it for too long; their intention to counter rather than complement the didactic or decorative scheme of the edifices on which they are projected or shown is only effective if they are transitory. As Wodiczko himself states: “slide projectors must be switched off before the image loses its impact and becomes vulnerable to the appropriation by the building as decoration”²⁹. Not only that, but the afterimage itself is potent—the psychological projection of the viewer onto that building in subsequent visits, the memory of the projection, takes on a life of its own. As the curator for the Hirshhorn Museum in DC said about the projection on the museum’s wall, “those structures will never be the same; [the projections] will be visible in a new way even after the projector is switched off. The absence of the image will be present”³⁰.

One can see that even within the rhetoric of the artist, the idea of the transitoriness of his work is at once embraced and resisted: on the one hand, the very point of the projection is that it not be permanent, and the artist recognizes at once the folly of wishing for immortality, the kind of static commemoration he uses for his counter-spectacles. On the other, there is a wish for the work to be remembered, for the structures and spaces to be changed, permanently, in the psyche of the witnesses. Holzer has intimated similar attitudes in her LED signs: she at once wishes to surprise the viewer and to be incorporated into the “daily life,” the slipstream of the witness. Her flashing electronic displays are designed to be ever-changing, and to move in on a space unannounced for a short time. Part

²⁸ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *Public Address*. 1993. p. 19.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 20.

of the capability to seduce and provoke the viewer is to enter into a relationship with him or her that is implicitly momentary, to show the chance witness visually compelling imagery that *will have to be committed to memory*. Daniel Buren, the French conceptual artist, put it this way:

First, how long is ephemeral? ... All works should attempt to be ephemeral. This should be their ambition. In this sense, ephemeral means; not to claim to have produced something which is of interest to anybody whatsoever today...it's to accept our limitations, our sparse knowledge, our times, our misery.. It's to accept that a stroke of lightning can be impressed upon our memory just as strongly as a pyramid.³¹”

Of course, attendant to such pragmatism and modesty is the wistful desire to be, perhaps, that stroke of lightning—to be visible, somewhere, if only for a moment, and to be remembered. It is in this desire to convey the importance of the message, even and especially in an ephemeral medium, that the contemporary urban artist begins to examine the role of audience and performance, mass media and publicity; the display of their work in urban spaces in turn asks the viewer to rethink his or her conception of the role of the artist, the media, and the audience or the “public” within that realm. It is through the temporary quality of the work that the artist may enter into an intimate transaction with the viewer, asking her participation and requiring her subjectivity by asking, first of all, for her memory.

Graphic Activism in the 1980s

Although we may trace both Wodiczko's and Holzer's work back to the Situationist impulse towards subversive urban replanning and the Fluxus concern with audience and participant, there exists a further strand of lineage, and one which, though it concerns these artists, also concerns Benetton. This is the resurgence of graphic arts and the deployment of text and images throughout city spaces to act as unofficial voices of protest, which

began in the 1960s and regained prominence in the 1980s. Established as a forum for the intersection of art and political or social activism since the 1910s (where graphics were used to support the formation of Soviet Russia, and elsewhere to support national mobilization for the war) the graphic, posted in urban sites, easily and cheaply disseminated, immediate in its legibility, and with its own 20th century history of artistic innovation, became a factor once again in the social and political scene in these years. What defines the graphic of the 1980s is lies not only in the proliferation of artists engaged in postering for political causes, but the use of group identities to create the message.

Sixties counterculture reappropriated the urban poster to voice anti-establishment attitudes, and produced both anti-war posters and posters for products and events which often took the “code” of psychedelic graphics to denote hippie sensibilities, mind-altering substances, and the new music on the scene³². In the eighties, with the rise of conservative governments in the United States and Europe, the iconography of public protest continued to assert itself through posters and billboards. These graphics were explicit, shocking to some viewers, carefully crafted to get attention, and brought group identification to the fore of their message: while registering dissent over a range of social issues, from racism, sexism, pro-choice/pro-life debates, and AIDS awareness, many of the artists who made these works created a style and promoted imagery which identified itself closely with the marginalized group whose interests were at stake.

The poster has been associated with the avant-garde and counterculture since the Bolsheviks recruited some of the most daring and innovative artists in Russia to make socially-oriented public art; the fact that the poster is made for the street makes it a natural vehicle for political work, and its basis in the street, with its attendant association with the masses, made it at once an ideal vehicle for the social constructivism of the new Soviet state and a medium destined to be associated not only with its primary patron, advertising, but with Marxist, Bolshevik, anti-fascist, and eventually radical left ideology³³. It has consequently carried with it both a history and an ongoing imperative to be a medium whose capabilities are constantly being pushed, one where innovation is expected and

³¹ Buren, Daniel. Interview, in *Daniel Buren: 42e Biennale de Venise, pavillion francaise des Giardini*. French Association of Artists. 1986.

³² McQuiston, Liz. *Graphic Agitation*. 1993. P. 7.

required. This is true of the approach of the advertising industry to graphic arts, since it must constantly find new ways to seduce its public in order to sell products. It is also true of the artist and the political action group, whose need to seduce, persuade and provoke is akin to that of advertising, though to different ends³⁴.



1. Gran Fury 1989 Poster, "Kissing Doesn't Kill:" appeared on buses in NY and Chicago.

Gran Fury and Barbara Kruger are two artists whose graphic work came out of this imperative, fueled by the AIDS crisis and the pro-life/pro-choice activism of the eighties. Gran Fury, as I have mentioned, was an artist's collective which made posters and billboards in response to the AIDS epidemic and the rhetoric of pathology which surrounded first the gay community, then minority groups in the wake of the discovery and spread of the HIV virus. Gran Fury, working with ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) created a series of posters which used the very images of homosexuality, poverty and deviance which were the target of right-wing groups to increase AIDS awareness and to overturn, or at the very least register defiance, of conservative rhetoric. As Liz McQuiston has documented in her book on social and political graphics from the sixties, *Graphic Agitation*,

ACT UP... has taken hold of the visual power-language of corporate design and advertising to fight government inaction on AIDS issues. A distinctive visual strategy lies at the centre of their political movement. They use propaganda graphics for group identification on demonstrations, for reinforcement and education on issues, and for 'keeping the pressure on', making sure that AIDS remains in the public vision as alive issue. They also exploit the possibilities of

³³ Ibid. 20-25.

³⁴ Crow, Thomas. *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. 1996.

merchandising, using T-shirts, badges and other items to strengthen group identity while at the same time encouraging a personal political stance³⁵.

That ACT UP and other graphics did not limit themselves to the poster, that they did take on broader techniques of advertisers, is also important here. Along with the formulation of group identity as a driving force for protest and a definitive feature in its iconography, we also see an increasing emphasis by these groups on symbols of protest as being incorporated into the body: the T-shirts, buttons, earrings, and hats serve the dual function of marketing the cause and associating the individual identity directly with the group's and its beliefs, so propelling the potential of social and political identity to be *embodied* by the individual.

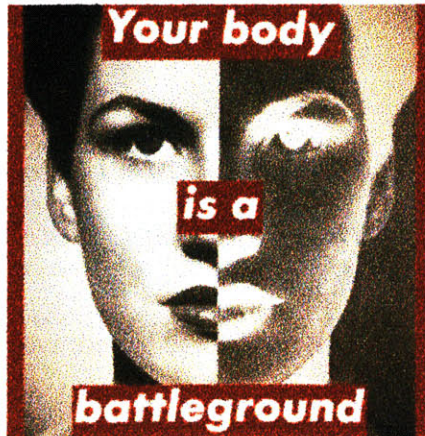


2-3. ACT UP graphics: *Gran Fury* 1987 “He Kills Me,” Keith Haring T-shirt with ACT UP logo

While *Gran Fury* focussed on AIDS awareness and safer sex, Barbara Kruger's works in the 1980s turned more often towards gender issues. Her work, like *Gran Fury*'s, incorporates striking and innovative uses of photography, graphics, and text in the tradition of collage, putting together diverse elements to create a striking and provocative image. She also created a distinctive style by which her authorship was immediately apparent: a close up, black and white image, often of a woman's face or body, perhaps altered by shifting exposures and graphic overlays; and a strip of red with white text running

³⁵ McQuiston, Liz. *Graphic Agitation*. 1996. P. 96.

diagonally or horizontally over the image surface. Perhaps because of its distinctive style, and because she produced her images as an individual, Kruger, like Holzer, became known in high art circles for her works, successfully creating a crossover between established art and “activist” art.



4. Barbara Kruger, “Your Body is a Battleground” used in the 1989 pro-choice march on Washington with the march information and the words “Support Legal Abortion, Birth Control And Women’s Rights”—also used to promote women’s rights issues in Berlin and Warsaw.

Of course, the resurgence in graphic agitation was not solely the result of the political ascendance of right-wing leaders in Europe and the U.S. in the 1980s. I would argue that many of its tactics of dissemination were prefigured in the intellectual and creative undertakings of Situationism and Fluxus. The Situationist tactic was the *detourne*, the voice which seemed to agree but actually rearranged dominant rhetoric, and Situationist detours worked directly within city streets and around the official urban agenda. Gran Fury and others proposed a comparable detour by adopting advertising and marketing strategies, the



5. Artist Gonzalez-Torres, 1991. After the death of his lover from AIDS, Gonzalez-Torres photographed the bed in which he now slept alone. The photographs were mounted as billboards in New York City.

dominant medium of promotion in the city street, to advance their political agendas; at the same time, their vision of a public composed of group identities builds on the Fluxus interrogation of audience, artist, and public and takes it to another place, one where this interrogation takes place under the rubric of political empowerment and individual embodiment of social values.

Movements From Margin To Center:

Avant-Garde and Subculture

In some ways the end of this story, as it relates to Wodiczko, Holzer, and Benetton, has already been foretold: it is fairly evident that Benetton appropriated many of the techniques of politically active artists who posted their work in public spaces in the 1980s, and that Benetton's campaign used the tactics of shock politics and the embodiment of group identity in a way that aimed to raise social consciousness while selling clothing. That this might be the end result of this period of creative innovation, and that, as the reader no doubt suspects, the works of Holzer and Wodiczko may have been readapted for mass culture, is in many ways prefigured the moment that the words *advertising* and *promotion* come into the narrative. But one component of this discussion is the means by which Holzer, Wodiczko, and even Benetton have worked to redefine the public sphere: and embedded in such an inquiry is a certain skepticism of the usual constructions of Public. Therefore, let us not yet relegate the adaptation of their work by commodity culture to the Fall of Public Man, for the Man himself may be in the process of being replaced³⁶.

Key to examining the absorption of dissent and innovation into consensus culture is Thomas Crow's essay, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts."³⁷ Crow traces the trajectories, one by one, of Impressionism, Cubism, and Surrealism from their initial status in as avant-garde to their eventual adaptation for both "high" and "low" art. He

³⁶ The term comes from Richard Sennett, the *Fall of Public Man*, 1976, in which Sennett conceives of the public sphere in cities as one which the liberal bourgeoisie of the 19th century held, then lost, to the forces of consumerism, mass media, and global capitalism.

argues that they are sustained and absorbed by “high art” formulations first, and that their relationship with the cultural elite is necessary for the survival of elite institutions artist alike. Linking modern (in his sense, this means late 19th century and 20th century) artistic production with the creation and commodification of leisure, he argues that “the dissonant mixing of class signifiers was central to the formation of the avant-garde sensibility...the avant-garde appropriated the form of high art in the name of the contingent, unstable, and material”³⁸. He saw this occurrence as being necessarily momentary, one in which opposition “proceeds from a productive confusion within the normal hierarchy of cultural prestige. Advanced artists repeatedly make unsettling equations between high and low which dislocate the apparently fixed terms of that hierarchy into new and persuasive configurations, thus calling it into question from within. But the pattern of alternating provocation and retreat indicates that these equations are, in the end, as productive for affirmative culture as they are for the articulation of critical consciousness³⁹.”

They are productive because by becoming reabsorbed by mainstream culture, they are once again part of the economy. They are also productive in the sense that the constant translation into the dominant culture of styles created by marginal groups means that the margin must necessarily regroup and begin again, finding still new ways to define their positions in relation to the center. This leads to further innovation, which in turn is adapted by the center. Crow argues that the avant-garde is particularly useful in this process: “because of its unique position between the upper and lower zones of commodity culture, this group performs a special and powerful function within the process. That service could be described as a necessary brokerage between high and low, in which the avant-garde serves as a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry.⁴⁰” In this framework, it is a given that the inventions of the margin will be reabsorbed and used by the center, and that this will mean that groups on the fringes of mainstream culture will find new ways of doing things. In the trajectories of both Wodiczko and Holzer’s work this basic formulation holds true: they are constantly adapting new and existing technology so that their work might still outrun mass culture, and so that they might outrun themselves—

³⁷ Crow, Thomas. “Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts,” *Modern art in the Common Culture*. 1996.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p 21, 25.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 33-34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 35.

both artists place great value on retaining a measure of anonymity in their work, seeing it as key to their continued effectiveness in public spaces. In this sense, although advertising's entry into this unique intersection of creative use of new media and provocative social stance marks a change in the levels of communication, it does not foreclose on the effectiveness of this node. It only leads to new iteration of "change the joke, slip the yoke"⁴¹; it changes the terms of the discourse.

Rethinking the Public

There has been a great deal of exploration in contemporary critical thinking of the definition of "public" and how this intersects with audience and visitor, subject and object, in public spaces. First of all, I must point out that the skepticism denoted in the very use of quotations around the word "public" is by no means new or singular: the idea of the public being something of a construct, or an impossibility, or a phantom, has been put forward since the early 20th century, if not sooner. There are two traditional formulations of the public and its spaces, and they are linked. The first is the ideal of civic man, and his desire and ability to participate in his corollary space, the democratic forum. This goes back to the brief moments of the republican government in Athens and Rome and their subsequent glorification by Plato, Aristotle and Pliny. The precondition for the republic was the virtuous citizen. This person must possess, in Aristotle's view, the necessary status and skills to speak; it was a precondition to participation⁴². To be a citizen, one must be able to speak in the formal structures of rhetorical discourse. The site of such discourse was the agora, and to enter it and stand as an equal among the other citizens was seen as a privilege which had to be earned by careful education; mirroring the ideological structures of the republic and of rhetorical speech, the agora was a flat space, regularly laid out within a grid of columns which spatially reinforced the idea that all citizens, once they were prepared to enter, had equal voice.

The second formulation is that we have lost both power and privilege to have such a republican structure, and so we have lost public space which is truly egalitarian. The reasons given have at turns been that our citizens cannot hold the enormous responsibility of real democratic government; that our society cannot offer adequate preparation; and more recently, that the industrial revolution has placed political power inalterably out of the hands of the common citizen. This is last is the

⁴¹ Ralph Ellison's phrasing, from an essay by that title in *Shadow and Act*. 1958.

argument advanced by Sennett in *The Fall of Public Man*⁴³: that a public sphere actually existed and was safeguarded by the liberal bourgeoisie until the end of the 19th century. However, the progress of the industrial revolution gradually separated daily life into categories—work and leisure, domestic space and economic space-- which squeezed out the possibility of public discourse in city spaces. The globalization of capital and the mechanization of work, along with the growth of consumer culture, all served to move power into domains ever more inaccessible to the average citizen, and, by proxy, to eliminate democratic discourse and egalitarian sites from the city⁴⁴.

But as Bruce Robbins asks in the *Phantom Public Sphere*, “for whom was the city once more public than now? Was it ever open to the scrutiny and participation, let alone under the control, of the majority? Was there ever a time when intellectuals were really authorized to speak to the people as whole about the interests of the people as a whole?”⁴⁵ The growing realization that there was never really a *more public* city has led to a new interest in the links between historic control and spatial control, and to a vital rethinking of what constitutes a public, both historically and potentially. That there may be many publics in itself supports the notion of favoring group identity over a larger collective identity which has historically be swallowed or repressed marginal interests. At the same time, it opens up the possibility that technology and even consumer culture might take a positive role in the formulation of publics. And finally, it offers the opportunity for a new relationship between the group or individual and the larger collective in urban sites.

As the Situationists, the Fluxus artists, and the theory of Thomas Crow suggest, the production of culture has played a crucial role, not only in the control of urban sites but in their reconfiguration. Holzer, Wodiczko, and Benetton have all contributed to this formulation. Wodiczko deals with historical memory and the discourse taking place in the site itself, using projections to embody a site or monument so that he may pose a question which may have different readings. He enters into conversation with the viewer around social issues, presenting a political dissonance between his haunting imagery and the monument in order to provoke discourse. Holzer, in turn, is monumental by being omnipresent, disembodied and anonymous. She uses the technology and forums of mass media to question received ideas and consensus communication. And Benetton adapts Holzer’s spacelessness to Wodiczko’s strategy of transposing a body onto the site, and

⁴² Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* lays this out.

⁴³ Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. 1974.

⁴⁴ Robbins, Bruce. *The Phantom Public Sphere*. 1993. p. viii-xvi.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. viii

offers its images of social protest in order to persuade the viewer to embody the values presented by wearing their clothing.

PROJECTIONS

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO ON SITE

There is nothing more disruptive and astonishing in a monument than a sign of life.

--Krzysztof Wodiczko. *The Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York*, 1986.

Past Work
New York City
and Uneven Development
Union Square Park
Tompkins Square Park
Bunker Hill Monument

My discussion of Wodiczko's work will focus on two cities, New York City and Charlestown, MA, and three specific sites: Union Square Park and Tompkins Square Park, both in New York City, and Bunker Hill Monument in Charlestown. When Wodiczko projected, or tried to project, his images on monuments and structures in New York City and Charlestown, MA, parks, what were the repercussions of this attempted intervention? And finally, what and whom did the work influence, and how may we locate this within the context of a discussion of the interrelation between site and projection? My object in examining Wodiczko's work in New York City and the Boston area is to begin to build a framework by which we may identify the relationships between the temporal work of protest, city agencies and private institutions, the public, and the site.

