

still searching

5. Delirious Anthropology

By CLAIRE BISHOP | Published: 26. OCTOBER 2013

I feel like I've spent the last four weeks overstating my scepticism about contemporary art's retrospectivity—as seen in the repurposing of modernist art and architecture, the incorporation of pre-existing archives, and the retrieval of outmoded mechanisms of display. All three are examples of art's fascination with the past that too often forgets to keep its sightlines on the present. This week I'd like to conclude my series of blogposts by looking at three recent videos that take past works and pre-existing archives as their starting point, but which do so in order to assess the present: *Provenance* by Amie Siegel (recently on show at Simon Preston Gallery in the Lower East Side), *Grosse Fatigue* by Camille Henrot and *Ricerce Three* by Sharon Hayes (the last two exhibited at the Venice Biennale).



Amie Siegel, *Provenance*, 2013 (HD video, color, sound, 40' 30") courtesy Simon Preston, New York, (installation view)

Siegel's lingering, luxuriant hour-long *Provenance* (2013) takes us back to the first week of my blog, when I asked why so many contemporary artists are making work about modernist art, architecture and design. Her video deals with the fate of Pierre Jeanneret's chairs for Le Corbusier's complex in Chandigarh. Designed and fabricated in the 1950s, these chairs are today sold as luxury furniture for the discerning one percent. The twist is that this story is told backwards: as the video opens with lingering shots of spacious, perfectly-arranged homes in London, Paris and New York, and aboard a luxury yacht. Jeanneret's chairs—now refitted in coloured calf-skin—are identifiable not just by their distinctive design, but by the handpainted serial numbers on their sides. Siegel cuts to the photographer's studio where two of these chairs from Le Corbusier's government buildings in Chandigarh are photographed for an auction house catalogue, and then cuts to the auction where they sell for \$60,000. Her camera then turns to the Belgian restoration factory where the chairs are gutted and refurbished around the original teak structure.



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Amie Siegel, *Provenance*, 2013 (HD video, color, sound, 40' 30") courtesy Simon Preston, New York, (HD video still)

And then we move to Chandigarh: a forest landscape at dawn, the sound of birds and monkeys, and exquisitely framed shots of Le Corbusier's architecture. The familiar chairs can now be seen in use, in government offices drowning in piles upon piles of paperwork. In the attic backspaces of these buildings, hundreds more of these broken and dusty chairs are stacked high on top of each other—and we soon find the reason why. In a renovated suite of offices, the clutter of paperwork has been replaced by computers in open-plan booths, complete with corporate swivel chairs covered in plastic. Over at the Punjab Assembly, meanwhile, Jeanneret's bright-coloured chairs are still in use, zinging in yellow, red, blue, green. In University library, amid the ambient rustling of research, students also use these same chairs. The film ends here in the university, with the chairs valued for their function rather than for the luxury signifier that is 'Le Corbusier'.



Amie Siegel, *Provenance*, 2013 (HD video, color, sound, 40' 30") courtesy Simon Preston, New York, (HD video still)

In the great slew of contemporary art that repurposes modern architecture and design, Siegel's piece is one of the few I have encountered that deals with the economic status of these objects in today's global marketplace. It's a lavish work, but this also makes me uneasy. *Provenance* tells a story, but does so in a visual language that is as luxurious as the private dwellings wherein these objects now reside. Collectors' (second or third) homes and Punjab University Library are filmed alike in the most sumptuous fashion, to the point where any position (criticism, indignation, or approval) is smoothed over in gliding camerawork. Siegel reports on a state of affairs, but declines to comment, letting a story speak for itself. The experience is ravishing, but its cost is a loss of the grit that made the storytelling function of previous photographic practices so poignant and memorable (Sekula, Goldblatt, Sternfeld).

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Sharon Hayes, meanwhile, has long made work that draws on the past, especially popular archives and political protest. Her recent video for Venice also looks backwards to go forwards: it takes as its starting point Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Comizi d'Amore* (1965), in which the director interviewed a wide cross-section of Italians about sexuality and relationships—from schoolchildren to the elderly, male and female, urban and rural, north and south. Crucially, Pasolini didn't interview his subjects one to one, in the manner of 'talking head' documentaries, but collectively—in the streets, cafes and fields. His interviewer asks small boys where babies come from; he asks an elderly farmer if a woman's virginity is important; he asks young women if they approve of brothels. The latter passages

are the most poignant, almost painful, as young women struggle to speak out in front of their cocky male peers.



Sharon Hayes, *Ricerche: Three*, 2013 (single channel HD video, 38') Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin, (Installation view)

In *Ricerche: Three* (2013), Hayes redirects this informal interview format to interrogate a group of thirty-six students at a women's college in New England. The resulting video, simply filmed in the spring sunshine, is some 38 minutes long and provides a cross-section of gender positions at an institution that many would regard as implicitly conservative. It turns out that the college houses the greatest diversity—from those with a strong religious framework (often from South East Asia) to the most radical (becoming transgender). The style of filming sticks closely to that of Pasolini, with individual faces framed within the collective body. Some of Hayes's questions also overlap with those of the Italian director: Do you think you'll marry soon? Do you think of yourself as a Don Juan? Others are more tailored to the context: Why did you come to an all-female college? Can you be more free sexually here than politically or intellectually?



Sharon Hayes, *Ricerche: Three*, 2013 (single channel HD video, 38') Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin, (HD video still)

The result is a generational snapshot that is also geographical. If Pasolini travels Italy to gain a diversity of results, Hayes finds a global spectrum on one campus. And if her respondents' answers have a common theme, it is the overwhelming pressure to identify and label oneself in the marketplace of identity. The appearance of these young faces in the sun, struggling to express their independence and individuality in front of their peer group, is unexpectedly hypnotic. And while *Ricerche: Three* can be seen as a historical update of (and antidote to) the gender politics of *Comizi d'Amore*, it also opens up to new questions. If Pasolini's film shows women struggling to articulate their sexuality in a macho Italian culture—the light of feminism still a faint glimmer on the horizon—then Hayes captures a moment when female self-assertion is unquestionably more confident, but where uncertainties now congregate around biological modulations of the body. Unexpectedly, the all-women's college becomes the testing ground for the co-existence of gender's own multiple modernities.

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It is telling that Hayes's mining of the past doesn't lead to a fascination with the Italian neo-realist director or with one of his actors, but to a discussion of sexuality *today*. In a similar fashion, Camille Henrot's *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) turns to the allure of the archive but in order to prompt thoughts about the

acquisition and storage of knowledge in the twenty-first century. Her thirteen-minute video resulted from a residency at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, and some of video's material is shot directly in its natural history archives and laboratories: drawers upon drawers of preserved parrots, toucans, insects, fossils. But rather than wallowing in archival nostalgia, Henrot turns this experience into a pounding, percussive video set to a soundtrack by poet Jacob Bromberg and music by Joakim Bouaziz. The work opens with the image of a galaxy upon her computer desktop, and proceeds to rhythmically layer knowledge upon knowledge in the form of stacked open windows. Natural history collides with technology, colonial history, poetry, Wikipedia and creation myths in a kaleidoscope of colour and taxonomy, research and incantation.



Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue*, 2013 (video, color, sound, 13') © ADAGP Camille Henrot. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris (video still)

Grosse Fatigue also marks an update of the multi-channel video installation: rather than surrounding viewers with simultaneous projections (à la Isaac Julien or Doug Aitken), Henrot makes a single-screen work that places images on top of one other, as windows on a desktop. Turning pages of books, scrolling pages on a website, video of archivists and storage systems: *Grosse Fatigue* is a poetic response to information overload and an antidote to the archival impulse, replacing the latter's austere aesthetic (the type-written text, the faded photograph, the glass vitrine) with acidic hues, virulently painted fingernails, and a sensuous, mythological soundtrack. It evokes the persistence of creation myths and deep time in the visual imagery of computers—from galaxy screensavers to the iPhone's globe motif—to produce a delirious anthropology of present-day perception exhausted by information.



Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue*, 2013 (video, color, sound, 13') © ADAGP Camille Henrot. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris (video still)

These works by Hayes and Henrot mine the past, but not in the name of retrieving and presenting obscure histories, minor figures and overlooked episodes for their own sake. Instead, the past is a starting-point for analyzing the present day. This is not to deny that archivally-oriented art, smitten with the vitrine and curatorial methodology, can offer important counterpoints to officially sanctioned histories, it is more frequently the case that they exacerbate our sense of unmanageably fragmented knowledge ('the Google effect'). The 'artist as historian' is today's equivalent of the nineteenth-century history painter, but chooses to focus on minor events rather than major, subjecting it to microscopic analysis. By contrast, the works of Hayes and Henrot are more interested in using the past as a way to grasp our own time, as if through binoculars held the wrong way. The present is seen from afar and defamiliarized, always with half an eye on the future's judgement-to-come.

Just Saying No

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON ON THE MUSEUM OF NON PARTICIPATION

IT'S APRIL 19, four days after the Boston Marathon bombings, and I'm on my way from the Minneapolis airport to my hotel. As the radio broadcasts news of the search for the Tsarnaev brothers, my taxi driver comments on the ironies of the phrase *criminal justice*. I'm in Minneapolis to attend the opening of the Museum of Non Participation's exhibition at the Walker Art Center, "The New Deal," which focuses on questions of political speech, the grammar of rights, and discourses of protest.

Created by London-based artists Karen Mirza and Brad Butler in 2007, when the two were living in Pakistan, the Museum is a peripatetic series of workshops, presentations, installations, and collectively devised performances. Its origin story is fable-like: Visiting the National Art Gallery in Islamabad one day, Mirza and Butler found themselves trapped inside by a melee just beyond the institution's doors, where a mass demonstration by the Pakistani Lawyers' Movement had been met with extreme police violence. Then and there, the pair conceived their conceptual project, a wide-ranging inquiry into how art production can, and cannot, be reconciled with contemporary crises. Their endorsement of what they call nonparticipation does not entail a rejection of political involvement (or of participatory art practices, for that matter). They think of

nonparticipation not as failure to engage, but as a space of possibility—as in opting out, boycotts, strikes, and other forms of withholding. Under the Museum's flexible rubric, they have generated specific responses to conditions in locations from Egypt to Germany. "The New Deal" marks their itinerant institution's first visit to the US.

One focal point of the opening is a performance of Bertolt Brecht's 1929 "teaching play," *The Exception and the Rule*, which uses the tale of a merchant and his servant to impart a lesson about class antagonism. The staging is the culmination of a series of workshops in which Mirza and Butler explored Brecht's text alongside artists, activists, performers, students, and workers from the Twin Cities, using the methods of the late Brazilian director Augusto Boal. Mirza and Butler have a serious, long-standing engagement with Boal, who in the 1970s developed the radically participatory Theatre of the Oppressed. Here they put into practice his theories about interactivity and the conversion of the audience into "spect-actors." I arrive too late to see the play, and, as a nonparticipant, I can only try to forensically piece together what happened. I question some of the players, examine photos, scour the written materials. I am frustrated that there is no video documentation. Meanwhile, as what is being gruesomely called the

"Boston manhunt" progresses, Google Earth homes in on a location, freezes on a blurry boat.

I am present for the other event that weekend, a discussion featuring sociologist Avery Gordon and artist Sharon Hayes. Gordon speaks about local legacies of nonparticipation in relation to Minnesota's abolitionist movement. Hayes, whose own practice (like that of the Museum of Non Participation) investigates the ways in which power relations are embedded in the structures of language, presents excerpts from the transcripts of the trials of detainees at Guantánamo Bay. Hayes reminds us that the detainees are on hunger strike—another refusal.

