

# Fieldsings / N°1

In 2001, the Danish group SUPERFLEX visited Brazil and met a group of local guaraná farmers who told them that they were facing economic struggles caused by large multinational beverage corporations such as Coca Cola and Pepsi. The guaraná berry is native to the Amazonian basin and is very high in caffeine. Because of this high caffeine content, it is often used in energy drinks and sodas, which are extremely popular in Brazil. Local farmers who had been cultivating the berry for generations sold the berry to the corporations which, in turn, used it to manufacture energy drinks. The large corporations noticed the increasing popularity of guaraná-based drinks and proceeded to manipulate the market in order to create a monopoly on the guaraná seed that caused its price to plummet. Because of this, corporations were able to spend less money to produce the popular drinks. However, the consequence of this was that the livelihoods of the farmers were jeopardized. They struggled to make a living after the price of guaraná dropped by 80 percent. The farmers told SUPERFLEX that they feared they might no longer

be able to support themselves on these reduced earnings. The local farmers prided themselves on their sustainable farming practices that helped preserve the ecosystem of the rainforest. If the corporations took over the growing of guaraná, they planned to use less sustainable methods in order to increase their profit.

The corporations were robbing the farmers not only of their livelihoods but also of their cultural identity. On the energy drink labels that the corporations produced, they printed images of the farmers' native city, Maués. The farmers felt that the corporations did not truly understand the cultural significance of their city or the guaraná itself (which is deeply honored and celebrated by local tribes) and were only using their cultural heritage as a marketing tool. The farmers were deeply insulted by this: the corporations damaged Maués's local economy, but in their marketing, they pretended to support the community. The corporations were profiting from the local culture while also destroying it. SUPERFLEX returned to Brazil in 2003 and collaborated with the local farmers to create their own energy drink, and thus they enabled the farmers to cut out the corporations completely. The farmers gained independence from the corporations because they no longer needed to sell their berries to them. Together with SUPERFLEX, they set up a space in which they could manufacture and bottle the drink. They named this drink Guaraná Power, and they labeled it with the image of Maués. They did this to protest the corporations' use of imagery associated with their culture for the purpose of marketing soft drinks. When the corporations sued for copyright,

the farmers countered with the argument that the corporations did not have the right to use imagery identified with their town and culture. While the farmers were eventually made to change their label, SUPERFLEX blacked out the image on the label, used first by the corporations and then by the farmers, and wrote "Guaraná Power" over it in large white letters. This act called attention to the way in which the farmers were made to cover up the image of Maués, which carried great meaning for them. In this way, the labeling of Guaraná Power signals the aggressive tactics of the corporations and the history of the farmers' struggles with them. SUPERFLEX put the farmers at the forefront of the project and included them in their advertisements. However, rather than using generic images of farmers like those used by the corporations, SUPERFLEX identified the farmers by name and thereby personalized the producers of the beverage. They also provided information about the purpose of the beverage and its cultural significance on the label. SUPERFLEX attempted to promote Guaraná at the São Paulo Bienal, a popular contemporary art show, but they were censored because many of the large corporations that they were protesting had sponsored the event. In response to this, SUPERFLEX blacked out the names of the corporations in their press statements and thus censored the corporations. The Guaraná Power movement caused the price of the guaraná berry to rise, and this allowed

**Guaraná Power**  
*SUPERFLEX*

*2003*

Cataloged by:  
*Esme Graham*



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the farmers to continue practicing their local and sustainable farming. Although corporations continue to attempt to monopolize the berries in order to drive down their price, SUPERFLEX helped the farmers establish control over their own product. Guaraná Power also helps the farmers reclaim and celebrate their cultural heritage as the traditional producers of guaraná and as its residents of the region in which it is produced.

While the Guaraná Power event is specific to a local region of Brazil, it can be used as an economic model for future action. SUPERFLEX identified a specific and local problem in which powerful corporations were working to oppress local groups. This problem is not unique to Brazil as corporations frequently exploit communities in order to increase their profits. They may do this by downsizing jobs in communities that need them or by limiting access to essential goods in communities that have no choice but to purchase their products. The example of Guaraná Power illustrates the steps that communities can take to reclaim economic autonomy. To do this, communities must join together and share resources in order to create products that eliminate their dependence on large corporate entities. In this way, communities can create more jobs for their people and stimulate their economies. The example of SUPERFLEX and the assistance it provided with funding the plant that produced Guaraná Power reveals the role that some outside sponsors may play in fostering economic autonomy. It is also very important that SUPERFLEX empowered the farmers to celebrate their heritage. This project forged a sense of community among the farmers by emphasizing their shared cultural values. Guaraná

Power is an example of how an oppressed group can take economic control over corporations in order to reclaim not only their independent livelihood but their culture as well.

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# Fieldsings / N°2

Douglas R. Ewart, a resident of Powderhorn, Minneapolis, has organized events for communities around the world almost every year. He calls them Crepuscules (pronounced kre'-pu-skewl) — an event that takes place at twilight. They center around bringing community together through music, dance, and artwork. Since his first Crepuscule in 1993 in Minneapolis, he has led community events in Paris, France; Guelph, Canada; Waterloo, Canada; as well as many cities throughout the United States.

Ewart focuses events around the “orchestra of community and activities.” He tries to create a microcosm of society where people from all corners of the community can come together to share their talents, interests, and creativity. Performances often include a wide variety of creative mediums drawn from many cultures, including music, dance, storytelling, martial arts, theatre, poetry, mural making, and ceramics. There is no delineation between audience and viewer. The two become one through experiencing the event together.

## Crepuscule Douglas Ewart

*1993 - Present*

Cataloged by:

*Julian*

*White-Davis*

Participants are often encouraged to contemplate an ancient proverb throughout the event, such as, “One small wind can raise much dust,” or “We are the present future.” These shared introspections encourage participants to think about their place in the community in relation to the people around them. They are meant to make each member of the community feel empowered, cared for, and nourished. They paid special respect to elders of the community, honoring and acknowledging those who contribute significantly to their families and communities.

Many aspects of the events come back to the idea of improvisation. Ewart is fascinated by this concept and believes it to be a central to moving smoothly through life. The performances are to be spontaneous and alive, drawing on the environment and people. He makes sure that the events are held near a body of water, group of trees, or botanical garden so the community can draw inspiration from the natural energy around them. “Sound and stories are crucial spiritual, emotional, and intellectual foods that we all must partake of in order to thrive,” said Ewart. “Sound and stories can remind us that life is rewarding and worth living — even with its current obstacles and challenges. There is vast potential and possibility if we share the wealth of the Earth in a more respectful, responsible, custodial, and equitable manner.”

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Ewart began to experiment at a young age with making instruments out of found objects. Later, after moving to Chicago, he studied at the Association

for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in clarinet and saxophone. At the time, was also training to become a tailor. Ewart beautifully incorporates all of these practices and talents together in the Crepuscules, laying down a stage for the rest of the community to step up and share their offerings. Neighbors have an opportunity to show each other who they are and be witnessed by each other. Through this groundwork, Ewart hoped that community members could carry this affection, care, and empowerment with them in the rest of their lives.

A particularly powerful Crepuscule event was in Chicago in 2000, when Ewart drew together children and adults from the Southside of Chicago to teach a smattering of skills and activities including jazz, dance, martial arts, theater, painting, and maritime skills. Responding to the lack of activities for young people and unstable financial infrastructure, Ewart created a space for public performance, intergenerational learning, and communal artistic expression. He partnered with the Chicago Park District, the Jazz Institute of Chicago, and the school district to create programs that could continue to function after the event.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, community protests have felt strongly reminiscent of Crepuscule events. Communities across the country and the world are coming



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together to sing together, dance together, and be together in solidarity. Neighborhoods are growing strong from a shared belief of what is right and an audacity to fight for those beliefs. Connections are being built across generation, gender, culture, class, and skin color. The momentum is here, we must not let it stop.

Ewart's Crepuscules are more essential now than ever. We must draw on each other's strengths and creative energy to envision a future that we want to live in together. Through artistic expression, we can contemplate these questions in concert with one another. What do you want your public spaces to look like? How do you want to interact with your neighbors? How do you want to be supported by your community? One of the most powerful aspects of Crepuscules is the nature of feeling your community surrounding you and holding you. In this strange time of COVID-19, that feeling is lacking. However, one thing that the protests have proven is that masked gatherings outdoors are surprisingly safe. Powderhorn is no stranger to these community events — both protests and Crepuscules. Ewart has hosted numerous of these gatherings in the neighborhood over the years, perhaps it is time for another.