After giving a brief introduction to his work, I will examine the sites, the situation the artist was protesting, and the role of the artist in both the conflict and in the subsequent or ongoing changes to the site. In the process, I will also analyze the role of city government departments and private institutions in enabling or hampering the enactment of the project. Finally, I will discuss the image of the public which emerges from Wodiczko's work and the process of making it. In looking at these processes, I have three conclusions: that the role of the artist in enacting a work of temporal protest is identified by city government

agencies as a potent and potentially disruptive voice in the city; that the capacity of the artist to play a part in private and public efforts towards site redevelopment is real, can be documented, but cannot ultimately be proven in any quantifiable way; and that works of social or political protest by such artists can often work at cross-purposes to their explicit intentions because of the ways in which cultural productions are processed by both the larger society and the stakeholders in the site.

Wodiczko's Work

Though the artist responsible for the Charlestown projection has at turns been associated with the Situationists and Fluxus ideas, his training was in the Constructivist tradition in Poland, and this, too, has remained a strand in his work. He left Warsaw because of increasing government repression of artists who stepped too far outside the Constructivist line and whose loyalty to the state was questioned, but the tenets of constructivism—social participation, an interest in the rhythms of life and in contributing to the social organization of the larger group—are still present in his work. However Wodiczko departs from constructivism, or perhaps “*detournes*” it, by his greater interest in interrupting these patterns of organization, to “interfere and intervene in the already highly-organized rhythms of life¹.”

Since Wodiczko began working for the Polish state as an industrial designer, many of his earlier works (and significant elements of his later work) were objects, namely vehicles. In the late seventies he designed a series of vehicles which were powered by the movement of a person or several persons but would move in one direction only-- a symbolic analogy to the machinery of culture, rational models of progress, and state organization. Thus, when someone paced up and down on the platform of his Vehicle in 1977, the vehicle would move *in a straight line in one direction only*, even though the user was going back and forth along its structure: in effect, the user was going nowhere, and the vehicle was going along its predetermined path, a corollary to the individual's impulses which, even though they seem at odds with the notion of progress, are nevertheless in its service².

¹ Boswell, Peter. “Krzysztof Wodiczko: Art and the Public Domain”. *Public Address - Krzysztof Wodiczko*. 1993. P. 10.

² Ibid. p 18.

Wodiczko began projections on buildings after he left Poland. His persistent interest in the “body” of the building led him at last to project arms and hands onto three buildings in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1981³. His interest in such embodiment stems on the one hand from a desire to incorporate and use the architectural components of a gallery space, and ultimately to break beyond them, and on the other to bring his critique of power --and the role of architecture as a vehicle of authority-- to the public eye. Wodiczko has spoken eloquently of his motivations in these projections:

There are similarities in the ways that architecture functions as an ideological medium, a psychological partner, in the way it educates, orders, participates in the process of socialization, in the way it integrates its ‘body’ with our bodies, in the way it rapidly changes or even destroys our lives...We feel desire to identify with or become part of the building....Superficially, we resent the authority of its massive monumental structure. We rebel against a tyranny of its deaf, motionless, immortal walls, yet in our heart of hearts... we will allow ourselves to become intoxicated and seduced by its structural ability to embody, and to artistically grasp our intimate, unspoken drive for the disciplined collaboration with its power.⁴

Not surprisingly, Wodiczko in his subsequent projections tended to choose monumental buildings constructed in a classical or neo-classical style: the War Memorial in Dayton Ohio, upon which he projected missiles on the columns and the images of women mourning from David’s neoclassical painting, *The Lictors Carrying off the Bodies of the Sons of Brutus*, in 1983; the pediment of MIT’s building 7 in 1981 on which he projected a corporate handshake; the Soldiers and Sailors Arch at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, where he projected chains and a padlock over the arch and missiles on its columns on New Year’s Eve, 1984-5; the Soldiers and Sailors Civil War Memorial in Boston, which became a homeless person with a shopping cart and a column of belongings in 1986; the Bundeshaus in Bern, Switzerland, where a giant eye on the pediment observed the banks

³ Ibid. 15.

⁴ Wodiczko, from “Public Projections,” Ibid. pp. 184-86.

around it, as if searching out ill-gotten gold, in 1985—to name but a few⁵. Although Wodiczko has certainly used other subjects, he has a preference for the monument and the monumental qualities, the architectural language of authority, embedded in classical building. In his projections on such monuments, he “updated the monument and focuses its abstract rhetoric on something immediate in the lives of his viewers”—his intervention, or interruption of the usual course of events usually involved calling attention to the ideological and historical underpinnings of the static monument by flashing revisionary images or alternate stories onto them, often to reflect pressing social issues of the time (PA 16). Thus in 1990 he proposed to “disable” the monuments in Union Square Park by projecting a cast on Lafayette’s arm and a wheelchair for George Washington. The proposal called attention to Union Square’s initial use as a space for labor organizing, its shift towards the increasing gentrification and policing as a result of the construction of the high-class residential Zeckendorf Towers and the remodeling of the park, and the growing numbers of homeless, or evicts, who were populating the city’s public spaces and were the actual witnesses and victims of the changes taking place in the built environment⁶.

The monument is critical to Wodiczko’s work because it is a site of memory; by projecting onto a static structure which is already commemorative, the artist enacts and encourages what Wodiczko calls “a critical evaluation of history” in a site which is usually established as a place of “public discourse and action.”⁷ The monument already has a life in the city; it is a known quantity. It usually invokes national ideals, commemorates a leader or a victory, and stands in a public space. In the case of the Bunker Hill Monument, it is used as a gathering place on national holidays and on Bunker Hill Day, while the George Washington statue in Union Square Park marks the endpoint of the annual Halloween Parade. The monument takes part in the larger discourse of national identity, standing as it does for the highest ideals or sweetest triumphs of the leaders who erected them. It is also a landmark and orienting point, and stands for a history and a set of values which it is assumed is shared by everyone, and of which the current leadership of the community in some ways receives along with its power to govern. When these values are questioned, or

⁵ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *Public Address*, 16, 90-137.

⁶ Sources: NYC Parks interviews with Bill Walsh and Laurence Mouro, 2.23.99 and 4.13.99; Abu-Lughod, Janet. *From Urban Village to East Village*, 1994. PP 164, 233, Boswell, Peter. “Krzysztof Wodiczko: Art and the Public Domain” *Public Address* pp 22, 56.

⁷ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *WORKS*, exh. brochure, Hirshhorn Museum, DC 1988.

their presence within the community put in doubt, even temporarily through a translucent projection, often members of the governing body or the community feel uncomfortable, if not outraged.

NEW YORK CITY:

UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT IN THE LATE 20TH C.

Before I talk about Wodiczko's projects, I will cover some territory around several persistent and overarching conditions which surround the sites he has chosen. In conducting this research, I have found that these exist for almost all of the sites I have examined where temporary art has been deployed to address social and political issues: they have more often than not been in a condition of flux, under negotiation between city agencies, policy initiatives, private companies, community groups, and business coalitions. In order to frame this discussion, then, an excursion into current critique around the spatial deployment of power and the role of cultural productions in advancing urban development and what has been termed, perhaps too easily, gentrification, is in order. I will focus here on New York City, since its development patterns have been thoroughly subjected to the lens of critical analysis and since many of the sites considered here, not only in Wodiczko's but in Holzer's and Benetton's work, are in the city. The substance of many of these critiques will hold true, however, for sites like Charlestown and Cambridge, MA.

First, subjects dealing with the spatial configuration of power have been thoroughly mined in critical writing in the last 20 years: David Harvey and Edward Soja have been among many scholars to reexamine the work of Henri Lefebvre and to apply neo-Marxist critique to the deployment of capital in cities. In addition, I have noted that in many of these texts the work of political and cultural theorists who have studied imperialism and modern world systems, like Hannah Arendt, Immanuel Wallerstein, and even Franz Fanon are an influence: the concepts of center and periphery and the uneven dispersion of global capital,

which I will venture were first applied in dependency theory, are very much present in the work of writers who look at the spatial dynamics of Western regions⁸.

Lefebvre, the first Marxist (and a Situationist,) to say that in dialectic materialism space was more important than history, advanced the idea that space is in itself a production, that “the planning of the modern economy tends to become spatial planning,” also contended that this process took place as a result of wider and better networks for production⁹. Soja, in his book *Postmodern Geographies*, provides an apt summary of both Lefebvre and subsequent spatial analyses, although I should add that he is looking exclusively at Marxist debate on the subject. First, he gives a useful synopsis of Lefebvre’s work as one which dealt “brilliantly with the organization of space as a material product, with the relationship between social and spatial structures, and with the ideological content of socially created space,” adding that it was Lefebvre who first connected and supplanted class conflict with spatial or territorial conflict¹⁰.

Renewed interest in the spatial deployment of capital in the 1970s and 80s, as well as the spatial aspects of history, led to a proliferation of socio-spatial critique. Soja gives a solid outline of how Marxist and neo-Marxists absorbed Lefebvre and came to see power, most notably “global capital,” as being spatially constituted:

Marxist spatial analysis at the urban scale evolved through the 1970s in conjunction with a larger development that combined several disciplinary emphases (economic, sociological, geographical) into a common focus on the political economy of urbanization. Underlying this...was a set of assumptions about the changing nature of the urbanization process in advanced capitalism. The rising importance of a monopoly capital, its expansion on a global scale, and its increasing dependence on state management and planning were interpreted as having introduced new

⁸ Arendt, Hannah. *Imperialism*, 1951. Wallerstein, Immanuel. *The Modern World System.*, 1974. Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967. Frank, Andre Gunder. “The Development of Underdevelopment,” 1986, for discussion on dependency theory from 1960 to present.

⁹ Lefebvre, “Space: Social Product and Use Value” 285

¹⁰ Soja, Edward. *Postmodern Geographies*, 1989. Pp. 76-77

historical (and spatial) conditions into contemporary capitalist social formations and hence into the politics of class struggle. Among other effects, these new conditions demanded a different approach to the city and to the urbanization process...[this] process became a revealing social hieroglyphic through which to unravel the dynamics of post-war capitalist development and to strategize an appropriate political response to an increasingly urbanized world economy...The city came to be seen not only in its distinctive role as a centre for industrial production and accumulations, but also as the control point for the reproduction of capitalist society in terms of labour power, exchange, and consumption patterns... Major attention was given not only to contradictions at the place of work (production) but also to class conflict over housing and the built environment, the state provisioning and siting of public services, community and neighborhood economic development, the activities of financial organizations, and other issues which revolved around how urban space was socially organized for consumption and reproduction¹¹.

What is germane about a discussion of the Marxist approach to space is that neo-Marxist thinkers—as well as scholars who don't identify themselves as such— have used the Marxist model to do extensive research on socio-spatial conflicts in New York City. Neil Smith, Rosalyn Deutsche, Janet Abu-Lughod, and Sharon Zukin have all examined issues of redevelopment and gentrification in New York, many of them dealing explicitly with the role of cultural production in advancing gentrification. These analyses will be useful in looking at Wodiczko's work as well as his sites.

Neil Smith has analyzed the development patterns in the Lower East Side and persuasively argued that *uneven development* played a significant role in the neighborhood—this, in short, is the way in which capital is systematically moved *out* of neighborhoods until property values are significantly weakened, and then moved *back* to the area into radiating nodes of reinvestment. The premise is twofold: first, that profit depends spatially on concentrating power in “dominant” spaces which depend on marginalizing other regions to ensure and perpetuate ascendancy and profit. This is structurally parallel to the

¹¹ *ibid*, 94-95.

Dependency Theory formulation in the 60s-70s of core and periphery, wherein industrialized (core) countries systematically ensure the continued dependence of poor (periphery) areas for profit and continued political dominance. Second, Smith contends that such unequal growth in cities actually in itself ensures profit in urban investment, because it is through systemic disinvestment in marginal areas that rent gaps – the difference between the current use and the potential use of the site, the land value—are created, and real estate development depends on rent gaps to guarantee profits on reinvestment¹². Thus, Smith re-frames the process gentrification and contends that “the decline of neighborhoods, rather than being corrected by gentrification, is in fact its precondition”¹³.

From this general analyses of the process of disinvestment and reinvestment, we move to the role of culture within it. Smith has posited in his essay “*Class Struggle on Avenue B—the Lower East Side as Wild Wild West*” that the cultural trappings of radical chic helped to create an image of an “urban frontier” in the rapidly gentrifying Lower East Side in the 80s and 90s¹⁴. The image, reinforced by bars called “Downtown Beirut” and art galleries called “Civilian Warfare” and “Virtual Garrison,” advanced the idea of the East Village as a glamorous battlefield; this conception in turn served to normalize what was happening in the neighborhood for visitors, as well as for newer, more affluent residents. Art critics traversing the neighborhood in this period would confess to being “captivated by the liveliness of ghetto culture,” and would comment on artists’ use of “the basic ghetto material—the ubiquitous brick¹⁵” By making the connection between counterculture and gentrification explicit, Smith also begins to approach the obvious double bind in which this argument leaves more politically conscious artists:

“The culture industry—art dealers and patrons, gallery owners and artists, designers and critics, writers and performers---... has

¹² Smith, Neil. *Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. 1996. pp 52-59,77-83.

¹³ The quote is from Deutsche, Rosalyn, in reference to Smith’s work. Deutsche, Rosalyn. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, 1996.

¹⁴ Smith, Neil. *Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. 1996 pp 18-19.

¹⁵ Smith, Neil. *Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. 1996 pp 18-19, quoting Moufarrege from *Arts* 57, 1982, and *Flash Art*, 84.

converted urban dilapidation into ultra chic...gentrification and art came hand in hand...block by block, building by building, the area was converted to a landscape of glamour and chic spiced with just a hint of danger...The simultaneous disavowal of social and political context and dependence on the cultural establishment placed avant-garde artists in a sharply contradictory position. They came to function as “broker” between the culture industry and the majority of still-aspiring artists. Lower East Side galleries played a pivotal role; they provided the meeting place for grassroots ambition and talent and establishment money... the neighborhood as a cultural mecca attracted tourists, consumers, gallery gazer, art patrons, potential immigrants-- all fueling gentrification...Of course, a significant artists’ opposition survived.¹⁶”

But Smith’s last-minute apology for those special cases, those avant-garde artists who eschew the gallery and put their work up in the streets, who even protest the very forces of gentrification, somehow rings false. The situation as he has put it makes *every* artist complicit in creating a space of radical chic, and one could argue that even in guerilla art there is the capacity for absorption of protest into the normalizing frame of a glamorous counterculture. Although Smith has taken the ideas of Crow one step further here in saying that because of reabsorption by official culture of the works of the avant-garde, these actors on the margins are always complicit, it is also fair to say that they will be complicit whether they like it or not. I make this point because, in several of the cases I will examine—most notably that of Holzer in the 42nd Street Art project-- the city and institutional roles, in tandem with artists, have used the very process of artistic dissent to further the goals to which the artists objected. But it is also important to note that these creative works, whether under the aegis of a gallery space or sponsor or enacted by the artist alone, legitimately publicized social concerns and served to define existing conflict and publicize it to larger group: no matter how paralyzing Smith and even Deutsche’s and Zukin’s analysis of the complicity of the avant-garde with the “establishments” acting in urban margins, that these artists still advanced their work gives rise to an internal fallacy in such theories; for if cultural production is on the one hand complicit with gentrification, it is

¹⁶ Ibid 18-19

also a reframing and advancing of existing dialogue into new forums in the urban sphere¹⁷. The activity of Wodiczko and Holzer serves rather to expose the connections which are otherwise hidden between actors in the public field, and to break down the division of public and private as they question the distinction between subject and viewer.



6. *Union Square Panorama, c. 1870, looking north from 14th Street*

UNION SQUARE PARK, NEW YORK CITY

The conjunction of Wodiczko's work of protest on and about Union Square park and the changing fortunes of the park itself is a significant marker of the role of the artist in the public sphere, and of the role of policy makers. Wodiczko's purpose in this project was to project directly onto the monuments in the park, which included an equestrian statue of George Washington and statues of Abraham Lincoln, the Marquis de Lafayette, and a mother and child. That he was not successful and had to "recreate" his projection at the 49th Parallel Gallery is evidence of the sensitivity of the Koch administration and city

¹⁷ See Deutsche, Rosalyn . "The Fine Art of Gentrification." *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, 1996. And Zukin, Sharon, "High Culture and Wild Commerce in New York City." *The Culture of Cities*. 1995.

planning officials over the proposed changes to the park and square, and over the potency of public outcry over these changes. I am indebted to Rosalyn Deutsche's essay, "Krzysztof Wodiczko's Homeless Projection and the Site of Urban Revitalization" for her critical discussion of the city's role in redevelopment of Union Square, and the response of Wodiczko's "Proposal to the City of New York," shown at the 49th Parallel art gallery after the artist was denied permission to stage his projection in the site itself¹⁸. Her basic framework of exposing Union Square Park as a site of uneven development, of questioning the repercussions of the city's motives in redeveloping the site, and of highlighting the collusion of Parks and Recreation with City Planning and Zeckendorf Associated is one that I have followed in this research.

Form and History of the Park



7-8. Top, Union Square, 1890-1901. Below, Union Square in 1905; both from the southwest corner. The statue of Washington has since been moved to the southeast edge of the park

¹⁸ Deutsche, Rosalyn . *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, 1996.