In addition to their work with theater, Mirza and Butler make audiovisual and text-based pieces, and "The New Deal" features a selection of this work. In their affecting video *Hold Your Ground*, 2012, a woman repeats a series of Arabic phonemes, as if struggling to

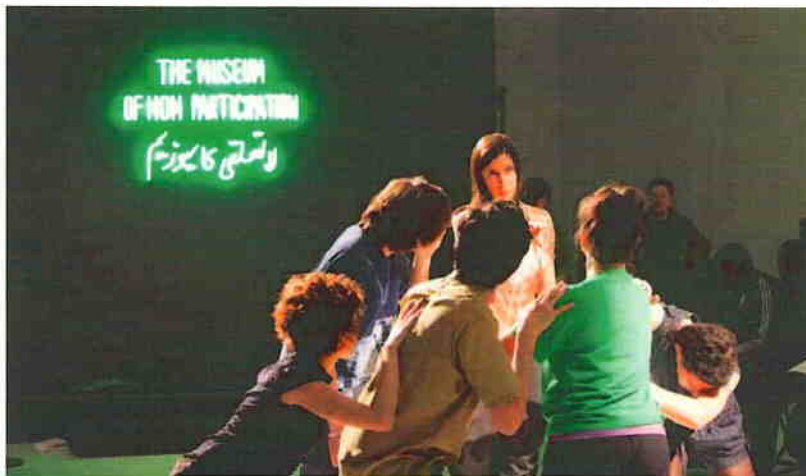
Mirza and Butler think of non-participation not as a failure to engage, but as a space of possibility.

teach, or learn, the language—a striking embodiment of thwarted communication that also signals the hopeful emergence of nascent dialogue. A large installation juxtaposes art from the Walker's collection with four United Nations resolutions on Iraq, presented as annotated documents of escalating length; the resolutions' cold syntax of authority is thrown into relief by carefully curated works, including a Kerry James Marshall print, Jenny Holzer's still-potent *Truisms*, 1977–79 (a litany of maxims like *AN ELITE IS INEVITABLE*), and Carl Andre's 1972 poem "Am Am Not Am Not Willing."

Every encounter with art is informed by the conditions of viewing. At the Walker that weekend, debates rage about when, exactly, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev should be read his Miranda rights. In a joint statement, Lindsey Graham and John McCain say he shouldn't be Mirandized at all: "Under the Law of War we can hold this suspect as a potential enemy combatant not entitled to Miranda warnings. . . ." In this, the brute power of lexical mechanisms—the import of the designation *enemy combatant*, the capacity of a spoken invocation to delineate a person's fate—is made manifest. But what happens when political actors reject language entirely? Such rejection can produce a deadly literal-mindedness, so that injured bodies become the medium of protest, bodily destruction the expression of rage. We cannot opt out of discourse without opting out of ethics too: We are part of the conversation whether we like it or not. The Museum of Non Participation reminds us of this, proposing that the tactics of cultural production—Brecht's allegory, Holzer's semiotic excess, Andre's reticent prosody—can be used to develop more nuanced and productive means of withdrawal. Perhaps this is why "The New Deal" feels like such an urgent and timely provocation. □

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The Museum of Non Participation's performance of Bertolt Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*, 1929. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, April 18, 2013. From left: Susy Bielek, David Kim, Rigoberto Lara Guzmán, Karen Mirza, Alejandra Tobar, and Aaron Rosenblum. Photo: Olga Ivanova.



Expropriating the Voice

woman (h)as a voice with meaning



A voice calls through the darkness. Filling a screen, a face sings a strange lullaby to anyone who will listen, drawing us down a dimly lit walkway. 'So hold me mum, in your arms.' (The artist appeals to her mother.) 'So hold me, mum, in your long arms.' (The artist appears to have a tall mother.) 'In your automatic arms, your petrochemical arms, in your arms. So hold me, mum, in your long arms, your petrochemical arms, your military arms, in your arms, in your electronic arms.' (No, it seems that having a larger-than-average mother is, in fact, not the issue for the artist. This is no lullaby.)

These are the lyrics of Laurie Anderson's *O Superman*, (1981). Bridging the gap between high and low culture, *O Superman* peaked at number two in the UK singles music chart in 1981. Nothing like the dub-step chart-toppers of today: the grave tempo; quiet impeding tone; and even the melody of the work, with its descending semi-tones (the ultimate signifier of melancholy in music), all work to represent a societal sadness, the result of a feeling of alienation engendered by Postmodernism. The postmodern subject becomes merely 'an other among others' through his or her recognition of plurality (a by-product of the loss of mastery experienced in the West at this time). Anderson's call in *O Superman* is her appeal against and refusal of isolated existence, an example of her being open to the other. Making this call enforces her precariousness as 'other amongst others', yet she does it nonetheless. This would seem to represent the subject's need for intimacy, and its impossibility in a postmodern world which has corrupted the image of the comforting mother into the catastrophic (m)other whom one must necessarily be armed against. It is through the singing voice that Laurie Anderson chooses to translate this terrible dichotomy.

Historically, the voice is a tricky medium for women to work with: it is attached to gender stereotypes, which date back centuries. Medieval monks, for example, believed in Sirens (mythological female sea-creatures) who lulled sailors to sleep with their voices only to rip their bodies apart. Slovenian cultural theorist Mladen Dolar describes the singing voice in particular as the 'voice beyond sense', as mere superficiality; the voice as the most perfidious form of the flesh. And, equated with the flesh, in the Middle Ages, it was also therefore analogous to carnal femininity - the temptress. The voice as woman was seen at best to be the mere vehicle of meaning, at worst to be the harbinger of senselessness; just another of women's tools of corruption. According to Dolar, the text or meaning was to be understood, in this simple paradigmatic opposition, on the side of masculinity. Now, we all know that these were just threatened men: scared of God, scared of women, and most of all, scared of themselves (hence all the projection). But, nevertheless, throughout the ages the effects of threatened men have had some catastrophic consequences. If those scared men have any power, which they often do, then centuries of gender stereotyping will take its toll. As a female

Bearing this idea in mind, it is interesting to note that to sing her call - to express her need for intimacy - Anderson adopts an androgynous (even masculine) appearance and sound in *O Superman*. In her video she is shown wearing an ill-fitting suit-jacket with shoulder pads; a plain unfitted shirt, buttoned right up; little or no make-up; and with cropped, spiky hair. Singing into a microphone she has manipulated her voice through a synthesizer so that it sounds an octave lower, electronic and robotic. There is something of a 'masculine masquerade' going on here. Craig Owens, on interpreting a work of art, wrote: 'In order to speak, to represent herself, a woman assumes a masculine position'. Does Anderson's masquerade as man in fact deny women's right to have a voice, relegating them to their traditional role as voice (the mere carrier of meaning at best)? Does she conform to the medieval rule that to translate meaning, one must speak as a man?

Sigmund Freud wrote of man as a kind of 'prosthetic god', having conquered nature. The title, *O Superman*, speaks to us of a god-like man, yet it is 'mum' Anderson constantly appeals to. By 'appropriating the phallus' in her dress and in voice, we can read the work, not as denying women's right to speak, but as mocking the 'prosthetic god' man has become. Undermining the ideal through a double whammy of her masculine masquerade, and actual lack of phallus, she shatters the male dream of whole singular identity twice-over - as woman, and then 'as man'. Anderson 'adopts the masculine negative fantasy in order to expose the underlying precariousness of the identity of the male ego, which is threatened by the uncanniness of the feminine'. You never said a truer word Mary Russo. It could be said that Anderson not only refuses to conform to the sexualised subject of popular cultural demand, she actively becomes the (scared) heterosexual male's negative fantasy - an almost-man - in her androgynous dress and voice synthesization.

A more useful term in thinking about Anderson's arrival at the position of speaking subject might not be 'appropriation' (of the phallus) but 'expropriation' of it, however. Anderson expropriates the voice (and the phallus implicitly) through her appearance and sound; she dispossesses them from their male owner. She claims the voice plus meaning for women, just as she claims the gaze for women in her earlier work, *Fully Automated Nikon (Object/Objection/Objectivity)*, 1973. This work involved her photographing men who had verbally harassed her as she walked down the street, claiming her right to mobility without the persistent objectification women suffer daily. The photographs remain unedited except for the cool but crippling obliteration of the men's eyes with a white line, expropriating their gaze as she does the voice in *O Superman*.

More than twenty years on Sharon Hayes is working with the voice to a similar effect. She has been expropriating the very words of men, however, rather than their surface appearance

Love You I'm Not Free, from the street corners of New York - commissioned by The New Museum in 2008. (Listen at <http://www.shaze.info/#>)

Her recital began, 'My dear lover, I'm taking to the streets to speak to you because there doesn't seem to be any other way to get through.' She goes on using the words of Wilde, burning with hopeful sadness: 'I need to speak to you, my love, of your life and of mine, of our past and our future; of sweet things that have turned to bitterness; and of bitter things that still could be turned to joy.' Her call grows from what sounds like a simple love letter to her absent lover, to a speech act addressing the collective as her lover. Her address becomes one of overwhelming love for her fellows, though most don't stop to listen. She migrates from speaking of how she feels like she has lost a limb in losing 'you'; to subtly address the issue of the monopolization of the state of the individual's inherent violence; and the hope and disappointment she and 'you' feel in the failure of collective political action; to the point that she as a lesbian, and opposing the current wars, feels like a 'stranger' in her own country. She speaks of the protest 'you' and her went on, in which you were holding signs: 'Mine read "TOGETHER WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD" which you said was simplistic and cheesy, but by the end of the day you were shouting it at the top of your lungs as if it were the most important thing in the world to say.'

Well, isn't it? Expropriating the voice of men, claiming the voice as their own, women artists are going beyond the constraints and historical associations attached to this medium of translating meaning. They are speaking or singing important things about what some (often scared) men are doing to the world in the hope of changing the path we have been on since *O Superman* was made, and before. Both Hayes and Anderson make themselves vulnerable in calling to the other in appeal for love: but whereas Anderson postulates a catastrophic future of impossible intimacy Hayes, though disappointed, remains hopeful for change through this very call, this very voice, this love. She simply waits to be heard.

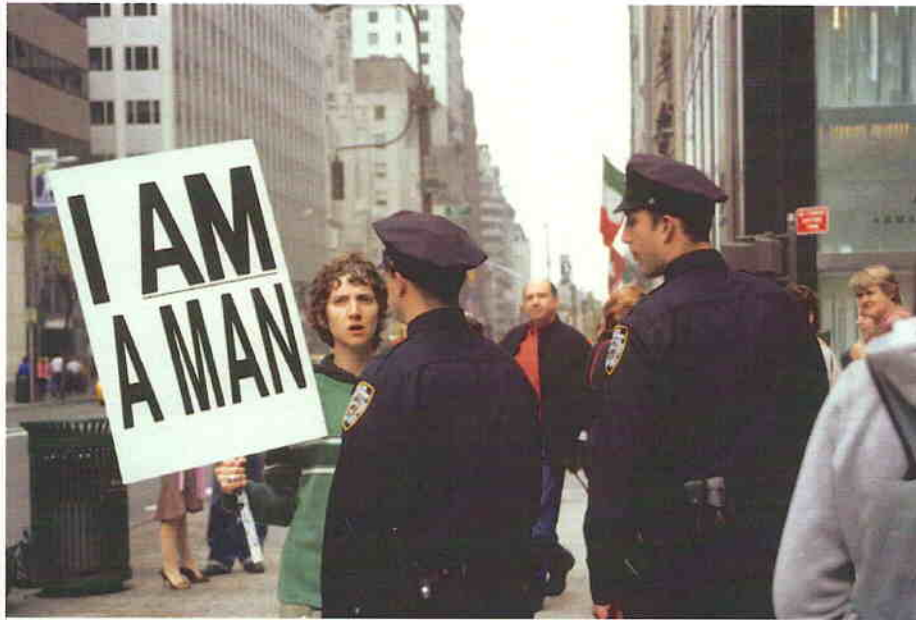
'I feel like I could talk to you for a very long time; like I could stand here on the streets for hours, and hours; for days, and days; for longer even; in the hope that some mere phrase, some single word, some broken echo of love might reach you, and find its way to bounce back to me. How many times can I say this to you?'

■ By Sarah Hardie

WERE YOU TALKING TO ME?

by Michelle Weidman | March 31st, 2012

[ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO · MULTIMEDIA](#)



"In the Near Future" (detail), 2005–09. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin.

[Sharon Hayes](#) is the epitome of what formalist and conservative aesthetes hate about contemporary art. Her work is queer, political and feminist but these aren't the only reasons to love her.

Hayes also addresses the complexity of communication depending on the temporal and social context in which it is located. She asks questions such as how many voices can be heard at one time before the result becomes noise? Every utterance from a long gone companion may be impossible to forget. Alternately, we may not hear a single word from a Republican primary debate broadcast and re-broadcast through a 24-hour news cycle. Voice carries varying weight depending on who is speaking and why, as well as who is listening. We may have never listened to Rush Limbaugh, but we have certainly heard him lately.

Hayes' first solo museum exhibition in the US at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) closed on March 11. It addressed not only the convergence of public and private speech, but also the potential of communication wrapped in various forms of political affect. Hayes, a mid-career artist based in New York, was featured at AIC as a part of the contemporary art focus series.