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# Fieldsings / N°3

The Roof is on Fire was the first of several public displays orchestrated by Suzanne Lacy in collaboration with the Oakland Public School District in the 1990s. The event featured over two hundred high school students from the district as they gathered in cars on the rooftop of a parking garage and participated in a conversation revolving around topics that were relevant to their lives, such as modern youth culture, drugs, police relations with the community, and sexuality. The conversation was completely unscripted and unedited, and over a thousand residents of Oakland listened in real-time. The event was later broadcasted as a documentary on NBC in the Bay Area and received lots of news coverage locally and nationally. The final performance was the result of two years of preparation; it began with Lacy developing a media literacy class for students who did a small performance that successfully got the attention of local media. From there, Lacy and the students helped create a media literacy class for teachers, which led to the performance known as The Roof is on Fire. Students for this project came from across the district,

and a small group of them went to planning sessions aimed to familiarize them with the media and production aspects. The project was heavily supported by the Oakland Unified School District. In thinking about the setup of the piece, a couple of questions come to mind. The conversation was aimed to be free-flowing and uninhibited, however, is it possible to engage in a truly open dialogue when you know you are speaking to an audience? Not only were residents of their community watching them, but it seems that they knew they would be filmed and broadcasted to an even larger audience. Is it possible that they were aware of preconceived notions of urban youth that members of their community had? That the general public had? If so, is it possible that they would be somewhat inclined to either lean into those assumptions or to subvert them? Another question that begs an answer is the question of the audience. What is the role of the live audience in the performance? Is it simply their job to listen to what the youth have to say, or should there be some sort of response? How was this audience selected? Are they all native to the area, perhaps alumni of the high schools of the participants, or is it a mixture of locals and people who moved to the area recently? What distinguishes the live audience of Oakland residents from the national, even international audience that the work eventually receives? Are the residents of Oakland more likely to understand the struggles that these high school students are going through, or are these topics universal? Questions of intention and audience are central to this work, and to potential performances influenced by this performance.

credibly diverse community with a history of political activism. There was a very strong youth culture present that Lacy aimed to tap into, engaging inner-city youth, many of whom were people of color, in a conversation that challenged the media's portrayal of them. Although Lacy spearheaded the project, the students were also highly involved in the setup of the conversation, seeking an audience for the discussion of their everyday experiences. Not only did this performance present inner city, urban youth in their own words to a large audience, but the work led to further projects that aimed to explore some of the most pressing issues they spoke of. Police relationships with youth in the area were identified as a particularly relevant issue, thus leading to the creation of a police training film, and a larger project called Code 33 that also tackled police relationships with youth in the community. Another pertinent issue was sexual relations and teen pregnancy, which was explored further in the project titled Expectations. This project gave a voice to youth, letting them recount their lived experiences that often get turned into mere talking points in the news. This not only gives power back to the people, but it also changes the narrative; these are not people to be pitied or feared, they are real, self-aware, intelligent people and this is their reality, and their fates are in no way set in stone. This project and the projects it inspired go to show that these are complex problems that do not have easy solutions, but that they can be talked

**The Roof is  
On Fire**  
*Suzanne Lacy*

*1993 - 1995*

Cataloged by:  
*Scout Riley*

Oakland in the 1990s was an in-



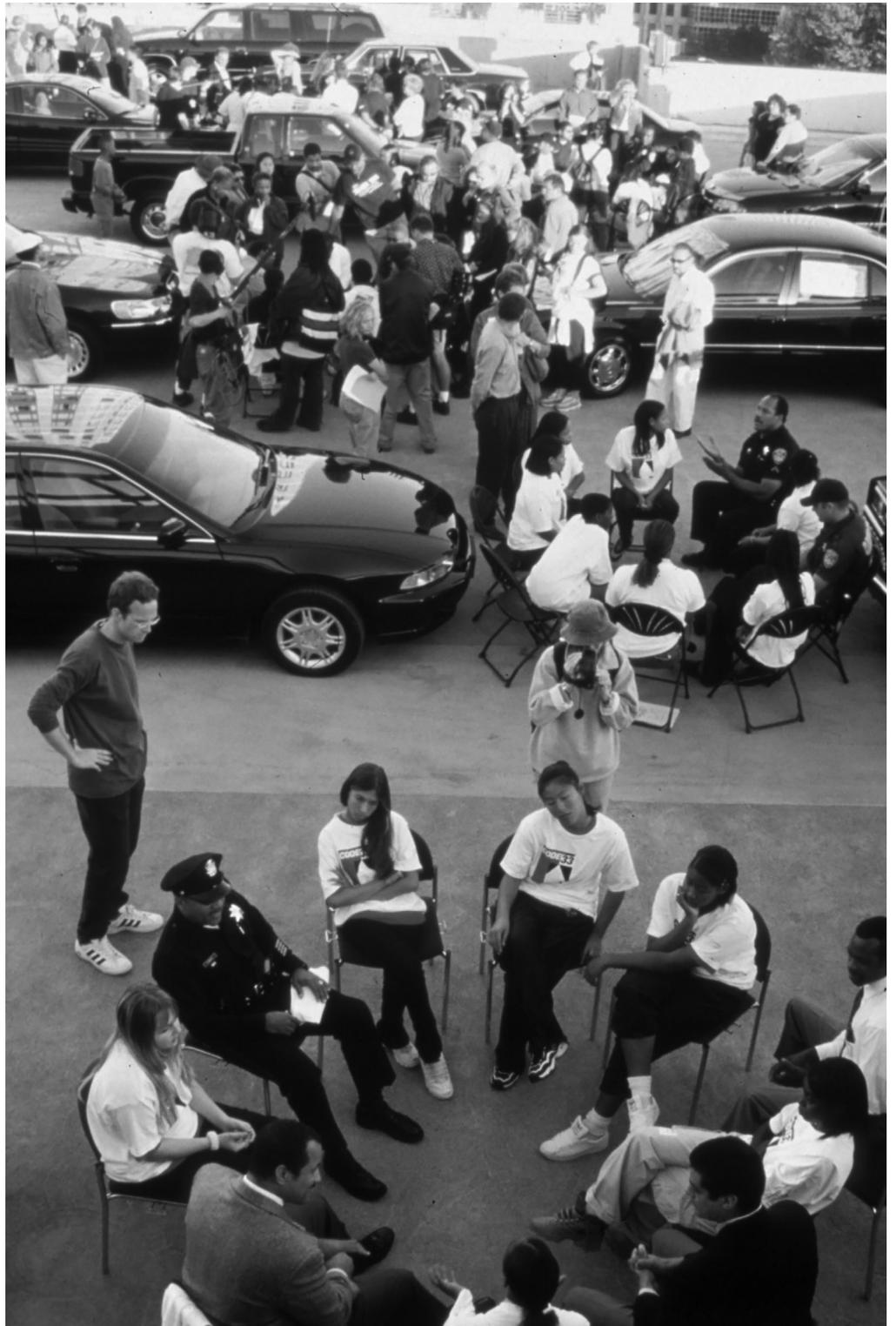
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about, dissected, and turned into compelling pieces of art that bring attention to the nuance of these topics.

The Roof is on Fire provides an excellent model that can be used and expanded upon in other communities. The idea of an open dialogue between residents of the neighborhood on topics deemed important could be a good way to address the needs of the community going forward. Focusing on youth voices is especially interesting, considering the massive impact the murder of George Floyd and subsequent unrest has had on the Powderhorn and 9th Ward area during some of the most formative years of their lives.

A conversation in Minneapolis could focus on this issue exclusively, or it could connect other critical issues as well, like in the Oakland performance. A dialogue such as this could provide a chance for the residents of the Powderhorn Park and greater 9th Ward area an opportunity to engage in a conversation about the needs of the community, and perhaps to reach some sort of consensus about pressing issues that might make good topics for future conversations, performances, classes, workshops, etc. Not only could this be a way to build a sense of community, but it could also provide a chance for the community to speak for itself. If the conversation were to be recorded and distributed, as *The Roof is on Fire* was, it could give back some agency to a place that has been a hotspot of international media attention recently, and allow for the residents of these neighborhoods to speak for themselves and what is important to them, relating to the events of summer 2020 and beyond.

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# Fieldsings / N°4

In the fall of 1971, the artists Gordon Matta-Clark and Carol Goodden roasted a whole pig under the Brooklyn Bridge. The pig reportedly fell off the spit at one point and ended up being “burnt on the outside and raw on the inside” according to the artist Tina Girouard, but the artists nonetheless managed to serve over five hundred pork sandwiches the next day. It was this experiment in fresh, communal cooking that led Matta-Clark, Goodden, and Girouard to open their own restaurant, called FOOD, several months later in the then-industrial area of SoHo, New York. At the time, SoHo was a neighborhood in transition; it was home to a budding artistic community, but its industrial landscape meant that it still lacked residential amenities such as eateries, grocery stores, and schools. Located in a space that had formerly been a Puerto Rican bodega, FOOD became an artist-run restaurant that provided exciting, reasonably priced food to the artists and neighboring residents.

Central to FOOD’s operations were its romantic ideals for what a community restaurant should

look like. Restaurant employees were allowed to work as many or as few hours as they wanted, which predictably created staffing issues, but also allowed the employees, many of whom were artists themselves, to have a flexible secondary source of income to support their artistic careers. FOOD frequently featured other artists as guest chefs, and rotated its menu based on the availability of fresh, locally sourced ingredients. As a result, many of the dishes served at FOOD had a cultural and artistic adventurousness that was unfamiliar to the New York of the seventies; Hisachika Takahashi, an assistant to the artist Robert Rauschenberg, served mackerel sashimi with wasabi sauce long before raw fish had become familiar to the mainstream American palate, and Matta-Clark served his famous “Matta Bones” meal—for four dollars, a patron could receive a multi-course meal featuring oxtail and marrow-filled bones which, once consumed, were hastily scrubbed and turned into bone necklaces for the customer to wear home. The ever-changing nature of the FOOD menu made each meal a creative enterprise, which customers both experienced and contributed to.