Union Square lies at a crossing point in New York City; standing at the intersections of Broadway, Park Avenue South, University Place, and 14th Street, it is a psychologically central axis in the city and marks the dividing line between “uptown” and “downtown” and all of its attendant associations. The park also marks the convergence of a number of subway lines, namely the N-R, the 4-5-6, and the L, so it is in actuality a connecting point, a link between many parts-- neighborhoods, activities, and economies-- of the city.



9. *Union Square c. 1900, from corner of Park Avenue South and 14th Street*

Like many New York city public places, Union Square Park, true to its name, was a square before it became a park; it was an open plaza, a meeting place, before it was planted in 1831. Most of all, in its existence as a square and in its existence as a park, it was a longstanding rallying point for labor, and stood in itself as a symbol of the power of the working class in the city. It was also an established forum for political debate by the time of the civil war¹⁹. It was from here that Boss Tweed gathered his forces; Tamany Hall stands on its Eastern edge, and Tweed was the first mayor in New York to actively

¹⁹ Union Square. Department of Parks and Recreation. 1986.

encourage and allow workers to strike. Labor Day itself was born of a workers' strike and rally which culminated in the park in 1882²⁰.

The Park is 8.6 acres and has the same basic oval shape it has had since 1831, which in 1839 was seen as a model of a London residential square. It has an fountain and a pavilion near in the north end of the park, the latter having been used for reviewing Labor Day parades. To the north and around the perimeters lie wide paved open spaces, while the center oval is banked a few feet higher than street level. The equestrian statue of George Washington was made by Henry Kirke Brown and was dedicated in 1854. It was moved to the center-south end of the park in 1931 in the midst of subway reconstruction. Lincoln, also by Brown, stands to the north of the park and wears the dress of the Public Man, mentioned in the last section: a Roman toga. Lafayette, a gift from France in 1876, lies to the east, and the 'mother and children' statue by Donndorf went in the center-west side of the park. The Liberty Pole, at the very center of the park, was erected in 1924 to honor Tamany Hall as well as for the 150th anniversary of the United States. Before 1980s renovation, it had a number of diagonal paths which me in the middle of the park, around the Liberty Pole²¹.

Surrounding Area

The park's role as a connector of many parts of New York is apparent not only in the convergence of subway lines at the site, but in the clear and divergent patterns of development along adjacent streets. While Broadway and Fifth Avenue, running north-south, continue to offer retail and an established commercial corridors, Broadway historically became more "upscale" north of the park, while Fifth Avenue was relatively affluent below the park—above it, it was part of Ladies Mile, a district of garment workers and clothing production running from Union Square West to 6th Avenue, and from 14th Street to 23rd. Fourteenth Street, however, a longstanding major east-west commercial corridor and traffic route, as it is one of the cross streets wide enough to accommodate two-way traffic, was and is more scruffy, catering to discount shoppers and to the daily and

²⁰ Union Square. Department of Parks and Recreation. 1986.

²¹ Union Square. Department of Parks and Recreation. 1986.

incidental necessities like shoe repair, discount clothing, and groceries, of city residents and nearby workers. Fourteenth Street has never been a glamorous street.

The way that the Park serves as a linking point for several different parts of the city becomes clear if one looks at the characteristics of neighborhoods which touch it. In this discussion, I have divided the areas around the park into four quadrants, using the Park center as the axis point. The Northeast quadrant which borders the park at Fourteenth Street is made up of office, warehouse and commercial space along and among the streets near the incipient Park Avenue South, which was just terminating its southward trajectory from the more exalted structures of midtown. Directly east were upscale rowhouses, including the exclusive Century Association, "the most unspeakably respectable club in the United States," according to Mark Twain, with members like Albert Bierstadt, William Cullen Bryant, Frederick Church and Henry Hobson Richardson. At the intersection of 14th Street and Park Avenue South stood a theater and a mid-price department store, May's, both dating from the 1930s and eventually demolished in the 1980s.

Further east stood the well-to-do residential buildings of Irving Place and Gramercy Park. To the southeast, however, lies what has traditionally been the bastion of immigrant housing and working class labor: the lower east side. Using Broadway as a dividing line, one finds again a block or two of warehouse and commercial buildings: historically (and currently) antiques along Broadway, with office spaces above. Southwest lies the historically affluent neighborhoods near Washington Square, and beyond, moving further west, the working and middle class enclaves Greenwich Village which were solidly gentrified as bohemian-yuppie by the 1960s. Finally, to the northwest, one finds a commercial corridor, the tony line of 5th Avenue, which feeds off the garment district and mixed immigrant and wholesale districts of Chelsea to the west and ends at Washington Square Park to the south. Broadly speaking, these demographics form two diagonals: one of working class residents and activities, with Union Square Park connecting the northwest quadrant to southeast quadrant, viz. Chelsea and the Lower East Side; and one of affluence, moving from northeast to southwest and encompassing Gramercy Park and Washington Square/ Greenwich Village. The park connects them all, and as such it acts as an intersection for the conflicting forces of labor and upper class, immigrant and cultural elite.



10. *Flower sellers, Union Square Park. 1902.*

The 1980s

Union Square in the years directly before both Wodiczko's projection project and the redevelopment of Union Square Park became increasingly subject to the pressures of New York City in the 1980s: the real estate market at the time and the inability of the city to manage growth or curb rents led to the massive displacement of New York City residents, a critical loss of housing, most especially low income housing, and of course, the rapid redevelopment of city neighborhoods. Concurrently, the city lost more than 10,000 of its blue collar jobs, and these were replaced, more or less, within the growing sectors of finance and white collar enterprise. With such pressure on land values and building space, an increasing number of residents found they could no longer pay the rent, and had no where else to move. The city itself was unprepared, and, perhaps unsympathetic to the situation in which many New Yorkers found themselves: there were few protections available to the city resident, no rent stabilization laws were yet passed, nor rent vouchers or subsidies (policy innovations of the 1990s), and the less fortunate New Yorkers found themselves on the street. By the mid-eighties, the presence of homeless people in this park was a potent sign of the progressive disempowerment of the working and lower classes in the last 60 years.

It was just at this time that the New York City Department of City Planning proposed its zoning amendments to the Union Square Park area, and so shifted the lines of power further from the park's populist mythology²². I should add here, however, that unlike other contested sites in New York City, the land ringing Union Square Park was predominantly commercial. There were relatively few residents who might be displaced by the amendment, although the ripple effect, as we shall see, did significantly impact residents and existing businesses once park renovation and redevelopment were underway. The special zoning overlay district provided density incentives to developers in the area in exchange for ground floor retail, pedestrian amenities, plazas, and nominal improvements to the Union Square subway station. The plan allowed an FAR of between 6 and 10, but allowed a bonus of 12 if improvements to the station took place. It also actively linked itself to Mayor Koch's controversial tax incentive program, known as 421a, which provided tax exemptions for residential construction in order to encourage development, but specifying that residential buildings be favored²³. As Jesus Rangel of the New York Times reported in October 1984, the 421a program "had benefited developers of luxury housing almost exclusively" and hence met with severe criticism; Mayor Koch got rid of the program in most of Manhattan between 14th and 96th Streets, starting in 1987. However, in Union Square, the Lower East Side, and Chinatown the incentive program remained²⁴. Given these policy shifts, it became more attractive than ever for developers to invest in the area—and it was clear that the city was aggressively seeking reinvestment. The first developers to bite were Zeckendorf, with a proposal for the massive Zeckendorf towers at the intersection of Park Avenue South and Fourteenth Streets, on the eastern edge of the park.

As part of the redevelopment incentive package, the city had proposed to renovate the park, a decision which would add cachet to the surrounding land values, and which would also conveniently clear out the relatively small number of homeless, as well as the regular drug

²² *Union Square Special Zoning District Proposal*, Department of City Planning, 1983.

²³ Weiss, Henry, Chairman of Community Board 6. "Letter: On Zoning" New York Times, 9/3/84. Rangel, Jesus, "Koch Moves to Limit Breaks for New Midtown Housing" New York Times. 10/16/84. Also for FARs, incentives/bonuses, and residential emphasis, Daniels, Lee. "A Pan to Revitalize Union Square," New York Times, 7/1/84.

²⁴ Rangel, Jesus, *ibid.* New York Times. 10/16/84.

dealers, who regularly spent time in the park. At such a time, this kind of policy initiative seemed to many of New York's residents a kind of willful cruelty towards those displaced by the soaring real estate market. Not only that, but nearby businesses and residents had no trouble making the connection between a "better" Union Square and the consequent rent hikes in their adjacent neighborhoods. Unfortunately, although the policy was met with protest by many New Yorkers, it was one which would become a standard in New York in the 1980s and 90s, as we will see below²⁵.

Zeckendorf's proposal for Union Square Park consisted of four towers 26 stories high, joined by a single base which housed a ground floor grocery store and two retail spaces, with office space above. The towers were devoted to luxury studio and one-bedroom condominiums which eventually sold for more than \$230,000 apiece, and included a full gym and rooftop gardens for residential use²⁶. This was a high end development, and a ringing vote of confidence for reinvestment in the area. Subsequently Barnes and Noble, Toys R Us, Staples, Eastern Mountain Sports, and now the Virgin Megastore and a Loews Multiplex have taken their places around Union Square park, and the site is an established host to major chains set up in renovated buildings. But in the 1980s, redevelopment was just beginning.

In 1985, when Wodiczko first proposed his projection work for Union Square Park, the city had just accepted the Zeckendorf proposal; evictions and rent hikes were putting pressure on nearby residents; the park was home to the homeless; and a new culture of high rollers in the city made the intensifying income inequality all the more glaring. New York Times architecture critic – Goldman described Union Square Park as "smelling of urine," and the Times editorial and journalist staff repeatedly described it, in the wake of park renovation plans, as "home to muggers, drug dealers, prostitutes, and the homeless."²⁷ Be that as it may, the park was a valuable resource to some of the city's dispossessed: it provided shelter, resting space, and relative sanctuary for the homeless. What is important to note is that commentators, which included some but not all Union Square Park area residents and renters, consistently pathologized the existing park space in narratives of the "new" Union

²⁵ Shepard Richard F. Headline: Union Square To Flatiron: A Renaissance In The making. 7.25.86.

²⁶ Gutis, William. "Union Square Getting a New Look." New York Times, 1/10/86.

²⁷ Carmody, Deirdre. "Renewal of Union Square Park is Hailed" New York Times. 8/3/86.

Square park, and Wodiczko, whose basic emotional stance was one of sympathy with the homeless, was not allowed its expression in the official register²⁸.

As Wodiczko has pointed out, the main visitors and audiences for city monuments area often the homeless; in New York in the 1980s, this was increasingly true. By projecting casts, crutches, and wheelchairs onto the monuments in the park, his goal was to open up a dialogue between the New York city residents and Union Square Park residents about what the meaning of the monuments once was, and what their meaning might be given the new uses for the space²⁹.

The homeless presence in Union Square Park was nowhere near as large, nor as well-rooted, as that in Tompkins, discussed below, which stood more than 200 strong. But a discussion of the role and behavior of City homeless is certainly pertinent in examining the intersection of the Wodiczko projection and City policy. While the city was correct in wishing to safeguard its residents, and while concern over drug dealing in the park seemed valid, it was nevertheless an act of eviction when the city decided, in the end, to close the park entirely for renovations, enforce a midnight curfew, and step up police arrests near the subway stations which bordered on the park³⁰. The city put more than 5 million dollars into park renovations between 1984 and 1987; this massive investment on the part of the administration, coupled with the building of the Zeckendorf towers, ultimately led to a sharp rise in real estate values in the area. Wodiczko's work heralded in some ways the end of an era for Union Square Park: gone were not only the homeless, the drug dealers, and the relative chaos of the area, the rag-tag street peddlers and region of second-hand bookstores, and instead, the open space became a showcase for its long-standing Green Market, its Friday night Jazz performances, and its expensive restaurants.

²⁸ Peterson, Iver. Union Square: Gritty Past, Bright Future. NYT. 11/26/89.

²⁹ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. Critical Vehicles. 1999. P. 55. And interview with artist, 4/10/99

³⁰ Oser, Alan. "The Worm and the Apple: Favoritism for Fish; Reclaiming the Square" NYT 12/16/86

Park Renovation, Projection Proposal and City Response

Park Renovations

The park renovation was one in which New York's Department of Parks and Recreation worked closely with City Planning to ensure the successful redevelopment of the site. An interview with Laurence Mauro, Landscape Architect and Director of Master Plans at Parks and Recreations, has been very useful in tracing the connections between the city, park renovation, and the Zeckendorf project. Mauro has overseen renovations to the park since the early 80s. In addition, interviews with the Director of Public Art for Parks, Elise DeMarco, have also been helpful in tracing the permissions process for art works or performance in New York City parks.

Mauro sees the 1980s renovation of Union Square Park as a welcome change from its previous state. Parks were lucky to get the money for the renovation at all: in a period where most park renovations consisted of "putting up chain link fence," in his words, the appropriation of \$3.5 million to complete the renovations—on top of a pre-existing \$2.3 million-- were a welcome enhancement to the somewhat embattled Parks budget. The source of these funds, as Mauro revealed, is also a crucial part of this study: apparently, Zeckendorf Associates, after having had their proposal accepted by the city for the corner of Union Square East, refused to actually begin construction on the site until renovations were complete. It was an act of corporate blackmail, where the developers correctly assessed the real-estate value of a renovated park and forced the City's infrastructural (by way of shared green space) investment in the space.

Although Deutsche sees the redevelopment of the Union Square area as hinging on the rhetoric of historic preservation—that in the name of preserving historic sites, the city was effectively able to mask the corporate interests at work—I do not fully agree with her assessment. Instead, it was the rhetoric of 'correcting a pathology', getting rid of what was termed as an endemic criminality in the park interior, as well as the active participation of the newly formed 14th Street BID, and the pressure of surrounding landowners, which,

combined with the city planning-Zeckendorf initiative, ultimately enacted the proposed redevelopment of the area. First of all, although there were, at the time of the park renovation, several proposals to create historic districts and reconstructions in the area, these were generally met with skepticism by the media, the Fourteenth St. BID, and the city: the proposal for the Ladies Mile, for instance, demarcating the garment district, was seen as a potential threat to economic development³¹.

More importantly, although efforts did begin in the mid-nineties to designate Union Square Park as a Historic Landmark, the park renovation from 1982-87 had no basis in historical restoration, and never made any pretense of being so³². As Mauro explained, the strategy of the renovation was one which would be repeated in almost every small Manhattan park in the next 15 years, from Tompkins to the oft-praised Bryant Park reconstruction in Midtown. The essence of it was as follows: the pathways were moved to the perimeter of the park, lighting was installed around this perimeter pathway, trees were cut down, and perimeter plantings vastly cut back. It is plain to see, even from this brief description, that the primary aim of the renovation was to enable surveillance from the outside of the park. At the same time, police presence was stepped up around the subway entrance on the Southwest corner; these officers were so successful in detaining suspicious persons that they ultimately got in trouble for it, accused of (and admitted to) making arbitrary arrests in order to fill a quota the police department had set out for them³³. Mauro also explained that the Parks department was skillful not only in its landscaping but in its programming; after the opening of the renovated “oval”—the green which replaced the older convergence of diagonal pathways in the park center—the park had programs for every weekend night in the spring, summer, and fall. The City also reopened the bandstand as a restaurant on the northern end of the park in 1986; thus, concessions and programming ensured further surveillance of the park and the ready identification of people who didn’t “belong” there—those who were uniformly termed criminals, some of whom were simply poor. Finally,

³¹Oser, Alan. “Ladies Mile Plan Kindles A Debate” NYT. 11/23/86.

Interview, Laurence Mauro, 4.10.99 and 4.19.99.

³²National Historic Landmark Nomination and supporting correspondence: 1997. Interview, Laurence Mauro, 4.10.99 and 4.19.99.

³³Interview, Laurence Mauro, 4.10.99 and 4.19.99.

Emery, Richard . “The Even Sadder New York Police Saga” NYT 12/12/87

Parks installed wooden park benches whose iron armrests in short intervals ensured that no tired person would be able to lie prone on them.

Projection Proposal and Response

At the time that these renovations were well underway, Wodiczko was approaching Parks and Recreation about a proposal for projections in Union and Washington Square Parks. He had already done projections on buildings and monuments which had earned him international attention: Brooklyn Parks had accepted his proposal in 1984 for the projection of missiles and a lock and chain on the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch, and he had just completed a project for which he had and would earn considerable attention: in course of a projection on Nelson's Monument in Trafalgar Square, London, in 1985 he had aimed one of his projector beams at the south African Embassy and has projected a swastika onto its pediment³⁴. In the light of these interventions, the projection of casts on park monuments seemed relatively tame.

As Elise DeMarco has described, he had a rigorous approval process to follow before he could unleash his projections³⁵. First, the artist has to be able to prove to the Public Art Director that the structure or performance he or she proposes will be safe; that they can provide for any necessary cleanup; that the site they have chosen is even permissible for temporary structures or installations; and that nothing will be permanently disturbed in the park itself. Then, they have to get permission from the community board and any local business groups—interesting in itself that BIDS or their equivalent would have as much power as elected and appointed officials in the approval process. And finally, the proposal must be approved by Henry Stern, Parks Commissioner, who is himself appointed by the mayor. Immediately there were two issues which halted the Wodiczko project: the monuments were maintained by veterans groups, a fact that DeMarco maintained would make the city very reluctant to allow any artist to do anything remotely controversial which involved these statues, for fear of enraging their caretakers. And next, the commissioner is notably sensitive to politically motivated activities, especially in sites where reconstruction and community conflict is at stake, and especially when the installation is critical of city

³⁴ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *Public Address*. 113-115.