The exhibition was comprised of three parts, the video installation "Parole," seven digital chromogenic prints of spoken word record covers arranged thematically titled "An Ear to the Sounds of Our History," and finally, "In the Near Future," a room of slide projections.

"Parole" circulated thematically connected videos around four screens of varying size that were embedded in an enclosure constructed from plywood and soundproofing foam. The fabricated space acted primarily as a symbolic barrier from the rest of the gallery. Included in the installation were diverse forms of speech – from a lecture and

In many of the videos, performer and artist Becca Blackwell travels through various public and private spaces – a kitchen, recording room, public squares and outdoor shopping malls (which are now often the same thing) – recording, listening, justifying viewership through example, yet rarely reacting to the events and speeches that are occurring. Her presence is formal, offering continuity, but also representing a model of contact. She never speaks but she is not inactive.

The seven digital chromogenic prints of spoken word record covers that make up “An Ear to the Sound of Our History” were individually organized to suggest sentences comprised of the album titles. Along with their semantic suggestions they provide miniature aesthetic historical snapshots. They are the visual equivalent of the DJ set performed by Hayes in which she remixed her collection of spoken word albums.

The final room of the exhibition contained “In the Near Future” a collection of projected images from Hayes’ protest sign performances that occurred between 2005 and 2009. In each projected image Hayes stands alone holding an emblematic protest sign. It becomes obvious quite quickly, however, that many of the slogans don’t function in the orthodox timely and persuasive style of political street language. Some of the signs address the Vietnam War while others are declarations such as “I am a man.” In this way the signs represent public address divorced from the urgency and the impotence of timely political speech.

In one section of “Parole,” the voice of author James Baldwin considers the role and motivation of a writer. He notes that there comes a time when “a writer realizes he is involved in a language that he has to change.” In the discussion with theorist Lauren Berlant, Berlant locates optimism in habitual acts of someone whose place in the world has been annulled. The example Berlant uses is the businessman who, after the financial collapse, would wake up every morning, put on his suit, take his suitcases and leave his home with nowhere to go. In the context of these statements “Parole” and the exhibition overall operates as a poetics of breakdown and hope in political language.

Aleksandra Domanović & Sharon Hayes

PROYECTOS MONCLOVA, Mexico City

February 4–March 24, 2012

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Aleksandra Domanović's practice analyzes socio-political transformations through the production of images and narratives largely based on popular culture. By decontextualizing and reconfiguring media content, Domanović delves into the accumulative nature of information and its intrinsic indexicality. Like many artists born on the communist side of the Iron Curtain, she is interested in the difficult transition towards capitalism and the emergence of new social values, and, in specific, in the case of former Yugoslavia (where she was born), how this is all exacerbated by the outbreak of an ethnic and nationalist war.

At Proyectos Monclova, Domanović presents *19:30* (2010–11), a two-channel video projection which articulates two heterogeneous sets of imagery: the opening titles of several regional news networks of the former Yugoslavia and a stream of shots of techno raves, which emerged in the same region, like in many other places in the 1990s, as a strong part of youth culture. This unlikely marriage of references is materially and conceptually made possible through the soundtrack, a remix of the news jingles made by techno DJs. While the series of opening titles evoke the socialist era of information distribution, the raves manifest forms of collective social venting in this "new" society.

Watching the work, one becomes aware of the sense of expectancy which has been increasingly built into news broadcast visual language everywhere. The daily news here—of which Domanović never shows us specific content—represents the rising tension which led to war, while the techno culture (which arose after the signature of the Dayton Accords in 1995) comes to stand in for a non-nationalistic, free-spirited attitude towards a yet uncertain future.

Unlike other of her works, *19:30* refuses to communicate with language, the contradictory environment of progressively glossy television design and frantic dancing is missing here that one finds, for instance, in her video essay *Turbo Sculpture* (2010) which traces the influence of Western culture by describing the appearance of statues of Hollywood celebrities in many cities of the former Yugoslavia as an attempt to represent ethnic cohesion in an otherwise deeply divided society.

For her part, Sharon Hayes presents *I March in the Parade of Liberty, but as Long as I Love You I'm Not Free* (2007–8), a piece composed of a sound recording and a spray-paint drawing on paper. The sound records an action in which Hayes addresses her unnamed lover through a megaphone in the streets of New York during five non-consecutive days between December and January 2007/8. Similar to other recent pieces, Hayes connects politics to desire or, rather, she articulates a politics of desire. Through a long exploration of the act of public speech and the spaces of political self-representation, Hayes has increasingly involved sexuality and intimacy in the configuration of political discourse, unveiling the impetuous force of affection in the construction of a political self.

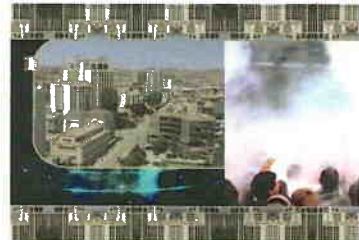
In *I March in the Parade of Liberty, but as Long as I Love You I'm Not Free*, the artist partly describes a situation in which political engagement against the war both unites and separates two lovers. Beautifully corny at times, Hayes's speech is as idealistic—"There is no prison in any world into which love cannot force an



1 Aleksandra Domanović, *19:30*, 2010/11.



2 Aleksandra Domanović, *19:30*, 2010/11.



3 Aleksandra Domanović, *19:30*, 2010/11.



4 Sharon Hayes, *I March In The Parade of Liberty But As I Love You I'm Not Free*, 2007/8.

and angry." Hayes speaks publicly about abandonment and despair in relation to both political representation and a love affair, using the formal language of a demonstration, and thus revealing a thin, porous boundary between a private (in this case impossible) communication and public speech in which communication is not necessarily implied.

The drawing functions perhaps as a caption (as it features the title of the work and the dates the action originally took place), stenciled on paper with spray paint. This helpless call for action in such a personal affair prompts again the intrinsic relation between love and politics.

However gratuitous the combination of Domanović's and Hayes's works under such a small roof may seem (the gallery collaborated with Tanya Leighton who represents both artists) together they convey a certain tension between the very personal and the necessarily collective, the amplified individual voice and the wordless shared experience of transient liberation.

Catalina Lozano is a writer and curator based in Mexico City.



5 Sharon Hayes, *I March In The Parade of Liberty But As I Love You I'm Not Free*, 2007/8.

1 Aleksandra Domanović, *19:30*, 2010/11. Still from HI with colour and sound. 11 minutes. All images courtesy Proyectos Monclova, Mexico City.

2 Aleksandra Domanović, *19:30*, 2010/11. Still from HI with colour and sound. 11 minutes.

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4 Sharon Hayes, *I March In The Parade of Liberty But As I Love You I'm Not Free*, 2007/8. Audio installation system. Spray paint on paper. 50.8 cm x 65 cm.

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ARTFORUM

Sharon Hayes

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
111 South Michigan Avenue
November 10–March 11

Love, like politics, longs to speak through us, and we, reciprocally, long to be heard and to speak: to feel as though on some basic level our hopes, fears, and desires register somewhere amid the forces that bind us to history and to one another. Sharon Hayes's work negotiates this territory while effectively disrupting the amalgamation of public and private identities. Her practice affords us a pause to reflect on the meaning of the classic feminist slogan "The personal is political"—both in a general sense and also, more specifically, in relation to LGBT rights today.

In Hayes's solo exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, curated by Lisa Dorin, we are presented with a tripartite show that includes *Parole*, 2010, first exhibited in the Whitney Biennial; *In the Near Future*, 2005–2009; and *An Ear to the Sounds of Our History*, 2011. Together, the pieces are more than the sum of their parts, and they reveal an artist working through various modalities of publicness in order to find the self and selves, authentic or otherwise. In the four-channel video installation *Parole*, actress Becca Blackwell proffers a countenance that is a near-blank slate; equipped with a microphone, she performs the work of a quasi-psychoanalyst probing the world. Through vignettes of her listening in the street, a classroom, her apartment, and a dance studio, the viewer is left to ponder how these encounters affect or construct her and, by extension, ourselves.

Hayes's references and source materials here include James Baldwin's 1974 lecture at Berkeley, Lauren Berlant's theorization of sentimentality, a 1904 Anna Riling speech, a dancer rehearsing, and Hayes's own declarations of love. Throughout this exhibition, the audience is made to feel privy to that which, taken collectively, might be best characterized as a type of prayer—one that is spoken against the odds that it will ever be answered but perseveres all the same, defiant in its resignation

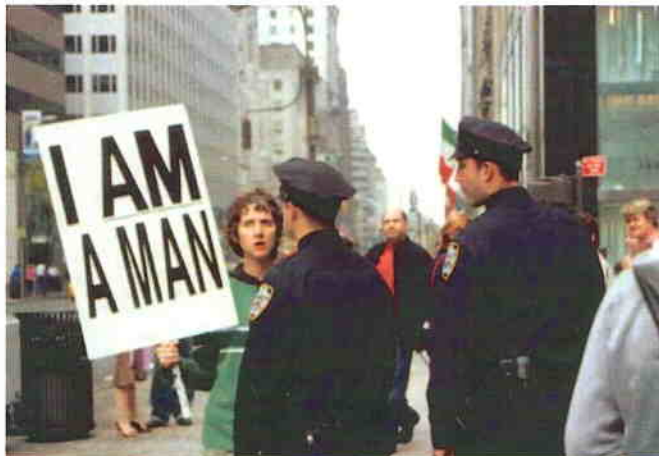


Sharon Hayes, *Parole*, 2010, still from HD single-channel video, 36 minutes.

— Zachary Cahill

Occupying the Near Future

[Alexandra Kleiman](#)



Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future* (performance), 2009. Courtesy the artist.

[Sharon Hayes's](#) 2009 performance and installation *In the Near Future* virtually predicted Occupy Wall Street. The artist sought to investigate the figure of the protester and the contemporary conditions of public space and speech, all of which had to be seriously considered by Occupiers in the context of a digital public sphere that could be mobilized for disseminating the protest's messages.

The artist's work in video as well as performance and installation often speak to time periods past and to come. Her focus on the construct of gender, political protest, and public speech have long served as sites for discussion and will likely remain as such. The artist will have a [solo show at the Whitney](#) opening in June. Below are images of several of Hayes's works accompanied by her descriptions.



Sharon Hayes, *We Knew We Would Go to Jail* (installation shot), 2009. Courtesy the artist.

We Knew We Would Go to Jail is a two-channel video installation which examines the present political moment through three quasi-fictional dialogues between pairs of 20 to 24 year-olds. Positioned side-by-side, facing out at the camera, each pair converses with each other through the filter of the camera/viewer. In this intentionally disjointed structure, the pairs discuss their impressions of '60s and '70s radical politics, their memory of the '80s as well as the possibilities of radical action in a present moment. Directly opposing the image of the talking pairs, and synched up to it in time, is another video image, this one a structured montage of shots of the university. [via](#)



Sharon Hayes, *My Fellow Americans 1981-88* (performance), 2004. Courtesy the artist.

In a 10-hour performance, Hayes read all 36 of Ronald Reagan's official "Address to the Nation" speeches, beginning with the Address to the Nation on the Economy, February 5, 1981 and ending with his Farewell Address to the Nation on January 11, 1989. The Address to the Nation speeches are a specific category of Presidential address. They are always given from the Oval Office and are presumably spoken directly to the American people. [via](#)



Sharon Hayes, *Parole* (installation shot), 2010. Courtesy the artist.

Parole is a four-channel video installation that is composed of semi-autonomous video “scenes” that string together to form a narrative without a story. Focused on a central character who records sound but never speaks, *Parole* teases out multiple relationships between politics and desire, intimacy and estrangement, speaking and listening, voice and body. The video installation is composed of footage of performed events in New York, London, Frankfurt and Istanbul, Turkey as well as staged footage of this sound recorder in various private and semi-public locations. [via](#)



Sharon Hayes, *Communiqué* (installation shot), 2002. Courtesy the artist.