One might ask, though, how successful this fusion of art, business, and social practice was. In one sense, Matta-Clark, Goodden, and Girouard were successful in that they identified a need—an accessible place for eating and gathering—and fulfilled that need by creating FOOD. And, historically, FOOD represented an important venture within the realm of the “aesthetic-gastronomic narrative”—which is to say that it was noteworthy in the context of artistic practice at the time. But as a business, FOOD was

less successful; the venture was largely funded by Carol Goodden, who had to use her inheritance money to secure the initial lease for the premises and to finance the costly endeavor as a whole. FOOD never set out to be a profit-turning business, but it is certainly possible that the day-to-day operations of running a restaurant with a spontaneous menu and erratic staffing contributed to the artists leaving after three years to pursue other artistic projects. Goodden recalled;

*“I did not like cringing when the busboy dropped the tray of glasses, because I knew what that would cost and margins were slim. I did not like being exasperated when the vegetable delivery would not show up. I was irritable going to the fish market at 4 a.m. and fighting for decent fish at decent prices. It had ceased to be an ‘adventure.’”*

It seems that for the three artists, the reality of the pragmatic eventually eclipsed their yearning for the idealistic. And, after the original founders departed, the energy of the project changed—FOOD became just a normal restaurant, losing its open-to-all, perpetual dinner party charm. The short-lived nature of FOOD, especially given its initial success, questions how artistic projects can effectively build lasting community relationships. Would FOOD have continued if the founders had more money to work with? Or was FOOD

## FOOD

Carol Goodden,  
Tina Girouard, & Gordon  
Matta-Clark

1971 - 1974

Cataloged by:  
Mei Knudson



# Fieldsings / N°4

only ever an extended installation event, just one project in the artists' careers? Of course, art doesn't have to last forever, but it's worth thinking about what the impact of FOOD would have been if it had continued to exist into the current day, when upscale eateries and grocery stores have come to increasingly dominate the food scene. It seems evident that at the very least, a financially sustainable business model is required to keep such a project going. But how can we reconcile that with FOOD's philanthropic ideals (a ledger lists "3,082 free dinners given")? One answer might be in the community itself—although FOOD was conceived as a collaborative restaurant, the burdens of handling the financial and managerial affairs of such an ambitious project fell on the shoulders of the three artists, who likely suffered burnout as a result. If the community were to take a project such as FOOD into its own hands by providing donations and labor, it could potentially become a long-lasting hub for community engagement. So, what would FOOD look like if it were recreated today, in Minneapolis? First, let's focus on what FOOD did well—it offered a rotating menu based on locally available produce, offered a variety of different cuisines cooked by guest chefs, provided jobs for those in the area, and served as a gathering place where cost was not a barrier for entry. FOOD, version 2.0, could continue to uphold the same values as the original FOOD by providing fresh, reasonably priced food cooked by community members from diverse backgrounds, and by serving as a venue for neighborhood events. A donation system could help keep the menu affordable, while allowing for contributions from those who are able to give more.

And volunteers, perhaps those with restaurant or food service experience, could help guide the restaurant towards its goals while maintaining a sustainable business practice. Ultimately, in order for a place to bring a community together, it requires the willingness of the community—as a whole—to make that place their own. Idealistic? Utopian? Maybe. But at the end of the day, there's no underestimating the power of food in bringing people together.

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# Fieldsings / N°5

Theaster Gates, a Black visual artist and resident of the Dorchester neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, began the Dorchester Project in 2009; a work that continues to evolve and activate the community today. In 2006, Gates bought multiple dilapidated properties on his street, Dorchester Avenue. The house beside his, 6916 S Dorchester Ave, was carefully reconstructed and became, over the years, a sort-of community center for the neighborhood and surrounding communities. Gates, a professor at the University of Chicago, saw an opportunity to bring the art practice he taught out into his community on Dorchester Avenue. He saw a disconnect between the experiences and economic disparities in his neighborhood and the knowledge and opportunities that were given to students just blocks away. Thus, in 2009, Gates founded the Rebuild Foundation, an organization which aimed to rebuild the neighborhood while also providing real artistic and practical skills to the people of his community through carpentry apprenticeships. Their

motto: “black people matter, black spaces matter, and black objects matter. (Rebuild Foundation)” The house, and other properties he bought for the project, served as building sites for students to learn carpentry and woodworking and ultimately became places for the community to congregate and learn together. The house was built of materials from across Chicago, as Gates puts it, the idea was to, “reuse, rebuild, and exchange. (Taft)”

Upon completing the house, Gates again drew from the community surrounding Dorchester Ave to fill the shelves. He installed a huge collection of vinyls and CDs acquired from the beloved Dr. Wax record shop which had supported and documented much of the contemporary independent soul and hip hop from the south side of Chicago. When the store closed down, Gates had the shop freeze its entire inventory and brought the records into the renovated house. In bringing a vital source of Dorchester’s musical history into the house, Gates incorporated the communal identity that Dr. Wax embodied into the space. The building also houses all of the University of Chicago’s now outdated glass slides previously used for Art History lectures. Gates brought these intellectual materials—which were previously unavailable to the community—into the house and subsequently out to the public. He speaks about his collection of items as a valuable archive to hold onto because they “were really special and people should know about them. (Kadist Art Foundation)” He underlines the fact that these things, both the house and the archives, had been previously neglect-

ed and emphasizes the value in caring for the broken down and discarded. Gates was also interested in how the creation of a work brings together people who would otherwise not interact. He says in an interview, “The products that come out, they are important but they are not primary. The product is a byproduct of relationships. (Lasser)” The communal aspect of the erection of the Dorchester house was integral to its artistic merit.

This work questions how a building can encourage community interaction and long-lasting improvement. The South side of Chicago is known for broad economic diversity and high levels of crime. Some communities, like Dorchester, did not have the means to “beautify” their neighborhoods and were often faced with threats of gentrification or demolition when a building fell into disrepair. Many living there were in need of work and were facing economic hardship, especially due to the economic recession sweeping America at the time. Gates was interested in inspiring a community effort to preserve the buildings in the neighborhood. His Rebuild Foundation worked two fold—it provided community jobs and encouraged the initiative to rebuild the neighborhood. Gates’ intentions for the Dorchester House were as follows: to create a space for artists to convene with other artists in the community where they live, to encourage a collaboration

## Dorchester Projects *Theaster Gates*

*2009 - Present*

Cataloged by:  
*Maddie Smith*



# Fieldsings / N°5

between the individual talents of his neighbors, and to create a stage for sharing in the community. The house largely succeeded in these goals. The space now exists as a place for artist residency and invites visitors to utilize the resources within. Gates also hosts large dinners at the building for his family and friends, treating the house more as a living space than an art piece or public community center. In this way the space also acts as an informal arena for discussion amongst community members. Gates describes his project as reflecting, “a neighborhood that is reactivated by people who already live here. (Kadist Art Foundation)”

This work brings up questions about how the Ninth Ward and neighborhood of Powderhorn might utilize public space to spark conversation and encourage creative collaboration. Although Gates approached his neighborhood with a very broad goal, he began with a smaller, more practical plan; at first, Gates just focused on one building. Only after his initial success did he move on to other properties and start thinking beyond Dorchester Ave. A successful concentrated effort in one particular place can have wide repercussions on a larger scale. This might be a useful consideration in the context of creating a work in Minneapolis’ 9th Ward. Another interesting aspect of this work is the extent to which Gates reaches out to other communities to provide support for his ventures. This cooperation is also applicable to the Minneapolis community, considering the pervasive presence of social media in any and all community ventures.

This piece doesn’t necessarily serve as a fix-all template for future action in the Ninth Ward. Gates built the project around the specific needs of his own community; he sought to improve the infrastructure of Dorchester, which was in disrepair and in the process of gentrification. The problems that face the residents of Dorchester are ultimately different than the problems that face members of the Ninth Ward. What would such a space made specifically for the Ninth Ward look like? We can look at the Dorchester Project as a successful transition of a private place into a public one, a place which embodied the community’s spirit and built up and built on the community’s talents and skills. Should the Ninth Ward make something new, or build up something already there? Will the change be a tangible place or work of art, or an intangible network of new people and activities? What is the best way to make and strengthen a community?

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# Fieldsings / N°6

In his essay, “Art, Trauma, and Parrhesia,” Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko asserts: “The democratic process depends on the vitality of public space. Public space is the space of rights.” But is this always the case? Often that vitality is depleted or taken away. Wodiczko aided the democratic process in his artistic intervention in the streets of New York City in the late 1980s with his work, *Homeless Vehicle*. A missile-like structure, *Homeless Vehicle* was a multipurpose aid for those experiencing homelessness. This cart served as a shelter, carrier, and barbeque. Resembling a shopping cart, this four-wheeled contraption made of metal and plastic is specifically designed for those who collect bottles and cans while having the ability to expand and contract to serve as a bed while still having mobility. Krzysztof Wodiczko sought to achieve many goals for this project. At a basic and important level, *Homeless Vehicle* sought to make living at least a little bit easier for the marginalized homeless community. Wodiczko put together a team of consultants who were themselves homeless to help find

solutions to common problems relating to living on the streets. Wodiczko believes that civic engagement and social design is the role of the Transformative Avant-Garde: the contemporary Avant-Garde has a “proactive attitude and role in intelligent, critical, post-contestational and post-deconstructive engagement through social design and civic practice.” However, the extent of which the utility of *Homeless Vehicle* was achieved, or really was a goal to begin with, can be questioned. In fact, Wodiczko writes that “The vehicle is neither a temporary or permanent solution to the housing problem, nor is it intended for mass production.” But this failure is also a bit of the point. Wodiczko acknowledges that this work of the Transformative Avant Garde is too much for just artists to tackle. This half-solution to the challenges faced by the homeless underlines to those who see it that further action needs to be taken, and not just by artists. Wodiczko fully realizes that *Homeless Vehicle* “should not exist,” but it temporarily provides solutions with the hopes that structural and systematic changes happened at the larger level.

But beyond this, visibility was one of the most important goals of this project to Wodiczko. He asserts: “Visibility and public testimony are closely linked to recovery from traumatic experiences.” Healing happens in public space. Many people view the streets as a way to get from point A to point B, “a mere passageway,” but *Homeless Vehicle* encourages these commuters to reflect and view the street as public space that serves as home for many and a place for healing. Indeed, public space

is often contested, especially for the homeless community, and with this project, Wodiczko wanted to “symbolically mark [the homeless community’s] right to occupy public space.” Visibility makes one aware of public space as well as aware of issues that don’t immediately pertain to themselves. The sight of these structures is a visual plea for systematic changes within society.

Now, *Homeless Vehicle* not only amplifies visibility of the homeless community and public space, but it amplifies the voices of the homeless community. First, the artist didn’t just perform this intervention according to his own perceptions of hardships within the homeless community. He instead raised the voices of those marginalized by hiring the consultants from the community. In addition, the greatest of the amplification of voices came when the art was put to use in public space. One of the consequences of having such an interruptive structure was that it would intrigue street-goers and thus serve as a catalyst for conversations between those using the piece and those viewing the piece. Wodiczko describes: “The user-operators of the vehicle began to act as presenters, narrators, performers, and storytellers. They testified as existential and political witnesses to a city undergoing rapid transformation.” The dynamics of systems of the city, whether that be political, structural, or existential, were discussed. The homeless com-

## Homeless Vehicle

*Krzysztof Wodiczko*

1988

Cataloged by:  
*Lucy Reece*



# Fieldsings / N°6

munity is a marginalized one, and thus the amplification of these voices allowed for a perspective new to the existing conversations.