³⁵ Interview, Elise DeMarco, 4.19.99

policy. For these reasons alone, she reported, the project, even if it were to pass the community boards and BIDs, would be denied permission. Wodiczko reported that after going through the process as far as the Washington Square Park community board, and being denied permission, he gave up and instead enacted his projections on images of the Union Square monuments and approached the project as one of subversive urban replanning, giving it the title of “A Proposal for the City of New York.”

Results

The fact that the projection took place instead inside the culturally sanctioned space of the gallery attests both to the power of the city in this instance and the perseverance of the artist. At first I concluded that the relegation of the projection to the space of the gallery was a signal of the failure both of public process and of the artist’s attempt at publicizing his objection to the city’s policies in redeveloping Union Square. However, the fact remains that Wodiczko’s project is widely cited by scholars and social commentators; it was not seen by those passing through the site, an incidental public, and it lost the immediacy of site commentary through its displacement from the park. But it gained a certain validity and the attention of the art and academic world as a result; in one view, that Wodiczko was not allowed to put his projection in the park attests, to the legitimacy of his critique.



11. Map of Tompkins Square Park, New York City, and surrounding area.

TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK

Although city policy ultimately mirrored the strategy taken with Union Square Park, in terms of encouraging reinvestment in the area around the park and evicting the homeless through park renovation and curfew, the case of Tompkins Square Park and Wodiczko's projection project is somewhat different. The most salient differences are that though Tompkins Square Park shares Union Square's legacy of working class protest, it lies in the heart of an established working class neighborhood, the Lower East Side; it is ringed on three sides by residential buildings, and its homeless population was, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, huge: more than 100 residents, its own Tent City. Also, although the city sought to "upgrade" the neighborhood, its efforts towards reinvestment and redevelopment in the area were comparatively feeble; what became important to the city in this case was in many ways the establishment of city law and authority and the protection of certain residential interests in the neighborhood; not the full-scale rebuilding and upgrading of the surrounding area.

In the 1980s in Tompkins Square park, the homeless were in many ways the *defining feature* of this 11-acre site. But although there were more than 100 park residents in Tompkins on any given day (well, on any warmer day) from 1987-1990, many residents had by and large accepted their presence. The community and the homeless had reached a kind of stasis of accepting one another—to be sure, neighbors felt ambivalent about the presence of the homeless, but that ambivalence was expressed more as, the city should provide housing for these people, rather than, these people are all criminals and should be kicked out of the park. There was a greater tolerance here of the homeless, in part perhaps because there was a greater sympathy and awareness of what had led these evicts to encamp in public space. At this time, the neighborhood was increasingly gentrified, but the overall social makeup of the "East Village" as it came to be known by real estate promoters, was of artists, "anarchists," squatters in abandoned housing, blacks and Hispanics, and older working class groups, by this time mostly Eastern European in origin.

Added to this was the more recent influx of white collar workers, many of whom later made alliances with the older working class groups to pressure the city to “do something” about the homeless in the park³⁶.

I should say here that Doris Greshof and John Dale in their essay “The Residents of Tompkins Square Park,” make a convincing case that the homeless in city parks had self-stabilizing qualities which brought their own order to the colony, and which tried to ensure that park visitors were not so threatened by the homeless that they would be kicked out of the park entirely³⁷. The homeless needed the park site badly, and were willing and able to police themselves in order to stay there. After all, once they were evicted from the park, where else could they go? It is naïve to imagine that the homeless could find shelters in the city, and from there be eventually transferred to assisted or subsidized housing in New York: at this time, the city simply did not have the resources to provide shelter for its displaced residents. As Greshof and Dale contend, “by the late 1980s, public concern over what to do about the homeless and frustration with the city’s failure to handle the problem were escalating. Also escalating was the political consciousness of the homeless themselves. In New York a public demonstration at City Hall in December 1988 drew thousands of homeless people and their supporters to protest Mayor Koch’s housing policies”³⁸.

Greshof and Dale also carefully trace the roots of the conflict over the use of the park: residents did not, in the beginning, protest the presence of the homeless. Rather, what was annoying the inhabitants of the surrounding row houses was the late night noise coming from the park, and created by “anarchists,” and visitors from outside the neighborhood who came to enjoy the downtown chic of Avenue A’s nightlife, and often drifted into Tompkins to hear bongo drums, rock bands, or just to “hang out” after the bars had closed. When the city first responded to the pressure of these residents and proposed a curfew for the park, there was no mention of that curfew actually affecting the homeless who had set up their shelters there, and in fact, the Community Board specified that the homeless be allowed to stay. The authors contend that the anarchists and noise makers, who were losing their rights

³⁶Abu-Lughod, *From Urban Village to East Village*, 1994. 275-277.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 265-67.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 269.

to the space, reinterpreted the proposal as meaning the eviction of the homeless, and so sought to build support from the Park's permanent residents to stop the curfew³⁹. This tactic served to quickly escalate the conflict and make the homeless presence newly controversial—it was as if residents were being told that in order to have some peace at night, they must now also push for the eviction of the homeless colony. The controversy shifted further in 1987 to include the newly formed coalition of white collar workers and white ethnic populations, who did indeed want the homeless out of the park; the lines were drawn, by 1988, between the “shock troops” of gentrification-- artists, students, well-educated but low-paid residents—the anarchists and squatters, the homeless, and the “yuppies” and older working class residents. Tensions were so high that in August 1988 the park saw New York's first “riot” in more than 20 years; also known in the area as *the police riot*, on a hot night more than 200 policemen barricaded the park and charged a large group of protestors, beating many of them up⁴⁰.

It was into this melee that our artist, Wodiczko, made his presence felt in a 1988 Exit Art installation which commented on the situation in the Tompkins. Again, Wodiczko was banned from doing anything in the park itself. It should be noted, though, that he had been active in the area while in the process of building his well known Homeless Vehicle, an ingenious device which he made in collaboration with the homeless in the park. It is designed to provide sleeping space, storage space, and some privacy for the homeless, and though the vehicle was controversial for seeming to offer a “solution” to the problem of homelessness in American cities in the late 80s and early 90s, his intention was to call attention to the issue and to provide a prototype for the new class of urban nomads which might, in itself, raise public awareness of the problem⁴¹

So Wodiczko, being thwarted in projecting an image onto one of the park monuments, decided to project instead onto pictures of the park, much as he did in the Union Square installation: but this time he chose to depict groups of homeless, their shelters and possessions, with certain objects projected onto them which changed the nature of the photographs memorably. He chose to project machine guns into the hands of his subjects,

³⁹ Ibid. 278.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp 5, 7, 168-70.

⁴¹ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *Critical Vehicles*. 1999. Pp. 79-82.

antennae at the top of shelters, and plans of the city onto the park chess tables round which groups of homeless men and women were gathered. Underneath these images were titles like, “The Exercise,” “The Barricade,” and “The Briefing.”⁴² The overall effect, to be sure, was one of a guerrilla insurrection being planned and taking place in the Tompkins homeless colony. While the projection project in Union Square Park was intended to produce sympathy and awareness, the installation on Tompkins had overtly military and subversive elements which instead evoked danger, threat, and power. The intention behind it, however, was a play on the term *projection*. Wodiczko explained in an interview that the installation was designed as a response to growing debate about the homeless issue in New York City, and the rhetoric of crime and social pathology which surrounded them. He noted, correctly, that the city resident is often afraid of the homeless, because they occupy public spaces, they embody the propertied resident’s fear of what might happen to him if his luck turned, and they seemingly have nothing to lose. However, as we have seen, the homeless did have something to lose: their access to the Park, to urban public spaces. Their access to Tompkins was severed by the end of 1990 with the same tactics that the City had used to renovate and thus redevelop Union Square Park: the park was closed for renovation, the homeless were evicted, and chain link fences denied access to all but families bringing their children to the playground. When in 1992 the park was reopened, the same strategies for surveillance had been deployed, street lighting put in, and benches installed that were next to impossible to sleep on. The bandstand was taken down, and a midnight curfew vigilantly enforced. Two years after his projection, the very community Wodiczko had documented and had used in his photographs and projections had disappeared.

The noticeable difference between this work and the Union Square Park installation is that it was not reviewed, although reviewers attended the show. There was a resounding silence about the subject matter in the mass media. Although Wodiczko’s installation made use of a number of technical innovations, namely the careful positioning of small and complex projection-images of weapons, which were projected in such a way as to alter the effect of the projections as viewers moved around the space, this too met with silence in New York City press and art circles. What is interesting, however, is that the show was immensely popular internationally, as if by seeing a social problem and construction through the lens

⁴² Ibid. in *Public Address*. P. 80-83

of another country, one community could understand the message and see it more objectively. In part it was the very site-specific, or site-referring, nature of the installation which made it so difficult for New Yorkers to understand and digest. The longstanding nature of the conflict in the Park, the level of tension between the new, affluent immigrants and the established residents in the Lower East Side, and the pitch of the election-year podium-thumping over what to do about the homeless may have made it impossible for this work to be absorbed by the bulk of the visitors to the installation, especially if they felt complicit in the suffering of the homeless and, in fact, afraid of them⁴³.

The very aspects of creative innovation, challenging of received ideas, and commentary on a real and ongoing situation served to hush debate within the gallery-going public. That Wodiczko's work may have been grievously misunderstood is another possibility: it is easy, on simply seeing the images, to think take them at face value, as read the installation as a proposal for the radical empowerment of the city's most dispossessed. In this case, the installation may have served to escalate the conflict between the stakeholders in the park. Although some residents of the park came to the exhibit, and Wodiczko ran a tape of one of them laughing at the images as she saw them, the reception of the installation by affluent residents who had an interest in a "clean" park and the higher property values it would generate is more important. The homeless were almost never the group to provoke conflict: they tended instead to be the group around which conflict raged, while many of them adopted their own policing policies within the park out of an effort to stay⁴⁴.

Part of Wodiczko's motivation is to provoke debate, and he often chooses, as in the cases of Union and Tompkins Squares, hot spots of urban conflict. His two installations under these conditions provoked very different responses: the one praise from academics, art historians, and the left-leaning cultural elite who saw the show; the other silence by establishment outlets and a continuation of the conflict, which soon escalated into the police riot. The end final outcome in both cases was the closing of the park, the renovation of the space, and the eviction of the homeless and subsequent policing of the public area.

⁴³ Interview with Wodiczko, 5.2.99 & follow up on 5.14.99.

⁴⁴ Interviews, with Wodiczko, 4.10.99, 5.2.99 & follow up on 5.14.99.
Abu-Lughod, 175.

In such conditions, Wodiczko's work leaves a legacy in the site and social history of New York City. The important aspect of these two projects is that they framed a moment of conflict within the urban sphere, and, with the use of striking opposition between projected image and figures in the site, served to define the attitudes and roles of the stakeholders, even though they were never enacted in the spaces he referenced.

BUNKER HILL MONUMENT

History

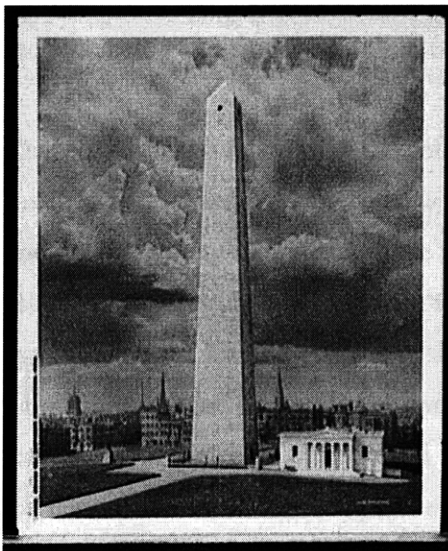
Charlestown, across the river from Boston, was a relatively small, rural community at the turn of the 18th Century. It was and is famous for being the site of the Battle of Bunker Hill during the Revolutionary War, a battle that the revolutionaries lost but which was seen, nevertheless, as a turning point of Revolutionary fortunes: it led to the almost complete demolition of Charlestown, burned by the British, but the heavy casualties of the British signaled that the revolutionaries were a force to be reckoned with. The site became a pilgrimage point for tourists to the Boston area, as George Washington Warren relates in his 1877 history of the buildings of the Bunker Hill Monument:

No stranger visiting Boston would willingly leave without visiting Bunker Hill and now the people living in its vicinity woke up of a sudden to realize to the full extent the immortal fame of the locality....As strangers came to Charlestown to visit the battle field, they often inquired after some of the old residents, who, as witnesses of the event, might relate to them the details of the battle, every year becoming more famous....(the veterans) would often repair in company, as guides of the interested traveler to the consecrated ground.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Warren, 1877. P. 9, 22.

Eventually, in 1823, the Bunker Hill Monument Association formed itself from prominent citizens in Charlestown and Boston. At this time, the town's population was not much more than 7,000, but the new bridge and canal connections to Boston and Western Massachusetts, as well as the siting of the nation's new Navy Yard in Charlestown in 1800, promised that this population would increase. Perhaps sensing the new economic potential of this town, as well as wishing to increase the town's prestige by capitalizing on the battlefield site, the Association aimed to build one of the first battlefield monuments in the United States, and the only one in which would ultimately rest in an urban area.

The choice of the monument and its construction are significant aspects to this history, not only because of the commemorative aspects of the site and its attendant meanings, but to the eventual demographics and development of the site itself; in short, the monument the association chose and built was so expensive that they had to sell off parcels of the actual battlefield and develop housing—Charlestown's first high-density row housing—around it. Bunker Hill battlefield became Monument Square, a small patch of green surrounded by housing. The ambition of the structure itself soon overtook the site, and the resulting spatial arrangements of wealth and power have ultimately played into the situation which Wodiczko documented and protested last fall.



*12. Bunker Hill
Monument, 1902.*

The Monument

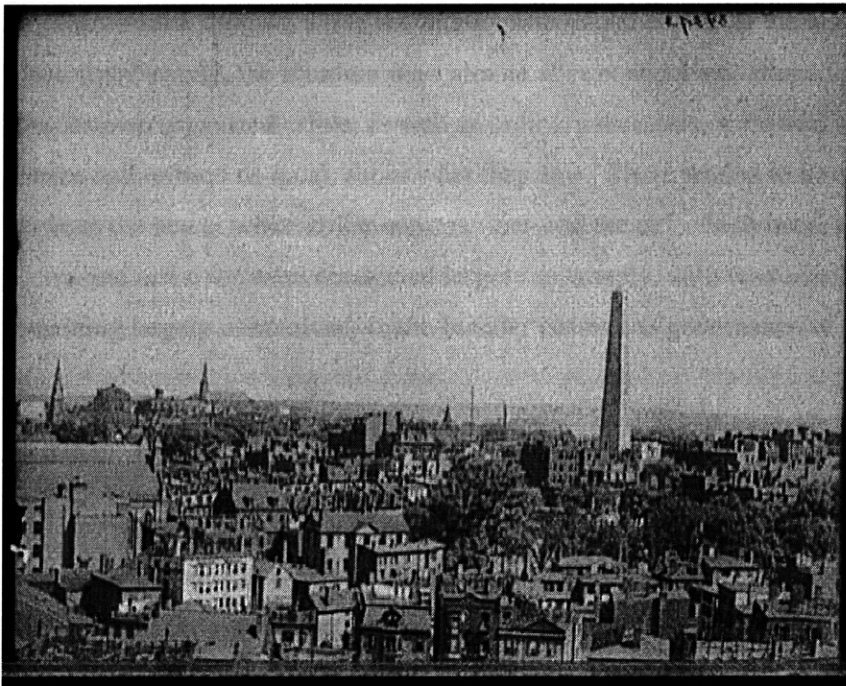
When the Bunker Hill Monument founding Fathers put their heads together and judged the design competition for the proposed monument, the obelisk was virtually unknown in American monument design⁴⁶. The form was a submission by Harvard senior Horatio Greenough, a Boston blueblood like most of the members of the Association, and his interpretation of the form was to be influential in subsequent monument design in the US: its absence of ornamentation, its departure from the then-standard commemorative form of the column, was seen by both him and the judging committee as a more “democratic” commemorative structure. This is somewhat surprising given that the obelisk comes from an ancient Egyptian architectural language, and that the pyramids and obelisks of Egypt were built by despotic rulers and slave labor, and that Napoleon was currently using the form in his own commemorations — but there was a growing fascination with Egyptian relics in the early 19th century, and this, as well as the desire to redefine the monument in American spaces, may have contributed to its choice. The consensus of the Association was that the plainness of the obelisk, the simple stone blocks proposed to build it, were in keeping with American democratic ideals and the with the properties of the New England granite which would, naturally, comprise it. As Greenough put it, the obelisk was to stand atop the battle site’s hill and proclaim to visitors simply, “Here”⁴⁷.

That the form and function of the commemorative monument would be so carefully justified and subsequently debated is not surprising given the political situation at the time and the role of any monument in the built environment. The United States was a relatively new republic, so a certain self-consciousness surrounded the choice of its symbolic forms; leading citizens wished to establish, in many ways, a singularly democratic lexicon of architectural form. At the same time, it was primarily eastward-looking in its choice of architectural vocabulary, so the precedent of France in embracing the new monumental form may have been a factor.

⁴⁶ Katz, Ellen. *Monument Square, Charlestown*. 1983. P.15

⁴⁷ *ibid.* 6

The Bunker Hill Monument was built privately through fundraising efforts, and the Bunker Hill Monument Association, which oversaw its building, eventually ran out of funds in 1831. In order to complete the monument, which stood half-finished on the skyline across from Boston, the Association had to sell off the green space it had bought and broker a real estate deal in return for the finished obelisk. The monument became the only national battlefield site and park to lie in an urban neighborhood, and stands now on 3 acres of land, ringed by a perfect residential square.