Using a 1983 Ronald Reagan presidential address to the nation as an absent center, *Communiqué* investigates the collective authoring as well as the collective reception of the institutional rhetoric of the U.S. presidential office. Situated inside a 4-foot-wide corridor, the sound score bounces between a left and a right channel, between fragments of exit interviews with five Reagan speechwriters and excerpts of interviews with people asked to read the October 27th address on paper and then respond to questions about the text. [via](#)

Join Artlog



Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Poland

As part of her series 'In the Near Future' (2005-ongoing), New York-based artist Sharon Hayes recently staged live actions on the streets of Warsaw. The documentation of her performances, in the form of five slide projections, constituted one of the first shows to be held at the temporary premises of the Museum of Modern Art while the city's new museum building takes shape. Using the language of street protests and demonstrations of the 1960s and '80s, the artist appropriates historical slogans and personally reintroduces them to new social and political contexts by taking handwritten signs out onto the streets and holding them up herself. Hayes' Warsaw project coincided with a seminar organized by the Museum and conducted by Claire Bishop on two watershed years in Poland's recent history: 1968 and 1989. Participating scholars from Western and former Eastern bloc European countries analyzed how seemingly identical notions and forms of artistic expression can adopt different meanings in different geopolitical contexts. What constituted the avant-garde in Eastern Europe? What sense does institutional critique make in two utterly different systems of artistic life? The Warsaw instalment of Sharon Hayes' project revealed comparable dilemmas: how does the language of protest, or even identical-sounding slogans, fundamentally differ in meaning in relation to place and local history?

The Polish slogan 'We condemn US aggression in Vietnam' was first voiced in 1968 by the country's communist government, which staged

Sharon Hayes
'In the Near Future'
(detail)
2005-ongoing
Documentation of
performance, Warsaw,
2008

'spontaneous' rallies to air its own propaganda against the 'American imperialists'. Hayes resurrected this slogan at the entrance to the Warsaw 10th Anniversary Stadium, a building erected in the 1950s which has operated since 1989 as a gigantic bazaar run by Russian and Vietnamese traders. This model socialist structure (soon to be replaced by a new National Stadium) still captures public attention as a relic of the ancien régime. The appearance of an artist on the site attracted the media, and, much to her amazement, Hayes was treated like a film star by journalists. While a few metres up the street Vietnamese sellers went about their usual business, unaware or uncomprehending that the artist's protest sign referred to their homeland.

In another action, the artist invoked the 1980s Solidarity movement among Polish workers and intelligentsia, which has become a landmark in the country's history. Hayes removed the word 'Solidarity' from the movement's original slogan 'There was, there is, there will be', thus opening up the historical message to new meanings. Positioning herself at the entrance to the FSO car production plant and holding aloft a board bearing her handwritten slogan, the artist was regarded somewhat disdainfully by the passing workers, who, amid the current political disengagement in Polish society, seemed to have forgotten the original slogan. Hayes' determined presence brings to mind the strong female characters in Andrzej Wajda's 'Solidarnosc' films from the late '70s and early '80s; she seems to perfectly correspond to the figure of a politically engaged Polish female - an ethos

that has endured, in spite of a strong tradition of chauvinism in the Solidarity movement.

It was this chauvinism that reinforced the stereotypical image of women in opposition as being nothing more than tea makers for their 'fighting' male colleagues, 'Women break walls', a slogan Hayes proffered on a banner at the entrance to one of the main metro stations in Warsaw, referenced a popular protest song of the opposition which predicted that 'the walls will fall' (though remained unclear who was supposed to break them down). The artist's subtle intervention pointed towards the role of women in the country's political transformation, in the context of a busy street in modern-day Warsaw that has borne witness to a number of feminist demonstrations in recent years.

Hayes appropriates historical slogans, alters their content and plays with the urban context by staging her performances in historical sites or places associated with protest movements, broaching unfamiliar political contexts in the process. Her new slogans transpire their original meanings, posing questions about the significance of the protest itself as well as the function of protest language in contemporary life. 'In the Near Future' presents hypothetical utterances at a time when political activism has been brought to a standstill and there seem to be few worldviews worthy of protest. The artist's actions point to the street as a traditional location of resistance that could once again fulfill its potential.

Małgorzata Charyło

Translated by Krzysztof Kościelniczek

Sharon Hayes

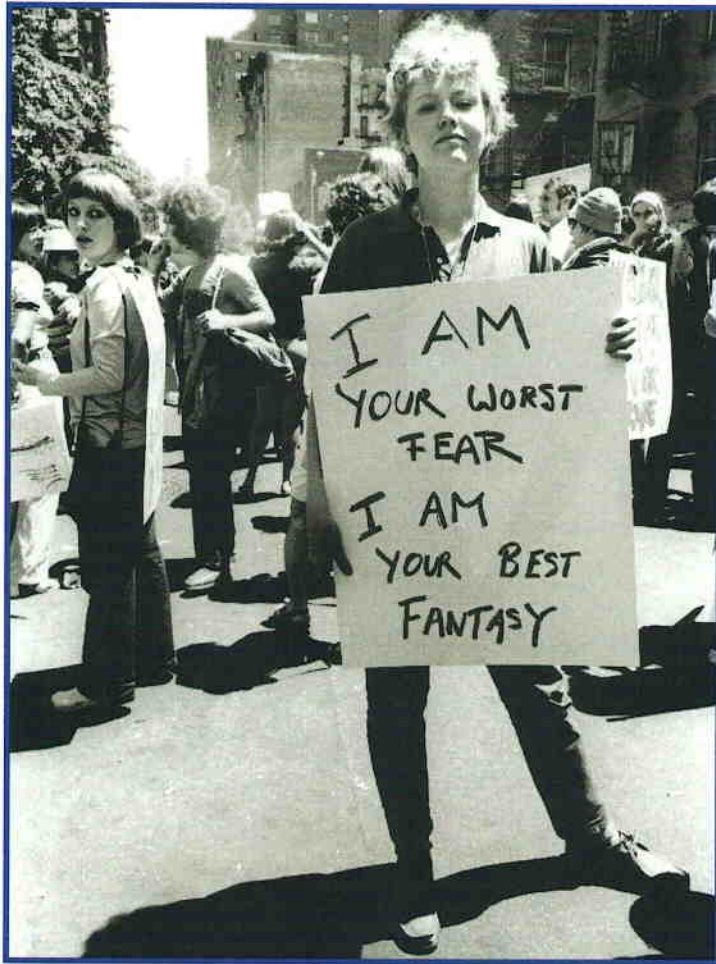
We Have a Future: U.S. An Interview with Sharon Hayes

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON

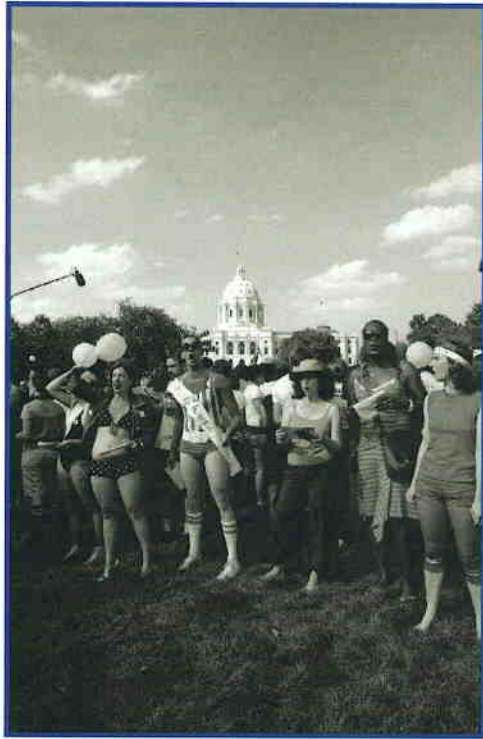
For the past fifteen years, New York-based artist Sharon Hayes has used video and performance to question the politics of address, to engage with histories of social movements, and to articulate queer desire in the public sphere. She has stood on street corners holding protest signs from the past (*In the Near Future*, 2005–present), respoken every speech President Ronald Reagan delivered from the Oval Office (*My Fellow Americans: 1981–88*, 2004/2006), and recited letters to an unnamed lover through a bullhorn while walking through lower Manhattan (*I March in the Parade of Liberty, but as Long as I Love You I'm Not Free*, 2007). On the occasions of the 2008 Democratic and Republican national conventions, she traveled to Denver and St. Paul for her two-part large-scale performance *Revolutionary Love: I Am Your Worst Fear, I Am Your Best Fantasy* (2008) in which she recruited large groups of queer people to read a scripted love letter in unison near the convention sites.¹ In late October 2008, we sat down to talk about that piece and its relationship to her other work.

Julia Bryan-Wilson: Let me start with a quote by the art historian Christopher Reed: “There is something queer about archives.”² This put me in mind of several signature aspects of your work: first, your reuse of historical documents; second, your commitment to queer politics. By twinning these things, do you suggest that our relationship to the past might be somewhat queer?

Sharon Hayes: That makes me think of an anecdote from *Revolutionary Love*. I first encountered the subtitle (*I Am Your Worst Fear, I Am Your Best Fantasy*) in the documentary *The Question of Equality* (1995). In it is a still of a woman wearing a protest sign hand-lettered with those words. That phrase captured what is interesting to me about gay liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which was the total imbrication of politics and love, because for queer people to stand publicly in the space of their own sexuality at that moment was a political act. I was captivated by the phrase when I first encountered it as a sign in a video. Later, while doing research into images from the 1970s, I found an archive of Diana Davies’s photographs at the New York



Diana Davies. *Donna Gottschalk Holds Poster at Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day Parade, New York, 1970.* Photograph © Diana Davies. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.



Sharon Hayes. *Revolutionary Love: I Am Your Worst Fear, I Am Your Best Fantasy*, 2008. St. Paul, Minnesota. Photo by Gene Pittman for the Walker Art Center.

Public Library and saw the image again—this time encountering it accidentally—and decided to use the phrase in my piece. Shortly before the performance in St. Paul, someone at the Walker Art Center, Creative Time's institutional partner in St. Paul, told me that an artist they work with named Michela Griffo had e-mailed them to say she had seen the still in their publicity. Griffo and Donna Gottschalk, the woman pictured, made that sign before the 1970 Christopher Street Liberation Day parade.

I bring up that anecdote because on one level it was a pleasurable encounter with someone who was located at the origin of the photograph, and the archive is precisely what threads me to her. On another level, photographs or other documents are the medium, the line of transit between past and present, and much of my work addresses such collapsed temporal moments.

JBW: A parallel queer charge or current runs between the photograph then and your use of it now, and between you and that woman in 1970. In addition, for documents and images to be stored in an archive, or to continue to circulate through time, someone has to *want* to see them and save them. Recovering a photograph from a dusty box is thus an act of desire. Collecting is rooted in a possessive urge, and whole archives are generated out of and depend on this desire. So much history gets disseminated, circulated, and uncovered because photos or letters produce a pleasure that exceeds their function as factual records. The longevity of a lot of the documents you deal with probably depends in part upon this libidinal exchange.

SH: For sure, there is something to be said for a photograph that is sexy. I noticed another kind of desire when I went to the libraries of gay and lesbian centers and looked through photographic collections; in particular, the collections of photographers who were shooting specifically queer events from 1969–1971. There the issue of desire is completely transparent, because if you look in the files you realize one photographer is taking pictures of beefy guys he's attracted to. Or another is fixated on collections of people who are kissing and hugging. You see the desire of the documenter quite plainly. So one site of a desiring encounter is between the photographer and the subject, and then there's my desire toward that desire. Because when I look at any of those images,

I'm not looking at just the body in the image; I'm looking through the desiring eye of the camera.

JBW: You bring another kind of desire to these histories. I don't think it's nostalgia exactly, but in *Revolutionary Love* you look back, perhaps with a certain longing, to the birth of gay liberation for what it might tell us now.



SH: *Revolutionary Love* is an extension of a set of projects I've been pursuing around love and politics where I've been doing what I call love addresses. My interest is in mapping political desire and personal desire on top of each other. In this case, in response to Creative Time's invitation to participate in the Democracy in America project, I intuitively gravitated toward the conventions, which I like despite their somewhat shallow spectacularity. For *Revolutionary Love*, I invited seventy-five to one hundred people in Denver and St. Paul to come out and be flamboyantly queer with me on the street and to speak a love address.



JBW: The performance functioned first as a live public act, but it was also shown as a series of videos at the Armory in New York. Likewise, your voice from the street performance *I March in the Parade of Liberty* was played through large speakers at the New Museum. You create installations, posters, photographs, and other material related to your actions that are shown in art spaces.

Are you conscious when producing video documentation or designing ephemera that you are creating your own archive? What kind of afterlife do you anticipate for *Revolutionary Love*?

SH: *Revolutionary Love* was a performance that had value and legitimacy as a live act, but I was very precise in shooting it. Always in my work I'm interested in the event of a performance and then what I call the not-event of its document. I wanted to generate an archival document that speaks exactly to what we're talking about, which is that it demonstrates a desiring camera, something that shows how the camera seduces.