What happens in a community that has these uncomfortable conversations? At the very least, an interruption into the mindless and capitalist flow of the day to day life of the city. Commuters are not only interrupted by the structure physically, but mentally. One has to ask themselves about how they think of public space and who has the right to it. Wodiczko believes public space can only be democratic once every person and voice is allowed in said public space. And this does not happen naturally or easily. He asserts that a community must make an effort to do this: "The democratic principles that are constitutive of public space cannot be sustained if we do not provide the cultural, psychological, technological, and aesthetic conditions for the inclusion (and acknowledgement) of the voices that are economically, culturally and socially marginalized and estranged- the voices of those who are perceived, treated, and at best tolerated as strangers, those who are labeled as 'poorly adjusted' or 'not integrated.'" The viewer must also think about the systematic challenges that would suggest the need for such a vehicle. Thus, communities like the 9th Ward of Minneapolis can use Homeless Vehicle as a blueprint for an intervention into public space to achieve visibility and amplification of marginalized voices. Public space needs to be actively and perpetually inviting to all communities, and this can be done with interruptive structure, whether this be as art or as utility as it is for Homeless

Vehicle. Activism and community outreach are, as Wodiczko asserts, a part of the "Functional Avant-Garde." Indeed, the goal should be making existence in this world and the community at least a little bit easier for those marginalized, and to do so communities must use public space. These solutions can be found from having conversations and creating catalysts for said conversations. Or, rather than trying to serve the ever-difficult task of finding solutions, these interventions can be for the mere sake of visibility. Because visibility creates awareness, increasing pressure on greater powers.

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# Fieldsings / N°7

Art Is... by Lorraine O'Grady was a performance literally fit for a parade. At the 1983 African American Day Parade in Harlem, New York City, O'Grady commissioned a float that carried a large golden frame, accompanied by 15 performers with smaller golden frames to share with parade watchers. The frame was nine feet tall and fifteen feet wide and adorned on both sides with gilded ornaments, giving it a distinguished presence that extended to everything it enclosed. Spray painted on the float below the antique-style frame were the words "Art Is...", giving the piece its name.

The performance of Art Is... was definitively joyous. Accounts of the event describe parade attendees' shouts of "Frame me, make me art!" and "That's right, we are the art!". O'Grady's frames made every person on and every bit of Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard a work of art as they existed naturally, in that moment. Children with friends, babies on shoulders, theatres, delis, and dry cleaners. Any given mental or physical image existed only

for a moment but was repeated over and over, gracefully combining into a communal experience comprised of countless perspectives.

Art Is... works in conversation with O'Grady's previous work as an assertion of Black people's place as art creators, viewers, and subjects. The performance rejected the demand for validation by the white-dominated art world and museum space and instead used art as a concept to affirm the community. Rather than making plain the alienation of blackness in the art world, the art world is alienated by the community. Everyone present is simultaneously made a legitimate viewer by witnessing the framed images, the subject by standing within them, and creator by deciding to view the image in the frame as art. Everyone is, at any given time, inside the work of art, witnessing a work of art, or both. The affirmation of all of these aspects of identity accomplished O'Grady's goal of "crashing the party" with a performance piece showcasing Black people relating to conceptual art, and also provided a platform for an investigation of community.

Art Is... fosters and celebrates community beautifully, at all levels of interpretation and analysis. It is set at an event already intended to support public togetherness and encourages that spirit through joy and fun and play. How could you not feel like a part of a large, important beauty when surrounded by smiling faces on a sunny day, literally framed by gold? It is also wonderful how the idea of art is able to catalyze this spirit, but the real content O'Grady uses to build togetherness is reality. The frames

don't change or elevate the setting in any way, they simply provide a moment to appreciate them. The frames make two-dimensional vignettes of complex identities that facilitate reflection on community. The fleeting mental pictures they leave behind create spaces to consider the multiplicity of the roles inhabited by those who interact with the frames. As a participant occupies the roles of a subject and a viewer of a work of art, they also become an insider and an outsider to the community.

The result of this reflection is the joy and neighborliness visible in the images of the performance that is bolstered by the piece's inherent rejection of white supremacy. On a more abstract level, the alienation of the white art world that O'Grady intended in the work strengthens the message of empowerment perpetuated by the art. But, also, the interactions between white police officers and the frames that are documented in O'Grady's images show evidence of direct resistance to white intrusion as part of the performance. The police officers stand out in the photos because they are white, because they are in uniform, and because, often, they are caught unsmiling. There is an image of a cop being framed while eyeing a young Black man, of a cop with crossed arms smirking at women posing together, and one of a near-smiling cop facing a serious-eyed Black woman holding the frame in front of

*Art Is...  
Lorraine  
O'Grady*

*September 1983*

Cataloged by:  
*Anna Klein*



# Fieldsings / N°7

herself. Their presence is jarring. It immediately makes you wonder what they are doing there and how they belong (or do not belong) in the community. Their image is not natural in the frame, as their insertion of power is not accepted or welcome in the community.

Lorraine O'Grady's *Art Is...* offers lessons on the value of joy, the capacity of celebration to exist in the same space as critique, and the ability of art to specify a moment or intention in a way that creates that space. The performance critiques the exclusion of blackness in art by making art surrounded by blackness, and the work is simultaneously defined by happiness. As we reach an anniversary of lockdowns and pandemic management, the excitement and willingness to enter the streets as a rejoicing group is growing and growing. A future, post-pandemic, work like *Art Is...* that allows us to celebrate and thank each other, compounded with the pure joy of being able to be close to other people would be, frankly, epic. Important, too, is keeping the goal of dismantling white supremacy close to the heart of the work, as O'Grady does by fostering Black joy in *Art Is...*

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# Fieldsings / N°8

At Carleton, we have been studying the ways that contemporary art involves its viewers in order to open up a dialogue, both between the viewers and the artists, as well as between the viewers with each other. For this reason, contemporary art has been particularly effective as a tool in modern social movements, which often start at a community level. Art works that necessarily involve the communities that they are about are more likely to have a lasting impact on these communities and keep the issues they represent in the public dialogue for longer. One work that attempted to create this kind of conversation was *Back to School* by John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres.

In this work, Ahearn and Torres went to the South Bronx and took plaster casts of the residents there. They later used these casts to make two sculptures each, one of which the artists kept, and the other returned to the community member who it represented. Many of these busts ended up being displayed along the facades of buildings in the neighborhood

where these people lived. When put up in this way, the statues are reminiscent of busts of historical figures placed in important buildings in order to honor them; however, when done with everyday people, as Ahearn did here, this piece elevates the community members to this same kind of status among each other.

The neighborhood where he did this was a majority minority community. In the years leading up to the 1980s, when this piece was made, the South Bronx was undergoing severe urban decay, and many of the people living there were experiencing poverty. Outside organizations came in to renovate the area, which did contribute to a degree of urban renewal, but the divide in community between insiders and outsiders remained. The work *Back to School* addresses this issue by questioning who makes up a community, and how members of the community contribute to a shared sense of identity.

A central aspect of this piece is how it addresses the notion of ownership in art. Even after the sculptures were taken down, the person who modeled for them got to keep their own sculpture. This contrasts with the trend in the art world towards an increasing commodity status associated with art, focusing on the monetary value of certain pieces in order to create an economic market around them. Ahearn and Torres get rid of that aspect of their work in order to return ownership to the community, which in this case was one that often got excluded from the art world altogether. Through this piece, the artists gave people of marginalized identities the op-

portunity to occupy the space of the art world.

This piece did, however, enter some controversy around who got to decide what was representative of a community, exemplified by how many of Ahearn's works got taken down after their initial displaying. Though most of the people depicted in *Back to School* were of racial minorities, the artist orchestrating the project, John Ahearn, was himself white. After these pieces were put up, some members of the community criticized it, with the argument that a white person doesn't have the right to come into a community that he doesn't belong to and decide which members of that community represent it. On the other hand, the people who modeled for these sculptures and many others felt that by virtue of being cast from people living in the neighborhood, by being direct representations of community members themselves, this piece did represent the community in an adequate way. Though both sides have fair points, this does spark a very interesting conversation around what kinds of intervention people outside of a community can fairly take into a community that is not their own. Can a person who is an outsider to a certain group represent that group in an honorable way at all, even when they choose to depict people who actually do comprise that group? Or is it better for them to not get involved and let the group decide how to represent

## **Back to School** *John Ahearn*

*1985*

Cataloged by:  
*Colby Hester*



# Fieldsings / N°8

itself? These are questions that arise from Ahearn's works that continue to affect artworks that stem from social movements today.

When thinking about how to represent a community through art today, Ahearn's Back to School provides a number of important starting points. This work shows us how important it is to consider what impact a work will have on the area where it is placed. Residents of the South Bronx had many differing opinions about Back to School, showing that no matter what the artist's intent, there will always be a number of varying responses, including some negative ones. It is important to acknowledge how a work could potentially impact a community negatively before installing it. Because Ahearn wasn't a resident of the South Bronx himself, he had to think extra hard about the impact of his work. Since only members of a group will know what kind of representations will be in good taste, it is important to consult with said group when undergoing a project that involves them or is about them.

Though I do believe it is possible for someone to make an art piece about minority groups in a respectful way, even if they are not a member of that minority group themselves, this piece and in particular the response to it show the importance of first creating the space for minority or otherwise oppressed groups to speak for themselves, before trying to make a work that speaks for them. Minneapolis's 9th Ward and Powderhorn Park today have thoroughly entered a national discussion about how communities respond to tragedies that take

place within them – everyone in America seems to be aware of George Floyd's murder and has their own opinion on what these communities should do in response. However, it is important to first make an effort to listen to the residents of the 9th Ward to understand what would be the most helpful to them, to make steps towards either activism or community healing. Art can have a very powerful impact on the communities that it is installed in, either by honoring certain people who had a connection to it or by remembering events that happened there, as well as keeping these people or events in the public knowledge and continuing conversations around them into the future. However, what result is most helpful to the community is entirely dependent on the community themselves and their response to such events, so in instances like this, it is crucial to first give them a voice.