13. Bunker Hill and Charlestown. 1890-1910. Photograph.

Charlestown

Charlestown itself became a predominantly Irish immigrant neighborhood in the course of mass migrations in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The spatial zoning of the town remained relatively intact, with more stable working class families situated near the top of Monument Hill, and poorer residents living to the northeast, closer to the industrial jobs at the Navy Yard. The slow dispersal of industry from New England and the closing of the yard in the late 1960s led to high levels of unemployment and poverty in the neighborhood, and Charlestown developed a reputation for organized crime which was widely recognized

by Boston area residents by the early 20th century. Charlestown also got national coverage in the 1970s for its violent demonstrations against school busing⁴⁸.

The 1980s, again, saw a gradual shift in the demographics of the town. Increasingly, affluent, educated white collar workers moved into the Monument Square area and the section south of the hill, close to Cambridge and the Boston bridge. By the time Wodiczko set up his projectors, the process of gentrification was well established, but tensions existed between older and newer residents: theft in the area was increasingly targeted toward yuppies, while the murder rate remained one of the highest in the region. More significantly, the murders were almost always unsolved, allegedly because Charlestown organized crime, as well as ordinary residents, were said to maintain a code of silence and refused to speak about what they saw. There tended to be a great separation between the newer white-collar communities and the older Irish ones, and community events and activities were conducted largely separately, with white-collar residents remaining largely uninvolved in the broader issues and governance of Charlestown⁴⁹.

Bunker Hill Projection

It was into this situation that Wodiczko first stepped, initially planning some kind of projection on the site for the Institute of Contemporary Art's "Let Freedom Ring" event in September 1998. On learning more about the high murder rates, the silence on the hill, and the code of silence on the flat, he decided to tackle the subject of crime, murder, and mothers who have lost their sons in the community. Meeting with community members, he told them what he had in mind, showed them his past work, and asked them to participate. What he discovered was that this process was very much based in what he calls a therapeutic model, or in psychology. Unlike most of his past collaborative work, where he asked the homeless to be his models and his consultants in the development of his Homeless Vehicle, Wodiczko found that a slightly different form of relationship was required of this project: it was the process by which these women, many of whom had never spoken in a public forum before, discovered how to speak about their most painful

⁴⁸ Keyes, Lang. *The Boston Rehabilitation Program*. 1970. overview.

⁴⁹ Keyes, Lang. cit.

experiences. Wodiczko used sound for this project, an innovation in his tactics which he had only used once before in a projection on the City Hall Tower in Krakow, 1996. In Krakow, the voices of several women and two men spoke about issues of abuse and addiction while projected images of hands engaged in everyday gestures—wringing a rag, peeling a potato, smoking a cigarette⁵⁰. Like the Bunker Hill project, the voices referred to landmarks and geographical areas in the square where they were projected, situating the viewer and the speaker back in ‘real time’ and ‘real space’⁵¹. By referring back to what the viewer knows is permanent, to what exists in and around the square, Wodiczko’s subjects engage the witness directly with their narrative, and the embodiment of the monument becomes more real. In this complex play between viewer, space, image and speaker, and in the memory required of the viewer to record the temporary event, there exists a redefinition of the public space. The usually silent monument now speaks, and speaks with the narratives of voices usually silent in that space. The site is repopulated and the meanings of monuments reconstituted to show, in a brief but intentionally haunting instant, the hidden interactions between a historical site, its visitors, and their relationships to each other. In this configuration of a public, Wodiczko forms relationships between audience and subject that is much more intimate and immediate than in his previous works. In order to show this here, I have included a portion of the installation transcript:

Michael Macdonald: ...But he was eventually murdered. He had a minor wound that could’ve been treated.. they could’ve dropped him in front of a hospital...but his partners in crime had gotten all they needed to get from him.. he was the one who did the work running with the money...And they strangled him to death and stuffed him in trash bags and stuffed him under the seats in the getaway car... He was found dead in the getaway car in Somerville; the next neighborhood over from here. He was found on Mystic Ave⁵².

One can see from the content that the stories were not easy to tell. Wodiczko recounted speakers coming to his studio, beginning to tell their story, then bursting into tears, leaving

⁵⁰ Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *Critical Vehicles*, 1999. 68-73.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 72-3

⁵² From videotape of event, Center for Advanced Visual Studies, MIT.

and coming back again⁵³. The participants to whom I spoke reported that it was helpful to think of themselves as a monument during the recording of the projection, to take on the form and high objective position of the monument. In addition, the participants found that community members reacted strongly to their participation; while it angered several prominent members of the community, it also brought grieving mothers to a closer coalition in the already existing advocacy group for mothers of murdered children in the community.

Institutional Roles

The project almost certainly would not have occurred without the sponsorship of the National Parks Service, which manages this site. The Bunker Hill Monument Association was strongly against the project; leaders in the association would deny that the projection was actually taking place. Many residents around the square were silently opposed, as well; houses were habitually dark on the nights the projection was shown, and residents voiced ambivalence and muted disapproval of the project⁵⁴. It was also the determination of the ICA leadership to sponsor the project which ensured its showing—the “Let Freedom Ring” site-specific art installations and performances were given over to the director of ICA for the first time in 1997, so the institution had an interest in the show being a success, a factor which further points to their leadership’s tenacity⁵⁵.

CONCLUSIONS:

THE MOMENT, THE MONUMENT, THE MEDIA:

REARRANGING TYPICAL NOTIONS OF PUBLIC SPACE

Wodiczko differs from Holzer and Benetton in that his work can only exist in the site that was chosen for it—it changes dramatically if it is forced to move, as in the case of the Union Square project, to the interior and aspatial world of the gallery. Wodiczko’s work relies on an instantaneous recombination of existing elements in a public site by dealing with historical memory and the discourse taking place at the time in or around the site

⁵³ Interview, 4.10.99

⁵⁴ Interviews, Lane, B., National Parks Service, 3.16. 99

⁵⁵ ICA website.

itself. He reappropriates the traditional role of the monument as timeless, laden with eternal value and representative of national ideals, the commemoration of a 'big public' to show a marginalized, 'small' public. That he does so with ghostly imagery, reworking the instruments usually given to high-tech sound and light shows, itself suggests the phantom qualities of both official and unofficial voices in commemorative architecture. The very impermanence of the work demands the resources of personal memory of the viewer just as it depends on the more traditional models of dissemination, the print and broadcast media, to both publicize the coming moment and to stabilize it in the city's social and spatial history.

By looking at the progression of Wodiczko's work in these cases, we can see that his use of technological tools was part of his process of interrogation. The first cases were simple photographs with images superimposed upon them. In this sense, he used existing formulas of media representation-- the photograph, the graphic, the image-- and by projecting these onto sculptural or architectural elements changed the image and the architecture, and simultaneously changed the historical meanings associated with the permanent or concrete "receiver" of the work. Although the tactic was similar in the Bunker Hill projection, Wodiczko advanced his own questioning of the medium in this case by further "embodying" the monument with life: he pushed the limits of more sophisticated projection technology to create a monument which was, for a few evenings, surprisingly alive, and alive with the moving images and voices of Charlestown residents. The recombination in this case effected a shift not only of what a public space and monument is for, but who has a right to it, and what they may use it for: the messages of the speakers were personal, they spoke of their specific experience, and this experience was made visible from miles away.

In this sense, Wodiczko makes a new interrogation of what public signifies. In the classical notion of public sphere, speech takes place in the city at prescribed times and places. The Athenian concept of debate is one which is still very much embedded in public space as an idealized use and structure for civic speech; that is, that there are designated spaces for debate over civic issues; that these spaces are used according to prescribed rituals by which the individual earns access and the right to speak, and is asked to speak following specific formal structures (rhetoric) and at specific times. That Wodiczko's subjects followed none of these prescriptions, that they spoke at night, 'through' their images, the

artist and the monument, is in itself a reworking of the notion of public. That they were relatively marginalized citizens, and that no one but the artist (and of course to some degree, the Parks Service and the ICA) had given them permission to speak, also poses the question of who has the right to speak, and by proxy, the right to the site. And finally, that the stories were personal, that the subjects spoke from their own specific experience, that they referenced the site and the neighborhood relative to the monument, worked to make what would otherwise be imaginary and even atemporal real, and situated in both space and time.

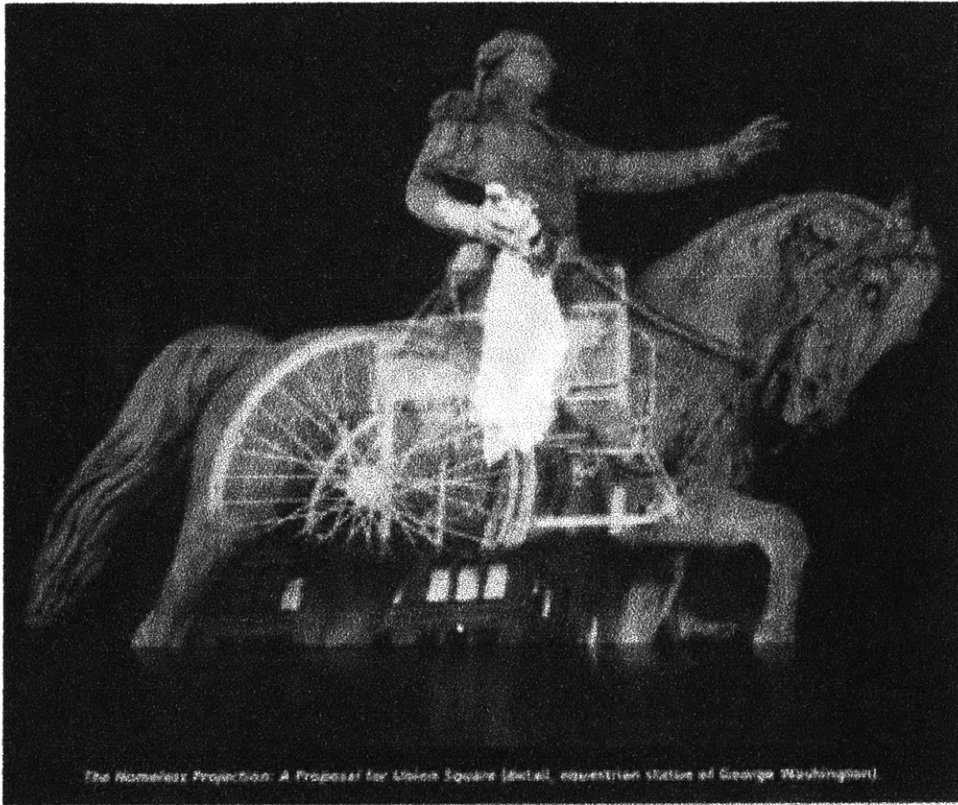
The Wodiczko projection also placed the individual, personal body into the civic memorial: the embodiment was not of an anonymous or symbolic figure, as in the case of Wodiczko's work on previous buildings (an eye on the Bundeshaus, Bern, Switzerland, 1985; the eyes, hands and shirtcuffs of the archetypal Bureaucrat on the R.C. Harris Water Filtration Plant in Toronto, 1988) but of residents of Charlestown, and it included their faces and bodies as well as their voices. The Bunker Hill stories required a process to public confession, but coming from the historical context of a public monument the confession, the emotional processing at work and the activity of public revelation was quite different from the rote public confessional, the spaceless space, of Oprah; by putting private revelation and emotional experiences, ones based in the very history of Charlestown and its spatial construction, and by siting it in the midst of the very spaces of a different kind of silence—the silence of affluent bourgeois which simply refuses to see and become involved in the longer history of the site and which is, perhaps, invested in the continued silence around the organized crime and individual losses.

At the same moment that the projections revealed a brutal, unspoken history of the site, the actual effect of the superimposition of images on the obelisk was fascinating and beautiful. Wodiczko and Holzer have both spoken about their need to create what is aesthetically appealing, what is beautiful, a measure of aesthetic care, in their work. There is a sense of deliberation, so that the overall effect is one of seduction: part of the provocative success of the piece relies in part on its ability to seduce the viewer through the twin tactics of surprise and pleasure.

FURTHER IMAGES

14-15. Bunker Hill Monument projections, Charlestown, MA 1998. Video projected on stone.





15-16. The Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York. 49th Parallel, Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, New York City. 1986. Slides projected on photographs.



17. *Bundeshaus, Bern, Switzerland: projected eye. 1985.*
Projection on Building



18. *Hirschorn Museum projection, Washington, DC, 1992. Projection on Building.*



19-20. *Tompkins Square Park Tableau: Exit Art, 1991.*
Projection on Photographs.



THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR WILL BE SECRET

Jenny Holzer

*Times Square
Messages to the Public
42nd Street*

Jenny Holzer uses words in public spaces to surprise and provoke the reader. Her projects often use public amenities, fixtures, or furniture, in the sense of objects regularly encountered by in the street, as the “tablets” or broadcast points for her work. Some notable examples are her use of the Times Square LED sign in New York; the inscription of short phrases on flyers, parking meters, and public phones; her projections of words on monuments and cityscapes, and her images of inked text on skin. What I will be looking at here will be her installations in Times Square and 42nd Street in the 1980s and 1990s.

Holzer’s work on this site provides a interesting study of the ways in which her installations, initially an innovative reuse of advertising media, came to be adopted by the institutions and economies acting on the square. Her combinations of subjective and universal text in electronic signs – messages which are at once global and intimate, speaking directly to its viewers and asking for their interpretation, also formed a moment in which the discourses of objective and persuasive voices were upturned by the artist’s substitution of second person speech, thereby suggesting a dialogue between the viewer, the medium, and the text. In embedding her text in a spatially dominant electronic sign, she highlighted the monumental qualities of the sign itself and its potential to ‘speak’ to the public, invoking the subjective relationships between viewer and the messages, an dby proxy, to the urban space. Although her work with signs also uses a medium which is spaceless, in the sense that the LED signs are transferable to any pubic space, she began

this process in a location which was, in many ways, defined by signs and their commercial messages¹.

Holzer's use of the LED signs and cinema marquees in New York's Time Square area is representative of her ongoing attempts to put provocative text in unexpected places – or to substitute provocative text for the more expected messages of promotion and information in urban spaces. As she said in a 1989 interview with Diane Walderman, "I wanted to see if I could make anything that would be of use to or have some kind of meaning for a very general audience, somebody on their way to lunch who didn't care anything about art," she begins,²

I started using (electronic signs) because I thought the posters had underground or alternative connotations and I thought the signs were the official voice of everything from advertising to public service announcements. Plus they're of the world. Also, on the most basic level, it's a good format for conveying writing. That's why they're used for news blurbs, for short bursts of information. Plus I'm attracted to the ways they look. They're modern and they appeal to me the same way they do to a lot of people. They flash and have nice colors and all that stuff.³

Holzer is characteristically reticent about the content of her messages here, and the relationship between her work, the space, and the reception of her words. She notes her preference to using public, outdoor spaces in her work, but on revealing any further intentions behind her first works, she is, like her writing, terse, cryptic, and unforthcoming. However, she does speak of her fascination with the electronic sign and her pleasure in the multiple meanings her work takes on when it is shown in this medium. It is the very aspect of not having control of the work, that it can become something else, or can be interpreted in ways which might be antithetical to each other, that Holzer seems to enjoy in both the medium and its siting. She discusses this below,

¹ Joselit, David. *Jenny Holzer*. Phaidon, 1998 pp. 57-63, discusses the spaceless quality of Holzer's work.

² Walderman, Diane. *Jenny Holzer*. Guggenheim, 1989. p. 15

³ *ibid.* p. 16.

DW: It's difficult now to disassociate any sign form yours. So I have a hard time when I walk around in New York, trying to figure out whether you've written this sign or not. It reverses the way you think about something that is in the real world. I would assume that you like this aspect of it.

JH: I like that kind of confusion. I also like when my material literally is mixed in with advertisements or pronouncements of some sort or another. That lends a certain weight to my things, makes them part of the real mix of life. It also creates some very funny juxtapositions⁴.