JBW: The camera has more work to do in *Revolutionary Love* than in previous works of yours, because it must capture a diverse crowd rather than a solo performer. Could you speak more about your transition from performing by yourself to enlisting others to join you? In both cases, the address is in the first person, but the tone and tenor of a solo voice registers differently than that of a collective chorus.

Top: Sharon Hayes. *I March in the Parade of Liberty, but as Long as I Love You I'm Not Free*, 2007. Performance still. Photo by Kristine Woods.

Bottom: Sharon Hayes. *I March in the Parade of Liberty, but as Long as I Love You I'm Not Free*, 2007. Installation view, New Museum. Photo by Collier Schorr.



Sharon Hayes. *Revolutionary Love: I Am Your Worst Fear, I Am Your Best Fantasy*, 2008. St. Paul, Minnesota. Photo by Gene Pittman for the Walker Art Center.

SH: To be precise, seventy-five to one hundred people spoke a text three times that was written from the first person, from the “I,” so those people were speaking as one body. The shift from the “I” to the collective was partly intuitive. But I also was interested in the tension produced by a group of people speaking as one, because it spoke to the impossibility of a collective, essential being.

JBW: You went to the convention sites ahead of time to make contacts with local queer groups and enlist people as participants. How did you embark on this organizing process?

SH: In each place, I tried to meet as many people as possible. I held meetings where I explained where I was coming from and that I had a somewhat unusual request. In each city, I hired outreach coordinators to do local organizing. In St. Paul, I worked with two incredible outreach coordinators and we ultimately gathered about seventy-five to one hundred people. In Denver, though they have an active queer community, it was challenging to find people willing to risk being publicly queer as well as to occupy a public space in a nonnormative way. We started with twenty-five to thirty people, but we ended up with an amazing, open encounter where people joined in.

On the one hand, *Revolutionary Love* appears to be a community project because I’m inviting people to participate. I chose not to cast people or to hire actors, which was very important to me. It had to be an open call. People had to be able to self-select, and I had to entice people to participate. The process was an organizing effort, but typically an organizing effort involves some incentive; people usually respond to such efforts because they will be able to make something or learn something.

JBW: Or speak their minds.

SH: Right, that wasn't what the performance was about either. I'm not "giving voice to the community." And sometimes there was a fissure between the expectations a participant brings to a participatory project and the reality that they'd be speaking my text, my words. So the event offered a funny kind of collision, which I was up-front about. I couldn't predict how the participants would find their own relationship to the text, but I told them I hoped they would. I also asked them to dress flamboyantly queer, but I did not script what that meant.

JBW: Because you did not police that in any way, people interpreted flamboyance widely, as you can see in the photo and video documentation.

SH: I was also extremely careful not to predetermine what queer was. That was something that was vital to me. This strategy ended up really working, producing an event-ness for *Revolutionary Love* that is quite odd; something familiar, but not exactly identifiable.

JBW: It is not quite a performance, not quite a protest, not quite totally intimate, not quite fully collective—it *verges* on each of those. Was asking strangers to inhabit and vocalize your words an audacious request? They didn't cowrite the text; it was not based on collective brainstorming.

SH: Some things were really interesting and challenging about that. A couple of people memorized the script, but by and large they read from it; still, they invested themselves in an incredibly full way with a text that is not their own. It's something we talked a lot about.

JBW: The press release for *Revolutionary Love* stated that you were intentionally creating a spectacle in response to the spectacle of the conventions. The word *spectacle* was deployed in that context with great care, and it has a specific historical and theoretical weight. I'm curious to hear what, if any, relationship you might have with that word.

SH: I don't really feel any of my work is spectacular. And I'm not sure that this piece was really spectacular. Certainly it didn't and couldn't match the spectacle of the convention; nor did I ever intend it to. But, having said that, as soon as you arrive in a city during a convention, you're in the middle of a circus of wildly competing desires. In Denver a series of art events took place during the convention—the institutional partner was the group Dialog:City, and they had ten other art projects going on. More- and



less-organized sets of protestors came as attendants to the convention apparatus, and corporate philanthropic groups came to host events. Many things that were not at all related to the election were claiming the site of that audience.

JBW: Given the solo, micro-interventions that you've staged previously, *Revolutionary Love* represents a shift toward a drastically increased scale in your practice. Did you feel you needed to magnify the address and amplify your voice as a way to command some small part of these dispersed attentions?

SH: As an artist, I'm not willing to concede the space of politics to politicians and reporters and FOX News and CNN. I'm not willing to relinquish participation in the production of the cultural imagination around politics.

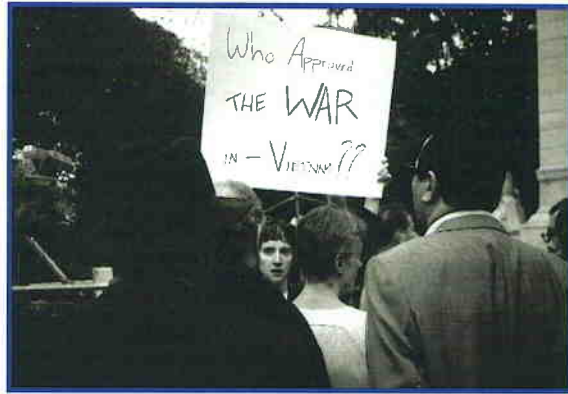
I felt strongly that to do something in relation to the conventions I had to magnify myself. I would get swallowed up if I were alone in that chaos. I needed some pals with me.

JBW: By bringing many people together to read about love in what was expected to be a space of protest and commercialism, were you attempting to model some sort of provisional public queer community, however fleeting?

SH: Maybe one answer to that can be got at anecdotally. In Denver the performance took place at the Sixteenth Street pedestrian mall, which is the only place I found a public—that is, people who don't intend to be on the street together: businesspeople, homeless people, musicians, queer youth. All sorts of Denverites were just going about doing what they usually do downtown on the pedestrian mall. A set of extra people, roving groups of protestors who were there for the convention, people selling Obama merchandise, and so on, were also present. The day of our performance, as we went to occupy the block and set up to speak, we saw a right-wing band of protestors carrying very large vertical banners. As we started to amass, we could see them coming. They had all these huge police guys with them. Their banners read "Fear God," "Homosex Is a Sin," "Homosexuals Are a Threat to

National Security”—basic variations on “Have Great Fear.”

JBW: A homophobic Christian group was on the street coming toward you: you couldn’t have choreographed it better. Those slogans encapsulate the bizarre combination of anxiety and fascination that queerness can inspire.



SH: And there we were with pink and yellow balloons that said “GAY” and were happy and festive. We hadn’t started yet, and they surrounded us, and then the police were around them, which caused a scene and a spectacle (to refer back to that term). All these passersby stopped to watch. I was sure they felt they had found their home and weren’t going to leave. The scene was quite tense, but I decided, okay, fuck it, we’re going to start. I got out a bullhorn and did a little countdown, and, right as we started speaking, they waved on. By and large we weren’t interacting with them. We weren’t shouting them down. Maybe because they couldn’t find anyone to spar with, they left. More likely, we were bigger than they wanted.

I never could have predicted this, but when they left an enormous sense of victory or relief swept over us. It was ecstasy; we were exuberant. And that was not constructed. Was it world changing? Did it ripple beyond that moment? No, but it was palpable. You could physically feel this claim to a sort of power. In addition, as we spoke the text three times, all these people joined in, many of them the queer and trans youth who hang out on Sixteenth Street. They had no idea we were going to be there, and suddenly we validated that space for them and marked it as an affirmative queer place.

JBW: That wouldn’t have happened if you hadn’t decided to be in that exact location. This emphasis on place takes me to some of your past work, such as *In the Near Future*, where site plays a significant role. In this work you are interested in rupturing a triangle of coherence around historical protest slogans. That is, you disarticulate the three elements that normally converge around slogans: first, the words on the sign that you are holding—such as “Ratify ERA Now!”; second, the body that holds the sign; and third, the place and the time in which the body is situated.

SH: *In the Near Future* functions differently than *Revolutionary Love* in that there is an action. I actually don’t call it a performance; I call it an action. I invite people to come and document that action of me standing on the street for an hour at a specific

Opposite, top and bottom: Sharon Hayes. *Revolutionary Love: I Am Your Worst Fear, I Am Your Best Fantasy*, 2008. Denver, Colorado. Photo by Andrew Clark Photography.

Above: Sharon Hayes. *In the Near Future*, New York, 2005. Detail.

site with a specific sign. None of them are reenactments. I never stand in the same site as the sign was originally held, but the sign is almost always a specific citation of a past moment.

JBW: So, *In the Near Future* is site specific and cite specific.

SH: Yes. Each place has a history as a site of public speech or protest. For instance, in one action I chose to hold the sign “I Am a Man,” which is from the 1968 Memphis sanitation strike, at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, which was the location of the Stop the Church action and a lot of the ACT-UP agitations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. That was an intentional mapping of those two places onto each other. That piece functions curiously because the action is completely quiet.

JBW: No surrounding demonstration legitimates what you’re doing. It’s rare to see a single protestor disconnected from a larger mass. That singularity has the potential to make you seem slightly crazy.

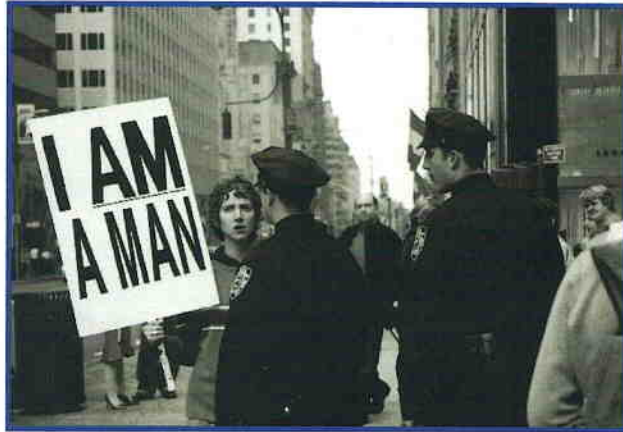
SH: Particularly because the places have by and large been urban sites, people do a small double-take when they see me. The texts are anachronistic. They don’t match the current situation. When you see somebody out on the street with a sign, you expect that you’re being addressed. But the current passersby aren’t being addressed by these signs.

The assumptive ground that I operate on is that there’s trouble in the site of public speech, a trouble that probably has always been there but in this present moment has a particular set of elements to it. A city like New York has much more private space now than in the past. I also think there is an exhaustion on the part of the listening public, because they know or they think they know what they can expect from people speaking publicly, particularly around politics. So, when they see me, they see a protestor, and they think that they know what that is, but then the incongruity of the sign belies that.

JBW: How important to you is it that *you* are the person standing with the sign?

SH: This is foundational to my work, particularly the work I’ve been doing over the last four years. It is not possible to plan what the work is until I am actually doing it. At the same time that I am doing the work, I am also rehearsing the work. So, the performance is also a place of labor for me. How can I possibly ask somebody else to do that work? If I did, then I wouldn’t get to understand what it is from the perspective of that encounter.

JBW: Several other artists working today are returning to past moments of political protest; for example, Andrea Bowers and Sam Durant. Mark Tribe had performers reenact historical speeches from the 1960s and 1970s in his *Port Huron Project* (2006–2008). Do you connect what you are doing to those practices?



Sharon Hayes. *In the Near Future*, New York, 2005. Detail.

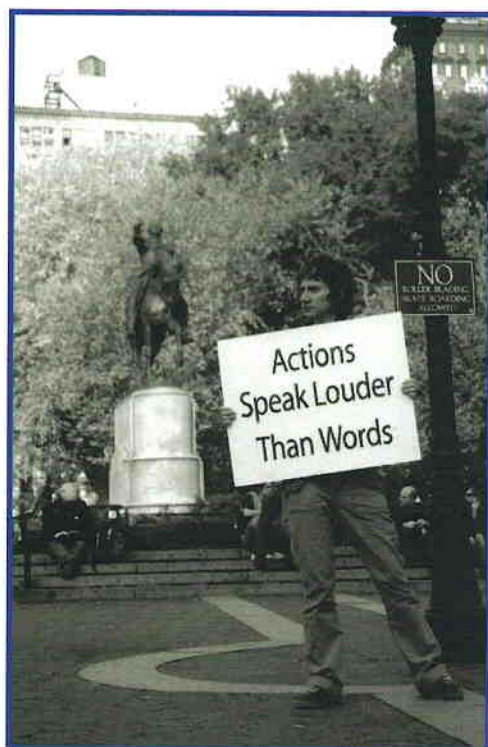
SH: *Revolutionary Love* worked as a *reference* to gay liberation; it was not a *reenactment* of gay liberation. And with *In the Near Future*, I don't have an interest in the protest sign as an aesthetic object or in it circulating as a separate piece in the space of art. To make a return to a past political moment by taking the sign and putting it on a wall is problematic. My interest is in the act of protest as a speech act.