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# Fieldsings / N°9

When reflecting on the use of urban public space in the United States, an essential location to consider is People's Park in Berkeley, California. Created in the fervent political activism of the late 60s, the park stands today as a testament to the kinds of innovative spaces that can be conceived if the values of a community reflect an ambition to be more inclusive and to radically change the way urban life in the 21st century life is lived.

Initially developed as a student housing, parking, and office space for the University of California-Berkeley in 1967, the college ran out of money to fund the project and the unfinished compound of debris, mud, and cement that was in the process of being bulldozed lay unused for months. In 1969, leftist community activists proposed that the space be turned into a public park and, through the help of the small counterculture publication *The Berkeley Barb*, were able to convince first the community and then the university to approve their plans. Hundreds of community members were directly involved in the devising of the space and completed the park by May of 1969.

However, Governor Reagan was concerned about the high volume of leftist activity that was occurring on California college campuses, and saw the creation of this park as a threat to the property rights of the university. Even though there was no widespread concern about the park from within the community, on May 15th the Governor sent in police officers to fence the area, which led to escalated tension and large-scale protests throughout the day. These spiraling events resulted with almost 3,000 National Guard Troops being deployed, one bystander dead, multiple wounded, and a state of emergency declared in Berkeley for two weeks. What should've been a communal cause for celebration transformed into a major cataclysm and one of the most tumultuous events in California in an already turbulent year.

Now, the park remains a free public space for all to use even though it is legally the property of the University of California. As well as being the site of many community events, concerts, art installations, and garden spaces, it has also gained a reputation for being a safe space for the homeless population of the Berkeley area. The park isn't just striving for the recreational needs of the community, but also to fulfill its basic human needs. In this way, it's taking on the form of a socioeconomic institution that is providing aid. Since People's Park grew out of the counterculture of the 1960s, both the creation of the space and the bloody incident that birthed it must be attached to the movement. Does the park still embody the ideals of the counterculture, and if it doesn't, does it matter if it is still an effective space for the community?

People's Park provides a compelling framework for the Powderhorn Neighborhood to think about the ways in which it can create spaces for both the underrepresented and the public overall. One of the glaring conflicts is that People's Park was fundamentally created externally of any kind of community organization, rather coming from a prestigious institution of higher education that had large amounts of money, even if it wasn't intended to become what it is. Without the money of UC Berkeley that was used to purchase the land, who is to say that People's Park would've been created? This also raises questions about the relationship between the university and the community, and if the university should have any kind of input on what the park should look like. While there are certainly universities in the Twin Cities that could replicate this kind of benefactor relationship, does this create an uncomfortable power dynamic? It seems to me that the purchase of such property should come from the community itself, to avoid the kinds of conflicts of interest that plague People's Park.

It's also interesting when looking at this place to consider how often politics and public art intersect. Why was Reagan so threatened by the creation of a public park? Although the goal of the community organizers was not to agitate the conservative establishment, they were still offended by the existence of this park because it went against some kind of value. This reflects how often public art can

## People's Park

1967

Cataloged by:  
*Felipe Jimenez*



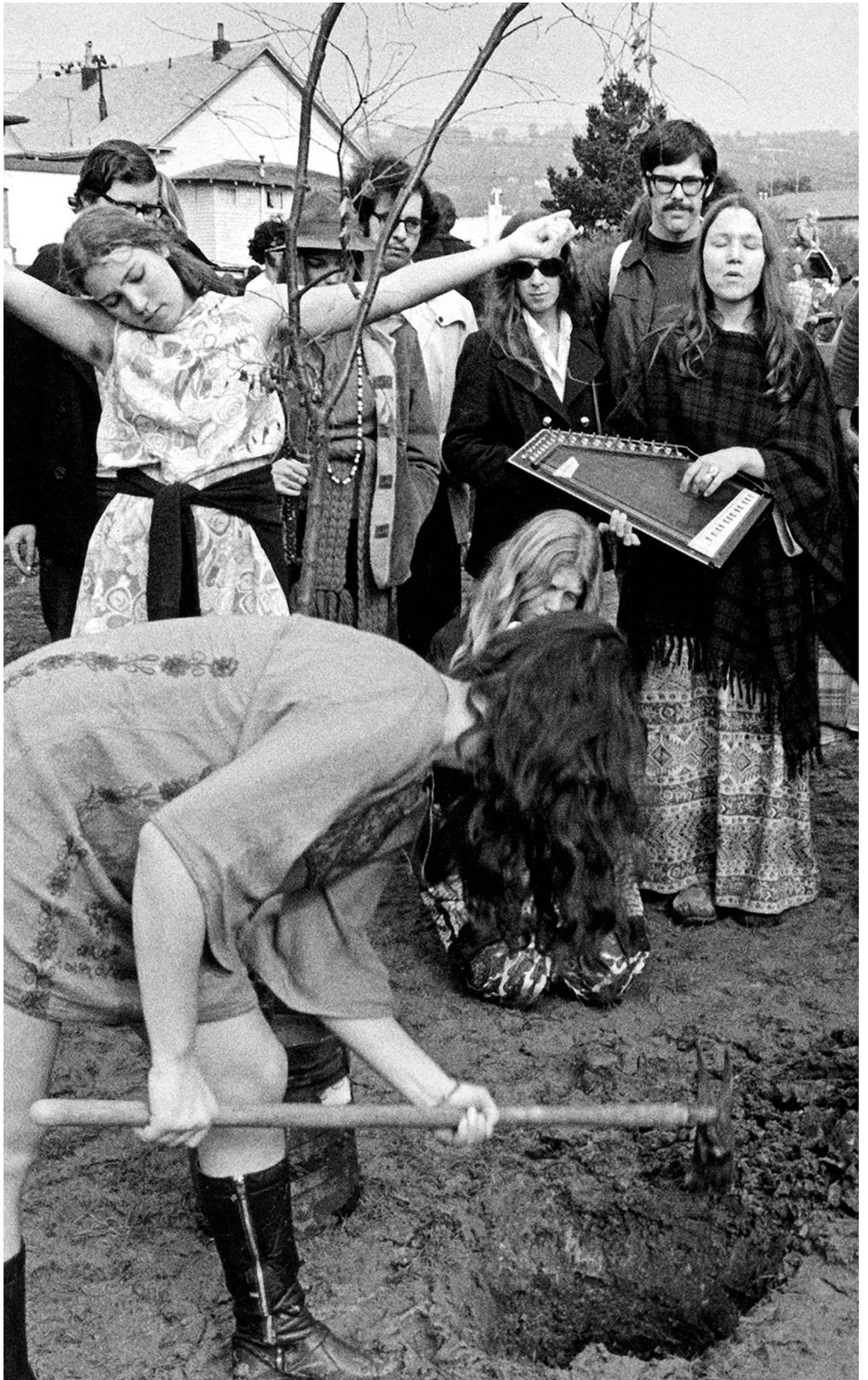
# Fieldsings / N°9

be charged with highly political symbolism that can be disruptive to a community and bring unnecessary tension. If a site like this were to come into creation in the Ninth Ward district, what would be the reaction from the overall community and the government, and what would the difference between the two responses reflect about the community's position within a sociopolitical state? Are the two the same?

People's Park is not without its contemporary issues; UC Berkeley, the legal proprietor, still is adamant about the construction of student housing given its low student-to-bed ratio. But the website of the park states: "The city and campus community must prevent UC Berkeley and private corporations from decimating People's Park". It is clear that the park doesn't affiliate itself with the university and views itself as its own entity. This also begs the question of who has the authority to 'speak' for the park.

Finally, once a place like this is established, it holds a special kind of utopian promise. A site for the community, built by the people of a place for themselves, is an open-ended vehicle that lends itself immensely well to communal imagination. We must recognize the value that such a place can provide as well as its potential hazards, but all the while radically reimagining what a public space can look like, for the more that is dreamed the more that it can achieve. Also by doing this, we must ask ourselves, why do we strive for inclusivity? More broadly, In exploring this question, community members can discover what it is they want out of such a public space, and more broadly, out of the community in which they inhabit.

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# Fieldsings / N°10

Academic discussions of globalization or international trade have historically under-considered the notion that there might be losers in such processes. On the whole, the two are often blithely considered to yield positive net benefits for all involved. The global neoliberal world order has been credited for bringing prosperity and democracy to the furthest reaches of the earth. That perspective was tempered in 1999 by the Battle of Seattle.

Reports of phenomena as varied as Banana Republics to Blood Diamonds had begun to crack the WTO's carefully maintained facade of globalization for years prior to the Battle of Seattle. However, never before had public actions against the international organizations that govern the globalized world occurred so potently within the United States.

Reports of a "massive" mobilization against the year end negotiations had circulated in the media throughout 1999. None predicted the 40,000 strong mass of protesters who took over the roads of Seattle in order to substantially delay and bring attention to the WTO's negotia-

tions. While there were spurious reports of violence, the protests were by and large peaceful. They were covered on all major media stations and broadcast around the country. In the end, the WTO meetings largely moved ahead after delays, but faced much greater scrutiny.

The protests, beyond raising a spectre of anti-globalization, posed questions on the nature of a "public". The WTO, full of countries with supposedly representative governments, ought not have been challenged by the "public" if it truly acted in their interest. The first line in the sand the Battle for Seattle created was between global institutions and the protesters. In this sense the protesters aligned themselves with publics all around the world wronged by globalization. Implicit in this dichotomy are lingering questions regarding who the WTO then benefits, and who directs the WTO's actions.