Holzer notes here that she is dependent, or at least enriched, by a certain amount of chance encounter and unlooked-for nuance in her work as it is shown in outdoor spaces: the text-rich, sign-rich outdoor space is one in which her work surprises and is itself surprised into its possible meanings. I should qualify this discussion by saying that I am speaking primarily of her early work here; her later work is more insistent on its role as transmitter of a particular message of protest to the viewer, though the content of even this later work is presented from multiple points of view. But I am concerned here with her earlier works, the ones which ended up on the Times Square Spectacolor (in 1982 and 1986) and were revived, in 1993, on the 42nd Street Lyric movie marquee and others along the block. Both of these sites' texts were drawn from Truisms, which Holzer wrote between 1977 and 1979. Holzer has called them "mock-cliches;" they are a series of terse, global statements, listed alphabetically and referring to generalized emotional states and proffering judgements about class, the economy, character, and prescriptives for human behavior. The images at the end of the chapter show some of her Truisms printed on a T-shirt. The series includes statements, listed together and often sequentially, like:

***ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE
IT IS THE FATE OF MAN TO OUTSMART HIMSELF
IT'S CRUCIAL TO HAVE AN ACTIVE FANTASY LIFE
IT'S NOT GOOD TO HOLD TOO MANY ABSOLUTES
IT'S NOT GOOD TO OPERATE ON CREDIT***

***KILLING IS UNAVOIDABLE BUT IT'S NOTHING TO BE PROUD OF
KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE ADVANCED AT ALL COSTS
LACK OF CHARISMA CAN BE FATAL
MORALS ARE FOR LITTLE PEOPLE
MOST PEOPLE ARE NOT FIT TO RULE THEMSELVES
MURDER HAS ITS SEXUAL SIDE
PEOPLE WON'T BEHAVE IF THEY HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE
ROMANTIC LOVE WAS INVENTED TO MANIPULATE WOMEN
SIN IS A MEANS OF SOCIAL CONTROL
SLIPPING INTO MADNESS IS GOOD FOR THE SAKE OF COMPARISON
SLOPPY THINKING GETS WORSE OVER TIME
YOU MUST HAVE ONE GRAND PASSION
YOUR ACTIONS ARE POINTLESS IF NO ONE NOTICES
YOUR OLDEST FEARS ARE THE WORST ONES⁵***

As we can see from this sample, the Truisms are often internally contradictory (and, in the case of “it’s not good to hold too many absolutes,” self-repudiating,) and shift between statements which may be readily acceptable to ones which may be shocking. For example, readers who knows a little pop psychology might gamely allow that “your oldest fears are the worst ones,” but find “murder has its sexual side” to be a jarring and unpalatable “truth”. Holzer’s strategy of setting these truisms into a uniform, sequential format, as she did in her first Truism project when she pasted up posters in the style of ad- or event-flyers throughout rapidly-gentrifying Soho and lower Manhattan, served to bring all of these accepted or unspoken “truths” up for renegotiation. The other function of her work is its implicit questioning of authority, and in this sense I mean the authority of language, the text and the sign, the authority of received ideas, the authority of the artist, and finally the authority of mass media and its attendant technology.

In this last instance I am referring to her deliberate move from what she described as more recognizably subversive, “street” model of disseminating information (“the posters had underground or alternative connotations”) to the LED display: from what she aptly termed

⁴ Ibid. 16.

⁵ Joselit, David et. al. *Jenny Holzer*. Phaidon, 1998. 116-126.

“lower anonymous’ to “upper anonymous”⁶. Since Times Square hosted her first such work, and it was and is a vitally kinetic and charged public urban space, I will examine her work at this site first.

TIMES SQUARE

DECADENCE CAN BE AN END IN ITSELF

DECENCY IS A RELATIVE THING

-Truisms, 1977-79

Times Square is probably the most visible and widely recognized public place in New York City: two reliable sources of its fame, the New Year’s Eve Ball Drop and the Letterman show, are both broadcast to wide audiences, and have helped solidify the square’s presence in a broad American conception of New York. The fact that Americans know Times Square from watching TV has its own functional consonance, in that Times Square itself is at first glance a composite of moving signs and images, a lavishing of light and color on the consuming public: it is a public space looking back at the TV-viewing public, as if it were the “real” kin of the virtual worlds of television.

Such a proliferation of advertising images—billboards, neon signs, and electronic displays, all employing increasingly advanced technology to create their special effects—is also the outward manifestation of the Times Square economy. The square is lined with buildings whose tenants include CBS, NBC, CNN and MTV; the theater district reinforces the sense of spectacle; and of course, the adjacent red light district generates a spectacle of its own as it offers its products for consumption. As a locus for advertising images, Times Square has developed its own formal syntax: it is a square made up of signs, its formal predilections moved forward by the competition between advertising companies and sign owners to have the best technology, the biggest sign, the most innovative effects, and the most striking messages. And somehow, Times Square has been so encouraging of this rivalry of display that it has taken on consumerist imagery as something intrinsic to it.

⁶ Joselit, David et. al. *Jenny Holzer*. 26.



21. *Aerial—Times Square 1993*



22. *The NYPD sign, c. 1998*

Form

Times Square is not really a square—it is more of a glorified intersection. It stands at the confluence of Broadway, 7th Avenue, and 42nd Street. The downtown trajectories of Broadway and Seventh cross each other here and form a star shape in the street grid—I should note that in the lexicon of New York City avenues, this is the symbolic intersection of Fashion (7th Ave.) and Theater (Broadway). The intersections also form two triangle apices within the city blocks, which eventually produced two wedge-shaped buildings facing each other across the square. Perhaps it is the friction between two spatially dominant sites which has produced the rivalry of display in the square—but be that as it may, both apices command extensive views of Manhattan and have high visibility from the avenues, and both harbor electronic signs and billboard or electronic advertisements.

Spectacolor, 1 Times Square

Within this urban form, the Spectacolor sign on the façade of the southernmost wedge-shaped building, at the apex of 1 Times Square, holds spatial as well as textual authority. Not only does it stand on a site of power, as I've discussed above, it also confronts the southward flow of traffic from both avenues, stands above the 42nd Street subway station for the 1,2,3 and 9 trains, and it has since its inception offered a constant textual flow of advertising and news messages, acting in this capacity as a running source of information for the square. It has since been updated, but in the late seventies and early eighties, it was a 20 by 40 foot board about 60 feet above the sidewalk, an LED (lighted electric diode) of

lighted yellow text on a black background⁷. The board produced letters about 5 feet high. All of these factors afforded its messages high visibility in the square at a time when lighted sign technology was certainly advanced, but not to the point of late 90s video-display-screen sophistication: the relatively straightforward, by current standards, large-text display had the psychological power of technical authority even as it took advantage of the spatial dominance of its siting and used its position to become a “voice” for the square, conferring upon itself the jurisdiction of the “objective voice” by reporting current events along with ads⁸.

MESSAGES TO THE PUBLIC IN SPECTACOLOR

It was within this spatial constellation, then, that Jenny Holzer used the media of authority to promote her work from lower anonymous, as I have said, to upper anonymous. In seeking to retain a sense of authorlessness in her work --the universal quality of her text, the imperative and absolutist language—she secured the authority of the sign itself, and to use it to her own ends. To say that she enacted a kind of subversion of the authority of the sign would be correct, but it would also be correct to say that the Spectacolor, and by proxy Times Square as a public space, soon absorbed this opposition in its midst: the sign is now well known for its broadminded and indulgent hosting of artists’ messages, to the extent that the Times Square Visitor’s Center has a video tape running which documents all the artists from Holzer on who have used the sign in the last 20 years. But this permanent exhibit in itself is testimony to how the artist (undisputedly with the help of subsequent work by other artists) by enacting a temporary installation in the square, contributed to the evolution of both the Spectacolor sign’s and Times Square’s images of itself.

As one of the first artists to use the Spectacolor board, Holzer not only created a precedent for the sign but began to redefine the space and function of Times Square itself. Deploying her “Messages” in the midst of the commercial bustle of the square, hoping to mistaken for either of two very different kinds of authority—that of advertising and that of news broadcast— she inevitably reflected the workings of these forms of authority back to the square itself, and suggested, ultimately, a divergent authority, that of the tenaciously subjective voice, that of the artist and, transactionally, the viewer.

⁷ Joselit, David, et. al. *Jenny Holzer*. 1998. P. 61.

⁸ *ibid.* 61-2.

In order to look at this more closely, and to begin to examine the specific impact of Holzer's work in Times Square, it might be useful to look first at a detail of it: how did the title of the erstwhile "Truisms" series transform into "Messages to the Public" once on a Times Square LED? Clearly, Holzer was very aware of the "upper public" nature of her work here, and the title brings up, again, questions around for which public and what kind of public this was a message. Diane Walderman introduces the idea that there are multiple ways to "read" Holzer's work in her introduction to the 1989 Guggenheim monograph:

Holzer is one of the most visible artists on the contemporary scene: much of her work is by definition presented in public surroundings. Couched in accessible language, it seeks public response. Location is part of its content, as it was part of the content of her predecessors, the Minimalists. Unlike much Minimalist sculpture of the sixties, however, Holzer's art can be both site-specific and self-sufficient, a part of a public arena and an entity unto itself. Therefore the viewer can experience Holzer's work as a member of group, on a public level, or interact with it in a more private, intimate way.⁹

But I would amend Walderman's idea that the multiple readings of Holzer's work lie in its ability to be "site specific and self-sufficient" to say that the nature of her text makes it at once universal (big public) and subjective (small public), and that her use of forums for advertising and news further underscores her deliberate fracturing of a "public." The multiple readings of her truisms are possible in and of themselves, but their meanings are further altered by the site and the medium. The very arrangement of the truisms invites questioning by the viewer of received ideas; this activity is necessarily informed by the fact that the messages are conveyed in a forum generally relegated to advertising and news. The Truisms are authoritative, but they make no pretense towards objectivity in the way of news bulletins; and they are persuasive, but in a political and social vein quite different from the more subject-oriented persuasive content of advertising copy. In the end, with the brief intervention of the Times Square project, the viewer was asked to reevaluate the formal characteristics in the language of both advertising and news, the two dominant languages in contemporary urban spaces, and this is where the caesura between publics

⁹ Walderman. *Jenny Holzer*. 1989. p. 13.

takes place. Advertising operates by connecting to the individual and the subgroup; as Schudson has argued in “Advertising, the uneasy persuasion” (1986),

Ads are oddly anticapitalist or noncapitalist, honoring traditions of social solidarity like the family, kinship, and friendship that at least in principle are in conflict with the logic of the market. What is capitalist is that these values are put to work to sell goods, invoked in the service of the marketplace. And what is also distinctively capitalist is that the satisfactions portrayed are invariably private, even if they are familial or social; they do not invoke public or collective values.¹⁰

Schudson’s assessment of advertising as being messages in the public sphere which appeal, primarily, to the individual or subgroup is valuable in beginning to examine both the intersections of public which artists began to challenge in the 1980s, and to look at Holzer’s ability to simultaneously appeal to the subjective and the collective. Her appropriation of the media of advertising to flash such messages as “Torture is Barbaric” was in Situationist terminology a “detournement” of the established role of both the LED sign and the content of advertising. Since Holzer concurrently challenged the formal language of objectivity contained in news media with her truisms with this project, she further obscured what is appropriate and “true” in the public sphere (news media) and what is persuasive and personal in its trajectory (advertising).

Holzer’s choice to use a highly visible site like Times Square, and one invested with commercial messages, further challenged the witnesses of *Messages to the Public* to formulate for themselves their own notion of what the “public” is. Certainly there is contained in her project title the implication that it is she conveying a personal message to the “public,” thereby presenting a transaction between the viewer and the purveyor of the messages. But the messages themselves were chosen from her Truisms with the site specifically in mind: for the Spectacolor project, she chose to post such truisms as “Abuse of Power Comes as No Surprise” “Private Property Created Crime,” “Torture is Barbaric,” “Money Creates Taste,” “Your Oldest Fears are the Worst Ones, and “Often You Should Act Sexless.” These messages become more pointed in the atmosphere of Times Square, gaudy, redolent with consumer messages, dotted with heavy hitting media companies from broadcast agencies to record companies, and acting as a gateway to the long block of sex-

industry businesses on 42nd Street west of the square. Holzer successfully introduced the idea of artist as legitimate conflator of the parallel spheres of personal and political, consumerist and disinterested, big public and small public, in the square, and simultaneously advanced that now well-worn track of suspicion and irony towards the messages of mass media, one which many consumers of such messages are now well acquainted.

The Public Art Fund, Sponsor

In part, the title *Messages to the Public* emerged from Holzer's collaboration with the Public Art Fund in this project. As we have seen from Wodiczko's failed attempts to engage the city in granting permission for works of protest, the forum and the sponsor are crucial to the successful enactment of a countervailing work, no matter how ephemeral it is. The Public Art Fund is a New York City-based organization which sponsors the work of contemporary artists in collaborative and site specific projects, all of which are temporary. Laura Reykovich, Public Relations Director of the Public Art Fund, contends that the temporary nature of the work is in itself a strategy: there is no other way, she says, that the city and the community boards would allow the work of these artists to be shown in the city. Having recognized this salient fact, the Fund has on its staff and board cultural and political heavyweights; its founder was Doris Freedman, once director of the Commission on Cultural Affairs and well connected to the well-connected and politically powerful Municipal Arts Society; the Fund's current president is her daughter Susan Freedman, who is also on the board of the City Parks Foundation. Part of the Fund's success, Reykovich readily admits, is the fact that the organization has close ties to the city government as well as the city's more influential private groups concerned with culture and public space, and that it works to keep these relationships positive. Reykovich herself came from the Public Art office of the city's Parks and Recreation, and is intimately familiar with the processes necessary to get approval from Parks for a work of art. It is testament to the power of the Fund that they have a permanent rotating public exhibition space in, naturally, the Doris Freedman Plaza in the Southeast corner of Central Park. Even so, she admitted that Parks had in fact vetoed for display in the plaza some works deemed too politically charged.

¹⁰ Schudson, M. *Advertising, the uneasy persuasion*. 1986. p 22.

The Fund not only commissions the work, but helps the artist get the necessary permissions from the city and also fabricates the piece. “We act like a film production company,” Reykovich explained, putting a nice commercial twist on her organization’s mission, “we help produce the work, we do the PR.... It’s like a multi-faceted production company, not ‘plop art.’” In light of the permissions required—the artist must get approval from the city, must be able to fulfill extensive safety requirements, and must then get approval from the community boards and any existing business improvement associations or other powerful community groups-- this kind of help for an artist in navigating what Reykovich herself referred to at one point as a “bureaucratic nightmare” is significant¹¹.

As I’ve said, the Fund employs a strategy of transience to show contemporary art to a wider audience in New York City public spaces. But interestingly, it also uses advertising forums as another strategy to circumvent the necessary processes of permission-seeking altogether, and to get the art out into the city. After the Holzer project, the fund continued to use the Spectacolor sign, and has since used such forums as the bus wrap and the billboard to purvey art works. The Fund has established, institutionally, relationships with advertisers, from whom Reykovich explains they also have to seek approval but who regularly allow the work of artists in their “spaces.” The formalized collaboration between advertisers and a cultural organization bent on giving contemporary art a wider audience reveals two significant aspects of showing public art in New York at the end of the twentieth century. One, that the processes of attaining city and community permissions have led non-profit organizations to choose erstwhile “private” forums to display artworks in public points to the prohibitive nature of city policy and the discouraging aspects of a public procedure that is frankly political. And two, that the link between ads and art has been institutionally established, whether from preference or necessity, and this further blurs the boundary between cultural and consumer commodification. If the Public Art Fund has advertising space practically on call, does the artist use this forum to reach their audience in a deliberately unexpected way, or is the artist essentially advertising him- or herself? And if the content of the work is made more provocative by its showing on a billboard or LED, is it not also taking on some of the qualities of the medium and changing protest to the persuasion of consumerism? I will explore these issues further in from the perspective of the advertiser, a.k.a. Benetton, but will limit myself now to a discussion of Holzer’s use of advertising media in her work.

¹¹ All from interview with Laura Reykovich, Public Relations Director of the Public Art Fund. 3/17/99.

Using Signs: Artist as Advertiser

As we know now, the choice of the LED display was not innocent, and I would argue in fact that it opened a window into the possibilities for convergent roles in art, advertising, and protest. The motivation behind Holzer's use of the medium was, in part, that it might be mistaken for advertising. The mixing of her messages with commercial messages, as well as the more official messages of news bulletins, gave her work a different set of values, and tended to add to the surprise factor which Holzer enjoyed in the siting of her work: one thing which she wanted in the piece was that it not be seen as art, per se—for her text, *Truisms*, to firmly sit in a public space rather than a gallery meant that it would be perceived differently. As Holzer has said, "it's hard to shock an art audience... There may be a greater chance with the outdoor work that you might startle people so much that you have some hope of changing their thinking a little bit, or even prompting them to take some kind of action. You might have an incrementally better chance of altering something in the world with the public stuff just because you reach more people, and because the content of the writing is taken at face value, it is not dismissed as art"¹². Here we see Holzer's explicit intention to startle, provoke, and produce political and social change in using the medium, but there is the additional intention to persuade, so suited to the medium and so seductive in itself: "It's just taking care... and seduction. Careful seduction," she explains in her interview with Walderman.¹³

If Holzer's goal, then, was to incorporate her words into everyday life, and to try, by adopting the medium of mass advertising, to surprise her viewer into understanding her message in a very different way, her choice of advertising venues was also one intended both to seduce and to disseminate her work. As Walderman notes,

The LED boards have allowed Holzer to reach an even larger audience than she had commanded earlier. And through their programming capabilities she is able to evoke nuances of meaning and to elaborate on her social and political views and her ideas about other aspects of life. Moreover they are

¹² Walderman, Diane. *Jenny Holzer*. 1989. p. 16-17.

¹³ *Ibid.* 18.

eminently suited to the device of repetition which Holzer often uses with her swift, accessible consumerist language to persuade the viewer effectively.”¹⁴

But Walderman has also noted her confusion now over what is Holzer and what is the work of other artist, and what is pure advertising. That the distinctions have blurred is especially relevant to the evolution of Times Square and a commercial and social space. What is also relevant is the deliberate blurring in other arenas, as in Holzer’s production of T-shirts, baseball hats, pencils, condom wrappers, and posters, admittedly to a limited audience but nevertheless a frank appropriation of the formulas of mass dissemination—this time, of her work¹⁵.

Holzer’s language and signs have become, beyond a way of at once contesting and reinforcing the symbolic aspects of the sign in the urban realm and the role of the sign as a “new monument” as Venturi and Scott-Brown have argued, but also a signature stamp¹⁶. The very act of marking an object or space with provocative phrases has become to some degree intrinsic to her oeuvre, has made her immediately recognizable, and marks her presence as a crossover between popular and counter culture, high and low art.