JBW: Photos of you performing holding the “I Am a Man” sign do circulate in art spaces, however. How does that differ from, say, Glenn Ligon’s work that is based on the same sign (*Untitled [I Am a Man]*; 1988)?

SH: With Glenn Ligon’s piece, there was a conscious and specific translation of that sign, a filtering. He took that slogan and reconstructed it through a process. He importantly reimagined it. Similarly, I can’t just cut out the protest sign and put it on a wall in this present moment, because history for me cannot be accessed that way—it just becomes style. That excision is not actually an investigation; nor does it tease out how history is rupturing in a present moment. Instead, it becomes an anesthetizing of the conflict.

My interest was to actually work with protest and protest signs by putting myself in the space of enactment. In this work, I understand myself as a demonstrator, not only in a political sense but also in the theoretical and methodological sense that Bertolt Brecht describes in his essay “The Street Scene,” in which actors are replaced by demonstrators.³ In Brecht’s epic theater, demonstrators propose that the event has taken place; what you are watching is a repeat. To think through my actions in *In the Near Future* as a certain kind of demonstration that asks for a form of critical viewership is helpful.

JBW: There’s also something pedagogic about it, which puts me in mind of another aspect of Brecht: the *Lehrstücke* or learning plays. You engage with the people who see you on the street who



Sharon Hayes. *In the Near Future*, New York, 2005. Detail.

stop and talk to you. You explain that you are an artist standing there to ask questions about the space of historical political protest and its function in the present.

SH: I don't say I'm an artist. That's the only thing I don't say. I say I'm interested in protest. I say everything but I am an artist.

JBW: I didn't realize that. Why don't you identify yourself in that way?

SH: Because then they think they know what I'm doing.

JBW: But you do otherwise describe your process: you tell people where the signs come from and what their roles in history have been—so the work has an educative component. And *you're* also learning things—you're educating yourself about what it feels like to be associated with the words you hold,

with all the possible risks and assumptions and complications that entails.

SH: I think that is true; it is not didactic, but it is pedagogic. The demonstration is a communication and a telling; it's a narrativizing that recognizes the position from which it's narrating. I'm not trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes. It's a very privileged space to be in.

Sometimes the understandings are very small. The first action I did with *In the Near Future* was at Union Square, and the sign said "Actions Speak Louder Than Words." I was standing there for twenty minutes with the sign in front of my stomach, watching people interact with me. And then I raised the sign over my head. That gesture made a huge difference. Maybe this is minimal, but in the space of doing *In the Near Future*, which is still ongoing, I became very aware of the body and the limits of the body in relation to the sign. That isn't a small matter, actually, because whether you hold the sign at your stomach or over your head is, on the one hand, a question of performance technique, but on the other hand, it also points to the critical import of the body to an act of protest.

JBW: It also raises some of the canonical issues of performance art, such as physical exhaustion, duration, and ability.

SH: In this way, of course, it is an aesthetic question, but it is an aesthetic question that is totally bound up in content as well, because it relates to intelligibility. How does protest become intelligible? Why and how can my specific body—versus other bodies—make this sign intelligible?

JBW: Some intelligent theoretical work has recently been done about art and historical research; for example, Hal Foster's "An Archival Impulse," Mark Godfrey's "The Artist As Historian," and Okwui Enwezor's 2008 exhibition *Archive Fever* at the International Center of Photography.⁴

SH: Historians and artists are alike in a certain sense. One of the biggest challenges is how to embark on a search and truly not know where you're going. Often an archival investigation will lead you toward what you knew or expected to begin with; so, you're only uncovering and finding material to literalize and concretize the search that you've already mapped. That's not the case across the board, however, and a lot of artists who have been talked about in the space of the archive or history are working in very complicated ways.

JBW: Although you're somewhat connected to the artist-as-archivist issue, what you're doing is a bit different in that you also pointedly conjecture about the future. You invoke time travel by inserting yourself into the space of possibility or speculation. Some of the slogans you use, for instance, do not come from the past but are invented—leaps of imagination, assertions of wishes for protests that might happen but have not yet; for example, "The American President Might Have to Call in the National Guard to Put This Revolt Down." The title itself, *In the Near Future*, indicates that you're intentionally Janus-faced: looking back and looking ahead.

SH: The present for me is a moment that is both reaching backward and forward, and it does so simultaneously. In a certain way, I haven't yet reconciled with the term *archive*. My work is intensely research based, but "the archive," particularly in the way that it's been taken up over the last ten years in discourses around contemporary art, has tended to become quite solidified.

JBW: Well, that gets us back to the quotation that we started with. Maybe the intervention that you make around archives is specifically about queerness—that is, the unruliness, instability, and eccentricity of historical documents. How you approach the past and think about the future is inflected by your queer commitment to understanding how history might warp or distort given different

subject formations, different ideas about community, and different relationships one has to the sweep of normative or official history. We've had to create our own alternatives. We've had to piece together our own patchwork of histories from out-of-print paperbacks or hidden documents or stashed-away love letters. A lot of what queer history is interested in is precisely what has fallen out of the singular "archive."

SH: Competing desires have played out in terms of the relationship between queerness and history, especially the relationship between queerness and visibility. What if queer studies didn't steer itself so intensely toward visibility but instead steered itself toward questions of speech? What if, following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, we were focused as much on hearing and speaking as on seeing?

JBW: This takes me back to your stories about Denver, because in part you were asking what it means to be a public listener. For some of the people watching the action, the queer way to listen was to join in. The invitation wasn't explicit, but observers clearly felt an implicit reciprocity or conversation that opened into a broadly articulated "you."

SH: Yes, and in English the singular and plural *you* are nicely the same. With *Revolutionary Love* the site of listening is much less in my control than it has ever been in my work. Because as soon as you speak about love, as soon as you stand on the street and say "I love you," that enters into the listener's psychosocial emotional space in completely unknown ways. When performing *Everything Else Has Failed! Don't You Think It's Time for Love?* (2007), on the third day I saw a woman cry. I thought, why is she crying? I can answer that question to a certain extent. She was crying because something had touched her. But how did this work touch her, and what does it mean to me that it's touched her?

JBW: In that piece, you stood on a street corner in New York with a small amplifier and spoke a series of love letters you wrote, many of which refer to loss and longing in a time of war. What do you feel is your responsibility for having sparked, or been the catalyst for, that kind of emotional response?

SH: It is a conundrum for me. I don't know what that means, and I appreciate that I don't know what it means.

JBW: Is it important that in these addresses the subject is queer love specifically?



SH: Absolutely. In *Everything Else Has Failed!* I dressed as a queer temp. I kind of butched myself up even more than usual because I didn't want the love to be read as heteronormative. Yet I want to be clear that queerness is not some kind of idealized space of political action. I am not positing queerness as the ultimate site of radicality, but I'm also interested in the specificity of gay liberation historically and what makes queer people threatening to a heteronormative political landscape.

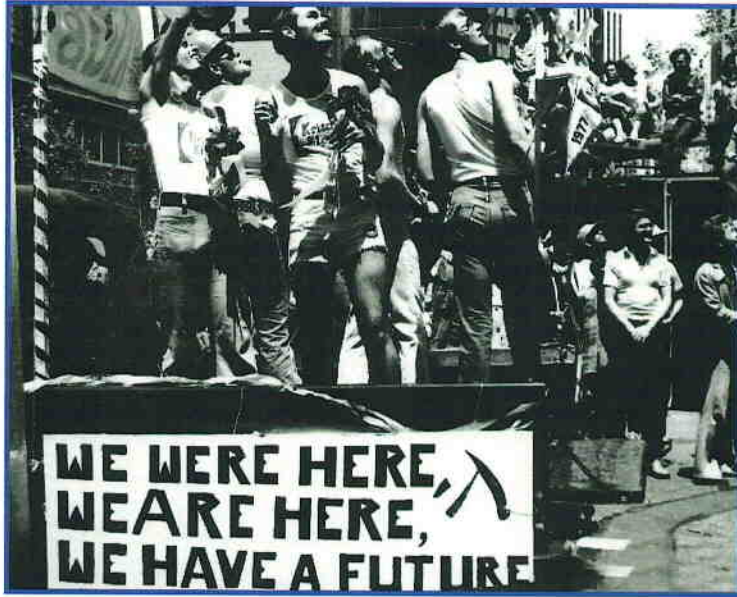
Sharon Hayes. *Everything Else Has Failed! Don't You Think It's Time for Love?* 2007. Performance still. Photo by Andrea Geyer.

JBW: We're having this conversation one week before the 2008 election, in the midst of the raging Proposition 8 debate in California. What will happen is unclear, but the proposition, which seeks to ban gay marriage, seems increasingly likely to pass.⁵ Even today, with the ostensible end of the culture wars, something is still vexing or dangerous about queerness. And let me say that gay marriage is not my issue; it's not something I feel politically galvanized around, particularly because "No on Proposition 8" conversations interpolate all queer people as staunch supporters of state-sanctioned marriage, which many of us are not. At the same time, I recognize that gay marriage is a civil rights issue and have been concerned about the homophobic campaign tactics around it.

SH: I'm also not somebody who would stand as an activist for gay marriage. And yet gay marriage is the route through which queerness is put into the mainstream political landscape.

JBW: Sexuality—as much as race, gender, and class—seems foundational to the questions that are facing the American electorate.

SH: What makes me anxious is that people aren't so good around those terms. Sexuality can lag so far behind other political formations.



Rink Foto. *San Francisco Gay Parade, 1977.* Photograph © Rink Foto.

JBW: I think we should wind things down before we get into a frenzy about the election. I want to show you a photograph that seems to encapsulate the issues you persistently deal with and maybe leaves us on a hopeful note: in it, a group of men at a gay rights parade in 1977 are standing in the back of a truck. They are looking up and smiling at something just outside the frame of the photo, almost as if in anticipation of something to come. The banner underneath them reads, "WE WERE HERE, WE ARE HERE, WE HAVE A FUTURE."

SH: I like that very much. The whole project of archiving, of documenting that "we have a past" is, in actuality, a desire for a future, no? What a nice way of evidencing ourselves.

Notes

1. The two components that together comprise this performance are titled *Revolutionary Love 1: I Am Your Worst Fear* (performed in Denver, Colorado) and *Revolutionary Love 2: I Am Your Best Fantasy* (performed in St. Paul, Minnesota).

2. Christopher Reed, "Design for (Queer) Living: Sexual Identity, Performance, and Decor in British *Vogue*, 1922–1926." *GLO: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006): 377.

3. Bertolt Brecht, "The Street Scene: A Basic Model for Epic Theater," in *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 121–129.

4. Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3–22; Mark Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian," *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 140–172; and Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography/Steidl, 2008).

5. Proposition 8, a popular referendum which amended the state constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman, passed by a 52 percent margin on November 4, 2008. Though the validity of the proposition was challenged in the California Supreme Court, it was upheld in a decision announced in May 2009.

The Artists' Artists

To take stock of the past year, *Artforum* contacted an international group of artists to find out which exhibitions were, in their eyes, the very best of 2008.

PETER COFFIN

Sharon Hayes, "In the Name of Women—Warsaw, 2008" Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw

This past summer artist-activist Sharon Hayes protested the Vietnam War in Warsaw. My immediate impression was that this action was radically out of context—that it was a stance in opposition to forgetting the war and a gesture in favor of dissent anytime, anywhere. As it turns out, the performance did have a context: It was one of five related actions in which Hayes carried signs from past protests in Poland, including placards from the 1980 Solidarity uprising and from a recent gay rights rally. The sign I saw, which proclaimed in Polish, WE CONDEMN US AGGRESSION IN VIETNAM, was identical to one carried at the antiwar demonstrations in Warsaw forty years ago. Hayes's performances are concerned with the public's reaction to a war or political crisis, the mediation of that response, and the manner in which our memory of it is framed—perhaps even how it has been handed to us.



Perplexed in Public: Can Art Still Intervene in the City?