A second distinction made by the protests was that between the protesters and law enforcement. Like the WTO, if the police truly are there to serve (and protect) the public, then there ought not be such a clash between the two groups. Indeed, the American public's right to gather is theoretically especially protected by the constitution. Photos of the police standing between American protesters and heads of state from around the world, and facing the protesters, became an optical faux pas which pointed to whom the police are actually accountable. Beyond placing themselves in a global public as well as opposite the law enforcement, anti-WTO protesters in Seattle in 1999 experienced internal divisions and factions. Coming from

around the nation, the protesters descended on a community which was itself involved in the protests. Different protesters had different expectations about the extent to which they would remain nonviolent, the message they wanted to send, and so on. The public represented by the protesters was called into question.

On the one hand, there were those protesters who lived in the community that the protests took place. There were further protesters from around the country, some from anarchist groups bent on wreaking havoc, and many members of the Seattle community did not take part in the protests. The "public" of Seattle, viewed on televisions across the country, was amorphous and ill-defined. From afar, it is not clear how the public could speak, given it was bisected so. Nonetheless, the protests demarcated a tangible difference between the "public", as incoherent as it was, and a non-public.

Despite its geographic specificity, the protests activated viewers around the states and around the world. Like one of Robert Morris' sculptures, how one perceived the protests was highly dependent on their location, although with regard to the Battle for Seattle it was more a non-physical location. In seeing the protests, one must ask oneself where they fit into the social dynamic laid bare by the protesters, police, and WTO negotiators visible differences. Beyond the outlining of some different strata

## The Battle for Seattle / WTO

*November /  
December 1999*

Cataloged by:  
*Hunter Keeley*



# Fieldsings / N°10

of society, the protests force viewers to answer the question: why? What spurred the protest, and why the protesters feel the way they do, are natural questions for a viewer of the protests to have, and the following inquiry begins to unravel some commonly held assumptions about globalization.

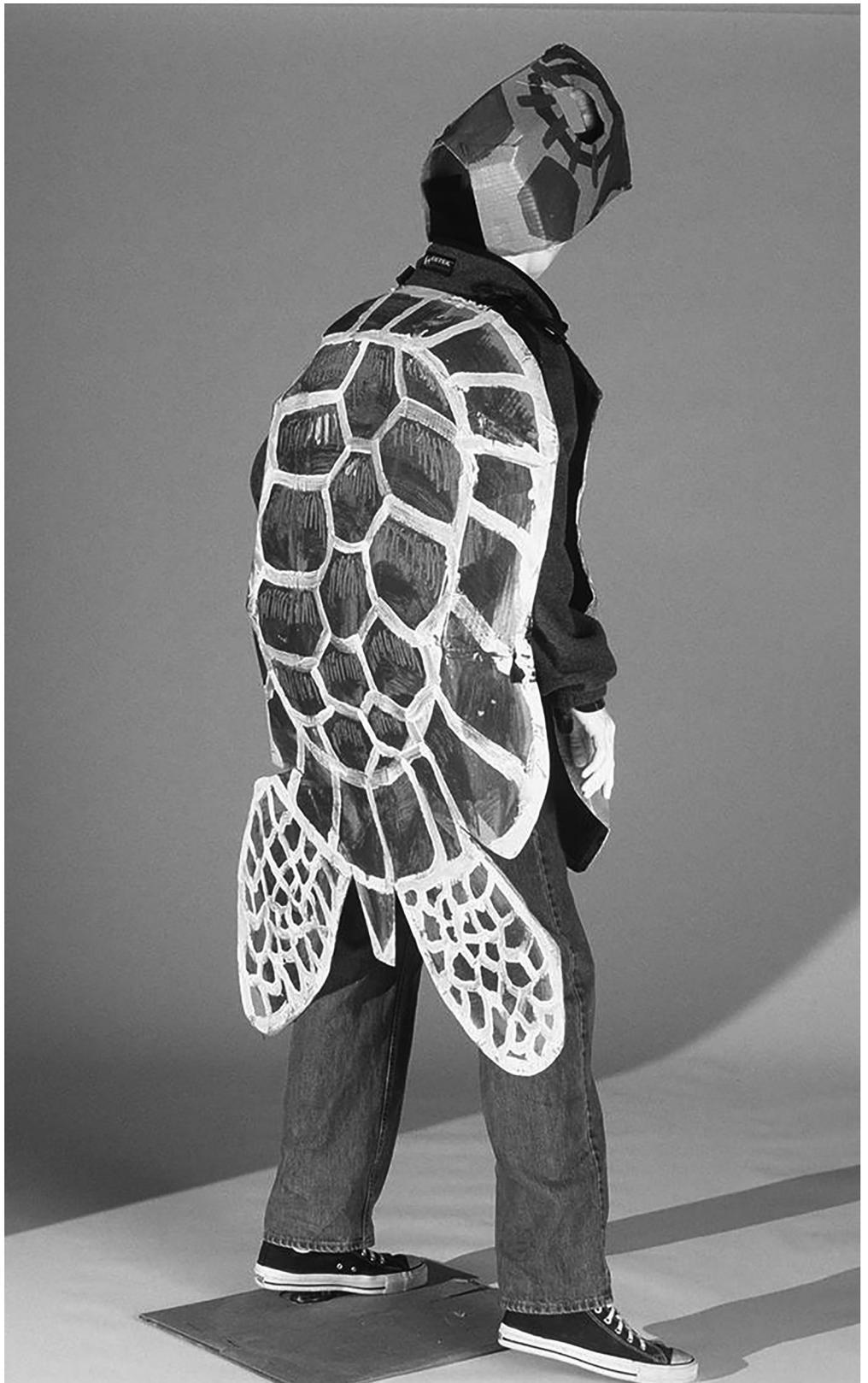
The Battle for Seattle is a parable for the protests over George Floyd's murder which rocked Powderhorn and Minneapolis last summer. While the issue at hand is less global, in this case police brutality instead of globalization, the same questions are posed by each set of protests. Who are the public in Minneapolis? Do the protestors speak for the public? What demarcations between the public and other groups do the protests point out?

As with the Battle for Seattle, the George Floyd protests clearly activated the public, the viewer. The follow-on protests around the country show that whatever the public voiced in Powderhorn, it was something that components of the public around the country agreed with. Like the Battle for Seattle, however, the conclusion of the protests did not coincide with a resolution of the questions posed by the protests.

The value that studying the Battle for Seattle or other mass protests of the past has for members of contemporary society is that it gives us a structure by which to better understand the meaning of the George Floyd protests, meaning which might be obscured by proximity (literal proximity for members of the Powderhorn neighbourhood). While the questions aren't the exact same between the two protests, in studying the former

we might better understand the questions of the latter, and might even be able to come up with some answers to them.

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# Fieldsings / N°11

*“Symbols are more meaningful than things themselves.”*

Wait what? Imagine seeing this statement on a billboard, shirt, sticker, or poster. What does it mean? That reaction is exactly what Jenny Holzer would want you to have. Holzer, an American conceptual artist, wrote many of these Truisms between 1977-1981 consisting of short, but very powerful, anonymous statements. She wrote upwards of three hundred Truisms during her time at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, inspired by her assigned readings on philosophy and theory. Holzer created these Truisms to present this information in a more accessible way to the public, providing an outlet for communities to question systems of power. These Truisms are thought provoking statements, often seemingly ambiguous or contradictory, persuading the viewer to take a second look and question their meanings. Many of the Truisms have a political message, often challenging authoritarianism and power or making bold claims about gender and class. In general, all of the Truisms use very stark and potent language, presented in

all caps. In this way, Holzer’s Truisms appear as factual and important bold statements. As the viewer is confronted with an anonymous one liner, they must decide if they agree with the jarring statement or not, possibly amending it in their mind to make it more agreeable. Heightening this interaction with the viewer is Holzer’s use of “you” and “your,” compelling individuals to ask themselves who the “you” is and who is speaking. The Truisms can provoke emotions as far ranging as joy, laughter, ambivalence, fear, or anger. That is what makes Holzer’s Truisms so special as their meaning is dependent on each individual viewer’s perspective and interpretation. In other words, the Truisms are activated by each person who engages with them. The Truisms are not meant to be definitive, but rather thought-provoking. Even though Holzer labels them as “truisms,” or true statements, it is up to the viewer to decide the extent to which they are true.

Holzer publicly displays her Truisms in a way that addresses everyone. Therefore, the viewer being discussed is the average city goer, not just the art viewing public. Even though Holzer’s Truisms have been displayed in gallery settings, most have been placed in public, even in Times Square! As these statements have been located in various locations across cities, they interrupt the passive flow of people and ideas through space. Holzer frequently presents her Truisms on storefronts and billboards, two of the most frequently viewed spaces in a city, often using LED signs. This is interesting as billboards are the epitome of public advertisement, blowing up an image, phrase, or slogan and placing it on a plane above the average citizen for all to see.