TEN YEARS LATER AND FURTHER DOWN THE BLOCK: HOLZER AND THE NEW 42ND STREET

Holzer revisited the Spectacolor once more in 1986 with her Survival Series, but it was her reappearance in a group show which used the shop fronts, marquees, and abandoned theaters of 42nd Street between 1993-4 which marked a decisive moment in the history of Times Square, and in the role of artists in its political economic development. That Holzer had been one of the first artists to “intervene” in the commercial activities of Times Square makes it particularly interesting to look at the ways in which the area changed in the 10 years between her first foray into the site and her most recent one. In the case of the 1982

¹⁴ Walderman, Diane. *Jenny Holzer*, 1989, second edition. P. 11.

¹⁵ Joselit et. al. *Jenny Holzer*. 1998. Pp 24-27.

¹⁶ Venturi, Robert and Denise Scott-Brown. *Learning From Las Vegas*. 1977.

Spectacolor project, we can map Holzer's welcome transgression between the defined spheres of artist and ad-man, and speculate on its larger implications, notably the increasing use of advertising forums to display artwork, be it from preference or political necessity. But in the case of the 42nd Street Art Project, the connection between larger commercial and economic interests and the intervention of artists is more clear, and the complimentary co-option of the work of artist by the commercial interests in Times Square is manifest.

In 1993 Creative Time, Inc, a non-profit arts organization whose goals are similar to those of the Public Art Fund but whose connections to city officials and powerful advocacy groups are more tenuous, saw its collaboration with the City's Economic Development Corporation and the 42nd Street Development Project bear fruit. Together, these groups mounted the "42nd Street Art Project" which over the span of two years took over spaces on 42nd Street, from its juncture with Times Square on Broadway to 8th Avenue. Financing? This project was made possible with the help of Discus Athletic Wear, to which the 42nd Street Development Project sold advertising space on 42nd Street for \$100,000¹⁷.

Forty-Second Street between 7th and 8th Avenues has been until very recently the hub of the sex industry in New York City. Other blocks in the area devote some space to it, but it was this corridor, historically the entry point of sailors landing on the West Side piers in midtown into the city, in which sex-related business has been documented as early as 1909¹⁸. It was also, in the early 20th century, a popular (in every sense of the word) theater district, but business eventually moved to Broadway and the theaters, many of them quite impressive in both their architecture and their interior ornamentation, fell empty if they were not taken over by X-rated theaters. The area and the sex industry itself has been seen by many as a "blight" on the economic power of Times Square.

¹⁷ Vogel, Carol. "In Times Square, Art Conquers Kung Fu." *New York Times*, 7/7/93.

¹⁸ Rich, Frank. "Times Square is but 1 Symbol of New York" *NYT* 12/26/94.



23. *Holzer Movie Marquee, 1994, on 42nd Street.*

Holzer predictably comes out on the side of the underdog in her contribution to the project; she put her Truisms back to work in Times Square, and on the old theater marquees between 7th and 8th she lettered pointedly, “WHAT URGE WILL SAVE YOU NOW THAT SEX WON’T?-- HIDING YOUR MOTIVES IS DESPICABLE. --EVERYONE’S WORK IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT--MURDER HAS ITS SEXUAL SIDE.”

Her contribution to the project, typically, was highly visible and used a venue normally reserved for advertising to deliver its message. It protested the generally prejudiced view of sex workers on the strip and implicated the clients and visitors on the street in the relationship between sexual domination and violence as well as in the process of passing judgement on sex workers without first looking either at their own actions or their own involvement in the economy of the area.

But taken as a whole, the art project in the space served the very interests which Holzer protested: the 42nd Street Development Project, the Economic Development Corporation, and the increasingly powerful Times Square Business Improvement District (BID) which helped finance the 42nd Street Project, were all interested primarily in shutting down these businesses. The alliance between big business, real estate, and state politics has been well documented in the anthology work, Policing Public Sex which explores the way in the

which New York City and State invoked the rhetoric of community to enact what was essentially a real estate deal and close down the sex-related businesses on the strip and throughout the area¹⁹. Briefly, the Times Square BID in 1993-4 were conducting a survey of the area to try to prove that the “secondary effects” of the sex-industry in the area was dangerous and led to crime. Their work was actually inconclusive, but the BID claimed, nonetheless, that streets with sex related businesses brought crime and negative “secondary effects” (such as urine on the street, drunkenness) to Times Square. David Serlin in this series has made a persuasive case that the actual motivation for the BID, the 42nd Street Development Project or “New 42nd Street,” and the Economic Development Corporation were to raise real estate values for the area while sanitizing the space further for visitors²⁰. By 1993, the New 42nd Street had signed a deal with Disney to take over the New Amsterdam theater on the corner of 7th Ave, and had in turn been given money to renovate the New Victory across the street and turn it into a children’s theater. Under the aegis of historic preservation and cultural enrichment, the push to move sex-related industry off of the street had begun.

That art was co-opted to effect this change is not surprising, but that it should be effective even while protesting the very policies at that moment being enacted by its sponsors is. Serlin at once demolished and dismissed the project in his essay *“The Twilight (Zone) of Commercial Sex”*: “Like the cryptic quotes by artists Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer that adorned old theater marquees and facades along 42nd Street as part of an urban art project, “redevelopment” and “gentrification” are simply buzzwords meant to distract citizens and conceal what’s really behind the ‘facelift’ of Times Square²¹.” The real thing in Serlin’s eyes is the collaboration between the city, state, and real estate developers to raise property values in the area, and by 1995 the city had succeeded in doing just that by passing zoning amendments which effectively closed down commercial sex in Manhattan.

In the 42nd Street Art Project we see the clear strategy enacted with the help of socially concerned artists like Holzer to foreclose on the very practices the artists questioned. Sharon Zukin has explored the issue of culture used for broader economic purposes and gentrification in New York City in her book, *The Culture of Cities*, but on 42nd Street we see that it applies to works of protest just as easily as to more “high” art forms. The

¹⁹ Dangerous Bedfellows. *Policing Public Sex*. 1996. pp 4-8,45-52.

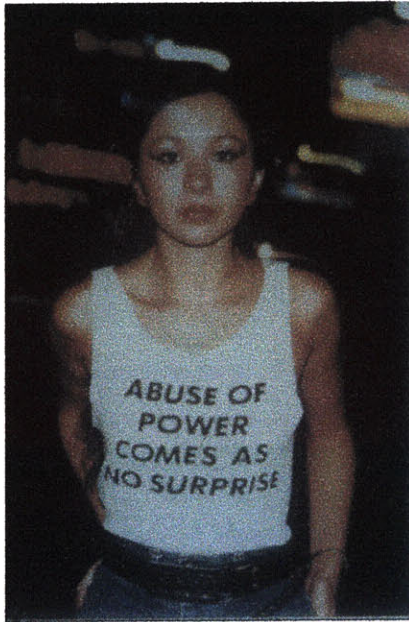
²⁰ Serlin, David. essay “The Twilight (Zone) of Commercial Sex,” *Policing Public Sex*. pp. 45-52.

marquees of Holzer and have been memorialized in postcards in bookshops around New York; they evoke the “old Times Square,” as a site of creativity and transgression, and in their own way, just as the art project itself has, serve to normalize the change in the minds of residents and visitors alike. That artists might intervene in spaces left open for redevelopment, or in those hovering on the brink of it, effectively makes the site and its evolution intelligible to those who have witnessed it, either through the mediating aspects of ‘site-specific’ art, which might uncover latent aspects in the space, or simply through the presence of a cultural imprint on the site, which in itself is a way of placing interpretation onto the built environment.

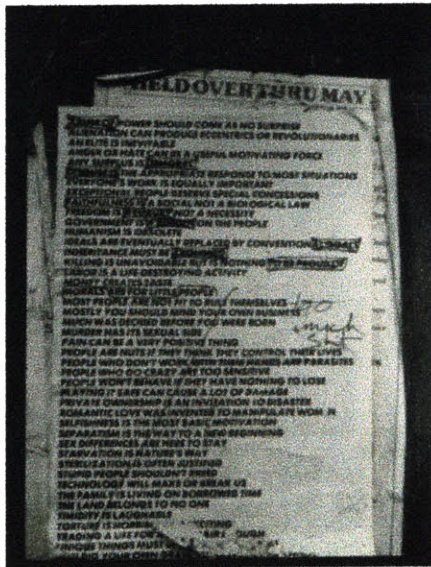
Just as the Spectacolor project opened up a new way of interpreting and integrating art and advertising, it laid the framework by which artists collaborated on an institutional scale with commercial interests in the changing face of Times Square. The 42nd Street Art Project was an adaptation of Holzer’s initial recombination of art, advertising, and the subjective reading: it enlisted artists in the project of stamping the site as one newly open to cultural intervention, and thereby made redevelopment by more powerful cultural/commercial interests possible, because the presence of widespread cultural intervention was already legible within the site.

²¹ Ibid. 48.

FURTHER IMAGES

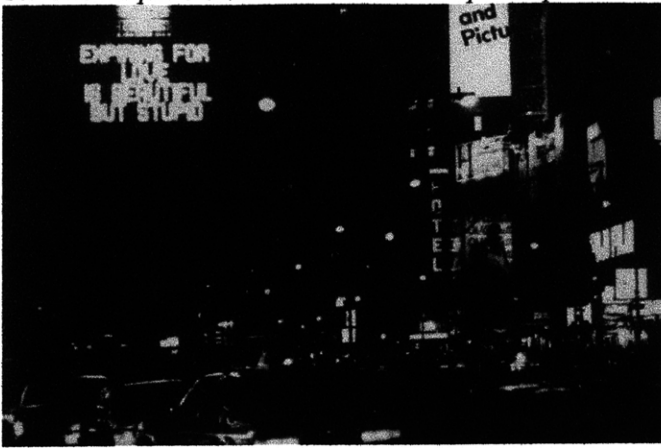


24. Holzer Truism on T-shirt, c. 1983.



25. Truisms poster with editorial suggestions, 1978.

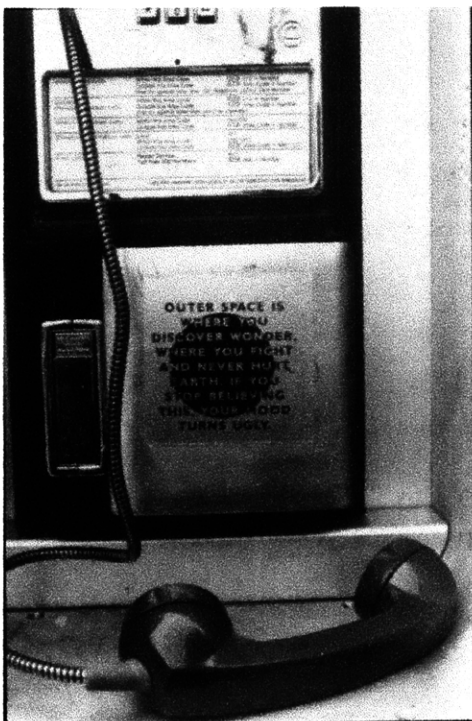
26. *Times Square Truisms—1982. Times Square Spectacolor LED sign.*



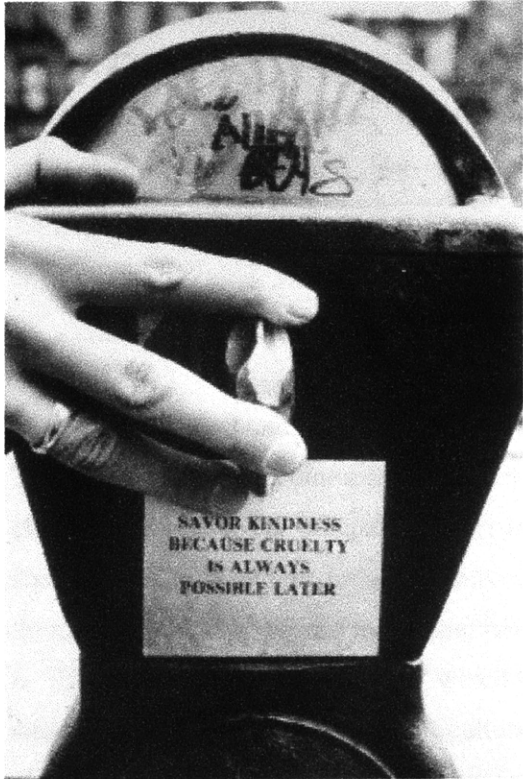
27. *Times Square Truisms, 1982. Times Square. Spectacolor LED sign.*



28. *Times Square Truisms, 1982. Times Square Spectacolor LED sign.*



29. *Phone text—from the Survival Series, c. 1987. Sticker.*



30. *Holzer sticker from the Survival Series, c. 1987.*

BENETTON

*The Campaign
Advertiser as Artist
Times Square and Cambridge, MA
Public Uneasiness*

In 1987, Benetton launched an ad campaign under the direction of photographer Oliviero Toscani that was to become a major source of controversy—and publicity—for the Italian clothing company. The company itself, run by Luciano Benetton, an Italian politician and socialist, and his brothers, produces knitwear and sportswear in a range of color and sells through their own boutiques in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the United States. Its older slogan is “The United Colors of Benetton” which has in itself become notorious for expressing a wide-eyed, optimistic vision of multiculturalism and transnationalism in the late 20th century. In these ads, which are still run as a parallel to the newer Benetton Campaign, groups or pairs of persons of different races, cultures, and ages are shown, freshly-scrubbed and facing the camera, wearing Benetton sportswear. The marketing strategy was designed to appeal to a market niche of young, hip, and internationally oriented group.

The new ad campaign got rid of the standard representational models for selling clothing (or any other product) by showing instead politically charged images and placing, in the lower corner of each poster, the company’s name. Gone was any reference to what Benetton was, in fact, selling. Instead, the images, chosen by Toscani, who had complete creative control in the campaign, showed, among other images: a burning car on a city street (reference to terrorism), a man dying of AIDS with his crying family gathered around him, the torso of a black woman nursing a white baby, a nun kissing a priest, and a baby just after birth. The campaign unleashed a storm of controversy. Benetton was at turns praised and reviled for its use of images with social content to sell its clothes; its ads were widely banned; the Vatican filed a complaint; the company’s sales increased markedly. ¹

¹ Tinic, Serra. “Benetton and the Commodification of Social Issues” *Journal of Communication*, summer 1997. P. 10

Essentially what many objected to in this campaign was the co-option of social-issues content and protest tactics—the very same ones used by artists and advocacy groups like Gran Fury, ACT UP, the Guerrilla Girls, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and even Holzer to some extent— by a company in order to sell its product. One must consider that on billboards in urban areas, Benetton was “taking over” work done by all of these groups and artists to surprise and provoke the viewer with socially-charged content; where artists like Jenny Holzer relied on performing a sort of bloodless coup in taking over media (LED signs, movie marquees) usually assigned to advertising in order to relay provocative, critical messages, Benetton was, in effect, enacting a counter-subversion: the forum of protest by which artists encamped temporarily on advertising venues like billboards, posters, and electronic signs, was now adopted by the very media that the artists had adapted to their goals. Toscani and Luciano Benetton insisted that their motives were essentially based around a civic agenda: Benetton said, in a session of the Italian Senate, “I cannot offer solutions to these problems, but if I can made people more aware, then that is all I can offer,” and Toscani, who before the campaign was known for his critical stance on advertising, held that his aim was to “document social realities rather than promote sales” (White, B2, Tinic 9). The company stated in 1992 that:

Using these images in this unconventional way is an effort by Benetton to break through the complacency that exists in our society due to the constant flow of even the most horrendous realities communicated through conventional media such as the evening news of the morning paper. By removing these images from their familiar contexts and putting them in a new contexts they are more likely to be noticed and given the attention they deserve as the viewer becomes involved in the process of answering the questions: What does this image mean? Why does this image appear with a Benetton logo? How do I feel about the subject of the image? What can I do?

Serra Tinic in his essay, “*United Colors and United Meanings: Benetton and the Commodification of Social Issues,*” contends that Benetton has inverted advertising’s traditional role: that of generating revenue in capitalist markets, usually by using idealized imagery of private life with implicit moral and social values attached. Benetton has made the connection to social values both explicit and “public” in the sense of representing social

concerns which are within the purview of politics, policy making, and the larger society. “The debate initiated by [Benetton’s] advertising strategy has less to do with company ideology,” he argues, “than it does with the larger issues of the commodification of social and political issues. In other words, the significance of cultural problems is perceived to be minimized or tainted by their association with the realm of commerce. The implication is that advertising transforms culture into currency and, thus, devalues social experience in a manner dissimilar to other forms of mass media”². But he argues that within a broader context, advertising can be seen as a form of communication and discourse in its own right, and that the Benetton campaign has in fact worked to define the role of advertising within civic discourse. That people are uncomfortable with this trajectory reveals that the ambiguous intentions of trying to act as advocate and salesman meets with innate resistance in many viewers.³

Another aspect of the Benetton campaign that is worth looking at is the fact that Benetton is, in fact, promoting two forms of political resistance, identification, and expression in its ads. On the one hand, the company uses of images which evoke social issues and call for social action—if the viewer were to act on his or her reactions to the content of the images, for instance, on the image of David Kirby, a young man dying of AIDS, I would guess that the forum for taking such action might include: public protest, advocacy drives, letters to politicians, voting platforms, lobbying, and fundraising or volunteering for social service agencies. On the other hand, Benetton also suggests that the viewer can buy a sweater, and like putting on an ACT UP t-shirt, embody his or her personal politics. For embedded in these images are two altogether different set of imperatives: that seeing these images will lead to greater political and social consciousness and ultimately to action, and that by buying and wearing Benetton clothing, will allow the consumer to “embody” the cause, and thus speak, without having to ‘say’ anything, his or her political values.