Posted by artreview.com on 1 July 2008 at 2:00pm

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By Ben Street

Standing outside KFC on Brixton High Street a couple of weeks ago with a sign reading 'When Is This Going To End', New York-based artist Sharon Hayes squinted in the afternoon sun, making her look even more aggrieved than you'd expect from her punctuation-free, angrily scrawled sign. Hayes' slight, defiantly eccentric adjustment of the Saturday afternoon shopping experience bewildered a handful of passers-by. A bus glided past, emblazoned with the weirdly resonant ad 'I Am The Way, The Truth and The Life', like an answer to Hayes's non-question. She walked a little course between the bus stop and the pedestrian crossing, as if warming up for a big march. A few in the know stood at a respectful distance, taking photos. An old man stamping his walking stick on the ground hobbled up and bellowed at each one in turn: "I work for Jesus Christ! I work for England! I work for Elizabeth the Second!" When he reached Hayes he paused for a second, perhaps recognising an affinity. Hayes smiled. There were titters. It was a bit tense.

Hayes' performance formed part of the Lisson Gallery's *Perplexed in Public* summer programme, an ongoing series of offsite projects investigating the nature and history of public political expression, explicitly playing on the 40th anniversary of 1968 – and as such its knowing failure was stamped through it as on a stick of rock. (In the two remaining installments of *Perplexed in Public*, in Trafalgar Square next week (8-11 June at 2pm daily), you can catch Allora & Calzadilla's *Balance of Power*, in which men in guerrilla outfits perform yoga, and next weekend, (11-13 July), Lara Favaretto will suspend a caravan over the parade grounds at Chelsea College.)



Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, London, 2008. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery.

In another of her performances, Hayes stood in Hyde Park holding a sign reading 'Votes for Women', which was met with bemusement and some curiosity by joggers and strollers, and soundtracked by the continuous clicks and snaps of artfully outmoded cameras. Hayes' melancholy anachronism and ferociously vague slogans, here and in Brixton, did generate an awkwardness that was political in a whimsical way, a kind of altered protest in the spirit of Mark Wallinger's *State Britain* (2006). Is a true public intervention actually possible now? Are we too knowing and cynical to be surprised into action? These were some of the questions I thought about while watching Hayes, before being distracted by overhearing someone say "But don't women already *have* the vote?"

By its very nature, a protest is pictorial, composed for photographic record and for maximum visual resonance, and, like most protests, Hayes' work lives best in photographic afterlife as a kind of readymade political cartoon. You don't really have to be there, in a way, and as in '68, so in '08: I can remember it, so I must not have been there. The events took on a pointed, perhaps ironic nostalgia for the days when art's weirdness could send cracks up government buildings. They also had a kind of willfully self-defeating shrug about them. Now, a savvy 21st century urbanite is wearily familiar with staged oddities in the city – guerrilla ad campaigns, flash mobs, *Trigger Happy TV* – and it's increasingly difficult to induce genuine, fruitful perplexity on the street.

Hopes were high, then, for the Lisson's next public project, which started in the East End a week ago: go-to artworld bad boy Santiago Sierra's *4,000 Black Posters*. Would they be made with ink from the dried blood of trainer-making sweatshop children? Collages of the bruised soles of Beijing stadium builders, sliced off using sharpened credit cards? No: they were 4,000 black posters.

THE PLACEHOLDER FOR LOVE AND POLITICS



Sharon Hayes, *I March In The Parade of Liberty But As Long As I Love You* (Not Prec., 2007/2008)

In August, Sharon Hayes went to the Democratic National Convention in Denver. She put out a call for volunteers who were "flamboyantly queer—or prepared to play the part." Eventually, she assembled about two dozen people on a busy downtown street, who declined to union something that she described as a "love address." It's a form of address she has used in several performances of late: part love letter, part protest for the times. It confronts a "you" that might be a solitary lover as much as it might be all the people in the world.

Hinting at the atmosphere of contemporary U.S. culture, where many of these protest performances take place, Hayes explains: "We emerged onto the streets of Denver just as this crazy Christian group was arriving with these placards that said things like 'Huzzo sea is a sin!' or 'Beware! Thieves, sinners, homosexuals, you'll burn in hell!' They kind of surrounded us for a moment, and they were followed by cops in thick riot gear. I thought they're just going to camp there. Yet what was interesting was that because we weren't engaging with them, because we weren't looking them back, they just passed on. And just as they did, we began our performance."

Hayes was busy this summer. Aside from narrowly avoiding cops, she also exhibited at the Deafness Symposium in Berlin as part of *Freedom Balautes*, a show in which photographer Collier Schorr played her own work alongside that of artists she considers to be among America's most important new talents. Hayes is also staging a performance at Frieze Art Fair on Friday "Unannounced." It will feature a politics-artists campaign including leaflets, metaphors, and pocket signs that will increase in intensity on each subsequent day of the fair. The performance will respond to the makeup of the fair's audience and will reflect instead of inclusively, exclusivity, and privileged access to information.

With American democracy at the crossroads, performance and video artist Sharon Hayes is making political art sexy again. Organizing flamboyantly queer protests at political conventions, or falsifying the radical speeches of Patty Hearst: Hayes' exploration of the intersection between history, politics, speech, and desire is unique. The artist is taking part in this year's Frieze Projects with her performance "Unannounced" and has also created an original work especially for this issue of *db artmag*. Morgan Falconer met Hayes at her Brooklyn studio.

Sharon Hayes was born in Baltimore in 1970. The lively, witty, framed woman, mostly accompanied by a dog named Cosmos, came to New York in the mid-1990s and was drawn to the downtown performance scene. Her peers were politically minded—often feminists and lesbians like herself—but there were mainly theatrical performances rather than performances for a gallery or museum context. "The last work that I made in that vein was called *The Lesbian*," she says. "It was based on a long drive I took across the country to discover lesbians in their natural habitat. The idea was to lay the course of 'the lesbian' on top of the American landscape. When I came back, I did perhaps the least theatrical thing I'd ever done—it was really just a conversation with the audience."

Realizing that she was seeking something else, she received a place in the Whitney Museum's highly-regarded Independent Study Program, and in 2002 she made a video which took serious feminist. In *Spontaneous Liberation Army (S.L.A.)*, she performed speeches that legendary heiress and leftist radical Patty Hearst

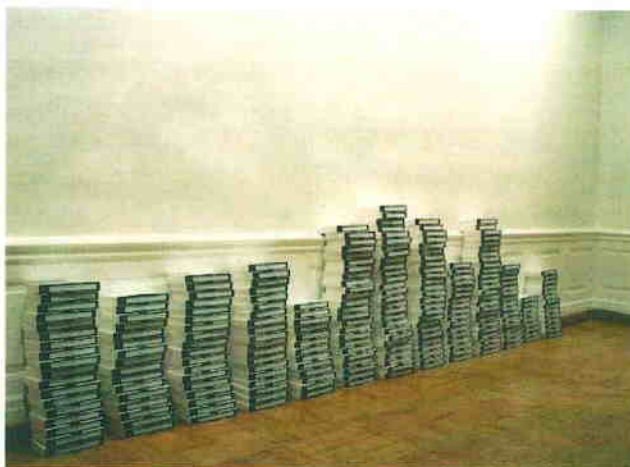
made to the camera in the period after she was kidnapped by the S.L.A. in 1974. But Hayes deliberately buffed the lines, falsified, and invited prompts from behind the camera. It created an eerie confusion: Was she signalling sympathy with Hearst's chaotic views? Or was she mocking a figure who has become almost camp as the years have passed?

Among the elements of that performance, which have since become leitmotifs in Hayes' work, is the filling of the past. Just in the *Spontaneous Liberation Army*, a performance first staged in 2005, she stood at various points around New York holding placards bearing slogans relating to struggles which, in political terms, were straight from the crypt. On Wall Street she demanded: "Rafferty K.R.A. Now," for instance, protesting for the Equal Rights Amendment to the American constitution, which was first proposed in 1924. In Central Park, she asked: "Who Approved the War—in Vietnam?" People actually stopped to tell her. This play with outmoded agitprop slogans, of course, is more than just an acknowledgment of history's political movements. American women are still discriminated against at the workplace and earn much less than their male counterparts. And with the vastly unpopular war in Iraq, the U.S. has acquired a new military quagmire, after all.

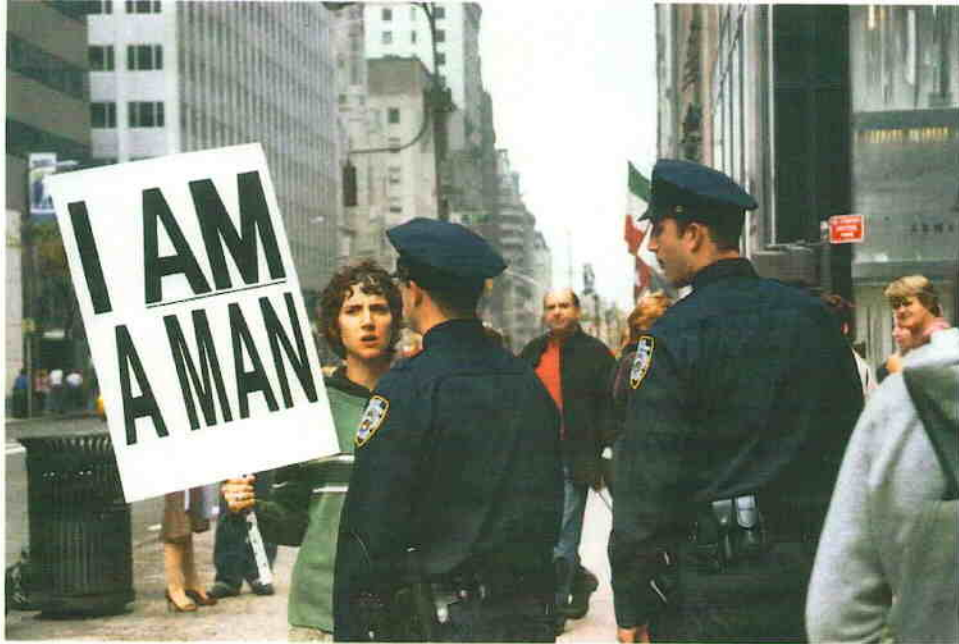
"I've started to think of myself almost as a placeholder," she says of *Je Ne Suis Parole*. "I'm holding the place of a kind of address that had meaning and resonance and impact at a certain moment in time. And I'm thinking about the possibility that this specific resonance and impact could be present at a future time." It's an attitude one also recognizes in the way some of her other images relate to her performances. Her videos go some way toward documenting her performances, but their peculiar styling sets them apart from the actual events. Similarly, she has made still-rooms which are the form of event announcements. She often installs these alongside the sound tracks from performances to hint at the historicity of events. The images refer to the recent past, and often the performances refer to events even further removed, leaving everything suspended uncertainly in time.

She made a series of these posters to tie in with a performance—another "love address"—that she first staged last year on Sixth Avenue in New York, as other workers hurried to lunch. She titled the piece *Everything Else Has Failed: Don't You Think It's Time For Love?* "It's based on the notion that I'm trying to reach someone who I can't get in touch with," she says. "After all these various forms of communication have failed, I'm just standing on the street throwing the words out and hoping they'll find a way. My interest is in laying political desire and personal desire on top of one another."

Democracy in America is in a perilous state, Hayes believes. "I think there's something about public speech that has been done in terms of anyone's ability to speak about what's on the street and get people to listen. That's a development that seems to leave the public more paralyzed than ever. People don't know what to do or how to be or how to act. I think there's been a very concerted political effort on the part of the right wing to construct a public that is concerned primarily with its own survival. We're given to believe that as we can hurry about in ourselves and our families."



Sharon Hayes, *Spontaneous Liberation Army (S.L.A.) Streets #13, 16, 20 & 25, 2003*, Installation



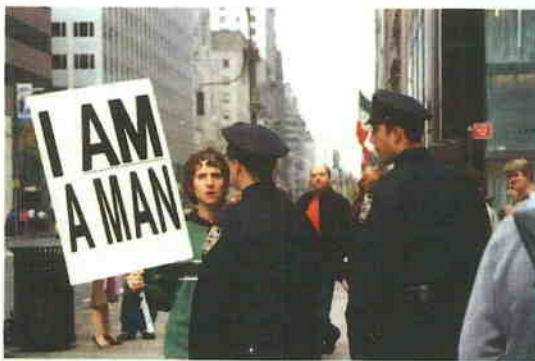
above and below: Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, New York, 2005. Installation

Sharon Hayes

ART IN GENERAL

The title of Sharon Hayes's new five-channel video installation, *After Before*, 2005, seems utterly opaque until it suddenly makes sense. Shown at Art in General a full year after the 2004 presidential election but filmed two months prior to George W. Bush's dubious reelection, it effects a kind of anticipation of a time already long gone. Indeed, the work, which documents the travails of two young microphone-wielding women as they scour the streets of New York City in search of "public opinion," is charged with a very particular set of anxieties, hopes, and suspicions that feel at once prescient and scarily outdated.