Yet, Holzer originally printed her Truisms on poster paper, scattering them throughout the city. Her Truisms have also appeared on condom packaging, been projected onto buildings, and have been displayed on t-shirts. More recently, Holzer has been working with projections and colorful flashing LED signs featuring scrolling words in her work. Even though Holzer’s statements are original, she appropriates both the medium of advertisements and the language they use. She appropriates corporations’ usage of billboards in her work, but also appropriates the somewhat aggressive language these companies use to attract attention and persuade the public. Holzer uses these mediums and strategies not only to interrupt an individual on the street by drawing their attention to read and interpret a message, but also to interrupt the transfer of information. Holzer chose the mediums of billboards, signs, and posters as they usually communicate dates, weather, statistics, and other impersonal and objective information. Holzer injects her striking and pronounced Truisms into these settings, undermining their original purpose as impersonal spaces. The viewer runs into a contradiction as the personal and subjective Truisms seem out of place on a public sign. At the same time, Holzer’s work is very site specific as it is ingrained into the urban landscape. Therefore, it is not only the message that is crucial to Holzer’s work, but also the medium and the site as they further assist in forcing the viewer to question the role

**Truisms**  
*Jenny Holzer*

*1977 - 1981*

Cataloged by:  
*Natalie Lafferty*



# Fieldsings / N°11

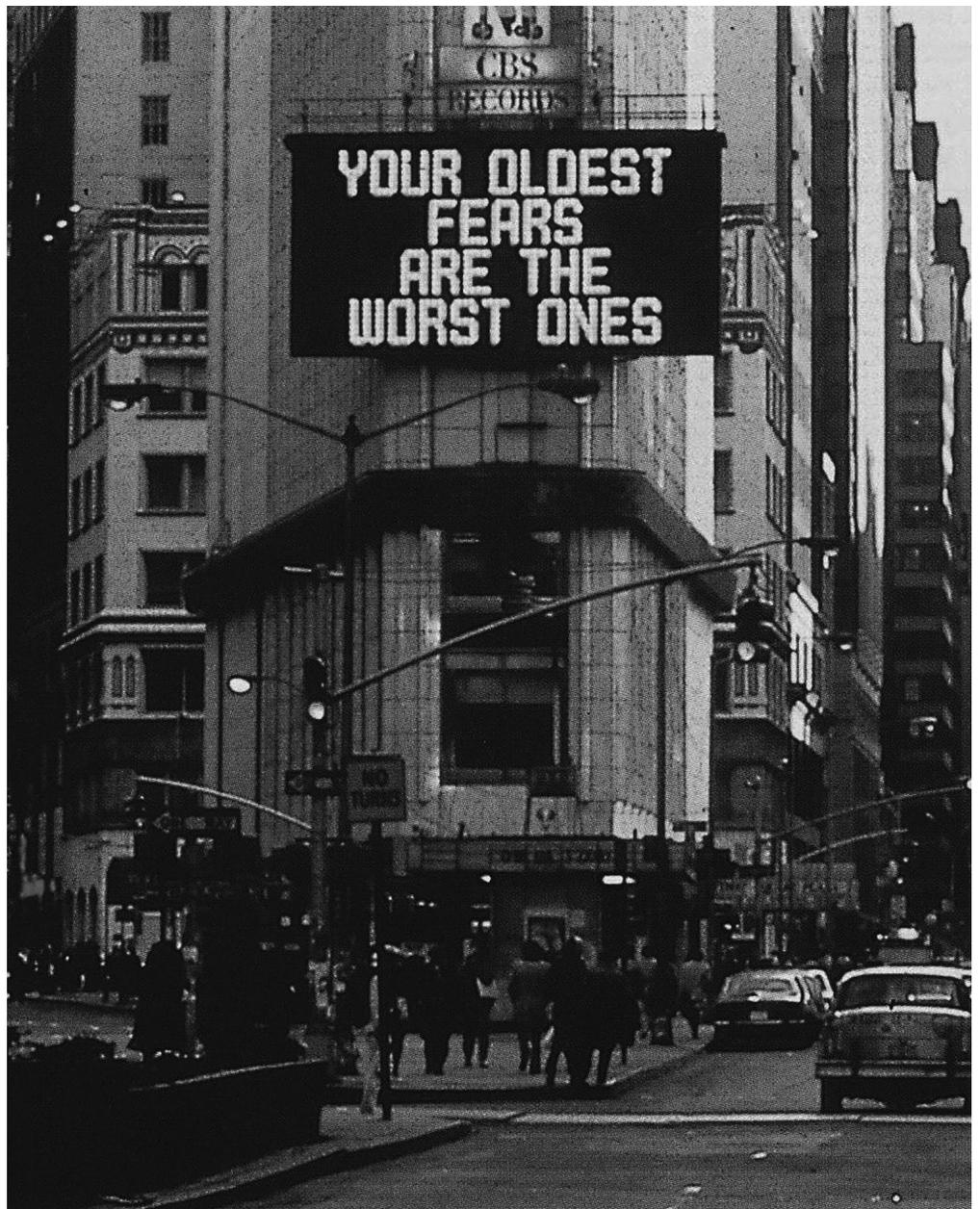
of media, advertisements, and those in power and the extent to which they control populations and their thoughts.

Holzer's work continues to have meaning and significance today as her work evokes the endless scroll through Twitter even though her original Truisms predate social media. The scrolling or looping of short statements is similar to the viewing of short character bound posts on a Twitter feed, yet Holzer's statements are more insistent and complicated in meaning. Holzer has also continued her work in this age of fake news, critiquing the government's role in concealing and misrepresenting information. In a 2020 interview with Artnews, Holzer explains how she is applying her Truisms to critique the handling of the pandemic, climate change, and gun violence. Overall, Holzer's Truisms continue to be impactful today and are a productive lens through which community activism can be studied.

Holzer's Truisms are important as they allow people to question not only individually, but simultaneously and together. This is significant as it serves as a catalyst for conversation, providing individuals within a community the opportunity to share their reactions and initial opinions on a specific statement. Holzer's goal is to disrupt the status quo, often deemed the "consensus," by the political system, but who decided that? These Truisms give the power back to the people, allowing them to make decisions that impact the places they inhabit. Therefore, Holzer's Truisms present a model for future action as they act as a template. Each community can decide what they would like the statement to say and what questions they feel are important to think about. This model allows every-

one to be entitled to their own ideas or questions, not forcing any opinion on anyone. Yet, this realization is only made after one thinks about the purpose of the statements as sometimes they can originally come off as command-like, exactly the opposite of open-ended conversation starters. Another productive aspect of the truism template is that the only expense comes from renting the space where they are projected or displayed, but other than that there are no costs besides printing if that is the route taken. The statement can also be projected, free of cost. Overall, Holzer's Truisms are examples of how to present food for thought through art and public space.

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# Fieldsings / N°12

Revolution is not a series of actions that simply raises awareness about disparities in society, revolution is a change in mindset when the oppressed realize their social potential to bring permanent change. It is an uprising of repressed who are ready to take control of their own situations. It is a shift in power and perspectives from individual to collective memory. May 1968 Paris saw one such movement. The student / labour union demonstrations were an eruption of years of racial, gendered and classed oppression where the people took back the power that the ideals of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' had rightfully granted them.

Constricted by a patriarchal conservative society where freedom of expression had been overshadowed by institutional restrictions, 2nd May 1968 was the boiling point of people's suffocation. "There was a need to talk and share", as the then 20-year-old Josette Preud'homme puts it, for revolutions to realize their cultural capital, there is always a need to connect people, resources and emotions. There is a need to share and communicate those deep-seated feelings of pain and

suffocation and find the solidarity within these shared experiences that connects one to their community, and human being to human beings with threads of shared stories.

This linking of shared emotions and solidarity among students became a thing of beauty and was demonstrated in the 1968 riots. The seeds of the revolution had been planted back in March when student radical groups occupied a university council room in Nanterre University to discuss issues of classism and political bureaucracy in French society and their school's administration. By May 2nd 1968, these ideas were expressed in student protests on University grounds, however, with simple demands of students to be able to move freely and spend nights in others' dorms. When this was met with arrests, threats of expulsion and temporary closure of the University, it instigated other Universities to join the cause. The motivations were not limited to demands of being able to go to others' dorms, they conflated into the overarching desire for freedom to honor each other's needs and asks and move as a community toward a society where demonstrated solidarity is not met with brutality from the state and institutions that were meant to serve and protect them. Arms linked, standing together as a unit, flags flying while people marched to the Arc de Triomphe, the riots held resemblance to a symphony of movement and expression.

Once the students from the Sorbonne supported the Nanterre students by occupying an amphitheater and were met with violent police brutality, more and more students formed bigger and bigger demonstrations. The result was clear; the protests

were not made up of pockets of students asking for permission anymore. The demonstrators had combined to form a unit that made concrete demands for a societal change toward freedom of expression, sexuality and movement within social and political hierarchies. Shared experiences were displayed on the streets with students' linked arms standing face to face with the state and the police. "It was a festival with no beginning and end,

I saw everyone and no one," as Mikhail Bakunin remembers, individuals transformed to groups, to communities. Thoughts of individual comfort and safety evaporated to be replaced by communal needs for freedom and equality. Such new expressions of community led to new experiences, inspirations and events eventually leading to labour demonstrations that almost brought down Charles de Gaulle's government. Sitting in power for over 10 years and hiding in Germany during the riots, it was the Paris riots that exposed Gaulle's disregard for public demands and led to snap legislative elections at the end of May.

The protests also employed disrupting quotidian movements and experiences by using cars as barriers. A classic mode of movement and transportation was placed in a new context where the cars barred movement of the police and obstructed the oppressive monotony of daily activities ruled by authority, that the right-wing mistook for peace.

## Art & Labor Solidarity - Paris

*May 1968*

Cataloged by:  
*Apoorba Misra*



# Fieldsings / N°12

Barricades were put up by the police and the shocking levels of police brutality portrayed the maliciousness that was always present within the conservative state and their policies. What came out of these upturned narratives was a revelation — the revelation that it is the public, the network of student, labour and other such communities that are the fuel of an economy. Therefore, slogans such as “Be reasonable — demand the impossible” came into popular use during the protests. People realized that their demands to experience life that is not entrenched in social, political and economic discrepancies and institutional brutality, are in fact not outrageous but well within their rights.

By May 13, over a million demonstrators were marching the streets of Paris. By May 16, they were joined by over two million labours and workers. This wasn't simply a showcase of strength in sheer mass, but the magnitude of shared experiences that we are often unaware of. In a neoliberal capitalist society that feeds off the vulnerable by shifting the blame of its own shortcomings, it is easy to forget that it is not just us and our immediate surroundings that are experiencing trauma. It is riots and protests like Paris 1968 and United States 2020 that show the universality of such experiences and it is only through an acknowledgement of each others' pain that we can move forward. It is only through a collective effort toward communal sharing of resources, emotions and strength that we can uplift ourselves and each other.