This of course was a conscious decision on the part of the Benetton marketing team. In promotional material, Benetton held that “Our strategy of advertising is to ‘communicate’ to consumers rather than to sell to them. All over the world, Benetton stands for multiculturalism, world peace, racial harmony, a progressive approach towards serious social

² *ibid.* p. 5

³ *ibid.*, p.3, 11, 22

issues, and colorful sportswear.”⁴ (You may wish to pause to laugh lightly here). Benetton continues with:

Benetton’s strategy for advertising is to communicate in a consistent way in the almost 100 markets we do business. Different markets response to different trends from the collection and are experiencing different climates and seasons at any particular time, therefore it is virtually impossible to represent our 4000-piece yearly product offering in an adequate, seasonally appropriate, representative way throughout the world, Instead, Benetton has chosen to create brand awareness through non-product image advertising that positions the company as a concerned, socially active, cutting edge and global fashion apparel company⁵.

But Benetton’s success in its advertising strategy is based more in its ability to find ‘resonance’ within its targeted audience, whether this is a large or specific cultural group⁶. In this case, the group is largely those between the ages of 18 and 30, affluent, educated, and upwardly mobile, who identify with being “internationally-oriented” and politically concerned, and surprisingly seems to cross cultural boundaries easily; the demographic remains the same in South Africa, India, Europe, and the United States, for instance⁷.

The Benetton sales and marketing strategy, creates an interesting intersection between the notion of public as participant in civic life and pre-existing structures, and the increasingly prevalent notion of “public” being embodied in personal aesthetics and group identification; in the postmodern view of public discourse, what you think and how you participate can be legitimately represented by what you wear, how look, and what you do to your body— protest and discourse finds a field in the semiotics of personal appearance, if you will. Such a view is, of course, intimately related to Baudrillard’s famous (and depressing) contention that in the economy and culture of “late capitalism,” what you consume is, literally, what you believe and who you are: it comprises your individual and group identity. Given that such a view is somewhat disempowering for both the individual

⁴ Benetton, 1992.

⁵ United Colors of Benetton, Press Release, 1993.

⁶ Schudson, *Advertising, the uneasy persuasion*. 1986. P. 169

⁷ Tinic, 9. United Colors Press Kit, 1999.

and for society as a whole, there are elements of it which are in fact not new and which may inform this discussion of forms of protest in the public sphere.

First of all, it is important to note that personal politics as a function of apparel and appearance has its own history: Walter Benjamin has made that case in his discussion of the Parisian flaneur in the 19th Century⁸. But in more recent writings, critics like George Yudice in his essay “For a Practical Aesthetics” have argued that group identity has consistently been used in the 1980s and 1990s as a way to frame protest and generate response. The marketing strategy of Benetton is not so different from those of ACT UP or Gran Fury, which promote group identity in order to frame their advocacy, a situation that Thomas Crow has already predicted in his theory of the movement of innovation from margin to center⁹.

Yudice examines the working of such public protest by asking “Is it possible, then, to speak of an aesthetic dimension that can contribute to change across the terrain of the social formation? I think so, but .. it would be understood in terms of the ‘community counter-practices’ that Trend advocates not only as something that art brings to a community but also as aesthetic practices by which group identity and ethos are formed... But what do I mean by this aesthetic dimension of the process of group formation?.. It consists of the ways in which sets of individuals, marked by certain features socially recognized as common to them, negotiate and manage the heterogeneity of perspectives by which they are variously imaged, valued, and devalued, in this way or that, on the basis of class, sex, race, religion, regional provenance, and other “subject positions”¹⁰ Yudice is defining for us the ways by which the group identity is created, and becomes transposed in to an aesthetic or style, much in the way of ACT UP graphics.

He goes on to say that the politics of identity is “where aesthetics and ethics meet. Understood thus, aesthetics is..defined as an ...ethical practice by which the conscience of our community is the primary catalyst for... policy change... As I understand it, identity politics does not have to mean minoritization, but rather pressure upon the rest of society not just to tolerate, but also to come to terms with a given ethos, to change in relation to it. In the process, aesthetic practices, redefines a practical aesthetics, break loose for the

⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “Paris, Capital of the 19th Century,” in *Reflections*, pp 146-162

⁹ Yudice, George. For a practical aesthetics. *Phantom Public Sphere*. p 228

straitjacket of representation and act to change our circumstances by seizing the public realm”.¹¹ This is precisely similar to the way in which Stuart Hall and Tom Jefferson have set out the traits of the subculture, as one defined by a visual style and agreed forms of behavior within the group. In this sense, the punk movement of the late 1970s was a way of voicing opposition based largely in the outward appearance and behavior of the group, who also identified each other through the visual display of personal style and appearance¹².

ADVERTISER AS ARTIST

When the photographer Oliviero Toscani was given creative control of advertising in exchange for contributing his talents to the marketing of this family-owned Italian maker of sportswear, the artist took the role of advertiser to a new level of discourse around art, advertising, and protest. Toscani, a socially conscious artist who had before spoken out about the evils of advertising, now used this opportunity to launch a series of provocative images for the company, images intended to generate dialogue over political and social issues. The campaign marked a new era for advertising, one which adopted many of the methods of New York artists in the 1980s, who had, like Holzer, co-opted the formulas of mass media and advertising in order to voice protest of city and national policy. The work of such groups as ACT UP, Gran Fury, and of artists like Holzer and Kruger to name but a few, “advertised” their causes and their viewpoints with billboards, bus shelter posters, and in other venues with text and graphics designed to challenge the viewer both aesthetically and ideologically. I have traced in the previous chapter the ways that Times Square absorbed the work of Holzer and her kin and made it part of its image, in turn co-opting the work of the artists to enact policy and planning initiatives for commercial interests. My purpose in examining the Benetton campaign is to approach the same phenomenon from the perspective of an advertiser which itself has taken the rhetoric and imagery of protest and provocation to merchandise itself.

The campaign marked the beginning of an era of “shock advertising,” with Benetton leading the way of major advertisers using provocative imagery in the public sphere. In the course of the early nineties, interest in using the public forum of the billboard and poster revived for major companies, and sales and interest in this form of advertising increased

¹⁰ *ibid.* 219

¹¹ *Ibid.* 227-28

revived for major companies, and sales and interest in this form of advertising increased significantly (NYT, Vogel, 5/6/96). The crossover between art, protest, and advertising had taken a new turn.

Benetton's singular success in the forum took form from the imagery of Toscani and his innovation of changing the methods of advertising from those of displaying and selling a product to selling instead a personal or group-based ideology. Gone was the colorful Benetton sportswear in his campaign, and any wording to convince the viewer to buy the clothes. These tactics were replaced by startling images such as a car on fire, a man dying of AIDS surrounded by his family, a priest kissing a nun, and a black man and white man shackled together. What identified them as being Benetton's was simply the company's logo in the lower corner of the piece.

That the advertisements unleashed a storm of protest and were widely banned in Europe and the United States is proof of both the general attitude towards the role of advertising in the public domain, and the discomfort generated by shifting views of what the public is and might be. Benetton's vision of the public was one in which political views could be "spoken" about not only from seeing their advertisements, but from wearing their clothing: the subjective choice of outward appearance was thus formally launched by the company as one of larger social and political significance. Benetton in a sense cashed in both on the power of provocative images to generate publicity and increase their visibility—from the launch of the campaign, sales went up exponentially while advertising costs went down, since much of their visibility was generated for free by way of media attention-- and on the growing identification as the group as a viable political force and site of protest. Where Gran Fury used the specific characteristics of the subgroup, in this case the codes and identifications of gay American men, to generate their signature works of public protest, Benetton inverts the model, selling a group identity associated with social concern and political provocation to the public, one embodied, literally, in the wearing of its clothing.

Benetton soon began to employ, along with other advertisers, the very tactics of guerrilla protest that artists of the 80s and 90s used: the companies established a policy of going into construction sites and empty lots in urban areas and surreptitiously putting their posters up

on blank walls. Calvin Klein spokesman Andres Vittell explained that the practice was “technically illegal” but that “no one really stops us”¹³.

The company’s work was widely banned, in France, England, the United States, and Germany, the last which ruled, interestingly, that compassion cannot be used to sell commercial articles to the public (NYT 7.8.97). It has also won a number of awards, and the posters themselves have taken on an art-like status, and have been displayed in travelling exhibits in Venice, Mexico, and Switzerland among others (Benetton press kit, 1999).

TIMES SQUARE AND OTHER SITES

One of the most visible sites for the billboards was the familiar Times Square, where in the early 90s images of a nun kissing a priest and a car on fire were put up in 90-foot billboards across from the Spectacolor site. The image was readily absorbed into the urban scene—no word of protest was spoken by the visitors to the square, or at least these were not documented by the press. That images of protest were readily absorbed by viewers in Times Square is testament to the ways in which the imagery and text of protest in advertising forums had been processed in the site, and a legacy of tolerance for the excesses of both advertising and protest established. Times Square, it seemed, could deal with just about anything from commercial companies and artists alike.

But Benetton was not so lucky in its pursuit of public forums for its imagery in Cambridge, MA, where as recently as 1996 the city demanded that its billboards of a car burning—an allusion to terrorist activity--- be removed for fear that it would “cause rioting”¹⁴. The billboard was supposed to be sited along Massachusetts Avenue, near Central Square. Benetton spokesman Matteo Marsilli, whom I interviewed, confessed that much of its advertising in the United States was toned down, and that advertising space renters, cities and fashion magazines alike had vetoed specific Benetton images in its spaces. The burning car image is one which made it to the States, while other images like a black woman nursing a white baby were rejected by the company for fear of playing to closely on the country’s history of slavery. But the car generated protest both in LA in the wake of the

¹³ Parrick, D. “German Court Rules Against Benetton Ads” NYT 2.5.95

¹⁴ No author. “Billboards banned in Cambridge.” Boston Globe 10.6.96.

LA Riots and in Boston, and were removed. Subsequently, Benetton has chosen to show more palatable images of multi-racial children in American advertising forums.

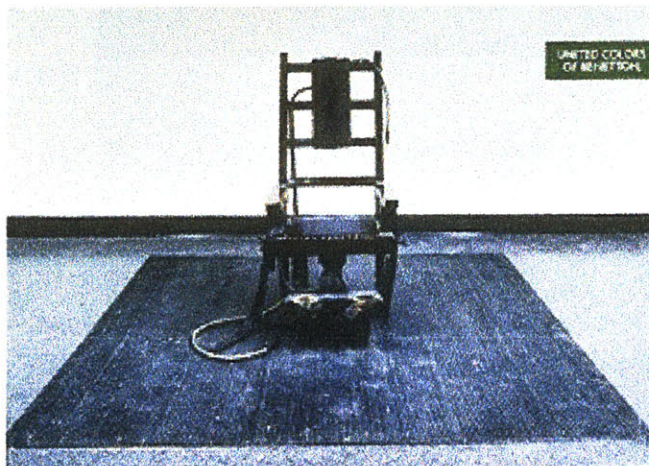
Public Uneasiness: whose discourse is it?

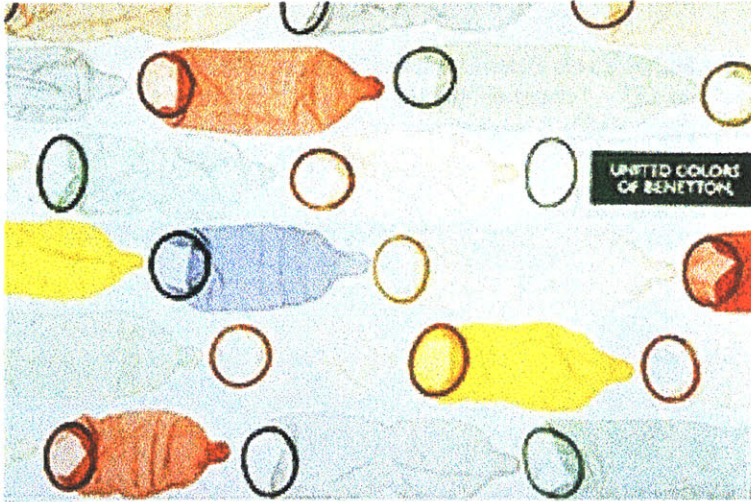
The public discomfort around the campaign can be traced to the persistent notion in the mind of viewers that advertisers have no place using political and social issues to promote products, and that the commodification of protest for profitable ends is unacceptable to the medium. Tinic has argued, however, that advertising is a potent form of communication, and that Benetton's espousment of social issues is simply a further step in the ongoing public dialogue, to which advertising legitimately contributes, even if its discourse is problematic.

Where Holzer and Wodiczko left off, Benetton has come in to fill the gap: Holzer's provocative reuse of the advertising medium to render what is at once spaceless and monumental, the LED sign, into what is transactional between viewer, message, and creator. While she was exploring the capabilities of the electronic sign and making new uses of the technology, Wodiczko had a similar, but historical and spatially grounded, agenda using multiple layers of imagery to create a space that itself embodies the marginalized, and sometimes very personal, voice. Benetton's success has been to adjust aspects of each of them—combining the politicized body in the urban site, with Holzer's quality of sitelessness, so that Benetton's imagery could be anywhere – and to reconfigure the notion of personal politics in a way that has a commercial agenda. Benetton's use of the graphic medium, its social content which is easily transposed from one nation to another, and its constant corporate logo opened up a window in advertising, in that it was the first of its genre to try to persuade the viewer that social consciousness can be dispensed and affirmed by a commercial enterprise.

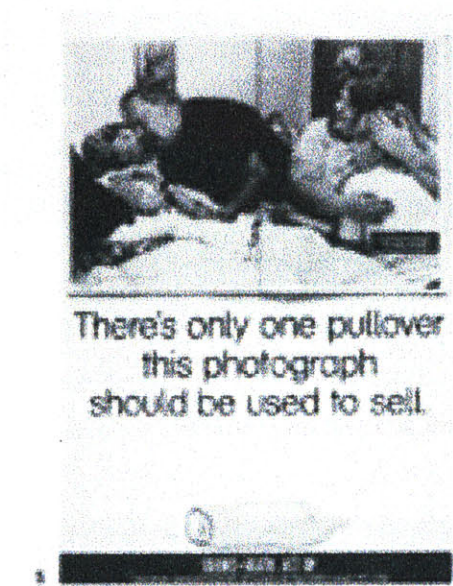
FURTHER IMAGES

31-34. Benetton images, 1990-1994. Clockwise from left: Electric chair, David Kirby, Priest and Nun, Car Bomb. Photograph with logo.





35. Benetton safer sex/
 united colors of condoms
 campaign, 1991.



36. ACT UP response to Benetton's use
 of a photo of a man dying of AIDS,
 David Kirby, and his family. Poster,
 1992. Poster, posted on streets & bus
 shelters.



37. Benetton sells
 condoms: 1994.
 Poster.

38. Reworked billboard by Saatchi and Someone. The original text read, "United Colors of Benetton". This one reads, "lesbian mothers are everywhere." Poster and pasted flyer. 1990-91. Britain.



39. Reworked Benetton Billboard, Saatchi & Someone. 1990-91. Britain.



CONCLUSION

As the Situationists, the Fluxus artists, and the theory of Thomas Crow suggest, the production of culture has played a crucial role, not only in the control of urban sites but in their reconfiguration. Holzer, Wodiczko, and Benetton have all contributed to this process in their provocative and politically engaging work. Wodiczko transposes images that evoke current conflict onto structures that hold its historical memory, and so highlights the present conflict in a way that also questions the historical values assumed by the commemorative monument. Entering into conversation with the viewer around social issues, he presents the political dissonance between his haunting imagery and the monument in order to provoke discourse. Holzer, in turn, is monumental by being omnipresent, disembodied and anonymous, using the technology and forums of mass media to question received ideas and consensus communication. And Benetton adapts Holzer's spacelessness to Wodiczko's strategy of transposing a body onto the site, and offers its images of social protest in order to shock their audience, and to persuade them to embody the values presented by wearing their clothing.

Combining the tactics of artists like Holzer and Wodiczko with commercial advertising, Benetton has introduced a new twist. Holzer's provocative reuse of the advertising medium renders what is at once spaceless and monumental, the LED sign, into what is transactional between viewer, message, and creator. While she was exploring the capabilities of the electronic sign and making new uses of the technology, Wodiczko had a similar, but historical and spatially grounded, agenda, using multiple layers of imagery to create a space that itself embodies the marginalized, and sometimes very personal, voice. Benetton's success has been to adjust aspects of each of them—combining the politicized body in the urban site, with Holzer's quality of sitelessness, so that Benetton's imagery could be anywhere – and to reconfigure the notion of personal politics in a way that has a commercial agenda. Benetton's use of the graphic medium, its social content which is easily transposed from one nation to another, and its constant corporate logo have opened

up another moment in the intersection of art, provocative content, technological innovation and the rethinking of the public sphere, one where advertising enters into dialogue with individuals to frame a public space. Here, we see two almost opposite agendas at work: political action and profit. But at the same time, Benetton has moved the conception of what constitutes the public even further from its traditional anchors, in demanding a paradigm shift not only in the way new media is used and the way through it the artist demands the viewer's subjective response and participation in a public domain, but in the reassessment of the public roles of the corporation. Benetton's campaign suggests, beyond its selling tactics, that a company may claim a space from which to engage in communication about serious social concerns—that it might have the right to speak on such matters, and in this way alter the traditional role of advertising, which is chiefly relegated to persuasion over private and domestic matters. The inherent ambiguity of the Benetton campaign, the inability of viewers to resolve their discomfort around this particular corporate stance, a stance in which profit and social activism may only be paired to market clothing, signals that the company has touched a new paradigm in the relationships between corporations and the identities of personal politics.

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