The two interlocutors—an androgynous art student with a thick accent and an African American actress, both hired by the artist—never inquire directly about political parties or current events, but the responses they receive are perhaps unsurprisingly, given the political climate, addressed largely to these subjects nevertheless. Interviewees from all walks of life (a socialite; Bill Ayers; a bus driver; George McGovern), invited to respond to such questions as "Who is your public?"; "What does free speech mean?"; "Are you politically active?"; "What do you expect from your fellow citizens?"; and "What do you hold strong opinions about?" offer answers—passionate,



Sharon Hayes, *In the near future*, 2005, performance view, November 6, 2005, St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York.

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aggressive, apathetic—that run the gamut, with succinct articulations of the failure of American democracy segueing into adamant affirmations of the Bush administration's policies. Two city kids convey their surprise at being asked to share their opinions at all, while an angry protester chastises the women attempting to interview him, accusing them of not asking sufficiently serious questions at such a critical moment.

The footage compellingly refuses to add up to anything holistic but instead conveys the feeling of a topical mapping, displaying the shifting contours of a "public" made up of so many particulars. Presented as four projections (impossible to see simultaneously) and a monitor on which a slightly out-of-synch transcript appeared, *After Before* offered a kind of disjunctive concurrence. One had to perpetually reorient one's body in order to ascertain which projection linked up (momentarily) with the spoken words on the sound track; screens went suddenly blank; narratives were interrupted and new ones begun midstream.

Described as a "quasi-fictional, quasi-documentary research project," *After Before* nods explicitly to 1960s cinema verité, particularly in its emphasis on the interpersonal and the political. Yet the fascinatingly "quasi" nature of the project has perhaps more to do with the performative than with film per se. Hayes, whose performance-based practice has long explored the vicissitudes, coercions, and resistances at the heart of subject formation, typically appears in her own work. But in *After Before*, she stays behind the camera, her surrogates each taking on the job of "interviewer" as a part to play but also as a role made real through enactment.

After Before operates as neither an after-the-fact proclamation nor a preemptive warning, but rather as a literalization of the desire—and the need—for public discourse. Interestingly, during the show's run, the artist also presented documentation of *in the near future*, a work-in-progress commissioned by Art in General and which was slated to be part of the separate PERFORMA05 festival. For each of nine successive days, Hayes staged a solo protest in a different significant site around New York. On November 6, for instance, she stood at St. Patrick's Cathedral (site of the famous 1989 ACT UP protest) with a placard reading I AM A MAN (a slogan borrowed from the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike); and while most of the signage was similarly borrowed from protests past, some evoked another kind of temporal dislocation, pointing toward possible future standoffs. A STOLEN ELECTION OR OTHER INTOLERABLE EVENT COULD SPARK MILLIONS TO THE STREETS IN A MASS REBELLION was the sign Hayes carried to Madison Square Garden on November 3. Thankfully, a lot of people had opinions about it.

—Johanna Burton

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON ON SHARON HAYES



"MOM, DAD, I'M OK." This is the opening line of Patty Hearst's first taped message, recorded soon after she was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974. Hearst made four such audiotapes in a few short months, her tone shifting from one of shaky reassurance to that of strident declaration as the rechristened, gun-toting Tania. New York- and Los Angeles-

based artist Sharon Hayes repeats these words verbatim in her four-part video *Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) Screeds #13, 16, 20, and 29*, 2002, in which she attempts to recite from memory (with her face framed tightly against a white background) the entirety of Hearst's four messages to her parents. Hayes's recall is not flawless, however. And just off-camera, a chorus of sorts assists the artist whenever she falters. If so much as a syllable goes awry, we hear these prompters referring to the exact transcripts and correcting her, but they are less punitive than pedagogic, occasionally laughing at Hayes's numerous errors. Hayes even looks to them for help and confirmation, diverting her otherwise direct stare at the camera. ("I'm sorry, could you give me the line?" she asks.) Produced as unlimited editions, the *SLA Screeds* are displayed in tall stacks for viewers to take, watch, and pass on—a gift that neatly contrasts with the "charity" demanded from the Hearsts as ransom for their daughter.

In the *SLA Screeds*, forgetting is the point. Many of Hayes's single-channel videos, video installations, and performances, which the UCLA interdisciplinary studio-MFA graduate has been making for about a decade, are compelled by the creation—and erosion—of collective memory. What more ideal mode of address than what she calls "respeaking," the artist's term for her recitation of historical texts, to confront the theme of memory? Reenactment reverberates in much contemporary art; artists such as Jeremy Deller, Omer Fast, and Marina Abramović have utilized restaging

for diverse purposes, from the therapeutic, as in a community project, to the nostalgic, as a form of homage. Hayes's work, seen in solo shows at the Andrew Kreps Gallery in New York and Vancouver's Video In, is somewhat distinct from this trend; she is driven more by an investigation into the stutters of history, its uncanny recurrences and unexpected recyclings. While her selection of historical documents is dictated by their

potential resonance or dissonance with our current political moment, there is always the possibility that they may fail to resound at all. In this regard, her work intersects with the linguistic theories of J. L. Austin and their adoption by queer theorist Judith Butler, both of whom investigate the conditions of successful communication as performative—that is to say, iterative and contingent. In the 2003 video installation *10 Minutes of Collective Activity*, a small group listens to an archival audiotape of Connecticut senator Abraham Ribicoff's speech at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Ribicoff's fervent indictment of Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley's "gestapo tactics" during the convention has powerful echoes in our current moment, but is received unevenly by the contemporary listeners. Some appear riveted and nod in affirmation; others gaze off distractedly. As Ribicoff is increasingly heckled by the 1968 crowd, the 2003 audience members begin to shift, silently and uncomfortably, in their seats. Watching their reactions—magnified by the installation's large-scale projection—creates a sense of physical and temporal disorientation.

A 1999–2000 Whitney Independent Study Program alum, Hayes bears the imprint of the program's commitment to institutional critique; in particular, she interrogates how "audiences" become "publics." In a performance for the group show "Republican Like Me" at Brooklyn's Parlour Projects in summer 2004, Hayes respoke each of Ronald Reagan's thirty-six addresses to the



nation. Most of these speeches begin with a direct address to “my fellow Americans,” simultaneously summoning a collective televisual viewership and hailing those viewers as citizens. *My Fellow Americans: 1981–1988* was ten hours long; as Hayes read the transcripts—on topics ranging from domestic economy policies to the Iran-Contra affair—her weariness became palpable. Her straightforward, affectless readings sharply contrasted with Reagan’s famously refined performances; his grief-stricken response to the Challenger disaster, for instance, is transformed into a series of flat phrases. Stripped of flourish, the speeches, rife with lines frequently aped by the present administration (in particular, those pertaining to defense and national security policies and suffused with a religious righteousness) take on a pointed political afterlife. They are also filled with archaic cold war references that, however urgent at the time, are now only remotely remembered.

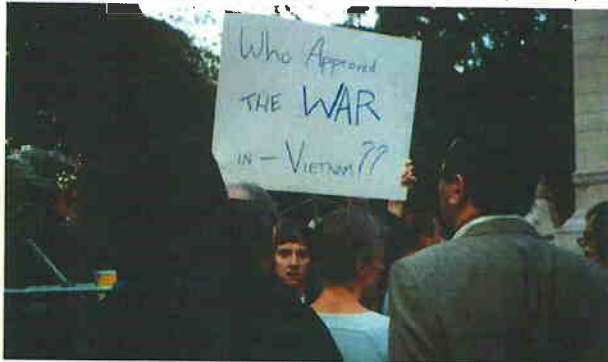
Hayes’s respeaking of Hearst’s and Reagan’s words in the *SLA Screeds* and *My Fellow Americans* raises questions about the sincerity of their original utterances. Sincerity, as theorized by Lionel Trilling in 1972, is “a congruence between avowal and actual feeling.” Was Hearst fed her lines to begin with, and how “real” was the actor-turned-president’s empathy? Today, when the conveyed air of steadfast certainty or belief often trumps accuracy—comedian Stephen Colbert, of *The Colbert Report* (his Comedy Central spoof of Fox’s *The O’Reilly Factor*), calls ours a time of *truthiness*—the question seems of particular pertinence. “Please listen to me because I am speaking honestly and from my heart,” Hayes repeats in (*SLA Screed #20 (Patricia Hearst’s Third Tape)*)—a sentiment that could have come straight from George W. Bush’s mouth. If for Trilling sincerity means a conjunction between what is said and what is felt on the part of a speaker, the congruence—or noncongruence—that Hayes points to is the match or mismatch between their reception then and now. Hayes could easily have made her performances ironic, campy, mocking, farcical (Hearst herself, with her cameos in John Waters’s films, has been fully recuperated as camp), but, through their lack of theatricality, the *SLA Screeds* sidestep the slippery nature of Hearst’s earnest intentions in 1974—coerced or not.

The question of the past as interpreted in the present returns in Hayes’s ongoing work *In the Near Future*, 2005–, presented by Art in General and PERFORMA05, last November. For this performance, Hayes stood for nine consecutive days in nine locations throughout New York holding different protest signs. Some clearly conjure their original moment: RATIFY E.R.A. NOW!, for instance, which she carried on Wall Street. Others, such as STRIKE TODAY or ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS, are generic, and incomprehensible when held by one person unmoored from the context of a catalyzing event. NOTHING WILL BE AS BEFORE, read another sign Hayes held in front of



Hayes is driven to investigate the stutters of history, its uncanny recurrences and unexpected recyclings.

Opposite page, from top: Sharon Hayes, Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) *Screed #16*, 2002, still from a color video, 10 minutes. Sharon Hayes, Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) *Screeds #13, 16, 20, and 29*, 2002. Installation view, Occidental College, Los Angeles, 2003. This page: Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, 2005–. Above: Performance view, New York Stock Exchange, November 2, 2005. Below: Performance view, Central Park, New York, November 5, 2005.



City Hall—this slogan (likely ambiguous in its own day) is, the artist thinks, from May 1968, although she learned of it by anecdote only. Time, place, the collective identity of protesters—these factors must converge for the nature of protest to be legible in public space. Such convergences are, to use Austin’s term, a matter of “felicity,” and Hayes here purposefully produces infelicity with her deliberate anachronisms. By dislocating one or more of a protest’s identifying factors, she creates static in the sign’s intended clarity. A white, somewhat androgynous woman holding a sign that proclaims, I AM A MAN, in 2005 would seem more likely to refer to transgender activism than to the 1968 Memphis sanitation strike.

Hayes’s signs provoked enough curiosity and interest to generate small eddies of conversation: Teenage girls asked questions; cops had puzzled queries; tourists snapped photos. When she held a sign in Central Park reading, WHO APPROVED THE WAR IN—VIETNAM?, people came up to tell her. Hayes welcomed the interactions: Hers is not a simple wistfulness for a lost collective culture but a genuine invitation for exchange (these interactions are documented and were shown as a slide presentation in last month’s “When Artists Say We” exhibition at Artists Space in New York). *In the Near Future* not only mines the past but also speculates about the future of dissent. This sets her work apart from that of a number of other artists who take historical protest movements as their subject—Andrea Bowers and Sam Durant, for instance. A few of Hayes’s slogans are her own inventions, such as THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT MIGHT HAVE TO CALL IN THE NATIONAL GUARD TO PUT THIS REVOLT DOWN—unwieldy as a catchphrase, forceful only to the point of conjecture, but certainly evocative, and, perhaps, longing.

To abruptly insert history into the present as Hayes does is a peculiar—even queer—thing. It activates what queer theorist and literary scholar Elizabeth Freeman has called “temporal drag,” or “the pull of the past upon the present.” Temporal drag implies a chronological distortion in which time does not progress seamlessly forward but is full of swerves, unevenness, and interruptions. With her emphasis on the ruptures of time, Hayes insists that our collective political past is not a compendium of documents that can be transparently analyzed.

Revolutionary communiqués, presidential transcripts, protest signs: These are archives that have been unevenly catalogued, partially understood, and often wrongly cited. The inaccuracies of Hayes’s Hearst performance are telling. All missives from the past are misremembered or misread as they enter the present tense. Some might be discarded and lost; others will linger, mutate, or become unrecognizable. Hayes’s work, however, shows us that at least this much is clear: Nothing will be as before. □

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