Before it was a political movement that exposed the inadequacies of the conservative government and stark realities

of inequality and suppression in French society, the 1968 protests were a cultural and sexual revolution. They brought to light the atrocities that were inflicted on the demonstrators and more importantly the riots expressed the silent strength that was always present within the public. It is in the united front of shared memories that true strength and potential culminates and that strength was felt on the Parisian streets. It is not a moment in history, but a testament to the power of the people. When individual goals morph into collective hopes, that's when revolutions are born.

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# Fieldsings / N°13

The AIDS activism posters from the 1980s were produced by the Gran Fury collective in collaboration with ACT-UP and displayed in various locations of New York City in an attempt to both educate the public on the HIV/AIDS epidemic and urge the government to put its resources towards medical research and the development of a treatment. ACT (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was an activist coalition that used civil disobedience and activism to fight the mainstream hostility toward the homosexual community due to a false common belief that homosexuals were the ones causing and continuing the HIV/AIDS epidemic. ACT-UP held weekly meetings at The Center on West 13th Street in New York, and those meetings brought about the emergence of an artist collective, Gran Fury, that began to produce various public expressions, such as t-shirts, posters, billboards, etc., to help ACT-UP get the message through. Thus, Gran Fury is sometimes seen as a sort of a “propaganda” arm of ACT-UP.

Gran Fury, also based in New York City, was comprised of a diverse group of artists and de-

signers, namely Richard Elovich, Avram Finkelstein, Amy Heard, Tom Kalin, John Lindell, Loring McAlpin, Marlene McCarty, Donald Moffett, Michael Nesline, Mark Simpson and Robert Vazquez-Pacheco. Their works and demonstrations in the late 1980s and early 1990s reflected the group’s outrage against the government that ignored HIV/AIDS as a national health crisis, failed to secure funding for medical research, treatment, and education, profited from inflated costs for therapeutic drugs, and perpetuated homophobic misrepresentations of HIV and AIDS. Their posters are still widely known today, and they serve as a powerful example of art being used as a platform for raising awareness around a major public issue.

The artists and activists of that time did not have access to social media platforms to spread their message; instead, they used their environment to communicate their ideas to both the individuals and the institutions. Avram Finkelstein, a member of Gran Fury and the author of *After Silence: A History of AIDS through Its Images*, wrote in his blog that the city itself was their social media platform: “the East and West Villages in New York were papered with manifestos, meetings announcements, and demonstration flyers. When young people needed to communicate with each other, we used the streets.”

Getting their works out in the streets as posters, announcements, or even billboards was therefore Gran Fury’s primary method of direct communication with the public. Another member of Gran Fury in their interview with *The Atlantic* was asked how their “conventional advertising approaches” were devised.

They responded by saying that “[they] simply used the tools that were available to [them].” Thus, the artists of Gran Fury opted for a practical and efficient way of spreading their message by going with what seemed to make the best use of their goals and resources. Additionally, in choosing the advertising medium, they deliberately and blatantly took on the job of the press, the government, and the medical establishments of delivering information and countering stigma; a job that should not have been left to artists and private organizations to begin with.

Gran Fury produced a large compilation of works, some of which are still widely known and remembered today; the AIDS activism posters were among such works. For example, the “Silence=Death” poster vividly communicates one of the central messages of the entire ACT-UP initiative - the battle against AIDS is a public one and it requires everyone’s effort to stop the spread of the disease. Silence comes at the cost of human lives, and the longer we ignore the issue, the more lives the epidemic will take. Another poster with the bloody handprint against the white background both blatantly places the responsibility on the government and communicates a terrifying statistic - “one AIDS death every half hour.” Including those two statements on a single work of art establishes a direct link between the government’s flagrant inaction and the consequences that it entails. Another poster that features a

## Gran Fury

*1988 - 1996*

Cataloged by:

*Anastasia  
Romanova*



# Fieldsings / N°13

pink-eyed portrait of Ronald Reagan, the US President at the time, and has the term “AIDS-GATE” printed across his image. It expresses the artists’ profound frustration with the institutions that were supposed to keep the public safe. Interestingly, the pink eyes were a last-minute artistic choice by Oliver Johnston who thought that Reagan “didn’t look evil enough” on the original work.

There was a great multitude of AIDS activist posters produced by the Gran Fury collective, most of which are still displayed at many public exhibits. While they all had unique artistic organization and value, what unites them is the artists’ desire to take action in the absence of any institutional response to a major health crisis. Thus, the ACT-UP and Gran Fury initiatives are a powerful example of using art as a means of raising awareness and urging both the public and the government to address a major social issue. The work of Gran Fury provides a relevant and efficient model for future action within communities that allows art to become an instrument for public change. Both ACT-UP as a whole and Gran Fury in particular started out as groups of passionate individuals who simply wanted to bring attention to a crisis that was swept under the rug by both the government and medical institutions. Art became a medium for public education and action, which allowed the HIV/AIDS pandemic to be seen and addressed by the community members. By bringing art out on the streets and making it impossible to ignore, the Gran Fury members established it as a powerful tool for social and political change.

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# Fieldsings / N°14

On April 11, 2002, five hundred volunteers moved a sand dune outside of Lima, Peru. This seemingly impossible feat was accomplished through the artwork by Mexico City-based Belgian artists Francis Alÿs, *When Faith Moves Mountains* (see image). In order to accomplish this ridiculous task, each volunteer was given a shovel before forming a massive line at the base of the dune. Over the course of an entire day, the volunteers slowly walked up the dune while shoveling, thus displacing the sand and ultimately moving the dune a few inches. The location chosen for the work was the arid Ventanilla district outside of Lima, and the volunteers were enlisted from the refugee shantytowns in the area.

This futile and absurd act of moving a mountain has larger social implications for Alÿs and thus accomplishes more than moving some sand a few inches. First, the artwork responds to the social situation in Peru in the early 2000s, when the country was transitioning out of the Fujimori dictatorship and was in a state of turmoil. Alÿs describes travelling to the Lima Bienal in October 2000, a year before the

fall of the dictatorship, where he witnessed “clashes on the streets” and the strengthening of the resistance movement. “It was a desperate situation, and I felt that it called for an ‘epic response, a ‘beau geste’ at once futile and heroic, absurd and urgent,” wrote Alÿs. Thus, the idea of moving a mountain was born. While the act itself may be pointless, Alÿs created a social allegory demonstrating the power of human will and collective action that could enter into oral tradition. Although there is extensive photographic and video documentation of the work, Alÿs said he was interested in exploring how *When Faith Moves Mountains* “has the potential to become a fable or an urban myth.” The story of humans moving a mountain is indeed fantabulous, and thus the work can survive beyond the actual event in rumors, urban myths, and oral history. This leads one to think about the power of oral tradition and how this tale of humans collaboratively performing a small miracle could inspire future generations.

While *When Faith Moves Mountains* is an opportunity for generating an uplifting myth about the power of humanity, it is also a critique on the political status of many Latin American countries. Alÿs’ motto for the work was “Maximum effort, minimum result,” which reveals the tendency of Latin American governments to undergo massive modernization campaigns that produce minimal reforms. Similarly, collectively moving a sand dune requires immense manpower to achieve a pointless task with no practical purpose.

*When Faith Moves Mountains* is also an extension of Land Art, which sculpts the landscape to create earthworks out of natural

materials in specific locations. For example, Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* was a spiral made out of sand, rocks, and soil that protruded into the waters of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. When *When Faith Moves Mountains* is “my attempt to deromanticize Land art” said Alÿs. “Here, we have attempted to create a kind of Land art for the landless.” By engaging Land art with the social context of Peru in the early 2000s, Alÿs’ work is not simply a detached, romantic, aesthetic structure emerging from the landscape, such as *Spiral Jetty*. Rather, *When Faith Moves Mountains* introduces Land art to social practice by involving the local community in the piece. Furthermore, unlike traditional Land Art works, the trace of *When Faith Moves Mountains* does not continue through the physical manipulation or addition to the landscape, as the sand dune’s movement is unnoticeable. As mentioned previously, this allows the work to live on in myth and oral tradition. The idea that by working together we can achieve small miracles such as moving mountains is quite empowering and can be used as a model for future community action. First, it is important to note that *When Faith Moves Mountains* was particular to Peru in the early 2000s and thus the exact same act would not have the same impact if translated to, say, Minneapolis in 2020. However, the ideas generated by *When Faith Moves Mountains* can be applied to new places and contexts. For example, residents of Minneapolis’ Ninth Ward could gather to-

**When  
Faith Moves  
Mountains**  
*Francis Alÿs*

*April 11, 2002*

Cataloged by:  
*Lea Winston*



# Fieldsings / N°14

gether in Powderhorn Park with shovels, form a circle around the perimeter of the pond, and push the earth away from the water, effectively expanding the pond. The work could be called *When Faith Expands Water*. Like *When Faith Moves Mountains*, *When Faith Expands Water* would be a futile act demonstrating the power of human will to achieve small miracles and its legacy could be passed down through rumor and myth, as the pond's expansion would be practically imperceivable.

One could argue, however, that *When Faith Moves Mountains* was a missed opportunity to harness collective action to achieve tangible, practical results. Therefore, perhaps a new adaptation of the work would involve acting together as a community to solve a problem. For example, residents of Minneapolis' Ninth Ward could work together over the course of an entire day to set up a community garden in Corcoran Park. *When Faith Grows a Garden* could also generate a mythical tale of how in one day community members effectively grew a garden. Unlike *When Faith Moves Mountains* or *When Faith Stops Water*, however, a community garden would be a noticeable and lasting change to the landscape. Because sustainability is key to effectively solving a problem, part of the mythical nature of Alÿs' work would be lost when applied to achieve tangible, positive results.

Finally, it is interesting to think about how Alÿs entered into the Peruvian community as an outsider, and how this affected his work. Although Alÿs conducted extensive research before executing the artwork, he was still a foreign, white, man coming into a struggling Latin American

community. I wonder how the work might change if the community members themselves instigated the work rather than relying on outsider intervention. Thus, if applied today, perhaps members of Minneapolis' Ninth Ward can organize amongst themselves to demonstrate the power of community, collective action, and human will to conduct small miracles.

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